Phenomenological Concepts in Architecture
Towards a User-Oriented Practice
To my family
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the inspiration and long-term support of many people.

First of all, I wish to thank my supervisors.

Professor Guttorm Fløistad of the University of Oslo has been present as a positive force from the very beginning of my doctoral studies, always generous with his time and invaluable advice on philosophical issues.

Professor Alberto Pérez-Gómez of McGill University has had a crucial role in the development and refining of my ideas regarding phenomenology in the architectural context. Furthermore, he made possible my stay as a Visiting Scholar at McGill’s School of Architecture, History, and Theory Program—this was a priceless experience in my doctoral journey.

Dr. Martina Keitsch of the Oslo School of Architecture and Design has been very supportive in the later phase of the research, offering tireless feedback on the evolving drafts of the dissertation.

I am also indebted to Professor David Leatherbarrow of the Pennsylvania State University, whose insightful comments on the final draft of this work directed my attention to a number of important issues and provided valuable references.

I would like to extend very special thanks to Professor Halina Dunin-Wojseth, the head of the doctoral programme at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design. Without her encouragement and continuous support this project would not have been realizable.

I am very grateful to the Oslo School of Architecture and Design and its rector, Professor Karl Otto Ellefsen for providing the flexible working environment and funding of this project.
In addition, the staff at the AHO library must be mentioned for their friendly atmosphere and professional assistance.

Finally, I have to thank my family for the patience and constant support in this long-term effort. Special gratitude is due to my sons, Mateusz and Damian, and also to my husband Tomasz, for enduring the extended periods of my self-absorbed work.
ABSTRACT

This thesis approaches the question of the role of the user in architecture from a phenomenological perspective. In the most common understanding, the formulation “user-oriented” has a strong methodological emphasis, directing attention to ways of getting feedback from the users and integrating it directly in the design process. This project, instead, concentrates foremost on the ontological and epistemological dimensions of the users’ role. It asks primarily why it is important to include individuals in a design process and how architects should approach a user’s experience in a non-reductive way.

The initial question of user involvement leads here to more general issues, such as the cultural context of architecture; architectural ethics; the role of tradition; the views of creativity and art; the challenges of globalization; and the professional ethos.

The initial part of the thesis explicates how different paradigms within contemporary architectural discourse ground different approaches to users. It reveals certain limitations of the dominating conceptual positions (postpositivism, critical theory, constructivism), and argues in turn for a need of adopting a paradigm that could support a more user- and context-sensitive architectural practice.

The subsequent part of the study points at the relevance of phenomenology for conceptualizing user involvement in architecture.

First, the thesis discusses ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of phenomenology focusing on the ideas of lifeworld, lived experience, and interpretation. These concepts are reexamined in terms of their implications for the role of user in architecture. This discussion is supplemented with a consideration of the phenomenological account of space as given in lived experience, and the views of art and ethics grounded in the lifeworld.

Second, the study addresses the relevance of phenomenology in contemporary, globalized conditions, which to some extent unsettle previous ways of thinking about architecture and its users. The foci of this part of the
study are technology and its implications for everyday life; diagrammatization of architectural theory; and sustainability concerns.

Next, the thesis seeks for ways to proceed towards architectural practice. In this context it discusses Gadamer’s view of phenomenology as practical philosophy and presents Donald Schön’s concept of the “reflective practice” as a model for user-oriented practice, which in many aspects coincides with the phenomenological framework.

The research concludes with a case study, which is considered primarily as a strategy facilitating the practical application of the research findings. The selected case is the design practice of the Rural Studio and its founder, the late Samuel Mockbee.

One of the major findings of the thesis is that the question of user involvement approached within the phenomenological framework extends far beyond addressing the opinions of users. Respect towards the perspective of an individual is here inseparable from the appreciation of her lifeworld. Pointing out the relational nature of understanding, phenomenological hermeneutics asks for a thorough consideration and acknowledgement of the social, cultural, and historical context of architectural interventions. In this perspective, the design process is not primarily guided by abstract objectives, but by the lifeworld and the ways of life of the users of architecture. What follows, a user-oriented architectural practice, ultimately refers to architecture’s participation in the culture,

Further, this study has revealed that creativity is an important dimension of a user-oriented, culturally-responsible practice. Yet, it is not the expressionistic model of creativity dominating contemporary architectural discourse and represented by modern aesthetics. In the phenomenological perspective, art connects the sphere of individual experience with the larger sphere of common significations and thereby provides grounds for social interactions. Art also has a transformative role; it helps individuals to identify and develop their true possibilities, to adopt a more reflective and resolute stance towards their lives. The transformative aspect of the architectural experience is an important dimension of a user-oriented practice.

On a more general level, this thesis – by situating architectural discourse in the perspective of human sciences – has demonstrated how the discussion of user involvement within architectural theory may be approached by analyzing different ways of “framing problems,” i.e., the most basic conceptual underpinnings of different positions. As Schön (1983) suggests, this type of research has a crucial importance for professional development.
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</th>
<th>iv</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 1 INTRODUCTION

1. Research problem .......................................................... 1
2. Research objectives ......................................................... 4
3. The structure of the thesis .............................................. 12
4. Methodological remarks .................................................. 14
   1.1 Data analysis and interpretation ................................... 17
   1.2 Evaluation of validity in qualitative research ............... 20
   1.3 The position of the author .......................................... 24

## 2 MAPPING THE RESEARCH BACKGROUND

2.1 Introductory remarks .................................................... 28
   2.1.1 Types of discourse within architecture .................. 28
   2.1.2 Concepts of theory ............................................. 30
   2.1.3 Classifying architectural theory ......................... 34
2.2 Paradigms in architectural research ............................... 38
   2.2.1 Positivism and postpositivism .............................. 42
      Positivism and structuralism .................................. 47
      Influence on architectural discourse .................... 49
   2.2.2 Critical theory ............................................... 55
      Influence on architectural discourse .................... 59
      Postcriticality discussion .................................. 63
   2.2.3 Constructivism ................................................ 69
      Influence on architectural discourse .................... 75
2.3 User involvement as an ethical issue ............................... 78
   2.3.1 Theory-practice relationship and the position of the
      ethical concerns within paradigms ......................... 83
   2.3.2 Grounds for the ethical problems ......................... 86
2.4 A niche for the research .............................................. 88
PHENOMENOLOGY: CONCEPTS, PERSPECTIVES

3.1 Phenomenology: a brief introduction
3.2 Phenomenological framework for a user-oriented practice
  3.2.1 Epistemology: lived experience
  3.2.2 Ontology: lifeworld—the shared horizon
    Homeworld and alienworlds
    Heidegger’s perspective: authenticity, dwelling and the fourfold
  3.2.3 Methodology: interpretation
    Gadamer’s perspective
    Phenomenological hermeneutics and conservatism
3.3 Towards architecture: art, ethics, and space
  3.3.1 Phenomenological understanding of art and modern aesthetics
  3.3.2 Searching for an ethical basis of architecture
    Addressing criticisms
  3.3.3 A lived experience of space
3.4 Summary

PHENOMENOLOGY: NEW CHALLENGES

4.1 Technology and everyday life
  4.1.1 The user as a “global nomad”
4.2 Diagrammatization of architectural theory
  4.2.1 Media, architectural criticism and user involvement
4.3 Sustainability concerns
4.4 Conclusions: the relevance of phenomenology today

APPROACHING ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE

5.1 Phenomenology as practical philosophy
  5.1.1 Rhetoric and architecture
5.2 Epistemology of professional practice
  5.2.1 Reflection-in-Action
  5.2.2 Architectural design as a reflective practice
5.3 Moving towards a reflective contract

PHENOMENOLOGICAL IDEAS BEHIND ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE—A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

6.1 Case studies and context-dependent research in professional development
6.2 Methodological remarks
  6.2.1 Case study—general characteristics
  6.2.2 Case study’s design
  6.2.3 Validity and reliability issues in case studies
6.3 Case study report
  6.3.1 Initial remarks
6.3.2 Introducing Samuel Mockbee and the Rural Studio concept ...........................................................................................229
6.3.3 Development of issues ......................................................233
   Lifeworld: approaching the context ..............................................233
   Lived experience: approaching the user’s perspective ...............239
   Interpretation: approaching the process....................................243
6.3.4 Sub-case: Bryants’ House, Mason’s Bend .......................251
   The client .......................................................................................252
   The process ...................................................................................254
   The outcome ..................................................................................255
6.3.5 Conclusions .......................................................................256

7 FINAL REFLECTIONS .................................................................263
7.1 Contributions to existing knowledge .........................................263
7.2 Indications for further research ..................................................268
7.3 Reflecting on the route ...............................................................269

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................................................271
Contemporary architectural theory may be generally divided into two groups of perspectives. These positions represent a contradiction between architecture as a contingent practice that has to deal with the given reality and architecture as an autonomous realm that acknowledges this reality in a very limited way. The present study addresses this gap, focusing on the position of user-related concerns in contemporary architectural discourse. It represents the search for a conceptual framework that could legitimize and encourage a more careful consideration of the perspectives of individuals affected by architectural choices. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for deeper reflection on the cultural context of architecture, arguing that to respect the perspectives of people means also to respect the cultural background of a place that situates architectural interventions.

The question of how to approach a user’s perspective in a given cultural context is particularly relevant today. As many scholars argue, a contemporary built environment, specifically the city, can no longer be considered a homogenous cultural entity. Rather, it should be seen as a collection of intersections where various social, cultural, or economic events dissect. The present-day globalized conditions unsettle older ways of thinking about architecture and its users. For some architects, they imply liberation from the traditional constraints of design, suggesting generic or purely aesthetic solutions. Yet, today’s built environment with “the overwhelming presence of massive architecture and dense infrastructures, as well as the irresistible utility logic […] have produced displacement and estrangement among many individuals and whole communities” (Sassen, 2006:1). This study argues that architects’ essential responsibility is to negotiate among different perspectives and realities and to create an environment meaningful for those who live in it.
At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that a clear, unambiguous definition of "users" of architecture may be problematic. As Donald Schön (1983) asserts, one of the challenges in the professional-client relationship lays in specifying "to whom should we define ourselves as standing in the essential professional relationship" (Schön, 1991:291). Eason (1987) identifies three types of users: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary users are those persons who actually use the artifact; secondary users are those who will occasionally use the artifact or those who use it through an intermediary; and tertiary users are persons who will be affected by the use of the artifact. In the present thesis, it is assumed that the successful design should take into account the wide range of possible users. In this perspective, a user-oriented architectural practice is inevitably a practice that not only respects the needs of individuals, but also takes part in an existing culture.

This thesis discusses how different paradigms within contemporary architectural discourse ground different approaches to users. It reveals certain limitations of the dominating conceptual positions (postpositivism, critical theory, constructivism), and argues in turn for a need of adopting a paradigm that could support a more user- and context-sensitive approach. The study suggests that phenomenology, beginning and extending from the perspective of lifeworld and lived experience, provides comprehensive foundations for a socially and culturally responsible architectural practice.

What is the main strength of phenomenology in this argument? As Merleau-Ponty (1945) states, phenomenology is a philosophy that "does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their ‘facticity,’” it concentrates on re-achieving a direct, pre-theoretical contact with the world which grounds the first principles of rational thought (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:vii). Consequently, phenomenology does not see subject and object as independent entities,

---

1 The answer is to some extent context-specific, i.e., dependent upon the kind of building/built environment we are dealing with. In the case of private dwellings, it is easier to determine the user group, but it is much more difficult in the case of public buildings. Here we may deal with inhabitants, employees, visitors, passers-by, tourists, and even people who do not have direct access to a building, but only see it through mass-media; some objects have a symbolic meaning and an influence that reaches far wider than their physical settings.

2 The notion of "practice" in modern, common understanding refers to the process of putting theoretical knowledge into action, thus it may have instrumental, pragmatic connotations. This thesis adopts a phenomenological understanding of practice, where facticity (not theory) is the starting point for practice. Phenomenology emphasizes a reflective relationship between theories and action, and the need for a constant effort of conceptualizing the meanings of what can be learned from experience in order to reframe the objectives of a given discipline, here architecture. See also: the discussion of theory-practice relationship in different paradigms, section 2.3.1; phenomenological view of practice, section 5.1.
where the priority is most typically given to “objectivity” (represented by a scientist, an expert, a professional, etc.), and “subjectivity” is conceived as an obstacle to gaining a clear view of the world. On the contrary, phenomenology unifies “subjectivity” and “objectivity” emphasizing that all our knowledge of the world (including science) is essentially grounded on our experience of the world.

The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:ix)

In its emphasis on the co-constituting subject-object relationship, phenomenology overcomes dualism which has been undermining contemporary philosophy and science since the 17th century. Dualist thinking separates regular, predictable, and controllable events of the corporal world from those that are not certain, and difficult to predict, i.e., related to human consciousness. As a consequence, the sphere of human meanings has been effectively set apart from nature, but also the individual self has been set apart from “the other” of everything outside the self (Willis et al., 2007:7). Dualist thinking disconnects “anthropological reference from its description of the world” (Dripps, 1999:47). As we shall see, a dualist approach is one of the main reasons behind the neglect of the user and his/her cultural background in modern architecture.

Accentuating the foundational role of human experience, phenomenology aims to articulate a notion of “subject” in a way which is different from modern “subjectivism,” as well as from relativism, represented by constructivist perspectives. As Madison argues, phenomenology helps to rearticulate the relationship between universal values and the contingent conditions of concrete existence in such a way “as to avoid both metaphysical essentialism and foundationalism and intellectual arbitrariness” (Madison, 1997). In other words, in the phenomenological perspective norms and values

---
3 Subjectivism may be also considered an example of a dualist thinking. As Lukács points out, “In theory of ‘reflection’ we find the theoretical embodiment of the duality of thought and existence, consciousness and reality … And from that point of view it is immaterial whether things are to be regarded as reflections of concepts or whether concepts are reflections of things. In both cases the duality is firmly established” (Lukács, 1971:200).
“are contextual, without being merely relative [...] and [...] they become normative without being abstract or a-historical” (Steinbock, 1995:157).

The mediating character of phenomenological concepts implies numerous benefits for architecture. Apart from encouraging a deeper respect toward the perspective of users and their cultural settings, phenomenology can contribute to bridging the gap between architectural theory and practice. Phenomenology conceives our practical engagement with the world as primary to the scientific rationality. Consequently, the connection between knowledge and practice is not a structured, hierarchical relation. The relevance of theory lies not in useful frameworks and techniques that one can apply to solve practical problems, but in its formative in nature: theory changes us. It enhances our perceptiveness, influences our relationships with others, and it provides us with embodied, situational forms of understanding (Gadamer, 1981).

The main body of this research is supplemented by a concise case study, which is considered primarily as a strategy facilitating the practical application of the research findings. However, the primary intention behind this project is not to give highly specific recommendations for architectural design. The main aim is rather to raise awareness of the issues associated with a user perspective and to articulate some fundamental principles for a practice that might be more sensitive to the realities, values, and questions arising from the depths of culture. From these principles, different implications—design choices—may be drawn.

Although this study is to a large extent based on philosophical texts and ideas, it is not a philosophical disputation. Its primary aim is to engage in architectural debate and, in this context, point to the relevance of some philosophical concepts and the benefits of establishing a more intimate dialogue between architecture and philosophy.

1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM

As Clare Cooper Marcus asserts, architecture can be a powerful, positive social force—people’s environments exert considerable influence on their behaviors and lifestyles. Inhabitants’ needs, as well as social and cultural

---

4 In this thesis, the category of “user” in architecture is not limited to inhabitants, dwellers, or occupants. In a widest sense, it indicates all those who are directly or indirectly affected by a given architectural artifact. Nevertheless, in order to avoid repetitions the notion of “user” will be in some places used interchangeably with “inhabitant,” “dweller,” “individual,” “client,” etc.
activities should therefore inform and shape the designed environment, balanced and merged with ecological requirements, contextual issues, and aesthetic goals (Cooper Marcus, 1986). To actually accomplish “user involvement” means to create architecture that is truly meaningful for individuals and responsive to contemporary cultural questions.

Yet, while a review of contemporary architectural theory indicates that user-related concerns have not been absent, this discussion remains rather fragmented and incidental. Many influential architectural theorists promote a vision of architecture as an intellectualized, abstract form exploration, claiming that it should be as free from any traditional “constraints” as possible (Eisenman, 1984; Tschumi, 1994). Others declare that architecture should follow the globalization processes and market forces rather than pay attention to the specificity of a given place and the needs of a local community (Koolhas, 1995; Lavin, 2005).

The voices calling for a more engaged, user- and context-sensitive architectural practice have been present within architectural discourse for over 50 years. These perspectives were primarily influenced by structuralist ideas and the shift from positivist to postpositivist framework in the social sciences; some of them were also grounded in the radical social movements of 1960s.

As early as in 1953 (at CIAM IX), a group of young architects led by Alison and Peter Smithson along with Aldo van Eyck, in reaction to the dominance of functionalist reductionism of the “old guard,” stated:

Man may readily identify himself with his own hearth, but not easily with the town within which it is placed. “Belonging” is a basic emotional need—its associations are of the simplest order. From “belonging”—identity—comes the enriched sense of neighborliness. The short narrow street of the slum succeeds where spacious redevelopment frequently fails. (quoted in: Frampton, 1994:271)

5 Tschumi and Eisenman have been criticized for a lack of respect for the perspectives of users (e.g., Salingaros, 2004). In his writings, Tschumi admits that he deliberately intends his buildings to have an interrupted, even violent feel (Tschumi, 1994).
6 CIAM (The Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne, i.e., International Congresses of Modern Architecture) was an organization founded in 1928 and disbanded in 1959, responsible for a number of events and congresses arranged around the world by the most prominent architects of the time.
7 I.e., Le Corbusier, Van Eesteren, Sert, Rogers, Roth, Mayekawa, Gropius (Frampton, 1994:271)
With this statement, the group (known later on as Team X) established a position based on the affirmation of the importance of both the social and symbolic aspects of the built environment. Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City* (1960) continues this line of thinking, stressing the importance of human perception of a built environment. He defines urban environment as a complex system of interactions between people (users) and various surrounding objects. The visual quality of the urban environment, in Lynch’s theory, relates both to the physical elements of the environment and the mental image of its users.

Lynch’s emphasis on the value of inhabitants’ perspective is shared by Jane Jacobs. In *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), she stressed the importance of local participants in a design process, giving a greater weight to an informed citizen than to an uninvolved expert. She described this once as “trusting the local” to prevent inauthentic, aggressive incursions into urban systems. Jacobs’ fundamental point was that built environment should develop holistically, through additions that do not overwhelm, and relate to the context and scale that is comfortable for the local dweller. Listening to the fears expressed by people when they testify at public hearings in opposition to big plans, one could learn that people are not against change per se but against overwhelming and inappropriate changes in which they have no role shaping, against a change that destroys functional, viable places and threatens their residents and livelihoods for unacceptable reasons.

The issue of dwellers’ participation in housing design was particularly emphasized in works of such architects as N. John Habraken, Herman Hertzberger, and Lucien Kroll in 1960s and 1970s. It was also addressed in the 1970s by the pioneers of phenomenologically oriented architectural theory (e.g., Norberg-Schulz, 1971), and structuralism inspired authors such as Christopher Alexander. Many positions emerged as polemics with the modern movement (e.g., Bruce Allsopp, *Towards a Humane Architecture*, 1974; Brent C Brolin, *The Failure of Modern Architecture*, 1976; Peter Blake, *Form Follows Fiasco*, 1977).

Currently, a consideration of users’ perspective in a design process is regarded as an important aspect of social sustainability. Socially sustainable development may be seen in an architectural perspective as linking the form...
of a city’s public places and inhabitants’ social, emotional, and physical well-being. It also has a political dimension, being enlisted as a strategy for increasing user empowerment and democratization (Bjerknes and Bratteteig, 1995).

The role of user in a design process may be understood in many different ways. In this context, it is worthwhile to refer to Carole Pateman. In her Participation and Democratic Theory (1970), Pateman discusses the contemporary theorists of democracy (e.g., Berelson, Dahl, Sartori) and the theorists of “classical,” participatory democracy (e.g., Rousseau, Mill) examining how they conceptualize the widespread participation in the political processes. According to Pateman, the participation of the individual in political decision-making is a central issue of classical political theory, while the contemporary theorists regard democracy in terms of the institutional arrangements where participation is restricted, through elections, to a protective function. In other words, the majority can only participate in choosing the decision-makers. Mass participation beyond this function is regarded as dangerous, since the masses are considered to lack the rationality necessary to make proper decisions; consequently, participation should not raise much above some indispensable minimum.

In the later part of her work Pateman contrasts “pseudoparticipation” (techniques used to create a “feeling” of participation in order to persuade individuals to accept the decisions that have already been made) with full and partial participation. “Full participation” is taking place when “each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcomes of the decision” (Pateman, 1970:71 in: Jones et al., 2005:27). We can speak about “partial participation” when there is no equal power in the decision-making process, “the final power to decide rests with one party only” (Pateman, 1970:71, in: Jones et al., 2005:27).9

9 A similar issue is addressed by Ives and Olson (1984). They categorize user involvement into six clusters:
- **No involvement**: users are unwilling, or not invited, to take part in a given process/development.
- **Symbolic involvement**: input from users is requested but not used.
- **Involvement by advice**: users’ advice is asked for with help of interviews or questionnaires.
- **Involvement by weak control**: users have the responsibility to “sign off” at each stage of a given process/development.
- **Involvement by doing**: users are design team members, or official liaisons.
- **Involvement by strong control**: users might pay for a new development out of their own budget, or the users’ organizational performance is dependent on the outcome of the process/development effort (Ives and Olson, 1984, in: Holst et al., 2009).

Another way of conceptualizing various degrees of user involvement is the following categorization:
Much of what is labeled as participation in architecture fits well into the category of “pseudoparticipation.” “Full participation” corresponds with Hannah Arendt’s (1958) ideal of shared, truly political space. But is it ever possible to realize such a model in architectural practice? Would it be most beneficial for the inhabitants? Till (2005), referring to Pateman (1970), maintains that “full participation” is an ideal impossible to achieve in architecture.

It depends on each party being in possession of the requisite knowledge and in there being transparent channels of communication. Neither of these pertains in architecture, where the expert knowledge of the architect and the tacit knowledge of the participant user remain on different levels, and where the lines of communication are compromised by codes, conventions and authority. (Till in: Jones, et al., 2005:27)

A problematic issue in the case of full participation is the matter of design responsibility. The role of the architect as a coordinator of a design process seems to be difficult to reconcile with fully egalitarian values. Furthermore, in many cases it may not be enough to ask users for a direct input—inventing strategies that would allow the individuals to express their views, experiences, and feelings often leads to more satisfying results. Thus, the architect has a crucial responsibility in interpreting the collected data and—I would argue—designing for users. 

- **Design for users:** data about the users, general theories, and models of users’ behavior are used as a basis for the design. This approach often includes interviews or examination of focus groups.
- **Design with users:** an approach focusing on the user, utilizing various data on user preferences, needs, and requirements. It often includes a demonstration of different solutions or concepts so the users can react to the design solutions.
- **Design by users:** the users are involved actively and partake in the design of their own product (Bekker and Long 2000; Eason 1987; Kaulio 1998, in: Holst et al., 2009).

The following example is very illustrative of pseudoparticipation:

“There is an architect’s scheme for a new community centre pinned up at the back, scrawny drawings that no one can really see. A cursory discussion has taken place about the merits of the scheme, and now the community is asked to vote on it, a procedure statutorily required in the participation process. All but two hands go up. Quite on what grounds approval is being given is hard to tell. Maybe it is late and people want to go home. Maybe they believe that a community hall will actually create a community. Maybe it is the promise of church-hall tea after the vote. Maybe they love the architecture. Maybe the NDC [New Deal for Communities] officer swayed them. Maybe it is like a Mexican wave. Who knows? But this is the very stuff of participation. The NDC officer is concerned about the hands that have not gone up and gently coaxes a response out of two old ladies sat at the back of the echoey hall. ‘Couldn’t hear a word you said,’ they shout. ‘But it is a lovely building,’ the NDC person says. ‘Can’t hear you, we left our hearing aids at home.’ … And so the two hands go up. The deal is done” (Jones et al., 2005:23-24).
integrating them in the design process. For these reasons, Paterman’s ideal of full participation may not be the best model for a user-oriented, culturally-responsible architectural practice.

Till sees partial participation as probably most realistic vision of architectural participation; nevertheless this vision is far from being satisfying if one believes that “the goal of participation is the empowerment of the citizen user and not the expert” (Till, in: Jones et al., 2005:27). Therefore, what is needed is another model, a model “realistic enough to acknowledge the imbalances of power and knowledge,” and at the same time working with these imbalances in a productive way, transforming the expectations and futures of participants (Till, in: Jones et al., 2005: 27). A model in which architects use their authority to respond to the real questions posed by the user in a given project, creating architecture that addresses contemporary cultural and environmental conditions.

Till emphasizes that the involvement of users and their meanings “confronts architecture’s comfort zone head-on, bringing uncertainty in place of purity. […] So the architect will do everything possible to delay the fateful moment when reality bites” (Till, 2006). According to Till, architects feel safer in a perfected model of practice—an idealized version of the Vitruvian triad: *firmitas*, *utilitas*, *venustas* (firmness, commodity, and delight or durability, convenience, and beauty—depending on the translation). When these ideals meet the reality of the contingent world, problems arise. Users tend to be unpredictable, they ignore many of the values held high by architectural culture, and they bring into play issues that at the first sight do not fit in the Vitruvian triad—issues of the social and political world (Till, 2006).

Yet, looking closer at the Vitruvian treatise, one may argue that the problem is not in the appropriation of the Vitruvian model, but rather in its misinterpretation. Read carefully, *De Architectura* provides a relevant agenda for a user-oriented architectural practice. Although Vitruvius deals extensively with the formal aspects of architecture, he makes it clear that architecture is ultimately for the good of the society in general, and for the health, enjoyment, and security of individuals in particular.¹¹

¹¹ E.g., in Book I, Chapter II, Vitruvius discusses the fundamental principles of architecture: Order, Arrangement, Eurythmy, Symmetry, Propriety, and Economy. While the former three principles refer to the formal properties of an architectural object, the latter two deal foremost with the ways of using architectural artifacts and the given cultural/economic/physical context of architecture.

Vitruvius defines “propriety” as “this perfection of style which comes when a work is authoritatively constructed on approved principles. It arises from prescription, from usage, or from nature. From prescription, in the case of hypaethral edifices, open to the sky, in honour of
Referring to different types of architectural objects Vitruvius states:

All these must be built with due reference to durability, convenience, and beauty. Durability will be assured when foundations are carried down to the solid ground and materials wisely and liberally selected; convenience, when the arrangement of the apartments is faultless and presents no hindrance to use, and when each class of building is assigned to its suitable and appropriate exposure; and beauty, when the appearance of the work is pleasing and in good taste, and when its members are in due proportion according to correct principles of symmetry. (Vitruvius, De Architectura: Book I, chapter 3, section 2)

In the interpretation of the Vitruvian triad, the attention often focuses on formal and/or technological aspects of architecture. Yet Vitruvius sought to address the ethos of architecture, declaring that quality depends foremost on the social relevance of the architect’s work, not on the form or workmanship of the work itself. More satisfactorily, Vitruvian terms may be considered through the perspective of Aristotle’s subcategorization of “science” (dianoia) as theoretical, practical, and poetical science (the term “science” refers here not to the scientific method but to different types of reasoning). The Vitruvian triad, understood through this perspective, points at three interrelated, irreductible dimensions of architecture. It may be therefore conceived as an ambitious agenda for a socially-responsible practice, encompassing theoretical, ethical, and creative aspects.

As the above example illustrates, different theoretical paths may lead towards a user-oriented practice. Alternative assumptions underlying design
often result in alternative aesthetics and spatialities. Ultimately, involving users’ perspectives in a design process may be seen as a strategy that effectively addresses the interval between “the world as built” and “the world as needed and desired” (Jones et al., 2005:xiv). This in turn may lead to the substantial reformulation of the currently dominating model of architectural practice.

This thesis focuses on phenomenology and its implications for architectural practice. In this framework, the acceptance of the value of users’ perspectives unavoidably leads to the appreciation of their situatedness—the social and cultural context of architecture. The phenomenological perspective does not imply that architects should abdicate their responsibility and simply follow the desires of users. This could easily lead to the view of architecture as a commodity. The task of the architect is rather to negotiate between the needs of the clients and more general objectives generated by a careful consideration of the context of the design. This thesis will argue that a user-oriented architectural practice in the phenomenological perspective ultimately refers to architecture’s participation in the culture, creating spaces for the inhabitant to find her place.

At this point it is worthwhile to add a short terminological remark regarding a distinction between “user involvement” and “user participation.” Barki and Hartwick (1989) indicate that participation refers to the actions users perform during a given design process, while involvement relates to a psychological state in which users are more concerned about the importance and personal relevance of the designed system (in our case, the outcome of the design process). This thesis emphasizes the involvement of the users’ points of view, their needs, expectations, and experiences, expressed both directly (by users themselves) and indirectly (approached by architects),

13 Jones et al. (2005) maintain: “It is too easy to dismiss some of these aesthetics as ‘crude’ or ‘dirty’, because that simply reinforces the presumed superiority of the standard architectural categories of refined and clean. Instead, we should recognize that the products of participation have their own value system that stands alongside that of conventional architecture – and that this value system is perhaps more relevant and appropriate to the democratic transformation of the built environment” (Jones, Petrescu and Till, 2005:xv-xvi). The example of Hundertwasser is very illustrative in this context. It was important to Hundertwasser that “one [could] stand in the street and, pointing up to one’s apartment, say, ‘I live in that red apartment. That’s my home’” (Hundertwasser, 1997:182). “Every house within the house has a colour of its own on the outer façade, made of coloured finishing plaster” (Hundertwasser, 1997:182). Furthermore, according to Hundertwasser “it is the duty of the state to provide financial assistance and support to every citizen wishing to undertake individual alterations, whether to outside walls or indoors” (Hundertwasser, 1997:59).

This view, however, is difficult to reconcile with the phenomenological perspective—it reduces the role of a cultural dimension of architecture.
rather than focusing on the actual engagement (participation) of users in a
given design activity. User involvement here is understood as the value given
to the individual perspective of the user and as a respectful attitude towards
the user’s cultural background. Consequently, the direct responsibility for the
individual is supplemented by the responsibility for the place—an adjustment
to the specific physical, cultural, and social surroundings. A successful
architectural artifact enhances its surroundings and brings in new, significant
meanings to the original context—this constitutes an important aspect of a
long-term architect’s responsibility towards the user.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to achieve the objectives set out below:
1. To give a critical overview of the paradigms underlying contemporary
   architectural discourse and to discuss how the basic assumptions of
   specific paradigms result in different approaches to user. Consequently,
   to point out the limitations of the dominating positions and delineate a
   niche for further research.
2. To discuss how certain aspects of phenomenology could provide
   conceptual foundations for a more user- and context-sensitive
   architectural practice in present-day conditions.
3. To situate the theoretical findings of this thesis in the context of an
   architectural practice. An attempt will be made to accomplish this
   objective by means of a case study.

1.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The organization of the thesis will reflect a developmental movement from
the consideration of general issues in philosophy/architectural theory to
coverage of issues related more specifically to architectural practice.

Chapter 1 (“Introduction”) presents the context of the study, the
research problem, and the objectives of the study. It also gives an overview of
the contents of the thesis and addresses methodological issues.

Chapter 2 (“Mapping the research background”) relates the project to a
larger ongoing debate in the human sciences/architectural theory and
investigates how different paradigms ground different approaches to users.

More specifically, it examines the main perspectives within
contemporary architectural theory since the late 1960s. Architectural theory
is presented as emerging from specific paradigms in the human sciences (postpositivism, critical theory, constructivism). The theory survey establishes a niche for the following research. It points out certain limitations of the dominating conceptual positions, which in turn creates a need for adopting a paradigm that could ground a more user- and context-sensitive approach.

Additionally, the aim of this survey is to draw attention to the importance of a type of research which Donald Schön (1983) calls “frame analysis” (the study of the ways in which practitioners frame problems and roles) for professional practice.

Chapter 3 (“Phenomenology: concepts, perspectives”) introduces phenomenology. It discusses ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of phenomenology (focusing on the ideas of lifeworld, lived experience, and interpretation) and points at their relevance for conceptualizing user involvement in architecture. The final sections of the chapter relate the previously introduced phenomenological assumptions more specifically to the architectural discourse, focusing on the concepts of art, ethics, and space.

Chapter 4 (“Phenomenology: new challenges”) deals with contemporary settings of architectural practice, addressing the relevance of phenomenology in this context. The chapter discusses the role of globalization and technology-related changes in transforming our everyday lives and defining priorities of architectural theory and practice. Further on, the concept of sustainability—one of the most important challenges for architecture—is thematized. It is suggested that sustainability concerns are a natural consequence of phenomenological thinking.

Chapter 5 (“Approaching architectural practice”) is dedicated more specifically to the relation between architectural theory and practice. It examines Gadamer’s view of phenomenology as a practical philosophy. Consequently, it points at the relevance of the concept of rhetorics for architecture. The chapter also discusses Donald Schön’s concept of the reflective practitioner as a model for user-sensitive practice, which in many aspects coincides with phenomenological framework.

The main body of Chapter 6 (“Phenomenological ideas behind architectural practice”) consists of a case study, seeking more concrete indications of how to accomplish user-oriented design process reflecting phenomenological ideas. The initial sections of the chapter address methodological issues of the case study research. The case to be explored is the Rural Studio, a university-based design-build practice that while not explicitly declaring phenomenological approach follows a phenomenological
line of thinking it in its socially engaged architecture. Additionally, an intention behind this chapter is to point at the importance of context-dependent knowledge (such as case studies) in professional development. A case study supplementing a body of theoretical research may be seen both as a validating strategy and a strategy facilitating the practical application of the research findings.

Chapter 7 (“Final reflections”) presents the contribution of the thesis to the existing body of knowledge and indicates directions for further research.

1.4 METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

This research may be most generally characterized as qualitative research.

Some scholars argue that the term “qualitative research” refers to one of two main research paradigms (qualitative and quantitative), but this view is often considered an oversimplification. Here, following the view of Guba and Lincoln (1994), the term “qualitative research” will primarily refer to a methodology, not to foundational ontological and epistemological beliefs that constitute a paradigm.

Methodology links specific ontological and epistemological assumptions to corresponding research methods, and bridges philosophical concepts and practical and applicable research techniques. John W. Creswell (2003) defined methodology as a “strategy of inquiry.” This strategy (which is typically suggested by the adapted research paradigm) governs choice and use of specific methods, i.e., techniques and procedures of data collection/analysis14 (Creswell, 2003:5).

One can find multiple strategies of inquiry in the social sciences. On the most general level, however, there may be distinguished three alternative groups:

1. Quantitative strategies of inquiry (e.g., experiments, surveys);
2. Qualitative strategies of inquiry (e.g., grounded theory, phenomenologies,15 ethnographies, narratives, case studies);

---

14 Polkinghorne (1983) defines methodology as “the examination of the possible plans … so that an understanding of phenomena can be obtained” and methods as “the particular activities that are used to achieve research results” (Polkinghorne, 1983:5).
15 Phenomenology has been referred to as a philosophy, methodology, and method (Byrne, 2001). In this context, it is referred to by Creswell as a methodology, more specifically as a procedure involving a study of a small number of subjects through “extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning.” In this process, researchers

The selected research strategy implies specific methods of data collection and analysis:

- Quantitative research methods (e.g., statistical analysis, closed-ended questions);
- Qualitative research methods (e.g., interviews, text and image analysis/interpretation, open-ended questions);
- Mixed research methods (combining the two above categories, e.g., open- and closed-ended questions, statistical and text analysis).

According to Creswell (2003), qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive research (researcher interprets data, develops description of the studied phenomenon, analyzes data for themes/categories, and finally draws conclusions about the meaning of the studied phenomenon, stating the lessons learned and the further questions to be posed). In this type of research, it is often explicitly acknowledged that data are filtered through the personal “lens” of the inquirer, situated in a specific historical, social, and cultural context. The reflection on this dependency represents honesty and openness of the researcher.

The studied phenomena are viewed holistically—qualitative studies are more often broad, panoramic views than micro-analyses. As Creswell (2003) remarks: “the more complex, interactive, and encompassing the narrative, the better the qualitative study” (Creswell, 2003:182).

Qualitative research may be described as “emergent,” in opposition to rather strictly prefigured quantitative research. Several aspects typically emerge during a qualitative study. Research questions are often reformulated in the course of the inquiry, as the researcher gets a deeper understanding of the situation. Considering the “unfolding” character of qualitative research, it is often difficult to define methods strictly at the initial stage.

The qualitative researcher uses typically multiple methods and complex reasoning. The reasoning process may be characterized as multifaceted (both inductive and deductive); iterative (moving back and forth from data collection and analysis to problem reformulation); and simultaneous.

“Bracket” their own experience in order to understand the experiences of the participants of the study (Creswell, 2003:15).
(consisting of the activities of collecting, analyzing, and writing up data) (Creswell, 2003: 182-183).

Creswell (2003) emphasizes the importance of reflecting on the closely interrelated elements, which may be seen as the most basic characteristics of any research: guiding paradigm, methodology, and methods. It is essential to make this framework explicit at the early stage of the research process, for it has a profound influence on the framing of research problem and the research results.

The guiding paradigm of this work (in terms of ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions) is hermeneutic phenomenology. Even though the study is not exclusively representing the phenomenological perspective, phenomenology may be identified as the dominant horizon of interpretation.

In a methodological sense, phenomenology can be seen as a strategy to interpret experiences, meanings, and practices embedded in specific contexts. As there are no human science methods per se, there are no exclusively phenomenological methods. In practice, diverse methods are used in this research and their common denominator is that they allow for grasping the complexity and ambiguity of the studied phenomena. The selection of methods was thus guided by the studied phenomena, the research questions, and the context.

The main part of this thesis is based on the analysis and interpretation of texts. The research process was partly guided by methodological suggestions provided by Dahlberg, et al. (2008).

The use of a case study (grounded in phenomenology) is, in this work, a supplementing strategy of inquiry. It has a twofold role: as a strategy facilitating the practical application of the research findings and as a strategy for validating the research findings. Here, certain methodological ideas of Yin (1994) and Stake (1995) were helpful.

The following section will address the general problem of data analysis and interpretation in phenomenological research. More specific methodological issues related to case study will be discussed in Chapter 6.

---

16 Creswell sees here the concept of paradigm in terms of ontological and epistemological assumptions; nevertheless, it may be argued that methodology is also an integral element of a paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). See section 2.2.
17 See section 3.2.
18 See the discussion regarding the case study methodology, section 6.2.
1.4.1 Data analysis and interpretation

The concept of analysis is sometimes criticized as having definite positivist connotations. Etymologically the word comes from Greek *analyein* or “unloose,” meaning “resolution of anything complex into simple elements.” Analysis is most typically understood as dividing up, breaking up a phenomenon into elements. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (2005) associates analysis with

[...] the philosophical method, or a set of methods, characteristic of much twentieth-century Anglophone philosophy, of the type which describes itself as 'analytic' to express allegiance to rigour and precision, science, logical techniques, and [...] careful investigation of language as the best means of investigating concepts.

Yet, the understanding of “analysis” does not have to be limited to the meaning it has within analytic philosophy. Thesauri also explain analysis as a critique, evaluation, interpretation, etc. Analyzing data in phenomenological research “is about understanding phenomena and finding their meanings using the lifeworld descriptions that relate to the phenomenon in focus” (Dahlberg et al., 2008:231). Within this perspective, all analysis within the field of phenomenology is meaning-oriented.

Dahlberg et al. define analysis in phenomenological research as a work “with the lifeworld descriptions that come from [...] participation in the lifeworld events or from other expressions and descriptions of a phenomenon that is in focus of the research” (Dahlberg et al., 2008:233). In order to understand the complex, relational phenomena of the lifeworld, the researcher has to approach them in a way that somehow organizes, simplifies and clarifies the picture. This analysis is always conducted in a specific context, with the whole of the research as a background. In this sense, phenomenological analysis can be understood as synthesis, emphasizing “the way that the different parts, the meanings, particularities and uniqueness are related to each other and to the whole of the research” (Dahlberg et al., 2008:233).

Phenomenological analysis has the structure of hermeneutic circle, and can be described as “the movement [...] from the whole to the part and back to the whole” (Gadamer, 1995:291). This is a general rule for phenomenological understanding.
Speaking more specifically, the idea of the hermeneutic circle may be applied as a principle of moving from the initial whole (e.g., text, collected data), through an analysis of its parts, to a new whole (e.g., as a proposal how to modify understanding of the initial data). A good, preliminary sense of the whole (the initial reading, the careful examination of collected data, etc.) helps to direct an analysis of its parts. Finally, when the parts are analyzed and meanings interpreted, a new understanding of the whole emerges. As Bengtsson (1991) points out,

[...] the actual knowledge about the whole generates questions about the parts and knowledge about the parts new questions about the whole. The answers to these questions have with them that new detail knowledge and whole knowledge comes into existence, which in turn generates new questions. (Bengtsson, 1991:19, in: Dahlberg et al., 2008:239)

Some scholars suggest that the term “spiral” is more suitable than “circle” to describe this process, for it is open both at the beginning and at the end (Radnitzky, 1970, in: Dahlberg et al., 2008:237).

Another important principle of phenomenological analysis is that a text must be understood in its own terms (Gadamer, 1960). It implies resisting the temptation to explain a phenomenon in ways that reduce its complexity, specificity, etc. The researcher’s encounter with a phenomenon and its context, “being present to the data as given,” should be the basis for understanding (Dahlberg et al., 2008:237).

Gadamer (1960) argues against a general trust in philosophical methods. However, this does not imply that all methodological principles should be rejected. Dahlberg et al. (2008), referring to Heidegger and Gadamer, formulate some methodological directions for hermeneutic interpretation. These suggestions guided this research work.

- Following Gadamer, they acknowledge the role of pre-understanding and tradition, at the same time emphasizing the importance of reflecting on these conditions in a research process. The researcher’s awareness of her/his pre-understanding enables its temporal withholding and restraining, and allows for a more open approach to data and its meaning.

---

19 See section 3.2.3.
20 It is worthwhile to examine in this perspective Donald Schön’s view of reflective practice. See chapter 5.

18
- In the process of analysis, the main emphasis should be on “otherness,” a possibility of seeing something new rather than confirming what is already known or what one wants to see.

- The phenomenon and the research questions, not the fixed rules, should guide the research activity.

On a more specific level, Dahlberg et al. (2008: 281-282), discuss some principles that can be helpful in formulating and evaluating interpretations:

1. Initial readings, i.e., getting a sense of the whole, preliminary understanding of phenomenon and its context.
2. Creating preliminary structure according to themes and sub-themes in order to identify what meanings there are.
3. The search for underlying meanings.
4. A new interpreting dialogue with the initial text.

This dialogue continues until all important questions are covered. Its initial results are tentative interpretations illuminating different aspects of the research phenomenon. Dahlberg et al suggest that in order to facilitate the formulation of the main interpretation it is often productive to make a comparative analysis of the initial interpretations. In this process, “small segments of meaning are put together in order to see structures and patterns that were previously hidden, or partly hidden” (Dahlberg et al., 2008:284). If this search for new meanings is successful, it is often possible to arrive at a common denominator—a main interpretation that expands the meanings included in the initial interpretations and binds them together.

These suggestions are helpful in guiding the interpretation process; nevertheless one has to be careful not to overrely on a method.

It is true that a tentative interpretation must start in the data itself, but a lack of sensitivity for hidden meanings, a strong ambition to follow

---

21 See, for example, Chapter 2. The initial part of the investigation dealing with contemporary architectural theory has been based on the readings of data (here, selected texts) with the aim of gaining a preliminary understanding of the research problem and its context. This reading has provided some clues regarding important paradigms underlying contemporary architectural discourse, and their main foci. As the next step, different paradigms within architectural theory have been examined with a more specific focus on the position of user-related concerns. In some cases, the position of these concerns was not explicitly given, so it had to be sought “between the lines.” These analyses helped to identify some problem areas within contemporary architectural discourse and indicate a specific niche for the research.

22 The main interpretation is “a form of structure at a higher abstract level than the earlier interpretations during the analytical process” (Dahlberg et al., 2008:284).
methodological rules, together with a very concrete way of thinking can indeed prevent creative and meaningful interpretations. (Dahlberg et al., 2008:282)

A more extensive account of the phenomenological concept of interpretation (particularly the view of Gadamer) will be given in section 3.2.3.

1.4.2 Evaluation of validity in qualitative research

Numerous scholars indicate that qualitative research findings have too little impact on practice. Among them, there are voices suggesting that the qualitative researchers have failed to communicate the nature of their studies to the wider scientific community. Undeniably, “there exists a widespread conviction that only quantitative data are ultimately valid, or of high quality” (Sechrest, 1992, in: Guba and Lincoln, 1994:106).

In contrast to the traditional science that often appears self-evident and easily understandable for a broader public, qualitative research requires self-reflectiveness and a critical attitude from the audience, which is not easy to attain. Consequently, qualitative research is often undervalued and separated from scientific discussions (Morse, 2006:416, Dahlberg et al., 2008:325).

The researchers themselves are also, to a certain extent, responsible for this situation. The following remark, regarding the situation in the social sciences, seems to be equally valid for architecture: “The field has been characterized by an unfortunate polarity of a positivist reification and a humanistic neglect of validity” (Kvale, 1989, in: Dahlberg et al, 2008:330).

One of the ways to improve this situation is to pay more attention to such problems as objectivity and validity in qualitative research. These issues are traditionally associated with positivism/postpositivism. However, it may be argued that the concepts of objectivity and validity are not restricted to a particular paradigm, but rather “stand for ideas that distinguish scientific research from other similar human activities, such as journalism and novel writing” (Dahlberg et al., 2008:326). It follows that qualitative studies have to be more rigorous than we see today.

---

21 As Guba and Lincoln argue, “Scientific maturity is commonly believed to emerge as the degree of quantification found within a given field increases” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:106).
Human science researchers have to be more suspicious of and careful with the increasingly glamorous research designs presented as qualitative research. Too little attention is paid to the coherence among the epistemological assumptions, research questions, methods, and results of investigations and their values. Weak philosophical and epistemological insights easily end up in a mish-mash of methods. (Dahlberg et al., 2008:350)

Researchers aiming to produce results worthwhile for a broader audience cannot dismiss the validity concerns as irrelevant; the alternative is “relativism and/or subjectivism, and scientific malpractice” (Dahlberg et al., 2008:337). It has to be acknowledged, however, that there are certain difficulties around the issue of validity within the human sciences. One of the main challenges is to describe the general scientific concepts in a way that is meaningful for non-positivist approaches, i.e., a way that can fulfill the demands of human science researchers and guide their inquiry. While researchers within human science have long tried to validate their research externally in the categories of mainstream science, the internal discussion how to understand scientific claims of validity in human science research has not developed to a similar degree.

Polkinghorne (1986) suggests that the issues of validity/reliability in human science research should be reconsidered in the perspective of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of a given paradigm.24

The traditional notions of validity and reliability in research design imply a system of concepts that is stable, context-free, and clearly delineated from one another, yet human existence points toward a conceptual system that changes, is context-dependent, and is organized around prototypical instances. (Polkinghorne, 1986:126)

According to Habermas (1979), a subject expresses three fundamentally different attitudes to the world. Consequently, there can be distinguished three fundamentally different dimensions of validity. The dimensions of validity can be summarized as claims to truth (IT), truthfulness (I), and

---

24 In a similar manner, Sandberg (2005) argues that using criteria from the traditional (positivist) epistemology to justify the results from phenomenological research is inconsistent. Instead, criteria grounded on phenomenological epistemology should be used to justify the knowledge created within phenomenological approaches. This is due to the fact that truth is accomplished only through criteria consistent with the basic presumptions underlying the given research approach (Sandberg, 2005, in: Dahlberg et al., 2008).
rightness (WE). More specifically, this means that individuals recognize different standards for validity; the validation of an empirical, objective truth claim requires different methods and procedures than the validation of a claim to intersubjective rightness or to a claim to subjective truthfulness; and all of these demand different methods and procedures of validation.25

What has to be emphasized is that validity/reliability in the human sciences research does not simply occur as a result of strictly followed procedures.

The production of qualitative studies in high quality necessitates its practitioners function not as rule followers, but as masters. […] The strength of a qualitative study is that its findings depend on the diligence and judgments of a researcher, not on adherence to a method. (Polkinghorne, 2006:74-75)

Consequently, the validity of qualitative research should not be evaluated in terms of its conformity to a set of methods/procedures. It is rather “a status given by a reader who is convinced that the researcher made responsible judgments and exercised care in the production of the study” (Polkinghorne, 2006:76).

In this context, it is worthwhile to refer to Madison’s (1990) distinction between a method in a traditional, abstract, and formal sense (a tool enabling an exact knowledge), and a method in a normative sense (an aid to good judgment). In the latter understanding, a method cannot provide a traditional logic of validation and procedures for arriving at “correct” decisions in interpretation. Nevertheless, it does not allow a license for arbitrariness—for it can provide a logic of argumentation in the light of which rational decisions can be made.26 In this view, method is considered as a set of interpretative principles, a system whose purpose is to orient action (among these principles are, for example, coherence, comprehensiveness,

---

25 Adopting an objectifying attitude, we relate primarily to the objective world of facts (IT); adopting a norm-conformative attitude, we relate principally to the social world of normatively regulated interactions (WE); adopting an expressive attitude, we relate in the first instance to the world of inner experience (I). Different types of discourse are connected with the above mentioned dimensions of validity. Habermas particularly highlights the distinction between theoretical discourses and practical discourses. Generally speaking, theoretical discourses are concerned with validity claims regarding objective states of affairs (IT) while practical discourses are concerned with validity claims concerning the rightness of norms governing social interactions (WE).

26 See also the discussion of rhetoric, section 5.1.1.
thoroughness, contextuality, appropriateness, agreement, and suggestiveness) (Madison, 1990).

Lindström (1990) represents a related position, arguing that objectivity in human science research can be characterized as “intellectual honesty; thoroughness in reasoning and in view of conditions and consequences; prohibition of favouring one’s own person, skewed sampling, omission of negative evidence, one sided maneuvers and wishful thinking” (Lindström, 1990, quoted in: Dahlberg et al., 2008:337). The thoroughness in reasoning is sometimes named a “coherence criterion.” This criterion “involves a research result that presents an inner logic, that is, it should be possible to follow the researcher’s reasoning all through the study” (Dahlberg et al., 2008:337).

Van Manen (1990) maintains that phenomenology operates with its own criteria of precision, exactness, and rigor. Precision and exactness in descriptive phenomenological research are attained as the descriptions explore the lived experience in a comprehensive manner, recovering the essence of the experience. Rigor depends on the meaning and the impact that phenomenological descriptions exercise over the topic being investigated. Van Manen also advocates a broadening of the notion of rationality. In his view, rationality should express the belief that any experience can be intelligible. In this, he follows Habermas’ conviction that the modern understanding of the world has opened up different dimensions of validity, and to the extent that each dimension of validity has its own standards of truth and falsity and its own modes of justification for determining these, one may say that there have been opened up different dimensions of rationality (Cooke, 1994).

Referring to phenomenological research, Dahlberg et al. (2008) argue that objectivity and validity can be most generally defined in terms of openness to the phenomenon in focus. The following elements may contribute to increasing the overall validity of phenomenological research:

- Critical examination of interpretations against data (e.g., looking for contradictions between interpretations and data);
- A reflection upon the possible effects of pre-understanding; an attempt to make pre-understanding to some extent explicit;
- The intersubjective control of interpretations (e.g., seeking for input/counterarguments from other scholars or previous studies);
- Comprehensiveness of interpretations (no data of general importance should be left unaddressed in a valid interpretation).

27 Dahlberg et al. (2008) elaborate in this context their concept of “bridling.”
In their view, phenomenology offers a consistent epistemology that provides research with a solid basis and prevents the researcher from scientific malpractice. At the same time, it allows for preserving the richness and complexity of the lived world. Phenomenology can be thus described as an approach that “attempts to balance the complexity of the lifeworld with the objectivity claims of science” (Dahlberg et al., 2008:276, 350).

1.4.3 The position of the author

Ernesto Grassi, in the introduction to his Rhetoric as Philosophy (1980), remarks: “I believe it is always important to return to the personal situation out of which one’s own thought arises, in order to clarify the theoretical problems that concern one’s self” (Grassi, 1980:4). This statement is particularly relevant for qualitative research, which is fundamentally interpretive research. The researcher analyzes and interprets data, develops description of the studied phenomenon, and eventually draws conclusions regarding its meaning. Data are unavoidably filtered through personal values, biases, and interests of the inquirer, while situated in a specific historical, social, and cultural context. Even though it is not possible to make all the personal influences explicit, it is worthwhile to indicate some of these factors.

My educational background is twofold. I obtained a MSc in Architecture (2003) and a MA in Philosophy (2003). Since my undergraduate studies, I have pursued my interests in the intersection of these two disciplines. This background has led me to pose the questions within this thesis.

In the course of my education, I noticed that the insider’s view of architecture (a view represented within the profession) often differs essentially from the view of architecture represented within philosophy and the social sciences. The prominence given to user-related concerns is one of the issues where perspectives tend to diverge. This difference can be most generally characterized by the contradiction between the perception of architecture as a highly autonomous discipline and a perspective where architecture is primarily a part of a social and cultural world.

Architects tend to disregard the voices coming from outside the discipline. This is not to say that architecture is a hermetic realm—it enters into a dialogue with contemporary philosophical debates, but most commonly ends up interpreting philosophical discourse solely in aesthetic terms,
typically avoiding any reflection on the wider (e.g., social and ethical) consequences of design choices.28

My conviction is that architecture would benefit from a closer relation to the social sciences/philosophy, not only by appropriating their concepts aesthetically, but also by more willingly engaging in important debates on a conceptual level. This would allow architecture to extend its disciplinary horizon and build up the awareness of a broader significance of architectural artifacts.

In this work, I try to look at architecture from an outsider’s perspective—the perspective of a phenomenologically-oriented researcher investigating the relation between architectural discourse and philosophy. Nevertheless, my architectural background has also been beneficial in this context; it helped me to get closer to the ways practitioners act and frame problems.

28 See section 2.3.
2 MAPPING THE RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Gary B. Madison (2001) asks “when in our philosophizing we attempt to articulate a particular position, how do we proceed?” and answers that “we do so dialectically, that is, we proceed by attempting to ascertain how, out of ideational necessity, the position we want to elaborate differs, has to differ, in key ways from other possible positions” (Madison, 2001:241).

Following this methodological insight, this chapter provides an overview over the main types of discourse, paradigms, and tendencies within contemporary architecture. Eventually, deficiencies of the dominating frameworks and a niche for the research are pointed out.

The objective of this overview is to situate architectural theory in the tradition of the human sciences, and to prepare a background for further presentation of phenomenology.29

An additional aim behind the theory survey is to point out the importance of a type of research which Donald Schön (1983) called “frame analysis” (the study of the ways in which practitioners frame problems and roles) for professional practice. According to Schön, when professionals are unaware of their way of framing problems, they do not experience the need to choose among different possibilities. They do not reflect on the way in which they conceptualize the reality in which they function, because for them it simply the “given reality.” The survey of different paradigms underlying architectural theory is essentially an analysis of the basic ways of framing user-related problems.

29 The human sciences may be most generally defined as “the sciences concerned with the study of [the] human realm” (Polkinghorne, 1983:15). Architectural artifacts are indubitably a part of the human realm. Situating architectural theory in the wider conceptual background of contemporary human sciences can be justified on this basis. Furthermore, such a way of approaching architectural theory may have many benefits. The debates and criticism regarding the specific approaches within human sciences can help to evaluate the most basic claims of architectural theories. The human sciences have an established and rigorous tradition of reasoning, argumentation, and criticism. However, one has to be careful in order not to entirely lose the specificity of architectural theory by identifying it with other domains of knowledge.
2.1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

2.1.1 Types of discourse within architecture

Not all architectural writings can be characterized as “theory.” Broadly speaking, there are three kinds of discourse within the discipline of architecture: history, theory, and criticism. The borders between them are not sharp. We could say however, that architectural history is descriptive of past works, architectural criticism is relatively narrow “activity of judgment and interpretation of specific existing works relative to critic’s or architect’s stated standards” (Nesbitt, 1996:19), and theory, overlapping to some extent with history and criticism, differs from these activities in that

[...] it poses alternative solutions based on observations of the current state of the discipline, or offers new thought paradigms for approaching the issues. Its speculative, anticipatory and catalytic nature distinguishes theoretical activity from history and criticism. Theory operates at different levels of abstraction, evaluating architectural profession, its intentions and cultural relevance at large. (Nesbitt, 1996:16)

The notion “architectural theory” may be understood and categorized in many different ways. 30 For example, Nesbitt (1996) divides architectural theory, according to the principal target of the study, into three groups:

1. **Descriptive theory**: most commonly represents a neutral position; reports the present or past state of the objects, e.g., describes new methods of design; introduces new technologies; here belong also the monographs of buildings, historical writings, and writings regarding technical aspects of architecture (e.g., theory of construction, legislation, norms, and standards of building).

2. **Explanatory theory**: reaches to a deeper level than just to description, investigates why the object is such as it is. This knowledge helps summing up all that is known about the object, it helps to see it in its context and in a historical perspective, and it helps to forecast its future

---

30 In the following section (2.1.2) different views of theory will be examined more specifically, with reference to different paradigms.
evolution when needed (e.g., studies conducted in order to find out why a given building has taken a certain form).

3. **Normative theory**: moves from explanation to evaluation. Includes hypotheses or other statements about what is right and wrong, desirable or undesirable in architecture. Can be classified according to the attitudes towards the subject matter:

   a) **Prescriptive theory**: proposes new norms for practice (e.g., Vitruvian set of criteria for architecture), new or revived solutions for specific problems, new design methods. Can be critical or affirmative of the status quo. The tone is often polemical (Nesbitt, 1996: 17).

