

## CULTURAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMES OF ARCHITECTURAL CRITICISM: Postmodern Transformations<sup>1</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

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Since the beginnings of seventies 'everyday architecture', as a non-critical and mass-produced form of architectural practice, is celebrating an acceleratingly dominant ground of freedom. The outcome of this liberation is a 'no-rule' architecture presenting itself as a scenography based form-fetishism. The commodity based promotion of numerous 'isms' and their image-based mass productions remove architecture from being a critical practice and create a false consciousness due to its representative relations with culture, reality, tectonic form, regional and contextual aspects. This shift is neither an outcome of a liberating postmodern project nor an inevitable aim of the *avantgarde* positions engaged with postmodern 'isms' in the field of architecture, but rather it is a consequence of contextual transformation initiated under the disciplinary frame of architectural criticism. In other words, transformations of architectural criticism under the conditions of media-society and postmodern culture prepared a disciplinary context for legitimizing false-consciousness of transformations in architectural practice.

When postmodernism is traced beyond its abstract and reduced definition as an architectural 'ism', it manifests the emergence of new cultural, social, economic and theoretical forms where architectural criticism similar to architectural practice faces a series of transformations. These transformations not only represent an institutional shift towards mediating and legitimizing the conditions of postmodernity, but also, as a theoretical attempt, to examine and transform itself as part of the same 'logic' or 'movement of ideas' in culture itself. The conditions of 'popular culture, mass-media and consumer-society' create a postmodern world in which everything has been reduced into 'representations' (Baudrillard, 1981). Transformations in architectural criticism, aiming to adapt itself to conditions of postmodernism towards creating a critical consciousness, are open to become a vicious-circle which ends up in a self-legitimizing position creating a false consciousness. In fact, this vicious-circle is not particular to architectural criticism; it is housed in the nature of postmodern theory as well. As Connor (1990, 218) puts it:

Although postmodern theory may begin with the attempt to politicize the realm of the aesthetic, it can invert easily into the distracting and self-promoting aestheticization of politics.

This study aims to understand and unmask a process of self-legitimizing and assimilating relation between different cultural spheres of architectural criticism in its postmodern transformations. Also by mapping cultural and positional differences between and across different forms of architectural criticism, it presents a critical effort to uncover the limits of architectural criticism.

#### TRANSFORMATIONS IN ARCHITECTURAL CRITICISM

Criticism, in general, establishes forms of knowledge through which experience is rediscovered. In the 'modern' tradition of criticism (including architectural criticism) there is a particular 'sense of gap between experience and knowledge, where the rediscovery of experience is the result of a reorganization of categories and relationships'. Knowledge therefore, presents a 'later version' and 'transformed form' derived from experience with a suspended emergence. It is a reflection of a gap between experience and consciousness or between 'an imperfect condition' and 'perfectionism' which characterizes modern sensibility. Modern tradition of criticism, in this sense, aims to cover the gap between experience and consciousness by performing a continuous desire 'to replenish rational consciousness with the intensities of experience, then this itself marks an awareness of the necessary and inescapable dependence of experience upon consciousness and vice versa' (Connor, 1989, 4).

Whereas recent critical and theoretical work in philosophy and social sciences bring alternative positions where knowledge and experience may be joined in a much more complex continuum. Criticism, in this sense, becomes a domain to protest life-denying abstractions of modern theory by refraining itself from the purism and perfectionism of modern tradition (Jameson, 91: xi). The essence of such alternative position can be identified with its commitment to indeterminacy, openness, and multiplicity. Connor (1989, 18) makes a general definition of the postmodern debate which blurs the positional significance:

The postmodern debate may be seen as an intellectual-discursive process which simultaneously multiplies critical options and binds them into recognizable and disseminable forms.

Architectural criticism addresses a general conceptual framework under which architecture is described, understood, promoted or judged towards improving the quality of architectural production. However, such a broad understanding of criticism also reflects plurality of meanings and cultural forms of different domains that may easily be in opposition to each other. Throughout its academic tradition, architectural criticism is usually reduced to a definition associated with critical historicist attitudes excluding its opposing popular forms, such as criticisms in newspaper columns or professional magazines. This study has a wider understanding of architectural criticism where its different forms become possibilities at the same time. This is due to the fact that in the context of postmodernism, a relationship between representations and transitions between different forms of architectural criticism becomes significant. The efficient culture of the consumer society and the subversive power of mass-media make popular forms of architectural criticism gain a certain significance and gravitation as the representative form of this culture. However, a responsiveness to popular cultural forms also prepares a ground for the naturalization of academic forms of criticism through their false-representations.

