

**FINDING THE ESSENTIAL MEANINGS IN ARCHITECTURE: MARTIN
HEIDEGGER, JØRN UTZON AND TURGUT CANSEVER.
PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH**

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ABSTRACT

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Architectural theory undergoes fundamental changes. It is no longer able to describe the complex process of the formation of modern architecture without referring to sociology or philosophy. The phenomenological concepts turn out to be most effective when trying to explain the "unreflective" and "non-symbolic" in architecture. And the main reason for the emergence of phenomenological concepts in architecture was modern "nostalgia" for authenticity. This article scrutinizes Martin Heidegger's views on architecture as a representative figure of phenomenological approach and great critic of technological invasion on art and architecture. As well as Jorn Utzon and Turgut Cansever, two different architects, from two different countries, with different world views but very similar ideas on how architecture should look like and what is ontological purpose of it.

**MİMARLIKTA TEMEL ANLAMLARI BULMA: MARTIN HEIDEGGER, JØRN UTZON VE
TURGUT CANSEVER. FENOMENOLOJİK YAKLAŞIM**

ÖZ

Anahtar Kelimeler

*Fenomenoloji,
Mimarlık,
Özgün varoluş mimarisi,
Martin Heidegger,
Jorn Utzon,
Turgut Cansever*

Mimari teori temel değişikliklerden geçer. Modern mimarlığın oluşum sürecinin sosyoloji ya da felsefeye atıfta bulunmaksızın tanımlanması mümkün değildir. Fenomenolojik kavramlar mimaride "yansımaz" ve "sembolik olmayan" açıklamaya çalışırken en etkili olduğu ortaya çıkmaktadır ve mimaride fenomenolojik kavramların ortaya çıkmasının temel nedeni, özgünlük için modern "nostalji" dir. Bu makale, Martin Heidegger'in mimarlık hakkındaki görüşlerini fenomenolojik bir yaklaşımın temsili bir figürü ve sanat ve mimarlığa dair teknolojik istila eleştirmeni olarak incelemektedir. Ayrıca, Jorn Utzon ve Turgut Cansever'in, iki farklı ülkeden, farklı dünya görüşlerine sahip, ancak mimarlığın nasıl görünmesi gerektiği ve bunun ontolojik amacı hakkında çok benzer fikirleri olan iki farklı mimarın eleştirisi de yapılmaktadır.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology itself takes deep roots in the history of Western philosophy and appears as separate discipline at the beginning of 20th century, with Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre and others. However, in this short article it would be impossible to cover or even review it, yet it is not even the point. For a new reader, it would be enough to look at Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, which defines phenomenology as "the study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience" (Malpas, 2019). Accordingly, when architecture becomes an object of phenomenological research, the focus will be on what role built environment plays in the existential experiences of people.

Phenomenology of architecture, in its turn, as an independent theory was formed as a response to the rationalization of modernism, and later reappeared as an alternative to critical theories of postmodernism. The phenomenology of architecture is searching for underlying mechanisms of human spatial representations on the study of professional thinking and its contribution to the interpretation of key architectural abstractions, such as "form", "image", "space", "design", "dwelling". In this context, it can be said that phenomenological approach is the search for ontological significance of architecture that hides not only visual, but also some unrevealed sensory truth about spatial existence.

Sociologists and philosophers have been interested in spatial and aesthetic theories starting from Gaston Bachelard, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer with "symbolic" truth of shapes and buildings, Henri Lefebvre, Gianni Vattimo (Leach, 2002, p. 81-154) and others. Phenomenological approaches to architecture varies from scientists to scientist, however for these mentioned thinkers space is perceived not as abstract, neutral space, but as "lived experience" on the first place. Phenomenology of architecture, meanwhile, claims to have resource to a deeper symbolic level of buildings; it seeks to go beyond the codifying capacity of semiology to reveal a deeper understanding of the world.

Theoretician of architecture Rapaport states that for such assumption-free perception of space we need to be naive: "The phenomenology of architecture is not

dealing with an abstract idea nor with a fixed sign, but with experience, inseparable from the living contact with the structure. This is not an explorative view on architecture, not a historical tour, but it is more an existential stay in the world of architectural forms. Excessive knowledge only prevents this perception" (Rappaport, 2000).