   An example of prescriptive theory is **critical theory** — a framework which “evaluates the built world and its relationship to the society it serves. […] often has an expressed political or ethical orientation and intends to stimulate change” (Nesbitt, 1996:18). It may be characterized by a strategy of resistance and/or negation (e.g., The School of Venice; Critical Regionalism; feminist theories of architecture). Another example is **affirmative theory** — yet not fully articulated framework, defining itself as a viable alternative to critical theory; represented by the recent current of “projective practice,” based on a shift from a Derridean to a Deleuzian framework for architecture; looks for opportunities within the capitalist society and exploits these.

   b) **Proscriptive theory**: similar to prescriptive theory, but it indicates what is to be avoided in design (e.g., New Urbanism postulates the avoidance of the functional zoning).

   It seems that today, most commonly under the label “theory of architecture,” there is understood a normative theory (such understanding is adapted in most of the available anthologies on theory of architecture). It has to be remarked, however, that what is customary classified as “theory of architecture” does not always fulfill the “theory” criteria of philosophy and the social sciences.\(^3\) Within architectural theory anthologies, we can find forms of discourse which are proclaiming rather than arguing, and thus could

\(^3\) Understanding of the nature of theory and its quality criteria is primarily dependent upon the adopted research paradigm. This will be discussed further on in the text.
be characterized primarily in terms of ideology and/or manifesto. This complexity of architectural thought on the one hand enables certain ways of thinking that are not reducible to other discourses (such as philosophy), but on the other hand makes any attempt to systemize and compare various architectural frameworks a very challenging task.

Would a more careful, systematic attitude towards theory be beneficial for architecture? Would it make a relation between architectural theory and practice more intimate, more responsive? Employing philosophical reflection in architecture is not a way of escaping from real-life problems and entering a comfortable zone of abstract speculations. Philosophical positions have important consequences for the practical conduct of research, as well as for design choices. As I will try to illustrate in the example of phenomenology, “a philosophical reflexion about the relation of philosophy and architecture asks for the associations of theory and practice, whereby philosophy has to become practical, and architecture can enlarge her theoretical foundation” (Biella, 2006).

2.1.2 Concepts of theory

Before introducing particular theoretical positions within architecture, it is worthwhile to discuss different ways of understanding theory.

In its original Greek usage, theory (theoria) was closely related to “contemplation” and it involved the idea of a spectator contemplating an event. Andrea W. Nightingale in The Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy (2004) argues that theoria originally had a spiritual dimension. In ancient Greece theoria was “a venerable cultural practice characterized by a journey abroad for the sake of witnessing an event of spectacle.” The three most prominent forms of theoria in the classical period included “visits to oracular centers, pilgrimages to religious festivals, and journeys abroad for the sake of learning.” As Nightingale observes, “in all journeys of theoria, the pilgrim or thereos traveled away from home to see some sort of spectacle.

---

32 Following the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, these categories can be defined as follows:

**Ideology** is a systematic body of concepts (especially about human life or culture), which extends beyond the facts—it is a form of visionary theorizing; ideology may be also defined as integrated set of assertions, theories and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program. Ideology, unlike theory, is less likely to be self-critical and self-reflective; on the contrary—it tends to be dogmatic. Ideological orientation characterizes critical theory.

A **Manifesto** is a public declaration of principles, policies, or intentions; a written statement declaring publicly the intentions, motives, or views of its issuer. Unlike a theoretical treatise, a manifesto is allowed to proclaim rather than argue.
or to learn something about the outside world, thus confronting foreign peoples and places” (Nightingale, 2004:40).33

Since then, the concept of theory has undergone a series of reformulations. It has many distinct meanings in different fields of knowledge depending on their methodologies, the context of the discussion, and the adopted paradigm.

The following section, will concentrate on the major ways of understanding theory as represented by 20th century thinkers within philosophy and the social sciences.34 These ways of understanding theory have been appropriated into contemporary architectural discourse in many different ways.35

In science (positivist/postpositivist framework), “theory” is generally understood as a testable model of a specific phenomenon capable of predicting future occurrences or observations of the same kind, and capable of being tested through experiment or otherwise falsified through empirical observation. Theory specifies universal laws and enables a possibly strict control of a given phenomenon. The quality of theory is evaluated in terms of conventionally understood “rigor”—internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. A heavy emphasis is placed on quantification. The influence of values in theory-building process is either excluded or considered as very limited. Theory and practice are regarded as separate activities—research guides practice in a disciplining relationship (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Willis et al., 2007).

In the Marxist/critical perspective, theory is not a way to attain “objective knowledge,” but part of a struggle for “undermining and capturing authority.” Within this perspective, theory is oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole, in contrast to traditional theory, which is oriented only to understanding or explaining it. Theory and practice are interactively linked here. Discussing the power and intellectuals with Deleuze in 1972, Foucault concluded that “theory is not like a pair of glasses, it is rather like a pair of guns; it does not enable one to see better, but to fight better” (Merquior, 1985:85). In his view, science was a part of the “web of the discipline” that aimed at uniformizing individuals, what is required by “rational” and “efficient” society. It helps to produce “useful creatures,”

---

33 As Nightingale argues, *theoria* was one of the most common religious practices in the ancient world, yet it is rarely analyzed in the scholarship on ancient Greek culture (Nightingale, 2004:40).
34 A thorough historical analysis of the evolving ways of understanding “theory” would be very relevant here, yet it is beyond the scope of this thesis.
35 More specific examples are discussed in section 2.2.
disciplined by certain punishments set during education and carried on in professional life. In this perspective, theory is just an instrument fully subordinated to a power struggle (Johnson, 1994:3).

In Guba and Lincoln’s (1994) view, representing a constructivist position, theories are nothing more than inventions of human mind. Findings are not only value-mediated and value-dependent (as, for example, in the Marxist view), but entirely created in the research process. A currently accepted theory in any discipline is the most sophisticated and informed construct that its proponents were able to create. Advocates of a particular construction have to rely on persuasiveness and utility rather than on incontestable logic or evidence.

The above differences in defining “theory” illustrate the differences among various paradigms. A paradigm is a broad, conceptual framework addressing the foundational questions of any discipline, such as the nature of reality and knowledge or the relationship between research and practice. Speaking about any concept of theory without referring to a paradigm, from which that concept emerges, often ends up in confusion. A more detailed elaboration of paradigms underlying architectural discourse will be presented in section 2.2.

A frequently debated issue in architectural research is whether the requirements regarding theory within the social sciences are legitimate with regard to architecture. As there is no one universally agreed-on concept of “theory” within the social sciences, this question should be probably more detailed, asking about concepts of theory in specific paradigms and how they are interpreted in architectural discourse.

Referring to the positivist framework, one could ask, for instance, whether architectural theory must be applicable, “useful” knowledge, and whether it must result in predictable outcomes. It is a widely debated issue among architectural researchers and theorists. Kate Nesbitt maintains that if theory must lead to predictable outcomes, then the only acceptable theory is prescriptive or proscriptive (Nesbitt, 1996:19). Probably the most common view among scholars with architectural background, is that theory does not have to be limited to scholarly analyses, but also can be performed through design practice; buildings and drawings can be considered as theoretical, “producing concepts as fully objective and material as built form itself,” e.g., when they are proposing new concepts of space and its inhabitation (Hays, 1998:xii). John Hejduk’s works may serve as an example of the critical power of the unbuilt project (Hays, 1996).

On the other hand, we have positions emerging from postpositivist tradition, as represented by Nikos Salingaros, a mathematician and
architectural theorist, who argues that there is no reason why the demands regarding theory within other scholarly domains should not be required in the case of architecture. Salingaros (2004) defines theory in any discipline as a general framework that (1) explains observed phenomena; (2) predicts effects that appear under specific circumstances; (3) enables one to create new situations that perform in a way predicted by the theory. Architectural theory, according to Salingaros, ought to coordinate and make sense of particular observations of how human beings interact with built environment. It also should allow for formalization of those observations into an easily applicable framework that can be utilized for design, such as with Christopher Alexander’s “pattern language” (Salingaros, 2004).

Whether a theory that fulfils these requirements can account for the totality of the design process, it is an essential question. According to Alberto Pérez-Gómez (1999), such stable, easily transmittable discourse renders only particular problems necessary to the architect. The crucial issues of meaning, appropriateness, and creativity can not be reduced to this level of articulation. Rather, these aspects rely on the capacity of an architect to understand and interpret a given context; they can not be translated into an easily applicable formula. Instrumental, prescriptive discourse is unable to account for the lived world of human experience. It is also unable to address the important, ethical dimension in architecture. Architectural practice must be guided by a notion of the common good, preserving a political dimension, understood as the human search for stability and self-understanding in a mutable and mortal world. Instrumental theories, regardless of whether they are driven by technological, political or formalistic imperatives, or by a desire to emulate models from the sciences, are always unable to account for this dimension (Pérez-Gómez, 1999:73).

Pérez-Gómez suggests phenomenological hermeneutics as the most relevant meta-discourse for architecture—a way towards a non-instrumental, non-reductive relationship with practice. This is achieved through the explicit affirmation of the embeddedness of the observer in the observed context and an un-hierarchizing mediation between the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of a given situation.

---

36 Analogous debates take place within the social sciences. As J. W. Willis recollects, one of the major questions at American Educational Research Association symposium in New Orleans (2002) was: “Could a novel ever be a dissertation in a college of education?” Some scholars spoke in favor of that possibility, arguing that if the purpose of the research is to inform and convince people, novel might do that better than many other forms of research. Other argued that there are certain standards of what research is and novel clearly does not fulfill them (J. W. Willis, 2007:19). This is essentially a debate between two different research paradigms.

37 The phenomenological view of theory will be discussed more extensively in section 5.1.
Phenomenology acknowledges that there is no supra-contextual point of view. Our situatedness in a given context is, however, not an obstacle, but the proper and only condition for understanding. In this view, theory should always account for the contextuality of lived experience and allow us to attain a perspective attached to local concerns, everyday practices, shared histories, and traditions. At the same time, phenomenology enables us to engage in a rational, non-arbitrary critique of actually existing practices in different domains of human activity. As Madison (2001) remarks, phenomenological theory “enables us to come up with (universalizable) reasons why some practices are better than others” (Madison, 2001:5).38

These assumptions make phenomenological hermeneutics a framework not only allowing for, but demanding a reconciliation of theory and practice.

2.1.3 Classifying architectural theory

Searching through the available anthologies of architectural theory, one could find many different ways of classifying architectural thought. It seems, however, that chronological and/or theme-centered ways of presenting theories are most common.

Charles Jencks in his *Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture* structures contemporary architectural discourse as follows: Post-modern, Post-modern Ecology, Traditional, Late Modern, New Modern, and the Complexity Paradigm (Jencks, 2005). In Jencks’ work, we can see numerous authors in more than one category (e.g., Peter Eisenman, Rem Koolhas, Christopher Alexander, Kenneth Frampton) but on the other hand, under a common label such as “post-modern,” the positions are very diverse. This makes the definition of categories in terms of common theoretical foundations very difficult.

Harry Francis Mallgrave and Christina Contandriopoulos, in their book *Architectural Theory: An Anthology from 1871 to 2005*, primarily classify architectural theories in a chronological way, and within specified time periods, according to subject rather than to common theoretical underpinnings. Again, we can find in one category, authors with very diverse

---

38 Phenomenology acknowledges that the value discourse is context-relative, but it does not imply here that it is entirely context-dependent (as in the constructivist perspectives), thus relativistic. It helps to rearticulate the relationship between universal values and the specific conditions of human existence in such a way as to avoid both metaphysical essentialism and intellectual arbitrariness (Madison, 1997).
backgrounds, and a few authors placed in more than one category. On a most
general level, Mallgrave’s and Contandriopoulos’ classification consists of:
Critiques of Modernism: 1958-1969; The Prospect of a Postmodern Theory:
1969-1979; The 1980s; Millennial Tensions (Mallgrave and
Contandriopoulos, 2008).
Kate Nesbitt characterizes the postmodern period in architecture by the
proliferation of theoretical frameworks imported from other disciplines. In
her view, contemporary architectural debates are structured by the primary
paradigms such as linguistics theory (semiotics, structuralism,
poststructuralism, and deconstruction), phenomenology, psychoanalysis
(“aesthetics of the sublime”), Marxism, and feminism (Nesbitt, 1996:28). In
Nesbitt’s anthology Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture, we can find a
way of classifying theories based on their conceptual underpinnings
supplemented by the exploration of main themes of postmodern architectural
discourse (such as History and historicism; Meaning; Place; Urban theory;
Political and ethical agendas; The body).
K. Michael Hays, in his anthology Architecture Theory since 1968, does
not attempt to classify theories according to the common theme or paradigm,
but presents them in a strictly chronological order. He refers, however, to
phenomenology, structuralism, critical theory and poststructuralism as the
dominating paradigms in the period 1968-1993 (Hays, 1998: xiii–xiv). In the
introduction to his anthology Hays reasons for the dominance of theme-
centered way of presentation of architectural thought:

[...] the importance of the period in question, from 1968 to 1993, is
not one of competing styles or group allegiances (Marxism versus
formalism, structuralism versus phenomenology, or the like), but
rather of a collective experience of an objective situation to which
diverse responses emerged, all attempting to provide maps of the
possibilities for architectural intervention, to articulate the specific
limiting conditions for architectural practice. (Hays, 1998: xiii)

It is certainly important to see the different responses to a problem; but at
the same time, it may be worthwhile to analyze each of these responses more
systematically, pointing at the sometimes hidden presumptions and
theoretical backgrounds of each. Such type of architectural theory work is
exemplified by Paul-Alan Johnson’s The Theory of Architecture (1994). It is
neither an anthology, nor a monograph presenting author’s own, specific
theory, but instead a survey exploring basic ideas, presumptions, and practices featuring in architectural discourse, structured in a conceptual order, using the model of compendium. Johnson specifies his agenda as follows:

I have had and continue to have concerns that too much is taken for granted or is presumptuous or pompous in architectural writing and theorizing; the demystification of writing and theorizing remains an active agenda in my own teaching and is no doubt influential both in my choice of matters addressed and in their explication. (Johnson, 1994:xviii)

This type of work—a systematic, critical review—is unfortunately not widely represented among recent architectural publications. As Johnson emphasizes, the conceptual underpinnings of architectural theories are too seldom made explicit. Reducing architectural theories to the point of basic conceptions and subjecting them to close scrutiny, “empowers those who are attempting to comprehend them over and against those who profess to be already ‘in-the-know.’” As a result “more are informed and fewer are deceived by rhetoric” (Johnson, 1994: xviii). In a similar tone, Diana Agrest states:

To render the theoretical instrumentality explicit, from the conception of a theory to its methodological procedures, is of major importance in critical work, particularly at the juncture when this analysis enters the public realm, in order to avoid the ideological effects of such discourse. (Agrest, 1991:8)

39 In any case, it is probably unavoidable that an author’s view is to some extent reflected in the way of addressing the problems, and Johnson does not deny this (Johnson, 1994:xviii).
40 Johnson organizes discussion around the following themes: Theoretical Positions (reflection on the reach and limits of theory and social aspects of theory); The Definition of Architecture (the specificity of architecture and different views of the discipline); Power Structures and the Architect (benefactors and beneficiaries of architecture, i.e., clients, patrons, and users); Professional Attitudes (positions adopted by architects in the society); Ethics and Architecture (ethical foundations in architecture and issues of applied ethics); Ordering in Architecture (methods of solving architectural problems and rationale behind them); Authority in Architecture (external and internal forces determining architecture); Governing Concepts of Architects (systems of beliefs in architecture and ways of conceptualization); Relationships in Architecture (attitudes to geometry, measure, space); and Architecture Expressions (esthetics and the conventions of communication) (Johnson, 1994).
Explicating notions on the level of their basic foundations can be also considered as an educational strategy; it is a way to facilitate the assembly of a working knowledge.

An interesting position within architectural theory is Neil Leach’s anthology *Rethinking Architecture* (1997). The texts are divided into the following categories: Modernism, Phenomenology, Structuralism, Postmodernism, and Poststructuralism. All the texts are written by non-architects (except S. Kracauer, who was educated as an architect, but in his professional life was primarily concerned with cultural critique). Leach argues for the necessity and relevance of looking at architecture not from its own, disciplinary perspective, but from outside, from a certain distance. As Theodor Adorno observes, “It seems to me, however, not unrealistic that at times—in latent crisis situations—it may help to remove oneself farther from phenomena than the spirit of technical competence would usually allow” (Adorno, 1965 in: Leach, 1997:6).

In this study, we will adopt a classification of architectural theories based on their underlying paradigms. In the following section, we will discuss the main research paradigms that guide human sciences research. In this context, we will situate the perspectives that are most commonly being mentioned within architectural theory anthologies (i.e., structuralism, phenomenology, poststructuralism, critical theory), expanding the debate with the recent “postcriticality” discussion.

It is a challenging task to systemize architectural theories according to their founding paradigm. As Jencks remarks, “It is always reductive to define growing, complex movements, always foolhardy because it can never be done satisfactorily, and always necessary—in order to clarify the issues at stake” (Jencks, 1997:9).

One of the main problems is a serious risk of oversimplification. Paradigms adapted into architectural theories hardly ever remain in their original form, but this is also to some extent the case for the social sciences—there are sometimes problems separating research by paradigms, especially since applied research tends to be grounded in more than one paradigm (Willis et al., 2007:80-81). One also confronts the problem of equating different conceptual positions with one another by applying a single homogenizing “paradigm label.” Furthermore, the same notions in different paradigms may often have different meanings. One has to be therefore very

---

careful when generalizing across different frameworks. Nevertheless, such comparisons are often needed in order to establish the common ground necessary for a dialogue.

It has to be remarked that this study, by situating different perspectives within the borders of a common paradigm, is not claiming that the perspectives are synonymous with each other. It would be extremely difficult, if impossible, to find any scholars who identify themselves with all the positions within a given paradigm and agree that they could be used interchangeably. The positions that these terms signify have many similarities with one another, but they are certainly not coterminous.

There are some reasons behind applying a simplified model of architectural discourse in this text. The aim of this work is not to present architectural theories with all their discussions of discrete subject areas (which is beyond the scope of the project), but rather to compare certain modes of thinking, to look at groups of ontological and epistemological presuppositions that determine the further solutions of specific problems. The intention is also to prepare a background for further discussion of phenomenology and its relation to other currents of thought.

2.2 PARADIGMS IN ARCHITECTURAL RESEARCH

The term “paradigm” signifies a broad, conceptual framework addressing the foundational questions of any discipline, such as the nature of knowledge and reality, the purpose of research, and the relationship between research and practice. Guba and Lincoln (1994) defined paradigm as a belief system based on basic ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions. The assumptions are “basic” in the sense that they “they must be accepted simply on faith (however well argued); there is no way to establish their ultimate truthfulness” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:107). If there were such a way, many philosophical debates would have been resolved millennia ago.

---

42 Ontology investigates the nature of being and the world. Epistemology is concerned with the nature, scope, and conditions of knowledge generation. Methodology links specific ontological and epistemological assumptions to corresponding research methods. “The ontological question: What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it? […] The epistemological question: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known? […] The methodological question: How can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?” Guba and Lincoln, 1994:108.)
An adopted paradigm guides research at every stage, from the selection of a problem to be studied and the methods used for data collection and analysis, until the final stage of interpreting the findings and drawing conclusions.

Paradigms are often taken for granted—not explicitly referred to in the research; but in order to be able critically evaluate a specific theory, it is necessary to identify the conceptual foundations that guided the thinking of its author. As Yanchar and Hill argue, paradigms are crucial to any scientific project, even if they are not made explicit, because

[…] what is assumed to be real (and not real) will necessarily dictate the type of research and theories generated. For instance, if we as psychologists assume at the outset that only central nervous system activity is real, and that minds are not, then we have predetermined the kinds of theories and research programs that can be generated (e.g., reductive materialistic ones); indeed, we have predetermined the kind of science we can become and the kind of conclusions we can draw. (Yanchar and Hill, 2003:12)

In a similar tone Donald Schön (1983) emphasizes the importance of “frame analysis” (the study of the ways in which practitioners frame problems and roles) for professional practice. Schön argued that professionals who are unaware of their way of framing problems do not experience the need to choose among different possibilities. They do not reflect on the way in which they conceptualize the reality in which they function, because for them it simply the “given reality.”

When a practitioner becomes aware of his frames, he also becomes aware of the possibility of alternative ways of framing the reality of his practice. He takes note of the values and norms to which he has given priority, and those he has given less importance, or left out account altogether. Frame awareness tends to entrain awareness of dilemmas. (Schön, 1991:310)

Schön maintains that traditionally, the discussions on different frames is too much focused on a polemics—the advocates of various perspectives rather than reflecting on their frames, act from them, seeking primarily to defend their view and attack the opponents (Schön, 1991:312).
Today in the human sciences, there can be identified several competing paradigms. The identification of basic paradigms varies from author to author. Some point at two main research frameworks—qualitative and quantitative—but this view is often considered an oversimplification, concentrating on methodology rather than on foundational beliefs (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Willis et al., 2007). Other authors divide the options into empiricism, postempiricism, critical theory, and interpretivism (Smith, 1993); or positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, and constructivism (Guba, 1990; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Most commonly, however, three paradigms are being discussed as the guiding frameworks in the human sciences: positivism, critical theory, and interpretivism (Willis et al., 2007:8). Interpretivism and critical theory partly overlap, but postpositivism and critical theory also have some common points, e.g., ontological realism (in its different forms).

In this work I will adopt a paradigm classification that differs slightly from the three-fold model proposed by Willis et al. (2007). While both postpositivism and critical theory are relatively easy to define, within the interpretivist paradigm we can find such diverse positions as phenomenological hermeneutics and poststructuralism or deconstructionism. Placing such different frameworks in one “interpretivist” category, one can easily overlook essential differences. Furthermore, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the critiques of entire interpretivist paradigm and the critiques of its particular manifestation.

Willis defines interpretivism in terms of:

- Rationalism: an alternative to empiricism, holding that the experience of the senses is not always the best way to gain knowledge about reality; i.e., thinking and reflection are preferred to observation.

It is worthwhile to indicate that a discussion of paradigms can have different emphasis. While historically, scholars used to focus on the differences among research paradigms and advocated staying within a single research paradigm, more currently the complexities of paradigms, their similarities and shared standpoints are in focus; possibilities of dialogue are explored (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Racher and Robinson, 2002).

As Guba and Lincoln (1994) state the metaphor of “paradigm wars” is undoubtedly overdrawn. “A resolution of paradigm differences can occur only when a new paradigm emerges that is more informed and sophisticated than any existing one. That is most likely to occur if and when proponents of these several points of view come together to discuss their differences, not to argue the sanctity of their views. Continuing dialogue among paradigm proponents of all stripes will afford the best avenue for moving toward a responsive and congenial relationship” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:116).
- Relativism: a view that the reality we perceive is always conditioned by culture and our experiences; furthermore, our view of world is not a reflection of any out-of-there “reality,” but an individual construct. Different constructs of reality “meet” because individuals are influenced by common culture and context.

- Antifoundationalism: a position emphasizing that “there is no secure foundations that humans can use to decide what is true and what is not” (Willis et al., 2007:48-49).

This characteristic does not help to avoid ambiguities, which arise especially around the issue of relativism and to some extent rationalism. Further on in his book, Willis points at phenomenology and hermeneutics as main examples of the interpretivist paradigm (Willis et al., 2007:104-109), but these positions are far from accepting a relativist position. Rationalism can be also a problematic issue, at least a form of rationalism that stresses conceptual reasoning at the expense of experience (phenomenology insists on the intuitive foundation and verification of concepts and all a priori claims—in this sense it is a philosophy from “below,” not from “above”). In this text, instead of referring to broad and sometimes problematic category of interpretivism, we will divide it into two frameworks: constructivism and phenomenology.

In this work, postmodernism will not be referred to as a separate paradigm. As Willis et al. (2007) observes, postmodern perspectives are represented in both critical and interpretivist frameworks. The problems with defining postmodernism may result from this heterogeneity—it is not a consistent paradigm which can be clearly defined in terms of its ontological, epistemological, and methodological claims, but rather a cross-paradigm view, staying in opposition to most of the positivist/postpositivist assumptions and referring primarily to constructivism and critical theory, also to some extent to phenomenology.\footnote{In most general terms, postmodernism is critical because it addresses the negative results of progress on certain social groups. It is constructivist because it sees research as co-constitution of investigated objects, a negotiation between the investigator and the investigated subjects; it sees deconstruction of old concepts as one of the strategies of knowledge construction; it also emphasizes the relative and interactive nature of scientific knowledge. With phenomenology, postmodernism shares a hermeneutical approach—a conviction that understanding is always embedded in a cultural/social/historical context.}

The term “postmodern” was first introduced by Jean-Francois Lyotard in his publication \textit{The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge} (1979). According to Lyotard, the main characteristic of the postmodern era is
“incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard 1984:xxiii). Compartmentalization, fragmentation of knowledge, and dissolution of epistemic coherence are the consequences. Narrative elements disintegrate into “clouds” of linguistic combinations and language games. As a result, new, hybrid disciplines emerge independently from old epistemic traditions such as philosophy or natural sciences. Furthermore, the loss of continuous, coherent meta-narrative breaks the unity of the subject into “heterogeneous moments of subjectivity that do not cohere into an identity” (Aylesworth, 2005).

2.2.1 Positivism and postpositivism

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2008), positivism in philosophy is most generally defined as any system that confines itself to the data of experience and excludes *a priori* or metaphysical speculations. The basic affirmations of positivism are that all knowledge regarding matters of fact is based on the “positive” data of experience (that “mirror” reality); and that beyond the realm of fact is only that of pure logic and pure mathematics.

Positivists became noted for their repudiation of metaphysics, i.e., of speculation regarding the nature of reality that goes radically beyond any possible evidence that could either support or refute such “transcendent” knowledge claims (“Positivism.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2008).

The positivist paradigm can be more specifically characterized in terms of its ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions.

- **On the ontological level:** reality is considered as an objective sphere, independent from the human mind but accessible to it. This view is often labeled as “naïve realism” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).
- **On the epistemological level:** it is believed that we can come to know something only by experience of real world or deduction. Collected data are considered as value-free, as a “mirror” of reality; i.e., a researcher is capable of studying an object without influencing it. Research reflects the true nature of the world (a correspondence theory of truth is adapted). The purpose of the research is to find universal laws as well as to explain, predict, and control a phenomenon under inquiry. Positivist
epistemology can be characterized as “dualist and objectivist” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

- **On the methodological level:** positivists hold that objectivism and a strict control of the research situation are possible when prescribed procedures are rigorously followed. Thus, the use of a precise, scientific method is advocated. Guba and Lincoln characterize positivist methodology as experimental and manipulative, focused on verification of hypotheses. Positivists emphasize that all research should start from clearly stated problems and well-defined methods.

Positivism as a way of thinking that accepts no mythic dimension as legitimate is particular to the 19th century and later. Yet, rational and empirical interests can be traced back to the Renaissance (15th/16th century) with its emphasis on experimentation and observation, or even earlier, to the 11th century, in Ibn al-Haytham’s *Book of Optics* introducing early scientific method, and the 13th century philosophy of Roger Bacon, who proposed experimentation as the method for learning about the world and stressing the importance of quantitative research.

Until the Enlightenment, however, the dominant mode of knowledge was an appeal to authority (such as the church, the state, the Bible, the classical philosophers). Empirical observation as the principal mode of knowing established itself indisputably in the Western tradition beginning in the 17th/18th century with the works of rationalists (e.g., Descartes, Spinoza), empiricists (e.g., Bacon, Locke), and early scientists (e.g., Newton, Galileo). The most extreme form of positivism is “logical positivism,” a position that was developed by the Vienna Circle—a group of scientists and philosophers (who, among others, included Moriz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Carl Gustav Hempel, and Otto Neurath). After the Nazis came to power in Austria, several members of the Vienna Circle moved to USA and had a profound influence on American philosophy both before and after the war. Conceptually, logical positivism is a modern reformulation of Locke’s and Bacon’s empiricism (the members of Vienna Circle were also called “logical empiricists”). The main assertion was that there were only two sources of knowledge: logical reasoning on the one hand and sense experience on the other hand. Experience, however, was in the main focus of the group. The Vienna Circle worked out a very precise version of universal scientific

---

46 “Questions and/or hypotheses are stated in propositional form and subjected to empirical test to verify them; possible confounding conditions must be carefully controlled (manipulated) to prevent outcomes from being improperly influenced” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:110).
method, specifying how it could be used to advance knowledge in any discipline. They also proposed the “verification principle,” i.e., if there is no way to specify whether a given statement is true or false, then the statement has no meaning and therefore no place in science. As the only knowledge that was valid was scientific knowledge, great areas of philosophical discourse (such as ethics and metaphysics) were considered meaningless and unworthy any discussion. Logical positivists viewed science development as a deductive process (1. a broad theory should be proposed; 2. testable hypotheses should be deductively specified; 3. hypotheses should be empirically verified).

In 1930s and 1940s, Karl Popper published several critiques of logical positivism. He pointed out that the gathered data does not always adequately represent the reality, so there is no guarantee that we can attain truth through well-designed experiments. Popper proposed the “falsification principle” instead of the “verification principle.” In it, he argued that data that disprove a hypothesis are far more definitive than data that support it. Popper’s theory is a foundation of modified version of positivism, “postpositivism.”

Among other important theories that influenced rethinking of positivist assumptions were Gödel’s incompleteness theorem, proved in 1931, which showed that the consistency of a formal language was only obtainable at the price of its limited expressiveness. Gödel helped release mathematics from the illusion that it could represent the world in a complete and consistent way. Another important contribution was from Wittgenstein, who in his Philosophical Investigations (1953), reinforced the view that mathematics was a part of human history and not an abstract ideal independent of it.

While positivists are convinced that by conducting scientific research we are able to discover the way things really are (scientific theories reflect the true nature of the world), postpositivists acknowledge that it is not possible to apprehend reality as it is and attain an absolute certainty that a given theory is true. Confirming experiments do not prove a theory, they only add some evidence that supports the theory. However, a carefully conducted study that does not support a theory provides a strong argument to believe that the theory is incorrect. In this view, objectivity is a “regulatory ideal” in that we can never be sure that a theory is true, but we can get closer and closer to

---

47 Gödel’s 1st theorem: Any effectively generated theory capable of expressing elementary arithmetic cannot be both consistent and complete. In particular, for any consistent, effectively generated formal theory that proves certain basic arithmetic truths, there is an arithmetical statement that is true, but not provable in the theory.
truth by a series of research studies (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Willis et al., 2007).

Another difference between positivism and postpositivism concerns the neutrality of collected data. Positivists believe that it is possible to collect objective, theory-free data and use them to develop a theory. Postpositivists however, acknowledge that the collection and interpretation of data may be to some extent influenced by a theory and the values of the researcher.

Ontologically, postpositivist position may be described as “critical realism” and epistemologically as “modified dualism/objectivism” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). On a methodological level, postpositivist can be characterized by “critical multiplism” as a way of falsifying hypotheses. This includes a greater variety of data sources and an increased utilization of qualitative techniques, e.g., by taking into account the meanings that people ascribe to their actions or in describing the research context (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 110).

Postpositivists accept various ways of developing theories. Theory does not have to be based on collected data, as in a positivist framework. A theory, however, has to be tested through scientific research. The purpose of postpositivist research remains the same as in a positivist framework: to discover universal laws through the use of scientific method (Willis et al., 2007: 72-73).

The human sciences that emerged as separate disciplines in the second half of the 19th century were strongly influenced by a scientific world view. Behind the emphasis on a scientific method lay the desire to be accepted as part of successful family of natural sciences. John Stuart Mill (1843) is regarded as the first to advise social scientists to emulate their older and more established “brothers.” In this, he saw a promise of a rapid maturation of the field and an emancipation from the limiting philosophical and theological structures (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:106). Émile Durkheim, one of the founders of sociology, viewed the social sciences as neutral, objective, and value-free domains of knowledge. Furthermore, he acknowledged the dualism of mind and body (i.e., cognitions about an object could be separated from an object itself). The goal of the social sciences, according to Durkheim, was to discover reality and find the underlying causes of social phenomena. A way to attain this goal was primarily through observation; a scientific language was required here to accurately describe the observed phenomena (Willis et al., 2007:35-44). Logical positivists continued this line of thinking, e.g., Carnap, in *The Unity of Science* (1934), argued that all science, including the human sciences, must use the same scientific method.
Among most social scientists, orthodox positivism has long fallen out of favor. While the majority are in agreement on the importance of the scientific method,\textsuperscript{48} social scientists realize that while the behavior of groups may at times be predicted in terms of probability, it is much more difficult to explain the behavior of an individual. Today, it is generally recognized in both the human sciences and the natural sciences, that the role of the observer can unintentionally bias or distort the observed event.

Positivist frameworks in the human sciences have been primarily criticized for their universalism and reductionism, due to their contending that all processes are reducible to measurable data or relationships.\textsuperscript{49} The legitimacy and coherence of the fact-value distinction was also questioned, especially by advocates of critical theory. As the Frankfurt School maintained, scholars’ needs and interests are a determining factor in the choice of facts considered in any study; thus, a value judgment can be found behind the selection of relevant facts (this problem has been acknowledged in a postpositivist perspective).

The Frankfurt School also pointed out that positivism falsely represented human social action, considering social reality as existing objectively. It failed to consider the role of the “observer” in the constitution of social reality, the historical and social context affecting the representation of social ideas.

Another issue criticized by the Frankfurt School, particularly by Horkheimer, was that the representation of social reality produced by positivism was inherently conservative, helping to support the status quo rather than challenging it.\textsuperscript{50} In his opinion, science has always been at the service of the dominant culture and has been used for the more efficient exercise and administration of power. The critics also emphasize that positivism “ultimately effaces human spontaneity and autonomy in the interests of a functional system that is taken to be fully self-justifying and hence rational” (Surber, 1998:132).

In \textit{The Postmodern Condition}, Lyotard indicates a paradox within a positivist framework. Although science is committed to denounce any narrative knowledge, its legitimacy is in fact founded on two narratives: first, the ideals of French Revolution (human liberation and emancipation of

\textsuperscript{48} Indisputably, “formulaic precision has enormous utility when the aim of science is the prediction and control of natural phenomena” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:106).

\textsuperscript{50} Critical theory, as advocated by the Frankfurt School, is a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole, in contrast to traditional theory oriented only to understanding or explaining it.
reason) and second, the philosophy of progress, based on ideas of Hegel and Darwin (Lyotard, 1984).

Both positivism and postpositivism in the human sciences have been also criticized for prioritizing the rigor of the research design over the important issues in the research process, e.g., the subject matter and the purpose of particular human sciences. Yanchar and Hill call this phenomenon “methodolatry,” when “method has been exalted nearly to the point of being an end in itself” (Yanchar and Hill, 2003:15).

**Positivism and structuralism**

Discussing the influence of positivism on the human sciences and architectural research, it is worthwhile to look closer at its relation to structuralism. Structuralism, roughly speaking, is a way of thinking about culture in terms of structures. Its aim, in different spheres of culture (such as religion, architecture, politics, etc.) is analogous to what grammar does for language—to explain how these systems work and how they generate meanings for their users.

Although defining structuralism as a form of positivism would be an oversimplification, structuralism may be rightly classified as a continuation of some aspects of the positivist/postpositivist tradition. Its task was to find an objective, rational, and “scientific” methodology for analyzing the data of perception.

Ferdinand de Saussure’s lectures, held at the University of Geneva between the years 1906 and 1911, are generally regarded as a starting point of structuralism. After de Saussure’s death, these lectures were published by his students and colleagues under the title *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). De Saussure’s main focus was not on the use of language (“parole” or speech), but rather on the underlying system of language (“langue”). He called his theory *semiology*.

Structuralism emerged out of the difficulties of positivism in dealing with the human sciences. The refutation of “metaphysics” by positivists made the conception of any kind of “meaning” within social and psychological

---

51 Structuralism has also some common points e.g., with Marxism and Freudianism—it addresses both a deep and a surface structure of a given phenomenon. In Freudianism and Marxism, the deep structure is a story—the battle between the life and death instincts, *eros* and *tanatos* (Freudianism) or the conflicts between classes that are grounded in the economic “base” (Marxism). These similarities gave rise to specific theories. Louis Althusser represents structuralist-Marxist approach (structural Marxism) while Jacques Lacan applied structuralism to psychoanalysis.
phenomena untenable. Structuralism may be also seen as a response to the need to account for the deep structural crises and transformative processes which were manifested in the late 19th century Europe, for which positivism was inadequate. Further on, structuralism was influenced by the same processes that led to the development of the postpositivist position.

Although structuralism’s origins reach back as early as the beginning of 20th century, it gained the most popularity within academia in the 1960s and 1970s. Researchers within this tradition constructed their models of culture employing structural linguistics and mathematical concepts of structure. The aim of the research was to determine and prove laws governing the structure of social relations. Although Lévi-Strauss denied that structuralism is solely for the purpose of applying mathematics, he did so limiting the domain of mathematics to its traditional, “metric” aspects such as number and magnitude. Mathematics is a constantly developing branch of knowledge and has long since surpassed this limitation. When we consider the more recent developments within mathematics (symbolic logic, complexity theory, set theory, group theory, cybernetics, information theory, games theory, and topology) structuralism can be more rightly characterized as “mathematisation” of a given object.

In the essay “Structure, Word, Event” (1968), Paul Ricoeur, drawing upon the work of the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev in his book Prolegomena to a Theory of Language (1943), points at the major presuppositions of the structuralist model. First, structuralism believes that language is an object that can be investigated scientifically. Second, structuralism makes a distinction between a science of states of the system and a science of changes, subordinating the latter to the former. Third, structuralism assumes that in any state of the system, there are no absolute terms, but only relations of mutual dependence. Fourth, structuralism approaches the collection of signs as a closed, autonomous system of internal dependencies. What follows from these assumptions, among others, is that structuralism defines a sign not in terms of the object which it represents, but rather in terms of its relation to all other signs within a given system.

Although Ricoeur recognizes the fruitfulness of structural analyses of particular well-defined fields of experience, he resolutely resists those structuralists who sought to reduce language to the functioning of a system of signs, having no reference to the reality outside itself. In his view, a comprehensive interpretation of a discourse requires both the objective kind of analysis (of which structuralism is an example) and an acknowledgement of the self-understanding of the discursive partners.
Ricoeur (1968), discussing the main limits of structuralism, argues that it excludes from consideration some important phenomena, such as the act of speaking when understood not only as an individual performance but also as the process of the free creation of new expressions. It also excludes history, which is treated merely as a passage from one state of the system to another. Furthermore, structuralism marginalizes the primary aim of the language, which is to say something about something, i.e., it has a real reference, not just an ideal sense.52 These critical apprehensions lead Ricoeur to question the basic presumption of structuralism—that language is an object that can be analyzed scientifically53 (Ricoeur, 1974: 81-85).

### Influence on architectural discourse

The positivist line of thinking in architectural theory, as Pérez-Gómez (1983) maintains, starts in the 17th century via Claude Perrault, “the first modern,” whose abstract and normative theories of proportion can be related to the astronomy of Galileo. The tendency towards abstraction, logic, mathematics, and technological systems in architecture has been continued by Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand and l’Ecole Polytechnique in 1800.

---

52 Ricoeur states: “The triumph of the structural point of view is at the same time a triumph of the scientific enterprise. By constituting the linguistic object as an autonomous object, linguistics constitutes itself as science. But at what cost? Each of the axioms we have listed is both a gain and a loss. The act of speaking is excluded not only as exterior execution, as individual performance, but as free combination, as producing new utterances. Now this is the essential aspect of language—properly speaking, its goal. At the same time history is excluded, and not simply the change from one state of system to another but the production of culture and of man in the production of his language. […] The structural point of view also excludes, along with free combination and generation, the primary intention of language, which is to say something about something; speaker and hearer understand this intention immediately. For them language […] has a double direction: an ideal reference (to say something) and a real reference (to say about something). In this movement, language leaps across two thresholds: the threshold of ideality of meaning and, beyond this meaning, the threshold of reference. […] [B]y means of this movement of transcendence, language ‘veut dire’” (Ricoeur, 1974: 83-84). Further, Ricoeur concludes: “These considerations […] lead us to question the whole first supposition of the science of language, namely that language is an object for an empirical science” (Ricoeur, 1974:84).

53 Yet, Ricoeur acknowledges that although a structural analysis cannot account for the meaning of a text in a non-reductive way, it may be a relevant step in the process of interpretation. He asserts: “For it is the task of understanding to bring to discourse what is initially given as structure. It is necessary to have gone as far as possible along the route of objectification, to the point where structural analysis discloses the depth semantics of a text, before one can claim to ‘understand’ the text in terms of the ‘matter’ that speaks therefrom. The matter of the text is not what a naïve reading of the text reveals, but what the formal arrangement of the text mediates” (Ricoeur, 1981:92-93). Ricoeur’s statement should be read in the context of Gadamer-Habermas debate (discussed in section 3.2.3); Ricoeur argues that “truth” and “method” do not constitute a disjunction, but rather a dialectical process.
In the prewar period, architects associated with the Bauhaus school self-consciously sought to articulate a view of the world in which logical positivism played an essential role.

Throughout their writings, the members of the Vienna Circle pointed out modern architecture as the cultural movement with which they most identified; furthermore, “their interests were reciprocated as the logical positivists were more prominent as visitors to the Dessau Bauhaus than members of any other single group outside art and architecture” (Galison, 1990:710). Discussing logical positivism and Bauhaus, Galison states:

Both enterprises sought to instantiate a modernism emphasizing what I will call “transparent construction,” a manifest building up from simple elements to all higher forms that would, by virtue of the systematic constructional program itself, guarantee the exclusion of the decorative, mystical, or metaphysical.54 (Galison, 1990:710)

Referring to simple observational reports (“protocol statements”) and logical connectives (such as if, then, or, & and), the logical positivists intended to ground a valid knowledge. Following this direction, “the Bauhaus school hoped to use scientific principles to combine primitive color relations and basic geometrical forms to eliminate the decorative and create a new aesthetic that would prize functionality” (Galison, 1990:711). The following statement of Theo van Doesburg (1931) is representative of the Bauhaus’ approach:

The work of art must be entirely conceived and formed by the mind before its execution. It must receive nothing from nature’s given forms or from sensuality or from sentimentality. We wish to exclude lyricism, dramaticism, symbolism, etc. In painting a pictorial element has no other element than itself. The construction of the picture, as well as its elements, must be simple and visually controllable. Technique must be mechanical, that is exact, anti-impressionistic. (Van Doesburg, 1931, in: Osborne, 1979:128)

Yet, even though there may be identified many similarities between logical positivism and the Bauhaus School, the wide rank of ideas

---

54 As Galison remarks, there was a political dimension behind this approach: by basing constructions on simple, accessible units, they hoped to banish incorporation of nationalist or historical features (Galison, 1990:711).
represented by the School surely can not be reduced exclusively to the positivist influence. As Marcel Franciscono in his analysis of the early Bauhaus observes, “from the beginning it was a tangled skein of various and even conflicting motives and tendencies” (Franciscono, 1971:240).

Supporting this statement, Joseph Rykwert in the essay “The Dark Side of Bauhaus” in The Necessity of Artifice (1982) remarks:

I hope that I will not risk paradox if I now accuse the Bauhaus masters—not of an excessive rationalism—but rather of not stating the religious, or quasi-religious postulates for what they were doing; or at any rate of not stating them explicitly. Only Itten and Klee have a clean record in this respect; and they were the two Bauhaus masters who realized most clearly the danger of van Doesburg’s excessive devotion to modernity; to interpreting every technological advance as a spiritual leap forward. (Rykwert, 1982; quoted in: Harries, 2000:391)

In the postwar period, until the early 1960s, positivism had a dominating influence on architectural theory. The ideals of International Style (e.g., rationalization of architectural production; functionalism; lack of interest for historical and cultural context; focus on new technologies) have their origins in positivism.

It has to be admitted that functionalists had a social agenda. Yet, as Kostoff (1989) indicates, the architects referring to the needs of users neglected the users’ perspectives and imposed on people arbitrary solutions.

Modernist rhetoric waxed eloquent about the needs of users. It represented architecture as the vehicle of social welfare and set public housing issues as the highest priority of architecture. But there was no question of consulting with the user of the housing estate during the course of their design. […] Users did not know what they wanted or, more importantly, what they should have. Their collective needs, interpreted by the architect and the sponsoring agency, would be codified in the ‘program’—as had been the case with hospitals, schools and prisons in the past. The fit might not be comfortable at first. The setting might appear alien to our habitual ways. The fault was with our habits. We would learn to adjust to the new Wohnkultur because it was based on rationally derived standards. […] Architectural revolutions required the redesign of humanity. (Kostoff, 1989, in: Stevens, 1998:13-14)
There is still a considerable representation of positivism/postpositivism in contemporary research dealing with the “science of building”—technological aspects of architecture. It can be also traced in architectural theories related to behaviorism, operations research, and system theory.

The postpositivist perspective within architectural research is often combined with structuralist ideas. Structuralism entered architectural debate in the early 1950s as a response to modern functionalism.55 While both frameworks promise empirically confirmable data and may be considered as a form of determinism, one of the most important differences is the philosophical issue of reductionism. Reductionism is the process of reducing complex phenomena into smaller elements for the purpose of study; for example, the reduction of human expressions and needs solely to what is physiologically necessary or—as in functionalism—analyzing a building in terms of spaces, each of which was assigned a single, static function, without taking into account that spaces can carry the meaning for their inhabitants. One consequence of functionalist reductionism was monotony and sterility of designed spaces and following on that, a lack of identification by the user with her/his surroundings. Structuralism, on the contrary, emphasizes the importance of socio-cultural studies in its analysis of the built environment, thus encourages a dynamic, holistic view of design where meanings carried by spaces to their inhabitants have to be taken into account.

There are, however, two different ways of adapting structuralism in architecture. On the one hand, there is the “aesthetics of number,” translating structuralist concepts directly into aesthetic qualities, which is in fact a form of reductionism. On the other hand, a more careful interpretation of structuralism (within the postpositivist paradigm) resulted in the space syntax theory, elaborated on in the late 1970s by Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson. This theory was developed as a tool to help architects simulate the likely social effects of their designs. The main presumption was that spaces can be broken down into components, analyzed as networks of choices, then represented in a graphic form that describe the relative connectivity and integration of those spaces.

55 At CIAM 9, held at Aix-en-Provence in 1953, the group of young architects led by Alison and Peter Smithson and Aldo van Eyck challenged the four Functionalist categories of the Athens Charter (Dwelling, Work, Recreation, and Transportation). Instead of proposing an alternative set of abstractions, they searched for the structural principles of urban growth and for the next significant unit above the family cell. Their discontent with the modified functionalism of the old guard (i.e., le Corbusier, van Eesteren, Sert, Ernesto Rogers, Alfred Roth, Kunio Mayekawa, and Gropius) was expressed in their critical reaction to the CIAM 8 report.
Christopher Alexander’s “pattern language,”56 created in 1970s, is another example of postpositivist/structuralist-influenced thinking aimed at creation of “architecture of living variety.” The purpose of employing scientific concepts in architecture, according to Alexander, is

[…] to enable us to create deeper structure—and that means more satisfying design, more eternal forms, more valuable places, more beautiful buildings. […] Theory is not merely a gloss on architecture, to raise its intellectual level. It is above all, a source of help. (Alexander, 2004)

Alexander’s recent research, done in close cooperation with mathematician Salingaros, continues the line of investigation started with *A Pattern Language* in the perspective of complexity theory.57 In his monumental work *The Nature of Order* (2002-2005), Alexander argues that the same laws apply to all structures in the universe; from atoms and crystals to living forms, and to even galaxies. The same set of laws determines the structure of a city; a building; or a single room. In their approach, Alexander and Salingaros combine scientific analyses and structuralist ideas with deep intuitive experience—aiming to describe architecture that is more adaptive to human needs and aspirations. They emphasize that the success of architecture should be measured in human terms, i.e., in terms of the physical and emotional well-being of the residents. The role of science is to provide architects with useful tools to realize this aim.

In some architectural adaptations of structuralism, the issue of user participation in housing design was particularly stressed. N. John Habraken,

---

56 Referring to the basic idea of “pattern language,” Alexander recollects (1996): “When I first constructed the pattern language, it was based on certain generative schemes that exist in traditional cultures. These generative schemes are sets of instructions which, carried out sequentially, will allow a person or a group of people to create a coherent artifact, beautifully and simply. The number of steps varies: there may be as few as a half a dozen steps, or as many as 20 or 50. When the generative scheme is carried out, the results are always different, because the generative scheme, always generates structure that starts with the existing context, and creates things which relate directly and specifically to that context.”

57 “We are now focusing on pattern languages, which are truly generative. That means they are sequences of instructions which allow a person to make a complete, coherent building by following the steps of the generative scheme. We have done this for houses, for public buildings, for office furniture layout, and so forth. It works. And it is powerful. Compared to the pattern language that you’ve seen in *A Pattern Language*, these generative schemes are much more like what you call code. They are generative processes which are defined by sets of instructions that produce or generate designs. They are, in fact, systems of instructions which allow unfolding to occur in space […] and are therefore more capable of producing living structure” (Alexander, 1996).
Herman Hertzberger, and Lucien Kroll made important contributions in this field. As Hertzberger (1991) emphasizes, in structuralism, one infills a structure with a long life-cycle with structures having shorter life-cycles. “Action space” and “discourse space” meet here. The architect’s role is not to provide a complete solution, but to provide a spatial framework to be filled in eventually by the users. Following this direction, structuralism was sometimes being coupled with phenomenology in the field of architectural theory. Common to both phenomenology and structuralism is posing the question of meaning in the context of the relations among architectural elements and their signification. Both these perspectives suspend “the commonsense perception of architecture as a vessel of meaning filled from outside, or as a collection of behaviors and uses considered as its content” (Hays, 1998:xiii). Other common themes are: the concept of a sense of place; addressing the importance of identification with the surroundings; an emphasis on individual interpretations; advocating user participation in the design process; respect for vernacular values and building forms; integration of “high” and “low” culture in architecture.

One of the major differences between these paradigms involves the status of the subject. In a structuralist perspective, the subject is construed as an effect of the signifying system; deep structures are valued over surface phenomena, which partly shares the views of Marx and Freud, both of whom were concerned with underlying causes and unconscious motivations, shifting focus away from individual human consciousness and choice. Therefore, like Marxism and psychoanalysis, structuralism supports the ongoing modern diminishment of the self, considering the individual largely as a construct and consequence of impersonal systems. Individuals are able to initiate or control the codes and conventions of their social existence, mental life, or linguistic experience only to a very limited extent. As a consequence of this “demotion of the subject,” structuralism has been widely criticized as an anti-humanistic perspective. Phenomenology, on the contrary, privileges subject over system, relying on such concepts as consciousness and presence.

Structuralism may be seen as the main foundation of a postmodern turn in architecture. Its greatest impact was through semiotics—a field of study that analyzes systems of signs, codes, and conventions in all domains of human activity, distinguishing three basic components of language: the word (sign), its symbol (signifier), and what the symbol stands for (the signified).
In the semiotic perspective, what the author meant by the text has a very limited relevance to the actual meaning of the text. With regard to architecture, a building can come to signify more or something completely different than its designer meant. Structuralism, in attacking the International Style, argued that it is not possible to design solely for function, in the aesthetics that symbolizes nothing but function (as functionalists claimed). All objects function as signs, and their meaning can never be fully dependent upon their creators.

Structuralism lost much of its influence on architectural theory around the mid-1980s with the proliferation of interpretive techniques that cut across traditional oppositions (such as signified/signifier, interiority/exteriority) and opened the subject to a more radical heterogeneity (Hays: 1998:xiii). This tendency began already in the mid-1970s with the emergence of poststructuralism and the dogma that reality is a social construction, determined and explained by the contingencies of its time and place, and based on no underlying constants or essences. In this perspective, structuralism becomes a series of systematic, scientific projects; semiotics is defined as the “science” of signs. Poststructuralists focus on critiques of these projects or explore of their ultimate impossibility. In opposition to structuralists who were convinced that systematic knowledge is possible and attempted to develop out of elements and their possibilities of combination “grammars” that would account for the form and meaning of specific works, poststructuralists claim to only know the impossibility of this knowledge.

2.2.2 Critical theory

Critical theory is a modern expression of Marxism—a materialistic, deterministic framework, closely incorporating science in its world view (dialectical materialism). The Marxist understanding of science is not value-free; on the contrary, it puts science “in practice at the service of the community” (Berndal, 1937, in: Willis et al., 2007:27). Yet, as the “Lysenko

55 The term semiotics has gradually replaced structuralism (the formation of the International Association for Semiotic Studies in the 1960s has deepened the trend).
60 Marx, referring to Hegel, accepted that any development happens through contradictions; however, he rejected Hegel’s idealistic proposition that this process was initiated by an Ideal Power, e.g., God or Spirit. Instead, he adopted the materialism of Feuerbach. This combination resulted in dialectical materialism.
effect” exemplifies, “the service of community” can easily end up in manipulation, subordinating science to political ideology. The impact of Marxism in the domain of the social sciences was mainly through its derivation known as “historical materialism.” In this view, changes in human and social behavior across history are caused by material objects and the efforts of various social groups to obtain material goods at the expense of other groups. Furthermore, Marxism holds that if we are to understand a given phenomenon, we have to understand a context in which it operated.

Marxism emerged in the 19th century in the context of rapid industrialization as a response to a miserable condition of factory workers. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels conceptualized the history of all hitherto existing society as the history of class struggles. The conflict between classes in society is unavoidable. If it remains unresolved however, it will lead to the destruction of all classes. As those who have power are normally not willing to give it up, the most likely way to improve the situation is, in the Marxist view, a revolution. Only in this way those who are oppressed (the working class) can free themselves from the oppression (created by the capitalists), and place the productive capacities of society into collective ownership. Upon this, material foundation classes would be eradicated and the material basis for all forms of inequality between humankind would dissolve.

According to Surber (1998), the main differences between the traditional Marxism and critical theory are as follows:

---

61 The story is told in the book *The Lysenko Effects: The Politics of Science*, by Nils-Roll Hansen (2004), and repeated in Willis et al., 2007: 27-31). An uneducated Ukrainian agronomist, T. D. Lysenko, claimed in the late 1920s that Darwinian evolution theory was wrong and supported the older, Lamarckian view. According to Lamarck, physical changes in an organism acquired during its lifetime could be passed on to the next generation. In other words, heredity was based not on genes, but on the interaction between the organism and its environment. While scientific evidence was clearly in favor of Darwin, the Lamarckian view was much more attractive for the Soviet Union leaders—it was compatible with Marxist idea of scientific determinism (while Darwinian theory relied on chance). Despite the concerns of many scientists, Lysenko’s approach was officially adopted. The advocates of Darwinian theory were accused of being “racists, fascists, saboteurs, terrorists, Trotskyites, powers of darkness, and hand-maidens of Goebbels” (Sheehan, 1993:225). Many of these who resisted Lysenko’s theories were arrested, some of them shot, others died in prison.

62 One of most radical examples of this approach can be illustrated by Adolf Hitler’s assertion that “[t]here is no such thing as truth. Science is a social phenomenon and like every other social phenomenon is limited by the benefit or injury it confers on the community” (quoted in: Sayer, 2000:47).
Critical theory assumes greater individual autonomy than traditional Marxism and rejects historical determinism.

It does not place empirical social science in the “ideological superstructure” but sees it as a potential agent for social change and individual autonomy.

Critical theorists see primarily themselves and the like-minded intellectuals as the agents of change (since the proletariat did not succeed in changing the power structures). “Metaphorically, the critical theorist is a ‘liberator’ seeking through dialogue to make social actors aware of oppressive structures” (Murray and Ozanne, 1991:136).

It takes account of the profound and pervasive influence of mass culture, in particular through the mass media (Surber, 1998:133-134).

Critical theory refers to a number of movements, but its foundations were established in the 1920s by the Frankfurt School, a group of scholars associated with the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt. Among the most prominent members of the group were Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse. The Frankfurt School expanded the focus of classical Marxism beyond the issues of industrial production and workers-capitalist struggle to include many other phenomena defining society, e.g., consumerism or mass-media, which were seen as tools helping the ruling class to control the masses (by shaping consciousness of individuals in a convenient way, e.g., justifying the status quo).

Contemporary expressions of critical theory in the social sciences focus on oppression, marginalization and social injustice based on such factors as gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, social class, etc. The advocates of critical theory maintain that even the ostensibly neutral formulations of science are to a large extent shaped by power struggles (Willis et al., 2007:45-48).

Summing up:

- **On the ontological level**, critical theory paradigm can be defined as “historical realism,” i.e., reality is material and external to human mind, but it is not possible to access it in an objective way (Willis et al., 2007:83-85). The reality accessible to human mind is inherently shaped by social, political, cultural, gender values, etc., and these factors over the course of centuries “crystallized” or “reified” into a series of structures, which are inappropriately taken as “real,” i.e., natural and immutable (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:110).

- **On the epistemological level**, it is believed that “truth statements” are culturally, socially, and historically mediated; they are not privileged in
any absolute sense. The observer and the observed object are interactively linked; the values of the researchers influence the research findings. Guba and Lincoln characterize this epistemology as “transactional and subjectivist” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:110). The task of the research is to uncover local instances of universal power structures and empower the oppressed (Willis et al., 2007:83-85). The starting point of inquiry is an ideological position, a conviction that the social relationships are entirely shaped by power factors.

- **On the methodological level**, a dialectical dialogue between the inquirer and the subject of inquiry is seen as one of the research strategies; dialogue transforms misinterpretations and ignorance into a more informed consciousness (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:110). Research is seen as a potential agent for social change and individual autonomy. Marx famously stated that “Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”

Because of the ideological foundation of the critical theory paradigm, research methods are not strictly limited; both qualitative and quantitative are acceptable.

From the side of postpositivism, critical theorists have been criticized for confusing ideological practice with “proper” research and for the preconceived bias about the inquired phenomenon. Similar criticism was raised from the side of phenomenology. As Madison (2001) emphasizes, it is always worthwhile to argue, to be open towards new, alternative possibilities, instead of just adapting an ideological position.

Argument (in the classic, rhetorical sense of the term) is the first and foremost categorical imperative of any being that lays claim to being rational. Reason admonishes us not to leave ourselves be suckered in by fallacious arguments dressed up in fancy, politically-correct clothing. (Madison, 2001:248)

Critical theorists may be also disapproved for their deterministic view of an individual and society; “they know that power relationships are critical factors in society, and they know the research they conduct will find specific examples of the negative influence of those relationships” (Willis et al., 2007:85).