Architectural criticism exhibits two different but related transformations as representations of two different forms of postmodernism. The first transformation is observed in the 'academic forms' of architectural criticism and present a preoccupation with postmodern theory as 'blurring of the disciplines and discursive styles of history, philosophy, social theory, and literary criticism into an undecidable amalgam' (Jameson, 85, 12). This transformation diverges the academy, in general, from the determinacy of a metalanguage and ideology. It is a resistance to the idealist, rational tradition of modernism and represents itself, as a 'post-critical theory'. Besides these institutional and constitutional transformations of architectural criticism, there exists another significant outcome as a second transformation which presents itself as the superimposed form of these transformations, and can be identified as the 'representative transformation between different cultural forms of architectural criticism'. In popular terms it is 'the responsiveness of academy to populism' which blurs the isolation between popular and academic forms of architectural criticism. Such a transformation questions hierarchies and distinct boundaries between opposing cultural forms. However, it represents the subversive power of media through which popular forms of architectural criticism enlarges their manipulative power by representing themselves as the essence of academic forms. This representative relation does not directly address a self-transformation but rather an 'illusion' brought by media-society, a transformation that blurs the distinction between forms of architectural criticism and addresses a divergence from a 'modern sensibility' of 'self-consciousness'.

#### CONCEPTUAL AND CULTURAL FRAMES OF ARCHITECTURAL CRITICISM

The conceptualization of architecture and its forms of representation differ due to cultural domains. The way architecture is understood, referred and evaluated in everyday life might differ from the way it gains significance in its academic disciplinary framework. Architecture has separate but co-existing effects on different domains of disciplines as well as on social and cultural groups. Within the diversity of disciplines it is signified and recognized with different references, values, concepts representing an hierarchical order of relevance. Therefore, 'reference domains' and 'cultural forms' become the major determinants to identify any category or 'position' under the disciplinary frame of architectural criticism.

