



A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH UPON THE ESSENCE OF ARCHITECTURAL PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The notion of ‘being’ is known as one of the initial problems of philosophy. Depending on its structure and existence, the architectural object has a convenient position to be reviewed in this context. From Plato to present, the question of existence has changed its focus from the universe to the individual, and the attempt to define the answers continues in a dynamic way. Architecture can carry existential concerns within itself as an object produced by a subject in the current philosophical system in which the acquisition of knowledge evolved from mental processes to bodily processes in the period between Kant and Merlau-Ponty. From this point of view, it is possible to talk about the concept of body in philosophical foundation as existentially as well as the body of architectural structure. This paper searches the possibility to make an existential reading through the reviewing of architectural products. The basis of the study is the assumption that the architect's design decisions and the architectural object itself can create an existential posture and this phenomenon can resist in time with the awareness of the architect. In this regard, this paper attempts to discuss the selected works of Carlo Scarpa as an architectural discourse through phenomenological approaches.

Key Words: Architecture, Meaning, Phenomenology, Carlo Scarpa

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy and architecture have been in a strong relationship since the beginning of searching the meanings of self and the universe. Due to its natural structure, the architectural act is fed physically and conceptually from all other fields of knowledge and art. In this manner philosophical discourses are continuous tools for the forms of expression in architectural production. With the help of philosophical texts, the conceptual and intellectual approaches can be taken from the process of comprehension and interpretation of the architectural work by the state of the architect at the stage of production and the position of the experienced individual against the space or structure.

One of the main inquiries in philosophy is existence, the existence itself. Is there really an entity? If so, how it existed. Is this asset in the real sense; or is it intellectual? The explanations of these types of questions are mostly handled in ontology, and the main purpose of ontology is to explore the meaning of existence.

Phenomenology is another field of philosophy based on the question of being, which is often associated with architecture in the context of perception and informatics. It deals with the production of knowledge through the experience of the individual. The main phenomenology concept established by Edmund Husserl and has been used to explain the emergence of

objects by a natural creative power by Hegel. On the other hand, Kant was the reference of Husserl when he was searching to the source of knowledge.

Kant argues that we can perceive reality in our minds in compliance with our own schemas and shape our understanding through them. Then, Husserl takes the next step and focused on how the objects appear in human mind. He argues that the objects of consciousness and the states of consciousness are indistinguishable, and consequently objects cannot be objects of perception separately from human consciousness or experience. However, all these arguments are made clear by the fact that the mind is directed to objects in certain directions or attention, which Husserl describes it as the conscious awareness of the being (Magee, 2001).

Additionally, Husserl states that one finds him/herself a member of this world, as a member. He explains this thesis in his Ideas quoted as; “I find myself aware of a world that is stretching in space and eternity and that has existed before me in time and will continue to exist. I'm aware of it because I discover it as right in front of me as I experience it. I know how the objects that exist for me are dispersed in the space, whether I am aware or not, with different ways of perception, such as seeing, touching, hearing.” (Husserl, 1962).

Subsequently, Martin Heidegger, one of Husserl's students, also based his phenomenological approach on ‘the experience’ with the notion of ‘house of being’, but apart from Husserl's abstract concept of self. The cause of this shift is defined as Heidegger's desire to work on the nature of existence instead of the nature of knowledge. Heidegger states that existence is not the result of act or choice, and the one is being thrown into the middle of existence as a being there (Dasein). In this case, it is the life that the one builds up upon his/her own choices. And relatedly, space is the place of interaction and experience for Heidegger (Hisarligil, 2008).

Merleau-Ponty started from the phenomenology of Husserl, but evaluates it through various transformations. For Merleau-Ponty, a human being means a being that sees the world with its own eyes; an entity that sees and understands with their own eyes while living and experiencing. Therefore sensation is a unite of experience and links with body in mind, as he put forth in his Phenomenology of Perception (1945).

All these philosophical discourses up to a point can be depicted through meaningfulness of the human being and his/her achievement of an existential reality through his/her own existential experience. However, it is also possible to read them through architecture, and to comprehend how it is formed through its different properties such as material, location, form, and relationship.