A major problem of critical theory may be identified in critical theorists' assertion that all knowledge is historical and at the same time – in their claim

---

63 Karl Marx (1845), *Theses on Feuerbach* (Thesis XI)
MAPPING THE RESEARCH BACKGROUND

of special insight into social ethics. Murray and Ozanne (1991) ask in this context:

[...] how can a researcher step out of this historicity and offer a critique of society by a transcendent rational standard? It is difficult to defend the existence of historical knowledge while at the same time suggesting that an ahistorical basis for critique exists. (Murray and Ozanne, 1991:136)

**Influence on architectural discourse**

Critical theory was introduced to architectural discourse by Manfredo Tafuri and the School of Venice. Different aspects of critical thought are present in writings of such scholars as Michael K. Hays, Diane Ghirardo, Kenneth Frampton, Bernard Tschumi, and Peter Eisenman. There is also a growing body of feminist and postcolonial critiques of architecture within this paradigm. Most commonly, however, critical theory in architectural discourse is coupled with elements of the constructivist framework.

Manfredo Tafuri is a key figure in critical theory of architecture and represents one of the most radical views in regard to social potential of architecture, so his position deserves a brief introduction at this point. Tafuri’s standpoint is built on a Marxist suspicion of ideologies (systems of legitimizing and naturalizing beliefs), which are construed in order to mask the profit-driven operation of capitalism. As Tafuri points out,

It is significant that almost all the economic objectives formulated by Keynes in his *General Theory* can be found, in purely ideological form, at the basis of the poetics of modern architecture. [...] The crisis of modern architecture begins at the precise moment when its natural target—large industrial capital—makes architecture’s underlying ideology its own. (Tafuri, 1969:29)

In the Marxist view, even the most ambitious and critical trends of independent culture are finally being assimilated by commercial culture, serving modern capitalism. According to Tafuri, this is the reason why a truly critical architecture or art is not possible, but there can only be a “class” critique of architecture. He states that “it is useless to struggle when one is trapped inside a capsule with no exit” (Tafuri, 1969:32). Ideological interventions may only cover the unbreakable alliance between the
techniques of visual communication and the commercial production, “there exists, between the avant-gardes of capital and the intellectual avant-gardes, a kind of tacit understanding, so tacit indeed that any attempt to bring it into the light elicits a chorus of indignant protest” (Tafuri, 1969, in Hays, 1998:6). Modern architecture has finally marked the path of its destiny when it defined itself in terms of progress and rationalization—these ideals in fact are serving primarily the interests of capital.

Tafuri’s extremely skeptical position with regard to the critical potential of architecture lead him to define the primary task of architectural theory as “ideological criticism” whose aim is to uncover and demystify the realities that lie behind such categories as architecture, art, city and to demystify “impotent and ineffectual myths,” which often serve as illusions that permit the survival of anachronistic “hopes in design” (Tafuri, 1976:182). The role of architects in Tafuri’s view should be limited to clearly defined technical or administrative tasks:

Only at this point—that is after having done away with any disciplinary ideology—is it permissible to take up the subject of the new roles of the technician, of the organizer of building activity, and of the planner. (Tafuri, 1980:182)

Not surprisingly, many theoreticians found Tafuri’s view difficult to accept, suggesting that the proposed limits would instead lead to the death of architecture than to the solution of its problems. Tafuri responded to the critique:

What is of interest here is the precise identification of those tasks which capitalism development has taken away from architecture. […]. With this, one is led almost automatically to the discovery of what may well be the “drama” of architecture today: that is to see architecture obliged to return to pure architecture, to form without utopia; in the best cases, to sublime uselessness. To the deceptive attempts to give architecture an ideological dress, I shall always prefer the sincerity of those who have the courage to speak of that silent and outdated “purity”; even if this, too, still harbors an ideological inspiration, pathetic in its anachronism. (Tafuri, 1976:ix)

Following Tafuri’s line of thinking, one could easily justify architecture’s retreat from any social engagement and its move towards
formalism, which is, for instance, advocated by Eisenman, who explicitly professed his disinterest in political or social aspects of architecture (Eisenman, 1976, 1984). Let us look, for instance, at his polemic against the classical and humanist paradigms in architecture in his essay “The End of the Classical: the End of the Beginning, the End of the End” (1984), which has served as a canon text for many architectural students and architects:

What is being proposed is an expansion beyond the limitations presented by the classical model to the realization of architecture as an *independent discourse*, free of external values—classical or any other; that is, the intersection of the *meaning-free*, the *arbitrary*, and the *timeless* in the artificial. [...] A ‘not-classical’ architecture is no longer a certification of an experience or a simulation of history, reason or reality in the present. Instead, it may more appropriately be described as an *other* manifestation, an architecture as is, now as a fiction. It is a representation of itself, of its own values and internal experience, [...] ‘not-classical’ origins can be strictly arbitrary, simply starting points, without value [...] With the end of the origin, the second basic characteristic of a ‘not-classical’ architecture, therefore, is its freedom from *a priori* goals or ends—the end of the end [...] With the end of the end, what was formerly the process of composition or transformation ceases to be a causal strategy, a process of addition or subtraction from an origin. Instead the process becomes one of modification—the invention of a non-dialectical, non-directional, non-goal oriented process. (Eisenman, 1984, in: Jencks, 1997:283)

Hays, owing much to Adorno, is less negative in his conclusions. Adorno believes in the critical potential of a work of art. Aesthetic experience can help us to resist the hegemony of instrumental rationality and the dominance of commerce. An autonomous work of art (in contrast to “affirmative,” commercial art) awakes a reflexive, critical attitude towards the reality (Keitsch, 2003:108). Referring to Adorno, Hays in his 1984 essay “Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form” argues for an architectural meaning that lies neither in the mass culture nor in a silent form but in the mediating space between these two. Refusing the view that contemporary architecture must choose between cultural dependence and formal autonomy,

---

64 Peter Eisenman has been a major influence in American architectural education and architectural theory since his founding of the New York-based Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (1967) and of its flagship journal *Oppositions* (1973-1984).
he states that architecture should be “resistant to the self-confirming, conciliatory operations of a dominant culture and yet irreducible to a purely formal structure disengaged from the contingencies of place and time” (Hays, 1984). This kind of architecture can be named “critical.” According to Hays, “critical architecture pushes aside other kinds of discourse or communication in order to place before the world a culturally informed product, part of whose self-definition includes the implication of discontinuity and difference from other cultural activities” (Hays, 1984). Unlike Eisenman, Hays does not argue for autonomy of architectural theory. In his view, architectural theory is a practice of mediation between different realities, among different discourses; it is

[...] the production of relationships between formal analyses of architecture and its social ground or context [...] in such a way as to show the work of architecture as having some autonomous force with which it could also be seen as negating, distorting, repressing, compensating for, and even producing, as well as reproducing, that context. (Hays, 1998:x)

Hays points out the importance of the relation between architectural objects and the socio-historical context of architectural production; these two categories should not be approached separately, as “unrelated things-in-themselves,” but only through their mutual interplay. He emphasizes that the world is totality and therefore it is an essential and essentially practical problem of theory to rearticulate that totality, to produce the concepts that link the architectural fact with the social, historical, and ideological contexts. At the same time architectural theory should account for a specificity of architecture:

While any theory that talks about architecture only—that does not relate architecture to larger social, material field—is practically useless, at the same time any theory that does not articulate the concrete specificity and semi-autonomy of architecture’s codes and operations misses a major medium of social practice. (Hays, 1998:xii)

It is undoubtedly important to address the social context of architecture, but what may be problematic with Hays’ perspective and related positions, is the implicit presumption that the architect can engage critically with contemporary problems solely through formal manipulation. As Ghirardo (1991) remarks, this premise has lead to a contemporary version of Venturi’s
playful response to such problems as mass consumerism and commodification of culture.

Following Venturi’s lead, architecture came to be seen as the silent witness to all of the weaknesses, indulgences, and self-absorption characteristic of modern culture. As disengaged voyeur, architecture first and foremost came to be understood as an exercise in meaning, meaning that issued from architect and emerged in the architecture […] in the form of witty comment upon earlier conventions […] or what is held to be comment upon a current social situation. (Ghirardo, 1991:9-10)

Tafuri, Eisenman, and Hays certainly do not exhaust the modalities of “criticality” within architectural theory, but probably due to their influence on architectural education during the recent decades, they are most often associated with this position.

Giancarlo De Carlo’s (1969) emphasis on the value of user participation, and his commitment to the “resistance” against consumer society, shared by such theorists as Frampton or Ghirardo, add an important dimension to the critical discourse in architecture. Nevertheless, these positions have not been as widely debated and appreciated as the aesthetic interpretations of criticality—perhaps due to their lack of a wider representation in the academic circles and the ability to attract media attention.

Postcriticality discussion

Terry Eagleton, in his book After Theory (2003), argues that the utility and vitality of critical theory has come to an end. Eagleton admits that in the years between 1965 and 1980, one could see the full effect of critical theory’s potency as an interdisciplinary critique of the global, socio-political status quo; but since that time, critical theory has lost its efficacy and cultural relevance, mainly because postmodern discourse has disengaged itself from social and political analyses, dismantled the notion of “absolute truth,” and turned away from the debate on moral imperatives.

In the recent years, “criticality” in architectural theory has also come under a fire. One of the most important architectural debates going on is between the proponents of critical theory and those who think that the critical project is exhausted and has to be replaced by a “post-critical,” “projective”
practice. The main argument made by the advocates of this perspective is that the critical approach is of no relevance to the everyday design practice of architects.

A generation of people in their forties believes that criticism isn’t a starting point for architecture at all, that criticism is a Marxist mistake, and that the idea of reflection should be replaced by a practice of “projection.” (van den Heuvel, 2006)

This debate is essentially about the role of architectural theory and the place of architecture in a wider social and cultural context. In their widely referred-to paper “Notes around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism” (2002), Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting define their aim as follows:

As an alternative to the critical project—here linked to the indexical, the dialectical and hot representation—this text develops an alternative genealogy of the projective—linked to the diagrammatic, the atmospheric and cool performance. (Somol and Whiting, 2002:74)

Somol and Whiting propose a move towards a “projective” architecture that, rather than resisting commercialization, looks for opportunities within the capitalist society and exploits these. Post-critical theorists claim that “criticality” results in an architecture of stunted creativity and retrogression. They suggest that architecture should investigate intelligence, projection, and innovation, seemingly staying away from a fruitless social critique and following the “creativity of the marketplace.” It should perform in a manner which accelerates the discipline and refuses to look back for critiques. Efficacy, performativity, and pragmatism are key issues here; however, it is claimed that “projective” architecture is not merely a turn to affirmative and “easy” commercial values, but it also aims to find a new approach that can both accommodate the complexity of the contemporary situation as well as take a position toward it. “Projective” architecture primarily focuses on its

---

61 Somol’s and Whiting’s metaphor refers to the acting styles of the late Robert Mitchum, representing the “projective” and Robert DeNiro, representing the “critical.” As they claim, Mitchum does not act, but performs. His cool and pleasant style contrasts with the psychological laboring of DeNiro. In their own words: “‘Mitchum architecture’ is cool, easy, and never looks like work; it’s about mood or the inhibition of alternative realities. With Mitchum, there are scenarios, not psychodramas. The unease and anxiety of the unhomely has been replaced with the propositional alternative of the untimely” (Somol and Whiting, 2002:77).
own discipline instead of looking for legitimatization of its practice in the disciplines outside itself, like philosophy and the social sciences. It relies on “intelligent” problem-solving instead of intellectualized critique as a means of advancing the field.

No longer dictated by ideas or ideologies nor dependent on whether something is really true, everything now depends on credible intelligence, on whether something might be true. In architecture as in other fields we have witnessed a shift in intellectual dominance from philosophy and its search for absolute truth, to theory and its retreat into the “truth” of negative critique. (Speaks, 2002:12)

Somol and Whiting hold up Rem Koolhas as one of the earliest representative of this new paradigm. Koolhas has not been concerning himself with the negative or analytical critique, but instead has been proposing an architecture which addresses the constantly changing world in hopes of discovering new formal and cultural possibilities within the given settings. Already in the1970s, Koolhas referred to emerging issues such as American mass consumerism in an affirmative way, seeking for a “projective” architecture of new forms, events and behavior. In one of his most influential works, *S, M, L, XL* (1995), he refers to the Attila Kotányi and Raoul Vaneigem (1961) situationist66 manifesto:

Architecture really exists, like Coca-Cola: Though coated with ideology, it is a real production, falsely satisfying a falsified need. Urbanism is comparable to the advertising propagated around Coca-Cola—pure spectacular ideology. (Kotányi and Vaneigem, 1961 [1])

Yet, unlike Kotányi and Vaneigem, Koolhas argues that such a view of architecture is not likely to produce less hospitable environments. “People can inhabit anything. And they can be miserable in anything and ecstatic in

---

66Situationist International was a movement rooted in Marxism and the 20th century European artistic avant-gardes. They advocated experiences of life being alternative to those admitted by the capitalist order. For this purpose, they suggested a construction of situations—the setting up of environments favorable for the fulfillment of alternative experiences. Their most influential theoretical work was “The Society of the Spectacle” (1967) by Guy Debord. Debord argued that mass media and advertising have a central position in an advanced capitalist society. Their role is to show a fake reality in order to mask the real capitalist degradation of human life. To overthrow such a system, the Situationist International supported the May 1968 revolts.
anything. More and more I think that architecture has nothing to do with it” (Koolhas, in: Heron, 1996).

According to Koolhas, the best architects can do is to get rid of a nostalgic view of architecture and follow the direction indicated by the development of new technologies. For him, the erosion of identity in urban landscapes around the world is not a negative phenomenon. On the contrary, this “blankness” is a condition for freedom, for identity “imprisons,” and resists expansion, interpretation, and renewal. In the rapid development of “generic” landscapes we are thus, according to Koolhas, witnessing a “global liberation movement” (Koolhas and Mau, 1995:1248). In “Conversations with Students,” Koolhas states:

I think we are stuck with this idea of the street and the plaza as public domain, but the public domain is radically changing [...] with television and the media and a whole series of other inventions, you could say that the public domain is lost. But you could also say that it's now so pervasive it does not need physical articulation any more. I think the truth is somewhere in between. But we as architects still look at it in terms of a nostalgic model, and in an incredibly moralistic sense, refuse signs of its being reinvented in other populist or more commercial terms. [...] you can go to these cities and bemoan the absence of a public realm, but as architects it is better for us to bemoan the utter incompetence of the buildings. (Koolhaas “Conversations with Students” 1996:45)

Further, Koolhas adds:

“We all complain that we are confronted by urban environments that are completely similar. We say we want to create beauty, identity, quality, singularity. And yet, maybe in truth these cities that we have are desired. Maybe their very characterlessness provides the best context for living” (Koolhas, in: Wired, 1996/7).

In this context, it is interesting to see how Debord (1967) in his manifesto “The Society of the Spectacle” reflects on the transformations of the urban environment related to the consumerist culture. Debord essentially speaks about the same transformation of urban landscapes as Koolhas does, but he is far from the affirmation of the ongoing processes:

“The self-destruction of the urban environment is already well under way. The explosion of cities into the countryside, covering it with what Mumford calls ‘a formless mass of thinly spread semi-urban tissue’, is directly governed by the imperatives of consumption. The dictatorship of the automobile … has left its mark on the landscape with the dominance of freeways, which tear up the old urban centers and promote an ever-wider dispersal. Within this process various forms of partially reconstituted urban fabric fleetingly crystallize around ‘distribution factories’—giant shopping centers built in the middle of nowhere and surrounded by acres of parking lots. These temples of frenetic consumption are subject to the same irresistible centrifugal momentum, which casts them aside as soon as they have engendered enough surrounding development to become overburdened secondary centers in their turn. But the technical organization of consumption is only the most visible aspect of the general process of decomposition that has brought the city to the point of consuming itself” (Debord, 1967:174).
Koolhaas’ view has a pessimistic undertone, perhaps contrary to his intentions. Is architecture so socially and culturally insignificant that there should be no other criteria for architectural choices than the commercial success? In this perspective, architecture becomes just one of the products of the market, which are essentially being designed to provide a quick profit. Yet, the life-span of architectural artifacts is much longer than any market trends or fashions. The following words of H. S. Thayer, although referring to philosophy and art, seem also relevant in relation to architecture:

In matters of intelligence and art, fashions are less to be trusted than feared. Few virtues and many vices may be fashionable. One difference between good and bad philosophic thought is that the former has a way of enduring in pertinence and effect, despite fashions, while the latter if not fashionable is nothing. (Thayer, in: Rosenthal and Bourgeois, 1980:5)

The representatives of attacked “criticality” do not seem to see a real threat in a “post-critical” stance. Hays maintained that the “post-critical” standpoint is only a rhetorical figure.

As soon as one recognizes that to think at all requires a medium—be that language or religious ritual, or architecture—one is already doing theory. As soon as one thinks about the boundaries and limits of a discipline or a practice, or about the ideologies necessary to engage that discipline or practice, one is thinking critically. So much of the anti-theory, post-criticality argument should be recognized as rhetorical flourish. (Hays, 2007)

According to Hays, critical theory is designed in such a way that it must constantly update itself, it must continually consider its own historicity as part of that which it purports. In contrast, many “after-theory” positions have neglected their own historical determinations, contexts, and forms of authority. Moreover, the abandonment of the categories of ideology and resistance only insures the perpetuation of an ideology that does not label itself as such. There always has to be a provisional ground of ideology from which “to project” new possibilities.

The postcritical stance, with its emphasis on technology and progress as well as its simultaneous neglect of the local contexts of design, appears to be related to positivist/postpositivist ways of thinking. Yet it lacks the social agenda of the Modern movement. As Hays argues, “projective intention”
may be seen as a form of the neo-avant-garde impulse that, unlike earlier avant-gardes, is essentially “consumerist and complicit in its abandonment of critique and commitment; it is also managerial and instrumentalist in its blank and reified technologism” (Hays, 2007).

Although it is rather early to speak about the consequences of the “post-critical” movement in architecture, certain risks of this position may be already identified. As Jason Nguyen remarks,

Amidst the ongoing flurry surrounding critical and post-critical architectures, we must pause to evaluate the recent proposals as they directly affect the future of architectural discourse. Must “projective” architectures jettison all traces of critical thought in their effort to accelerate the discipline? Today, as sweeping technological advances promise possibilities for numerous design agendas, we should remember what was eventually lost in previous architectural movements blindly guided by the rhetoric of “advancement.” (Nguyen, 2007)

What is sometimes overlooked, the proponents of a “post-critical” standpoint, in referring to critical theory, primarily refer to a specific trend of “negative” critical thought (as indicated before, emerging from Tafuri’s writings and further developed by Eisenman and Hays). They are not paying much attention to the currents that have more positive potential. Consequently, it is accepted that the pursuit of a “critical” architecture on a formal level is somehow equivalent to a critique of architecture’s collaboration with the external forces it appears to resist or a socially-sensitive critiques of architectural practice, as present in the works of De Carlo, Ghirardo, and Frampton. In other words, the hidden supposition here is that there exists an equivalence between a political critique and an aesthetic critique (Martin, 2005).

The interpretation of critical theory solely in aesthetic terms is a form of reductionism and it may indeed arouse doubts as to the utility and vitality of this perspective. This is definitely not a typical position for critical thought, for one of the major interests of Marxism-inspired movements is the historical and social context of investigated phenomena. Essentially ethical issues—such as erosion of ignorance and transformative power of theory—are among the main quality criteria. An important problem examined in this context is the relation between knowledge and action in the public domain. Critical theory does not counterweigh critical and normative discourse; on the
contrary, theoretical research is most commonly seen as a direct foundation of action.

In conclusion, it seems that while most of the arguments from the side of the advocates of “projective practice” are indeed admissible when referring to the aesthetic appropriation of criticality, this criticism loses much of the relevance in relation to critical theory itself. There is still much to be learned from critical theory, but if the discourse is to be productive, architecture should be understood as an intervention into an environment that bears social, economic, and political programs, and that in turn affects all of these domains, not as “self-expression and some form of effete cultural commentary” (Ghirardo, 1991:10).

2.2.3 Constructivism

Constructivism\(^{69}\) may be seen as a reaction to a certain “crisis” which emerged in relation to:
- the failure of logical positivism as a philosophy of science;
- the impact of such works as Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962); Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* (1953); Feyerabend’s *Against Method* (1975), Austin’s *How do Things with Words* (1962) and Bergen & Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966);
- an increase in the perceived relevance of both Continental and linguistic philosophy;
- contributions from philosophers such as Derrida, Rorty, and Foucault (Hibberd, 2005: vii).

\(^{69}\) A short terminological remark on the distinction between constructivism, social constructivism, and social constructionism: **Constructivism** refers to a paradigm; social constructivism and social constructionism are theories of knowledge within this paradigm that consider how social phenomena develop in specific social contexts. **Social constructionism** is concerned primarily with the development of phenomena relative to social context, while **social constructivism** focuses on an individual’s making meaning of knowledge, relative to social context. What follows is that social constructionism is described as a sociological construct, whereas social constructivism is mostly referred to as a psychological construct.

Social constructivism can generally be divided into two camps: weak social constructivism and strong social constructivism. The difference is in a perceived degree of social construction; weak social constructivists tend to see some underlying objective factual elements to reality; strong social constructivists see everything as, in some way, a social construction. The notions of “real” and “unreal” are themselves social constructs, so that the question of whether anything is “real” is just a matter of social convention.
Constructivism, generally speaking, emphasizes the historicity, the context-dependence, and socio-linguistically constituted character of all human activity. Constructivists hold that realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially- and experientially-based, local and specific in nature, although often shared among many individuals (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:110). One of the central points of the theory is that “truth” can never be claimed for the knowledge (or any piece of it) that human reason produces. In other words, the constructions are beyond the assertion of any existential, scientific, philosophical or religious truth. In this perspective, knowledge—including scientific knowledge—is constructed by researchers and not discovered from the world. “The investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the ‘findings’ are literally created as the investigation proceeds” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:111).

Constructivists acknowledge that there may be an external world that is separate from the human mind and not dependent on it, but there is no possibility to come in direct contact with that reality (Every, 1998). According to constructivists, our sign systems (language and other media) play a major part in “the social construction of reality” and realities cannot be separated from the sign systems in which they are experienced and interpreted (hermeneutics). The other paradigms also acknowledge that even in relation to “physical reality,” the social processes of mediation are involved, but they would certainly not agree that knowledge is barely a construct of human mind.

Constructivists differ from extreme subjectivists in insisting that realities are not limitless and unique to the individual experience and interpretation; rather, they are the product of social negotiations and as such are far from being neutral in status. Realities are contested, and textual representations are sometimes interpreted by constructivists as “sites of struggle.”

Summing up:
- **Ontologically** constructivism can be characterized as relativism. Realities are defined as multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially grounded, local and specific in nature (however, with shared elements) and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions. Constructions can not be characterized as more or less “true” or “correct” in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).
Constructivist epistemology can be described as “transactional and subjectivist.” The investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that the “findings” are literally created during the research process (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). As in the constructivist view, the world is not an unchanging, independent structure; one cannot adopt the constructivist principles as an absolute truth, but only as working hypotheses that may or may not turn out to be viable. This is the main reason why the constructivist orientation is sometimes labeled as post-epistemological (von Glasersfeld, 1990).

Constructivist methodology is characterized by Guba and Lincoln (1994) as “hermeneutical and dialectical.” The variable and personal nature of social constructions implies that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between an investigator and respondents. These constructions are often interpreted using conventional hermeneutical techniques and are compared and contrasted through a dialectical interchange. The final aim is to reach a “consensus construction” that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the hitherto existing constructions.

Langdon Winner, in his paper “Upon Opening the Black Box and Finding it Empty: Social Constructivism and Philosophy of Technology” (1993), conducts an interesting, critical analysis of a social constructivist approach. Admitting that there are many valuable aspects, such as a conceptual rigor, a concern for specifics, and an attempt to provide accurate empirical models of investigated phenomena, Winner however states:

I am increasingly struck by the narrowness of this perspective. Advances along this line of inquiry take place at significant cost: a willingness to disregard important questions about technology and human experience, questions very much alive in other approaches. (Winner, 1993: 367-368)

Examining social constructivist research on technology Winner points at numerous shortcomings such as:

---

71 As Guba and Lincoln (1994) remark, both in critical and constructivist approach, the conventional distinction between ontology and epistemology to a certain extent disappears.
- an almost total disregard for the social consequences of technological choice;
- a lack of reflectivity in defining “relevant” and “irrelevant” social actors and interests groups;
- a disregard for the possibility that in the studied phenomena, there may be a dynamics exceeding the processes revealed by studying the immediate needs, problems, interests and interactions of specific social actors (e.g., underlying condition such as social class in Marx’s theory);
- the lack (and even apparent disdain) for any evaluative stance, not to mention moral or political principles, that would help to evaluate the consequences of studied phenomena (Winner, 1993: 371-372).

As Winner concludes,

[…] the methodological bracketing of questions about interests and interpretations amounts to a political stance that regards the status quo and its ills and injustices with precision equanimity. Interpretive flexibility soon becomes moral and political indifference. (Winner, 1993:372)

Further, social constructivists show us “…the fascinating dynamics of conflict, disagreement and consensus formation that surrounds some choices of great importance. But as they survey the evidence, they offer no judgment on what it all means” (Winner, 1993:375). This is because constructivism takes the concept of truth to be a socially “constructed” (consequently a socially relative) one. This leads to the charge of self-refutation: if what is to be regarded as “true” is relative to a particular social context, then this very conception of truth must itself be only regarded as being “true” in this specific context. In another social formation, it may be considered false. If so, then the theory of social constructivism itself would be false in that social formation. Consequently, one could then say that social constructivism could be both true and false at the same time.

Constructivists often argue that constructivism is liberating because it enables “oppressed,” disadvantaged groups to reconstruct “the reality” in accordance with their own interests rather than according to the interests of dominant groups in society. It also compels people to respect the alternative worldviews of “oppressed” groups because there is no possibility of judging them to be inferior to dominant worldviews. Thus, constructivism is being closely linked to such movements as multiculturalism, broadly conceived as “the project of giving proper credit to the contributions of cultures and
communities whose achievements have been historically neglected or undervalued” (Boghossian, 2000:181).

Some scholars, however, point at the internal inconsistency present in seeing constructivism as a perspective supporting “the oppressed” (Sokal and Bricmont, 1998; Boghossian 2000). Indeed, constructivism supplies a philosophical basis which helps to prevent anyone from accusing oppressed cultures of holding false or unjustified views. However,

[...]

... on purely political grounds [...], it is difficult to understand how this could have come to seem a good way to conceive of multiculturalism. For if the powerful can't criticize the oppressed, because the central epistemological categories are inexorably tied to particular perspectives, it also follows that the oppressed can’t criticize the powerful. The only remedy, so far as I can see, for what threatens to be a strongly conservative upshot, is to accept an overt double standard: allow a questionable idea to be criticized if it is held by those in a position of power—Christian creationism, for example—but not if it is held by those whom the powerful oppress—Zuni creationism, for example. Familiar as this stratagem has recently become, how can it possibly appeal to anyone with the slightest degree of intellectual integrity; and how can it fail to seem anything other than deeply offensive to the progressive sensibilities whose cause it is supposed to further? (Boghossian, 2000:181)

A related problem appears when we consider the criteria of validity for constructivist theories; more precisely, the lack of any foundational criteria. As Guba and Lincoln admit, in a constructivist view there is no way to elevate one theory over another on the basis of any ultimate criteria. “No construction is or can be incontrovertibly right; advocates of any particular construction must rely on persuasiveness and utility rather than proof in arguing their position” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:108).

It seems that in this perspective, some social groups/individuals have a privileged position—those who are more likely to elaborate “the most informed and sophisticated view,” those who can be most persuasive and can convincingly demonstrate the utility of presented theories are in most cases those who are already in power, not the “oppressed.” In this, constructivism may indirectly support the status quo, i.e., the existing power structures.

Constructivism has also been criticized for its implicitly presupposed deterministic view of language, which significantly constrains the minds and use of words by members of societies: they are not just “constructed” by
language on this view, but are literally “determined” by it. However, there seems to be a contradiction here: the advocate of constructivism is not similarly constrained. While other individuals are controlled by the dominant concepts of society, the constructivist theorist can transcend these concepts and see though them.71 As Mariyani-Squire argues,

[…] when one looks at much Social Constructivist discourse (especially that informed by Michel Foucault), one finds something of a bifurcation between the theorist and the non-theorist. The theorist always plays the role of the constructor of discourses, while the non-theorist plays the role of the subject who is constructed in a quite deterministic fashion. This has a strong resonance with the point already made about solipsistic theism—here the theorist, conceptually anyway, “plays God” with his/her subject (whatever or whoever that may be). In short, while it is often assumed that Social Constructivism implies flexibility and indeterminism, there is no logical reason why one cannot treat social constructions as fatalistic. (Mariyani-Squire, 1999)

The above indicated problems of constructivism may be to some extent attributed to the deficiencies in conceptual rigor and critical self-reflectivity of this position. Although constructivists often present appealing, suggestive accounts of the investigated problems, it seems that they tend to undervalue the role of a critical, historical examination of used concepts and notions. This results in quite common misuse of scientific terminology.72

The following account of Heidegger’s critique of Jaspers’ *Psychology of World Views* (1919) is surprisingly relevant in the context of constructivism:

Heidegger’s major complaint about this book was that Jaspers “underestimated and failed to recognize the genuine methodological problem” of his own treatise. So long as he operated with concepts as Spirit, totality, life, and infinity without undertaking a critical examination of the history of such notions, and so long as he applied them to human *Existenz* without giving a preliminary account of the Being of this entity, Jaspers’ endeavor remained an arbitrary account of man—allbeit an ingenious and suggestive one. […] The lack of

---

71 This objection may be also related to critical theory.
72 As illustrated by Sokal and Bricmont in their *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals’ Abuse of Science* (1998).
structure, neglect of problems of method and ahistorical manner of accepting preconceptions—all these showed Heidegger the way not to go in his own work. (Krell, in Heidegger, 1977: 20-21)

**Influence on architectural discourse**

The constructivist paradigm\(^{73}\) in architectural theory can hardly be identified in a “pure,” univocal form. Most often constructivism in its different variations (primarily represented by interpretative frameworks such as poststructuralism and deconstruction) is coupled with critical theory and reconsiderations of architectural modernism. This has been a dominant mode of thought within architectural theory for over three decades. This trend has been represented by many educational institutes and periodicals, as well as by the most celebrated architects, such as Peter Eisenman, Bernard Tschumi, or Daniel Liebeskind. Eisenman’s cooperation with Jacques Derrida was one of the main channels from a deconstructivist philosophy to architectural theory.

The following quotation from Tschumi’s widely praised book *Architecture and Disjunction* (1994) may serve as an example of a deconstructivist approach within architectural theory (here, Tschumi refers to the idea behind the structures he built at Le Parc de la Villette in the 1980s):

> In this analogy, the contemporary city and its many parts—here La Villette—are made to correspond with the dissociated elements of schizophrenia [...] The transference in architecture resembles the psychoanalytic situation [...] This fragmentary transference in madness is nothing but the production of an ephemeral regrouping of exploded or dissociated structures. (Tschumi, 1994:177-178)

Such a way of conceptualizing architecture is not uncommon in constructivism-inspired theory texts. An emphasis on individual experience without any significant concern for the shared, public sphere (which in a

\(^{73}\) It is important to note that constructivism in architectural theory has at least two different meanings. It refers to 1) a research paradigm; 2) a movement/style of modern architecture that flourished in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and early 1930s. It combined advanced technology and engineering with Communist ideology. Constructivist architecture emerged from the wider constructivist art movement, which was related to Russian Futurism. Constructivist art can be most widely characterized by an attempt to apply a three-dimensional cubist vision to wholly abstract non-objective “constructions,” including a kinetic element.
constructivist view is not “real”) leads to a socially and culturally detached vision, where formal sophistication and persuasiveness of a theory are the primary criteria deciding whether it will be accepted. One of the problems emerging here can be expressed in terms of a contradiction between an idiosyncratic approach and the claims of the universal validity of the work. On the one hand, there is an assumption that a creative architecture should be based on individualistic interpretation, as original and unique as possible; on the other hand, architects expect that the result will be universally understood and appreciated. However, this problem appears not only in the context of architecture. Loose connections established between personal feelings and ideas of universal validity; the arbitrary nature of the relation between the sphere of experience and the sphere of concepts; diffusion into separate activities aiming to solve particular problems; these are some of the symptoms of general fragmentation and discontinuity of modern culture (Vesely, 2004). Max Stackhouse points at the possible sources of the problem:

When individuals and groups develop a link between their own imagination and their own reason that serves their own ends, and are not fundamentally concerned with the overall shape of the society, fragmentation inevitably ensues. [...] Everyone emotionally or intellectually, politically or economically grabs his fragment, which is partially real and creates a total reality with it. The splintered identities, the competing ideologies, the fractured parties and the glaring, cluttered advertising of competing businesses assault the person and the society from a thousand sides. (Stackhouse, 1972:3, quoted in: Vesely, 2004:12)

Constructivism-inspired architectural theory has been also criticized for its purposely over-complicated language, and thus its inaccessibility for an average, cultivated reader. Critics see it as a purely formal exercise with little social significance and lack of respect for the user, e.g., Frampton finds it “elitist and detached, testifying to the self-alienation of an avant-garde without a cause” (Frampton, 1994:313).

---

74 The following quotation may give an idea of the relation between architect and user in constructivism-related perspectives:

“I am an architect, a constructor of worlds, a sensualist who worships the flesh, the melody, a silhouette against the darkening sky. I cannot know your name. Nor can you know mine” (Lebbeus Woods, “Manifesto,” in: Jencks, 1997:304).
Mathematician and architectural theorist Nikos Salingaros is one of the most engaged critics of constructivist-related approaches in architecture, particularly of architectural deconstruction. He points at the common practice of misusing scientific concepts and terminology in relation to architecture. By superficial and arbitrary application of certain terms (e.g., fractal, chaos theory) and using scientific jargon in front of the non-scientific audience whereupon a deep confusion is often created. This is essentially a problem of a lack of respect for the reader.

Architects and architectural critics have become expertly adept at fancy wordplay, sounding impressive while promoting the deconstructivist style’s unnatural qualities. This linguistic dance is used to justify a meaningless architecture of fashion. The problem is that criticizing an empty but flowery discourse is like shadow boxing with phantoms—one can never win a debate against an opponent who creates an impressionistic cloud empty of tangible facts. (Salingaros, 2004)

The lack of conceptual clarity seems also to be the case for a considerable part of the recent architectural writings (e.g., the post-criticality current). Furthermore, one can observe a tendency to mix art and research, and the formal, aesthetic aspects often dominate the subject of the research. “There is a fascination for the art source per se, and sometimes it seems that the more amazing and fanciful a method is, the better” (Dahlberg et al., 2008:334). An extensive use of artistic means in order to communicate the research findings may have an disturbing effect—it tends to make the researcher and his/her audience “come too close to the experience” and lose “the positive distance that brings us closer to an understanding, that makes us see the ‘otherness’” (Dahlberg et al., 208:335). In other words, getting too close to the inquired issue, we end up being too distant from its meaning.

Although Salingaros clearly represents a postpositivist perspective, the advocates of other paradigms would probably agree with many points of his critique. Similarly to critical theorists, he points out the power relationship that made this type of architecture proliferate: “In addition to its intellectual power base, deconstructivist architecture possesses a considerable political power base in those persons and institutions that have profited from it, and therefore have the most to lose if it ever collapses” (Salingaros, 2004). With phenomenologists (e.g., Harries, 1998; Vesely, 2004), Salingaros shares the critique of the disrespect for the user and place, the arbitrariness of architectural solutions, and the unapprehendability of architectural theory writings.
2.3 USER INVOLVEMENT AS AN ETHICAL ISSUE

Jeremy Till’s recent work *Architecture Depends* (2009) provides a relevant point of departure for further investigations. Till situates the question of user involvement in the perspective of architectural ethics. He argues that the notion of ethics is used all too freely and vaguely in architectural discourse, often equated with formal expression and misappropriated as a “smokescreen” used to cover unethical values (Till, 2009:171). Furthermore, according to Till, one of most commonly made mistakes is to confuse the codes of professional conduct (whose primary aim is professional self-protection) with an ethical position (Till, 2009:181).

Till, referring to Emmanuel Levinas, defines architectural ethics ontologically as “being-for the Other.” Assuming an ethical stance means here “to assume responsibility for the Other.” The “Other” refers to “the diverse mix of people whose political and phenomenal lives will be affected by the construction of the building and its subsequent occupation” (Till, 2009:173).

Yet, it is not entirely clear how to understand this responsibility. As Steinbock observes, conventionally being responsible for the Other is considered as taking over a project in place of the Other. This may lead to a patronizing relationship that “can easily develop into a pattern of domination or one-sided dependency” (Steinbock, 1995:185). A worthwhile alternative to this approach could be an understanding of the responsibility for the Other in terms of co-participation in the process of determining what is to be done for the benefit of the Other.

Consequently, the essential responsibility of architects lies not solely “in the refinement of the object as a static visual product,” but primarily in the creation of spatial, and hence social, relationships contributing to the well-being of Others (Till, 2009:178). In this perspective, including the perspectives of users, and addressing their cultural background, is fundamentally an ethical demand.

This demand, however, is often neglected. Bruce Allsopp in his book *Towards a Humane Architecture* (1974), passionately points at all that he sees as being wrong with the current state of architecture. The book was first

---

76 As illustrated by the following statements:

“...express the purpose of a building and the sincere expression of its structure. One can regard this sincerity as a sort of moral duty” (Marcel Breuer, quoted in Till, 2009:175).

77 “We are aspiring to a new ethics. We are looking for a new aesthetics” (Le Corbusier, quoted in Till, 2009:175).
published in 1970s (at the time when functionalism—thus positivism—was a dominating conceptual position within architecture), nevertheless Allsopp’s criticisms are still highly relevant today. Although Allsopp does not use the term “star architecture,” his characteristics of the architecture that the most influential architects produce is a good definition of this phenomenon: “the extravagant iconic building that is 95% image.” Other issues, such as the problem of land ownership vs. public good, are even more pertinent now than in 1970s. Allsopp puts particular emphasis on the importance of including user’s perspective in a design process:

Architecture is not for architects; it is for people, and whatever architects may think and whatever theories may they have, it is through the senses that people appreciate, that people feel architecture. One does not satisfy feeling by expressing one’s own feelings, any more than one makes a wedding cake by eating the icing-sugar oneself. What is required of the architect is a mainly intellectual process based upon sympathy. He must contrive to give to people what they will enjoy, not what he would wish them to enjoy because it is what he wants to do. (Allsopp, 1974:3)

The major fallacy of modern architectural thought is the deeply grounded presumption that if architects design what they conceive—by their own standards of pure architecture—the best, the public ought to grow to like it. Nevertheless, even if certain people enjoy complicated crossword puzzle, it is at least unreasonable to expect that everybody will prefer this form of enjoyment. Similarly, it is absurd to presume that in all domains (including architecture) the public should admire and enjoy what the experts propose (Allsopp, 1974:4).

People want architecture which is warm and comforting to the senses, architecture which is pleasant to live with, which caters for man as he is and not for man as an abstraction, architecture which is seen to be appropriate to its purpose, bearing in mind the habitual attitudes and responses of people who have been brought up in a living society, not processed in a laboratory. (Allsopp, 1974:4)

Allsopp blames the state of “inward-looking professionalism” for the loss of respect for common people, not only in architecture, but also in other disciplines. Members of various professions develop their standards of judgement, criticism, and conversation peculiar to their group. “Thus a
surgeon can perform an excellent operation, though the patient dies, and an 
architect can design a students’ hostel which is the cynosure of professional 
admiration but creates detestable living conditions” (Allsopp, 1974:3-4). 

According to Allsopp, contemporary architects did not only lose the 
confidence of the public, they also lost their own way. The pioneers of 
modern movement were at least dedicated to their ideals and not did not 
become rich men, but their heirs—“the great architects of today”—can be 
characterized as “men whose principal qualifications are ability in handling 
committees and a gift for making money” (Allsopp, 1974:5). Consequently, 
ariculture is primarily treated as a lucrative business, where users’ interests 
are often nothing more than a hindrance. Again, these reflections seem 
surprisingly relevant today, even though functionalism has lost its influence. 

Over 30 years later, in his essay “Lost Judgment,” Till states 
“architecture, as a profession, promotes a series of self-referential and 
autonomous values” (Till, 2005:166). According to Till, the architectural 
profession tends to exist in a state of denial regarding the social and political 
dimensions of the design practice, preferring to concentrate on more or less 
abstract form-making. As Till claims, and many exemplifications prove, 
formal finesse seems to be the more important value than the user’s well-
being. Architectural “masterpieces” tend to be created with a handful of 
kindred spirits in mind, rather than an “unenlightened” user.

It is the radical who is celebrated, and in this celebration architecture 
falls into the well-known trap of believing that avant-garde forms 
represent avant-garde thinking, confusing fashion with thought, form 
with content. In fact the most ‘radical’ forms of making are often 
conducted under the most conservative of regimes. (Till, 2005:167)

Jack L. Nasar, in his insightful study on design competitions (1999), 
points at concrete problems grounded in a split between two kinds of 
meanings: “the high-brow artistic statement intended for the appreciation of 
other artists and the everyday meanings seen by the public and occupants” 
(Nasar, 1999:1-2). Although praised by architects and critics, too often 
competition-winning architecture leaves the typical user and observer 
disappointed; there is an evident conflict between elitist and democratic 
values. Let us dwell on the example of Peter Eisenman’s award-winning 
design for the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts at the Ohio State 
University. On the one hand we have Eisenman’s view on the project:

80
The idea of the Wexner Center was not to make yet another object-shelter-enclosure as dominant values. And the Wexner Center is a fracturing of a dominant enclosing building, both in terms of the armory, which is fractured into pieces in terms of the two existing buildings, which then are fractured apart and itself becomes a remnant. And the site is full of remnants and that was an attitude that one had been working with for a number of years, this breaking down of the traditional envelope. (Eisenman, 1989, quoted in: Nasar, 1999:181)

On the other hand we have Wexner Center annual report to the university president:

For all the publicity the building brings, its design also poses serious problem in its use. [...] The Wexner Center for the Arts [...] is expensive to operate and it was designed that way. (Wexner Center for the Arts: Annual Report, 1991:15-16, in: Nasar, 1999:113)

Postoccupancy evaluation of the building, apart from very high maintenance and energy costs and extensive technical problems, identified design problems disrupting secondary or support functions as well as the main function of the facility—the display of visual or performance arts. The surveys of users showed that the design obstructs the intended function of nearly every space in the facility (Nasar, 1999:43). It is at least doubtful whether the following statement of the architect would satisfy the discontented users:

My work is not about convenience—it is about art. I am not suggesting that people should necessarily live in art—I don’t live in art—and I’m not suggesting that people should necessarily live in my architecture. (Eisenman, in: Cuff, 1989:66)

An important, yet often neglected, essentially ethical problem emerges from this, and many similar situations—the architect’s long-term responsibility for various aspects of the built project. A comment by Chris Degenhardt, a Fellow in the American Society of Landscape Architects, points out the issue: “If design becomes so selfish and so arrogant that it does not and will not respond to a client’s needs, then we are not serving the client properly” (Degenhardt, in: Nasar, 1999:144). Designers are making arbitrary choices in the name of clients, inhabitants, and people who use and live in
created spaces. But are the choices adequate? Jan Michl’s remark deserves to be quoted here at some length:

Like their functionalist grandparents, who trusted that they arrived at an objective aesthetics, the new generations of architects also tended to refuse conscious thought of considerations of institutional status and social prestige in buildings and products; they believed as well that their aesthetic solutions, purportedly intrinsic to the tasks at hand, had taken care of everything worth taking care of. Students were too seldom reminded that the *raison d’etre* of architecture and design has always been to make buildings and products meaningful to their owners and users and that the owners’ and users’ need for signs of social or institutional belonging has always been, and will no doubt always remain, the prime engine of any design culture. (Michl, 1995)

The neglect of ethical implications of architectural choices may be seen as resulting from a prolonged dominance of positivism-related ways of thinking in architectural theory. The contemporary situation is essentially an extension of theoretical positions that go back to the Enlightenment, where architecture was first defined in terms of its own, intrinsic principles (Pérez-Gómez, 1983). In this context, Dalibor Vesely (2004) indicates that the difficulties contemporary architecture faces are related to the “crisis of representation”—symbolic, reconciliatory, “participatory” representation serving as a plane of communication and understanding has been, since the time of the Enlightenment, transformed into an aggressive instrument of domination and control. Vesely conceives the distinction between “participatory” and “emancipatory” modes of representation as the basis of two fundamentally different concepts of architecture. In this context, he points at a gap between the communicative and the instrumental role of architecture—the difference between a vision of architecture as an embodiment and a foundation of culture and a vision where architecture is seen as an autonomous discipline and treated as an instrument or as a commodity.

In cases of instrumental thinking, the problem of representation tends to be addressed without references to cultural background. Instead, the central issue is the relationship between an instance of representation and its creation.

---

77 In more recent conditions, this approach is also supported by the ways of thinking grounded in paradigms other than positivism and encouraging wider contextual considerations, nevertheless interpreted within architectural theory primarily in aesthetic terms.
process. Such a reductive way of thinking inevitably leads to tautologies. Nevertheless, architects seem to be unaware of these problems. Moreover, they believe “that instrumentality can simply produce its own form of symbolic representation” (Vesely, 2004: 358).

The major consequence of the dominance of “emancipatory,” autonomous modes of representation is a displacement of meaning in modern culture. One of the aspects of displacement is “a contradiction between the monotony and sterility of buildings and the complexity of our life, experienced in situations very often associated with the same or similar buildings” (Vesely, 2004:356). As a result, the gap between architecture and the real world increases.78 The world of the users, with all their problems and meanings, is turned into an object for aesthetic appraisal. The following example very illustrative:

Rem Koolhas, flying in his helicopter over the rubbish dumps of Lagos, Nigeria, testifies to this aestheticisation. Fascinated by the dumps, Koolhas sees in them ‘a freedom from order’ and ‘a freedom from the tyranny of style’. The fact that this ‘freedom’ is a product of absolute restraint—the restraint of poverty—does not enter into Koolhas’s argument, which, essentially, is an aesthetic judgement. (Hvattum, 2008:114)

2.3.1 Theory-practice relationship and the position of the ethical concerns within paradigms

The way of approaching ethical issues within a given paradigm is to a large extent determined by the conceptualization of the relation between theory and practice (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) within this paradigm. The relation between theory and practice within specific paradigms therefore has a crucial importance for the discussion on the position of user-related concerns in contemporary architectural discourse.

78As Hvattum (2008) remarks, the desire to make architecture into a self-contained work of “sealed” significance is a major characteristics of contemporary architectural discourse and practice.

“It has, perhaps, been a way of making architecture less dangerous: a way of declaring that […] we simply build beautiful, self-contained buildings that talk about nothing but their own tectonic and material processes. Buildings, that is, that don’t have to draw on messy, political world for their meaning, but carry their significance in their own precious corporeality” (Hvattum, 2008:109).
This section will briefly examine this relationship in previously discussed paradigms—positivist, critical theory, and constructivism—preparing background for further discussion of phenomenology.79

The theory-practice relationship within a given paradigm is essentially determined by its ontological and epistemological presumptions. Positivist frameworks imply a hierarchical relationship between research and practice. Strict conditions of valid research are rarely met in professional practice, which is an inherently subjective activity. Researchers thus have to step out of their role of practitioners in order to conduct a good, objective research, in this they are cast in the role of “expert.” The universally applicable research findings can be communicated to others in order to guide their practice.

In the critical paradigm, theory and practice are intimately connected domains, for the primary aim of theory is not to find universally applicable laws and explain, but to improve practice, to give a stimulus for action, to reduce ignorance, and to initiate transformations. The relation between the researcher and respondents is however hierarchical; the inquirer is assumed to understand a priori which transformations are needed.

In the constructivist paradigm, theory and practice are also interdependent fields (but perhaps not as closely connected as in the critical perspective). It may be said that theory influences practice indirectly, by increasing understanding. Practice, on the other hand influences theory in that the interaction between the inquirer and the respondents is assumed to be essential in theory building process. The final authority, however, is given to the researcher.

In which way does the relation between theory and practice within a given paradigm determine the position of ethical concerns? According to Guba and Lincoln (1994):

- In positivist/postpositivist frameworks, ethics—although taken seriously by inquirers—is extrinsic to the inquiry process (ethical behavior is policed by external mechanisms, such as professional codes).
- In critical theory, ethical concerns are intrinsic—as implied by the concern to erode misinterpretations and to take an account of values and historical situatedness of the inquiry process.
- In constructivism, ethics is also typically an intrinsic part of the inquiry process, e.g., when respondents’ values are included in the inquiry

---

79 See section 5.1.

84
process. This is, however, not often the case for constructivism-inspired architectural discourse.

It has to be indicated that a certain discrepancy may be observed between the understanding of paradigms within the social sciences and architecture. While the general characteristics of the theory-practice relationship in the positivist frameworks remain most typically valid for architecture, the issue is more complicated in the constructivist and critical perspectives.

It seems that constructivism-inspired thinkers within architecture do not see the role of theory as important to increasing understanding, as in providing a very individualistic vision of the discipline (e.g., in Tschumi’s (1994) view, one of the main aims of theory is to provoke). The issue of consensus around individual reconstructions and the voice of other actors appears to be here of less importance than in constructivism-inspired research within the social sciences. As a result, theories—instead of increasing understanding—often increase confusion among the readers. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that there are also examples of socially-sensitive, participatory design practices grounded in constructivism (Jones et al., 2005).

Critical theory in architecture has been appropriated in many different forms. While some thinkers (e.g., De Carlo, Ghirardo, and Frampton) put their emphasis on the transformative power of theory, others would rather counterweigh theoretical and practical concerns (most notably, Peter Eisenman). Diana Agrest identifies the source of the separation between architectural theory and practice in the essential opposition between critical and normative discourses:

Architecture tends to make an absolute separation between theory and practice, between analysis and synthesis. This difference, however, could be better expressed in the difference between discourses: an analytical, exploratory, critical discourse and a normative discourse. Most theories are developed within the first category, while practice falls into the latter. (Agrest, 1991:1)

Agrest emphasizes that critical discourse, as opposed to normative one, “allows for questions to grow, to acquire a depth, to open fields, and not to be stopped short by the normative will trying to find immediate answers” (Agrest, 1991:1). It depends, however, on the definition of “normative,” whether normative discourse has to be necessarily defined as a discourse aiming to find immediate solutions. Furthermore, there is no consensus if critical and normative aspects stand in such a clear opposition (at least in the
paradigms other than positivism). Looking closer at architectural theories, one could notice that in fact the majority of the positions have at least one implicit normative aspect—they suggest a certain way of acting.

In recent years, the discontent with the role of theory in design practice contributed to the emergence of “postcriticality”—a position that radically questions the necessity of architectural theory. The source of this discontent may be to some extent attributed to the domination of a specific form of criticality, promoting the view that architecture is a strictly autonomous discipline and avoiding consideration of wider social and cultural background. As already indicated, criticality is here understood primarily in aesthetic terms. This is definitely not a typical position for critical thought, for one of the major interests of Marxism-inspired movements is the historical and social context of investigated phenomena. Essentially, ethical issues—such as erosion of ignorance and transformative power of theory—are among the main quality criteria. Theoretical research is in this perspective most commonly seen as a direct foundation of action.

In summary, within architectural discourse there seems to be a tendency to interpret paradigms in a way that expands the gap between theory and practice, even if the social sciences/philosophy research suggest a relatively close interaction of these domains. As a consequence, important real-world concerns are often marginalized. Why is this so? Till (2009) gives a possible explanation. He emphasizes that architecture at every stage is shaped by external forces (people, events, circumstances, etc.) but architects tend to deny this influence. “They feel more comfortable in a world of certain predictions, in linear method, in the pursuit of perfection” (Till, 2009:1). As a result, the distance between architecture and real world increases. Till argues that a way to bridge this gap is to open up to architecture’s dependency not as a threat but as an opportunity, “the inescapable reality of the world must be engaged with and not retreated from.” In that engagement, we may find a possibility for the reformulation of architectural practice in a way that “would resist its present marginalization and find new hope” (Till, 2009:2).

2.3.2 Grounds for the ethical problems

It seems that the grounds for the ethical problems that can be identified in contemporary architectural discourse should not be seen primarily in the lack of a normative aspect. The word “normative” has its origins in “the Latin norma, carpenter’s square, pattern, or rule, whence its common meaning as
establishing a norm of standard [...] or most frequent value or state of something” (Johnson, 1994:202). Most of the architectural theory perspectives imply a certain way of acting; in this it they have a more or less explicit normative aspect. For instance, “postcriticality” suggests that to follow market forces and technology development, to explore their possibilities, and to abandon social and historical considerations is the most appropriate way to act for architects. This suggestion may be identified in such texts as Koolhas’ S, M, L, XL (1994) or Somol’s and Whiting’s “Notes Around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods” (2002).

One of the more problematic aspects of “postcriticality” and related, technology-affirmative positions is related to so-called is-ought problem (also known as “Hume’s guillotine”). The issue was raised by David Hume,80 who noted that many authors make claims about what ought to be, on the basis of statements about what is. In Treatise of Human Nature (1739), Hume indicated that there seems to be a significant difference between descriptive statements (about what is) and prescriptive statements (about what ought to be).81 Hume postulated that writers should be more careful in drawing the normative conclusions from the is-statements. There should always be given an explanation of how the ought-statements are supposed to follow from the is-statements. In his own words: “For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, ’tis necessary that it shou’d be observ’d and explain’d; and at the same time that a reason should be given” (Hume, 1739: book III, part I).

In this context, it seems that the advocates of “postcriticality” draw too far-reaching conclusions from the current situation of rapid transformations. They do not give a convincing argument as to why progress is good and why it ought to be reflected in architectural practice. It is far from being self-evident that evolution is always worth following. As George Edward Moore argues in Principia Ethica (1903), different forms of “Evolutionistic Ethics”

---

80 Scottish philosopher and historian, 1711–1776.
81 In book III, part I of A Treatise of Human Nature (1739), Hume states: “In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark’d, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary ways of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when all of a sudden I am surpriz’d to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, ’tis necessary that it shou’d be observ’d and explain’d; and at the same time that a reason should be given; for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.”
are characterized by the “naturalistic fallacy,”82 i.e., they assume that the evolution of nature can be used to determine what is good. Moore points out that there is no evidence that nature necessarily develops towards the good. Consequently, to be “better” does not necessarily mean to be more evolved; to be more evolved does not necessarily mean to be “better” (Moore, 1903, Chapter II, Section 35).

It appears that some basic assumptions in contemporary architectural discourse need more scrutiny, for what is taken as a self-evident truth is often based on arbitrary opinions, following the generality of thinking at the given time.

Summing up, speaking about the ethical problems of contemporary architecture, one could localize the primary problem not in the lack of normative implications of architectural theories, but in the way of defining practice and specifying its priorities. As Hans-Georg Gadamer maintains, practice is something more than just an application of certain theory/rules. Discussing science, he asked “Is the application of science as such practice? Is all practice the application of science?” and answers:

Even if the application of science enters into all practice, the two are still not identical. For practice means not only the making of whatever one can make; it is also choice and decision between possibilities. Practice always has a relationship to a person’s ‘being.’ (Gadamer, 1993:3-4)

In this perspective, ethical concerns are an inseparable part of any practice.

2.4 A NICHE FOR THE RESEARCH

The analyses conducted in this chapter indicate that currently dominating approaches within architectural theory tend to underestimate the value of user’s perspective. Positivist/postpositivist frameworks concentrate primarily on quantitatively measurable phenomena; prioritize scientific, expert knowledge; and refrain from considering subjectivity. Structuralism, although it takes into account the dimension of meaning, to a large extent

---

82 Most generally, the “naturalistic fallacy” is to assume that if one names various properties of things which we believe to be good (such as pleasure, satisfaction, evolution, etc.), one is actually defining “good.”
rejects the concept of human freedom and choice and focuses instead on the way that human behavior is determined by various structures.

Constructivist frameworks which acknowledge the importance of individual human experience, still deny the existence of a shared background other than a common interpretation.83 This rejection of universalism may lead to relativism, incommensurability, moral particularism,84 and even nihilism (Harris, in: Madison, 2001:ix).

Specifically in the field of architecture, constructivism-inspired theories are often promoting a strictly individualistic, at times even explicitly anti-social view of this discipline represented by their authors (e.g., Tschumi, 1994). This is however, in line with the main presumptions of constructivism—that the only criteria of validity for a given theory are its persuasiveness and sophistication (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Critical perspectives, although they refer to participation (as a strategy of empowering the “oppressed” groups) are not interested as much in an individual perspective as they are in social processes. Individual autonomy and concreteness of an individual experience can be obscured by a generalizing, ideologically grounded and deterministic model of social mechanisms.

The conducted analyses also indicated that within architectural discourse, there is a tendency to interpret paradigms in a way that expands the distance between theory and practice, even if the understanding of paradigms within the human sciences suggests a close interaction of these domains. As a consequence, ethical concerns are often marginalized.

The limitations of the currently dominating frameworks suggest a need of adopting a paradigm that could support a more user- and context-sensitive approach.

This study will argue that phenomenology, beginning and extending from a lifeworld perspective, may help to articulate a practice that is more responsive to a user, culture, place, and at the same time truly creative and innovative. What is also important in the context of architecture is that phenomenology puts emphasis on the “practicality” of our “being in the world” rather than on a theoretical, disengaged apprehension. “What man needs is not just the persistent posing of ultimate questions, but the sense of

83 Even scientific concepts are, according to constructivists, arrived at by consensus and are social constructs, “orthodox science is but one discursive community among the many that now exist and that have existed historically. Consequently its truth claims are irreducibly self-referential, in that they can be upheld only by appeal to the standards that define the scientific community and distinguish it from other social formations” (Gross and Levitt, 1998).