	<b>REDUCTIONIST FRAME</b> POPULAR / MEDIATIC / ACTIVIST	<b>ANTI-REDUCTIONIST FRAME</b> ACADEMIC / CRITICAL / HISTORICIST	<b>PLURALIST-ECLECTIC FRAME</b> PROFESSIONAL / POST-CRITICAL
<b>CRITIC</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* architecture / related discipline based journalist and/or</li> <li>* personal popularity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* architect / historian / academician in the related fields</li> <li>* personal qualifications as theoretician, academician</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* architect / historian</li> <li>* personal popularity and/or qualifications as architect, historian, theoretician, or academician</li> </ul>
<b>AUDIENCE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* ordinary people interested in architecture in terms of its commodity value or of its relation with environmental consciousness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* architects-academicians/ academicians in various fields</li> <li>* interested in architecture under the frames of various disciplines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* architect-academician/ academician/intellectuals/ students of architecture</li> <li>* those interested in real production of architecture</li> </ul>
<b>TASK</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* to gain power to control the built environment</li> <li>* the development of taste and popular attitudes in order to control commodification of architecture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* to understand, explain and criticize architecture within the co-existing frames of related disciplines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* to gain power to control architectural tendencies/ to set categories and arise classifications in the profession/ to populize discussions under academic frame</li> </ul>
<b>CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* all instruments of media / newspapers, magazines, radio, tv, books, video, computer networks, billboards, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* instruments of academia / magazines, books, symposiums papers, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* limited existence in media</li> <li>* instruments of academia / magazines, books, symposiums papers, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>MEDIATIC POSITION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* popular</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* elitist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* elitism as a representation</li> <li>* populism as a representation</li> </ul>
<b>LANGUAGE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* popular, reductive, personal</li> <li>* simplicity is required</li> <li>* use of metaphor, humor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* elitist, anti-reductive, reference to science, philosophy and other disciplines</li> <li>* complexity is required</li> <li>* anti-metaphor, anti-humor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* eclectic, semiotic articulation, ambiguous reference to other disciplines</li> <li>* complex-simplicity</li> <li>* pro-metaphor, pro-humor</li> </ul>
<b>SUBJECTS / CASES AND EXAMPLES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* already popular pieces of arch. having a potential to be at the center of mediatic interest</li> <li>* local examples / mediatic limits</li> <li>* no significance in other frames</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* significance for academia</li> <li>* representation of the whole</li> <li>* wholistic / comprehensive</li> <li>* universal validity</li> <li>* representation of type</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* generally popular but has certain potential to represent the whole</li> <li>* significance to control architectural tendencies</li> <li>* piecemeal / comprehensive</li> <li>* mediatic validity</li> </ul>
<b>IDEOLOGICAL POSITION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* utopian and idealist</li> <li>* architecture as an agent of social redemption</li> <li>* activist/representation of public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* systematic ideological investigations</li> <li>* usage of ideology as the framework</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* popular and pluralist</li> <li>* professional</li> </ul>
<b>POSITION OF THE ARCHITECT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* architect as a savior/doctor</li> <li>* responsible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* architect as an artist</li> <li>* support and subvert the hegemonical power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* architect as professional</li> <li>* representative</li> <li>* philosopher</li> </ul>
<b>HOW OTHER FRAMES ARE CONSTRUCTED</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* limited reference to support a position</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* no significance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* represents itself as the others, /academic and popular</li> </ul>
<b>METHODS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* interpretive</li> <li>* advocatory</li> <li>* evocative</li> <li>* impressionistic</li> <li>* authoritative</li> <li>* absolutist</li> <li>* tautological</li> <li>* reductionist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* systematic</li> <li>* scientific</li> <li>* refers to methods of other disciplines, science and philosophy</li> <li>* anti-reductionist</li> <li>* classificatory</li> <li>* normative</li> <li>* traditional</li> <li>* historicist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* eclectic</li> <li>* plural</li> <li>* double coding as elitist-popular</li> <li>* semiologic</li> <li>* pro-historical reference</li> </ul>
<b>VALIDITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* in media/with non-critical mentalities in everyday-life</li> <li>* in politics /municipalities / mediatic power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* in academia</li> <li>* architectural practice via other frames</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* in architectural practice</li> </ul>
<b>INFLUENCE ON ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* considerable power on environmental issues, public investments, specific buildings of mediatic interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* establishes the norms</li> <li>* generates typologies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* direct mediatic control on architectural production</li> <li>* generates, support current tendencies</li> </ul>

Figure 1. The Conceptual Frames of Architectural Criticism.

When traditional method and norm-based classifications of architectural criticism is replaced by 'classifications of conceptual frames -under which architectural criticism exists-', then these frames become inclusive of a certain complexity where not only the methods and norms but cultural forms and multi-disciplinary domains of architectural criticism become determinants of classification as interrelated to each other.

This kind of differentiation between the frames of architectural criticism not only addresses the difference of contextual properties, but also represent levels of differentiation between critical and non-critical mentalities. Pamir (1989, 136-137) attempts to clarify the differences between the critical and non-critical mentalities, establishes norm dimensions, and offers contents of criticism for both cultures.

Figure 1, 'The Conceptual Frames of Architectural Criticism', is an abstract presentation addressing sharp distinctions between mediatic or contextual categories which cause, generate, contain and legitimate alternative positions labelled as architectural criticism. In other words, the map of architectural criticism, in this study, is a disciplinary matrix towards understanding how the positions in architectural criticism hang together or get into a representative relation between each other. This table contains basically three frames. In addition to two opposing cultural frames, as reductionist / popular and anti-reductionist / academic, a third transitory and intermediary frame as pluralist / eclectic are outlined in the table.

This abstract matrices of relations are, like any diagram, reductive in the sense that one may easily add further variables to the lists. This is not only for the convenience of the study, but the aim is to establish a general model for understanding positions in architectural criticism that is open to extensions and alterations.

The first conceptual frame which represents popular cultural forms can be named as a 'reductionist' position. This is due to the tendency to reduce its domain to popular media issues and also because of its 'pragmatic' ignorance of alternative critical options while gaining an 'activist' manipulative character. Therefore, it can be named as either 'popular' or 'activist' or 'mediatic', addressing an engagement with the rules and norms of the mass-media of consumer society.

The second conceptual frame represents the 'elitist / critical historicist' tradition of academic criticism and 'critical mentalities'. The represented forms of criticism under this frame are 'anti-reductionist' in the sense that they oppose the 'reductionist' tradition of popular forms and 'non-critical mentalities'.