The evaluation and criticizing approaches of the architectural product are generally structure-based. Architectural discourse has been developed especially around the subjects of modern building and building surfaces. On the other hand, it is important to point that architecture not only establishes a relationship with nature, but also demands to be nature itself (Frank, 1999). The architectonic structure of architecture stands on a path that leads to existence, not on the contradictions such as internal-external, density-subtlety and light-shadow. It is the building that turns the sun into light, as Louis Kahn emphasizes (Brownlee and Long, 1994); which indicates that a mere structure has the potential to reach its existence by means of architecture.

EXISTENCE OF SPACE- “DESTRUCTION OF THE BOX”

It is clear that architecture is not a closed system of orders consisting of construction and structure; but an open self-reference system arising with the developments in science and thought. Since the idea of architecture has emerged the form of spatial configurations determined by the structural forms. As a result, the architectural products consist of two co-

existing elements, structure and space, which cannot be handled independently from one another. The main characteristic of modern architecture is that it is open to the possibilities of being able to respond to these elements while coming out of the features of modern space (Eyüce, 2011). The critical discourses of the architectural product are generally around the modern architecture period and they are mostly focused on structures and building surfaces.

Modern architecture was a design idea which has a statement of creating spaces related to each other and making solutions by taking advantage of new building materials. The internal and external relations in modern architecture are designed over the concepts of continuity and unity. In addition, it is aimed to follow the same concepts for internal areas by forming fluids between the inner spatial units. In this context, the strongest discourse is F.L. Wright's "deconstruction of the box" (Brooks, 1979) which offers to reach an understanding of a new structure of shell and mass by combining independent surfaces. The process of deconstruction recommends a brief rebuild of the box (Eyüce, 2011), in which the priority is the liberation of the corners.

In this context, Wright's separation of the planes within the deconstruction of the box appears to have a reflection in Carlo Scarpa's perception of space (Figure 1) and his details (Figure 2). After disassembling and isolating the architectural object, Scarpa goes back to a concrete space, following the requirements of its essence (Erman, 2001); the essence that depends on the historical content, material physics and constructional requirements (Figure 1). The design of the joints, the organizations of spaces, the awareness of material and personal phenomenological desires are influential in the details of his structures (Figure 2). Above all, their common ground is the way that the space or the detail is perceived in light and the feelings that they emerge; in other words, the meaning of the architectural language in contemporary discourse (Erman, 2001).