84 Moral particularism is the view that there are no moral principles and that moral judgement can be found only as one considers particular cases, either real or imagined.
what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now” (Gadamer, 2004: xxxiv). Gadamer argues that understanding is not a task in itself, but always should involve applying the meaning understood in a specific context (Gadamer, 2004:328).
3 PHENOMENOLOGY: CONCEPTS, PERSPECTIVES

This chapter begins with a general introduction to phenomenology. Further on, it explores the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of phenomenology, focusing on concepts particularly relevant in conceptualization of user involvement: lifeworld, lived experience (*Erlebnis*), and interpretation. The final sections of the chapter focus on further implications of phenomenology for the user involvement debate discussing the phenomenological account of space as given in lived experience, and the views of art and ethics grounded in the lifeworld.

3.1 PHENOMENOLOGY: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Martin Heidegger describes phenomenology as “the science of phenomena” (Heidegger, 1977:74). Phenomenology in its etymological sense is the activity of giving an account (*logos*) of the way things appear (*phainomenon*). In other words, it is concerned with phenomena (anything that presents itself to consciousness) and aims to depict them directly as they appear. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines phenomenology as follows:

> 20th-century philosophical movement, the primary objective of which is the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced, without theories about their causal explanation and as free as possible from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica. Retrieved April 30, 2008, from Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*)

The definition given by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the introduction to his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) gives a more specific idea about phenomenology:
Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definition of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness, for example. But phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than of their ‘facticity’. It is a transcendental philosophy which places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude, the better to understand them; but it is also a philosophy for which the world is always ‘already there’ before reflection begins—as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status. It is the search for a philosophy which shall be a ‘rigorous science’, but it also offers an account of space, time and the world as we ‘live’ them. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:vii)

Merleau-Ponty conceives phenomenology as a return to the world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks “and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:ix).

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is considered the father of phenomenology. The phenomenological movement began with his *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901). Husserl’s phenomenology developed in the context of his critique of the dominant philosophical tendencies of his time: psychologism and historicism. These currents, in Husserl’s view, were reducing philosophical knowledge to factual, scientific knowledge. For him, the main task of philosophy was to pursue and discover indubitable knowledge in contradistinction to factual knowledge that could never be apodictically certain. In his Inaugural Lecture at Freiburg im Breisgau (1917) Husserl states:

A new fundamental science, pure phenomenology, has developed within philosophy: This is a science of a thoroughly new type and

---

85 Although phenomenology arrived at complete awareness of itself as philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century, it can be identified as a manner or style of thinking that existed a long time before that. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:viii)
endless scope. It is inferior in methodological rigor to none of the modern sciences. All philosophical disciplines are rooted in pure phenomenology, through whose development, and through it alone, they obtain their proper force. Philosophy is possible as a rigorous science at all only through pure phenomenology. (Husserl, 1917 [4])

In *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936), Husserl describes phenomenology as pure looking at a phenomenon and viewing its essence. Phenomenology can be therefore considered as a *theoria* in the original, Greek sense of this term which referred to “seeing” truth, “sacralized spectacing.” The purpose of taking the phenomenological attitude is to recover human experience on a very large scale, i.e., using Husserl’s terminology “to go back to the things themselves.” By means of doing so one can critically reflect on the basic concepts and general

---

86 Essence in phenomenology is a complex notion that refers to the ways in which a phenomenon reveals itself in thinking—to the ways in which we encounter something. This term does not describe the “objective” properties of a phenomenon, but rather the meaning relations that we maintain with the world before the theoretical reflection.

87 A thorough and insightful account of the early Greek understanding of theory (*theoria*) may be found in already quoted A. W. Nightingale’s *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in its Cultural Context* (2004).

88 In this context, on the methodological level, Husserl advocates *epoche*, “phenomenological reduction,” a sort of Cartesian doubt in regard to all beliefs dictated by common sense. In Greek philosophy, epoche referred to a “suspension of judgment”; it was a principle introduced by non-dogmatic philosophical Skeptics of the ancient Greek Academy who, viewing the problem of knowledge as insoluble, proposed that, in controversial situations, an attitude of non-involvement should be adopted in order to gain peace of mind for daily living.

Phenomenologists argue that the problem of phenomenological inquiry is not that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much. In other words, the problem is that our “common sense” suppositions and the existing body of scientific knowledge predispose us to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before we have even come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question (Van Manen, 1990:46). As long as we assume our everyday-attitude towards the world, it remains in a certain sense hidden. Thus we have to adopt a specific attitude to go “back to the things themselves.”

Husser initially argued that a philosopher should put all beliefs, as well as all things of the natural-empirical world, in “brackets,” subjecting them to a transcendental suspension of conviction. Nevertheless, towards the end of his life he became aware of the problems related to phenomenological reduction in its radical form; he admitted that even at the deepest level, consciousness is operating in the world of socially and culturally grounded meanings and pre-judgments. Other phenomenologists (e.g., Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty) insisted that epoche should not be thought as a total withdrawal from the world into a kind of absolute subjectivity, but rather it consists in changing our way of seeing the world, in “relearning to look at the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:xxiii), in an attitude of “wonder” towards the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:xv). We do so when we make explicit our understandings, beliefs, and biases, and then try to temporarily abandon this conceptual framework. Referring to phenomenological reduction, Dahlberg et al. (2008) state that “…researchers have to find ways to scrutinize themselves in order to encounter data in an open manner; truly willing to be surprised and understand that one did not know after all” (Dahlberg et al. 2008:242).
frameworks of our habitual ways of representing, conceptualizing, and practically modeling human reality. One could also gain a new view of commonly known philosophical issues (e.g., the mind/body or theory/practice distinctions).

Phenomenology, with its view of an intimate connection between the world and human existence, stands in opposition to traditional modes of philosophical inquiry which may most generally be articulated in two types of conceptions:

1. A reductionist/empiricist view, conceiving the world as being only the sum of the things contained within it, where the category of world, as such, does not exist;
2. An idealist/rationalist view, where the world as such exists beyond the realm of matter.

As Merleau-Ponty asserts,

In the first case consciousness is too poor, in the second too rich for any phenomenon to appeal compellingly to it. Empiricism cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it, and intellectualism fails to see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally again we should not be searching. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:28)

Phenomenology approaches philosophical inquiry from a different perspective, addressing the phenomenon of the world in terms of its being the determinate for the ontological meaning of all the entities within it, and not just something which is determined by them. As Heidegger emphasizes, we always refer to things as being “within-the-world,” and this indicates that we have an intuitive understanding of the world, as coming before the notion of the things which are present within it. We understand ourselves and things in terms of the world. The world, however, is not the ultimate frame within which everything is conceived; the world also needs a human existence to perceive it. Phenomenology thus concedes that the “world” is, in fact, also a part of Dasein, human existence. The human world is always a lived-world, a lifeworld.

Ontology and epistemology are closely interconnected in the phenomenological framework. As Heidegger maintains, “Ontology and epistemology are not two different disciplines which among others belong to
philosophy. Both them characterize philosophy itself, its object and procedure” (Heidegger, 1977:87).

**On the ontological level,** phenomenology acknowledges the foundational character of the lifeworld. The concept of lifeworld implies an epistemology in which the question of meaning is most important; the lifeworld is the ultimate horizon for all cognitive activities. As Husserl put it, “The concrete life-world […] is the grounding soil of the ‘scientifically true’ world and at the same time encompasses its own universal concreteness” (Husserl, 1970:130).

**On the epistemological level,** lived experience (*Erlebnis*) is, in phenomenology, the primary source of knowledge, but non-intuitional (e.g., scientific) perspectives as a part of the lifeworld are also taken into account. An essential aspect of the lifeworld is being-with-Others, and an important assumption of phenomenological inquiry is that “the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (Patton, 1990:278).

**Methodologically,** depending on adapted approach, phenomenologists focus either on a description of human experience as lived or on the interpretation of its meanings.

### 3.2 PHENOMENOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR A USER-ORIENTED PRACTICE

Ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of phenomenology make this framework particularly relevant in the argument for the value of user perspective in any domain of professional practice, including architecture. The following sections explore these assumptions concentrating foremost on the concepts of “lived experience,” “lifeworld,” and “interpretation.”

#### 3.2.1 Epistemology: lived experience

The notion of “experience” has a central position in phenomenology. The discipline of phenomenology may be most generally defined as the investigation of structures of experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the first person’s point of view.

There is, especially from the side of natural sciences, a suspicion regarding any introspective approach to reality (a lack of objectivity is pointed out), however, individual consciousness does not have to be
equalized with relativity and idiosyncrasy. From a phenomenological perspective, it's not a matter objects on the one hand and subjects on the other hand. Rather, we could say that subjects and objects stay in an inseparable relationship. Consciousness is the very place of “phenomenality”—the “proper,” most primordial reality. More simply, the being of other beings is revealed in our encounters with them. This should not be equaled with relativism or immanentism. Following Twardowski (1894), one can distinguish between content and object of the conscious act, the former of which is immanent to the act, the latter is not.

Considering the foundational role of consciousness, phenomenology conceives the analysis of human existence (the human way of being) as a primary task of philosophy. In the introduction to *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger emphasizes that we can only understand the structure of reality by understanding ourselves:

> Ontologies which have beings unlike Dasein as their theme are [...] founded and motivated in the ontic structure of Dasein itself. [...] Thus *fundamental ontology*, from which alone all other ontologies can originate, must be sought in the *existential analysis of Dasein*. (Heidegger, 1977:56)

Accordingly, the role of phenomenology is not to supplement the investigation of “outer” phenomena, with the investigation of “inner” experience, but rather to question the subject-object dichotomy in general.89

From a phenomenological perspective, it is a peculiar prejudice that the outer and an inner sphere (if by the latter we mean consciousness) are independent domains. This prejudice has its origin first, in our conviction that there exists an outer, objective reality (which can be explored by science), and second, in our feeling that there is also our consciousness which we surely experience, but which is immediately accessible only to the individual subject: thus it is labeled as an “inner” phenomenon. However, consciousness is not an inner phenomenon but the foundation of being-there of phenomena—be they inner or outer. Phenomenology does not attempt to eliminate scientific (objective) exploration, but argues that the objective world is not epistemologically foundational; instead it points at the foundational role of human consciousness and lived experience.

---

89 As Fasching remarks, “The phenomenological theory of consciousness is not about a special region within the objectively given world but about the givenness of the world itself. Therefore, its topic is not the subjective as opposed to the objective but objectivity as such. This is what makes phenomenology a transcendental theory of consciousness” (Fasching, 2005).
In German there are two words for experience: Erlebnis and Erfahrung. Erlebnis (usually translated as “lived experience”) relates to the idea of an individual, isolated experience, i.e., “experience as we live through it and recognize it as a particular type of experience” (Van Manen, 1990:177). As Gadamer (1960) explains, erleben means primarily “to be still alive when something happens,” and the word Erlebnis suggests to him “the immediacy with which something real is grasped—unlike something which one presumes to know but which is unattested by one’s own experience” (Gadamer, 2004:53).

Yet, there is a certain ambiguity in the concept of the lived experience. Lived experience is being associated with an immediacy that precedes all explicit retrospection or objectification; but, at the same time, lived experience is not reducible to fleeting impressions, but has a unity of meaning. As Gadamer argues, what can be called a lived experience constitutes itself in memory, i.e., it has a lasting meaning for the person who has it (Gadamer, 2004:58).

Some phenomenologists have attempted to reconcile this apparent tension between immediacy and explicit reflection. For instance, Schütz (1967) argues that meaning does not lie in the experience, but rather is constituted; those experiences are meaningful which are grasped reflectively. “It is, then, incorrect to say that my lived experiences are meaningful merely in virtue of their being experienced or lived through. [...] The reflective glance singles out an elapsed lived experience and constitutes it as meaningful” (Schutz 1967:69-71, quoted in: Burch, 1990).

Accordingly, the full meaning of an experience is not simply given in the immediacy of the lived moment but rather emerges from retrospection, where meaning is recovered and recreated, for example, in remembrance, narration, or more systematically, through phenomenological interpretation (Burch, 1990). This aspect of Erlebnis is related to the form “das Erlebte” which signifies “the permanent content of what is experienced.”

Both meanings obviously lie behind the coinage Erlebnis: both the immediacy, which precedes all interpretation, reworking and communication, and merely offers a starting point for interpretation—material to be shaped—and its discovered yield, its lasting result. (Gadamer, 2004:53)

---

90 As Burch observes, “The etymological structure of Erlebnis suggested […] a basic ontological meaning. In general, the prefix er signifies ‘from out of something according to its own essential measure,’ and Lebnis, the process and result of ‘living.’ Read in this way, Er-lebnis would mean more literally what unfolds and endures from life by virtue of life itself” (Burch, 1990).
Gadamer argues that the two meanings that can be identified in the word *Erlebnis* do not have to be seen as contradictory, “something becomes an ‘experience’ not only insofar as it is experienced, but insofar as its being experienced makes a special impression that gives it lasting importance” (Gadamer, 2004:53).

Lived experience is the basic epistemological category in phenomenology; it is the most fundamental source of human knowledge. As Husserl emphasizes, the processes of experiencing or intuiting, that grasp the object in the most original way, are at the lowest cognitive level.

If higher, theoretical cognition is to begin at all, objects belonging to the sphere in question must be intuited. Natural objects, for example, must be experienced before any theorizing about them can occur.’ Experiencing is consciousness that intuits something and values it to be actual; experiencing is intrinsically characterized as consciousness of the natural object in question and of it as the original. (Husserl, 1917:7)

Gadamer (1967), reflecting on Husserl’s view of experience, emphasizes that the phenomenological concept of experience is expressly distinguished from the popular one.

The unit of experience is not understood as a piece of the actual flow of experience of an “I”, but as an intentional relation. […] Experiences exist only insofar as something is experienced and intended in them. It is true that Husserl also recognizes non-intentional experiences, but these are merely material for units of meaning, intentional experiences. Thus for Husserl experience becomes the comprehensive name for all acts of consciousness whose essence is intentionality. (Gadamer, 2004:57)

Here, the concept of experience has primarily epistemological meaning. All knowledge begins with experiencing phenomena; this is not an obstacle, but the most fundamental condition for understanding.

In relation to *Erlebnis*, the notion *Erfahrung* has different connotations. It is used to indicate the experience as ongoing and cumulative. It may be

---

91 Husserl acknowledging the existence of the “actual” objects clearly steps beyond Bretano’s understanding of intentionality—referring only to “mental objects” (see the discussion of intentionality, section 3.1.1)
translated as “life experience” (Van Manen, 1990:177) or “the experience of social interaction” (Arthos, 2000). Erfahrung has a social and historical dimension; it connotes the experience of a community. In Erfahrung, the subject is transcended and the experiencing individual participates in an “event of meaning,” an event in which one involves his/her own horizon and through which this horizon is widened. Erfahrung, thus, can have a transformative effect on our being.

In Truth and Method (1960), Gadamer relates Erfahrung to the truth that occurs in the experience of art (Gadamer, 2004:84). More generally, Gadamer conceives Erfahrung as the basis for hermeneutic understanding. At the same time, he uses the notion Erlebnis with a critical undertone, particularly criticizing aesthetics based on it. In his view, Erlebnis is connected with radical subjectivization of aesthetics that began with Kant’s Critique of Aesthetic Judgment (1790).

Gadamer criticizing Erlebniskunst referred essentially the concept of a genius-creator, imposing his/her individual experience on the audience. The position of “star architect” is a corresponding one within architecture. Also, in many instances in architectural writing, experience is being personalized to an exaggerated degree. The emphasis put on experience obscures equally important concerns: intersubjectivity, historicity, language,

---

92 In this, the notion of Erfahrung is closely related to the concept of sensus communis and rhetorics. See section 5.1. It is also related to the concept of lifeworld—among many interchangeable expressions that Husserl uses to denote the personal, communicative world of human meanings there is the notion of Erfahrungswelt—“the world of experience” (Steinbock, 1995:87). See the discussion of the concept of lifeworld in the following section.

93 Gadamer’s critique of “Erlebniskunst” (an art based entirely on an individual experience of an artist) seems to be relevant in regard to a constructivist approach. Constructivism shares with phenomenology the emphasis on individual experience, but while phenomenology admits the possibility of a shared experience (Erfahrung), constructivism admits only areas of compatibility of individual experience.

94 What needs to be emphasized here is that a study of experience is not the same thing as an existential analysis. The latter requires specific methodological steps, as discussed (for example) by Dahlberg et al. (2008) (see section 1.4.1).
etc. Nevertheless, if we concentrate on the experience (Erlebnis) of users,95 situating it in its cultural context, Gadamer’s criticism cannot be applied any more. An architect looking at a user’s perspective transcends her own experience, her horizon is widened, and she participates in an “event of meaning.”

It seems that in the case of architecture, most beneficial would be to combine the two modes of experience—Erlebnis and Erfahrung—in a vision reflecting a progression from an individual experience to a common world of human significations.96 In this context appears the notion of lifeworld.

3.2.2 Ontology: lifeworld—the shared horizon

The concept of lifeworld was introduced by Edmund Husserl. The lifeworld’s status—both personal and intersubjective—makes it one of the more complicated notions in phenomenology.

Most generally, the lifeworld can be described as the horizon of all our experiences, a background on which all things appear as meaningful. In Gadamer’s words, “the world in which we are immersed in the natural attitude that never becomes an object as such for us, but that represents the pregiven basis of all experience” (Gadamer, 1995:246-247). It cannot be understood in a purely static manner, but rather as a dynamic horizon in which we live, and which “lives with us.” Our personal ways of being are influenced by the lifeworld, but at the same time, by these ways of being we contribute to the lifeworld’s development.97

The lifeworld is an intersubjective world. As Husserl states,

[…] in living with one another (Miteinanderleben) each can take part in the life of others. Thus in general the world exists not only for isolated humans but for the human community; and this is due to the

---

95 A crucial, essentially methodological question that appears here is how to approach user’s lived experience in a non-reductive way. This will be addressed in the further part of this research.
96 The two dimensions of experience may be identified in Heidegger’s concept of dwelling. Through this concept, Heidegger refers to the structures of individual human existence—dwelling gives meaning individually to everyone who dwells; it represents a reflective self-determination. But also social and historical dimensions may be traced here. One of the conditions to accomplish dwelling is to relate meaningfully to the important spheres of human world represented by the elements of the fourfold—earth, sky, divinities and mortals (Heidegger, 1951). See the discussion of dwelling in section 3.2.2.
97 As it was already indicated, there is an intimate connection between ontology and epistemology in the phenomenological framework.
communalization (Vergemeinschaftung) of even what is straightforwardly perceived. (Husserl, 1936, quoted in: Moran, 2005:221)

Although intersubjectivity was given ever increasing value as Husserl’s thinking matured, the realm of social existence is commonly considered a “blind spot” in Husserl’s philosophy. As Steinbock observes, “it has long been held that Husserl, following Descartes, remained committed to a philosophical perspective that recalcitrantly reduces structures of meaning and sense to a purely subjective foundation, to the so-called ‘transcendental ego’” (Steinbock, 1995:2). Yet, the recent research on Husserl suggests an alternative understanding of his theory. Steinbock (1995) demonstrates that Husserl’s work can be interpreted as a fruitful contribution to the theory of social world.

The concept of lifeworld appears already in some of Husserl’s works before 1920, but it was during the 1920s when it became more significant. In The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (1936), lifeworld is one of the central concepts. Initially, however, Husserl viewed phenomenology as the science of pure consciousness.

This means that pure phenomenology draws upon pure reflection exclusively, and pure reflection excludes, as such, every type of external experience and therefore precludes any copositing of objects alien to consciousness. (Husserl, 1917)

Encountering difficulty in his initial endeavor, Husserl embarked on a different path, gradually realizing the significance of the everyday world in which one lives prior to reflective analysis. He recognized that consciousness, even at its deepest level, is operating in a world of meanings
The main task of phenomenology was thus reformulated; it was not just the study of the pure consciousness and meanings of a transcendental ego, as in Husserl’s earlier works, but the study of consciousness and meaning in context.

In *The Crisis of European Sciences* (1936), Husserl points out a mistaken rationalism, which had become detached from its lifeworld, as the source of the crisis of the West. The roots of the problem may be traced back to Galileo’s assumption that “to be” means “to be mathematizable.” Consequently, modern science identified its aim in overcoming the ambiguity of everyday experience through mathematization of nature. Further, in the Western tradition, it has been concealed that the lifeworld is the foundation of all cognitive activities. The objective perception of the world, as represented by science, has been long considered as the only authentic one.

Yet Husserl argues that science should be understood in terms of its basis in human experience; various scientific theories are artificially constituted by idealizing and structuring the pre-logical, pre-scientific lifeworld.

The crisis of European sciences should not be understood as a diagnosis of an internal weakness of science, but rather as increasingly insignificant in shaping the worldview and cultural landscapes. The crisis is a result of the dominance of natural sciences and their model of rationality over other discourses, especially philosophy, and as a consequence, a mistaken understanding of humans’ place in the world. According to Husserl, “this science has nothing to say to us. It excludes in principle precisely the questions which man […] finds the most burning: questions of the meaning or the meaninglessness of the whole of this human existence” (Husserl, 1970:6).

In Husserl’s view, the way out of the current crisis would be to reconstruct the basis of philosophy and the intellectual life on the foundation of phenomenology. Starting from our personal engagement with the world would allow us to talk about the world in a far more universal way than science does.

---

Influences on Husserl's formulation of the notion of “lifeworld” include Richard Avenarius (1843–1896), a German-Swiss philosopher, who presented the concept of the natural world—an experiential world prior to all conceptual divisions and categorizations—as the source of all knowledge. Husserl was also to some extent influenced by Wilhelm Dilthey's concept of “life-nexus” (*Lebenszusammenhang*) discussed in *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* (1910) and Martin Heidegger’s concept of “Being-in-the-world” (*In-der-Welt-Sein*), introduced in *Being and Time* (1927).
As Steinbock (1995) observes, Husserl’s concept of lifeworld has many dimensions. In fact Husserl (1936) creates a series of “provisional”\textsuperscript{102} notions of lifeworld that are not assimilable into one coherent, univocal theory of “the” lifeworld. Yet, these concepts may be viewed as systematically related (Steinbock, 1995:87-88). They number four:

1. “The lifeworld as intuitable.”
   In this sense, the notion “lifeworld” refers to the preconceptual, prelinguistic experience—a prescientific, immediately given world. It is the epistemological basis for discursive thinking.

2. “The lifeworld as a foundation of sense.”
   In this sense, the lifeworld is supplying an intuitive basis for sciences.
   In the basic meaning the term “lifeworld” can be used in an opposition to science. Husserl, however, admitted that science is one of human accomplishments, and as such also belongs to the lifeworld; but it is in no way privileged. It is a specific kind of human activity that exists among many other ways. Already, in his lectures from 1927, Husserl asks “Is not science itself then a function of life […]? Is it not itself a piece of the unitary lifeworld?” and continues, “Whether the sciences be clear or unclear, completely valid or invalid, like all good or bad human formations, they belong to the store of the world as the world of pure experience” (Husserl, 1927, quoted in: Steinbock, 1995:90).

Husserl (1936), speaking about the constitution of the lifeworld, uses the notion of “sedimentation.” The outcomes of objectifying human activity (such as science or technology) flow into the horizons of non-scientific praxis. He describes this process as “streaming-in.” The transformed world becomes then the lifeworld for the next generations. In other words, the lifeworld develops historically, through the human praxis that takes place in it, incorporating also scientific views.

It seems that what Husserl objected to “was not that science belongs to the lifeworld, but rather that the lifeworld cannot be the world described by objective scientific theory” (Steinbock, 1995:92).

\textsuperscript{102} Steinbock explains: “I call these concepts of the lifeworld ‘provisional’ because they belong within a static as opposed to genetic (and ultimately generative) phenomenology. They are to be distinguished from two transcendental concepts of the lifeworld as horizon and as ground” (Steinbock, 1995:87).
3. “The lifeworld as the realm of subjective-relative truths.”

The consequence of removing science from its privileged position is that “objective truth” has no longer validity outside the lifeworld experience. In other words, the very notion of “objective truth” becomes relativized. It follows that,

[…] there is no possibility of discriminating between lifeworlds either in terms of a priority of sense or by virtue of some necessary common feature they all share; instead they are simply juxtaposed in their differences. My objective truths make sense within my lifeworld, another’s objective truths make sense within theirs. […] there is no way of scientifically adjudicating between them. The result is that each lifeworld would legitimately have its own science proper to it. (Steinbock, 1995:93)

In this perspective, the notion of lifeworld may suggest a non-hierarchical conception of lifeworlds as cultural worlds. Yet, as Steinbock observes, this view of lifeworld is for Husserl only a “springboard” to further elaboration of the concept of lifeworld; “it sets up difficulty that Husserl wants to resolve in a particular manner” (Steinbock, 1995:94). This difficulty is historical/cultural relativism.

4. “The lifeworld as an essential structure.”

Husserl tries to overcome relativism arguing that the lifeworld, in all its relativity, possesses a “concrete universality,” i.e., some general structures (“eidetic structures”), the invariant elements. Husserl’s aims to identify the common structures shared by all diverse cultural worlds by regarding the relative worlds exclusively in terms of their invariant and unchanging organization, irrespective of their layered on cultural senses. What remains is a singular structure of a perceptual world, reflecting the structure of human consciousness. This structure is “that to which everything relative is bound, but is not itself relative,” it is “the lifeworld a priori.” This strategy allows Husserl to reestablish foundations for the “objective sciences” (Steinbock, 1995:96).

Another way of approaching the concept of lifeworld, one that can be identified in Husserl’s later works, is the view of lifeworld as “territory.”

---

103 This is the major presumption of the constructivist paradigm. See section 2.2.3.
The question here is “not what the lifeworld is, but rather how as the lifeworld it is always already in play,” thus the emphasis is moved from the giveness of lifeworld to its pregiveness (Steinbock, 1995:103). Husserl states:

[...] the lifeworld is always already there, being for us in advance, ‘ground’ for everyone, whether in theoretical or extra-theoretical praxis. The world is pregiven to us [...] not occasionally but always and necessarily; it is pregiven as the universal field of all actual and possible praxis, pregiven as horizon [Horizont]. (Husserl, 1936, quoted in: Steinbock, 1995:103)

*World-horizon* is the ultimate condition for the appearance of things, yet the horizon itself is never given. As Steinbock emphasizes, the lifeworld as horizon should not be mistaken for the background of human praxis, but is rather “a mode of meaningful interaction between ‘subject’ and ‘object’, ‘praxis’ and ‘meaning’” (Steinbock, 1995:108-109).

“Ground” may be understood as an expression of the prescientific, immediately-given lifeworld, but also as a physical, bodily basis of the lived-experience (Steinbock, 1995:114). “Horizon” and “ground” indicate two ways of how the lifeworld functions as pregiven; both are constitutive conditions for experience. Together, these concepts found the concept of the lifeworld as “territory”—a geo-historical, delimited sphere; the world as it is coherently and harmoniously experienced and anticipated, constituted by language, history, tradition (Steinbock, 1995:121).

A “territory” is the most general sense of a geographical, historical, and cultural delimitation for a community. It is a constitutive condition for intersubjective experience.

### Homeworld and alienworlds

In the manuscripts written in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Husserl investigates the substructures of the overall theme of lifeworld. What is particularly interesting for us is that he discusses the plurality of cultural

---

104As Steinbock (1995) observes, these concepts have not been subject to more detailed commentary within the Husserl scholarship. Yet, they signify an important thematic shift in the lifeworld analysis; a transition from a lifeworld ontology (pursued in the “natural attitude”) to a transcendental concept of lifeworld (Steinbock, 1995:97).
worlds, introducing such notions as “homeworld” (Heimwelt) and “alienworld” (Fremdwelt).

Normally, we live in a “homeworld,” which is an intersubjective, geo-historical world, normatively familiar to us and which can be approached intuitively. Our “homeworld” develops as we grow up; it takes new dimensions and layers of sense. Its development may be characterized as “ring-shaped.” Initially, our familiar world is restricted to the closest surroundings—family, local people, etc.—but later on, it extends to a cultural world, a world occupying its own “cultural space” and constituted by language through which we communicate with our “home fellows” (Heimgenossen). Another constitutional feature of a “homeworld” is the past—our tradition and history. Our present world has been, to a large extent, formed by the activity of the previous generations, and we continue this process as “co-bearers” (Mitträgern) of our world. We carry with us the structure of our “homeworld” in the structures of our everyday practices, in the structures of our lived-bodies.

Outside this well-known “homeworld,” there are alien humanities and cultures. Meeting the worlds that are different from our “homeworld” and cannot be related to it, we experience their strangeness and unfamiliarity. An “alienworld” does not refer merely to “otherness,” also known as the normality we are familiar with; it has its own dynamics, language, tradition, and history. In this, it is inaccessible to us. Even though the internal “meanings” of this “alienworld” can be communicated, they can never be apprehended as alien; the alienworld can only be understood, appropriated or assimilated into the “homeworld” on the background of the “homeworld”—translated into its terms.105 Experiencing the alienworld, we become aware of the familiarity of our homeworld; it receives its proper meaning in relation to alien cultural worlds. As Steinbock observes, “the home is not an one-sided original sphere, but understood as being co-constituted as home by encountering an alien world” (Steinbock, 1995:182). Accordingly, we can speak about “the co-constitution of the home through the transgresive

105 Italo Calvino provides a very succinct illustration of this phenomenon.
At the beginning of chapter six of Calvino’s Invisible Cities, Kublai Khan confronts Marco Polo about the subject of Venice:
“There is still one of which you never speak.”
Marco Polo bowed his head.
“Venice,” the Khan said.
Marco smiled. “What else do you believe I have been talking to you about?”
The emperor did not turn a hair. “And yet I have never heard you mention that name.”
And Polo said: “Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice. […] To distinguish the other cities’ qualities, I must speak of a first city that remains implicit. For me it is Venice.” (Calvino, 1972:86)
experience of the alien” and “the co-constitution of the alien through appropriative experience of the home” (Steinbock, 1995:179). This structure may be understood as “generativity.” As Steinbock argues, generativity is “both the process of becoming, hence the process of ‘generation,’ and a process that occurs over the ‘generations,’ hence the process of historical and social movement” (Steinbock, 1995:172).

One could ask whether Husserl’s discussion of “homeworld” and “alienworlds” does not lead to cultural relativism. Husserl asserts the plurality of lifeworlds. It is particularly evident in some of his manuscripts from the late 1920s.

Thus for the Zulu, the things we know and experience as sciences, scientific works and literature, are simply not there as books, journals, etc., although the books are there for the Zulu as things, and possibly as things imbued with this or that magical property; that is, with interpretations which in turn are not there for us. If we take what presents itself in the subjective consensus (subjektiv-einstimmig) of experience, or in the consensus of experience nationally or socially in the historical community, if we take this to belong to the concrete world of experience of this human community, then we must say: every such human community has a different concrete world. (Husserl, 1927\textsuperscript{106}, quoted in: Soffer, 1991:151)

In one of his earlier manuscripts, Husserl states even more clearly that there is a variety of cultural worlds:

We do not share the same lifeworld with all human beings. Not all humans ‘on the face of the earth’ have in common with us all the objects which constitute our lifeworld and determine our personal acting and striving, even when these persons come into actual contact with us, as they can at any time.[...] Objects which are there for us—although admittedly in changing, now harmonious, now conflicting apprehensions—are not there for them, and this means, the others have no apprehensions, no experience at all of them as these objects. This is the case even when they see them, and as we say, see these same objects of ours. (Husserl, 1925\textsuperscript{107}, quoted in: Soffer, 1991:151-152)

\textsuperscript{106} Manuscript A V9 of 1927 entitled “Umwelt und ‘Wahre’ Welt”
\textsuperscript{107} Manuscript A V 10 of 1925
Yet, acknowledging the plurality of cultural worlds, Husserl does not deny the possibility of intercultural understanding. He is also far from relativist conclusions. As Steinbock (1995) observes, if the homeworld were equivalent to a mere lifeworld among other possible lifeworlds, there would be no possibility of discriminating between lifeworlds as normatively significant or insignificant, i.e., “of understanding how our lifeworld as our homeworld is privileged for us as home, as normal, as familiar, as our world” (Steinbock, 1995:183). Even though certain elements of one lifeworld are not elements of another, the concrete lifeworlds contain a universal structure of experience. Furthermore, the concrete lifeworlds partly overlap each other. This gives a sufficient ground for the formation of high-order concepts and communication.

The embarrassment of the relativity of the lifeworld disappears as soon as we consider that the lifeworld does have, in all its relative features, a general structure. This general structure, to which everything that exists relatively is bound, is not itself relative. (Husserl, 1970:139)

This assertion does not necessarily imply that “universal intersubjectivity” is possible and thus people from different cultures may eventually come to the same understanding of world. It rather suggests that cultural worlds are not unrelated “monads,” and there are some paths to access “alienworlds.” Nevertheless, the meanings of our “homeworld” penetrate so deeply into the structure of our thinking and experience, that we understand “the alien” primarily in the terms of our lifeworld.

The discussion of “homeworld” and “alienworlds” has important implications for architecture. It points at the need of a careful consideration of a given cultural context, particularly in situations when an architect is working in cultural settings different from his/her “homeworld.”

It also suggests rethinking of some general assumptions undermining contemporary architectural discourse, which often conceptualizes the “user” as a person living in a global space. While for some of us, the global space is undoubtedly a part of the “homeworld,” others see it in terms of an inaccessible “alienworld.”

The co-constitutive relationship of “homeworld/alienworld” provides a relevant conceptual model for approaching the dynamics of globalized urban environments. A question to be addressed in this context is how to create a

---

108 One example of such “structure of experience” is the way we relate to space, as discussed by Heidegger (1927); see section 3.2.3.

108
meaningful milieu in contemporary, multicultural cities. In the phenomenological perspective this would mean to create normatively significant enironing-worlds in the mutual communication with different, co-existing cultural worlds.

This discussion will be continued in Chapter 4.

**Heidegger’s perspective: authenticity, dwelling and the fourfold**

Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Schütz and other phenomenologists developed their own studies of the problems of the lifeworld. Here, we will focus on Heidegger’s perspective. Although Heidegger does not use the term “lifeworld,” he conceives that human beings are being born to the world of social, cultural, and historical environments, and interpret the world and the self within these contexts. In *Being and Time* (1927) Heidegger conceptualizes this relation as “being-in-the-world.” “Being-in-the-world” is the foundational state of human existence. It is the very ground upon which every other determination of human being stands. Although “being-in-the-world” is a compound expression, it refers to a unitary phenomenon. “Being” (the Being of *Dasein*, the human existence) and “the world” are not separate entities but must be grasped together. In other words, there is no subject and object, nor is there any division between the internal and the external.

Our relation to the lifeworld does not only consist in our relation to culturally, historically grounded meanings. To be human and to be in the world, in Heidegger’s view is also to be with others, “…the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of *Dasein* is a with-world [Mitwelt]. Being-in the world is being-with Others”\(^{109}\) (Heidegger, 1962:155). Being-in-the-world is thus being in an intersubjective world. Intersubjective dimension is an integral part of the background that makes world meaningful (the relationship with others can considerably influence the way we experience world).

“Authenticity” and “inauthenticity” are the grounds on which a particular human being determines its own possibilities. *Dasein*\(^{110}\) is either “authentic,” which means that one can chose and “win” oneself (fully develop one’s own potentials) or is “inauthentic,” which means “forgetting” that one can chose and “win” oneself.

---

\(^{109}\) "Die Welt des Daseins ist Mitwelt. Das In-Sein ist Mitsein mit Anderen” (SZ:118).

\(^{110}\) The human being is referred to by Heidegger as “Dasein” (which literally means “Being-there”).
Speaking more specifically, Heidegger describes inauthenticity in terms of irresoluteness—forfeiture of self-determination and awareness of one’s potentiality for individuality (*Jemeinigkeit*). In this mode of existence, *Dasein* is falling into *das Man*—submits to often unnoticed domination by the social norms and conventions and uncritically sticks to socially prescribed ways of being. This results in conformity, averageness, and absorption in everyday routine. Nevertheless, *das Man* belongs to the structure both inauthentic and authentic *Dasein*. In the first instance, it is related to uncritically accepted public opinion and social conventions (*Offentlichkeit*), in the second instance, to heritage (*Sitillichkeit*) and tradition. *Das Man* is a product of history—with authenticity, we enter into a new relationship with the historical facts; we see their condition and realize that there are other possible choices.

By seeing this condition, the authentic *Dasein* consciously chooses its “hero,” i.e., its authorities. In being authentic, *Dasein* does not completely reject *das Man* and thereby find its morality within itself or in a transcendent reason, but rather finds itself in a historical context and chooses its authorities, either within its own tradition or by finding new traditions. By finding exemplary stories and figures, *Dasein* finds foundations on which it chooses its authentic possibilities. *Das Man*, thus continues to inform the *Dasein’s* life, but instead of limiting, it helps to establish a more genuine mode of existence, in relation with history and culture.\(^{111}\)

According to Heidegger, the breakthrough to an authentic existence is accomplished through the process of individualization. To be authentic, one must realize one’s authentic potentialities, then rethink and resolutely reject the domination of the society on certain planes, and finally take over conscious responsibility for one’s choices.

The process of individualization is related to the phenomenon of being-towards-death (*Sein zum Tode*), a mode of an authentic temporality, which is realized when *Dasein* becomes aware of its own finite existence.

Life, grasped as a whole from one’s own unique perspective, gains meaning as one’s own life-project, bounded by the sense of one’s realization that she or he is not immortal. Such a perspective does not cause resignation, but is a positive force, for it makes our choices meaningful.

Speaking more specifically, authentic temporality is constituted by the unity of the three dimensions—what Heidegger calls “ecstases”—the future, the past, and the present. It may be described as a movement through a space

\(^{111}\) Gadamer’s view on the role of tradition follows Heidegger’s line of thinking. See section 3.2.3.
of possibilities. In one moment (Augenblick, literally “glance of the eye”) Dasein is going back to the possibilities that have been (the past), and projects them in the resolute movement of “being-towards-death.” In this process, anticipation of the future and our past (tradition, history) release themselves into the present moment of action. This does not imply that Dasein is somehow condemned to its past. On the contrary, it can make a decision to determine itself. This is what Heidegger calls “resoluteness.”

An inauthentic or “everyday” mode of time is lacking some primordial quality which authentic temporality possesses; it is dissolving in the indifference of das Man, public opinion, volatile fashion, and time-related values. (Heidegger, 1927)

As Heidegger indicates, “authenticity” and “inauthenticity” are themselves grounded upon a state of being-in-the-world. This suggests the significance of a non-reductionist relation to the lifeworld in developing an “authentic” mode of existence. Yet, due to the primacy of “temporality” in the philosophy of early Heidegger, an understanding of authenticity in Being and Time does not fully acknowledge the importance of physical background of human existence. This understanding changes with Heidegger’s “turn” (Kehre), which may be in this perspective understood as the “topological turn.” Heidegger’s understanding of authenticity in this period implies the recognition of the importance of spatiality and place for a true “being-there.”

In Building, Dwelling, Thinking (1951), the concept of lifeworld may be identified when one looks closer at Heidegger’s description of the fourfold (Geviert). The elements of fourfold refer to the spiritual, cultural, social, and natural aspects of our world. It could be understood in opposition to idea of Gestell (an imposition of techno-scientific, instrumental rationality upon the world as a whole).

There is a normative element in Heidegger’s view of the fourfold; he points at a way toward an authentic, non-reductive relation with reality in the idea of “dwelling.”

Mortals dwell in that they save the earth […] Saving does not only snatch something from a danger. To save really means to set something free into its own presencing. To save the earth is more than

---

[112] The topological aspect of being-in-the-world is however not absent in Heidegger’s early philosophy. See section 3.3.3, the discussion of Dasein’s spatiality in Being and Time (1927).

[113] Dwelling is “the manner in which mortals are on the earth.” Heidegger (1951) describes dwelling as staying “on the earth” and “under the sky,” “remaining before the divinities,” and “belonging to men’s being with one another.” Further, Heidegger adds “By a primal oneness the four-earth and sky, divinities and mortals-belong together in one” (Heidegger, 1977: 327).
to exploit it or even wear it out. Saving the earth does not master the
earth and does not subjugate it, which is merely one step from
spoliation.

Mortals dwell in that they receive the sky as sky. They leave to the sun
and the moon their journey, to the stars their courses, to the seasons
their blessing and their inclemency; they do not turn night into day nor
day into a harassed unrest.

Mortals dwell in that they await the divinities as divinities. In hope
they hold up to the divinities what is unhoped for…

Mortals dwell in that they initiate their own nature-their being capable
of death as death-into the use and practice of this capacity, so that
there may be a good death. (Heidegger, 1977: 328)

Heidegger’s concept of “dwelling” is an extension of his understanding
of the “authentic” mode of existence. The concept of authenticity provides
clues to the understanding of dwelling and its conditions. Dwelling occurs
not only by staying within the lifeworld, i.e., “in saving the earth, in receiving
the sky, in awaiting the divinities, in initiating mortals.” It implies an active
element of creating/nurturing new objects.

Mortals would never be capable of it if dwelling were merely a staying
on earth under the sky, before the divinities, among mortals. Rather,
dwelling itself is always a staying with things. Dwelling, as
preserving, keeps the fourfold in that with which mortals stay: in
things. […] Dwelling preserves the fourfold by bringing the
presencing of the fourfold into things. But things themselves secure
the fourfold only when they themselves as things are let be in their
presencing. How is this done? In this way, that mortals nurse and
nurture the things that grow, and specially construct things that do not
grow. Cultivating and construction are building in the narrower sense.
Dwelling, insofar as it keeps or secures the fourfold in things, is, as
this keeping, a building. (Heidegger, 1977:329)

---

114 The concept of authenticity is also an integral part of Heidegger’s reflection on art; the task of
art is to open us to authentic possibilities of our being, to transcend the dominating behavior of
everyday existence (inauthenticity). See section 3.3.1.
An essential aspect of dwelling is preserving the lifeworld in “things,” i.e., material objects, either natural (such as landscape) or artificial (such as a building). In this process, the lifeworld is not only preserved, but also extended and enhanced with new elements. 115

Referring specifically to the activity of building. Heidegger describes its task as “letting-dwell,” which means “presencing” and “housing” dwelling. Buildings are material expressions, a “presencing” of the meanings of lifeworld. In other words, buildings let the meanings of the lifeworld appear. At the same time, the edifices “house” dwelling, providing the physical settings where dwelling may occur.

The edifices guard the fourfold. They are things that in their own way preserve the fourfold. To preserve the fourfold, to save the earth, to receive the sky, to await the divinities, to escort mortals—that fourfold preserving is the simple nature, the presencing, of dwelling. In this way, then, do genuine buildings give form to dwelling in its presencing and house this presence. Building thus characterized is a distinctive letting-dwell. Whenever it is such in fact, building already has responded to the summons of the fourfold. (Heidegger, 1977:336)

In Heidegger’s view, the design process should be grounded on the responding to the fourfold (i.e., the conditions of lifeworld). This responding “in turn opens up to the designer the precincts suitable for his designs,” i.e., determines the boundaries of possible design solutions.

As soon as we try to think of the nature of constructive building in terms of a letting-dwell, we come to know more clearly what that process of making consists in by which building is accomplished. Usually we take production to be an activity whose performance has a

115 In his lecture (1951), Heidegger etymologically links the words “building” and “dwelling.”

“The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is Bauen, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal, it means to dwell. The old word bauen, which says that man is insofar as he dwells, this word […] means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine. […] Building in the sense of preserving and nurturing is not making anything. Shipbuilding and temple-building, on the other hand, do in a certain way make their own works. Here building, in contrast with cultivating, is a constructing. Both modes of building-building as cultivating […] and building as the raising up of edifices […] are comprised within genuine building, that is, dwelling” (Heidegger, 1977:325).

According to Heidegger, the real sense of the word bauen, or dwelling, has long fallen into oblivion. The activities of cultivating and constructing claimed the name of bauen, building exclusively for themselves, losing their relation to “dwelling,” the basic character of human being.
result, the finished structure, as its consequence. It is possible to conceive of making in that way; we thereby grasp something that is correct, and yet never touch its nature, which is a producing that brings something forth. For building brings the fourfold *hither* into a thing, the bridge, and brings *forth* the thing as a location, out into what is already there, room for which is only now made by this location. (Heidegger, 1977:337)

In this understanding, the act of building is not just producing effective problem-solutions, but most primarily it is incorporating the hitherto-existing meanings of lifeworld into an edifice, at the same time providing room for future possibilities of a human existence.\[^{116}\]

In this context, it is worthwhile to mention that the lecture “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” (1951) was initially presented to a group of leading architects in Darmstadt, during a symposium on “Man and Space.” The symposium was accompanied by an exhibition, commemorating the Darmstadt Colony of 1901. The leading idea of the entire event is included in the following statements:

> Building is a fundamental activity of man. Man builds, by joining spatial figures, thus shaping space. Building, he responds to the spirit of the age. Our age is the age of technology. The plight of our age is homelessness. (“Darmstädter Gespräch: Mensch und Raum,” Otto Bartning (ed.), 1952)

Heidegger calls these assertions into question.

However hard and bitter, however hampering and threatening the lack of houses remains, the real plight of dwelling does not lie merely in a lack of houses. The real plight of dwelling is indeed older than the world wars with their destruction, older also than the increase of the earth’s population and the condition of the industrial workers. The real dwelling plight lies in this that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling that they must ever learn to dwell. What if man’s homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the real plight of dwelling as the plight? Yet as soon as man gives thought to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly

\[^{116}\] This movement reflects the dynamics of an “authentic” mode of temporality.
considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that calls mortals into their dwelling. (Heidegger, 1977:339)

Heidegger argues that the essential task of architecture is not solely appeasing the “hunger” of houses, but satisfying man’s deepest, existential needs; it means to help us find our place in the world, to find meaning in our lives, to dwell. The activity of building helps us to gather elements of our existential space and concretize, embody them in our environment.¹¹⁷

The famous example of a peasant cottage in the Black Forrest exemplifies building that emerges from the lifeworld and “houses” dwelling of its inhabitants.

Let us think for a while of a farmhouse in the Black Forest, which was built some two hundred years ago by the dwelling of peasants. Here the self-sufficiency of the power to let earth and heaven, divinities and mortals enter in simple oneness into things, ordered the house. It placed the farm on the wind-sheltered mountain slope looking south, among the meadows close to the spring. It gave it the wide overhanging shingle roof whose proper slope bears up under the burden of snow, and which, reaching deep down, shields the chambers against the storms of the long winter nights. It did not forget the altar corner behind the community table; it made room in its chamber for the hallowed places of childbirth and the “tree of the dead”—for that is what they call a coffin there: the Totenbaum—and in this way it designed for the different generations under one roof the character of their journey through time. A craft which, itself sprung from dwelling, still uses its tools and frames as things, built the farmhouse. (Heidegger, 1977:338)

Heidegger is not calling here for a return to traditional/vernacular ways of building. His intention is far from providing stylistic suggestions. He explicitly states that his reference to the Black Forest farm in no way means that we should or could go back to building such houses. Rather, this example “illustrates by a dwelling that has been how it was able to build” (Heidegger, 1977:338). It is clear here that this way of dwelling no longer exists. The task for architects is to find expressions for the current ways of “dwelling” for the contemporary ways of “authentic” life.

¹¹⁷ The issue of “participatory” and “emancipatory” modes of representation could be traced here (Vesely, 2004).
This task is essentially the task of interpretation. There are no straightforward procedures to be followed by those who build, but a personal effort and dedication from the side of architects are crucial. In this view, an architect is not just a skilled designer of houses, but also a person who exemplifies an authentic mode of existence. Ethical commitment is essential here: “Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build” (Heidegger, 1977:338).

Gadamer (1960) follows this line of thinking. For him, “tradition” (Überlieferung, “what is handed down from the past”) is not just what lies behind us or what we adopt more or less automatically. Rather, it is a task. As in Heidegger’s view, it helps us to develop our true possibilities. Tradition confronts us as an effort of understanding that we feel ourselves required to make because we recognize our limitations. In this perspective, our relation to tradition precludes passivity; instead it demands active questioning and self-questioning.118

3.2.3 Methodology: interpretation

According to Heidegger, the concept of method is of a crucial importance in phenomenology.

The expression “phenomenology” signifies primarily a concept of method. It does not characterize the “what” of the objects of philosophical research in terms of their content but the “how” of such research. (Heidegger, 1977:73)

Yet, the subject of method in phenomenology has to be approached with a great dose of carefulness.

The more genuinely effective a concept of method is and the more comprehensively it determines the fundamental conduct of a science, the more originally it is rooted in confrontation with the things themselves and the farther away it moves from what we call a technical device - of which there are many in theoretical disciplines. (Heidegger, 1977:73)

---

118 See also the discussion of phenomenological hermeneutic and conservatism (section 3.2.3); the relevance of phenomenology in contemporary conditions (section 4.1).
Phenomenology defines method in opposition to the view represented within natural sciences. In the field of natural sciences, the primary goal of research is to establish similarities, regularities, and conformities to general laws, which in turn make it possible to predict individual phenomena and processes. The use of method here is “free from all metaphysical assumptions and remains perfectly independent of how one conceives of the phenomena that one is observing” (Gadamer, 2004: 3-4). There have been numerous attempts to adopt this model within the human sciences, but as Gadamer (1960) emphasizes, these attempts contradict the very nature of the human sciences, i.e., that, “one has not rightly grasped their nature if one measures them by the yardstick of progressive knowledge or regularity” (Gadamer, 2004:4). Gadamer argues that in the human sciences, the primary task is not to grasp a concrete phenomenon as an instance of a universal rule, but rather to understand a phenomenon in all its uniqueness and concreteness.

Methodological emphasis in phenomenological research is to a large extent a result of adapted theoretical approach. Generally speaking, there can be distinguished two traditions within phenomenology—descriptive phenomenology, referring primarily to Husserl, and hermeneutic (or interpretive) phenomenology, which emerged from the works of Heidegger and includes Gadamer and Ricoeur, for example (this approach is adopted in this paper). Accordingly, methodological emphasis is either on description or on interpretation.

Nevertheless, some scholars choose to see description and interpretation as a continuum where specific research may be more or less interpretative/descriptive, arguing that traditional boundaries “would be antithetical to the spirit of the phenomenological tradition that prizes individuality and creativity” (Langdridge, 2008:1131).

As Wertz argues, “interpretation may be used, and may be called for, in order to contextually grasp parts within larger wholes, as long as it remains descriptively grounded” (Wertz, 2005:175). Van Manen (1990) points out that when a description is mediated by elements of expression (e.g., an

---

117 Most notably, John Stuart Mill’s (1843) argument that the inductive method, which is the basis for experimental science, is the only method valid in the field of human sciences. According to Mill, “the effect produced, in social phenomena, by any complex set of circumstances, amounts precisely to the sum of the effects of circumstances taken singly” (Logic, VI, ix, 1).

119 Although it is most generally agreed that there are two main currents within phenomenology (descriptive and hermeneutic), it is worthwhile to note that on a more specific level one can distinguish a greater number of approaches. *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (1997) gives an interesting overview over the numerous tendencies within phenomenology.
action, a work of art, or a text) a stronger element of interpretation is involved.

Dahlberg et al. (2008) emphasize that a difference between the hermeneutic and the descriptive approach is that the former includes external material in an analysis (e.g., existing theories, researcher’s pre-understanding, etc.), while the later works primarily with the empirical data that are obtained in the course of a given study.\(^{121}\)

Most of the scholars following Husserl’s tradition agree that the ultimate goal of phenomenology is “a rigorous description of human life as it is lived and reflected upon all of its first-person concreteness, urgency, and ambiguity” (Pollio 1997, quoted in: Seamon, 2000). The assertions made within this framework are usually restricted to those which can be supported “by appropriate intuitive validations” (Mohanty, 1983, quoted in: Giorgi, 1986:9). This approach is especially useful for describing the lived experiences of research participants through “sense perceptions—seeing hearing, touching, tasting and smelling, and other phenomena such as remembering, believing, and judging” (Ray, 1985:127). It is often used in “empirical” phenomenological research in such fields as nursing or psychiatry. This approach also proves to be useful in many cases of architectural research, e.g., when investigating the lived experience of inhabitants of a given building, their sensory experience of a space, etc.

While Husserl concentrated foremost on epistemology, in Heidegger’s view, phenomenology went beyond the description of lived experience and aimed at its ontological interpretation. Hermeneutic phenomenology emphasizes our embeddedness in the world of language and social relationships, and the historicity of all understanding. In Being and Time (1927), Heidegger suggests the following view of the hermeneutic circle of meaning and being:

\[
\text{This circle of understanding […] is the expression of the existential fore-structure of Dasein itself. […] In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. To be sure, we genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our explication,}
\]

\(^{121}\) External material can of course be included in a descriptive phenomenological study, but not until the full empirical analysis and the findings of it have been established. According to Dahlberg, theory can help us to elucidate and clarify the meanings of a phenomenon, but on the other hand, it poses a risk of impressing too much on the researcher, “which could disturb the harmony and balance of the phenomenal field. Wanting to further illuminate the phenomenon by using theory, one easily becomes too abstract, general and distant, and end up far from the phenomenon” (Dahlberg et al., 2008:273).
we have understood that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make this scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves. (Heidegger, 2001:195)122

Interpretation is not an additional procedure; it constitutes the basic structure of our being-in-the-world. When we experience a thing, we experience it as something that has already been interpreted. According to Heidegger, language (logos) can reveal what phenomena show. However, as being of language is different from the being of phenomena, language can also conceal their true being. This is why we need a method of “interrogating” language, a method that would reduce the risk of covering up phenomena. Heidegger called this method “hermeneutics”—a systematic approach to interpreting through which the authentic meaning of phenomena can be articulated.

Gadamer’s perspective

After Heidegger’s Being and Time, the first manifestation of the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach is Gadamer’s Plato’s Dialectical Ethics (1931). The issues addressed here reemerged in Gadamer’s later work, Truth and Method (1960). Gadamer’s understanding of hermeneutics developed in a polemic with the earlier views, particularly Dilthey’s123 position.

Dilthey’s (1910) primary aim was to elaborate methodological foundations for the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften) that were rapidly developing in the 19th century.124 Dilthey argued that the human sciences have as their specific subject matter Erlebnis, lived experience of historical and social subjects.125

122 Further, Heidegger emphasizes that hermeneutic model of understanding—based on the ontological constitution of Dasein—transcends the idea of rigour held in the natural sciences. He states, “Mathematics is not more rigorous than historiology, but only narrower, because the existential foundations relevant for it lie within a narrower range” (Heidegger, 2001:195).

123 Wilhelm Dilthey was a German philosopher (1833-1911), one of the key representants of life philosophy (Lebensphilosophie). Dilthey’s reflections on history and hermeneutics influenced thinkers in the twentieth century, especially Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur.

124 He sought to “ground” human sciences philosophically in a similar way as Kant did earlier with natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften), in the Critique of Pure Reason (1781). Dilthey intended to supplement Kant’s primarily cognitive Critique of Pure Reason with a Critique of Historical Reason dealing with the full scope of lived experience.

125 Dilthey was first to elaborate on the division of the sciences, but it was Heinrich Rickert (1896) who pointed at a qualitative distinction to be made between historical and scientific facts.
Consequently, the method most relevant for the human sciences is “empathetic understanding” (*Verstehen*). While natural sciences seek to explain phenomena (*Erklären*) in terms of causal relationships, the task of the human scientist should be to investigate the alien or distant life-experience as it manifests itself in documents, texts, etc. It is presupposed that being a part of “life,” a part of the human world, the researcher is capable of understanding and reconstructing other “objectivisations” of the human world. Dilthey writes: “The first condition of possibility of a science of history is that I myself am a historical being, that the person studying history is the person making history” (Dilthey, quoted in Gadamer, 2004:217). Understanding—the methodological basis of the human sciences—is here a matter of interpretation (*Deutung*). The aim of interpretation is, in Dilthey’s view, to achieve a reproduction (*Nachbildung*) of distant life-experiences. All interpretation consists in “translating the objectifications of life back into the spiritual life from which they emerged” (Dilthey, quoted in: Gadamer, 2004:57). Dilthey was particularly concerned with the problem of achieving “objective validity” in the interpretations of historical experience within the human sciences.

According to Gadamer (1960), the main weakness of Dilthey’s theory is that it eventually conceals the difference between the nature of historical experience and science’s mode of knowledge. In other words, Dilthey harmonizes the human sciences’ mode of knowing with the methodological criteria of natural sciences.¹²⁶ This, according to Gadamer, can be seen clearly in the kind of objectivity Dilthey attributes to the human sciences which very much correspond to the understanding of objectivity in natural sciences.

Dilthey, following romantic hermeneutics,¹²⁷ assumes that the object of understanding is “the text to be deciphered and its meaning understood. […] Just as natural science always examines some present thing for the information it can yield, so the human scientist interrogates texts” (Gadamer, 2004:233).

What Gadamer essentially criticizes in Dilthey’s theory is the neglect of the social and historical nature of human experience. In Dilthey’s view “the interpreter” is absolutely contemporaneous with “the author” i.e., the

---

¹²⁶ According to Gadamer, “In Dilthey’s thinking there is no merely extrinsic accommodation between the method of human sciences and the procedure of the natural sciences; rather he sees a genuine community between them. The essence of the experimental method consists in rising above the subjective fortuitousness of observation and with the help of method attaining knowledge of natural laws. Similarly, the human sciences endeavor to rise methodologically above the subjective fortuitousness of their own standpoint in history through the tradition accessible to them, and thus attain objective historical knowledge” (Gadamer, 2004:230).

¹²⁷ As represented by, for example, Schleiermacher.
“interpreter” can transcend his own situatedness and “extract” the author’s meanings directly from the text; historical reality is a “pure thread of meaning” to be deciphered, as a result “objective” historical knowledge can be attained. The investigated phenomena are “‘wrenched from their original world” (Gadamer, 2004:158), from their lifeworld.

In this context, Gadamer specifies what has to be done “to describe more adequately the experience of the human sciences and the objectivity they are able to achieve” (Gadamer, 2004:235). As indicated before, a great part of architectural discourse may be situated within the domain of the human sciences. Consequently, Gadamer’s discussion of the modes of experience and objectivity that is distinctive for the human sciences is also relevant for architectural theory.

Gadamer’s intention was not to provide a “method of interpretation” fitting into the scheme of modern human sciences (as Dilthey attempted), but rather to reflect on what happens “over and above” our understanding (Gadamer, 2004:xxvi). In the Foreword to the second German edition of his major work he states:

I did not want to develop a system of rules or skill that would be able to describe or even to guide the methodological procedure of the cultural sciences. It was also not my intention to investigate the theoretical foundations of work in the humanities in order to turn the knowledge gained to practical ends.