The third conceptual frame is named 'pluralist and eclectic' where eclecticism refers to abstracted transitions/reflections of previous frames and pluralism stands for a multi disciplinary post-critical position.

The diverse contextual properties of each frame are outlined and compared under a set of inter-related variables. These interrelated and consequent variables seem to be the basic determinants of cultural forms and mediatic domains through which the positions in architectural criticism can be identified. Under these frames architectural criticism gains different depths, critical positions, mediatic characters and presents different methods and techniques. The limits of architectural criticism, as a manipulative power on architectural production, is mostly overruled by their cultural forms and mediatic domains.

## DIVERSITY PRESENTED AS UNIFORMITY : A CASE STUDY

Though the critical positions mapped above, what is also observed is a certain responsiveness of these positions to each other. There exists an issue, and promoted-case based on unity between different frames of architectural criticism which brings 'assimilation' of used terms and concepts. While academic and anti-reductionist frames become more transparent to popular issues, mediatic-popular frames present themselves engaged with the academic frames, at least in the way that they reproduce established label-categories and assimilate the terms and concepts in the domain of academic frames. This responsiveness between the forms of architectural criticism under the domain of media culture, presents itself as a 'representative relation' between each other, neutralizing their contextual and cultural differences and critical oppositions.

Frank Gehry as the popular architect-hero and related discussions of deconstruction, as an important construct of the 1980s, presents a significant domain to exemplify representational relations between different forms of architectural criticism. Many critics concentrated on Gehry and Deconstruction, including activist, mediatic criticism of Allan Temko, eclectic, plural criticism of Charles Jenks or more academic forms such as Carol Burns'. Criticisms of Allan Temko, Charles Jencks and Carol Burns, are referred here, not only due to their representative relations between different forms of architectural criticism, but also to present a conclusive addition for the previous discussions .

Temko, in his article which appeared in San Francisco Chronicle (March 27, 1988), and titled 'Architectural Theater of the Absurd: The work of Frank Gehry', writes:

Today Gehry is the hottest 'architect-artist' in America, and by all odds the foremost practitioner of 'deconstructivism', a term borrowed from literary criticism, which in architecture comes close to nihilism. For 'deconstructivist architecture' or - 'no rules' architecture as Gehry calls it.

Besides many of the typical characteristics of popular-activist criticism as being advocatory, evocative, authoritative, *etc.*, as mentioned above, Temko also presents a certain 'reductionism' towards conceptualizing 'deconstruction'. The way he defines 'deconstruction' and its engagement with Gehry is common for most positions in architectural criticism. But the abstract way Temko labels it, and associates with Gehry, leaves no room for alternative engagements both for Gehry and deconstruction. Gehry's attempts to isolate his architecture from 'deconstruction' by bringing an alternative concept of 'no rule architecture' shows no significance in Temko's criticism. Similarly, there is an ignorance towards alternative positions in architecture that are also associated with deconstruction. Temko, through such reduced association, uses the label-popularity of deconstruction and significance of Gehry in other frames of architectural criticism to reinforce each other towards establishing a mediatic popularity of his criticism. When the whole text is concerned, anything Temko underlines has a certain reference or validity in the other frames of architectural criticism. However that 'tautological' gathering of 'truth' is still open to shifting understandings of Gehry and deconstruction, not through 'what is included in his text', but rather through 'what is excluded'. Therefore alternative forms of architectural criticism separate themselves from Temko's by becoming inclusive of alternative relations between conceptualizations of deconstruction and Gehry. Charles Jencks (1990, 205), in this sense, in a more plural and eclectic frame, stays nearer to an academic criticism, to get into further classifications and definitions:

Here is a joke on a joke and one that becomes more ironic when one notes how much deconstructionists try to separate themselves from Post-Modernists, especially Post-Modern Classicists... What are the main differences, in a movement which supposedly celebrates difference? There are basically four divergent tendencies.

First is the fragmentation and discontinuity of Frank Gehry -breaking up the whole into dissociated parts and juxtaposing them with an artful informality.