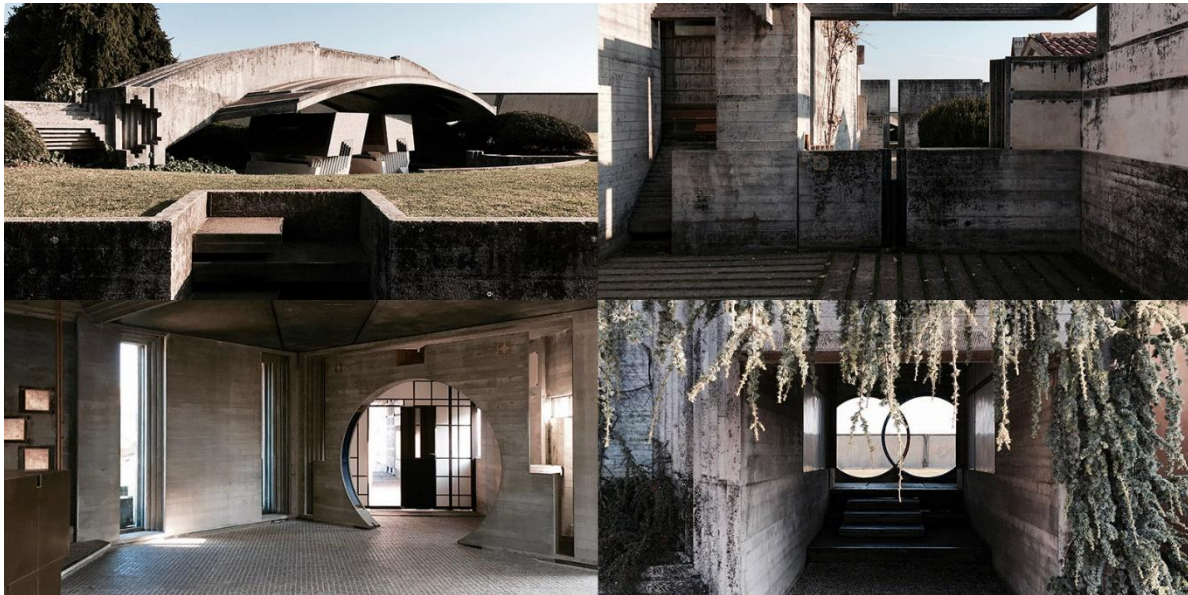


Figure 1: Brion Cemetery, Carlo Scarpa 1970-72 (Url-1).

The deconstruction of the box is also a suitable point of view to interpret the restoration and reconstruction of the Castelvecchio Museum in the context of the place of modern in historicity (Figure 3). Although the design dates back to the 1950s, this museum building still has a phenomenological discourse today. In the restored design "the new" thing integrated into the historical structure is attached. "The new" expresses its own existence through floating slabs that appear to be independent of each other, as plates stretching out from different surfaces of the historical structure, specially designed to connect the interiors. On the

other hand, it is possible to review it as an architecture that always seems to be there, independently from time.

In this context, it is possible to comment that the existence of space together with time and moment internalizing the spatial dimension, creates an entropy (Aydınlı, 2009). The probability potential inherent in the spatial order constitutes the driving force for re-reading the space (Alexander, 2002). Also, the use of the material is another efficient factor that enables a phenomenological experience (Frampton, 1988). The existential manifestations of architectural production become evident by the location, time, material and integration of structures. Therefore it is possible to evaluate Scarpa's designs in a dimension where time goes beyond space. In this regard, the spaces created by the combination of old and new are integrated with the existence of the structure and always arouse the feeling of being there.