If there is any practical consequence of the present investigation, it certainly has nothing to do with an unscientific ‘commitment’; instead, it is concerned with the ‘scientific’ integrity of acknowledging the commitment involved in all understanding. (Gadamer, 2004:xxv).

Gadamer here follows Heidegger’s line of thinking, where all understanding is ultimately a self-understanding, “a person who understands, understands himself (sich versteht), projecting himself upon his possibilities” (Gadamer, 2004:25). Here, understanding is not separable from the historical and temporal horizon of human being; our situatedness in the world is the necessary condition for understanding. According to Gadamer, the

128 “Human sciences are most generally concerned with the study of human realm” (Polkinghorne, 1983:15), i.e., the study and interpretation of the experiences, activities, and artifacts associated with human beings.

129 Gadamer states, “What first seemed simply a barrier, according to the traditional concept of science and method, or a subjective condition of access to historical knowledge, now becomes
Enlightenment’s ideal of overcoming of all prejudices via understanding, in itself proves to be a prejudice. Furthermore, the fact that we are situated within traditions does not mean that we are limited in our freedom. On the contrary, traditions—rather than limiting us—open us up to what is to be understood. They are an irreducible element of the structure of understanding.

The horizon of the present can not be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves. (Gadamer, 2004:305).

In Gadamer’s view (echoing here Hegel’s standpoint),\(^{130}\) the interpretation of the past life is possible only to the degree that it is a reconstruction of the present, based on its past. The past unavoidably enters into a relation with the present life. Meaning (Sinn) can be considered as a collection of sedimented significations (Bedeutungen) continuously emerging from new interpretations. It then follows that meaning is never complete; it is open for sedimentations that may come from future perspectives. Gadamer argues:

Every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way, for the text belongs to the whole tradition whose content interests the age and in which it seeks to understand itself. The real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and his original audience. It certainly is not identical with them,

---

\(^{130}\) In The Philosophy of History (1837), Hegel introduces the idea of “reflective history,” i.e., “history whose mode of representation is not really confined by the limits of the time to which it relates, but whose spirit transcends the present” (Hegel, 2004: 4). Referring to historical reflection, he states, “When we have to deal with the Past, and occupy ourselves with a remote world a Present rises into being for the mind—produced by its own activity […] The occurrences are, indeed, various; but the idea which pervades them—their deeper import and connection is one. This takes the occurrence out of the category of the Past and makes it virtually Present” (Hegel, 2004:5-6). In this perspective, historical reflections “are truly and indefeasibly of the Present, and quicken the annals of the dead Past with the life of today” (Hegel, 2004:6).
for it is always co-determined also by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history. […] Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well. (Gadamer, 2004:296)

Gadamer, following Heidegger, considers understanding not as a subjective process but an *ontological* one. Madison (2001) explains that, “understanding is not something that the human subject or we ‘do’ as it is something that, by reason of our ‘belonging’ to history (*Zugehörigkeit*), *happens to us*” (Madison, 2001 in Kearney (ed.), 2001:297). Furthermore, since hermeneutics is not concerned with the individuality of the author, but with the meaning of what is said, the text is not understood as a mere expression of individual experience, but “is taken seriously in its claim to truth” (Gadamer, 2004:296). In this context Gadamer speaks about “the productivity of temporal distance” (Gadamer, 2004:296).

What is the relevance of these insights for architecture? Pointing out the relational nature of understanding, phenomenological hermeneutics asks for a thorough consideration and acknowledgement of the social, cultural, and historical context of designed artifacts. In this perspective, the design process is not primarily guided by abstract objectives, but by the lifeworld and the ways of life of the users of architecture.

Another reflection coming from phenomenological hermeneutics is that the meaning of an architectural object extends far beyond the intentions of the architect. Consequently, any purposes or meanings that the architect ascribes to the object have a minor importance. As Gadamer emphasizes, “we understand in a different way, if we understand at all” (Gadamer, 2004:269). Architects have to anticipate that the progress of time may bring out new aspects of the designed objects. Architectural artifacts should be perhaps designed with some openness, so as to provide space for a fruitful dialogue with the future.

Using Gadamer’s terminology, the creation of buildings can be considered as “the fusion of horizons” i.e., even though the act of making takes place in the present, it is determined by the horizon of the past and the horizon of the future possibilities.131

---

131 See the discussion of the relationships among lifeworld, dwelling and building in section 3.2.2.
Phenomenological hermeneutics and conservatism

The opponents of Gadamerian hermeneutics often accuse it of being intrinsically conservative. One of the major criticisms has been formulated by Jürgen Habermas, who argued that seeing the tradition as a basis for understanding “shifts the balance between authority and reason” (Habermas, 1977: 268). Habermas also pointed out that the background consensus of established traditions can be in fact a forced consensus, a result of pseudo-communication. In other words, the concept of “tradition” leads one to ignore the dimension of ideology and power relationships (e.g., the influence that the domineering groups within a tradition have over the development of social justice).

According to Habermas, Gadamer ignores the possible necessity of criticizing the tradition and underestimates the role of a critical reflection. Habermas argues that if we lose a distance from the tradition, we lose an ability to rationally criticize the powerful, ideological forces in the society that perpetuate various forms of domination (e.g., nationalism, colonialism, imperialism, etc.). Consequently, he searches for a “distanciation” (critical distancing, setting reflectively aloof) from tradition and the subjectively-involved conditions that would make space for critical reflection.

Gadamer’s emphasis on tradition may indeed have a conservative resonance. Nevertheless, Gadamer himself resolutely protested against labeling hermeneutics conservative.

It is a grave misunderstanding to assume that emphasis on the essential factor of tradition which enters into all understanding implies an uncritical acceptance of tradition and sociopolitical conservatism [...] In truth the confrontation of our historic tradition is always a critical challenge of the tradition. (Gadamer, 1979:108)

Moreover, tradition—as viewed by hermeneutics—does not present an obstacle to a critical reason. As Madison (2000) argues, hermeneutics could be rightly labeled as conservative if it held that all values are tradition-

132 In 1967, two years after the second edition of Gadamer’s Truth and Method appeared, Habermas launched a critique in Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften. Representing a critical theory perspective, Habermas was particularly attentive towards sections of Truth and Method, discussing the rehabilitation of prejudice, authority, and tradition. Habermas’ attack, Gadamer’s response, and the following debate are collected in volume entitled Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik (Frankfurt, 1971). It is beyond the scope of this work to introduce this entire debate, so we will concentrate only on selected aspects.
dependent (rejecting universality of certain values).\textsuperscript{133} The belief in the “universality” of values is important, because by only appealing to values that are not relative to the tradition to which we belong are we able to elaborate a critique of this tradition.\textsuperscript{134}

Furthermore, Gadamer’s emphasis on tradition does not imply the incessant repetition of the same. “Tradition” in hermeneutic understanding is a “living” tradition, always mediated by our situatedness in a specific social and historical context. In other words, the same tradition should be always understood in a different way. What is commonly referred to as “traditional” (e.g., traditional societies, traditional building) and is characterized by a denial of any change ceases to represent tradition in a hermeneutic sense.

Considering the relational nature of human understanding, a total rejection of tradition is utopic. But the impossibility of a total critique does not imply that there are things that cannot be criticized. According to Gadamer, “the happening of tradition” or a fusion of horizons, admits to a kind of hermeneutic self-reflection on the part of language in dialogue with the authority of tradition.

Gadamer asserts that tradition, far from being something that happens to us, is something in which we participate as active agents. The preservation and continuation of tradition is the product of people affirming, embracing and cultivating what they inherit. In Gadamer’s view, the opportunity for questioning tradition appears when our participation in tradition is confronted by our interactions with others. In our encounters with other horizons, our prejudices are put at risk; we have an opportunity to question them. As Gadamer states,

Every encounter with others […] means the ‘suspension’ of one’s own prejudices, whether this involves another person through whom one learns one’s own nature and limits, or an encounter with a work of art […] or a text: always something more is demanded than to

\textsuperscript{133} The belief in universality of certain values is one of the basic beliefs of the Enlightenment or an enlightened reason.

\textsuperscript{134} As Madison (2000) points out, it is clear that Gadamer does believe in the universality (the unquestionability) of certain values. Particularly, the greatest Enlightenment value of all: freedom.

“[T]here is no higher principle of reason than that of freedom. […] No higher principle is thinkable than that of the freedom of all [note the word “all”] and we understand actual history from the perspective of this principle: as the ever-to-be-renewed and the never-ending struggle for this freedom” (Gadamer, Philosophy in the Age of Science, quoted in: Madison, 2000).

And also: “The principle of freedom is unimpeachable and irrevoable. It is no longer possible for anyone still to affirm the unfreedom of humanity. The principle that all are free never again can be shaken” (Gadamer, Philosophy in the Age of Science, quoted in: Madison, 2000).
“understand the other,” that is to seek and acknowledge the immanent coherence contained within the meaning-claim of the other. A further invitation is always implied. Like an infinite idea, what is also implied is a transcendental demand for coherence in which the ideal of truth is located. But this requires a readiness to recognize the other as potentially right and to let him or it prevail against me. (Gadamer 1979:108)

Although we cannot escape our prejudgements, in the dialogical interaction with other horizons we are given an opportunity for understanding ourselves—our prejudgements, our tradition—as mistaken. What follows, if our horizon is based on domination/force, it is not a fixed relation to domination/force. There is a possibility that we will apprehend this relation as such and decide to transform our prejudices. But this apprehension can only come about through a dialogical interaction with other horizons, in leaving the comfort of coherence to the unfamiliar ground of others, a ground requiring interpretive understanding.135

Referring to the accusation that tradition implies an unreflective obedience to authority, Gadamer emphasizes that the true authority need not be authoritarian. It distinguishes itself from a false authority (acquired by force) through recognition (Anerkennung). The act of recognition includes reflection. In his view, authority cannot be bestowed, but is acquired.

Based on the Enlightenment conception of reason and freedom, the concept of authority could be viewed as diametrically opposed to reason and freedom: to be in fact, blind obedience. […] But this is not the essence of authority. Admittedly, it is primarily persons that have

---

135 Habermas in this context contends, however, that Gadamer’s hermeneutics does not anticipate the possibility of pseudocommunication, i.e., communication in which the partners are not able to identify relations of domination because the communication coheres. In his view, politically, Gadamer’s hermeneutics cannot account for the influence of ideology.

Speaking more specifically, Habermas sees the “linguistic infrastructure” of a society only as a part of a complex system, constituted also by the “constraint of reality”—reflected, for example, in the repressive power relationships. The constraints of reality are not only an object of interpretation, they affect the very language in which we interpret the world. What follows, Habermas argues, is that “Social actions can be comprehended only in an objective framework that is constituted conjointly by language, labor and domination” (Habermas, 1977: 273).

Responding to Habermas’ criticisms, Gadamer argues that the contrast between a linguistic tradition and the material conditions of domination and control are not justified. In Gadamer’s view, tradition itself incorporates extra-linguistic, material forces as a part of self-understanding. These forces (for instance hierarchical power structures) always influence the self-understanding of a culture and therefore they remain an inextricable part of tradition itself. What follows is that they are accessible to hermeneutic analysis.
authority; but the authority of persons is ultimately based not on the
subjection and abdication of reason but on the act of acknowledgement
and knowledge. […] This is connected with the fact that authority
cannot actually be bestowed but is earned, and must be earned if
someone is to lay claim to it. It rests on acknowledgement and hence
on an act of reason itself. (Gadamer, 2004: 281)

Gadamer observes that the Enlightenment “prejudice against all
prejudices” is in fact a prejudice against “authority,” a core characteristics of
modern rationalism. Rationalists maintain that in order to attain “true
knowledge” it is necessary to get rid of all inherited beliefs and opinions (the
“authority of tradition”). According to Gadamer, equaling authority with
blind obedience and domination (as Enlightenment rationalism does) is
arbitrary.

If the prestige of authority displaces one’s own judgement, then
authority is in fact a source of prejudices. But this does not preclude its
being a source of truth, and that is what the Enlightenment failed to
see when it denigrated all authority. (Gadamer, 2004:280)

Gadamer stresses that hermeneutics has a capacity of to disclose
prejudices, and what follows is to overcome society’s mistaken self-
understanding. He argues that hermeneutics not only is suitable to the task of
critical reflection, but specifically suited to it, with its ability to reveal
complexities in meaning and to disclose different dimensions of a text and
the tradition itself.136 Specific structures are always being approached from
different points of view, different historical perspectives. Accordingly,
prejudices, values, and meanings, obscured from one perspective, may be
illuminated from another. Referring to the “productivity of temporal
distance” Gadamer emphasizes that presuppositions, which are hidden at one
point in time (e.g., ideological assumptions), may be revealed with the
transformation in perspective provided by historical experience.

Yet, contrary to Habermas, Gadamer sees the capacity of critical
reflection not as the result of an appeal to a supra-historical concept of
reason. The capacity to see through prejudices is itself a prejudiced insight
i.e., an insight that reveals certain possibilities of social or individual self-

136 In a similar tone, Ricoeur (1981) asserts that “The power of the text to open a dimension of
reality implies in principle a recourse against any given reality and thereby the possibility of a
critique of the real” (Ricoeur, 1981:93).
understanding, at the same time obscuring others. In other words, reflection itself is shaped by the tradition. Paul Ricoeur (1981) shares this understanding, addressing the position of Habermas:

For in the end, hermeneuts will say, from where you speak when you appeal to Selbstreflexion? […] It is indeed from the basis of a tradition that you speak. This tradition is not perhaps the same as Gadamer’s; it is perhaps that of the Aufklärung […] But it is a tradition nonetheless, the tradition of emancipation rather than that of recollection. Critique is also a tradition. (Ricoeur, 1981:99)

Ricoeur’s intervention in the Gadamer-Habermas debate is an attempt to overcome the antinomy between “truth” and “method,” between understanding and explanation. Staying within the hermeneutic tradition, Ricoeur nevertheless sees the relevance of Habermas’ critique of ideology. Yet, he emphasizes that the reawakening of communicative action may only succeed if grounded on the interpretation of cultural heritage:

The task of the hermeneutics of tradition is to remind the critique of ideology that man can project his emancipation and anticipate an unlimited and unconstrained communication only on the basis of the creative reinterpretation of cultural heritage. (Ricoeur, 1981:97)

In this context, Ricoeur asserts that “critique can be neither the first instance not the last.” Distortions in traditions cannot be criticized without proposing a real alternative. This alternative cannot be just a regulatory idea (i.e., an ideal of communication); it should be concretized, situated in a specific context. In this process of exemplification, what is essential is “our capacity to overcome cultural distance in the interpretation of works received from the past” (Ricoeur, 1981:97).

Summing up, the hermeneutical position takes a more positive and sanguine stance towards tradition, while the critical theory views tradition with a great dose of suspicion, as a distorted expression of communication under unacknowledged conditions of violence. In Ricoeur’s view “the most formidable difference between the hermeneutical consciousness and the critical consciousness” is that

---

137 Ricoeur’s argument is presented in his essay “Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology,” in Ricoeur, 1981:63-100.

128
The first [...] is turned towards a consensus which precedes us and, in this sense, which exists; the second anticipates a future freedom in the form of a regulative idea which is not a reality but an ideal, the ideal of unrestricted and unconstrained communication. (Ricoeur, 1981:99)

The two views of tradition imply different views/roles of the researcher. In Habermas’ position, it seems to be presumed that the inquirer is able to transcend the possible ideological influences, evaluate objectively whether a given structure is a form of domination, and propose a better direction.

In Gadamer’s perspective, an emphasis put on the collective knowledge instead. It is believed that society itself, for example, in dialogue with other traditions, can determine which values/institutions are worthwhile to preserve. The researcher is here as an observer and interpreter, rather than an agent introducing change. As Ricoeur (1981) points out,

The gesture of hermeneutics is a humble one of acknowledging the historical conditions to which all human understanding is subsumed in the reign of finitude; that of the critique of ideology is a proud gesture of defiance directed against the distortions of human communication. (Ricoeur, 1981:87)

Referring to architecture, Gadamer’s view implies a lesser authority for architects; the architect is to interpret the existing practices, enter into discourse with traditions, and eventually propose evolutionary change. Following Habermas’ perspective, the architect should treat the existing practices with a large dose of suspicion and propose new (if necessary even revolutionary) solutions. The danger of the latter position is that architects, in the attempt to overcome forms of domination identified within tradition, may in fact neglect users’ perspectives and impose on people arbitrary solutions, as has happened, for example, in the case of modern functionalism. As Kostoff observes, architectural revolutions may require the redesign of humanity (Kostoff, 1989, in: Stevens, 1998:14).

The discussion of the concept of interpretation will be continued in section 5.1 with a reference to the phenomenological view of practice. In this context, the debate will be extended with the concepts of phronesis and rhetoric, and more specific implications regarding architectural practice will be drawn.

---

138 See the discussion of modern functionalism in section 2.2.1.
3.3 TOWARDS ARCHITECTURE: ART, ETHICS, AND SPACE

The aim of this section is to relate the previously discussed concepts of phenomenology (experience, lifeworld, interpretation) more specifically to architectural discourse, with a focus on the possible implications for the user involvement debate. The writings of Heidegger and Gadamer will be the primary source of references here.139

3.3.1 Phenomenological understanding of art and modern aesthetics

The understanding of art has direct implications for both conceptualizations of architecture and the position of architect and user in a design process. As Stevens (1998) argues, the currently dominating concept of art is one of the major reasons for architecture’s lack of interest in the social and cultural context of design.

Since the time of the ancient Greeks, the word \textit{aesthetics} has referred to sensations (stimulation from one or more of the five bodily senses). Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten appropriated this word in a different way. He defined “aesthetics” as a science of the perceptions, thus, “things known are to be known by the superior faculty as the object of logic; things perceived are to be known by the inferior faculty as the objects of science of perception or aesthetics” (Baumgarten, 1735, quoted in Vesely, 2004:372).

More specifically, Baumgarten’s aesthetics focused on the study of good and bad “taste,” linking good taste with beauty. In his \textit{Metaphysic} (1739), § 451, Baumgarten defines taste, in its wider meaning, as the ability to judge according to the senses, instead of according to the intellect. In his view, a judgment of taste is based on feelings of pleasure or displeasure. A science of aesthetics is for Baumgarten is a deduction of the principles of artistic or natural beauty from individual “taste.”140 Baumgarten generated philosophical debate around the meaning of aesthetics.141

---


140 In the essay “Six Basic Developments in the History of Aesthetics” (1961), Heidegger explains that the term “aesthetics” was developed similarly to the terms “logic” and “ethics” in that each term denotes a kind of knowledge, or \textit{episteme}, related to human behaviour and its...
Kant, in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790), supported Baumgarten’s idea and employed the word *aesthetic* to denote the judgment of “taste” or the estimation of the beautiful.142

In Kant’s view an aesthetic judgment is subjective in that it relates to the internal feeling of pleasure or displeasure and not to any qualities in an external object. Taste does not have here any significance as knowledge.143

In taste nothing is known of the objects judged to be beautiful, but it is stated only that there is a feeling of pleasure connected with them [...] in the subjective consciousness. (Gadamer, 2004:38).

According to Kant, the fact that an object serves some purpose limits the aesthetic pleasure it can give. The real beauty therefore precludes the idea of purpose. Free beauty of nature and—in the sphere of art—ornament, are considered as “the beauty proper,” for these are “beautiful in themselves.” Whenever a conceptual element is brought in—for instance, in the case of representational art—we are dealing with “dependent beauty,” an inferior form of beauty.

The concept of genius has a significant place in Kant’s theory. Genius “discovers” something that cannot be found through learning, methodological work, etc.144 Genius *invents* aesthetic ideas. For Kant, art is the art of genius.

---

142 Kant (1790) was primarily concerned not with characteristics of good and bad taste (as Baumgarten), but with the conditions of justification of aesthetic claims—an *a priori* element which would constitute the validity of aesthetic judgments.

“Clearly, the validity of an aesthetic judgement cannot be derived and proved from a universal principle. [...] Good taste will never really attain empirical universality, and thus appealing to the prevailing taste misses the real nature of taste. [...] On the other hand, our outline of the history of the concept of taste has shown clearly enough that particular preferences are not what decides; but in the case of an aesthetic judgement, a supra-empirical norm is operative” (Gadamer, 2004:38).

This supra-empirical norm, the principle which Kant discovers in aesthetic judgement, is that the feeling of pleasure connected with a beautiful object is grounded on the fact that the representation of the object is suited to our faculty of knowledge. “This suitedness to the subject is in principle the same for all—i.e., it is universally communicable and thus grounds the claim that the judgement of taste possesses universal validity” (Gadamer, 2004:38).

143 As a consequence, Kant’s reflection does not permit a philosophical aesthetics in a sense of philosophy of art (it only justifies the claim to aesthetic judgement).

144 Kant narrows the concept of genius to artistic creation; in his view, only the work of art is immanently so determined that it can be created exclusively by genius.
This means that for artistic beauty, there is no other principle of judgement than the feeling of pleasure it gives the cultivated observer.¹⁴⁵

Phenomenologists, most notably Heidegger and Gadamer, criticize the radical subjectivization of modern aesthetics founded on the views of Baumgarten and Kant.¹⁴⁶

In the essay “Six Basic Developments in the History of Aesthetics” (1961), Heidegger argues that even though the word “aesthetics” was used in the 18th century for the first time with the reference to a discipline of knowledge, meditations on art and beauty in Western thinking began much earlier. The Greeks never developed aesthetics in a sense of systematic and critical reflection on art, but it does not mean that they had no concepts about art. “On the contrary, they had such an originally mature and luminous knowledge, such a passion for knowledge, that in their luminous state of knowing they had no need of ‘aesthetics’” (Heidegger, 1979:95). Greek concepts set the boundaries for most of the further inquiry into art. Nevertheless, modern aesthetics cannot be seen as a continuation of that essential discourse. According to Heidegger, it is much too narrow in its scope.

Most importantly, the confluence of beauty and truth is concealed in modern aesthetics. Hegel in his Lectures on Aesthetics (1835), not surprisingly depicted by Heidegger as “the most comprehensive reflection on the nature of art that the West possesses” (Heidegger, 1971:79), points at this lost relationship:

Art no longer counts for us as the highest manner in which truth obtains existence for itself. One may well hope that art will continue to advance and perfect itself, but its form has ceased to be the highest need of the spirit.

In all these relationships art is and remains for us, on the side of its highest vocation, something past. (Hegel, in: Heidegger, 1971:80)

---

¹⁴⁵ In Kant’s doctrine, the feeling of pleasure provided by the work of art is based on “its suitability to promote the feeling of freedom in the play of our cognitive faculties” (Gadamer, 2004:48).

¹⁴⁶ The phenomenological critique is not the first one. Already Hegel (1835) in his Lectures on Aesthetics, criticized the limited scope of modern aesthetics:

“It came by its origins as a science, or rather something to start with purported to be a branch of philosophy, during the period of the school of Wolff, in other words, when the works of art were regarded in Germany with reference to the feelings they were calculated to evoke, as, for example, the feelings of pleasure, admiration, fear, pity, and so forth. […] The science here referred to does not investigate beauty in its general signification, but the beauty of art pure and simple” (Hegel, 1964:382).
The very nature of art is for Heidegger poetry.\textsuperscript{147} Heidegger’s understanding is grounded in the Greek concept of \textit{poiesis}.

Plato in his \textit{Symposium} points out \textit{poiesis} as the common ground of every kind of artistic creation:

You will agree that there is more than one kind of poetry (\textit{poiesis}) in the true sense of the word—that is to say, calling something into existence that was not here before, so that every kind of artistic creation is poetry, and every artist is a poet. (Plato, 1978:557)

What is important, in the Greek understanding, is that \textit{poiesis} referred to a way of making in which the result preserved continuity with the conditions of its origin, thus “what characterizes a way of making as poetic is the situatedness of the results in the communicative space of culture” (Vesely, 2004:387). \textit{Poiesis} may be thus understood as an act of creation essentially grounded in the lifeworld. Such a way of thinking stands in clear contrast with the autonomous approach of modern aesthetics (this approach is also undermining a great part of architectural theory).

In this context, Heidegger asks with Hölderlin’s words, “what are poets for in a destitute time?” (Heidegger, 1971:91). What is the role of art in our modern era, the era of technology, in which everything, including man himself, becomes a “standing reserve,” i.e., material for a process of self-assertive production? In this “dark time,” the time in which man “has ever forgotten that he has forgotten the essence of being,” the task of art is to help us to see the true possibilities of our existence, to situate ourselves in regard to culture, tradition, environment; in other worlds, to dwell, for “dwelling occurs only when poetry comes to pass and is present” (Heidegger, 1971:227). These words also relate to the role of architecture and the task of architects; as Heidegger emphasizes in “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” (1951), dwelling can have its foundation in the activity of building.

Christian Norberg-Schulz, referring to Heidegger, argues that the role of architecture is to assist us in establishing a meaningful relation with the world, to help us to interpret and understand the world.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{147} Poetry in its essence is the founding of truth, not “aimless imagining of whimsicalities and a flight of mere notions and fancies into the realm of the unreal” (Heidegger, 1971:72), or as it is for Baumgarten, “a perfect sensate discourse” conformed by a body of rules (Baumgarten, 1735, in: Vesely, 2004:372). Gadamer (1960) follows Heidegger in his understanding of art.

\textsuperscript{148} According to Norberg-Schulz, in an epoch of architecture which often fails to fulfill the essential human needs, phenomenology comes to our rescue. “Conceptualizing architecture as a
The meaning of a work of architecture […] consists in its gathering the world in a general typical sense, in a local particular sense, in a temporal historical sense, and, finally, as something, that is, as the figural manifestation of a mode of dwelling between earth and sky. A work of architecture does not exist in a vacuum, but in the world of things and human beings, and reveals this world as what it is.’
(Norberg-Schulz, 1985:30)

In the phenomenological perspective, art has a very significant role. “The fact that through a work of art a truth is experienced that we cannot attain in any other way constitutes the philosophic importance of art” (Gadamer, 2004:xxi). Phenomenology stays here in opposition to modern aesthetics, which follows Kant and denies aesthetic judgments any significance as knowledge. This reduces the dimension of “truth” in art to a subjective principle.

What kind of truth is experienced in art? How can we do justice to the truth of aesthetic experience and overcome the subjectivization of modern aesthetics? Gadamer argues that the experience of art contains a claim to truth that is different from the rational, conceptual model of science, but not inferior to it. In contrast to the modern aesthetics, which considers Erlebnis (individual experience) as the model of aesthetic experience, Gadamer conceptualizes the experience of art as Erfahrung.149 Such a view could be already identified in Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics, where “the truth that lies in every aesthetic experience is recognized and at the same time mediated with historical consciousness” (Gadamer, 2004:84). In this perspective, aesthetics becomes “a history of worldviews—i.e., history of truth, as it is manifested in the mirror of art’ (Gadamer, 2004:84).

Art connects the sphere of individual experience with the larger sphere of common meanings (the lifeworld, sensus communis150), thus it provides grounds for social interactions. Accordingly, art may provide an access to the lifeworld of users of architecture. It may afford a profound account of being-in-the-world of the individuals, situating their feedback in its cultural context.

Art also has a transformative role. It helps individuals to identify and develop their true possibilities, to adopt a more reflective and resolute stance towards their lives. As Gadamer (1950) remarks, “the significance of the art also depends on the fact that it speaks to us, that it confronts man with

---

149 See the discussion of two modes of experience (Erlebnis, Erfahrung) in section 3.3.1.
150 See the discussion of rhetoric in section 3.3.3.
himself in his morally determined existence” (Gadamer, 2004:45). The transformative dimension of the architectural experience is an important aspect of the responsibility of the architect.

The realm of art is understood more widely in phenomenology than in modern aesthetics.151 Furthermore, different forms of art are considered as central, “namely all those whose own content points beyond them to the whole of a context determined by them and for them” (Gadamer, 2004:149). In other words, it is not the forms of art embodying the ideal of “independent beauty” that have primary significance, but those which emerge from and relate back to the lifeworld. According to Gadamer, “the greatest and most distinguished of these forms is architecture” (Gadamer, 2004:149). Gadamer’s remarks on architecture deserve to be quoted here at some length.

A work of architecture extends beyond itself in two ways. It is as much determined by the aim it is to serve as by the place it is to take up in a total spatial context. Every architect has to consider both these things. His plan is determined by the fact that the building has to serve a particular way of life and adapt itself to particular architectural circumstances. We call a successful building a “happy solution,” and mean by this both that it perfectly fulfills its purpose and that its construction has added something new to the spatial dimension of the landscape. Through this dual ordering the building presents a true increase of being: it is a work of art. (Gadamer, 2004:149)

Following Gadamer, one can distinguish different dimensions of architect’s responsibility.152 The direct responsibility towards the user (where building “serves a particular way of life”) is supplemented by the responsibility towards the place (the adaptation to a specific architectural context). Furthermore, a successful building adds something valuable to its surroundings; it enriches them, brings in new, significant meanings to the lifeworld to which it belongs, and at the same time preserving this lifeworld. Thus, an architectural practice respecting the perspective of the user is almost always a practice responding to the given cultural conditions. Gadamer explains further what makes a building a work of art:

151 As it was indicated before, poiesis is the common ground of every kind of artistic creation (Heidegger, 1971).

152 This suggests a close relation between ethics and the philosophy of art in the phenomenological framework. See section 3.3.2.
A building is not a work of art if it stands just anywhere, as a blot on the landscape, but only if it represents the solution of an “architectural problem.” Aesthetics acknowledges only those works of art that are in some way worth thinking about and call them “architectural monuments.” If a building is a work of art, then it is not only the artistic solution to a building problem posed by the contexts of purpose and life to which it originally belongs, but somehow preserves them, so that they are visibly present even though the building’s present appearance is completely alienated from its original purpose. Something in it points back to the original. (Gadamer, 2004:149)

Where the original intention becomes unrecognizable (destroyed by subsequent alterations, etc.) the building becomes incomprehensible. The original purpose of the building, through which it belongs to the lifeworld, cannot be separated from the building without destroying some of its reality. A building, thus, is never only a work of art. If it has become barely an object of aesthetic appraisal, “then it has merely a shadowy reality and lives a disorted life only in the degenerate form of a tourist attraction or a subject for photography” (Gadamer, 2004:150).

On numerous occasions, emphasizing the importance of tradition, Gadamer argues for the need of its critical reappraisal from today’s perspective. This is also valid for architecture:

[…] the presence of great architectural monuments of the past among the buildings erected by the modern word of commerce poses the task of integrating past and present. […] Even if historically-minded ages try to reconstruct the architecture of an earlier age, they cannot turn back the wheel of history, but must mediate in a new and better way between the past and the present. (Gadamer, 2004:150)

Highlighting the significance of tradition and lifeworld in the creation of architecture, Gadamer criticizes an unreflective reproduction of historical forms.
3.3.2 Searching for an ethical basis of architecture

Karsten Harries (1983) continues a critique of modern aesthetics from a phenomenological perspective, referring specifically to architecture. The point of departure of his criticism is the problem of arbitrariness in contemporary architecture. Harries sees the “possibility of otherwiseness” as a characteristic linking diverse, contemporary architectural movements (Harries, 1983, in: Seamon (ed.), 1993:43). The “aesthetic approach” dictated by the concepts of modern aesthetics is to be blamed for the problem. Its main consequence is a broken relation between architecture and the lifeworld.

The aesthetic approach—which for more than two centuries has dominated both reflection about art and artistic practice—has lead to an architecture of decorated sheds. Given such an approach, the proper focus of aesthetic concern is in a deep sense never more than just decoration and shed cannot but strike us as arbitrary, no matter how much the decoration may present itself to us as a self-justifying aesthetic presence—as arbitrary as the relation of a strong painting to the wall on which it happens to hang. The problem of arbitrariness in architecture has one root in our aesthetic approach; the other lies in our inability to view buildings apart from any consideration of dwelling, just as sources of aesthetic delight. There can thus be no merely aesthetic answer to this problem. (Harries, 1983, in: Seamon (ed.), 1993:43-44)

Harries admits that the concept of beauty represented by modern aesthetics is very limited; an important ethical dimension has been lost. He seeks a more profound basis for architectural design and finds it in phenomenology, particularly in Heidegger’s ideas. In a phenomenological framework, there is no need of opposing ethical and aesthetic concerns. On the contrary, the concept of art and possible ethics are dimensions of the same phenomenon. A central issue for both is the reference to the ontological conditions of our being-in-the-world.

---

153 As in the Greek thought, where the beauty and the good were inseparable, thus the dichotomy between the ethical and aesthetic meaning of representation did not exist.
154 Dalibor Vesely (2004) shares this position speaking about “emancipatory” and “participatory” modes of representation in art and architecture. The “emancipatory” mode of representation is the arbitrary, autonomous ideal of contemporary aesthetics. The “participatory” mode of representation refers to the Greek view of art; it is essentially grounded in the lifeworld.
It may be argued that even though Heidegger did not develop an explicit ethics, he clearly indicates a way of grounding ethical reflection in ontology. In “Letter on Humanism” (1947), referring to the Greek concept of *ethos*, Heidegger indicates the relation between the lifeworld (“the abode of man”) and the authenticity of human existence.

A saying of Heraclitus which consists of only three words says something so simply that from it the essence of the *ethos* immediately comes to light. The saying of Heraclitus (frag. 119) goes: *ethos antropoi daimon*. This is usually translated, ‘A man’s character is his daimon.’ This translation thinks in a modern way, not a Greek one. *Ethos* means abode, dwelling place. The word names the open region in which man dwells. […] The abode of man contains and preserves the advent of what belongs to man in his essence. According to Heraclitus’ phrase this is *daimon*, the god. The fragment says: Man dwells, insofar as he is a man, in the nearness of god. (Heidegger, 1977:233)

In Heidegger’s perspective, ethical reflection seems to be inseparable from the reflection on the conditions of human life (on the “essence” of our being-in-the-world). Moral concerns are thus an essential part of any project of understanding human existence.

If the name ‘ethics’, in keeping with the basic meaning of the word *ethos*, should now say that ‘ethics' ponders the abode of man, then that thinking which thinks the truth of Being as the primordial element of man […] is in itself the original ethics. (Heidegger, 1977:235)

By pointing at the relation between the lifeworld, our being-in-the-world, and possible ethics Heidegger indicates a way of grounding ethical reflection. This approach in many aspects coincides with Husserl’s position. Steinbock, (1995) discussing Husserl’s concept of lifeworld,

---

138 Similarly, Madison (2001) emphasizes referring to the principle of freedom,

“The ‘basis’ for this most sacred rights is phenomenological (not metaphysical); it derives from what is […] the most salient characteristic of ‘man’, the fact that he, and he alone (as far as we know), is the ‘speaking animal’, the *zoon logon ekon*, as Isocrates and the ancient Greek rhetors pointed out” (Madison, 2001:250).

In other words, the essence of human rights is hermeneutical, not metaphysical. Rights are posited, not discovered in nature. “People demand basic rights, because without them it is simply not possible to lead a properly human life” (Madison, 2001:252). In this perspective, “value” is a “mirror image” of our way of being.
addresses the question of normativity. He argues that, while in the phenomenological perspective norms are not context-independent, they are not for this reason simply relative or arbitrary. Norms are an essential dimension of the lifeworld. They are generated “in and through living as optimal for that life” (Steinbock, 1995:157).

In Husserl’s view, what is “normal” is not the usual or the average, but what is optimal and concordant. That which is average and usual can be at the same time “abnormal,” e.g., the majority of instances could not constitute a “normal” society because it may not be optimal in a given context. Husserl’s understanding of “optimality” is specific to action and context; in this it may be related to the concept of phronesis.156 In one of his manuscripts, Husserl characterizes the “tendency toward the optimum” as “the principle of selection of practical possibilities” (Steinbock, 1995:149).

Concordance, in Husserl’s view, is “the capacity to take up the optimal and to repeat it in an internally coherent manner” (Steinbock, 1995:158). It may be thus characterized as reappropriation, the integration of that what is “optimal” into a given way of life. As a consequence, that what is optimal acquires a “genetic density” and, as a “norm,” begins to influence the original context. As Steinbock expresses it, “on the one hand, the optimal emerges in and through its relation to an experiencing being, and on the other, normal experience prefers the optimal and thus tends toward it” (Steinbock, 1995:149).

In this context, Steinbock discusses the concept of “terrain,” a sub-theme of Husserl’s view of the lifeworld. Terrain may be defined as a normatively significant environing-world, “the typically familiar milieu, affective in experience and constituted privileged through the genetic density of the optimal” (Steinbock, 1995:162). It is the “familiar” (vertraut) ground, the one we are accustomed to (gewöhnt). Yet one has to be careful not to confuse “familiar everydayness” with the “average everydayness,” for “familiar” in the first instance refers to the “optimal.”

As Steinbock asserts, “the familiar terrain is privileged not merely because we prefer it for some reason or by chance; rather we actually carry with us the structure of our terrain in the structure of our lived-bodies […] and in our practices” (Steinbock, 1995:164). The familiarity of “terrain” is the prereflective familiarity of the norms, where norms are unique to specific groups of individuals. It refers not primarily to the physical surroundings, but

---

156 See the discussion of the concept of phronesis in section 5.1.
to the typical practices, lifestyles, functions, etc. Yet the physical surroundings (the environing-world, Umwelt) carry a normative significance in a terrain. Accordingly, “there is no terrain in itself” (Steinbock, 1995: 165). Terrain can not be simply relocated, since it is the very relation between living beings and their environing-world.

What is particularly relevant for architecture is that providing an individual or a group a location is not a sufficient basis to constitute a terrain as a familiar milieu. An inability to constitute a terrain may be interpreted as an inability to sustain norms in a given setting. Heidegger’s (1951) statement that the task of architecture is not to satisfy a “hunger” of houses, but rather to provide a basis for dwelling, may be understood in this perspective.

A new location may be unfamiliar to such an extent that it cannot be integrated into a new terrain. In this case, an individual or a group will have a new, unfamiliar environing-world, but not a new terrain. Yet, in the cases where the encountered objects are familiar and the conditions normatively significant, a new environing-world may become a terrain. An attempt to recreate a terrain may be illustrated on the example of culturally distinctive immigrant districts within today’s global cities.

This discussion points at a way of grounding ethical reflection in architecture.

Christian Norberg-Schulz, in his Existence, Space and Architecture (1971), followed this direction, arguing that the structure of architectural space should reflect our existential space, the way of our being-in-the-world. Thorough consideration of users’ lifeworld, their ways of being, and their perspectives should provide a point of departure for architectural discourse and design choices.

Karsten Harries’ search for a non-arbitrary architecture appears in this light to be a search for ethical foundations in the architectural discourse. It is also a search for a more socially and culturally grounded concept of art, as the categories of modern aesthetics do not address the lifeworld context of this concept.

According to Harries, sole tradition is not enough to provide convincing basis of architectural practice. We have become too critical to repeat what has

---

157 In this context, Steinbock observes that “a hunting dog chasing down game may be said to share the same terrain as a hunter. Nevertheless, the terrain of the two would be different from a hiker on a walk through the same landscape” (Steinbock, 1995:164).
158 See the discussion of Heidegger’s concept of dwelling, section 3.2.2.
159 Speaking more accurately, with a change of a location, the terrain does not necessarily change; it is not simply left behind since it “attaches to the lived body.” When we take up residence elsewhere, we carry our terrain with us. In some conditions it may be sustained, while in other conditions it gets lost (Steinbock, 1995:165-166).
long been done, just because it is a part of tradition. Today, the return to the origins is not as much a turn to the past as a turn to the essential, a rethinking of our place in the world, an attempt to renew the validity of our objectives.

Harries argues that the problem of arbitrariness in architecture is essentially a hermeneutical problem. It may be solved only to the extent that architects make an effort of understanding what human existence is to be. The ethical function of architecture may be understood to have as its task “to help to articulate common ethos” (Harries, 1997:4), or—in Giedion’s words—“the interpretation of the way of life valid for our period” (Giedion, 1974: xxxiii).

The ethical force of architecture appears to be foremost related to its role in influencing the lifeworld and individual human beings. Behind the decision to build, there can be identified speculations on the way we should live. Architectural concerns are the central concerns of human dignity and being in the world—the way of being, the good way of being—the same motivating choice as ethics’ questions (Wasserman et al., 2000:34).

Addressing criticisms

Jeremy Till (2009) asks on what basis the design decisions should be made in today’s conditions. For him, the answer has to come from the understanding of “the other,” i.e., the individuals affected by the architectural choices. In this assumption, Till comes close to phenomenology, which is grounding the ethical reflection in ethos—the conditions of human life, the “essence” of our being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1947). Considering this, it may appear surprising that Till’s criticism is directed at phenomenology.

Till essentially criticizes ethical positions where “the divergent voices of the other are […] subsumed under a uniform moral code” (Till, 2009:184), i.e., local communities of individuals are conceptualized as situated in a common good. Among these standpoints, he places phenomenology along with Aristotelian approaches, as represented by Alasdair Macintyre. Following John Caputo, Till describes these approaches as forms of “primordial, originary ethics” (Till, 2009:184). Although the two positions

\[^{160}\] Yet, such a view of architecture is not common in the recent architectural discourse, which in its large part rather pragmatically looks for opportunities within the global market and exploits these. See, for example, the discussion of “postcriticality” and the position of Koolhaas in section 2.2.2.

\[^{161}\] Criticizing the search for a “common good,” and emphasizing that “the flux of the contemporary world presents a disturbing vision of irreconcilable difference, and this […] must be amoral insomuch as no shared vision can be found” (Till, 2009:185), Till apparently represents here a constructivist perspective.
differ in many issues, they “agree in all the essentials: the great beginnings in the Greeks, the terrible decline in modernity, the hope in a new beginning, nostalgia, anti-modernism” (Caputo, in: Till, 2009:184).

In Till’s view, the major problem with phenomenology and other forms of “primordial ethics” is the assumption that a closed, static system exists in which social norms become stable and coherent. In this context, he assigns the conviction that “an ethical life can be found only in a state of removal from the everyday, with dreams of ‘another and better world’” (Till, 2009:185) to phenomenology. As he emphasizes, today’s ethics should take into account the diversity of contemporary societies and negotiate within it (Till, 2009:184).

No community can be immured from interactions with a changing environment, nor can the heterogeneity of its members be altogether eradicated and their potential conflicts altogether prevented. Where difference continuously emerges it must be either continuously negotiated or continuously suppressed, the latter always at somebody’s cost and often enough, it appears in the long run, at considerable communal cost. (Herrnstein Smith, in: Till, 2009:184)

Yet, looking closer at phenomenology, it is far from being clear that it implies the ethical solutions outside the realities of the everyday world. Contrary to Till’s observations, it is also far from “imposing an abstract set of codes from without” and it does not have any “pretentions to absolute rightness” (Till, 2009:186). As it has been already discussed,162 phenomenology encourages responsiveness to specific conditions and contexts. Although it believes in the common background of the social, historical, and cultural meanings, it acknowledges that diverse perspectives and experiences exist in any situation.

It is likely that Till’s argument is based on a misinterpretation of phenomenology. The notion of “primordial, originary ethics” used by Till in relation to phenomenology most likely refers to Heidegger’s statement from the “Letter on Humanism” (1947), “thinking which thinks the truth of Being as the primordial element of man […] is in itself the original ethics” (Heidegger, 1977:235). The expression “the truth of being” is not referring here to any concrete, fixed set of features, but rather to a more general

---

162 See the discussion of phenomenological hermeneutics and conservatism, section 3.2.3.1 and the discussion of lifeworld as the shared horizon, section 3.2.2.
dynamics characterizing human existence, namely its temporality. The horizon of the past is its essential dimension, but it does not imply that we are condemned to our past and “immured” from interactions with the everyday world. On the contrary, our past may help us to address and negotiate “the difference” emerging in the contemporary context.

3.3.3 A lived experience of space

An important issue in the debate on a user-oriented architectural practice is the phenomenological view of space. If “architecture is about shaping our physical habitat to suit human purposes” (Wasserman et al., 2000:13), it should consider the way we relate to space. It should take into account the specifics of a lived experience of space. The analyses presented in the first part of *Being and Time* (1927) are very relevant in this context.

Heidegger’s thinking about space proceeds along the same lines as his thinking about being. In *Being and Time*, the issue of space is discussed in the context of Dasein’s concernful involvement (*Besorgen*) with things which are ontologically determined by their availability for utilization (*Zuhandenheit*). Things in their way of being (being-in-order-to; *Um...zu*) present themselves as tools, instruments (*Zeuge*). A particular tool cannot be considered as an abstract entity; it is always referring to other instruments and therefore points at instrumental totality structured with a view for utilization (*Zeugganzheit*).

163 See the discussion of temporality, section 3.2.2.1.

164 The intention of this section is to give a concise overview of phenomenological concept of space, referring primarily to Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1927). However interesting, it is beyond the scope of the present work to discuss the recent phenomenological research on space, represented by such authors as Edward Casey in *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps* (2002); *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (1996); *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (1993); or Jeff Malpas’ *Heidegger’s Topology: Being, Place, World* (2007); *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (1999).

165 While in *Being and Time*, the problem of space and Dasein’s spatiality was considered in the perspective of a network (wholeness) of places (Ganzheit von Plätzen), within an equipmental whole, after the turning (Kehre) Heidegger puts emphasis on the issue of place (*Ort*), relation between space and place, and the concept of dwelling (discussed in section 3.2.2). Most generally it may be said, that Heidegger moves his focus from the conditions of individual human existence (“the happening of being”), to the interrelationships between an individual and the sphere of meanings belonging to lifeworld. This shift makes itself known in the lecture “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1935). A Greek temple is not considered here only as an architectonic object, but firstly as a place that concentrates around itself an entire network of human significations. It gives a meaning to human dwelling by creating a communicative milieu.
In *Being and Time*, Heidegger distinguishes two different types of space: world-space and space of action. The space of action has two aspects: regions (*Gegend*) and the spatiality of *Dasein*.

World-space is an abstraction from the spatial experience of our everyday activities. In other words, it is an objectified space based on a more fundamental space of action. Because space of action is the basis for world-space, Heidegger’s aim is to describe the former without referring to the latter. As our usual linguistic expressions presuppose world-space (e.g., talking about the distance between objects, people presuppose a kind of metric relation), this task is especially difficult. Heidegger is trying to re-describe spatial notions from a perspective of the spatial relation of *Dasein* to the things dealt with. For this purpose he invents his own terminology.

“Region” (*die Gegend*) is the kind of space we deal with in our everyday activities, the kind of space where, in a way, we belong. In *Being and Time*, region is described as “functional” (*zuhanden*) space. The places we live and work—e.g., the house, the factory, the school—have varied regions, which organize and contextualize our activities along with used “tools.” Regions determine where things have their place. A painter’s workshop, as her/his work region, has an easel, paints, solvents, brushes, etc., and is organized according to the spatiality of the way the painter works. A location of a particular object is not defined through abstract co-ordinates; instead, it is “referential” to the context objects and activities. According to Heidegger, referential functionality is not just a subjective characteristic added to the objective, “scientific” space, but an inherent, primordial feature of space itself.

Research on the spatial intuition of primitive tribes confirms the pertinence of Heidegger’s assumptions—the spatial descriptions often refer to a man and his environment. For example, some African languages have the same word for “an eye” and “in front of somebody/ something.” In Ancient Egypt, spatial descriptions referred to the country’s geography; expressions like “up the river” and “down the river” meant “in the northern direction” and “in the southern direction.”

The spatiality of *Dasein* is characterized in *Being and Time* by two features: “de-severance” (*Ent-fernung*) and “directionality” (*Ausrichtung*). Heidegger attempts to describe spatiality as a mode of human existence, rather than counting space as separate, independent entity. De-severance describes the process of “making things available” to ourselves by “making the farness vanish” and by “bringing things close” in a sense of being engaged in something, working on something, or thinking about it (Heidegger, 1962:105,139). In de-severance, distance is not defined as an
exactly measured interval. Spatial descriptions are being formulated accordingly to our spatial intuitions. We say: “It is not far to the shop, a short walk,” etc. A long, but interesting way often seems to us shorter than another one which is, in fact, shorter, but boring and more tiring.

We exist through acting in the world; being in relation to other people, things, and places. When we walk from point A to point B, we do not simply change location in space, but we are “taking in” space in a process of spatial self-determination.

Every de-serving is directional. It is aimed in a certain direction, which is determined by our concern, but also by a specific region. As regions determine where things belong, they coordinate our actions as well as de-severance and directionality. If I need some bread, I move in the direction of the bakery, following the region of the town centre.

Wilhelm von Humboldt noticed that there are languages expressing “me” by here, “he,” by there, etc., thus the basic meaning of these words is not adverbial, but pronoun-tive. Heidegger’s standpoint is similar; the words: here, there, etc, are not primordially descriptions of an abstract location in space, but characters of existential spatiality of Dasein.

In the field of architecture, Kevin Lynch was among the first to emphasize the role of human experience in perceiving space. He maintains that not only are the abstract characteristics of a space are most important, but the “mental images” people have of this space. “The image is both the product of immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience, and is used to interpret information and to guide action” (Lynch, 1960:4). Mental images “are organized structures of recognition and relationship. They are also suffused with meaning, feeling and value, and these meanings are more complex and subtle than are the dry bones of structure” (Lynch, 1976:112-113). The neglect of this dimension of space is one of the reasons behind the gap between architects and users. The way an architect thinks about space does not always correspond to the way space is perceived by those who live in it.

What are the consequences of phenomenological vision of space for architecture? Heidegger initiated an inverted perspective. So far space was regarded as a “container,” an “arena” for things; three-dimensional, uniform “material,” which can be defined in terms of an interval between any given objects. According to Heidegger, such a conception of space is secondary to the primordial, non-homogeneous, “referential” space of human actions. This standpoint calls into question the prevailing, techno-scientific, instrumental paradigm in architecture, founded on an “objective” conception of uniform, homogeneous space. Architectural artifacts, according to Heidegger, should
be only created and understood in inherent relation to existential structure of human being. This essentially implies a respect toward’s user’s perspective.166

3.4 SUMMARY

One may argue that addressing architecture goes beyond the sphere of “pure” philosophy. However, as Sven-Otto Wallenstein remarks in the context of Heidegger’s works and their influence on architectural theory:

[…] the “impiety” of many adaptations of Heidegger in this field need not to be construed as just misreadings of a “pure” philosophy […] but could, or even should, be seen as a way to enact and transform the text of “thinking” into something else. What Heidegger’s texts in the final instance mean is dependent on what we do with them, and there is no way to once and for all draw the line between uses and misuses.  
(Wallenstein, in: Zahavi et al., 2003:78)

Adopting a phenomenological perspective in relation to architecture, means to accept the primordiality of the lifeworld, a social, cultural, and historical realm in which we live prior to reflective analysis, a background on which all things appear as meaningful.

The discussion of lifeworld and its sub-themes, “homeworld” and “alienworld,” emphasizes the need for a careful consideration of the cultural, historical, and social context of architectural interventions, particularly in

166 Referential space of human actions (“existential space”) is one of the central motifs in Christian Norberg-Schulz’s works. Referring to Heidegger, Norberg-Schulz argues that the concept of existential space proves to be an essential “instrument” in analysis of the human environment. In his Existence, Space, Architecture (1971), existential space is defined by means of topological schemes. Topology does not consider space as homogenous, uniform “material;” distance is not regarded as “objectively” measurable interval between any given objects. On the contrary, topology is based on such relations as nearness, farness, succession in time and space, continuity, limitation. Norberg-Schulz refers here particularly to Piaget, who investigated children’s spatial orientation. According to Piaget, an infant’s space can be described as a “collection” of separate spaces concentrated around different activities. Relations ordering these spaces have topological character. They are constituted a long time before establishing “objective” distances and forms. Topological relations are essential in the process of developing spatial orientation.

According to Norberg-Schulz, the structure of existential space should be reflected in the structure of architectural space. The relation between man and architectural space shall consist as well in an attempt to integrate the structure of space with our personal schemes, as in an attempt to translate our relevant schemes into architectural structures. The creating of architectural spaces can be described as “integrating an intended form of life in the environment” (Norberg-Schulz, 1971:39).
situations where an architect is working in settings different from her “homeworld.” It also indicates the need of rethinking of some general assumptions undermining contemporary architectural discourse, which often conceptualizes the “user” as a person living in a global space. While for some of us, the global space became a part of the “homeworld,” others see it in terms of an inaccessible “alienworld.”

The acceptance of the ontological status of the lifeworld has epistemological consequences; here, lived experience is the foundation of rationality. Our “situatedness,” our involvement in the lifeworld, is not an obstacle, but a proper condition for understanding. Consequently, the “lay perspective” of the user gains a significant importance. What follows is that the disengaged, “expert knowledge” of an architect is not considered as a privileged form of rationality.167 Human beings make a sense of the world from within lived experience, not detached from it. Rationality is essentially based on the experience in which it is disclosed.

Yet, as Gadamer (1960) emphasizes, the meaning of experience depends on what is made of it. It follows that the full meaning of experience is not simply given in the immediacy of the lived moment but rather emerges from retrospection where meaning is recreated (e.g., in remembrance, narration). It may be more systematically recovered through phenomenological interpretation. One has to be aware however, that “essential to an experience is that it cannot be exhausted in what can be said of it or grasped as its meaning” (Gadamer, 2004:58). Thus, the meaning of the experience remains fused with the whole movement of life.

As it has been already indicated, getting a user’s direct feedback should not be equalled with an effort to access a user’s lived experience. While the former may suffer the same consequences as relying on the professional (i.e., express an uncritical acceptance of the view of the world conditioned by modern science and technology), the latter avoids it by being primarily based on an empathetic consideration of the meanings of the user’s lifeworld, which may appear more clearly in a painting, a film, or a novel than in a direct survey of user’s opinion. Art seems here particularly relevant, considering that the meaning of lived experience cannot be exhausted by conceptual determination.

Accordingly, an architect’s role is not to follow the directly expressed desires of users, but rather to consider their perspectives and the design context hermeneutically; the effort of interpretation is here central.

167 See Donald Schön’s view of “reflective practice,” chapter 5.
Following Gadamer, we may conclude that a building has to emerge from the lifeworld of its users, “serve a particular way of life,” and at the same time relate meaningfully to the physical surroundings and “adapt itself to particular architectural circumstances” (Gadamer, 2004:149). It should preserve the lifeworld from which it emerges, but also add something important; for instance, it could bring new meanings that would enrich the original context. The creative, innovative aspect of design is here essential. If a building succeeds in unifying those dimensions, it may be called a “work of art” (Gadamer, 2004:149).
4 PHENOMENOLOGY: NEW CHALLENGES

As Steinbock observes, “perhaps one of the major criticisms facing phenomenology today is that it cannot treat problems of contemporary concern” (Steinbock, 1995:2).

The aim of this chapter is to explore the relevance of phenomenology for architectural discourse in present-day conditions, defined to a large extent by technological development and globalization processes. In this context, postcritical and constructivist positions are discussed from a lifeworld perspective.

On November 2, 2002, Roger K. Lewis emphasized in the *Washington Post* two opposing forces that affect contemporary architectural practice:

One force seeks to safeguard and promulgate established indigenous architectural traditions, forms, decorative motifs and technologies. It advocates historical continuity, cultural diversity and preservation of geographic identity, all symbolized by a particular architectural vocabulary, just as spoken languages and local dialects impart identity.

The other force promotes invention and dissemination of new forms using new technologies and materials in response to changing functional needs and sensibilities. It places a premium on systematization, flexibility and interchangeability. As commerce, transportation, communication and information become globalized, it argues for internationalized, innovative architecture transcending local conventions and constraints. (Lewis, 2002)

Within these dialectics, three important features—discussed in the following text—are: the altered the understanding of place/space, consequences of the emergence of new means of architectural representation, and sustainability concerns.
4.1 TECHNOLOGY AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Although there is no consensus regarding the definition of globalization, scholars within the domain of social science mostly agree that, at its core, there has been a fundamental change in the spatial and temporal framework of social existence. What is particularly important for architectural discourse is the fact that a considerable reduction in the time required to connect distinct geographical locations has resulted in a compression or even “annihilation” of space. Theorists of globalization generally agree that these alterations in a way of perceiving space and time have transformed the meaning and importance of local boundaries in many arenas of human activity.

The allusions to the phenomenon of space-time compression can be traced back to at least the advent of industrial capitalism, mostly in relation to the development of high-speed forms of transportation such as rail and automobile as well as new means of communication, e.g., the telegraph and telephone.

According to Harvey (1989), the reduction of space to a contingent category is implied in the notion of progress itself. “Progress entails the conquest of space, the tearing down of all spatial barriers, and the ultimate annihilation of space through time” (Harvey, 1989:205).

Since the early 1960s, the rapid development of information and communication technologies has been the main source of references regarding the annihilation of distance. At this time, McLuhan introduced the term “global village” describing how the world has been transformed into a “village” by electric technology and the instantaneous movement of information from every quarter to every point at the same time (McLuhan, 1962, 1964).

In the 1980s, social theorists extended the concept of globalization beyond the phenomenon of space-time compression.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ The other aspects of globalization that have drawn most of the attention (Scheuerman, 2006):

- **Deterritorialization** refers to the diminishing role of territory (a geographically identifiable location) in the constitution of social space. An increasing variety of social activities takes place regardless of the geographical location of participants. Deterritorialization can be observed in many different spheres, such as business (e-commerce), academic activities (video conferencing), entertainment, etc.

- **Interconnectedness** refers to social connections being built across existing geographical and political boundaries. Although this phenomenon is closely linked to deterritorialization, the main focus in the case of interconnectedness relates to the way in which distant events and forces influence local and regional processes.

- **The acceleration of social activity** is a result of the emergence of new, high-speed information, communication and transportation, technologies enabling relatively fast flows
Rowan Wilken observes that nowadays, we face a shift from a traditional understanding of place as stable and fixed (*stabilitas loci*) to place formed in and through mobility (*mobilitas loci*) (Wilken, 2004). Manuel Castells (1996) describes this transformation in terms of a transition from a “space of places” to the “space of flows,” explaining that “localities become disembodied from their cultural, historical, geographic meaning, and reintegrated into functional networks, or into image collages, inducing a space of flows that substitutes for the space of places” (Castells, 1996: 375). According to Castells, although the “space of places” continues to be the predominant space of experience, the logic of the “space of flows” is underlying its organization, inducing such phenomena as the marginalization of people and places. The dilemma architects and planners are facing today is whether to “mirror” these changes in their design decisions, or rather to resist some processes and try to propose alternative values or solutions. The question posed by Lewis (2002) is relevant in this context:

We admire historic buildings, neighborhoods and communities shaped by site, climate, history, native culture and locally available materials and construction technology. But are such unique places at risk of being engulfed by the rise of “global” cities that eventually could look more or less the same, full of buildings that could be anywhere? Is architecture becoming increasingly globalized, standardized, sanitized? (Lewis, 2002)

and movements of people, information, and capital. The phenomena of deterritorialization and interconnectedness are closely tied to the increasing speed of social activity.