Jenck's criticism is more contextual when compared with Temko's. He uses a general frame of contemporary positions in which Gehry's position can be identified with relevance to alternative modes of deconstruction. Jencks, in this sense, gets into further classifications to set sub-positions in 'deconstruction'. Different than Temko he refers many of the references engaged with discussions of deconstruction in more academic frames. Besides Nietzsche, he also refers to Foucault, Derrida, Late-Constructivism of Chernikov, aesthetics of Kandinsky etc. (1990, 205). The outcome is a more academic language, less advocatory, less evocative and less reductionist. But still the classifications present an authoritative content and continues to gravitate towards an image-based interpretation. However, Jencks uses the context of academic frames only to support and subvert his position. Under the generous frames of 'style based', 'image oriented' classifications, Jencks not only disregards the regional characteristic of Gehry's architecture but also the responsiveness of established examples to alternative positions in architecture.

Carol Burns' (1990, 75) critical essay, delivered to the conference *Thinking the Present*, is also an example for an alternative way to conceptualize Gehry's work. Burns defines her alternative position as 'topical thinking':

Topics are circumstantial: they are local or designed for local applications (such as a topical anesthetic); likewise they disclose particular conditions (such as topical allusions)... Topical thinking is manifestly caught up in time. It is neither fixed nor invariant. It works with probabilities, knowledge that is seemly or likely in certain circumstances... The circumstances of topical thinking are based in the specifics of time and place. To understand Gehry's work, it is necessary to look at Los Angeles today. The city itself is a vast and amorphous body.

Dealing with Gehry's architecture inevitably brings an engagement with the popular discursive forms in architectural criticism. In this sense 'topical thinking' for Burns, creates a safety zone between theoretical thinking and popular discursive forms, representing itself as technical thinking, where she can address properties of Gehry's architecture beyond 'styles' and 'manners'. In fact Burns' criticism, different than Temko's and Jencks', is not based upon the 'images' and her context is biographical background of Gehry, 'drawn from sources within rhetoric and phenomenology', carrying his current work back to their origins, in his practice and specificities of time and place of his architecture (Los Angeles as the American commonplace). She excludes any subversive context, based upon a 'style', like 'deconstruction'. Instead, her argument used to construct a method of discourse, consistent, in wide range and in particularities, establishing its own reference frames with the Gehry's architecture itself (1990, 72). This kind of an approach leaves the ground open to reproduce the promoted images as a general 'type' for any architectural 'style'-based domain. In other words, it is a critical process, which tries to cover the gap between experience and consciousness, while staying reserved for false-consciousness that is created through the generosity of label-frames. Burns in this sense, directly addresses Gehry's architecture, carrying it into a general frame, rather than using it as a subversive mean:

The projects are self-insistent in their Loosian materiality. However, they also bring into focus aspects of the built environment that are typically perceived but not actually seen...Gehry's work is also located in the historical conditions of culture-growth and decay. Topics are caught in history, locating moments in time by human agency. By analogy, architectural knowledge is likewise intertwined in historical time (1990, 74-76).

What we confront here, is a representative relation between different forms of architectural criticism. The unique work of Gehry, in Burns' criticism, is promoted in terms of its relation with its urbanistic context and architect's 'merits of materially, urbanistically, and conceptually joining differences'. However, Gehry's work is associated with image and style-based architectural classifications in Charles Jencks' criticism. Jencks' position, emphasizing a semiotic view, disregards many contextual and regional dimensions covered in Burns' criticism. He presents a classificatory position for Gehry under the connotative dimensions of image-based representations in architecture. This classificatory context is carried to a further abstraction in Temko's criticism, where Gehry's work is construed due to the dominance of works' independent images as the representation of a 'style'. In this abstraction, Gehry's personal position and merits, the urbanistic context of his work and particularities of his architectural discourse, is isolated from the 'images' of his work, where such criticism, in this sense, becomes an attempt to promote representational relations between unique cases and current architectural tendencies. It is not a naive aim to promote and support a media reality but on the other hand, it eventually becomes a self-legitimizing position towards presenting a certain consciousness of media-reality as being 'updated' or responsiveness to 'contemporary'.