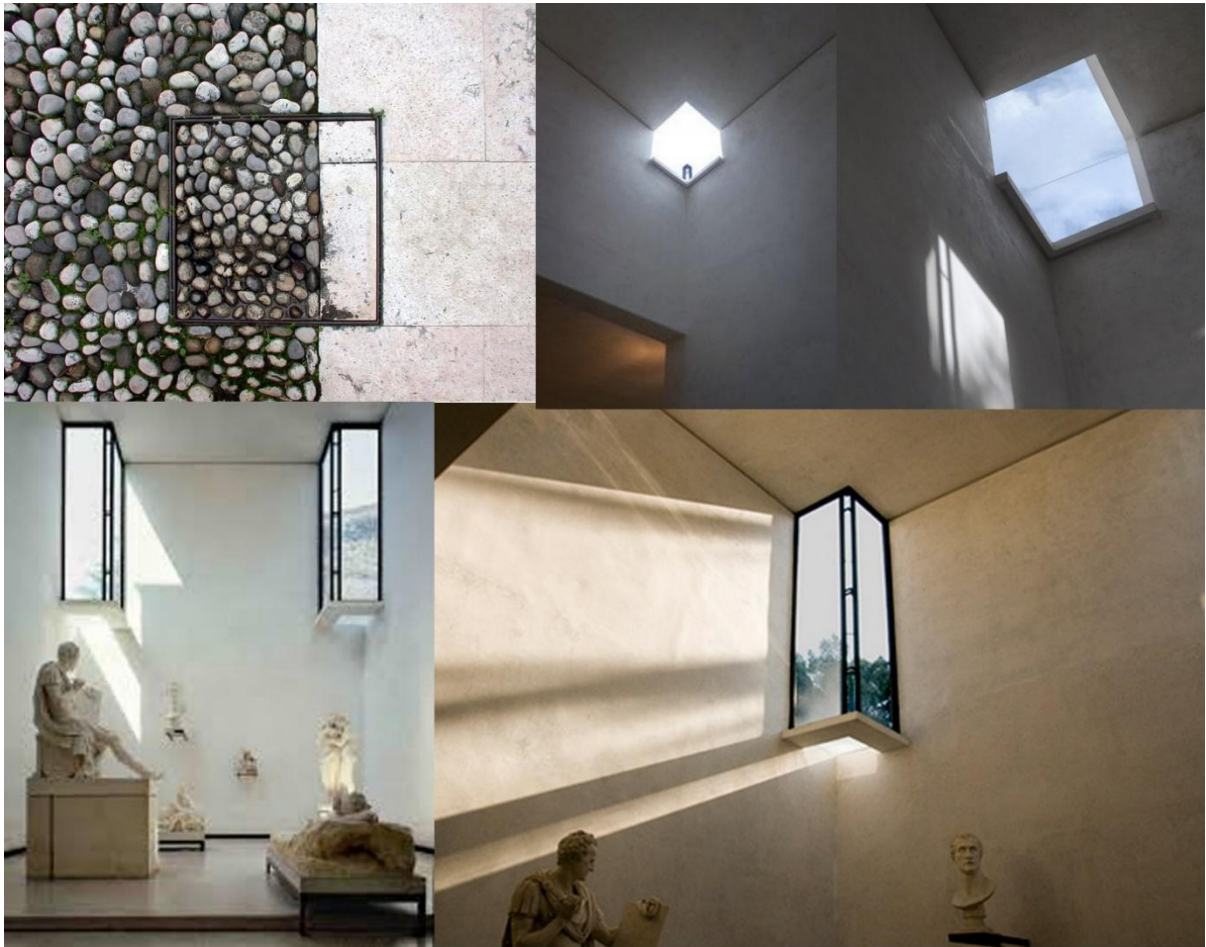


Figure 2: Canova Museum Gipsoteca Canoviana, Possagno, Carlo Scarpa, 1955-57 (Url-2).

According to Tafuri, Scarpa has created dialectic between the blessing of the form and distribution of structural parts, the desire of representation and the reality of the object; and internalized them in his architecture (Los, 1995). Frascari (1984) states that to feel the stair rail, walk on the stair steps or between the walls, to notice a wall sitting on a beam as the corner all turn to a visual and tactile experience. Besides, Güzer (2001) states that the art observed in Scarpa's work are a design approach determined by the constructional nature of the building rather than reaching a finished product. This evaluation can be interpreted through the building's sensory integrity which is achieved by encountering the essence of the materials.

Indeed, as we focus to the works of Scarpa, existential features of the materials put front. Stairs, windows, doors, bearing elements appear as sub-parts of an existential whole. Materials are used as not only purely formal but also sensory and perceptual aspects, and they become objects of exploration by embodying this sensibility in detail. The space can exist in many forms. And the temporality of architecture is a form of existence; an existence strictly connected to the essence of the being that attributes various meanings to it. The details in his buildings emerge like Kahn's dialog with a brick in which he asks the brick what it wants to be and what it wants to be is an arch, and consequently an arch shape has emerged. Naturally, a brick that has a load bearing quality wants to be an arch and work under pressure. Thus reading Scarpa's architecture is another way of interpreting Kahn's point of view in which the materials have a language in themselves.