- Most theoreticians agree that globalization should be conceived of as a **long-term process**, an essential feature of the modern world, captured already by nineteenth-century thinkers reflecting on the consequences of the development of new transportation and communication possibilities (Harvey, 1989).

- Globalization is also conceived as a **multi-pronged process**, since its aspects (deterritorialization, interconnectedness, and the acceleration of social activity) are observable in many different spheres of human activity (economic, political, cultural, etc.). Each manifestation of globalization generates different set of problems.

---

169 In his earlier work, *The Informational City* (1989), Castells states that “the emergence of the space of flows actually expresses the disarticulation of place-based societies and cultures from the organization of power and production that continue to dominate society without submitting to its control. [...] The flows of power generate the power of flows, whose material reality imposes itself as a natural phenomenon that cannot be controlled or predicted, only accepted and managed. This is the real significance of the current restructuring process, implemented on the basis of new information technologies, and materially expressed in the separation between functional flows and historically determined places as two disjointed spheres of the human existence. People live in places, power rules through flows” (Castells, 1989: 349).
Martin Heidegger is arguably one of the first philosophers to explicitly discuss the implications of technology-related changes for human existence. In his essay “The Thing” (1950), Heidegger, describing the “abolition of distance” as an essential feature of contemporary human condition and elaborating on the growing possibilities of instantaneousness and simultaneity in human experience, anticipates one of the most important features for the architecture discourse in the globalization debate:

All distances in time and space are shrinking. Man now reaches overnight […] places which formerly took weeks and months of travel […] Distant sites of the most ancient cultures are shown on film as if they stood this very moment amidst today’s street traffic […] The peak of this abolition of every possibility of remoteness is reached by television, which will soon pervade and dominate the whole machinery of communication. (Heidegger, 1971:165)

According to Heidegger, the “abolition of distance” instead of opening new, richer possibilities of interaction with the environment, tends to generate a certain indifference, an experience where “everything is equally far or equally near,” a feeling in which distinct objects became a part of a homogenous mass. The blurring boundaries between “nearness” and “distance” rendered human experience monotonous and one-dimensional.

“The Question Concerning Technology,” one of Heidegger’s most celebrated and well-known essays, contains perhaps his most explicit critique of modern technology. It was presented on November 18, 1953 as a contribution to a series of lectures organized by the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts on the theme of “The Arts in the Technological Age.” The essay is primarily concerned with the essence (Wesen) of technology.

One could define technology as a means to an end. However, in Heidegger’s view, the essence of technology lays not in technology itself, but in the human understanding of being which makes technology possible. Such a specific way of understanding of being Heidegger calls “enframing” (das Ge-stell). Ge-stell is characterized as a way of revealing (disclosing, uncovering, or bringing out of concealment) of what is (das Seiende) as a standing-reserve (Bestand). It is an instrumental, efficiency-oriented approach to the surrounding world. For instance, through technology we approach nature solely as a source of profit that we can develop or extract for ourselves.

The essence of technology, according to Heidegger, poses a serious problem for human existence.
Enframing does not simply endanger man in his relationship to himself and to everything that is. As a destining, it banishes man into that kind of revealing which is an ordering. This ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing. Above all, Enframing conceals that revealing which, in the sense of poiesis [truth], lets what presences come forth into appearance. (Heidegger, 1977:27)

Enframing prevents us from having a proper understanding of our own being because it seeks to exclude other ways of looking at world; for instance, those involved in creating and engaging with works of art. More plainly, technological understanding does not conceptualize human world as a lifeworld. Technology—a way of understanding of the world as being apprehendable, manipulable—conceals what was our past, a multidimensional understanding, and creates a new world. This new environment is the one where our surroundings are seen in terms of orderable categories, distinguished by their relation to us as either usable or unusable. What is especially disturbing is that such an attitude is directed toward not only nature, but also other human beings.

Pointing at the ancient Greek culture, where humans did not orient themselves towards the world in a technological way, Heidegger argues that the horizon in which we find ourselves tends to dispose us in specific ways. For instance, in a pre-technological epoch, the human relation to making and shaping was primarily directed by a certain openness, a reciprocal intimacy and care, where what was important was not challenging and ordering, but rather “letting be,” letting the world to show itself in its own forms.

Albert Borgmann, conceiving modern technology as a phenomenon shaping our relation with world in a one-dimensional, disengaged manner, shares Heidegger’s point of view. Borgmann points out that things and ultimately other people are increasingly perceived in terms of available resources or “devices.” As a consequence, the original, rich contextuality of the world becomes hidden.

In his *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (1984), Borgmann addresses the question of the possibility of a relation with modern technology in which everything is not already “framed.” In this context, he points at the importance of “focal practices” based on full and engaging presence; for example, preparing and sharing meals with family and friends as opposed to eating alone in a fast-food bar. According to Borgmann, the prevailing, technological paradigm in which we find ourselves does not mean that we are doomed to relate to our surroundings in a disengaged manner. As Lucas Introna remarks,
Borgmann’s analysis does point to the possibility of the emergence of a device mood—as we increasingly depend on devices—and our moral obligation not to settle mindlessly into the convenience that devices may offer us. Otherwise we might […] become the devices of our devices. (Introna, 2005)

It appears that the primary concern of phenomenology with regard to modern technology is not an analysis of certain technological artifacts. Instead, the main focus is the conditions which made these artifacts seem necessary and obvious in everyday life. The very interest of phenomenological thinkers is also on the ways in which specific technologies influence or “frame” us as we use them.

Unlike phenomenology, poststructuralist thinking does not seek to arrive at a consensus as to the meaning of an artifact by developing a sense of continuity between the present and the past. On the contrary, the loss of meaning is conceived as a productive mechanism rather than as a negation of identity.

In his essay “Domus and Megalopolis” (1997), Lyotard\(^{170}\) strongly criticized the notion of “domesticity” (i.e., “dwelling” or “place” as sources of identity). According to Lyotard, “domus” is a regretful myth, a pointless yearning for what can only be a mirage, especially in a metropolis. Consequently, any form of reference to the local, well-known traditions is criticized. For Lyotard the notion of place, the emphasis on the local, are only nostalgic responses to the conditions of late capitalism—its homogenized space and placelessness of contemporary society. Today “place” is nothing more than a product of the market, a commodity to be promoted and successfully sold. The traditional realm of the “domus”—the countryside—is perceived in terms of tourism and leisure. The home—once a stable point of origin and important source of identity—is now seen primarily as a property with a specific market value. There is no escape from the global capitalism—even what is seen as a “difference,” an alternative, is in fact not resistant to it but also spawned by its forces. “In a world dominated by all-consuming capitalism ‘difference’ itself can be seen as to be a product of the market” (Lyotard, 1997: 95).\(^{171}\)

\(^{170}\) Although Lyotard himself probably would oppose classifying him as a constructivist thinker, his ideas to a large extent fit into the constructivist paradigm, at times supplemented by influences from critical theory.

\(^{171}\) A reference to critical theory can be identified here. See, for instance, the discussion of Tafuri in section 2.2.2.
According to Lyotard, globalization effected a fundamental shift in the ways in which we relate to the world. Such concepts as *dwelling* and *place* do not retain much authority any longer and in today’s conditions are not relevant as sources of identification.

Identity is nowadays constituted only to a minor extent by a stable system of references (such as a place of origin), and increasingly through such transitory phenomena as jobs, interests, or possessions (Lyotard, 1997:95). The development of new technologies is a driving force of these transformations. But should we, in any respect, attempt to distance ourselves from these phenomena or resist some of them? Lyotard’s position may be seen as a far-reaching affirmation of the contemporary processes. In the following excerpt he clearly disagrees with Heidegger’s critical view on modern technology:

Indeed, technology far from being the necessary source of alienation, as Heidegger had supposed, may itself offer mechanisms of symbolic identification. For what thinkers such as Heidegger overlook is the fundamental capacity of human beings to accommodate and adapt to new conditions. This chameleon-like tendency ensures that human beings eventually absorb technology as part of their symbolic background, to the point where they may grow attached to and identify with technological objects. (Lyotard, 1997: 95)

After a closer analysis, one could argue that Lyotard’s polemic against Heidegger’s view of technology is only touching the surface here; Heidegger criticized not so much technology itself, but the way of understanding world which made technology possible. Heidegger does not deny the possibility of human adaptation to new, technology-initiated conditions. On the contrary, he remarks that we have become too attached to technology and gone too far in appropriating a technological mode of thinking; at the same time, we are losing an important aspect of our existence.

Constructivists share with phenomenology the point of departure; in both cases, the Western metaphysical tradition is being criticized. However, for constructivists, the very foundational concepts of our culture are nothing more than strategies that enable us to act as if the world was intelligible. In fact, by the means of metaphysics, the West has concealed its own fictive character, the lack of permanent transcendental “reality” to be known. The aim of philosophy here is to deconstruct “naive” assumptions about reality and to escape the realm of reality-as-convention by becoming, in a sense, free.
Phenomenology also indicates the need for the displacing of the illusions of the past, but at the same time it emphasizes the possibility of establishing a genuine belonging with the world given to us, rather than engaging in an ironic or alienated relationship.

Postcriticality current in architecture (e.g., Rem Koolhas’ understanding of the contemporary city as a “generic city”) to some extent follows Lyotard’s line of thinking. It is an example of a perspective grounded entirely in the “present.” Identity conceived as a form of sharing the past is here “a losing proposition” because

[…] identity is like a mousetrap in which more and more mice have to share the original bait, and which, on closer inspection, may have been empty for centuries. The stronger identity, the more it imprisons, the more it resists expansion, interpretation, renewal, contradiction. (Koolhas and Mau, 1995:1249)

Such an understanding, as we already learnt from Heidegger and Gadamer, is incomplete, for human existence is inescapably historical. A “horizon of the past” is an irreducible element of all understanding. The fact that we are situated within traditions does not mean that we are limited in our freedom. On the contrary, rather than limiting us, traditions open us up to what is to be understood.

The horizon of the present can not be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves. (Gadamer, 2004:305).

Phenomenology provides a conceptual framework which allows approaching the interrelationships among technology, human beings, and a built environment in a possibly comprehensive way. It does not seek to exclude technology but rather to incorporate it in human world in a way that

172 Gadamer states that “What first seemed simply a barrier, according to the traditional concept of science and method, or a subjective condition of access to historical knowledge, now becomes the center of a fundamental inquiry. ‘Belonging’ is a condition of the original meaning of historical interest […] because belonging to traditions belongs just as originally and essentially to the historical finitude of Dasein as does its projectness toward future possibilities of itself. […] Thus there is no understanding or interpretation in which the totality of this existential structure does not function, even if the intention of the knower is simply to read ‘what is there’ and to discover from his sources ‘how it really was’” (Gadamer, 2004:252).
does not dominate other spheres of human activity. The current transformations of the built environment are not considered as a restricted, rootless contemporary problem. Phenomenology aims to encompass in its view both the path which led us to such a state of events and try to project its future implications. It also argues that we must seek understanding of a given phenomenon simultaneously from different perspectives, implying an attitude towards culture that is based on dialogue.\footnote{As Merleau-Ponty remarks, “Should the starting-point for the understanding of history be ideology, or politics, or religion, or economics? Should we try to understand a doctrine from its overt content, or from the psychological make-up and the biography of its author? We must seek an understanding from all these angles simultaneously, everything has meaning, and we shall find this same structure of being underlying all relationships. All these views are true provided that they are not isolated, that we delve deeply into history and reach the unique core of existential meaning which emerges in each perspective” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:xviii-xix).}

As Dalibor Vesely asserts,\footnote{As Vesely (2004) argues, “The task and dilemma we are facing is how to reconcile the inventions and achievements of modern technology, which have already established their autonomy, with the conditions of human life, our inherited culture and the natural world. We will find no answer in a naive belief that the difficulty can be resolved by subordinating all knowledge and different ways of making to instrumental rationality and technology. Whole areas of reality are not amenable to such treatment, and perpetuating the belief that they are merely deepening the dilemma” (Vesely, 2004:7).}

Most relevant here was the discovery of the primacy of the natural world as a ground and framework within which the achievements of modern science and technology could be reconciled with the concrete conditions of the natural world and everyday human life. (Vesely, 2004:4)

Consequently, in the phenomenological perspective, the main challenge for contemporary architectural theory is to find a satisfactory relationship between technology and the sphere of non-instrumental needs and values of inhabitants.\footnote{The question that could be posed here is how to accomplish this task in practice, i.e., how do we find a balance between different perspectives? How do we engage users in a design process? The answers are, to a large extent, context-specific. These questions are addressed in a concise case study presented in chapter 6.}

The effort of maintaining a balance between varied, often opposite perspectives is crucial, “if we are to adequately understand, plan, and build a socially pluralistic and ecologically appropriate environment” (Mugerauer, 1993:94).

Yet, one could ask whether a balance between technological styles of thought and conduct and a phenomenological account of a human being is even possible. What Tafuri said about capitalism, we may think about

\footnote{As Merleau-Ponty remarks, “Should the starting-point for the understanding of history be ideology, or politics, or religion, or economics? Should we try to understand a doctrine from its overt content, or from the psychological make-up and the biography of its author? We must seek an understanding from all these angles simultaneously, everything has meaning, and we shall find this same structure of being underlying all relationships. All these views are true provided that they are not isolated, that we delve deeply into history and reach the unique core of existential meaning which emerges in each perspective” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:xviii-xix).}

Consequently, in the phenomenological perspective, the main challenge for contemporary architectural theory is to find a satisfactory relationship between technology and the sphere of non-instrumental needs and values of inhabitants.\footnote{As Vesely (2004) argues, “The task and dilemma we are facing is how to reconcile the inventions and achievements of modern technology, which have already established their autonomy, with the conditions of human life, our inherited culture and the natural world. We will find no answer in a naive belief that the difficulty can be resolved by subordinating all knowledge and different ways of making to instrumental rationality and technology. Whole areas of reality are not amenable to such treatment, and perpetuating the belief that they are merely deepening the dilemma” (Vesely, 2004:7).}

The effort of maintaining a balance between varied, often opposite perspectives is crucial, “if we are to adequately understand, plan, and build a socially pluralistic and ecologically appropriate environment” (Mugerauer, 1993:94).

Yet, one could ask whether a balance between technological styles of thought and conduct and a phenomenological account of a human being is even possible. What Tafuri said about capitalism, we may think about

\footnote{The question that could be posed here is how to accomplish this task in practice, i.e., how do we find a balance between different perspectives? How do we engage users in a design process? The answers are, to a large extent, context-specific. These questions are addressed in a concise case study presented in chapter 6.}
technology. For this reason, one may argue for “resistance” instead, which is hardly striking a balance.

What has to be stressed is that the “resistance” to technology does not have to imply a romantic, nostalgic yearning for the pre-technological past. Nevertheless, even some phenomenologically-oriented authors, (Don Ihde (1993) is one example) argue that classical phenomenologists (most notably Heidegger) in their discussion of technology display nostalgic tastes. In Ihde’s view, the issue now is to explore the contemporary situation, rather than reject it and demand a return to the idealized past. In this context, Ihde develops a modified version of phenomenology, “postphenomenology.”

Yet, one could ask whether Heidegger’s view on technology can be rightly interpreted as a longing for some idyllic, pre-technological conditions. His examples (e.g., the Heidelberg bridge, the Black Forrest farmhouse) can indeed have some romantic connotations. But Heidegger emphasizes that he in no way means that we should or could go back to building such houses, resisting contemporary transformations. His aim is not to promote regionalism, but rather to illustrate “by a dwelling that has been how it was able to build” (Heidegger, 1997:338), to indicate how building may respond meaningfully to a specific way of life by integrating different and sometimes heterogeneous conditions.

In the Marxist view, even the most critical trends of independent culture are finally being assimilated by commercial culture serving modern capitalism. As Tafuri points out, this is the reason why a truly critical architecture or art is not possible, that there can only be a “class” critique of architecture. He argues that “it is useless to struggle when one is trapped inside a capsule with no exit” (Tafuri, 1969:32).

With the term “postphenomenology,” Ihde refers to a contemporary perspective, stemming from phenomenology and hermeneutics, and directed toward science and technology. Ihde defines postphenomenology as “a deliberate adaptation or change in phenomenology that reflects historical changes in the twenty-first century” (Ihde, 2009:5). His intention is to reframe phenomenology as to better suit the today’s technological world. Ihde’s revised form of phenomenology draws from pragmatism and the philosophy of science. One of his main aims was to overcome a critical stance towards science and technology, which as he argues, is present within “classical phenomenology.” Postphenomenology, rather than dealing with technology in general (e.g., the conditions that made modern technology possible), concentrates on specific technologies and analyzes their role in social and cultural life. Conducting concrete, empirical studies, postphenomenology investigates the real changes following the development of specific technologies.

176 In the Marxist view, even the most critical trends of independent culture are finally being assimilated by commercial culture serving modern capitalism. As Tafuri points out, this is the reason why a truly critical architecture or art is not possible, that there can only be a “class” critique of architecture. He argues that “it is useless to struggle when one is trapped inside a capsule with no exit” (Tafuri, 1969:32).
177 With the term “postphenomenology,” Ihde refers to a contemporary perspective, stemming from phenomenology and hermeneutics, and directed toward science and technology. Ihde defines postphenomenology as “a deliberate adaptation or change in phenomenology that reflects historical changes in the twenty-first century” (Ihde, 2009:5). His intention is to reframe phenomenology as to better suit the today’s technological world. Ihde’s revised form of phenomenology draws from pragmatism and the philosophy of science. One of his main aims was to overcome a critical stance towards science and technology, which as he argues, is present within “classical phenomenology.” Postphenomenology, rather than dealing with technology in general (e.g., the conditions that made modern technology possible), concentrates on specific technologies and analyzes their role in social and cultural life. Conducting concrete, empirical studies, postphenomenology investigates the real changes following the development of specific technologies.
178 See section 3.2.2.
4.1.1 The user as a “global nomad”

Vilém Flusser (1987), when referring to his multicultural background, said “I am homeless, because there are so many homelands that make their home in me” (Flusser, 2002:91). Today, such “homelessness” seems to be an increasingly common phenomenon. Globalization and the subsequent change in lifestyles are among the most common arguments regarding the need for changing priorities of architectural practice. The altered understanding of space and the increasing speed of social activity have specific implications in terms of design choices. Seeing the user/client as a global “nomad” implies the decreasing relevance of such notions as identification or cultural background. It also makes a community based user participation considerably less relevant. The environments that constantly change their purpose, users, and inhabitants must be rather provisional in order to accommodate rapidly changing needs and purposes.

It would be worthwhile to ask to what extent globalization really changes our patterns of life. Is global mobility a common process, or is it still limited to a certain elite?

The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1998) argues that a major consequence of globalization is a social stratification undermined by the concept of mobility. At the top of this new “hierarchy” there is a social group that lives “in time” rather than “in space.” These people are, of course, situated in particular locations at any given time, but physical locations have a very limited significance to them. They are not bound to any particular landscape, and travel as they wish—either in reality or virtual space—for the sake of entertainment, work, education, or other reasons. At the bottom of this hierarchy, there is a social segment of people who essentially live “in space.” Not because they have chosen to do so, but because they do not have any other possibility. These people are bound to a specific location and are forced to bear any change that may happen to this place. Although they too live in time, they have no use of it. Not much happens where they live, so time loses its significance.

Summing up, according to Bauman, there are two sorts of worlds, “the world of the globally mobile” and “the world of the locally tied” (Bauman, 1998:88). In his view, the process of globalization “divides as it unites” (Bauman, 1998:85). On the one hand, the world of the global elite—businessmen, politicians, academics, etc.—emerges with its privileges, wealth, resources, power, and freedom. On the other hand, there is a world of those bound to space, with its deprivation, poverty, powerlessness, and
constraint. As Bauman argues, the rich are able to abolish the territorial aspect of their identity and to build a new meta-territorial system of values, based on the criteria of mobility. Although only few can enjoy this system of values, it has become the most influential model—due to the political and economic resources of the global elite.

Referring to Husserl,179 we could say that globalization essentially influences our lifeworlds, redefining “homeworlds” in a new sense, one based on the criteria of mobility. While for some of us, globalization implies that an accessible “homeworld” extends, for others, their “homeworld” grows smaller, restricted by alien, inaccessible worlds.

This discussion asks for the rethinking of certain presumptions of globalization-affirmative in contemporary architectural discourse. We could “ask the affirmative, projective practitioners of the ‘postcritical’ just what sort of world they are projecting and affirming” (Martin, in: Saunders, 2007:xii).

For instance, those who see in phenomena such as “generic cities” the promise of unlimited freedom seem to ignore “the world of locally tied.” In this context, it is worthwhile to look closer at the concept of freedom undermining the postcritical discourse.

The poststructuralist/postcritical view of identity (history, culture, lifeworld, etc.) as a limiting condition seems to be grounded in the conceptualizing of freedom as freedom from (negative freedom) while phenomenology understands freedom as freedom to (positive freedom).

The idea of distinguishing between a negative and a positive sense of freedom goes back at least to Kant, but Isaiah Berlin in the 1950s and 1960s gave it the modern formulation.

Negative freedom can be roughly defined as the absence of barriers, constraints, or interferences from others. Positive freedom is the possibility of acting in such a way as to take control of one’s life and realize one’s fundamental purpose.

While negative freedom is defined only by the absence of external obstacles, positive freedom requires the presence of some internal features, e.g., control, self-mastery, and self-determination (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Positive and Negative Liberty”).

Positive freedom seems to be related to what Heidegger names “authenticity,” a mode of existence in which one can choose and “win” oneself, i.e., fully realize one’s own potential. In this perspective, autonomy means to act according to the insight in oneself and one’s dependency on the

---

179 See Husserl, concepts of “homeworld” and “alienworld,” discussed in section 3.2.2.
lifeworld and not simply to be able to choose among a number of possibilities.

What Isaiah Berlin emphasized is that these two kinds of freedom can be seen as rival, incompatible interpretations of a single political ideal. Since most people consider freedom to be of crucial importance, the way this term is interpreted and defined can have very important political implications; some groups may use it in order to promote their own interests.

Political liberalism tends to presuppose a negative definition of liberty: liberals generally claim that if one favors individual liberty one should place strong limitations on the activities of the state. Critics of liberalism often contest this implication by contesting the negative definition of liberty: they argue that the pursuit of liberty understood as self-realization or as self-determination (whether of the individual or of the collectivity) can require state intervention of a kind not normally allowed by liberals. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Positive and Negative Liberty”)

Unfortunately, the way of defining freedom is too seldom made explicit. This is also the case for architectural theory; for instance, the postcriticality trend, as represented by Koolhas, views freedom as the absence of any constraints (such as identity, culture, or even urban planning authorities); in this, it promotes a form of radical liberalism. The question of who would benefit and who would lose in such a political configuration remains unaddressed by the advocates of postcriticality. This is also the case for poststructuralist thinkers (e.g., Lyotard, 1984). As Ghirardo (1991) remarks,

[...] developers and real estate agents, in their wildest dreams, could not have come up with such an intellectually credible screen for their activities, an intellectually and academically respectable and viable means of diverting attention away from the toughest issues in land development and the building process towards trivial matters of surface. (Ghirardo, 1991:15)
4.2 DIAGRAMMATIZATION OF ARCHITECTURAL THEORY

Within contemporary architectural theory, there may be observed an increasing (sometimes exclusive) emphasis on the new means of architectural representations and new technologies, along with their possibilities. Architectural theory not only addresses these issues, but also to a certain extent imitates their character, abandoning traditional modes of discourse.

This tendency cannot be observed on a similar scale in the social sciences, even though they also address the issues of technological development and globalization. It is, therefore, worthwhile to pose the following question: should architectural thought transform itself in order to follow the current technology-related developments or rather should it adapt a certain distance to the ongoing, rapid changes? In other words is it necessary, in order to grasp the “essence” of the investigated phenomenon, to follow its rapidly changing conventions (stylistic, linguistic, etc.)? Or, is it better to look at it in the perspective of established discourse traditions?

A related, but often overlooked question is whether the essential human needs and purposes develop on the same level and at the same pace as technology does, and most basically, what is the place of human-related concerns in a given discipline? If we assume that human needs transform at a similar pace as the sphere of objects, then the most natural approach will be probably to follow technology development and to search for the new means of expression. But if we maintain (following phenomenology) that the sphere of human needs and purposes is relatively stable, and human-related concerns are foundational in a given discipline, then a critical reappraisal of technological development from an interdisciplinary distance and in a wider social and cultural context will likely be a more reasonable path towards future. Nevertheless, as Leach (1997) argues, architectural theory has been very deficient in the tools of self-reflexivity.

Once caught in the full glare of external critique, architectural theory is exposed for all its shortcomings. These external critiques employ

---

180 The answer is to some extent dependent upon the view of architecture; either it is an autonomous discipline or it is a domain closely related to other disciplines.

181 In a phenomenological perspective, the vision of modern society undergoing a steady technological transformation is misleading. There are certain levels of reality that can be directly manipulated and those that resist such manipulation. For example, technological innovations are being developed on a different level than the nature of our relation to the world, which is rooted in the basic human needs of tradition, customs, and habits, and thus is relatively stable (Vesely, 2004:26).
precisely the tools that architecture itself needs. [...] For architecture to open up to impulses from other disciplines need not to be thought of as an indulgence. On the contrary, the indulgence may lie in architecture’s failure in the past to engage substantively with other disciplines. (Leach, 1997:xiv)

Most common in contemporary architectural theory, however, seems to be the view that new representational strategies are necessary in order to deal with the ongoing transformations and to create architecture that responds to the needs of the contemporary world182 The current “diagrammatization” of architectural theory may be conceived as a manifestation of a much older phenomenon; a view in which the main goal of architectural theory is the determination of the abstract principles underlying the built form.

Once discovered, it is believed, these principles allow architects to design good architecture. Since Greek times it has seemed self-evident that these principles must be mathematical in nature. Sometimes the mathematics has been numerical, sometimes geometric. The former leads to proportional and modular systems. Taking the latter route entails asserting that architecture must emulate the underlying geometrical order of nature, and tends to produce schemes for the analysis of finished forms. (Stevens, 1998:13)

Theories focused on architectural form exclude the social and cultural dimensions of architecture; the quest here is for a profoundly suprahuman order. Yet, the currently fashionable strategies of “mapping,” “diagramming,” and “info-scaping” are not uncommonly believed to be able to “open up not only the world ‘as is’ but the future possibilities as well” (Hvattum, 2008:110).

In this context, it is worthwhile to refer to Vilém Flusser,183 who was among the first to suggest that currently, there is a paradigmatical change in representation going on. He referred to four universes of cultural history: sculpture; pictures (starting with the first cave paintings); text (beginning with the oldest writings from Ugarit); and computation. Flusser maintained that the evolution of a cultural universe is not as a linear process, but rather...

---

182 This position is, to a certain extent, a consequence of the view of architecture as an autonomous discipline.
183 Vilém Flusser (1920-1991) was a philosopher, media theorist, writer, and journalist born in Prague. He lived for a long period in Brazil and later in France. His works are written in several different languages, but most of them are in German.

163
“a sudden, almost incomprehensible leap from one level to another,” as described by Thomas Kuhn (Flusser, 2002:xiii).

In the same manner that a form of thinking based on writing opposed itself to magic and myth (pictorial thinking), so a new form of thinking based on digital codes directs itself against procedural, “progressive” ideologies, to replace them with structural, systems-based, cybernetic modes of thought. (Flusser, 2002:xiii)

Flusser viewed computation as an entirely new possibility of design which is not reproducing the existing world but rather generating a new one, new objects, and finally new human beings.184

Following this line of thinking, Zimmerman (2005) maintains that the “new paradigm of telematic culture” is not only revolutionizing architecture, it is “demanding a new architectural theory, which is based not only on text, not only on traditional imaging, but on a new media culture which integrates computational imaging, simulation and global media networks, including the cyborg concept” (Zimmermann, 2005).

In today’s architectural practice, there can be indeed observed a significant switch to new forms of representation. Global networks are gaining the increasing significance in producing and experiencing architecture. There is also developing a new sphere of virtual architecture which is not built but only exists in virtual media networks.

Zimmerman (2005) suggests that we can expect a decline of the text metaphor in architectural theory and a rise of the idea of virtual space. These developments are finally leading to architectural theory as a new philosophy of virtual space. Subsequently, as Zimmermann argues, we have to develop a new framework of media tools, including simulation, computation, and mediation, to represent architectural theory today.

184 What is interesting is that Flusser interprets Husserl’s thought in a very original way. He uses phenomenology as a technique for analyzing communication structures that shape society and refers to Husserl’s notion of lifeworld as a network of concrete intentionalities. “A telematized society will be exactly that network of pure relationships that Husserl defines as the concrete structure of the social phenomenon. […] We can see, then, in what sense it may be said that Husserl has done away with humanism. Instead of the individual man being the supreme value, it is now dialogue between men that becomes the supreme value” (Flusser, 2002:xiv).

As Ströhl points out, the analysis of communication structures and current technological development led Flusser to the idea of a utopian, liberated society. “In this society to come, humans communicate and philosophize freely in a network that allows communication between all members of that society. This communication structure, called ‘net dialogue’ […] carries its purpose within itself and is technologically supported by communication channels” (Ströhl, in Flusser, 2002: xvii).
Although the influence of Flusser’s ideas may be observed in many domains of cultural theory, it is often overlooked that Flusser himself was distant from the affirmation of undergoing changes. A cultural pessimism is evident particularly in his later works.

In *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1983), he conducts a general analysis of the evolution of codes in communication techniques. This evolution is seen as a process of increasing our distance from the world. Three-dimensional, pre-historical sculpture was nearest to the four-dimensional space-time continuum of the lived-world. Pretechnical, pre-historical, two dimensional images made this interval increase, but were still quite closely related to things. Writing, in turn, referred to images rather than to things and significantly increased the distance from things. Currently, calculable and computable means of representation continue this process. Zero-dimensional binary code (and its graphic representation, the pixel) is the dominating code of communication today.

“Technological images” dismiss writing as a paradigmatic cultural technique. They do not represent objects, but instead represent texts (such as ideologies, theories, and scientific laws). In *Writing* (1987), Flusser’s cultural pessimism is undeniable:

> As we await the end of alphabetic writing as well as its most complete form, the thing that we fear is the decline of reading, that is, critical deciphering. We fear that in the future all communications, especially our modes of perception and experience, will be accepted uncritically. We fear that the information revolution could transform men into uncritical mutant addresses, which is to say robots. (Flusser, 2002:xxvii-xxviii)

Jean Baudrillard, represents a related position. In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), he investigates how images and signs relate to reality. He concludes that modern society has replaced all reality and meaning with simulacra (symbols and signs of contemporary culture and media) and that

---

185 Flusser (1967) sees photography as the first example of new communication techniques. In his later work, *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (1983), he defines “technical images” as meaningful surfaces, dependent on the laws of technology and natural sciences. Apart from photography, we find in this category film, video, computer graphics, holography, and virtual reality.

186 Yet, he is more radical in his conclusions. Unlike Flusser, Baudrillard believes that it is no longer possible to distinguish the reality from simulation. He begins his *Simulacra and Simulation* with the following statement: “The simulacrum is never what hides the truth—it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true” (Baudrillard, 1994:1).
the human experience is an experience of a simulation of reality rather than of reality itself. Baudrillard argues that contemporary society has become so dependent on simulacra that it has lost contact with the real world on which the simulacra are based.

The benefits of new means of representation for architectural practice have to be acknowledged. It is however alarming that the new representational strategies are less and less critically seen as an alternative to “traditional” theoretical considerations in architecture.

Representational strategies such as mapping and diagramming might, perhaps, help us in the sense that they tell us something about the world in which we live and build. Yet, as the diagram fetish of recent decades has shown, the means quickly becomes an end in itself, with its own aesthetic ambition and its own self-fulfilling terminology. (Hvattum, 2008:114)

We have to be aware that the evolution in means of representation increases our distance from things; in the case of architecture, it increases the separation of the architect from the lifeworld and lived experience of users. Social, cultural, and economical concerns lose much of their complexity when turned into diagrammatic structures. The world of human meaning is reduced to a “technical image,” an object for aesthetic appraisal.

Furthermore, the current attempts to redefine architecture—primarily in terms of new spatial possibilities enabled by technology—seem to be most in line with the values of the “global elite.” Whether such an approach is ethical and sustainable remains often unaddressed.

4.2.1. Media, architectural criticism and user involvement.

Discussing the emphasis on the new means of representation and “diagrammatization” of architectural discourse, it is worthwhile to address the role of media and architectural criticism. With the development of new information and communication technologies, architecture has gained a lot of public attention. It seems that increasing media coverage of architecture may contribute to the rise in public engagement in architectural issues. However, as some authors suggest, media culture with its emphasis on image and
By providing snapshots of lifestyles the media panders to the public’s wishes, but in a way that is completely circumscribed by the dominance of taste and consumer technologies—both of which exhibit built-it obsolescence. The public thus becomes fixated on a superficial and transient version of architecture, losing sight of the transformative potential of the built environment and the way in which they may become properly engaged in transformation. (Jones et al., 2005:xv)

Architecture is most commonly presented as if it were merely a potential space, not an actual space, made of concrete materials and inhabited by real people. Stevens (1998) makes a similar observation:

People, it seems, get in the way of architects and architecture. Take a look through any of the glossy architectural magazines showcasing the talent and one cannot but be struck by the absence of people in the photographs. It may be impossible to clear the streets of New York to photograph the latest skyscraper, but wherever possible it seems the photographers vacate the buildings and surrounds to present the building as a pristine objet d’art, uncontaminated by users, clients, and inhabitants. (Stevens, 1998:13)

Media influences not only public perception of architecture, but also the design choices of architectural practitioners and students, promoting more or less “generic,” context-free design solutions. As Lewis (2002) argues, the culture of design today is one of the main sources of pressure to globalize architecture.

The global culture of design is supported by architects who study what other architects are creating, no matter where. With fabulous photographs in slick magazines and professional journals, trend-conscious designers can scan and span the globe, sharing high-style concepts rendered in stylish materials. Glass, aluminum, stainless

---

187 As Susan Sontag observes, “Photography has become one of the principal devices for […] giving an appearance of participation” (Sontag, 1977:10).
steel, copper, titanium and natural stone are readily available. If they can't be acquired locally, they can be imported. (Lewis, 2002)

According to Lewis, architectural magazines are often merely “a vehicle for propaganda,” supporting the “global culture of commerce.” The architectural manifestations of this culture include “iconic, skyscraping banking towers (often built where they don’t belong); chains of standardized hotels and franchise restaurants and shopping malls full of all-too-familiar name-brand stores” (Lewis, 2002).

Diane Ghirardo (1991) blames architectural critics for sustaining socially disengaged, formalistic views of architecture. The social impact of a building seems to be of no relevance in a typical architectural review.

Architects and critics work together to set forth a rubric for evaluating buildings. Clear aesthetic standards are proposed, and then architects and critics explain how a project originated, how the design team approached the problem, how the building fits into its environs, and depending upon the size of the building, what the nature is of its structural system, its materials, its formal relationship to neighbors, and so forth. (Ghirardo, 1991:10)

Already in 1969, Giancarlo De Carlo pointed at the decisive function of journalism in estranging architecture from its real-life context.

There is hardly a magazine or newspaper column that illustrates architecture taking the user into account; that furnishes news about how architecture really functions in its daily existence; that publishes images, photographs or articles in which the people who use, transform, and recompose the three-dimensional physical organism which they have been given are actually present. (De Carlo, 1969 in: Jones et al. (ed.), 2005:12-13)

According to De Carlo (1969) two main lines of development in architectural writings can be identified:

The first analyses the vicissitudes of architecture through the behavior of its heroes, and, if lacking heroes, tends to invent them, causing misunderstandings that are troublesome to demythologize. The second creates models of simulation borrowed from figurative arts, the
humanities or literature, sometimes even from the jungle of intellectual paradoxes. (De Carlo, 1969 in: Jones et al., 2005:12)

The second model typically creates even more serious misunderstandings, which not only obscure the cultural content and social responsibility of architecture, but also cause “monstrous mutations in the habits of the architect.” A symptom of such “mutations” is, according to De Carlo, “the transformation of language of architecture, now often incomprehensible and lacking in syntax, and playing on the terroristic effect of its incommunicability to hide the underlying confusion of ideas and purposes” (De Carlo, 1969 in: Jones et al. (ed.), 2005:12).

Considering the incomprehensibility and overcomplication of a great part of contemporary architectural writings, one has to admit that these remarks are as up-to-date today as they were over 40 years ago.

De Carlo suggests a way out of the current crisis; he sees user involvement not only as a way to engage users more fully in the production of space, but also as a means to criticize and redirect architectural culture in general.

It needs some commitment to place oneself outside the mainstream architectural culture, a culture which is obsessed with image and appears to ignore that architecture needs to be understood within a broader framework than the graphic representation allows. The issues of the social, cultural, and political worlds, brought in by the users, are an essential part of this framework. Yet, the normal reaction of architectural establishment as to the critical voices is “to marginalize or dismiss the actions of the irritants as perverse behavior” (Jones et al., 2005:xvi).

4.3 SUSTAINABILITY CONCERNS

The multi-dimensional impact of globalization on human existence generates many philosophical questions and normative challenges. Sustainability issues are the essential part of this debate.

Since the late 1980s, human influence on the global environment has been widely discussed at an international level. In 1987, the Brundtland Commission formulated probably most commonly quoted definition of sustainable development: the development that “meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”
Sustainability, which entered into the consciousness of architects towards the end of the 20th century, is one of the main challenges for contemporary architectural discourse.

There is much written about the urgency of taking sustainability in architectural practice seriously, and it is relatively easy to find advice on the solution of specific, technical problems (the responsibility for the environment is primarily dealt with by articulating codes and regulations of appropriate behavior). Nevertheless, as Williamson et al. (2003) remarked, there is still too little research addressing the interrelation of socio-cultural, ethical, professional, and technological dimensions of sustainable architecture. The most common approach to sustainability, underlying a great part of the available design guides and regulations, may be characterized as reductionism; it focuses primarily on environmental issues, ignoring many contextual aspects surrounding sustainable designing.

In modern Western societies discussions of sustainability are almost invariably associated with a particular way of looking at the ‘environment’ that is scientific in nature and global in scope […] The very expression ‘the global environment’ makes this scope explicit, but even when we leave out the term ‘global’ the way that environmental issues are discussed often implies that there is just one big environment that we can somehow stand outside and comprehend. (Williamson et al., 2003:19-20)

Consequently, users’ perspectives tend to be underestimated in sustainable practices.

[A]ttitudes to participation within architectural profession are characterised by disinterest, or worse, by downright hostility. Social concerns barely register in the reductive understandings of sustainability expressed by the profession’s leading practitioners, who tend to equate sustainable design with environmental design.’ (Cottrel and O’Coill, 2006)

This is not surprising, if we consider that positivism-grounded ways of thinking (e.g., dualism, reductionism) have been dominating in the societies of European descent since the 17th century.188 Dualist thinking, as it was already indicated, is among the main reasons to be blamed for separation

---

188 See the discussion of positivism in section 2.2.1.
170
between architect and user in contemporary architecture. Such an approach is also a basis of certain problems with the concept of sustainability.

On the one hand, it is derived from science; on the other hand, it points at the limits of science and acquires legitimacy referring to imperatives that clearly stand beyond science. As Redclift (1994) remarks, “married to the idea of development,” sustainability represents the Modernist tradition; but at the same time, its emphasis on cultural diversity is a clear expression of post-modern way of thinking (Redclift, 1994:17, in: Williamson et al., 2003:9).

What is sometimes overlooked is that instrumental rationality—the belief in the “infinite capacity of human reason to control, dominate and put to work the forces of nature” (Pérez-Gómez, 1983:273)—resulted in the devastation of our habitat, something we are now trying to handle.

The emergence of the problem of sustainability may be seen in terms of the relatively recent transition from the predominance of “external risks” (i.e., risks which we feared from the natural environment) to that of “manufactured risks” (i.e., risks which are a result of human impact on the world). The “manufactured risks” are a direct effect of the increasing application of technology in response to such conditions as growing populations and desired higher standards of living (Giddens, 1999). The way of thinking behind technology—“enframing”—considers the environment as a standing-reserve (Heidegger, 1955). It is an instrumental, efficiency-oriented approach to the surrounding world, in which we see nature solely as a source of profit that we can develop or extract for ourselves. The current degradation of natural environment and related social, cultural and economic problems are clearly a result of such thinking.

In opposition to the most common view of sustainable architecture as a product or specific attributes of buildings, some authors advocate a way of thinking which carefully encompasses local, cultural, and physical contexts. In this understanding, sustainable architecture is “a cultural construction in that it is a label for a revised conceptualization of architecture” (Williamson at al. 2003:14). As Susan Maxman emphasizes, sustainable thinking cannot be reduced to procedural, instrumental rationality. Referring to architecture, she states, “Sustainable architecture isn’t a prescription. It’s an approach, an attitude. It shouldn’t really even have a label. It should just be architecture” (Maxman, 1993, in: Williamson et al., 2003:7).

---

189 Anthony Giddens, in one of his lectures delivered within BBC Reith series (1999), remarks: “At a certain point […] we started worrying less about what nature can do to us, and more about what we have done to nature. This marks the transition from the predominance of external risks to that of manufactured risks” (Giddens, 1999).
The way sustainability is framed determines the issues that are considered important in a design process. Among others, it influences the value given to the perspectives of users and their cultural context. What is currently needed is a more inclusive view of the scope of sustainability in architecture, “a revised conceptualization of architecture in response to [...] contemporary concerns about the effects of human activity” (Williamson et al., 2003:ix). Design choices should be based on a profound understanding and consideration of ethical stances, objectives, and the systems involved. Specific actions and broader policies have to follow from this understanding (Williamson et al., 2003:13). Without such a multi-dimensional approach, the attempts to use available published advice on sustainability may be counterproductive.

It seems that the mediating, anti-dualist character of phenomenology makes it a relevant framework in the search for a more inclusive conceptual basis for sustainable architecture. Furthermore, if phenomenology is concerned with our entire understanding of world—and ultimately, our self-understanding—it cannot neglect the issues of sustainability. As Madison remarks, “what, after all, could be more central to our own self-understanding than the understanding we have of our relation to that supreme ‘other’ than ourselves, the great world in which we live, move and have our being” (Madison, 2001:241).

Phenomenology thus suggests a rethinking of environmental issues in terms of its influence on our everyday lives (the sphere of human significations, cultural meanings, everyday practices). In this view, the natural environment is a part of the lifeworld, and can never be fully apprehended from the “outside.” Sustainability issues would be, in the phenomenological perspective, part of a wider network of meanings and apprehensions. These concerns would emerge from the lifeworld—the “environments” in which we are daily engaged—and would be directed at whatever threatens to separate us from these “environments,” in the sense of making them alien. Although the sustainability concerns would begin from our local perspective, they will not remain exclusively local. As Cooper (1992) argues,

---

190 We can refer here to Heidegger’s concept of space. See section 3.3.3.
191 The sustainability concerns would be directed at, for instance, “the planned construction of a motorway which will render impossible the old intimacy between neighbors on opposite sides of the valley” (Cooper 1992:170). Sustainability may be thus understood as an effort to preserve lifeworlds.
While my environmental concerns begin with my environment, I recognize that other people (and animals too) have, or should have, their environments. If I appreciate the importance for my life of a place I know my way about I must appreciate the importance this has for the others as well, and I will want to defend their efforts to preserve such places. (Cooper, 1992:179)

The above discussion points out the importance of including individuals and their perspectives in any sustainable practice. Following a phenomenological perspective, sustainability discourses would have to reconceptualize their notion of “subject” such that, instead of assuming anonymous, isolated, uniform individuals, they would have to pay more attention towards specific needs, values, and cultural settings. Pragmatic expert solutions, although a necessary and important part of the process, are never sufficient on their own if one intends to reach long-term sustainability goals.

4.4 CONCLUSIONS: THE RELEVANCE OF PHENOMENOLOGY TODAY

The main question posed at the 1997 “After Postmodernism Conference,” organized by University of Chicago, was “If we absorb postmodernism, if we recognize the variety and ungroundedness of grounds, but do not want to stop in arbitrariness, relativism, or aphorism, what comes after postmodernism?” In this context, many scholars argued for the relevance of phenomenology. What makes phenomenology a still-valid approach in contemporary conditions? According to Gary B. Madison, the two main features that make this position relevant today are “(1) that it is as ‘postmodern’ as any other form of postmodern thought, but (2) unlike other forms of postmodernism (‘poststructuralism,’ ‘neopragmatism’), it does not lead into the dead-end of relativism and nihilism” (Madison, 1997).

In which respect is phenomenology a postmodern way of thinking? According to Madison, it seeks to rethink many of the traditional concepts of philosophy (e.g., reason, value, truth) in strictly experiential terms. More specifically it rethinks these concepts in terms of communicative praxis. “For

192 This is also emphasized in principle 1 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Sustainability (1992) which states that “Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.”
this reason, like other forms of postmodernism, it eschews all forms of essentialist and foundational thinking, and thus involves, to a significant extent, a work of ‘deconstruction’” (Madison, 1997). The phenomenological hermeneutic approach embraces the postmodern critique of metaphysical tradition (“metaphysics of presence”), but at the same time, what makes this approach different from other postmodern critiques, is that it helps to rearticulate the core values of the Enlightenment tradition in such a way as to avoid intellectual arbitrariness and cultural relativism (Madison, 1997). Even though we can no longer speak about metaphysically groundable values, it does not follow that the value discourse is pointless. Some values are rationally justifiable, i.e., they are “universalizable.” As Madison remarks,

One of the core tasks of phenomenological hermeneutics […] is the articulation of full-fledged theory of communicative rationality in all the domains of social life and endeavor and, along with this, a non-dogmatic notion of transcultural universality. (Madison, 1997).

Madison essentially emphasizes that the central trust of phenomenological hermeneutics is to move beyond both objectivism and subjectivism, which is to say, also beyond relativism. In other words, it aims to help to rearticulate the relationship between universal values and the contingent conditions of a concrete existence in a meaningful way.

In a phenomenological perspective, the architectural debate on issues such as sustainability, technology, and globalization would always be conducted through the perspective of lived-experience and lifeworld. Contemporary technology-related transformations would not be rejected, but approached from a reflective distance. Heterogeneity and the fragmentation of our experience of a rapidly changing world is seen here as a hermeneutical problem to be solved by developing a sense of continuity of meaning through seeing events in a broader temporal perspective (Vattimo, 1985). In this perspective, architectural choices should be guided by a thorough analysis of the ways of life—past, contemporary, and future possibilities. This implies a greater respect for the perspective of users and the cultural settings.

Architecture is here not an end in itself, but nor it is just a pragmatic “tool” satisfying specific functional demands. Instead, it is a means to

---

193 We could refer for instance to Husserl in this context. He aimed to identify the common structures shared by all diverse cultural worlds by regarding the relative worlds solely in terms of their invariant and unchanging organization, irrespective of their layered on cultural meanings. What remained was according to Husserl a “universal” structure of a perceptual world, reflecting the structure of human consciousness. See the discussion of lifeworld, section 3.2.1.
preserve and sustain the lifeworlds; it is a way to enhance the existence of individuals. In this, it has an essentially ethical agenda.

Phenomenology suggests the opposite of a generic approach, i.e., a context-sensitive, user-oriented design, where the specific needs of people and communities; the cultural and historical context and the unique characteristics of a given place are the foundation of design choices.
5 APPROACHING ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE

The preceding chapters reexamined phenomenological concepts in terms of their implications for the role of user in architecture. One could ask, however, how to proceed with this knowledge, how to incorporate it in the real world practices. This chapter explores the relation between theory and practice in the phenomenological perspective. In this context, it emphasizes the relevance of rhetoric for architectural discourse.

It also refers to Donald Schön’s seminal work, The Reflective Practitioner (1983), a book on the role of knowledge in professional conduct. The concept of a “reflective practice” may be conceived as a model for a user-oriented architectural practice, which in many aspects coincides with the phenomenological framework.

5.1 PHENOMENOLOGY AS PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

Alberto Pérez-Gómez (1983), referring to Husserl’s Crisis of European Sciences (1936), maintains that separation of architectural theory and practice originates in the modern transformations, i.e., conceptual shifts that took place after the beginning of the nineteenth century. What were the consequences of these changes for architecture? As Pérez-Gómez remarks, architectural theory—similarly to modern science—has been devoid of a reference to transcendental meaning and the “lived world.”

Because architectural theory is assumed to imply absolute rationality, it has been considered capable of standing on its own, free of all relations to fundamental philosophical questions. Subject to the values of technology, its interest is not in meaning, but in a conceptual or
material efficiency dominating design and construction. This naturally has created a peculiar tension between theory and practice. Theory may work smoothly on a formal level, but it is unable to come to terms with reality. Correlatively, practice has been transformed into a process of production, without existential meaning, clearly defined aims, or reference to human values. Or else practice has ignored its connections to theory in order to recover its poetic dimension. (Pérez-Gómez, 1983:8)

Further, Pérez-Gómez adds:

The illusion remains, however, that practice can be reduced to a system of rational prescriptive rules. This is particularly evident in architectural education and obstructs our perception on how the relation between theory and practice operated until the end of the eighteenth century. (Pérez-Gómez, 1983:8)

As a result, architects fail to understand and acknowledge the transcendental dimension of meaning in architecture. Before the beginning of the nineteenth century, architects never considered formal language as the sole source of meaning. Architectural form was not an autonomous invention, but an embodiment of a certain style of life, an expression of culture. As Pérez-Gómez remarks, “today architects often work under the absurd assumption that meaning and symbol are merely products of the mind, that they can be manufactured a priori and that they possess somehow the certainty of number” (Pérez-Gómez, 1983:12). Consequently, the gap between architectural theory and practice increases. This is closely related to the distance between technological/economic development and the lived world of human values and meanings.

Phenomenology provides us with an alternative in which human values and practical engagement with the world are primary to the scientific rationality. The basic assumptions of phenomenology—the foundational character of lived experience and the primordiality of the lifeworld—imply inseparable relation between theory and practice in any domain of human activity.

Gadamer, in many of his works (especially the essays published in the late 1970s), addresses the question of practice and emphasizes that
phomenological hermeneutics is a practical philosophy. Accordingly, he stresses that the connection between phenomenological knowledge and practice is not a structuring relation. In this understanding, “theory […] does not produce specific answers to individual problems, but it does greatly facilitate asking the right questions” (Madison, 2001:5).

The practical significance of phenomenology lies not in easily-applicable problem-solving strategies, but rather in the formative nature of phenomenological knowledge. Phenomenological understanding changes the participants of the design process; it enhances their perceptiveness, influences their relationships with others, and it provides them with embodied, situational forms of understanding. In this, phenomenology has a potential to restore the relation between different domains of human activity and the lived world.

Aristotle is one of the main references for Gadamer, thus his standpoint deserves a brief introduction.

In Metaphysics, Aristotle states “all science (dianoia) is either practical, poetical or theoretical” (Metaphysics 1025b25). This use of the term “science” carries a different meaning than that covered today by the term “scientific method.” Generally speaking, Aristotle makes science coextensive with reasoning. In the early Greek understanding, science (dianoia) referred to the capacity for, process of, or result of discursive thinking, in contrast with the immediate apprehension that is characteristic of noesis (understanding as the ability to sense, or know something immediately; intuitive thinking).

In Aristotle’s view, “theoretical sciences” are concerned with things of invariable cause (this is where physics, mathematics, metaphysics belong):

The object of scientific knowledge is of necessity. Therefore it is eternal; for things that are of necessity in the unqualified sense are all eternal; and things that are eternal are ungenerated and imperishable. Again, every science is thought to be capable of being taught, and its object of being learned. (Aristotle, NE: VI, 3)

---

194 Generally speaking, “practical philosophy” is a domain of philosophy that foremost focuses on human activity and the foundations of the social sciences. It asks how, individually and socially, we should live, and investigates the nature of individual action and social institutions. Ethical concerns are here essential.

“Theoretical philosophy” in turn is interested in the nature of reality as a whole and asks how the world can be known to the inquirer. These areas of philosophy intersect at many points, but the degree of interaction is largely dependent upon an adapted paradigm.

In the case of phenomenology, the relationship between “theory” and “practice” is particularly strong; ethics, ontology, and epistemology are intimately connected here.
The ideal of theoretical sciences is theoretical (or philosophic) wisdom. It is, according to Aristotle, scientific knowledge combined with intuitive reason. Aristotle asserts: “[…] the wise man must not only know what follows from the first principles, but must also possess truth about the first principles” (Aristotle, NE VI, 7).

Both “practical sciences” and “poetical sciences” are dealing with the things of variable cause, i.e., “things which admit of being other than they are,” the realm of coming-to-be (Aristotle, NE: VI, 3).

Speaking more specifically, “poetical sciences” are sciences concerned with producing an end result; we could describe them therefore as productive sciences or techne, skills. The term poiesis is here central—in the Greek understanding it referred generally to the activity of making; not only the act of creating a work of art, but any everyday object such as a chair or a building. Since poiesis is defined by its external product, the human capability for “making” is perfected not in the activity of making itself, but in the quality, pathos, or usefulness of its product. What needs to be emphasized here is that the poetical sciences (as opposed to the other types of science) include reasoning.

According to Aristotle, poiesis is a reasoned state or capacity to make. In other words, it is “a state concerned with making, involving a true course of reasoning” while the lack of poiesis is “a state concerned with making, involving a false course of reasoning” (Aristotle, NE: VI, 4). Yet Aristotle admits that there is an undetermined element in poiesis, “in a sense chance and art [poiesis] are concerned with the same objects; as Agathon says, ‘art loves chance and chance loves art’” (Aristotle, NE: VI, 4).

Aristotle’s view of the “practical sciences” is of the greatest importance for our further discussion; it will be therefore discussed more extensively than the theoretical and poetical sciences.

The “practical sciences” are concerned with the human good and the principles of right action (here Aristotle situates politics and ethics). The ideal of practical sciences is practical wisdom, phronesis. Practical wisdom is...
concerned with the human sphere, i.e., things about which it is possible to deliberate (as Aristotle observes, no one deliberates about things of invariable cause, such as the objects of mathematics). Aristotle describes *phronesis* as follows:

Regarding practical wisdom we shall get at the truth by considering who are the persons we credit with it. Now it is thought to be the mark of a man of practical wisdom to be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect, e.g., about what sorts of thing conduce to health or to strength, but about what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general. […] It is for this reason that we think Pericles and men like him have practical wisdom, viz. because they can see what is good for themselves and what is good for men in general; we consider that those can do this who are good at managing households or states. (Aristotle, NE: VI, 5)

Practical wisdom may be briefly characterized as “a true and reasoned state or capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man” (Aristotle, NE: VI, 5). Here, knowledge and action are intimately connected and “practical wisdom issues commands, since its end is what ought to be done or not to be done; but understanding only judges” (Aristotle, NE: VI, 8).198

Aristotle argues that practical wisdom (unlike philosophic/theoretical wisdom) is always context-dependent, e.g., “what is healthy or good is different for men and for fishes, but what is white or straight is always the same” (Aristotle, NE: VI, 8). Furthermore, those who have theoretical wisdom do not necessarily possess practical wisdom:199

This is why we say Anaxagoras, Thales, and men like them have philosophic but not practical wisdom, when we see them ignorant of what is to their own advantage, and why we say that they know things that are remarkable, admirable, difficult, and divine, but useless; viz. because it is not human goods that they seek. (Aristotle, NE: VI, 8)

198 Good action is here an end (purpose, *telos*) in itself; unlike in the case of “making” (*poiesis*), which has an end other than itself—a created object. In other words, *phronesis* is realized insofar as it is practiced well in and of itself, while *poiesis* is realized insofar as it produces something good beyond itself, in the making of non-internal goods.

199 In Plato’s view, however, theoretical knowledge leads to practical wisdom. In the *Republic*, he argues that philosophers should rule the ideal city; theoretical knowledge thus provides a basis for action (even though the philosopher is characterized by detachment and alterity—a result of a divine perspective afforded by the theoretical “journey”).
For Aristotle practical wisdom is not concerned with universals; it must primarily recognize the particulars:

[...] Practice is concerned with particulars. This is why some who do not know, and especially those who have experience, are more practical than others who know; for if a man knew that light meats are digestible and wholesome, but did not know which sorts of meat are light, he would not produce health, but the man who knows that chicken is wholesome is more likely to produce health. (Aristotle, NE: VI, 7)

**Phronesis** requires an extensive experience of particulars, which is typically gained throughout the years, as Aristotle puts it, “while young men become geometricians and mathematicians and wise in matters like these, it is thought that a young man of practical wisdom cannot be found [...] for it is length of time that gives experience” (Aristotle, NE: VI, 8).200

Referring to Aristotle, Gadamer characterizes practical philosophy (“practical science”) as follows: “It must arise from practice itself and, with all types of generalizations that it brings to explicit consciousness, be related back to practice” (Gadamer, 1981: 92). Gadamer indicates that *phronesis* is the central concept of “practical science” and defines it as “the reasonableness of practical knowing” (Gadamer, 2004:21). By this, he means a practical reason, an ability to apply a general law to a specific case, and in this sense, *phronesis* refers to a problem of interpretation, thus it is one of the core concepts of hermeneutics.

Consequently, an emphasis is put on the “practicality” of our “being in the world” rather than on a theoretical apprehension. “What man needs is not just the persistent posing of ultimate questions, but the sense of what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now” (Gadamer, 2004:xxxiv). Gadamer emphasizes that understanding is not a task in itself, but should always involve applying the meaning understood in a specific context (Gadamer, 2004:328).

There is an ethical dimension in the concept of practical reason; Aristotle considers *phronesis* an “intellectual virtue.”