Within this transience, an architectural work in the domain of academic criticism with its unique particularities, becomes a 'prototype' to be distributed all over the world in a more plural / eclectic context and reaches to the level of the 'fashionable', and the 'hottest' as the revelations of false-consciousness under the domain of popular criticism. The popular acceptance of deconstruction as an alternative 'movement' and 'style', brought the promotion of concepts such as 'impurity', 'imperfection', and 'disorder' which reflected back to 'everyday architecture' as 'jagged shapes' and 'fragmented forms' within few years. This vulgarization was the result of a naturalization process towards contradictory differences between the forms of architectural criticism. While academic forms of criticism concentrated on references of philosophy and art-criticism that liberate the ground towards 'imperfectionism' or 'non-rational' architecture, in popular, mediatic channels the abstract representations of these discussions as 'image promotion', let deconstruction to be construed as an alternative 'style'. The images of Gehry's additions for his own house became a model for a 'form fetishism' which triumphed all over the world. In fact this is an outcome of a postmodern world towards fulfilling the necessities of 'mass-media' and 'consumer society', Jean Baudrillard (1987, 65) argues:

(This is) a postmodern world in which everything has been reduced -or rather, perhaps, extended and intensified- into representations and simulacra, a world in which, so complete is the identification between power and representations of power, that power must be said effectively to have disappeared.

The manipulative power of architectural criticism as the representation of a critical consciousness in academic forms of architectural criticism, is totally open to an inversion by their reduced or extended representations in popular forms in architectural criticism. Media, therefore, not only supports the manipulative power of popular cultural forms in architectural criticism but also becomes a domain to establish a representative relation between different forms of architectural criticism, a process of self-legitimation, by neutralizing the academic forms of architectural criticism.

## IMAGE VERSUS / REPRESENTS CRITICAL TEXT

In architecture, image has always been an integrated part of critical texts, though image-text relation varies with forms of architectural criticism. In most forms, image is presented as the complementary part of the text. Whereas after 1970s, due to the reflections of a postmodern discourse, image started to gain an immense dominance as the representative form of the commodification of architecture in mass-culture. Kenneth Frampton (1989, 19) reformulated this interactive relation between media-society and architecture:

The arts have nonetheless continued to gravitate, if not towards entertainment, then certainly towards commodity and towards pure technique or pure scenography. In latter case, the so called post-modern architects are merely feeding the media-society with gratuitous, quietistic images...after the supposedly proven bankruptcy of the liberative modern project.

Scenography in architecture, in Frampton's terms, is not only a tendency gaining importance in architectural practice, but also an outcome of an interactive process due to media-dominated transformations in architectural criticism. Architectural image, in mass-media, becomes a representative form of architectural criticism, in the sense that, promoted images become superficial and abstract critical representation, separating themselves from the literary text as an independent text, subverting and neutralizing the literary text. The popular understanding of architectural criticism in mass-media as a 'consumption guide' 'to promote styles, and forms as fashion', disregards and neutralizes the diversities between similar images. Texts trying to uncover the relation between the factors that contribute to the actual production of architecture and their contextual relation with the produced-form, lost their importance. Instead, text became a ground to legitimize and promote selected images. In this sense, image became the generative nucleus of 'types' and 'styles' in architecture, rather than being their end product. Media-society, associated with the manipulative forces of the commodity-society, leaves no room for architectural criticism to preserve a disciplinary autonomy that is built upon the text. Image becomes a popular form of knowledge which disregards and subverts the significant diversities and contradictory information produced by the text. In a way, the representational character of image becomes a text of its own.

Alternative positions in architectural criticism such as Carol Burns' 'topical thinking', Kenneth Frampton's contextual criticism (critical regionalism), even Demetri Porphyrios' project of 'demythification' (supporting Manfredo Tafuri's position) are defensive intellectual stances, resisting the dominance of image as a communicative or instrumental sign (Frampton, 1989, 21). Frampton distinguishes between 'simple-minded' (popular) attempts and critical regionalism:

In contradistinction to Critical Regionalism, the primary vehicle of Populism is the communicative or instrumental sign. Such a sign seeks to evoke not a critical perception of reality, but rather the sublimation of a desire for direct experience through the provision of information. Its tactical aim is to attain, as economically as possible, a preconceived level of gratification in behavioristic terms. In this respect, the strong affinity of populism for the rhetorical techniques and imagery of advertising is hardly accidental. Unless one guards against such a convergence, one will confuse the resistant capacity of a critical practice with the demagogic tendencies of Populism.