So, it can be said that existential experience which people live and feel towards architectural constructions is one of the main concepts of the phenomenology of architecture. If so, then it is essential to analyse Martin Heidegger's approach to the concept of dwelling, which he uses to partly explain existential experience in connection to built environment and to start this discussion on scientific level on the first place.

2. ARCHITECTURE OF AUTHENTIC EXISTENCE: HEIDEGGER, UTZON AND CANSEVER

Martin Heidegger³'s essay "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" (1954) is one of the texts which has had the most influence on architectural thinking in the second half of 20th and early 21st century. Heidegger himself is one of those philosophers who searched for the ontological meaning of dwelling. What does it actually mean, are every building suitable for dwelling, or when we dwell in building does it merely means that we shelter in it? The essence of "dwelling" for Heidegger lies outside of architecture or construction, like, for example, the essence of technology is not technological.

Heidegger comes to the conclusion that dwelling is never thought of as the basic character of human being. He makes some short language analysis and defines that the word *Bauen* in German means building. But if one takes a deeper look at the High German or Old English language they can discover that *bauen* actually means 'to dwell'. Yet, what does it mean to dwell? Here, we have to separate *dwelling* from other activities, like work, travel, play, and others. We *stay* for a vocation in one place, but we *dwell* in another place. However, to dwell means all of them: to stay, to shelter, to play and live in some place, building in particular. And here comes interesting thing, that Heidegger emphasises - the word '*bauen*' (to dwell) actually come from the verb '*to be*': "Where the word *bauen* still speaks in its original sense it also says how far the nature of dwelling reaches. That is, *bauen, buan, bhu, beo* are the word *bin* in the versions: ich bin

³ Martin Heidegger (1889 - 1976) is German philosopher, more known for his pioneer ideas in existential philosophy

(I am), du bist (you are), the imperative forms of *bin*, be. Then what does *ich bin* means? (Heidegger, 2001, p.145-146) According to this linguistic research, *ich bin* actually means *ich baue*, i.e. *to be* means *to dwell*, adequately *ich bin*, *du bist* means: I dwell, you dwell. To be human being means to be on the earth as mortal. It means to dwell. It also means to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, even to cultivate or to construct. Building as dwelling, says Heidegger, "that is, as being on the earth, however, remains for man's everyday experience that which is from the outset 'habitual' - we inhabit it" (Leach, 2005, p. 96).

Heidegger clearly let reader understand that dwelling is not only existing. It is actually the most bounded way to understand it. *Dwelling* itself means constructing, being a part of the process of creation of something, which is, by the way, not because of our needs to be sheltered, but because of our need as humans to be producers, to be 'dwellers'. In the words of Heidegger: "We do not dwell because we have built, but we built and have built because we dwell" (Leach, 2005, p. 97).

As Jonas Holst⁴ states in his paper Heidegger's predilection to Greek and German languages can be actually contested if we take a look at other languages which Heidegger did not take into consideration. In this way, understanding of dwelling can have an odd excitation: "the original setting of dwelling is neither the house nor any kind of built environment, nor it is the free, peaceful place or the act of freeing, sparing and cultivating, as Heidegger sustains in "Building Dwelling Thinking" says Holts. It is more probable to say that dwelling is a state of being lost in incomprehensibility and unknown as Old Norse *dvelja* stands for "remaining or staying where one is" (Holst, 2014). Eventually we will be led back to the meaning of dwelling as making a halt, withdrawing in order to be less exposed and so resist being swept away onto unknown. This opens utterly new phenomenological understanding of building and dwelling.

What much of modern and postmodern architectural thinking extracts from Heidegger's text and revolves around is the understanding of building and dwelling as more or less abstract forms of being without taking into account the people inhabiting

⁴ Jonas Holst, PhD in Philosophy and History of Thought in University of Aarhus, Denmark, where he was professor and researcher since 2002 until 2007 with stay at Eberhard University Karl Tübingen, Germany. He finished his postdoctoral on History and concept of Humanism in 2009. He has worked as a language teacher and researcher funded by Danish foundations such as Carlsberg And Politiken. At the moment, he is assistant professor doctor in the Superior Technical School of Architecture of the University San Jorge where he works the Open Source Architectures research group. A paper of Jonas Holst on "Rethinking Dwelling and Building. On Martin Heidegger's conception of Being as Dwelling and Jørn Utzon's Architecture of Well-being" published at 2014 in ZARCH.

space. In these traditions, Holst claims that little has also been said about what the Danish architect **Jørn Utzon**⁵ adds to the term “being” and announces as the most important aspect of architecture: *well-being* understood as human well-being. Utzon interprets Heidegger’s text critically in order to rethink dwelling and building within an architectural context, presenting lifelong search for the architecture of well-being.