---

200 As Aristotle argues, “indeed one might ask this question too, why a boy may become a mathematician, but not a philosopher or a physicist. It is because the objects of mathematics exist by abstraction, while the first principles of these other subjects come from experience” (Aristotle, NE: VI, 8).
Although practicing this virtue means that one distinguishes what should be done from what should not, it is not simply practical shrewdness and general cleverness. The distinction between what should and should not be done includes the distinction between the proper and the improper and thus presupposes a moral attitude. (Gadamer, 2004:20).

In relation to Aristotle’s thought, Gadamer formulates the main tasks of philosophical hermeneutics: (1) to enable better self-understanding; (2) to encourage people to examine the motivating questions and presuppositions behind all actions; and (3) to increase the awareness of the experience of understanding.

We badly need this, for we live in a condition of ever-increasing self-estrangement, which far from being caused by the peculiarities of the capitalist economic order alone, is due rather to the dependence of our humanity upon that which we have built upon ourselves as our civilization. (Gadamer, 1981:149)

The realm of hermeneutic experience is the realm of shared meaning; an emphasis on communal, social reason is very strong here.201 As the model for philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer proposes a conversation, a dialogue in which common language is discovered, and—once it happens—the participants are changed. Theory and practice function here reciprocally, “This theoretic stance only makes us aware reflectively of what is performatively at play in the practical experience of understanding” (Gadamer, 1981:112).

In this context, Gadamer’s reflections on technology and science are very relevant. In the essay “What is practice?” Gadamer argues that contemporary science develops “into a knowledge of manipulable relationships by means of isolating experimentation” (Gadamer, 1981:70) and thus follows the path of technology. In the pre-modern period, the user’s needs and choices were the main criteria for the standard of what was made. Modern technology first makes the things, and then creates the needs, building “a consumer awakening and need-stimulating industry” (Gadamer, 1981:71) around us. As a result, we lose freedom and flexibility in relation to the world; our choices are diminishing. The development of computer

201 See also the discussion of Gadamer’s view of understanding as a fusion of horizons, discussed in section 3.2.3.
technology serves here as a good example. Technology changes more rapidly than its users can or need to absorb. The standards are not set by the users, but rather imposed on them. We are convinced that we have to follow the developments of technology, even though it limits our freedom and induces more stress. According to Gadamer, what happened was “the degeneration of practice into technique” and its “general decline into social irrationality” (Gadamer, 1981: 74).

In modern life, the question of whether the achievements of technology actually serve people seems no longer important; this is as much the case for architecture as for the other disciplines. The source of crisis may be identified in the domination of the models from the natural sciences (a “development” of Aristotelian theoretical sciences), also in the fields regarding the human world—and the consequent underestimation of the practical wisdom.202

One of the aspects of this process is the increasing reliance on experts and organizational planning process. We believe that experts can handle practical, political, and economic decisions, and while it is true that they may have the theoretical knowledge or skills (productive knowledge), they may not have the practical and political experiences necessary to determine the good of the society (practical wisdom, phronesis) (Gadamer, 1981: 72).

The narrowing of what counts as knowledge in modern science and most of philosophy has resulted in a very strong tension, even an opposition, between science (theory) and practice. As Gadamer observes, modern civilization lacks the ability to address and consider questions about life and reality as a whole. In order to overcome the crisis, we need to rehabilitate the concept of practice and restore a connection of what is good for humans to scientific development.

In The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age (1993),203 Gadamer illustrates the problem by examining the paradoxical nature of Western medicine, which chooses the body-object as its investigative starting point, when in fact it deals with subjects. This tension between knowledge and practice can be overcome by a model of medicine as the art of understanding and dialogue, capable of bringing together its various constituent parts: theory, “know-how,” and the knowledge of how to be human.

202 Considering Aristotle’s argument (e.g., book VI of Nicomachean Ethics) we could indubitably situate fields of knowledge regarding the human world in the domain of practical sciences. In this perspective, a modern attempt to approach human sciences using the methods of natural sciences seems highly inadequate.

203 The Enigma of Health is a collection of essays presented to medical and psychiatric societies, mainly during the 1970s and 1980s.

184
Not only in modern medicine it is problematic that we have lost the crucial link between knowledge of the world and knowledge of what it means to be human; we can easily observe this disconnect in modern architecture as well, where formal or technological explorations often seem to be a more important than the well-being of inhabitants. Architectural “masterpieces” tend to be created with a handful of kindred spirits in mind, rather than an “unenlightened” user (Till, 2005:167). The ethical dimension, however, is fundamental if one is to have a humane form of any practice, let alone a humane society.

As Allsopp (1974) argues, the architectural profession needs to use every possible means to build up its awareness of people. Architects need to give a great deal of consideration to the nature of their work, their social responsibilities, as well as revise their concept of professional good conduct in a way that gives a priority to individuals and families, rather than to abstract groups and classes (Allsopp 1974:97).

5.1.1 Rhetoric and architecture

The discussion of “practical reason,” or phronesis, points toward the concept of rhetoric. As Aristotle remarks, “Now it is thought to be the mark of a man of practical wisdom to be able to deliberate well about […] what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general” (Aristotle, NE: VI, 5).

Gadamer’s view of rhetoric is based on both Aristotelian interpretation and the humanistic tradition, particularly the works of Giambattista Vico. As early as 1708, Vico—in his small work On the Study Methods of Our Time (1708)—presented a theory of education formulated against Cartesianism. According to Vico, Descartes’ ideal of clarity and certainty in human knowledge excludes from it all forms of thinking that are traditionally placed under the heading of common sense or classically understood wisdom.

It seems to be overlooked that the human sciences generally depend upon the reasoning that proceeds from sensus communis204 and tradition; that

---

204 Vico in New Science (1730/1744) defines the term “sensus communis” “[il senso comune] is judgment without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation, or the entire human race.” Sensus communis can be thus understood as “communal sense” rather than a “common sense.”

Further, Vico explains that “uniform ideas originating among entire peoples unknown to each other must have a common ground of truth [un motivo comune di vero]” (Vico, quoted in: Bayer, 2008).

Gadamer defines “sensus communis” as “the sense that founds community” (Gadamer, 2004:19).
it provides us with well-argued probabilities, not logical certainties. In Vico’s view “what gives human will its direction is not the abstract universality of reason but the concrete universality represented by the community of a group, a people, a nation, or the whole human race” (Gadamer, 2004:19). Emphasizing this issue, Vico does not deny the importance of modern science, but intends to show its limits. In this context, he points out the importance of rhetoric. In his understanding, rhetoric is based on sensus communis, the “communal sense,” for what is true and right, which is not primarily grounded on argumentation, but “enables one to discover what is evident (verisimile)” (Gadamer, 2004:19).

Here, Vico follows the humanistic tradition that stems from antiquity where rhetoric is not just the “art of speaking” (i.e., of saying something well), it also requires saying the right thing and as such it refers to knowledge and wisdom.205

As Gadamer remarks, rhetoric has always been in conflict with philosophy. This conflict reflects “the contrast between the scholar and the wise man on whom the scholar depends,” or more generally, the contrast between the theoretical ideal of “sophia” and the practical ideal of “phronesis” (Gadamer, 2004:18).

Ernesto Grassi206 shares Gadamer’s perspective on rhetoric. In his view, far from being a theory or an abstract philosophy, rhetoric is always praxis. In his book Rhetorics as Philosophy (1980), Grassi brings out the very essence of rhetoric in a contrast to a discourse based on the ideals of rationality and objectivity:

Language is divided into two fundamentally different forms of expression. One is purely rational, which serves to prove and provide the reasons for something. It is considered to be the measure of science, since it vouches for the objectivity of its statements with reasons, and these are not allowed to be clouded by subjective

205 As Aristotle argues, “excellence in deliberation is clearly a kind of correctness, but neither of knowledge nor of opinion; for there is no such thing as correctness of knowledge (since there is no such thing as error of knowledge), and correctness of opinion is truth […] But again excellence in deliberation involves reasoning.” Further Aristotle concludes “If, then, it is characteristic of men of practical wisdom to have deliberated well, excellence in deliberation will be correctness with regard to what conduces to the end of which practical wisdom is the true apprehension[i.e., a good life]” (Aristotle, NE: VI, 10).

206 Ernesto Grassi (1902-1993) was a philosopher of two cultures; he was born in Italy, but lived practically all his adult life in Germany. He was a student of Martin Heidegger, with whom he worked for about ten years in Freiburg (from 1929). At the same time, Grassi was immersed in the Italian humanist tradition, which Heidegger dismissed as lacking philosophical significance.
opinions. [...] It cannot be bound to times, places, or personalities; it is unrhetorical. [...] Such a language must restrict itself to finding what already is contained in the premises but not yet explicit or obvious.

The second form of language is the one that determines the premises themselves which, since they cannot be proven, are the archai, the principles. [...] It is able only to make manifest and not to demonstrate. [...] This language “shows” us something, lets us see [phainesthai], and hence is “imagistic”. Since it must rely upon images [eide] it has a “theoretical” [theorein: see or look at] character and yet has the metaphorical character [...] The metaphor, and hence the language which it draws upon, has an “archaic” character, “possesses principles,” and is what we call “rhetorical.” (Grassi, 1980:96-97)

The opposition between the traditionally understood ideal of rationality and rhetoric does not imply that rhetoric is an irrational form of discourse. Rather, rhetoric provides foundations for the rational argumentation, “on the basis of its archaic character, it is what outlines the basis or framework of rational argument; it comes ‘before’ and provides that which deduction can never discover” (Grassi, 1980:97).

Nevertheless, most of the Western tradition did not acknowledge the significance of rhetorical language, seeing rhetoric barely as “a technique for the ‘superficial’ use of persuasion” (Grassi, 1980:97).

The importance given to rhetoric is a natural consequence of phenomenological thinking. We are not rational, disembodied minds, but finite beings immersed in the lifeworld, building our knowledge and understanding from a socially and historically conditioned perspective. As Husserl (1936) points out, a rationalism which had become detached from its lifeworld has been the source of the crisis of the West. Husserl’s argument that science should be understood in terms of its foundations in human experience207 is essentially an argument supporting the priority of rhetorical language.

What is the relevance of rhetoric for architecture? Among its main advantages is the emphasis on the concrete universality represented by the community, rather than on the abstract universality of theoretical reason. It implies the definition of architectural practice in terms of “the good of the society” and the restoration of the relation between architecture and the lived

---

207 Various scientific theories are artificially constituted by idealizing and structuring the pre-logical, pre-scientific lifeworld. See discussion of the concept of lifeworld, section 3.2.2.
world, the world of its users and inhabitants. Furthermore, as Madison (2001) emphasizes, the practice of *mutual persuasion* characteristic of rhetorics permits us to find a common solution in a way that preserves the principle of freedom of expression. In order to determine the “good,” a dialogue among different actors of a design process is necessary; this means a conversation in which all meanings are being considered and all participants are open to change.

Again, Gadamer’s reflections on the relationship between the doctor and the patient are here very illuminating:

[…Plato’s suggestion that the physician, like the true rhetorician, must take the whole of nature into view remains valid. Just as the latter must draw on true insight to find the right word which will influence those who listen, so too the physician must look beyond the immediate object of his knowledge and skill if he is to be a true physician. The position of doctors thus remains a fragile and intermediate one between enjoying a particular professional existence just like any other, with no special human commitments, and participating in something that is binding upon our very humanity. The predicament of doctors is defined by their capacity for inspiring trust but also equally by the necessity of limiting the use of their professional power and influence. Doctors must be able to look beyond the ‘case’ they are treating and have regard for the human being as a whole […] Indeed doctors must even be capable of reflecting on their own medical intervention and its probable effect on the patient. They must know when to stand back. (Gadamer, 1993:42-43)

It is not difficult to recognize that these statements possess a far more universal validity than just in the domain of medicine. Gadamer proposes here a human-oriented model of practice which could be beneficially adopted by any profession, including architecture. The model of rhetoric (with its emphasis on *sensus communis*, *phronesis*, and metaphor) can provide the foundation for developing strategies for engaging users in a design process.

Yet, engaging the inhabitants directly in the design process is not enough to make architecture a rhetorical practice. Users may hold the view of architecture as a commodity, i.e., they might not acknowledge that there is anything inappropriate with a technological, hedonistic practice. It is the

---

208 In this context, Madison (2001) strongly criticizes Habermasian idea of consensus, arguing that “undisputed agreement” is in fact the opposite of what “democracy” means.
architect that should bring the lifeworld into the communication in order to make appropriate decisions; this is the source of genuine phronesis.

5.2 EPISTEMOLOGY OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

The question of the role of knowledge in the actual design process is an important aspect of the discussion on the relation between architectural theory and practice, and in this context, between architect and user.

As the following quotations illustrate, there seems to be a certain rift between how theories conceptualize their relation to practice and how practitioners actually use theory.

An architect does not arrive at his finished product solely by a sequence of rationalizations, like a scientist, or through the workings of the Zeitgeist. Nor does he reach them by uninhibited intuition, like a musician or a painter. He thinks forms intuitively, and then tries to justify them rationally; a dialectical process governed by what we may call his theory of architecture, which can only be studied in philosophical and ethical terms. (Collins, 1965:16).

Collins argues that the actual role of theory in a design process is secondary to intuitive thinking, which resides at the beginning of a design process. Theory, however, has some influence as a way of directing design activity. Allsopp is more pessimistic in his conclusions as to the role of theory in a common design practice:

The great majority of architects do not design from theories or first principles. They work within a current idiom and imitate each other, thus creating the recognizable style of their period. So convinced do some designers become that the current idiom is “right,” that they become moralistic about it and make it a matter of personal artistic integrity to design with the style. (Allsopp, 1974:75)

Although one could identify many authors commenting upon the role of theory in a design practice, it is far more difficult to find a systematic examination of this problem. One of the most rigorous studies of the actual role of theory in a design process was conducted by Donald Schön in The
Reflective Practitioner (1983). The point of departure in this study is a gap between the kinds of knowledge honored in the academia and the competencies valued in professional practice.

Reflecting on his own experience, Schön maintains that the universities are not interested in the production and distribution of knowledge in general, but rather in promoting a particular epistemology, a view of knowledge that results in inattention to practical competence. Practitioners themselves—by conceiving their knowledge as indescribable—also contribute to the rift between universities and professions (Schön, 1991:vii-viii). Consequently, one can observe increasing signs of a crisis of confidence in professions. As could be seen in various public domains, the solutions to problems proposed by professionals often have unanticipated consequences and side effects. Furthermore, there are many instances of professionals using their positions illegitimately for private benefits. Schön gives many examples of the evidence of professional ineffectiveness, mostly by criticizing the attitude of professionals towards their clients.

Professionals claim to contribute to social well-being, put their client’s needs ahead of their own, and hold themselves accountable to standards of competence and morality. But both popular and scholarly critics accuse the professions of serving themselves at the expense of the clients, ignoring their obligations to public service, and failing to police themselves effectively. (Schön, 1991:12)

Another side of the crisis of professions seems to be rooted in the inadequateness of professional knowledge in the context of rapidly changing situations of practice. Professionals themselves speak about a new awareness of complexity which resists traditional skills and expertise (Schön, 1991:12-14). The awareness of uncertainty, instability, and value conflicts led in some professions to the emergence of significant professional pluralism. Diverse, competing views of professional practice—its central values, aims and knowledge base—can be also observed in architecture.

According to Schön, the way to deal with contemporary indeterminacies and value conflicts is not through unreflective application of established models of problem solving. Theoretical models are never sufficient to deal with complex practical situations.209 In Schön’s view, a way to bridge the gap between theory and practice is not to force practical situations into the

---

209 This inadequacy can be most clearly observed on the example of positivism (as was discussed in section 2.2.1).
models derived from research, but rather to reject the traditional view of professional, practical knowledge as standing in an opposition to research activity. We have to recognize that research is also an activity of practitioners; they become reflective researchers in the situations of uncertainty, unstability, and value conflicts. In this perspective, “research is triggered by features of the practice situation, undertaken on the spot, and immediately linked to action” (Schön, 1991:308). As a consequence,

There is no question of an “exchange” between research and practice and of the ‘implementation’ of the research results, when the frame- or theory-testing experiments of the practitioner at the same time transform the practice situation. Here the exchange between research and practice is immediate, and reflection-in-action is its own implementation. (Schön, 1991:309)

Nevertheless, as Schön admits, there are also important examples of “reflective research” which are undertaken outside the immediate context of practice, in order to enhance the professional’s ability for reflection-in-action. According to Schön, the idea of reflective research implies a specific agenda, one generated out of a dialogue between reflective researchers and practitioner-researchers. As a consequence, the rift between theory and practice will be minimized, for implementation will be built into the process of research.210 The next section will show that Schön’s position corresponds in many aspects with the phenomenological view of practice.

---

210 Schön divides this kind of research into four categories:

a. **Frame analysis:** “the study of the ways in which practitioners frame problems and roles.” It is essentially the study of the paradigms underlying professional practice. According to Schön, it is very important for practitioners to be aware of the ways they conceptualize the reality; this entrains the awareness of alternative possibilities of dealing with a problem.

b. **Repertoire-building research:** “description and analysis of images, category schemes, cases, precedents and exemplars.” The role of this type of research is to build the repertoires which practitioners bring to unique situations. It is especially useful when practice situations do not fit available theories or models of action. An example of such research is the study of legal cases and judicial precedents.

c. **Research on methods and theories fundamental to practice:** research on the methods and theories “that some practitioners have learned to use as springboards for making sense of new situations which seem, at first glance, not to fit them.” It often deals with situations of uniqueness, instability, and uncertainty in which the application of established theories meets difficulties. This type of study has connections to both frame research and repertoire-building research, but what gives it a place on its own is the understanding of method and theory as staying in an inseparable connection, and used to *restructure* a specific situation, so the practitioner can explain it. This kind of research may help other practitioners “to
5.2.1 Reflection-in-Action

Schön argues that in order to find a way out of the current crisis of professions we need to investigate “epistemology of practice.” This means that we need to examine the kind of knowing in which competent, successful practitioners engage and try to identify intellectual rigor behind it.

The most fundamental question Schön addresses is how the theory-practice relationship should be structured in order to account for the complexity of real-world situations in a non-reductive way. Searching for answer, Schön looks at the ways in which we deal with situations of everyday life. In most cases, we act spontaneously and intuitively. Furthermore, we often find difficulty in describing what exactly we know. It may be said that our knowing is knowing-in-action.

This reflection seems to be in line with Heidegger’s (1927) thinking about our everyday involvement with the world. We primarily refer to the objects of our surroundings (“tools”) without theorizing; we see them as ready-to-hand (a hammer is ready-to-hand when it works as intended). In contrast to readiness-to-hand, presence-at-hand is not the way things in the world are usually encountered, and it may be conceived as a deficient or secondary mode (e.g., when a hammer breaks, it loses its usefulness and appears as merely there, present-at-hand). While a thing which is ready-to-hand always exists in a network of other tools and structures, a thing present-at-hand stands apart from any useful set of equipment. In seeing an entity as present-at-hand, we adapt an attitude similar to that of a scientist or theorist, for we are concerned only with the neutral, factual characteristics of a thing (or a concept) in order to theorize about it.

Schön initially assumed that not only our everyday activities are based on knowledge-in-action, but also that professional practice primarily depends on this way of tacit knowing.

Every competent practitioner can recognize phenomena […] for which he cannot give a reasonably accurate or complete description. In his day-to-day practice he makes innumerable judgments of quality for which he cannot state adequate criteria, and he displays skills for

---

d. Research on the process of reflection-in-action: addresses researcher’s and research participants’ cognitive dynamics, e.g., intuitive understandings underlying their performance. This type of study helps researchers to understand their own influence on the investigated phenomena (Schön, 1991:309-322).
which he cannot state the rules and procedures. Even when he makes conscious use of research-based theories and techniques, he is dependent on tacit recognitions, judgments, and skillful performances. (Schön, 1991:49-50)

Nevertheless, while conducting his case studies, Schön noticed that most of the successful practitioners revealed the capacity for a conscious reflection on their intuitive knowing and used this knowledge to cope with more difficult situations of practice. This reflection was often taking place in the midst of action, so it may be called “reflection-in-action.” Such “theorizing” is most typically stimulated by a surprise such as a “puzzling or troubling phenomenon with which individual is trying to deal” (Schön, 1991:50).

When intuitive, spontaneous performance yields nothing more than the results expected for it, then we tend not to think about it. But when intuitive performance leads to surprises, pleasing and promising or unwanted, we may respond by reflecting in action. (Schön, 1991:56)

Here, Schön’s remark is again corresponding with Heidegger’s (1927) thinking that theorizing attitude is a way of encountering things in situations when they do not work as expected (in such situations, an intuitively used, ready-to-hand tool suddenly appears as present-at-hand). What is also somehow in line with phenomenology, reflection-in-action involves a certain openness, a readiness to step back from one’s preconceptions and adopt what we might even say is an “attitude of wonder” toward a given situation.

The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. […] He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new

211 It is worthwhile to note the difference between the terms “reflexivity” and “reflectivity.” The term “reflexivity” regards a critical introspection. As Sandelowski & Barroso (2002) explain, “Reflexivity is a hallmark of excellent qualitative research and it entails the ability and willingness of researchers to acknowledge and take account of the many ways they themselves influence research findings and thus what comes to be accepted as knowledge. Reflexivity implies the ability to reflect inward toward oneself as an inquirer; outward to the cultural, historical, linguistic, political, and other forces that shape everything about inquiry; and, in between researcher and participant to the social interaction they share” (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002:222).

The term “reflectivity” used by Schön is wider; it emphasizes both critical reflection and an ability to employ this reflection in professional practice.

212 By the phrase “the attitude of wonder,” Merleau-Ponty (1945) characterizes phenomenological reduction (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:xv). See the discussion of the concept of *epoche* in section 3.1.1.
understanding of the phenomena and change in the situation. (Schön, 1991:68)

In Schön’s view, when a practitioner reflects-in-action, she is not dependent on the categories of established theory, but rather develops a new theory of the unique case. The previous knowledge is somehow “suspended.” In this characteristic of reflection-in-action, there may be identified another connection with phenomenology, namely the concept of phenomenological reduction advocated by Husserl.\footnote{213}

Reflection-in-action may be seen as a certain way towards understanding the world as lived, with all its complexity and uniqueness. The role of reflection-in-action is not to rise above our practical involvement with the world and offer a meta-level explanation, but rather to understand the variety of our modes of being-in-the world in order to propose a non-reductive way of dealing with specific problems. According to Schön, reflection on our activity helps us to identify understandings that have been implicit in our actions. Consequently, we modify, criticize, and restructure these understandings in our further actions. The process of reflection-in-action is a way in which “artful” practitioners deal with situations of complexity, uncertainty, and value conflict (Schön, 1991:50).

It may be argued that such a reflective attitude is one of the central methodological principles of phenomenology. Phenomenology emphasizes that we always understand the surrounding world in relation to a general pre-understanding, the implicit knowledge that is there with us. However, it demands a significant effort to reflect on this knowledge.

At a minimum, having a lifeworld is a pre-understanding that we can never escape. […] In the natural attitude the pre-understanding comes to play in an uncritical and, most often, un-reflected way. Not even in a professional activity, where we are confronted by problems that demand a reflective stance from us, do we necessarily reflect on the pre-understanding that still governs our understanding. When it is mentioned, it is referred to as maturity, life wisdom, professionalism etcetera. (Dahlberg et al., 2008:278)

Furthermore, phenomenology shares with Schön’s view the emphasis on the inseparable relationship between theory and practice; in both perspectives understanding “transforms” practice.

\footnote{213 See section 3.1.}
According to Schön, reflection-in-action is a way of thinking about practice that is not restricted to a specific paradigm. It may be, however, seen in general opposition to the model of “technical rationality,” a positivist approach which sees an intelligent practice as an application of knowledge to instrumental decisions. Although theoretical knowledge is an important aspect of practice, Schön emphasizes that intelligent practice cannot be defined in terms of “knowing that.” Referring to Gilbert Ryle, he maintains that what distinguishes sensible operations from the silly ones is not so much their “parentage” (conceptual antecedents), as their procedure (Schön, 1991:50-51).

5.2.2 Architectural design as a reflective practice

Architecture is for Schön a part of a family of design professions which may be most generally defined in the contemporary context as “occupations engaged in converting actual to preferred situations” (Schön, 1991:77). In this family, architecture has a special role as perhaps the oldest recognized design profession; as such, it functions as a model for understanding design in other professions.

According to Schön, a design process may be most generally defined as “a conversation with a situation.” Designers make things (products or, more often, their representations) in particular situations, using particular materials and employing specific media and language. Typically, the design process is very complex; there are far more variables than can be represented in a finite model. Because of this complexity, the designer’s choices tend to produce consequences other than those intended. In such situations, designer may take into account the unintended changes he has made by forming new understandings and by making new moves. In short, we may say that the designer shapes the situation, in accordance with his initial understanding of it, then the situation “talks back,” and eventually designer responds to the situation’s back-talk (Schön, 1991:78-79).

In an “artful” design process, this “conversation with a situation” is reflective. “In answer to situation’s back-talk, the designer reflects-in-action on the construction of the problem, the strategies of action, or the model of the phenomena, which have been implicit in his moves” (Schön, 1991:79).

Although Schön acknowledges the multiplicity of approaches within architecture, he does not limit his discussion to any particular position. Instead, he focuses on the dynamics of the design activity, which he sees as a
“generic process” common to various positions (Schön, 1991:78). It seems that Schön’s perspective grounds a possibility for a fruitful inter-paradigm communication. In his understanding, a “good practice” is not primarily grounded in theoretical presumptions, but in a “reflective” way of approaching specific situations. Schön is, however, far from admitting that the theoretical background has no importance. Reflective conversation with the situation can have very different outcomes, depending on the adopted theoretical position. A theoretical background implies certain priorities which designers assign to a design process at its various stages.

5.3 MOVING TOWARDS A REFLECTIVE CONTRACT

Schön’s idea of a reflective practice has important implications, among others for professional’s role in the society; his autonomy and authority in relation to clients; the kinds of research and education most likely to be beneficial for practitioners; and the institutional contexts of professional practice. It also implies a certain vision of social progress and well-being, which may be used to justify professional activity (Schön, 1991:287). The following discussion will focus on the professional-client relationship.214 Schön argues that the idea of reflective practice questions the traditional understanding of the professional as a technical expert and implies the need for the “demystification” of professional knowledge, not in a sense of showing up the falsity of practitioners’ claims to knowledge, but as making professional knowledge more transparent, opening it up to inquiry.215 “Mystification consists in making knowledge-in-practice appear to be more complex, private, ineffable, and above all […] more closed to inquiry, than it needs to be” (Schön, 1991:289). Harold Rosenberg216 (1959) highlights one aspect of such “mystification”—the overcomplication of professional language:

214 As Schön (1983) states, one of the problems in the professional-client relationship lies in specifying who the client actually is, i.e., “to whom should we define ourselves as standing in the essential professional relationship?” (Schön, 1991:291). We assume here that “client” is tantamount to “user.”

215 Till’s remark is very relevant in this context: “One of the problems identified in participation is that the channels of communication between the expert and non-expert are not transparent, and so participation remains dominated by the experts who initiate the communication on their own terms, circumscribing the process through professionally coded drawings and language” (Till, 2005:28).

216 Harold Rosenberg (1906-1978) was an American writer, educator, and art critic. He coined the term Action Painting in 1952 (later referred to as abstract expressionism).
Thus the essential mark of a profession is its evolution of a unique language […] The more incomprehensible the lingo is to outsiders, the more thoroughly it identifies the profession as such and elevates it out of the reach of mere amateurs and craftsmen. (Rosenberg, 1959, quoted in: Molesworth et al., 2003:33)

Further, Rosenberg suggests that the continuous use of Latin by the medical profession appears as single-minded compared to what some professions have been able to accomplish in English in the recent decades. This seems particularly relevant for numerous examples of contemporary architectural writings.217

A problem related to the “mystification” of professional knowledge is the dominance of the traditional model of the professional-client contract, in which

[…] the professional acts as though he agreed to deliver his services to the client to the limits of his special competence […] and the client acts as though he agreed, in turn, to accept the professional’s authority […] to submit to the professional’s ministrations, and to pay for the services rendered. (Schön, 1991:291)

In other words, the client agrees to not challenge the professional’s decisions or to demand explanations beyond the professional’s willingness to give them. The status, autonomy, and authority of an “expert” are here clearly prioritized. As Schön points out, under such a contract, the professional’s accountability for his performance is mainly to his peers. The client has in most cases a limited ability to determine whether the legitimate expectations have been met and the institutional mechanisms of evaluation work most typically only in the cases of a violation of the law.

The failure of institutional mechanisms of accountability have contributed a great deal to the current disenchantment with the professions, for example in the nursing home scandals […] There is […] a widespread worry that the relatively rare instances of public exposure signal a far wider pattern of violation of the professional contract, which existing mechanisms of accountability are insufficient to reveal or correct. (Schön, 1991:293)

217 For instance, Tschumi (1994). See also the discussion of constructivism-undermined architectural theory, section 2.2.3.
An ethical issue emerges here. The professionals may argue that the clients are not paying to address the broader ethics and that the concept of wider ethical responsibilities is an idealistic stance. Nevertheless, as Till (2009) emphasized, referring to architecture, the issues of social ethics are inherent in any design process and ignoring them does not mean that they disappear. The best way is to confront them, and deal with the tension between the values and priorities expressed by the professional codes and those implicit in social ethics. “The former are framed by a short-term transaction between architect and client, and thus tend to focus on short-term delivery in which architecture is reduced to a commodity; the latter operate beyond these fiscal exchanges and in long term” (Till, 2009:182). As Till argues, at the heart of architect’s role is “the negotiation between the brute reality of immediate demands and the long-term vision” (Till, 2009:182).

According to Schön, when a practitioner is a member of a profession that carries a strong presumption of authority and autonomy, then the problem of moving to a “reflective contract” may be particularly difficult; it involves giving up some of the initial claims to authority and opening up to the dialogue with clients. Furthermore, the reflective contract calls for competences which may seem strange or difficult to acquire. Whereas the professional is typically expected to play the role of expert and keep his expertise private and mysterious, the model of “reflective practice” demands an open reflection on the knowledge-in-practice; in this, the practitioner makes himself confrontable by his clients (Schön, 1991:298). In this situation, after a true dialogue, the practitioner is still responsible for the outcomes of the process, as Gadamer’s doctor (1993) is ultimately accountable for healing the patient.

It seems that in the case of architecture (or any other design profession), switching to the “reflective contract” is even more challenging. Apart from the strong presumptions of professional autonomy and authority, there is also a considerable emphasis on creativity, understood most often as self-expression. As Bruce Allsop remarks,

[…] perhaps the greatest snare for the architect and planner lies in the fact that he has been taught to regard the practice of his art or skill as a fulfillment of himself, and it is all too tempting to see people as an obstacle to the realization of schemes which are the projection of his cultivated powers of intuition and reasoning. It is terribly easy to become convinced that what you want to do is in the interests of humanity, and all you have to do is impose your ideas in the face of
resistance which springs from ignorance and stupidity. (Allsopp, 1974:39)

Nevertheless, as Allsopp emphasizes, creativity cannot evolve from the continued practice of expressing one’s emotions. Any creative endeavor requires a personal commitment, but this endeavor is essentially different from expressionism.

Truly the artist who would achieve greatness has to forget himself, to “die to himself” and become the vehicle for the creation of something which comes from all the stimuli which actuate his work. In the case of a work of architecture, site and environment, significance, client, community, cost, structure, function and many other factors are focused in the mind of architect, where the design is created through a process of challenge and response between the mind and what is externalized as the evolving design. (Allsopp, 1974:72)

This perspective is very much in tune with the phenomenological way of thinking about art, as discussed in section 3.3. Creativity here is not conceived as autonomous self-expression, but as a phenomenon intimately connected with the lifeworld.

Creativity is always situated within a particular communicative context from which it grows and in which the creative results participate. This circular process is not only the essence of creativity but also the essential moment in the disclosure and in the construction of the human world. (Vesely, 2004:19-20)

In Vesely’s view, a design activity that lacks a communicative relation with its cultural settings should be characterized as “production.” Products are normally being designed regardless of specific place, people, or culture. Consequently, purpose and meaning are primarily defined by the products’ internal logic. It seems, however, that most commonly creativity in architecture is defined primarily in such categories as novelty, originality, or utter individualism. Furthermore, creativity understood in such a way is thought to be one of the most essential aspects of a successful design.

It is a peculiarity of our time, fostered by art critics, that originality is greatly admired. Ambitious architects have yearnings to be original which resemble the yearnings of some religious people for martyrdom;
there is the same element of insincerity in both. Originality cannot be sought or commanded: it happens or it does not and there is nothing we can do about it. Being different in order to appear original is merely fraudulent. (Allsopp, 1974:72-73)

An exaggerated emphasis on creativity and originality understood in terms of self-expression contributes to the increasing of distance between the architect and the lived-world. The architect’s ideas and forms are given a priority, overwhelming the user and his voice.

There are numerous reasons that make a departure from an expressionistic vision of creativity difficult. Some architects perhaps fear being labelled as reactionary when referring to local culture and tradition. Furthermore, autonomous self-expression is surely a great source of satisfaction for those architects and students who have such a possibility. Schön admits that in the move to “reflective practice,” a professional has to give up some familiar sources of satisfaction such as “the rewards of unquestioned authority, the freedom to practice without challenge to his competence, the comfort of relative invulnerability, the gratifications of deference” (Schön, 1991:299). In the case of architecture, we may also add that the architect gives up the satisfaction of unrestricted self-expression.

What has to be emphasized in this context is that a critique of an expressionistic view of creativity is not implying that there is no place for creativity and innovation in a reflective architectural contract. On the contrary, an artistic dimension emerging from and relating meaningfully to the lifeworld of the users is an essential aspect of architect’s responsibility. As Gadamer (1960) emphasizes, art connects the sphere of individual experience with the larger sphere of common meanings (the lifeworld), thus it provides grounds for social interactions. Art also has a transformative role; it helps individuals to identify and develop their true possibilities, as well as to adopt a more reflective and resolute stance towards their lives. It “confronts man with himself in his morally determined existence” (Gadamer, 2004:45).

Schön argues that there are new sources of content to be discovered in a reflective contract, for instance, in the sense of freedom and of real connection to the client that emerges as a result of no longer needing to maintain a professional façade; or in the continuing process of self-education and development (practice functions here as a source of renewal). Till’s (2009) statements confirm Schön’s assertions:

218 See the discussion of phenomenological understanding of art and creativity, section 3.3.1.
Architecture’s dependency is finally seen as an opportunity and not a threat, with the architect working out from the contingencies of the given situation and using their embedded knowledge, skills, and imagination in an open and curious way in order to contribute to the making of new spatial possibilities. (Till, 2009:151)

Schön puts into question the legitimacy of the a priori accepted professional’s authority and the client’s unquestionable submission to it. It places client and professional in a far less hierarchical relationship, insisting on the rights of the client and empowering him “to resist the professional’s efforts to control him.” schön argues that the traditional professional-client relationship may be most successfully transformed when the professional is able to function as a reflective practitioner.

Just as reflective practice takes the form of a literally reflective conversation with the situation, so the reflective practitioner’s relation with his client takes the form of a literally reflective conversation. Here the professional recognizes that his technical expertise is embedded in a context of meanings. He attributes to his clients, as well as to himself, a capacity to mean, know and plan. He recognizes that his actions may have different meanings for his client that he intends them to have, and he gives himself the task of discovering what these are. He recognizes an obligation to make his own understandings accessible to his client, which means that he needs often to reflect anew on what he knows. (Schön, 1991:295)

Yet, Schön admits that there are certain constraints on the applicability of the reflective contract.

Its establishment is difficult and time-consuming, and the matter at hand must seem of sufficient importance to make the effort worthwhile. There are occasions when the client wants nothing more than the notarization of a deed, or a prescription of a conventional remedy, and to be done with it. There are also situations of crisis, when the practitioner ought to do nothing more than the bare task

219 However, as schon remarks, we have to be aware that those who organize citizens to defend their rights against excessive professional control still take the professional stance, claiming special knowledge and autonomy; “the organized advocacy […] may become as controlling and as unreflective as traditional professional practice at its worst” (Schön, 1991:293-294).
required; conversation, reflective or otherwise, would be irrelevant. (Schön, 1991:297-298)

The establishment of a “reflective contract” seems most worthwhile and reasonable in situations which are neither emergencies nor routine cases.

Schön’s characterization of a reflective practice is partly in tune with Gadamer’s model of medicine as the art of understanding and dialogue. The model of design as a reflective “conversation with a situation” resembles the rhetorical process of arriving at a mutual understanding. The emphasis on the unity of theory and practice and the stress on the role of pre-understanding in all understanding also reflect the phenomenological perspective. Another connection may be drawn between Schön’s characteristics of reflection-in-action and the concept of phenomenological reduction, where it is understood as readiness to step back from one’s preconceptions and adopt an “attitude of wonder” towards a specific situation. This attitude characterizes artful practitioners in non-typical situations, such as in confrontation with a puzzling or troubling phenomenon.

What seems to be the main difference between Gadamer’s and Schön’s views is that phenomenological hermeneutics puts much stronger emphasis on the cultural context of understanding/practice. Furthermore, phenomenological hermeneutics stresses the importance of artistic experience (i.e., its innovative and transformative dimensions),

As indicated before, Schön does not identify his view with any particular theoretical framework. In his understanding, a “good practice” is not primarily grounded in theoretical presumptions, but in a “reflective” way of approaching specific situations, guided by the common good and based primarily on a dialogue. In this, he offers the proponents of different paradigms a possibility of establishing their epistemologies of reflective practice—epistemologies which would show that reflective practice is not inferior to technical rationality, but has a rigor on its own.

The dilemma of rigor or relevance may be dissolved if we can develop an epistemology of practice which places technical problem solving within a broader context of reflective inquiry, shows how reflection-in-action may be rigorous in its own right, and links the art of practice

---

220 See the discussion of phenomenological view of art, section 3.3.1.
in uncertainty and uniqueness to the scientist’s art of research. We may thereby increase the legitimacy of reflection-in-action and encourage its broader, deeper, and more rigorous use. (Schön, 1991:69)

In this perspective, a model of reflective practice based on the phenomenological framework would be one of the possible ways towards a user-oriented architectural design.
PHENOMENOLOGICAL IDEAS BEHIND
ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE—A CASE
STUDY ANALYSIS

Following Aristotle, it has been assumed that providing specific examples is an essential part of research dealing with the sphere of human actions.

We must, however, not only make […] [a] general statement, but also apply it to the individual facts. For among statements about conduct those which are general apply more widely, but those which are particular are more genuine, since conduct has to do with individual cases, and our statements must harmonize with the facts in these cases. (Aristotle, NE: II, 7).

The intention behind this chapter is to situate the theoretical assumptions developed in the preceding part of this thesis within the context of a concrete architectural practice.

The value of communicating such a dimension is that it gives readers access not just to principles, explanations and conclusions, but grants the possibility of intuitive empowerment, that is, access to a range of implications about the phenomenon that serve as a rich personal reference when acting in relation to the phenomenon. (Todres, 2007:47)

A case study supplementing the main body of research may be therefore seen as a strategy facilitating the practical application of the research findings.
6.1 CASE STUDIES AND CONTEXT-DEPENDENT RESEARCH IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Bent Flyvbjerg (2006) indicates that there are many misunderstandings and oversimplifications regarding case study research. The most common is the view that, in the human sciences, case studies have a very limited value compared to theoretical research. Essentially, this is a view that theoretical, context-independent knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical, context-dependent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006:221). Although some scholars generally agree that case studies may be useful in the preliminary stages of investigation (or as a method of producing anecdotes), they often doubt whether such studies can provide reliable information about the broader class of phenomena. Consequently other, more conventional methods are seen as more appropriate in theory building and testing process.

Flyvbjerg’s arguments for the value of case study research have much in common with Schön’s presumptions. Flyvbjerg claims that case study research produces a type of context-dependent knowledge which is necessary in many learning processes. It allows a qualitative step from the rule-governed use of analytical rationality to the intuitive performance of tacit skills. This process is particularly important for professional development, to take one from a beginner to a virtuoso-expert.

Common to all experts […] is that they operate on the basis of intimate knowledge of several thousand concrete cases in their areas of expertise. Context-dependent knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity. Such knowledge and expertise also lie at the centre of the case study as a research and teaching method. (Flyvbjerg, 2006:222)

Flyvbjerg suggests that if people were trained exclusively in theoretical, context-independent knowledge, they would remain at the beginner’s level of the learning process. For him, theoretical knowledge is important and necessary, but should not be considered as the highest goal of learning, for “the highest levels in a learning process […] are reached only via a person’s own experiences as practitioner of the relevant skills” (Flyvbjerg, 2006:223).

---

221 Schön’s description of “repertoire-building research” refers to the study of specific cases, precedents, examples. The role of this type of research is to build the repertoires which practitioners bring to unique situations. It is especially useful, when practice situations do not fit available theories or models of action.
This argument has important implications for education, particularly in professional programs such as architecture. Case studies and other “practical” methods (such as internships) allow students to achieve the experience necessary for their future work.

The argument for the value of context-dependent research (such as case studies) often corresponds with the phenomenological perspective. For instance, Campbell (1975) maintains:

After all, man is, in his ordinary way, a very competent knower, and qualitative common-sense knowing is not replaced by quantitative knowing. […] This is not to say, that such common-sense […] observation is objective, dependable or unbiased. But it is all that we have. It is the only route to knowledge—noisy, fallible, and biased though it be. (Campbell, 1975:179, 191, quoted in Flyvbjerg, 2006:224)

The relevance of case studies is not limited to professional contexts. Their importance for researchers lies in their closeness to real-life situations, their complexities, and their ambiguities. Case studies verify simplified models, showing that human behavior cannot be meaningfully understood in terms of rule-governed acts (something which is often implied by the research within positivist or critical theory paradigms). Furthermore, case studies are essential for researchers’ own learning process.

If researchers wish to develop their own skills to a high level, then concrete, context-dependent experience is just as central for them as for professionals learning any other specific skills. […] Great distance to the object of the study and lack of feedback easily lead to a stultified learning process, which in research can lead to ritual academic blind alleys, where the effect and usefulness of research becomes unclear and untested. (Flyvbjerg, 2006:223)

It seems that within architectural theory there is a need for a more extensive case study research, situating particular theories in real-life contexts and verifying their claims. As Eckstein (1975) remarks, “aiming at the disciplined application of theories to cases forces one to state theories more rigorously than might otherwise be done” (Eckstein, 1975:103).

---

222 As we already noted discussing Schön’s theory.
Contemporary architectural discourse is largely based on simplifying models (such as Koolhas’ “generic city”), which often obscure more than they explain. As a result, architectural theory seldom contributes to a more informed practice.

Following these insights, the next part of this text situates theoretical assumptions of the thesis in the context of concrete architectural practice. More specifically, it examines how phenomenological concepts of lifeworld, lived experience, and interpretation may direct an architectural design process.

6.2 METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS

According to Robert K. Yin (1994), the main mistake to be avoided when conducting a case study is to consider this type of research as a variant or subset of the research designs used for other strategies. Following Yin’s suggestion, the design of this case study was preceded by a thorough study of the literature dealing with case study research. Two books were particularly useful in guiding my inquiry: Yin’s *Case Study Research* (1994), and Robert E. Stake’s *The Art of Case Study Research* (1995). Following these two authors, in this section we will discuss basic characteristics and procedural demands of a case study. The rationale behind the selection of the case will be also addressed.

The procedures for case study research are relatively well-developed. The recommendation to follow a set of principles in the composition of the research may perhaps be seen as a limiting condition, but there are many advantages. Case study procedures demand a careful rethinking of the relationship between different parts of the research (such as initial assertions, evidence, analyses, and final findings). Making these relationships more explicit is likely to facilitate comprehension and an evaluation of the study for the reader (particularly for the reader coming from a different research tradition than the author of the study) can be very helpful. Furthermore, the recommended practice of validating the findings demands a more rigorous, disciplined, and constantly self-critical style of thinking.

As indicated in the previous section, the potential benefits of using case studies for architectural research seem to be underestimated. That is one of my reasons for including a more extensive discussion on the methodological aspects of this type of inquiry. A reflection on methodology is also a way to increase the overall reliability of a case study (Yin, 1994:37). In the context
of a more general, methodological discussion, the issues related specifically to the present study are addressed.

6.2.1 Case study—general characteristics

Although authors dealing with the procedural aspects of case study research generally agree on the main characteristics of this strategy, there may be found slightly different concepts of case study, depending on which philosophical and methodological traditions they are based.223

According to Yin (1994), a case study is an empirical inquiry that deals with a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. The case study relies on multiple sources of evidence and benefits from the prior development of a theoretical stance to guide the data collection and analysis (Yin, 1994:13).

Stake (1995) defines case study as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995:xi).

Further characteristics of the case study research are:

- Special attention is given to completeness in observation, reconstruction, and analysis of the cases under study.
- Case study should be done in a way that incorporates the views of the “actors” in the case under study; i.e., researchers consider alternative perspectives, including rival interpretations, etc.
- The essential characteristic of case studies is that they strive towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1990). Cultural systems of action refer to sets of interrelated activities engaged in by the actors in a social situation.
- Case study must always have boundaries. A case may be defined as a “bounded system.” An “object” (e.g., an architect, an innovative

223 Case study is considered as a qualitative research strategy (see section 1.4), but under this broad term, one may find a whole spectrum of approaches; some of them include significant quantitative aspects such as case studies based on the collection of descriptive variables, common in medicine, business, or education.

Stake and Yin, who are among the most highly esteemed authors writing on case study research, reflect this variety. Stake (1995) developed a view of case studies grounded in interpretative research traditions and “naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological and biographic research methods” (Stake, 1995:xi). Compared to Stake, Yin (1994) seems to be advocating a more quantitative approach.
building, or an architectural studio) is more likely to fulfill this demand than a “process” (e.g., the reasons for innovative design) which may lack the required specificity. In other words, a case is “a specific, a complex, a functioning thing” (Stake, 1995:2).

- Case study research is not a sampling research; nevertheless, cases must be selected so as to maximize what can be learned in the period of time available for the study.
- Case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined.
- Although case studies typically allow for certain generalizations to be drawn, this research strategy is not primarily being chosen with the objective of producing generalizations. The more important feature of case study is particularization, meaning that a particular case is being examined with an emphasis on its uniqueness.

Yin (1994) presents case study as one of several ways of conducting social science research. He suggests that the selection of a research strategy should be primarily dependent upon the type of the research question. Other important aspects include the degree of required control over the event and the temporal context of the studied phenomena (i.e., historical vs. contemporary). Case studies are generally the preferred strategy of inquiry when “how” and “why” questions are being posed, a strict control over the event is not possible/not necessary, and the focus of the research is on a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 1994:1).

If the research question is complex, or there are different types of research questions in a given project, it is often necessary to employ more than one research strategy. Various research strategies are not mutually exclusive; large areas of overlap exist among strategies, and the same questions may sometimes be approached by different research strategies (depending on the main focus and disposition of the researcher). Nevertheless, there can be identified some situations in which a specific strategy has a distinct advantage (Yin, 1994:9).

In this thesis, different research strategies have been utilized for the different parts of the research. Following Yin’s recommendations, case study

---

224 The other strategies Yin mentions include: experiment, survey, archival analysis, and history (Yin, 1994:6).
225 Yin distinguishes the following forms of a research question: how? why? who?, what? where? how many? how much? The form of the research question provides an important clue as to the selection of the most appropriate research strategy (Yin, 1994: 6, 8).
has been selected as the most appropriate strategy for the part of the research dealing with an example of architectural practice.226 227

There are three basic types of case studies (Yin, 1994):

- **Exploratory** case studies: fieldwork and data collection may be undertaken prior to the definition of the research questions and hypotheses. This type of study has been considered as a prelude to further research.

- **Explanatory** cases are suitable for doing causal studies, i.e., to explain the causal links in real-life interventions, typically in situations which are too complex for other research strategies (e.g., a study to examine the reason why some research findings end up in practical use).

- **Descriptive** cases require that the investigator begin with a descriptive theory or face the possibility that problems will occur during the project (the descriptive theory must cover the depth and scope of the case under study). What is essential in this type of study is the formation of hypotheses with regard to cause-effect relationships.

Depending on the main focus of the case, case studies can be divided into two categories (Stake, 1995:3-4):

- **Intrinsic** case studies: the main emphasis is on the specificity and particularity of a given phenomenon (the researcher has an intrinsic interest in the case); research questions typically do not address more general issues, but focus on the issues critical to a given case.

- **Instrumental** case studies: the selected case is instrumental to accomplishing something other than understanding a particular phenomenon under the study; research questions address a more general problem.

---

226 Following Yin’s view, this part of the thesis dealing with a concrete architectural practice might be perhaps more rightly situated in the area of overlap between case study and historical research. Typically, historical research is done on the “dead past” with virtually no direct access to the studied phenomenon. Nevertheless, when histories are being written about contemporary events, they largely overlap with case studies. One of the main differences is a wider variety of evidence typically considered in case studies (including direct observation and interviewing, which are seldom available in historical research) (Yin, 1994:8). This study is not taking advantage of direct observation and interviewing (which are among the main strengths of case study research); this is due to the limitations of time and resources for the project.

227 The research question here has a form of “how,” i.e., “How can phenomenological concepts (lifeworld, lived experience, interpretation) be integrated in a design practice?” The main focus here is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context; a strict control over the inquired phenomena is not possible.
The study conducted within this project has elements of both descriptive and explanatory case study. It begins with a descriptive theory (elaborated in the preceding chapters) and then, through the perspective of this theory, it seeks to explain causal links in real-life interventions (architectural practice).

As my main interest is not limited to the specificity of the case, but instead is directed toward using the study to achieve a greater understanding of a more general issue (a way of integrating phenomenological concepts into architectural practice), the study may be characterized as an instrumental case study.

An important decision when designing a case study is whether to choose a single-case design or a multiple-case design (a comparative case study). Yin (1994) maintains that single-case designs are more appropriate when a researcher is dealing with one of the following situations:

- A **critical case** (analogous to a critical experiment): a single case meeting all the conditions for testing a well-formulated theory. Such a case can confirm, challenge, or extend the theory.
- An **extreme or unique case**: a phenomenon which is so rare that a single example is worth studying and documenting.
- A **revelatory case**: a situation when a researcher has an opportunity to observe and investigate phenomena previously inaccessible to scientific inquiry.

A single-case design is also appropriate in some other circumstances; for instance, when a case study is conducted as a prelude to further study (an exploratory case study or a pilot case study), but in those situations the single-case study cannot be conceived as a complete study on its own (Yin, 1994: 38-41).

In situations that do not satisfy the rationale indicated above, multiple-case designs are typically more appropriate. Multiple-case designs, which

---

228 The selection of cases for a multiple-case study should be done with care, so that each case is likely to either produce similar results (a literal replication) or produce contrasting results for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication). In other words, a thorough elaboration of a theoretical framework prior to the conduct of a case study is essential here. This theoretical framework should suggest conditions under which a specific phenomenon is likely to be found (the conditions for a literal replication), and the conditions under which it is not likely to be found (the conditions for a theoretical replication). If the cases do not turn out as predicted, the initial propositions should be revised and retested with other cases (Yin, 1994:46). The replication logic is the logic behind multiple-case designs. It must be clearly distinguished from sampling logic, commonly used in statistical research (where a number of respondents are assumed to represent the entire pool of respondents, so the data collected from a smaller group is

212
are becoming more prevalent, have certain advantages and disadvantages in comparison to single-case designs. The evidence from multiple cases is regarded as more convincing, thus the overall study is typically regarded as being more robust. The conduct of a multiple-case study, however, can require time and resources beyond the means of a single investigator.

Stake (1995) recommends a single case design in a wider variety of situations than Yin. Stake considers a single case design as appropriate for most of the studies within qualitative research. He argues that qualitative researchers typically “emphasize episodes of nuance, the sequentiality of happenings in context, the wholeness of an individual,” thus most of their case studies are the “unique cases,” the studies of the particularity and complexity of a given phenomenon (Stake, 1995:xii).

When there is more concern for representation, Stake suggests a collective case design. He emphasizes, however, that case study is not a sampling research and the representation of a small sample is difficult to defend. The rationale behind the selection of cases should not be to select the most representative/typical ones, but to select those cases that would help to understand a given problem (Stake, 1995:4-5).

In this paper, the working premise is that the main criteria for the selection of a case should not be to represent a variety of approaches (a class of phenomena), but rather to maximize what can be learned within given time and resources. A more detailed examination of a single design practice appeared to fulfill this objective better than a more superficial presentation of numerous examples (a multiple case). Consequently, a single-case design has been selected.

The following two sections discuss the issues which are typically included in a case study protocol. Additional remarks relate the components assumed to represent the data that might have been collected from the entire pool (Yin, 1994:47).

229 Stake emphasizes that, unlike Yin (1994), he does not refer to the studies of a more quantitative nature, based on a battery of measurements and descriptive variables. His primary foci are case studies drawing from “naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological and biographic research methods” (Stake, 1995:xi-xii).

230 Among the main components of a case study protocol there are:
- Enumerating the theoretical framework of the study (this has been established in the preceding chapters);
- Setting the boundaries for the study, (i.e., identifying the basic questions to be answered by the case study, identifying the propositions to be examined, and defining study’s “units of analysis”);
- Indicating the types of data to be collected and general sources of information;
- Indicating the way data will be interpreted;
- Discussing validity/reliability issues (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994).
of a case study, as suggested by Yin (1994) and Stake (1995), to phenomenology.

6.2.2 Case study’s design

As for any other type of scholarly investigation, a careful research design is needed when planning a case study. Yin (1994) defines research design as “the logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of a study” and “an action plan for getting from here to there” (Yin, 1994:18-19). The basic purpose of a research design is to help to avoid the situation when the evidence does not address the initial research question. The central problems to be addressed in any research design are:
- What questions to study
- What data are relevant
- What data to collect
- How to analyze the results

Speaking more specifically about a case study research design, Yin (1994:20-27) mentions the following components:

**Study’s questions:**
These are usually “how” and “why” questions. Stake (1995) calls the initial questions behind a case study “issue questions.” These questions provide a conceptual structure for organizing the study; they facilitate all of the research work. The issue questions usually evolve and become more refined as the inquiry proceeds (this process has been called “progressive focusing”). At a certain stage, the researcher begins to restate the issue questions as assertions (Yin labels such assertions “study propositions”).

The “issue questions” direct attention to the main concerns of the study and main problems to be resolved. Furthermore, the “issue questions” determine a series of more specific questions, covering the anticipated needs for information (“topical information questions”) (Stake, 1995:25-28).

---

231 Addressing these components of a research design is an essential step in the development of a theory related to a given topic of study. This step should be supplemented by the study of the existing research (knowledge base) on the subject. According to Yin, the prior specification of a “preliminary theory” is a feature that distinguishes case studies from related methods (such as grounded theory or ethnography) (Yin, 1994: 27-28).
The study’s question (the “issue question”) in this thesis is:
*How can phenomenological ideas (such as lifeworld, lived experience, and interpretation) be integrated into a design practice?*

**The Study’s propositions (or assertions):**
These are the initial hypotheses or “petite generalizations” behind a case study (in exploratory case studies, which have no such assertions, a purpose of the study should be clearly stated). The study’s propositions help to identify the relevant information to be collected. The more specific the propositions, the more likely a study will stay within feasible limits.

- Addressing the issues of lifeworld and lived experience in a design process means to create architecture that is meaningful for its users, and at the same time responds to contemporary social, cultural, environmental conditions.
- User involvement should not be considered just in terms of direct input of the user, but also as an architect’s empathic effort to interpret the lifeworld and lived experience of the users.
- Involving users does not deprive architecture of its creative dimension.

**Topical information questions/evaluative questions:**
These are more specific questions, related to the study’s propositions. These questions anticipate the need for information.

The topical questions for this case:

- What were the main assumptions/ideas directing the design process?
- How were the issues of lifeworld approached and interpreted by designers in concrete design situations? (What were the ways of addressing the meanings of lifeworld: references to history, tradition, culture, lifestyles; the selection of materials and spatial forms; or sustainability concerns?)
- How were the issues of lived experience approached and interpreted by designers in concrete design situations? (Here we will focus on the architects’ effort to reach user’s perspective; their willingness to understand user’s experience in its cultural context and to incorporate it in a given design; the ways implemented to get users’ feedback; the status of different types of knowledge in a design process).
- How did the integration of the issues of lifeworld and lived experience influenced the design outcomes?
- Was there a place for the architect's creativity?
- Were the design outcomes successful (in both a short- and a long-term perspective)?
- What were the main problems found by the architects? What were the main problems of the users?

**Study’s unit of analysis:**
This is the definition of the “case” and the identification of a phenomenon to be studied, whether it’s an individual, a site, or a program. The unit of analysis is a critical factor in the case study; it should help to understand the given problem. Accurately specified, a study’s questions should lead to favoring certain units of analysis over another. After the unit of analysis has been specified, its boundaries should be delimited; i.e., the immediate topic of the study should be distinguished from its context; this includes the discussion of the setting, the actors, the events, and the process (Miles and Huberman, 1994, in: Creswell, 2003:185).

The “case” analysed in this thesis is the Rural Studio design practice/educational program under the direction of Samuel Mockbee (time period 1993-2001).

- The setting: Hale County, Alabama, USA.
- The actors: Samuel Mockbee, other Rural Studio instructors, students, clients.
- Processes: the design process, its assumptions and objectives; in the background: the educational process.

Within the practice of Rural Studio, a sub-case will be examined on a more specific level: Bryants’ House. 232

**The logic linking the data to the propositions/findings:**
This represents a way of analyzing/interpreting data in case study research. Data analyzing is the process of “examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of the study” (Yin, 1994:102). According to Yin, the analysis of case study

---

232 The sub-case has been selected on the basis of available documentation. A limitation here is that the example of a private house may not be sufficient to give an overview how the practice of the Rural Studio contributes to the local culture. This issue, however, has been addressed on a more general level throughout the case study.
evidence is very difficult, particularly for a novice researcher; the strategies and techniques have not been sufficiently developed and the process relies primarily on the investigator’s own style of rigorous thinking. Nevertheless, it is important to indicate at least a general strategy for data analysis in the initial phase of the inquiry. A complete disregard of this aspect in the early phase of research is likely to lead to further problems.

Yin (1994:103-106) suggests two general strategies for data analysis: one is based on theoretical propositions, the other starts with a descriptive approach to a case.