Carol Burns' 'topical thinking' discussed above, also proposes a critical resistance towards extreme preoccupations of image. In the Gehry example, Burns' criticism is

an attempt to replace sign with 'critical perception of reality' introducing peculiarities of place, architect, program and rhetorical techniques. These peculiarities avoid Gehry's images to be construed as representations of a certain style. The popular understanding of 'deconstruction' in architecture as a 'philosophical context to end up with a style', leaves no room for these peculiarities. In popular forms of criticism where generating typologies and promoting styles are vital, 'typology' and 'style'-setting criteria mostly depend upon 'image-alikeness'. Texts, addressing the peculiarities that are not directly represented by the image, the distinctions that blur behind the abstract 'alikeness' of designed object, is not used by the popular cultural forms. Therefore, the transience between different forms of criticism ends up with the annihilation of critical texts resisting the independent power of 'image'. Popular discourses not only gain synthetic power by representing themselves as the abstract form of critical text, but they neutralize the resistance of the text established through the peculiarities beyond image a-likeness. The misleading, illusive presentation of popular forms as abstract representations of academic frames is the basic reason for vulgarization in architecture.

## CONCLUSION

Vulgarization and over-emphasis of architectural tendencies as movements, mass-production of 'styles' as scenographic imitations, popular constitution of criticism as a process of mythification and manipulative power of images are not peculiar to postmodern context only. Under the frame of postmodernity what became significant is that, both cultural, economic and social context of postmodernity and representations of postmodernism, as a style, accelerated and sharpened such a vulgarization, and weakened the resistance power of criticism.

In addition to these contextual peculiarities, the pluralist nature of postmodern architecture created a further complexity as the domain of architectural criticism. When forms became more responsive to hypothetical forms of history, to popular cultural references, and when rhetoric techniques in design regained a popularity, architecture transformed itself to become an alternative media or domain to create sign and to represent myths. It became nearly impossible to realize a process of demythification in a social context where myths replaced ideologies. The direct relation between ideology of modernism and architectural criticism based upon 'a critical perception of reality' lost its ground of existence. Numerous images were promoted as sub-movements contrary to ideology-based universality of modern architecture. Architectural criticism therefore, lost an important domain, as ideology, through which it could represent itself as a meta-language.

Here, two different modes of postmodern theory and art practice have to be identified. The first one is rather an opposition to the institutionalization of modernism. It is a reaction that rejects 'the pose of aristocratic aloofness from the mass cultures that has always functioned as the *avantgarde*'s despised opposite'. This reaction shows itself as the acceptance of popular culture, kitsch and fashion as observed in works of artists like Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and writers like Kurt Vonnegut (Connar, 1990, 238). In architectural criticism, the view of postmodernism that is promoted by Jencks, also addresses a similar position. Jencks (1987, 17), opposing Modernism for becoming a natural style of bourgeoisie by the institutionalization of the *avantgarde*, explains his alternative position as:

The *avantgarde* which drives Modernism forward directly reflects the dynamism of capitalism, its new waves of destruction and construction, the yearly movements and isms which follow each other as predictably as the seasons.

The way Jencks transforms the concept *avantgarde* brings nothing more than an uncritical acceptance of commodity and media-society. He offers no resistance to merging culture into fashion. This positional abstraction of postmodernism fulfills Frampton's reaction as fragmentation and decline of critical adversary culture. In architecture, what is observed is the mass produced version of postmodern architecture, uncritical reflections of pop, kitsch and fashion which results in architecture moving towards pure technique and scenography.

However, there exists a second mode of postmodern theory and art practice which actually tends to recapture and recover much of the energy of modernist *avantgarde* (Connar, 1990). The art of Laurie Anderson and John Cage or the architecture of James Stirling replaces the simple-minded concept of 'populism' with the concepts of 'situational' and 'participatory', which requires of the viewer / user not the mere adoration of an object but an active reflection upon its nature. It is a critical, defensive tendency acting upon the self-mirroring trance of art, reflecting upon institutional contexts and functions.

In architecture, popular forms of architectural criticism become the generation point where the distinction between the different modes of postmodern theory starts to blur. Though positions such as Kenneth Frampton's (1989a) 'contextualism'; Carol Burns' (1990) 'topical thinking' or Tafuri's (1980) 'process of demythification' create an alternative ground to regain these distinctions, their exclusive nature towards popular forms of criticism and 'everyday architecture' naturalizes their manipulative power. On the other hand, the 'plural-eclectic' forms of architectural criticism gain an immense manipulative power not only through their formal engagement with media, but also through presenting themselves as the representative form of academic spheres. Here the question that Alan Plattus left open in his introduction of Demetri Porphyrios' position on critical history becomes significant:

The open question -and one seems to lie outside the field of critical history *per se* - is whether the freedom of consciousness made available by the critical project of 'demythification' includes the freedom to manipulate creatively the myths that have been themselves the agents of manipulation (Plattus, 1985, 15).