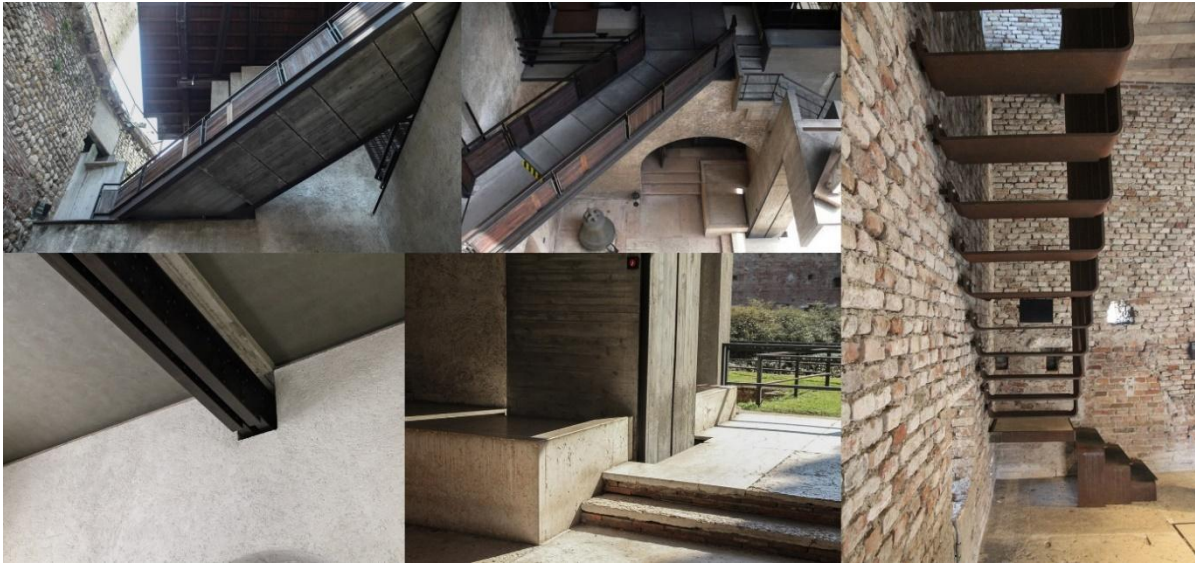


Figure 3: Castelvechio Museum Verona, Carlo Scarpa, 1959-73 (Url-3).

Understanding the existential reality of architecture coincides with the sense of the existence of each individual. Existential architectural reality is the metaphor of the architectural object. The metaphorization of being is to propose an architecture that does not rely on the past and, does not use past experiences and aims to create today's new experiences. This metaphor lies in the architect's awareness of the existence of the existential freedom of architectural creation. In this context, the existential reality of today's architecture corresponds to the efforts of reflecting awareness of existence to architectural creation process, which is also parallel with the concept of being in the world (Yürekli and Güney, 2004).

In the designed realities of architecture, the surfaces are not just a shell. Through the materials and textures, the surfaces become new perceptual millues, new geometries, colours and new spatial experiences. As a result, the new sensual data proposed in architectural reality is the creator of experience. The arrival of all these architectural constituents aims to add new beings to this new object of architecture. In this architectural reality, the problem of meaning is identical with being described above, and the being itself creates its own meaning by its way of existence (Yürekli and Güney, 2004).

These architectural constituents are clearly apparent in Scarpa's monument designed for the women resistance in World War II (Figure 4). The use of water as a material and an element of the monument adds an existential meaning to the design. The different elevations of the sea at different time periods are undetectable parts of the monument, and the appearance of the woman in the supine position at different moments between the waves presents different existential meanings.

This design takes us to Schulz's argument that suggests there are some places that show the essence of existence. The reflection of Heidegger's philosophical views on the conceptual level of architecture, Schulz defines architecture as an action that reveals the soul of the existing nature and transforms it from land to place (Schulz, 1985). According to him, space has an organic bond with the earth, and this bond originates from the spirit of the earth (genius loci). And Scarpa's monument presents a unique example of this argument over its relation with the sea and shore.

Scarpa, with its approach to architecture, has been giving examples of architectural production for almost 50 years in its timeless designs. According to Tokyay (2002), he rejects the classical academic relationship between architecture and historical texture and believes architecture is a tool to ensure the visibility and recognition of reality. Scarpa believes that art and architecture should form a universal language of architecture that communicates through artistic work, which is developing from generation to generation. As a result he had designed many timeless products that present unique spatial experiences for each of its participants.



Figure 4: Monument to the Female Resistance Fighter, Carlo Scarpa, 1968-70 (Url-4).

CONCLUSION

The planes that define the lines, the points that define the shapes and spaces are the things that form the whole of architecture. Beyond the aforementioned visual functions, these elements convey their mutual relations and the nature of the organizations they participate, as well as the ideas of a field and a place, of an entry and movement, of hierarchy and order. These are presented as verbal, indicative meanings of form and space in architecture. It is important to

note that architecture combines the form and space in a single essence, while not only serving the purpose, but also meaning. Architecture makes our presence visible through its own existence, but also makes it meaningful. According to Frank Lloyd Wright, architecture is a form of life. Architecture shapes life, but life shapes architecture as well. It lives with life, changes with it and ends with it. Only the architecture that can survive remains. The existential definitions of architecture and their explanations can be resolved continuously, independent from time. This is also a common necessity for the process of change continuously.

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