While Heidegger bases his understanding of building and dwelling on being and in this scheme of things human beings play only a minor role, Utzon proposes another understanding of dwelling and building based on human wellbeing. While Heidegger dismisses architectural observations and reasoning about light and air, assemblage and economy as secondary in relation to the original meaning of dwelling and building, Utzon displays an architect’s sensibility for these elements’ significance in visualizing and creating places where people can integrate the building process into dwelling as a way of furthering human well-being (Holst, 2014).

Interesting remark was made by Holst when paying attention to how both thinkers mention natural environment. Heidegger rose in the immense forest on the South of Germany, Schwarzwald, when Utzon, since he was a child, had been at the Nordic sea, just next to the waters surrounding Denmark. "Where Heidegger relates dwelling and being to freeing and abiding in a clearing, Utzon links dwelling to a protected place in the middle of a landscape where the sea, which is not always calm and clear, is always near" (Holst, 2014). On this basis, architecture, for Utzon, means "the art of building places where people can feel rooted to the earth and stay in contact with the forces of the sky, the air, the light and the sun, without being directly exposed to them". More careful study of the influences of these elements on human well-being is what Utzon proposes as the basic architectural principle.

Both Heidegger and Utzon refer to a state of human being thrown towards their own existence, for Heidegger is *Befindlichkeit* which he is trying to disclose in the notion of *Dasein*, and for Utzon is well-being, namely *velbefindende*. But Heidegger, even scrutinizing the notions of building and dwelling, still tends to stay on the way of revealing the meaning of being itself, which in the end will turn out to fit into his notion

⁵ Jørn Utzon (1918-2008), was a Danish *architect*, most notable for designing the Sydney Opera House in Australia.

of *fourfold of things*⁶. Utzon goes beyond the sheer state of being and tries to understand how surroundings influences us with its dimensions, light, shadows and colours. Heidegger talks about building, but he forgets about the shape of that building which is architecture itself, building as a setting not only for living, but for "living well", as Utzon would say.

What makes even greater interest for this paper is point of view of one of Turkish architects **Turgut Cansever**⁷ who was also concerned with existential problems within architecture. He might not be that advanced philosopher or thinker as Heidegger who actually started phenomenological discussion on architecture, but Cansever had also contributed into understanding the essence of buildings and existence as well.

Cansever, on the contrary to Heidegger or Utzon, looks at architecture from Islamic point of view and conducts his analysis basing on the main concepts of this religion. What makes his ideas original and different is that for Cansever western dualistic approach is meagre and inadequate for the understanding of human existence as such. In this regard, Islam and its understanding of being, which is based on the four-dimensional concept, solves this problem. Thus, according to him, there are four levels of human existence: "material, bio-social, psychological and spiritual" (Cansever, 2016, p.14), and architecture should be considered without detaching from these spheres as it develops in them. The structure of houses, their frontal areas and gardens, connections between streets, distances between important focal points etc. are all directly connected with values and the form of social organization of people living in that certain area. And the task of architect is to take all of it into consideration.

One may find similarities between Heidegger and Cansever's ideas in the way were Hidegger's notion of fourfold as gathering of *earth, sky, mortals and divinities* may correspond to Cansever's *material, bio-social, psychological and spiritual* respectively. Moreover, mentioned above linguistic analysis of the notion of dwelling reveals Heidegger's understanding of it as being, and real 'being' can be reached within the framework of *fourfold*, thus if experienced as a point of unity of four dimensions. In this way, one can say that dwelling, i.e. building, means creating a work that will fit into the

⁶ Fourfold of things for Heidegger is a way to understand the things as gathering of earth, sky, mortals and divinities, which he also reflected on understanding the architecture.

⁷ Turgut Cansever (1921 - 2009) was Turkish architect, city planner and thinker. He is the only architect in the world to win Aga Khan Architecture Award for three times. Also known as "wise architect".

concept of fourfold. As well as for Cansever, creating an architectural structure should be done only after analysing its further existence on four level and correspond to understanding of Islamic concept of *tewhid*, which is also unity.