The plurality and diversity embodied in postmodernism inevitably brought a hope to gain a freedom towards manipulating the 'agents of manipulation'. Postmodernism, in this sense, proposed an attractive domain for architectural criticism. But similar to the gleaming apple in the tale of 'snow-white and seven dwarfs', it carries with it a sly and secretive nature. While it represents a renewed awareness of an intellectual process, it also prepares the conditions for the transformation of any theory (in criticism) to mediate and legitimate itself as a part of this condition rather than theorizing about it.

Architectural criticism, in its postmodern domain confronts a similar duality, while it transforms itself to a postmodern position to gain a manipulative power of critical consciousness, it can not stand clear from the risk of falling into fantasies of populism which can easily revert into becoming an 'agent of manipulation', or narrowing down into self-promoting professionalism, or acting as the cultural legitimization of the alienating effects of media-society (Connar, 1990). Therefore architectural criticism is always open to further transformations to re-create myths as the agents of manipulation under its postmodern domain.

To stay away from such incarnating character of postmodernism, this study aimed to re-credit 'modern sensibility' of 'self-understanding', if modern sensibility is characterized by an awareness of the inescapable dependence of experience upon consciousness. Therefore, as it was intended, it was not only an effort to understand the nature of transformations of architectural criticism under the domain of postmodernism, but also an effort to unmask a process of self-legitimation through a criticism of architectural criticism. For a renewed awareness of recent architectural criticism, reorganization of categories and relationships was inevitable. Therefore a post-critical presentation of 'postmodern transformations' have been used as a frame to structure critical analyses of architectural criticism, uncovering its categories and relationships. The outcome was a regained distinction between different modes and cultural forms of architectural criticism. Such a consciousness uncovers the assimilating relation between different forms of architectural criticism, to create room for an optimistic call to invert the distracting and self-promoting aestheticization of politics into a freedom to politicize the realm of the aesthetic.

## MİMARLIK ELEŞTİRİSİ İÇİN KÜLTÜREL VE KAVRAMSAL ÇERÇEVELER:

Eleştirinin Postmodern Dönüşümleri

### ÖZET

Mimarlıkta 'çoğulcu' ve 'post-modern' olarak isimlendirilen eğilimlere kültürün, ekonominin ve teknolojinin getirdiği yeni koşullar çerçevesinde bakıldığında mimarlığın kendi dinamiğinden kaynaklanan bir kültürel ve sanatsal içerikten çok bu koşulların kaçınılmaz yansımaları barındırdığı gözleniyor. Bu koşulların getirdiği bir özellik olarak, mimarlığın ideolojik zeminini yitirmesi, mimarlık ürünlerine çoğulculuk kavramının ötesinde bayağılığın meşrulaşması olarak yansdı. Mimarlık eleştirisi de, karşı çıkma gücünü yitirerek kavramsal farkların yitirildiği ve *media* toplumunun yapay etkilerinin meşrulaştırıldığı bir ortama dönüştü.

Bu çalışma kriz olarak tanımlanabilecek bu dönüşümün doğasını anlamaya ve mimarlık eleştirisinin içindeki tutum ve anlayış farklılıklarını, benzerlikleri ve karşılıkları belirlemeye yönelik kavramsal bir çerçeve sunmaya çalışmaktadır. Bu çerçeveden hareketle mimarlık eleştirisini yeniden sınıflamaya yönelik bir model oluşturulmakta ve çeşitli örneklemelerden de yararlanılarak ortak kavramsal zeminler içinde birbirlerini temsil ediyor gibi görülen farklı kültürel tutumların, aralarında çelişkiler barındırmaya varan farklılıkları sergilenmeye çalışılmaktadır.

Mimarlık eleştirisinin farklı kültürel biçimleri arasında oluşan kavram farklılıklarının sanatla *kitsch*, imajla gerçek, popülerle kalıcı ve orijinalle taklit arasındaki ayırmaları belirsizleştirdiği saptanmaktadır. Bu ayırmaları yeniden kazanabilmek için mimarlık eleştirisinin de, çerçevesel farklılıkları içinde yeniden tartışılması ve eleştirilmesi her zamankinden daha gerekli.

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