Another point that should be noticed is that Heidegger in "Building Dwelling Thinking" says that ' *the fundamental character of dwelling is... sparing and preserving* (Young, 2002, p.129). Julian Yung believes that here we should understand Heidegger from two different points of view: firstly, dwelling is a place where person is safe from outside world, thus is being preserved; but on the other hand person also plays a role of an agent who should preserve and take care of each thing in nature."Dwelling is, in brief, both caring for and being cared for"(Young, 2001, p. 89). Phenomenally, it is very similar to what Cansever tries to prove in his works as well.

Firstly, Cansever, who takes Islam as reference point, claims that creating architectural forms should be done only within the principle of protecting the environment. As well as some other modern thinkers Cansever was against using mixtures of styles and not natural materials of construction because this would fail the idea of "putting everything on the right place" (Cansever, 2016, p.28) (which can also be compared with Heidegger's claim "every being has its proper place" (Malpas, 2012, p.102). That is why, it can be said that for Cansever the use of raw materials means the creation of an architecture in which a person can "dwell authentically" by taking care of the environment and at the same time not detaching from the nature and its origins.

Secondly, Turkish architect even gives reference from Biblical story of Adam and Eve who were sent out of Heavenly Garden on Earth and were doomed to continue their being there (Cansever, 2016, p.97-98). Living in terrestrial world people were given awareness that they are obliged to protect the environment, thus architectural constructions (as well as everything that is made by humans) should be environmentally-friendly. Moreover, except of not being hostile to human being, the biggest task of people is to "beautify the world around", and by this thesis Cansever "supports" mentioned above Jørn Utzon, who sees building as realizing the concept of *well-being*.

Architecture for Utzon is about furthering the well-being of the people who use and dwell in the buildings. It is this word, "well-being" (or in Danish "*velbefindende*"), is

the basis of architecture if we want to achieve harmony between the space that is created and what is to happen in it" (Holst, 2014). And as Holst notices, well-being in this context does not mean living wealthy, but living in harmony with the surrounding. As if a response to this, Cansever says: "Make every moment of your life beautiful!" (Ayvazoğlu, 2016, p.78), and it is important to notice that one should not understand beauty as a category that describes only external appearance of something. Beautifying means highlighting the natural wealth and creating harmonious environment which are preconditions for existence in space and time.

Turkish architect Cansever also adds to this, that in order to live in harmony with the surrounding it is necessary to give people chance to modify buildings according to their needs and let people be aware of the responsibility they have against the environment. In this context, Cansever mentions Ottoman cities, which he calls "heavenly cities", because their dwellers were given opportunity to change the architecture of construction as they wanted: "people who were dwelling in those houses [Ottoman houses] were able to change them accordingly to their needs and at the same time oversee the environment; thus they were making contribution into the formation of the city and gaining some responsibility for it" he says (Ayvazoğlu, 2016, p.99). For Utzon, this intervention of citizens to the form of building would be actually creating well-being itself. "This extension of their own being through which the dwellers participate in adding something vital to their own life form, aware of the nature of the elements and dimensions in the building process, contributes to the heightened state of wellbeing, "*velbefindende*" (Holst, 2014). Human beings do not have to remain in a state of finding themselves thrown into the world, but they may find a source of well-being, *velbefindende*, in dwelling and building.

3. CONCLUSION

It would not be an exaggeration to say that nowhere else as in architecture we can understand Gadamer's idea of phenomenology as 'practical philosophy' (Malpas, 2019). Phenomenology of architecture as well as poetry tries to reduce symbols back to signs. And that is why some architects and theorists in the last 30-40 years, find ideas and concepts that are close to their jobs in phenomenology. Phenomenology was a resource, a tool for finding solutions to the problems of the theory of architecture.

Phenomenological concepts, accepted and developed by professionals, turned out to be most effective when trying to explain the unreflective and non-symbolic in architecture.

The whole essence of phenomenology lies in returning back to the pre-lingual, pre-experimental contemplation of things, which refers to the personal experience of one's existence. The reason for the emergence of phenomenological concepts in architecture is nostalgia for authenticity, for genuine perception of things, which was typical for modern world. Whether its finding conditions for authentic existence as in Heidegger, Utzon's well-being or Cansever's "beautiful" buildings, thinkers and architects of modernity would search first of all for authentic existential patterns that should be implemented in buildings. It was the search for the real, the "given" that forced architects to turn to the phenomenological tradition, in which they try to find a way to the limitations of the language.

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