The reliance on theoretical propositions that led to a case study is the preferred strategy. The study propositions (which reflect the research questions) should shape the data collection plan (i.e., determine the relevant data to be collected) and guide the process of data analysis (i.e., to define alternative explanations to be examined; to help focus attention on certain aspects and organize the entire material, etc.). This strategy has been adopted within this paper.

The development of a case description is the second general analytic strategy. It aims at developing a descriptive framework for organizing a case study. This strategy is seen as an alternative to be used when the theoretical propositions are absent (e.g., in exploratory studies), or when the overall purpose of a case study is a description of a specific phenomenon.

There are specific analytic strategies that can be used as a part of a general strategy (e.g., pattern-matching, explanation-building, time-series analysis, and program logic models) which is relevant in those case-studies that include quantitative elements. These strategies are particularly helpful in dealing with the problems of developing the internal and external validity in a case study (Yin, 1994:106).

For our purposes, “explanation building” seems to be the most relevant model (the other strategies appear more appropriate for case studies having an element of quantitative data analysis). The main idea here is to analyze the collected data by building an explanation about the case. To build an explanation of a phenomenon means to determine a set of causal links

---

233 At the initial stage of data examination, some statistical analyses are conducted (there are fixed formulas available), but their relevance is in most cases is limited to preparing the data for further qualitative analysis.

234 In the tactic of “pattern-matching,” pieces of information from the same case are related to different, “rival” theoretical propositions. Eventually, it appears that the data supports one proposition better than the other (data matches one “pattern” better than the other). This tactic seems most relevant for case studies involving quantitative data.

235 None of the strategies can be applied mechanically, simply following a set of operational procedures.
regarding this phenomenon (this is usually done in a narrative form). Furthermore, the explanation should reflect some theoretically significant propositions (e.g., refer to an established theory, a public policy, etc.). Explanation building is a gradual, iterative process; the final explanation is the result of a number of iterations (i.e., examining the case study evidence, revising the initial theoretical propositions, examining the evidence again from a modified perspective, etc.). The iterative process demands discipline in thinking from an investigator; there is a risk of drifting away from the initial topic of interest. In order to reduce this risk, experts advise that the researcher refer frequently to the original purpose of the inquiry; to use a case study protocol (specifying what data were to be collected); to establish a case study database; and to follow a chain of evidence (explicit links between the questions asked, the data collected and the conclusions drawn) (Yin, 1994:110-113).

According to Stake (1995), there exist no adequate guidelines for transforming observations into assertions in qualitative studies; but formal rules are not necessarily needed here. The logical path from data to assertions is seldom apparent to the researchers themselves, for the assertions are drawn “from understandings deep within us, understandings whose derivation may be some hidden mix of personal experience, scholarship, assertions of other researchers” (Stake, 1995:12). There seems to be certain similarity between the researcher and the “reflective practitioner”—the procedural, theoretical knowledge is a necessary but insufficient basis for a successful practice. The dimension of “tacit knowledge” and the ability of “reflection-in-action” are the features that define mastery both in research and professional activity.236 Stake (1995) describes his way of analyzing the case study evidence:

In my analysis, I do not seek to describe the world or even describe fully the case. I seek to make sense of certain observations of the case by watching as closely as I can and by thinking about it as deeply as I can. It is greatly subjective. I defend it because I know no better way to make sense of the complexities of my case. I recognize that the way I do it is not ‘the right way’. Methods books like this one provide persuasions, not recipes. Each researcher needs, through experience and reflection, to find the forms of analysis that work for him or her. (Stake, 1995:76-77)
In the present case (as in the entire project), the analysis process was generally guided by the hermeneutic-phenomenological principles referred to in sections 1.4.1 and 3.2.3.

In short, phenomenological analysis has the structure of a hermeneutic circle, and can be described as “the movement […] from the whole to the part and back to the whole” (Gadamer, 1995:291). This is a general rule for phenomenological understanding.

The idea of a hermeneutic circle may be applied as a principle of moving from the initial whole (collected data, initial assumptions), through an analysis of its parts, to a new whole (e.g., as a proposal on how to modify understanding of the initial data). A good, preliminary sense of the whole (the initial reading, the careful examination of collected data, etc.) helps to direct an analysis of its parts. Finally, when the parts are analyzed and meanings interpreted, a new whole of understanding emerges.

**Data sources:**

Stake (1995) and Yin (1994) identify at least six possible sources of evidence in case studies: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts (not all sources of evidence are relevant for all case studies). Yin (1994:78, 92-99) maintains that the following principles are particularly important to the data collection effort:

- Using multiple sources of evidence (two or more different sources converging on the same set of facts); data triangulation is one of the main tactics to build up a construct validity.
- Creating a case study database (including all the evidence collected during the inquiry such as notes, documents, audio-visual material, etc.). What is important is that this evidence should be distinguished from the evidence presented in a case study report. A case study database is a way to increase the study’s reliability (other investigators can evaluate the evidence directly and not be limited to a given interpretation presented in a case study report).
- Maintaining a chain of evidence (explicit links between the questions asked, the data collected, and the conclusions drawn). The main principle here is to make the reasoning clear enough as to allow the observer to follow the steps from the initial research questions to the final conclusions (also in the other direction). Following this principle is a way to increase the reliability and construct validity of a case study.

In this project, limited time and resources contributed to the decision to exclude field work and select a well-documented case with relatively easy
access to various sources of evidence such as documents, archival records, and audio-visual materials. These sources of data, as any other, have their strengths and limitations. Among the main strengths are:

- stability (can be reviewed at any time);
- exactness (contain precise details of an event, references, names, etc.);
- broad coverage (cover a broad range of events, settings, etc.).

Among the main weaknesses, there are:

- reporting bias (unknown bias of the author of documents);
- selectivity (if the data collection is incomplete).

Documents and archival records are considered an important source of evidence in case study research, but we have to be aware that no situation can be fully captured in documentation. As Merleau-Ponty remarks,

> The conversation reproduced exactly is no longer what it was while we were living it. It lacks the presence of those who were speaking, the whole surplus of meaning yielded by the gestures and faces that especially give the impression of something happening, of a discovery and continuous innovation. The conversation no longer exists. It does not ramify in all directions—it is, flattened out in the single dimension of sound. Instead of summoning our whole being, it does no more than touch us lightly by ear. (Merleau-Ponty, 1973:65)

Furthermore, the reliance on secondary sources of information requires a dose of criticality in interpreting the data; the investigator must be careful not to overlook the conditions under which the documentation and archival records were produced. This seems particularly important for the visual material. For instance, a set of photographs of a place “is in part a report and in part a creation; the representation is not the same as original, and if we change the selection of photographs, we change the place created” (Dean et al., 2002:173).

Typically it is advised to supplement the secondary sources with more direct data collection forms, such as interviews, participant observation, or an

---

237 The weaknesses mentioned here also apply to a large extent to other sources of evidence; e.g., bias can be created due to poorly constructed questions in interviews, due to the investigator’s manipulation of events in participant observation, selectivity due to poor recall in interviews, or selectivity due to a narrow coverage of events in observations, etc. (Yin, 1994:80).
examination of physical artifacts. These sources of evidence could provide specific details to corroborate and augment information from documents.

Any findings or conclusions in a case study are likely to appear more convincing when based simultaneously on different data sources addressing the same set of facts (this relates to the issue of data triangulation and construct validity). Nevertheless, any of the six types of sources of evidence mentioned can and have been the sole basis for entire case studies (Yin, 1994:80-92).

6.2.3 Validity and reliability issues in case studies

The assumption that a research design deals with a logical problem rather than a logistical one (Yin 1994:20) suggests that any given design can be evaluated according to some logical “tests.” Relating more specifically to empirical studies in social science, the four “tests” are: construct validity: internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin 1994:33). These “tests” may at a first sight seem more appropriate for positivism/postpositivism undermined research (such as experiments, quantitative surveys). It may be more problematic to apply some of these criteria to studies within non-positivist perspectives.

As Polkinghorne (1986) suggests, the issues of validity and reliability in the human sciences should be reassessed through the perspective of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of a given paradigm. Following this suggestion, an attempt was made to reconsider the relevance of the criteria specified by Yin (1994: 34-38) through the perspective of phenomenology. Using this perspective, validity concerns are primarily the concerns of the validity of an interpretation. As Ricoeur (1976) emphasizes,

[... ] if it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal. The text presents a limited field of possible constructions. The logic of validation allows us to move between the two limits of dogmatism and skepticism. (Ricoeur, 1976:79)

Construct validity

In quantitative research, construct validity refers to whether a concrete scale of measures correlates with the theorized construct that it purports to

---

238 See section 1.4.
measure. Thus, construct validity answers the question “Are we actually measuring what we think we are measuring?”

Establishing a “scale of measures” is a way to operationalise the concept, focusing on several observable phenomena that supposedly reflect the underlying theoretical concept.

In the case of phenomenological research, specifying a concrete, limited set of features that constitute a given phenomenon would be antithetical to the foundational assumptions of phenomenology; such an attempt could rightly be labeled as reductive and instrumental. Nevertheless, it still seems worthwhile to make more explicit the rational steps behind a case study design and reflect on the way of conceptualizing the phenomena to be studied. This may be helpful for the reader in evaluating the linking of the collected data to study’s propositions, i.e., in evaluating whether the events recorded in a case study genuinely reflect the investigated phenomena.

The central concepts of the present study, discussed extensively in the preceding chapters, are: lived experience, lifeworld, and interpretation. It is therefore worthwhile to indicate how these concepts have been approached in the case study. Being aware of the essential difficulty of this task, we initially assume the following understandings:

1. The term “lived experience” will refer in the present study to the user’s experience, approached as direct/indirect user’s feedback situated in the perspective of the user’s lifeworld-background.
2. The term “lifeworld” will refer to the social, cultural, historical, and environmental context of architectural practice; in Husserl’s terminology, the “homeworld” of users.
3. The term “interpretation” will refer to the process of grasping and refining the meanings of lifeworld and lived experience by an architect. The process of interpretation ultimately leads to the creation of an architectural artifact.

Although the concepts of lived experience, lifeworld, and interpretation are discussed separately here, they are in fact intimately interconnected. The issues emerging at the intersection of these categories, addressed in the previous chapters, are: phenomenological concept of art, the questions of architectural ethics, sustainability, technology, globalization, tradition, and creativity; the models of professional practice (architectural design as a reflective practice; architectural education; professional ethos). These issues

239 See the concepts of “homeworld” and “alienworld,” section 3.2.2.
will surface throughout the case study. The preceding chapters offer reflections on the way of conceptualizing these phenomena.

**Internal validity**

The problem of internal validity can be extended to the wider problem of making inferences. Yin points out that a case study includes an inference every time a phenomenon can not be directly observed. In such situations, an investigator “infers” that a given event resulted from some other events, based on secondary, documentary evidence. In order to address the problem of internal validity, the investigator should reflect on the process of making inferences (e.g., to ask whether the evidence is convergent; to deal with possible rival explanations, etc.).

While it is relatively easy to address the issue of internal validity in studies that involve some quantitative aspects (i.e., the analysis of some measurable data or descriptive variables) and are conducted in possibly isolated settings, it is much more problematic in the studies that are primarily based on interpretation and conducted in real-life situations.

Nevertheless, for the studies that assess the effects of social interventions, internal validity is an important consideration. In those contexts, it is often essential to be able to conclude that a given phenomenon (program, intervention, object, etc.) made a difference. For instance, to be able to show that a given building caused specific improvements in the lives of its inhabitants, etc. Behind these improvements, there could be many possible reasons, other than our building. The essential question for internal validity is whether observed changes can be attributed to our program, intervention, object (i.e., the cause) and not to other possible causes (sometimes described as “alternative explanations”).

In most cases of research dealing with real-life problems, it is neither possible nor necessary to identify all the factors influencing the studied phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is important to address in a research design some aspects of the problem of internal validity, e.g., reflecting on possible alternative explanations of the phenomenon. In the phenomenological perspective, unlike in positivist-undermined frameworks, these explanations are not viewed as “rival explanations,” posing a threat to our view. According to the foundational assumptions of phenomenology, there is no supra-
contextual point of view, thus there is no one single valid explanation of a
given relationship. As Merleau-Ponty (1945) emphasizes, it is worthwhile to
seek an understanding from many angles simultaneously; all perspectives
contribute to a better understanding of a phenomenon, provided they are not
isolated and that we make an effort to “reach the unique core of existential
meaning which emerges in each perspective” (Merleau-Ponty 2002:xxi).

**External validity**
The concern of external validity deals with the extent to which a study’s
findings can be generalized. Critics of case study research typically argue that
single cases do not provide a sufficient basis for wider generalization. Behind
this criticism, there is most commonly a statistical view of generalization
(where a representative “sample” generalizes to a larger “universe”), whereas
case studies rely on analytical generalization (where a particular set of results
is being generalized to a broader theory). The selection of a case for a case
study, unlike in statistical research, is carefully based on a prior theory. This
theory is also the target, to which the results of a case study could be
generalized later. Therefore, a single case often gives a sufficient base for
broader generalization.

In the case of phenomenological research, typically the aim is not to
specify a set of findings which could be then applied in other situations with
the same effect (“generalized”); this would, in fact, be an example of an
instrumental, reductive approach, antithetic to phenomenological
assumptions. Can we therefore speak about generalizations in an empirical
phenomenological research? It seems that the role of a single, context-
specific case study is to facilitate reflection, to initiate a conversation (as in
the model of rhetoric), and through this perhaps influence other contexts of
practice. An effort to understand and interpret is essential here. As Ricoeur
pointed out, “to understand is not merely to repeat the […] event in a similar
event,” it is instead “to generate a new event beginning from the text in which
the initial event has been objectified” (Ricoeur, 1976:75).

**Reliability**
A key issue here is to document the procedures that have been followed in a
given case study, so as to make possible the repetition of these procedures. In
an ideal situation, the later investigator repeating the described procedures
should arrive at the same findings and conclusions as the researcher in the
initial study. While this demand is relatively simple in a
positivist/postpositivist quantitative research, in non-positivist qualitative
studies, it may be seen more as a regulatory concept (to fully eliminate the
influence of personal biases and experiences is neither possible nor desired here). Nevertheless, it is important to make explicit as many operational steps behind a case study as possible. In other words, “to conduct research as if someone were always looking over your shoulder” (Yin, 1994: 37).\(^{241}\) As a way to deal with the documentation process, Yin suggests the use of a case study protocol and a case study database. This has been accomplished with this study. The reflection on methodological aspects of the case study is also aimed at increasing its reliability.

An extensive addressing of validity and reliability issues is neither possible nor necessary in all types of studies, but in most cases it is beneficial to apply at least selected validation procedures, such as triangulation. Stake (1995) sees triangulation as the most universal strategy for the validation of case study’s findings (this is also one of the main strategies for validation in qualitative research in general).\(^{242}\) As triangulation is usually a time- and resources-demanding procedure, it is most common to triangulate only the most important data and claims (e.g., the data critical to the assertions; key interpretations; and dubious or contested descriptions).

We can distinguish between several kinds of triangulation. The main types, according to Denzin (1984), are:

- **data source triangulation** (an effort to see if the investigated phenomenon carries the same meaning when found under different circumstances or in different data sources);
- **investigator triangulation** (an examination or interpretation of a given phenomenon by other researchers);
- **theory triangulation** (an observation of a given phenomenon from alternative theoretical perspectives; a deliberate effort to disconfirm one’s own interpretations);
- **methodological triangulation** (multiple methods are used to examine the same phenomenon from independent points of observation).

In this case study, *data source triangulation* was the primary type of triangulation. *Theory triangulation* was also applied, but primarily in the

\(^{241}\) It has to be acknowledged that the corrections made by the case study actors are particularly valuable; they enhance the accuracy of the study, thus contribute to building up the reliability of the text. Nevertheless, in this project, getting the feedback from the study actors was not possible. This was primarily due to resource limitations.

\(^{242}\) For the advocates of constructivism, triangulation is perhaps most problematic. Through this perspective, it is difficult to argue that any complex observation or interpretation can be triangulated. Consequently, triangulation seems to be the search for additional interpretations, rather than the confirmation of a single meaning.
preceding chapters, dealing with the theoretical foundations of user-centered practice (e.g., supplementing the perspective of phenomenology with Schön’s theory of reflective practice or contrasting it with constructivist, positivist, or critical frameworks).

As we are discussing validation issues, it is worthwhile to mention that Paul Ricoeur (1976) proposed a procedure of “invalidation” as a part of a validation process in a qualitative research.

But to the procedures of validation there also belong procedures of invalidation similar to the criteria of falsifiability proposed by Karl Popper in his *Logic of Scientific Discovery*. Here, the role of falsification is played by the conflict between competing interpretations. An interpretation must not only be probable, but more probable than another interpretation. (Ricoeur, 1976:79)

Thus, the interpretation that is considered as valid should explain a phenomenon in a more comprehensive way than any other, from among multiple tentative interpretations dealing with a specific phenomenon. Triangulation may be seen as one of the ways to accomplish the “invalidation” procedure; it helps to identify the most complete interpretation of a phenomenon.

### 6.3 CASE STUDY REPORT

In this study, the composition of the report was primarily guided by the suggestions of Stake (1995:123).

The initial section of the report (“Initial remarks”) includes the presentation of the case, the purpose of the study, and the identification of main issues. It also addresses the rationale behind the selection of the case.

The subsequent section (“Introducing Samuel Mockbee and the Rural Studio concept”) consists of a narrative description to further define the case and its context.

The middle part of the report is focused on a more specific development of issues—lifeworld, lived experience, and interpretation. The discussion of a few key problems is not aimed at generalizing beyond the case, but at understanding the complexity of the case.

A section of the report deals with a sub-case (“Bryants’ House”). It consists of descriptive details, quotations, and some elements of interpretation.
The final section includes my interpretation of findings (summary of my understanding of the case; indications how and why particular propositions were demonstrated or not demonstrated in the case; etc.). More general conclusions will be also stated at this point.

6.3.1 Initial remarks

The theoretical framework that has been developed in the previous chapters facilitated the entire research work; it served as a basis for the selection of a case and provided a conceptual structure for organizing the study. Within this framework it has been claimed that user involvement is a necessary condition for the creation of meaningful, socially, and environmentally sustainable environments. It has been also suggested that phenomenology may help to articulate the theoretical foundations for an architectural practice that is more responsive to a user, a culture, or a place, and at the same time truly creative and innovative. The phenomenological concepts of lifeworld, lived experience, and interpretation have been identified as particularly relevant in establishing a theoretical framework for a user-oriented architectural practice.

The initial question of the user’s perspective in contemporary architectural theory/practice led the present investigation toward more general architectural issues, such as architectural ethics, art, technology, globalization, sustainability, and professional ethos. This is not unexpected, considering that ontology, epistemology, and methodology are considered as a closely interdependent network from the phenomenological position. Accordingly, starting from an epistemological point of departure (e.g., the lived experience of the user), one has to address the questions at the ontological and methodological levels as well.

The primary aim of this study is to point out possible ways of integrating these concepts in architectural practice.

In the main focus of the study, there are no actual, physical outcomes of a design process (architectural artifacts), but instead there is a set of convictions/assumptions influencing and directing the design process.

The case to be examined in this work—the Rural Studio—was selected as an object of the case study out of a few other possibilities. In this context, it is worthwhile to remark that an “aesthetic” interpretation of phenomenology seems to be very common among architects explicitly declaring a phenomenological approach. The priority is given to the architect’s vision/experience and the sensory qualities of architecture; the
effort to reach a user’s perspective is rarely taken up. The following remarks on Steven Holl’s relationship to clients may serve here as an illustration:

Part of his fame is a reputation for being demanding and uncompromising with his clients, in pursuit of the realization of his concepts, his architecture. Clients may be attracted to him for exactly these qualities, but [...] working with enamored client is seldom easy. Once the romance cools down, as it always does when the hardcore issues such as program and budget are engaged, the toughest part of the struggle begins. This is when the architect’s character is most solely tested. (Lebbeus Woods, in: Holl, 2007:6)

As indicated before, the creative and innovative aspects of architecture constitute an important dimension of an architect’s responsibility, yet phenomenological concepts suggest an openness and respect towards the horizons of others should also be part of that obligation.

The Rural Studio itself does not directly refer to phenomenological ideas; nevertheless, after a preliminary comparative analysis of the tentative choices, it appeared that the phenomenological way of thinking is most profound here (at least, when we focus on the notions of lifeworld and lived experience).

The Rural Studio is a non-commercial, non-profit oriented, in many ways experimental design-build program,243 established as a part of architectural curriculum at Auburn University (Alabama, U.S.). The designers are mostly undergraduate students, working under the direction of more experienced practitioners. However, this is not a regular educational situation. As one of the students remarked, the character of the studio “is in many ways more similar to work than school; we’re dealing with subcontractors and suppliers, and are on-site every day with no other classes for the last semester” (Chang, 2007).

The specific character of the Rural Studio (comparing with “ordinary” design practices) may be considered a limitation. In this study, however, it is regarded more as an advantage than a restraining condition. As was indicated

243The Rural Studio was most likely inspired by the Building Project initiated by Charles W. Moore in 1967 at the Yale School of Architecture. That program offered the students a unique opportunity to design and build a structure as part of their graduate education. "Moore saw that getting out of the studio and building something would have several benefits for the students. As a believer in simple tectonics and basic technologies, he hoped students would be inspired by the mechanics of building. In the midst of the student unrest of the 1960s he saw the project as a way for students to commit to positive social action by building for the poor" (Building Project’s website, http://www.architecture.yale.edu/drupal/student_work/building_project).
before, the main criterion for the selection of a case should not be to represent a typical example, but to maximize what can be learned.

6.3.2 Introducing Samuel Mockbee and the Rural Studio concept

In presenting the Rural Studio, it is essential to introduce its founder, Samuel “Sambo” Mockbee (23 December 1944–30 December 2001), “the mind and the soul of the Rural Studio” (Dean et al., 2002:3).

Mockbee was born in Meridian, Mississippi. He enrolled at Auburn University and graduated from the School of Architecture in 1974. After an internship in Columbus, Georgia, he returned to his native Mississippi in 1977 and entered into cooperation with his classmate and friend Thomas Goodman. The firm “Mockbee Goodman Architects” quickly established a reputation for innovative design through the utilization of local materials to create works referring to vernacular motifs. The firm won more than twenty-five state and regional design awards during a period of six years.

In 1983, Mockbee began an architectural association with Coleman Coker. This cooperation confirmed Mockbee’s position as “a strong and important new voice coming from the South.” In her book Mockbee Coker: Thought and Process (1995), Lori Ryker describes the design approach of the two architects:

> It is not a rational understanding of the South they seek, but a blurring of knowable and resolute truths caused by the intimacy of place, nature and personal experience. Their observations of overreliance on scientific truths and subjection of personal views effect in their belief that Western society is searching for unnecessary clarity and therefore, reduced refinement and understanding of the world around them. (Ryker, 1995:18)

In their architecture, Mockbee and Coker combined references to local forms, landscape, and narratives with ideas and forms holding universal meanings. New interpretations of Southern traditions and particularities were here developed along with the interpretations of the global culture. As Ryker puts it,
They offer an architecture created from a multifarious time period. They rely on their personal knowledge of a place, its people, and its particular social habits to design their architecture and reject current tendencies of generalization and formal abstraction. (Ryker, 1995: 18)

Mockbee and Coker believed that contemporary society is experiencing “a loss of knowing the subtleties of life and seldom provides unique responses to the varied ways people live” (Ryker, 1995:18). In this context, they argued for the need to extend the definition of architectural responsibility (limited most commonly to technical and economical issues) as to emphasize the social and cultural obligations of architects.

In 1991, Mockbee abandoned a full-time, prosperous architectural practice with Coleman Coker to accept a position at the Auburn University School of Architecture. He recollects “Even though my career had been developing successfully, I did not feel that I was maturing as a responsible architectural citizen” (Mockbee, 1998).

Already at the time of his cooperation with Cooker, Mockbee had begun to bring into focus a personal understanding and recognition of the social, economic, and cultural ambiguities that existed in the late 20th century South. That experience, coupled with his interest in the existing cultural heritage of the region and a desire to improve the living and working conditions of the South’s most impoverished citizens, became a framing device which established both boundaries and opportunities for his further work in the Rural Studio, which he initiated in 1993 along with Dennis K. Ruth (then head of the Auburn Architectural School). In Mockbee’s own words, the Rural Studio was a “collaging of different experiences” he had over the years thinking how he could pursue “architecture, social improvement, education, arts, and ideas about environment” (Mockbee, in: Dean, 2002:5).

244 Mockbee recollects, “I’d like to explain a little about my background—about being blessed and cursed as a Southerner [...] As Southerners our heritage is part of our character. My great grandfather rode with the Mississippi Partisan Rangers under Colonel WC Falkner and later General Forrest. These were my heroes growing up in the segregated South of the 1950s and the early 1960s. [...] Later I came to realize the contradictions that existed in my world. That I came from an isolated area where lies were being confronted with the truth. That I came from the American South which was attached to fiction and false values and a willingness to justify cruelty and injustice in the name of those values” (Mockbee, 1998).
PHENOMENOLOGICAL IDEAS BEHIND ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE—A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Samuel Mockbee

Mockbee with students.

Courtesy of The Rural Studio Web site, © Timothy Hursley
At that time, American architecture most typically distanced itself from social engagement and focused on matters of style. The architectural stars seduced by the new global economy and emerging possibilities of new technologies were designing fancy buildings for prosperous clients worldwide. Mockbee was instead working intensively on the design and construction of innovative houses for the poor in one of the most disadvantaged regions in America—Hale County, Alabama.

In Hale County [...] you see ghost buildings: abandoned barns, tumbledown shanties, and rusted trailers—fragile remnants of a most prosperous agrarian past. You see old people sitting quietly on sagging porches and scruffy chicken hens noisily pecking and wandering on hard dirt yards. Hale is a left-behind place. (Dean, 2002:1)

Why was Hale County selected as the location for the Rural Studio? Mockbee was drawn there partly because of the poverty; the residents needed help and coming to such an area would force students to test their abstract notions about poverty by “crossing over into that other world, smelling it, feeling it, experiencing it” (Dean, 2004). He also sought a place that was some distance from Auburn, so students would not be distracted by campus activities and would concentrate entirely on their building projects.

Mockbee explicitly criticized this situation and called for more engagement from the side of architects, saying “Architecture is a continually developing profession now under the influence of consumer-driven culture. The profession is becoming part of the corporate world and corporations (citizens of no place or any place) increasingly resemble nation states. Of the world's largest 100 economies, 49 are countries and 51 are corporations. The 200 largest corporations employ only three-quarters of one percent of the world's work force. During the next 25 years forces in the world of politics, economics and the environment will be driven by two factors: a demographic explosion that will double the population in undeveloped countries; and a technological explosion of robotics, biotechnology, lasers, optics and telecommunication in developed countries. These two factors will have a major impact on the natural environment. The architect's role will be to make architecture labor under the given conditions of a particular place [...] It is not prudent to sit back as architects and rely on the corporate world's scientists and technology experts to decide which problems to solve. It is in the architect's own interest to assert his or her values—values that respect, we should hope, the greater good” (Mockbee, 1998).

The county has a total area of 1,700 km², and a population of slightly more than 17,000. The largest city and the county seat is Greensboro. Hale County is Alabama’s second-poorest county. The poverty rate is nearly forty percent.

Alabama is the thirtieth largest state in the United States. It is located in the southeastern region of the U.S. and bordered by Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, and the Gulf of Mexico. The total area of the state is 135,775 km² and 3.19% of that area is water. About three-fifths of the land area is a gentle plain with a descent toward the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. The North Alabama region is mostly mountainous. The climate is classified as humid to subtropical (the average annual temperature is 18°C). Generally, Alabama has very hot summers and mild winters with abundant rainfall throughout the year.
What was also important was that Mockbee was impressed by “an almost supernatural beauty” of the area. “Hale County seduced him, pure and simple” (Dean, 2002:1). Furthermore, the county’s lack of building codes made it a perfect “laboratory” (yet, the Rural Studio restricted experiments with untried building methods and materials to objects for its own use).

Initially, the Rural Studio was meant to be a one year educational experiment, including twelve Auburn University architecture students. Nevertheless, the studio is still operating (since 2002, under the direction of Andrew Freear). On its web page, the Rural Studio defines its mission as follows:

The Rural Studio seeks solutions to the needs of the community within the community’s own context, not from outside it. Abstract ideas based upon knowledge and studies are transformed into workable solutions forged by real human contact, personal realization, and a gained appreciation for the culture.

What makes the Rural Studio’s approach distinct from many other, socially-responsible architectural practices is the conviction that everyone, rich or poor, deserves not just a shelter, but an inspiring, individually-tailored home. Mockbee used to say, “the goal is not to have a warm, dry house, but to have a warm, dry house with a spirit to it” (Mockbee, in: Dean, 2002:17).

6.3.3 Development of issues

Lifeworld: approaching the context

Dennis K. Ruth, a friend of Mockbee and the co-founder of the Rural Studio maintained that “the connection between esthetics and the realities underlying design was being lost” (Ruth, in: Dean, 2002:6). This remark is emblematic of the broken relationship between architecture and lifeworld. Establishing the Rural Studio was an attempt to address this situation.

What are the realities and meanings of the South? As Ryker (1995) argues, the difficulty in an unambiguous understanding of the South can be seen in the inability to reconcile contradictory traditions.

248 In September, 1998, Mockbee was diagnosed with leukemia. Even though the illness slowed him down, in the following years he remained committed to the aspirations and ideals of the Rural Studio. On December 30, 2001, he died of complication from the disease.

249 As discussed in section 3.3.1.
The South is a land of mystery with a historical legacy comprehensible to most through its social and cultural traditions. But it is precisely these traditions and their contradictions which makes the life of a Southerner so difficult to grasp objectively. […] While Civil Rights laws demand equality among all people, a prevalent population of poor in the rural South continues to be passed over in matters of social and economic equality. The traditions of an agriculturally based economic structure that has been diluted by the world market contrasts with a geographic disconnection to the advancing state of market affairs in the rural areas, allowing a focus on their daily lives and personal relationships. […] Meanwhile, strip centers and city edges expand with culturally non-specific businesses. (Ryker, 1995:15-16)

Most generally, the South may be characterized by the struggle between the universalized culture and a local heritage, reflecting somehow the struggle between the world of the “globally mobile” and the world of the “locally tied” (Bauman, 1998).

Moving through the deep South into Alabama and Mississippi the differences between rural and urban communities are apparent in their histories, economies, social structures, and definitions of the family. Cities which were once distinct are now overshadowed by the plague of sameness affecting all American cities. Rural communities exist as if time has left these places without measure. (Ryker, 1995.17)

The contradictory ways of living in the South—the social, economic, and cultural inconsistencies—make any generalizing approach irrelevant. “There is no equalizing, nor is there a consistently applied system […] which can be employed to provide a sincere response for its condition” (Ryker, 1995:17).

Hale County was brought to a national attention by James Agee’s descriptions of the Depression-era realities of impoverished sharecroppers in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), supplemented by a set of photographs by Walker Evans. The work combined elements of essay, portrait, poetry, and engaged journalism. It grew out of a commissioned magazine article exploring the conditions of poor white sharecroppers in the South. The article was never completed in the original form and instead grew into the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. It focused on the lives and living conditions of three sharecropper families. Evans and Agee presented...

---

234

---

236 See section 4.1.1.
Walker Evans’ photographs in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941).

an interesting mix of observed detail and intimate storytelling, supplemented with an outsider’s perspective. Objective exterior overviews were followed up with privileged interior observation concerning the details of a specific day or a person’s life. By moving from interior to exterior perspectives, the work created a profound understanding of the people involved. It mirrored both a particular way of life and larger societal issues during Roosevelt’s New Deal era.

*Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is a great example of an account of a lifeworld and lived experience. James Agee asserted in the book’s introduction, “This is a book only by necessity. More seriously, it is an effort in human actuality, in which the reader is no less centrally involved than the authors and those of whom they tell” (Agee and Evans, 2001:xii).

The authors made a successful attempt to transcend their “homeworld” of well-educated, middle-class men in order to grasp the “alienworld” of the sharecropper families. Art (photography) and poetry allow access to and express the meanings of lifeworld in a non-reductive way.

It seems that this way of approaching lived experience in its social/cultural context could be very relevant for architects; turning to art and literature may invaluably deepen the insight into the reality of inhabitants.

Mockbee himself viewed art as a means of entering a “taboo landscape”—in his case, the world of the impoverished Southerners. He found out that art makes possible not merely looking at a given phenomenon, but developing a discourse on the lifeworld experiences of it. Through this perspective, the role of art is far from “aestheticizing” poverty. Instead, it is an agency of understanding (Mockbee, 1998).

In geographical terms, Hale County is a part of the “Black Belt of the South,” a crescent-shaped region of south-central Alabama extending from its eastern to western borders.

Booker T. Washington, in his 1901 autobiography *Up From Slavery*, wrote on the origin of the expression “Black Belt”

> So far as I can learn, the term was first used to designate a part of the country which was distinguished by the colour of the soil. The part of the country possessing this thick, dark, and naturally rich soil was, of

---

231 The discussion of the role of art and creativity will be continued in this chapter in the subsection regarding interpretation.

232 The “Black Belt” is also referred to as a broad region of 11 southern states, from Texas to Virginia.

236
course, the part of the South where the slaves were most profitable, and consequently they were taken there in the largest numbers. Later, and especially since the war, the term seems to be used wholly in a political sense—that is, to designate the counties where the black people outnumber the white. (Washington, quoted in: Tippett, 2007)

The last century brought new challenges—soil erosion, the collapse of the cotton market, and massive out-migration. The farmers who remained attempted to convert their land to use by cattle and tried to grow soy-beans, but most of them failed again (Dean, 2002:2). Today, the area is dominated by catfish farms, which struggle with increasing competition from Southeast Asia.

Yet, these characteristics do not fully reflect the reality of the region. Andrew Freear, the current director of the Rural Studio, said in a radio programme:

I think one of the things that always distresses me a little bit is that the descriptions of the Black Belt and west Alabama are always, they’re always biased towards the social and political strife and some of the poverty. And of course there is an extraordinary sort of burden of history, but from my point of view, I found a place where there is sort of an extraordinary optimism. (Freear, in: Tippet, 2007)

What particularly attracted Mockbee is that the landscape here is stunningly beautiful—“vast and lush rolling hills, fields of grazing cattle, catfish ponds, pine forests. Two gorgeous rivers, the Black Warrior and the Cahaba, are lined with oak trees draped in Spanish moss and kudzu vines” (Tippet, 2007). Mockbee was also inspired by the spectral buildings of Hale County, “frail, antebellum mansions, and collapsing, weather-beaten barns, outbuildings and warehouses—that speak of a prosperous agrarian past” (Dean, 2005:7).
Hale County views.

Courtesy of The Rural Studio Web site, © Timothy Hursley.

238
Lived experience: approaching the user’s perspective

The respect for the individuality of a client is one of key characteristics of the Rural Studio’s design approach. Samuel Mockbee believed that “everybody wants the same thing, rich or poor […] not only a warm dry room but a shelter for the soul” (Mockbee, in: Tippet, 2007). Behind this statement, which may seem idealistic, there is a deep conviction that every client, regardless of his or her economic situation or personal background, deserves respect. Accordingly, already at the time of his cooperation with Coleman Coker in constructing affordable housing, Mockbee sought to “find economical means to construct a home that would provide shelter without neglecting the spiritual life of its occupants” (Ryker, 1995:53). On many occasions, he emphasized the role of understanding an individual client and her situation, saying “What is necessary is a willingness to seek solutions to poverty in its own context, not outside it” (Mockbee, 1998).

The Rural Studio architects spend a considerable amount of time getting to know the individual needs and preferences of their clients. In many cases, they live in and become a part of the community in which they are working. Mockbee described this process as “the replacement of abstract opinions with knowledge based on real human contact and personal realization applied to the work and place” (Mockbee, 1998). Furthermore, the architects usually have an ongoing relationship with the client. As Mockbee stated, “I don’t think you’re successful if you can’t call your client back up and say, I’m coming out to see the house” (Mockbee, 2001).

Nevertheless, communication with client is not always straightforward. An effort is often required by the architects to initiate a dialogue.

We work with people who don’t know what an architect does, so we have to educate them as to what an architect can bring to a situation. We educate them to understand drawings, to engage in a conversation about spaces, to engage in […] the question of, what do you want? when people have never been asked what they want. We make lots of models. We make lots of perspectives, so people can begin, or at least try to begin, to imagine themselves in that place, because they have never been asked to do that before. They’ve never been asked to imagine before. And that’s an amazing situation to be in as a student, I think. (Freear, in: Tippet, 2007)
Referring more specifically to the “strategies” of reaching users’ perspective, it is worthwhile to let the clients speak for themselves. Evelyn Lewis, one of the first clients of the Rural Studio recollected,

We had many dinners. They showed me other houses they had built, and asked me what I wanted in a house. They told me I should not just agree with what they did but tell them what I wanted. (Lewis, in: Dean, 2002:160)

She added that, at the top of her priorities were high ceilings, “because I’m kind of claustrophobic. […] I told them I liked lots of windows. And I told them I wanted something for me and my family to get together. I got all that.” What else does she like about the house? “I love the way it smells, the looks of the house. The wood is beautiful” (Lewis, in: Dean, 2002:160).

When asked how the students treated her, Lewis said, “With utmost respect. They were very, very nice people” (Lewis, in: Dean, 2002:161).

How did this experience influence her life and the way she viewed the world?

You know, I grew up thinking I wouldn’t be able to have this and that […] because when I was coming up we were really poor. I thought stuff like this happened only in dreams. Even when the students were working I didn’t think I’d get a house; I thought it was just a story. That’s why I call it my house of miracles. (Lewis, in: Dean, 2002:161)

Reflecting on the role of client’s feedback, Mockbee described the typical design process:

16 second-year students each individually come up with a design for that house. We meet, and then we meet with the client and the client looks at all 16 solutions saying what they like, what they don’t like. Now usually out of that 16, there’ll be similarities in the group. […] You can split the students up and put them into groups. So it goes from individuals to a group of four people. And they have had the benefit of listening to the client’s likes and dislikes. We did some two-story schemes, and [the client] was real fast to say, “We’re too old to be climbing stairs.” So they went back and redesigned it with a bigger roof. Then they show it to the client again. And again we hear the client’s likes and dislikes and we again mesh all that together and go in and come up with the definitive plan. (Mockbee, in: Hudson, 2001)
When asked whether any clients complained at the vibrant designs and unconventional materials being used for their homes, Mockbee said that in most cases clients need a house so badly they were afraid to criticize the design. But that was just in the initial phase. After a while, they were happy to discuss the project and be more critical.

The students have to learn to listen to the clients, and find out what their needs are. But on another level, as hard as we try to get the clients to be honest and relaxed with us, there is some apprehension that if they don't agree with us somehow we won't build it for them. I'm always trying to explain to the clients that we're going to build the house for them no matter what, and that they need to tell us what they need and want. We don't push our aesthetics onto anybody, nor do we push any values. The students work very hard to win the respect of these clients. They want to make these houses wonderful for them. (Mockbee, in: Libby, 2001)

Apart from the direct comments of the clients, the observation of lifestyles plays an important role in discovering how the clients use their living space. Referring to Harris family and their house, Mockbee recollected:

They lived on the porch, which wasn't probably six feet wide and maybe fourteen feet long, at most. When I visited them, we'd all sit on that porch. I knew the porch was a big deal, and this wasn't going to be an airconditioned house. (Mockbee, in: Dean, 2002:33)

Andrew Freear (an architect closely cooperating with Samuel Mockbee, currently the director of the Rural Studio) stated that getting close to the user is not a kind of sacrifice or charity on the part of the architects. The benefits are mutual. In this, he refutes the charge of paternalism.

---

253 In this context, Mockbee emphasized that the problem was not just that the client did not trust the architect, it more often happened the other way around. “Well, sometimes that word [trust] means the architect wants the client to indulge his ego. Architects like to have their way; they micromanage too much and they think they have the answer to everything. But we are good problem solvers, and our education serves us well in attacking projects and looking at them creatively. The problem is, we often believe our own propaganda. But there are also two sides to that coin. You don't want a client who misunderstands what design and architecture are really about. Many want this faux architecture, and that drives us nuts” (Mockbee, in: Libby, 2001).

254 Criticism of the Rural Studio has been very sparse. The main charge is that since the designers are middle-class white students, and the clients are poor and black, the program may
What we see as being the exchange that’s taking place here is that our client is a good and willing and interested and observant and rigorous and questioning client. And that’s the privilege that we have in that situation. Yes, we will work with you. We want to listen to you. We want you to be very critical about what we do. Don’t just say give us anything. (Freear, in: Tippett, 2007)

Mockbee emphasized that the clients were aware that they were contributing to the students’ education. “It’s a two way street. We don’t judge or ask questions. No one is feeling like anyone is taking advantage of anyone” (Mockbee, in: Dean, 2002:12).

The attempts to establish a dialogue are well-received in most cases. “At least about eighty percent of the time, we’re welcome,” remarked one of the students255 (Dean, 2002:2). Apart from discussing project-related issues, designers attended social events, such as community catfish fries. This experience was for many their first exposure to real poverty. In Mockbee’s view, a personal contact with an impoverished client can displace misconceptions nurtured by detachment with a willingness to understand. In an interview for Architectural Record (2000), when asked whether his students had any problems learning to work with poor clients, Mockbee answered:

No. However, most of our students come from affluent families. For the most part, they haven’t experienced this sort of poverty. They’ve seen it, but they haven’t crossed over into that world, smelled it, felt it, experienced it. They come with abstract opinions that are fairly quickly reconsidered once they meet the families and realize that they’re really no different from other American families. It’s good to see these white middle-class students working hard all day trying to be paternalistic. As Tippet (2007) pointed out, there is a fine line between helping others and being paternalistic.

255 Although the typical Rural Studio client is very happy at the prospect of getting a new cost-free house, there were some cases when the client at first declined the offer, for instance, Anderson Harris, an elderly retired farmer. Mockbee recollected that, “the social worker handling it was concerned about their health, living in a shack with no running water and all that. Three carloads of us pulled up to their house, and I said, ‘Look y’all, let me go talk to them first,’ ‘cause I wasn’t sure what was gonna happen. I went and knocked on the shack and Anderson Harris invited me in and I told him what was going on. He said, ‘Well I don’t think I’ll take one of those today.’ I mean, here you got a big white man saying he’s gonna build you a house and you figure, What the hell’s going on? I don’t blame him” (Mockbee, in: Hudson, 2001). Nevertheless, with some persuasion, Harris eventually relented.
win the respect of people they wouldn’t even acknowledge on the street before.

Students’ remarks confirm this statement. One of the students recollected:

I’d only driven through that kind of poverty on my way to private school. At the studio I learned that economic poverty is not a poverty of values but a fact of birth. You come to realize it’s the luck of the draw that you don’t end up poor. You learn poor people are like you and me. You get to know them and respect them. (Dean, 2002:3)

Clearly, to the students working with the Rural Studio it appeared that for their clients, a house was not just a shelter or a functional object fulfilling their basic physical needs, but an important source of identity. Bruce Lindsey (Mockbee’s colleague and co-director of the Rural Studio after Mockbee’s death) recollected:

[…] at the Rural Studio something that came up all the time was that people see the places they live as unique. For instance, Lucy, the owner of the Carpet House—a radical building by any measure—loved it. The reason she gave was that nobody else had one like it.

Further on, Lindsey argued that our society has gone far away from thinking that “architecture matters.”

By nature it’s in the background. Its capacity to connect to the public has been overwhelmed by not only the professional insularity of architects but a mediocrity in architecture that is all too common. We’ve forgotten that architecture can inspire us and help us know where we are. And most important, we’ve forgotten that our built environment can enable us—that people have a basic human right to environments that enhance life. (Lindsey, in: Heathcott, 2007)

**Interpretation: approaching the process**

Robert Ivy, a friend of Mockbee, recollected the man was “A born storyteller, Sambo was in a sense an interpreter of people, place, and history” (Ivy,
According to Mockbee, “the best way to make real architecture is by letting a building evolve out of the culture and place.” Further on, he added, “As a social art, architecture must be made where it is and out of what exists there” (Mockbee, 1998).

The problem of interpreting the contradictions inherent in the South was central for Mockbee, even going back to the early years of his career. It was also the central issue for the Rural Studio project, which attempts to “capture the spirit of place and people in a new way” (Ivy, 2002).

Mockbee addressed the inconsistent nature of the South in his works (both with Coker and with the Rural Studio). He did not seek a rational understanding or attempt to overcome the contradictions, but rather aimed to provide a “framing device” through which one could develop a non-reductive understanding of the existing conditions. He criticized an overreliance on the scientific truths in Western society, as it precludes us from understanding of the world as it exists. Mockbee saw architecture as a means of “exposing, addressing, answering, beckoning, questioning, and affirming” (Ryker, 1995:18), a means of restoring our relation with the world as lived, in all its complexity.

Interpreting the world, Mockbee did not provide definite answers. A certain ambiguity, a blurring of any finite meaning in his works allows the users to enrich architectural artifacts with their individual experiences (Ryker, 1995:18).

Taking into account both local particularities and an expanding, global culture, Mockbee developed new interpretations of Southern traditions, mythologies, and allegories; he reinterpreted and assembled many local symbols into his work.

In a dialogue with the universalized culture, Mockbee made an effort to interpret, discover, re-construct, and preserve local values and traditions. In the interview for the Architectural Record, Mockbee emphasized the importance of a profound knowledge of local context:

**AR:** You’ve stayed close to your Southern roots. Can you get an appropriate design from an architect who isn’t rooted in place?

**SM:** I’m not going to say that someone like Frank Gehry can’t build something beautiful in a culture and place he doesn’t know well. For the rest of us mere mortals, the best way to make real architecture is by letting a building evolve out of the culture and place. (Mockbee, 2000)
The fact of not being from a given place is not a “crippling deficiency that will render one incapable of inspiration.”256 What is particularly important in such circumstances is “using one’s talent, intellect and energy in order to gain an appreciation and affection for people and place” (Mockbee, 1998). Using Husserl’s terminology, an effort to approach “alien lifeworlds” is substantial here.257

At the same time, Mockbee advocated a dialogue with contemporary phenomena:

I don’t want to be pigeonholed as a regionalist, yet I am, and I certainly don’t want to get marked as a local colorist. I pay attention to my region; I keep my eyes open. Then I see how I can take that and, using modern technology, reinterpret certain principles that are going to be true 200 years from now. I want the work to be looked at as contemporary American architecture, and, in that sense, it has to have a certain honesty to it. That’s what’s wonderful about the really great American architecture, its honesty. (Mockbee, 2000)

Speaking more specifically about the design process and its inspirations, Mockbee said:

The forms and the shapes I design are derived from looking at outbuildings and connective buildings in the rural South; I’m informed and influenced by that and I’ve reinterpreted it. The shacks and barns, tornado shelters, silos, chicken coops, these big, long warehouses. Those are strong images in my memory. Burned-out houses where all that’s left is the chimney. I’m drawn to anything that has a quirkiness to it, a mystery to it. And I’m real conscious of the weather conditions, heat and shade. It’s the shade down here that we want. You can have a lot of glass on the north and east, but you want very little on the south and west. And if you do use it that way then you have to have big overhangs. I draw the best from the old and incorporate it into materials that reinterpret contemporary aesthetics. (Mockbee, in: Hudson, 2001)

256 Nevertheless, being a part of a community increases the possibility of a socially-responsible architectural practice. Steve Hoffman, one of Mockbee’s students, and since 1998, one of the Rural Studio instructors emphasized that “The more you root yourself in a place, the more you can be an advocate to get things done” (Hoffman, in: Dean et al., 2002:159).

257 See section 3.2.2.
Mockbee emphasized that he and the Rural Studio did not try to be “southern” (e.g., by using historical or vernacular references in a theatrical way), they just ended up that way because they were trying to be authentic and to respond to given circumstances. In this matter, there is a lot to be learnt from history and tradition. Dick Hudgens, an architect who teaches the history of architecture at the Rural Studio maintains that this is still true:

[...] Some of the houses we see, that we tour, were built right before the Civil War. And I think, if you know the history of the Black Belt in west Alabama, it’s one of the poorest areas in the nation now, but not then, not in the 1840s and ’50s, particularly 1850s. It was one of the most prosperous parts of the nation. And the houses had to work with the climate without any kind of artificial systems. And I think a lot of architecture students today tend to take artificial systems for granted and don't consider orientation, climate, and sun angles, and prevailing winds, and things like that. And so these houses are great a document on how to build with simple systems to work with the climate. You know, they’ve survived, they’ve lasted and they have certain principles and certain truths—you might even use the term architectural truths—that are still valid today. And so I emphasize proportion, quality of light and how that impacts design.258 (Hudgens, in: Tippet, 2007)

Responding to the local conditions, almost all of the Rural Studio’s buildings have exaggerated, protective roofs. This is because the region’s annual average rainfall is very high, “so flat roofs just aren't going to do it” (Mockbee, in: Dean, 2002:9). The climate conditions are different from the American West, for instance, where architects can concentrate more on sculptural forms. Mockbee turned the limitations of the climate into opportunities; he often “overstated” his roofs.

258 In this context, Hudgens emphasized that the history of architecture should not be taught just as a history of buildings. One has to understand what was going on socially and culturally. For instance, he discussed slavery and the effect of slavery on architecture (Tippet, 2007).
The Rural Studio’s “exaggerated” roofs.

Courtesy of The Rural Studio Web site. © Timothy Hursley
The building materials can also be unconventional, often salvaged or donated, always locally available, e.g., old bricks, beat-up railroad ties, hay bales, corrugated cardboard, rubber tires. “But even the most futuristic constructions look anchored in their neighbourhood, because their scale fits and their shapes spring from the local vernacular” (Dean, 2002:10).

Andrew Freear, referring to the formal aspects of the buildings, said:

At the Rural Studio, we very rarely actually have a conversation about the sort of the stylistic nature of the architecture. It’s, more often […] how do I decide which material to use here? And often, the forms are actually driven by the materials, the fact, for example the… corrugated tin, it’s easier to cut it one way than it is to cut it the other way. So somehow, the form and the shape and the, kind of the grain of the material can actually begin to generate the form of the building. You respond to the type of material that you’re using. And it, very rarely do we say […] I want to do a tower because it looks cool. (Freear, in: Tippet, 2007)

This brings our attention to the sustainability concerns, which are an integral part of the Rural Studio’s design approach. “I want […] to be over the edge, environmentally, aesthetically, and technically. […] That’s the goal, to be the most technically advanced, low-cost house available” remarked Mockbee in one of interviews (Mockbee, 2001). Andrew Freear described the sustainability-based approach of the Rural Studio as sustainability with a small “s.”

There’s always a lot of questions. People come and see the work and say, well, you know, why aren’t you using composting toilets? Or why aren’t you using solar panels? And the truth of the matter is, is not just that the sort of the huge sort of upfront costs of things like that. But the fact of the matter is that I am better off making sure that if I put in a septic system, that the local people can fix it if it fails. And for me, that’s sustainability with a small “s.” It’s not trying to reinvent the wheel. It’s simply recognizing the capabilities of local people when they’re dealing with essential services. (Freear, in: Tippet, 2007)259

---

259 Speaking more specifically, the Rural Studio is aiming for zero-maintenance structures. Freear explained that “in a place where there’s no money for maintenance, our sort of focus, particularly with some of the public buildings, has been to […] use materials that have a natural lifespan of their own that’s as long as we can possibly find. But they don’t rely on any level of
In this context, sustainable solutions emerge from a careful consideration of users’ reality. Sustainability is not defined in terms of technologically advanced solutions, but rather focusing on lifestyles and a given context; i.e., asking what is feasible for the user (such as low-maintenance materials) and what is locally available. Architects are also learning from architectural solutions of the past, e.g., the ways of responding to the climatic conditions of the South in antebellum houses.

The emphasis the social and environmental responsibility of architects may suggest an instrumental view of the discipline. Nevertheless, the Rural Studio’s architecture is not just a pragmatic activity, which fulfills concrete social needs. Bruce Lindsey, referring to his experience with the Rural Studio recollected that “it really showed me that you don’t have to suspend the expressive and innovative aspects of architectural design to work in the community.” At the same time, he emphasized that the clients trusted the students “because the program had been there and made a commitment to the community that residents knew was real” (Lindsey, in: Heathcott, 2007).

Mockbee explicitly accentuated that a creative dimension is an essential aspect of the design process. Creativity, however, is not viewed as a self-expression, but as a way of getting “the most profound insight into the lives of community.” Here, art is “an agency of understanding” and it may help the architect to enter into “alien lifeworlds.” Referring to the series of large murals that he created in an attempt to “extend the study of architecture into […] a wider human landscape” Mockbee asserted:

I am interested in what might prompt and make possible a process of entering a taboo landscape, in my case, the economic poverty of the Deep South; also in developing a discourse beyond merely looking at the effects of poverty but also at how architects can step over the threshold of injustice and address the true needs of a neglected maintenance. […] It’s really been borne of necessity” (Freear, in: Tippet, 2007).

260 In an interview with Judy Hudson (2001), Mockbee emphasized: “Any work of art has to have a moral sense.

“JH: What do you mean?”

“SM: In other words, the painting The Raft of the Medusa, has a moral sense to it. Guernica, I’ve never particularly liked the painting aesthetically, but it has a moral sense to it.

“JH: In other words something about it addresses something larger than what it is.

“SM: Yeah” (Mockbee, 2001).
American family and particularly the needs of their children.
(Mockbee, 1998)

In Mockbee’s view, the paintings engaged and revealed “the spirit of a noble sub-culture and its authenticity” (Mockbee, 1992), while at the same time establishing a discourse “between those of us who have become mentally and morally stalled in modern obligations and these families who have no prospect of such obligations” (Mockbee, 1998). Lori Ryker observed that when viewed in a series, the murals record and support the local sub-culture based on the stories of life, love, and death. Furthermore, the pictures portray not only the actuality of a situation, but present a spiritual narrative, “combining the observable with a personal mythology based on Mockbee’s view of the world” (Ryker, 1995:93). Hence, the murals are by no means an attempt to aestheticise poverty.

It’s about stepping across a social impasse into an honesty that refuses to gloss over inescapable facts. It’s an honesty that permits differences to exist side by side with great tolerance and respect. Just as those of us who have had advantages can learn from this resilience, so can architecture learn something from an architecture of honesty. […]

These paintings are an attempt at becoming an agency of understanding what is common and universal for all families.
(Mockbee, 1998)

Mockbee believed that contemporary consumerist culture and modern technology alienated people from their collective memory. Art may be viewed as a means to overcome this alienation, to meaningfully incorporate the past into the present. Accordingly, he viewed each mural as a link to the collective memory, which is fading from the lives of those preoccupied with the issues of profitable developments. The pictures sustain and support the lifeworld of the people from which they grow. This—although not explicitly acknowledged—faithfully reflects the phenomenological view of art (as discussed in section 3.3.1). Furthermore, the pictures ultimately help individuals to realize their innermost potential, and in this they sustain dwelling.

The murals offer a supportive position through their themes, and in their local installation offer a magical and hopeful vision of the people portrayed. The murals are noble in that […] they are intended to bring
spiritual good into the lives of others without question or pretence. (Ryker, 1995:93)

Mockbee’s experiences from the period of creating murals were echoed in his later work with the Rural Studio. Art remained an essential part of the design process. Apart from providing an insight into the lifeworld of clients, artistic explorations (particularly drawing and painting) are essential to the development of architectural form:

The sketch is always out front. It sees ahead and deeper into what is already on the paper.

The initial sketch is always an emotion, not a concept. In the beginning, it is important to allow the imagination to move freely without any influence from a preconceived form. It’s a mark that suggests the possibility of an idea. For me, it’s the act of drawing that allows the hand to come into accord with the heart. When that happens, there comes a moment when the marks of the sketch—it can be a pen mark or a computer mark—utter the first deeper knowledge of what will come later. (Mockbee, 1998)

Nevertheless, architectural drawings and models are a means to get someplace, but not an end. An interpretation usually needs time to evolve, and so does the design of architecture. According to Hoffman, Mockbee’s student and currently one of the Rural Studio instructors, the best projects evolve through the process of building. The design goes through many iterations and then “somewhere things begin to click” (Hoffman, in: Dean, 2002:159).

6.3.4 Sub-case: Bryants’ House, Mason’s Bend

Judy Hudson (2001), a reporter for the Bomb magazine, recollects her experience:

We drive up to the Bryant house. Its walls are stuccoed hay bales, and it has a sweeping porch covered with translucent corrugated Plexiglas held up with yellow columns. In back, the students have built a smokehouse with concrete rubble and bottles, and a roof of road signs.
It looks like a magical, mini Ronchamp Notre Dame du Haut, and it’s everyone’s favorite. It cost $40.

We get out of the car. The clay mud sucks at my feet. Kids come running. To say the house is lived in is an understatement. All the walls are propped and plastered with cards and pictures. There are live turtles in buckets, chickens everywhere, an old freezer on the porch filled with catfish. Sambo doesn’t even blink; he clearly feels architecture should serve people, not the other way around.

**Judy Hudson:** Hi, Mr. Bryant. How do you like your house?

**Shepherd Bryant:** I love it.

**JH:** It’s kind of different, no?

**SB:** That’s what I love about it. At first I thought they were crazy. I thought the cows would eat the hay. But I never even hear the rain; it stayed perfect.’ (Hudson, 2001)

---

**The client**

“Masons Bend is not a trailer park. But most of the residents live in trailers—beat up and rusty ones at that” (Dean, 2000). It is one of Hale County’s poorest communities, a home of four extended families (about 100 people). “The most important thing about it, is it’s ignored,” said Mockbee (Dean, 2002:15). In 1994, the Rural Studio completed its first building, the Bryant “Hay Bale” House.

The clients were Alberta and Shepard Bryant, a couple in their 70s, raising three grandchildren. They lived in a in a decaying shack without water or electricity when Mockbee and the Rural Studio students approached them.

“When it rained we had to put our furniture in a corner,” recalled Shepard Bryant (in: Dean, 2002:17). Yet, in spite of these conditions, they
Bryants’ (Hay Bale) House and the smokehouse (1994/95)

Bryants’ House, interiors

Courtesy of The Rural Studio Web site. © Timothy Hursley
were not bitter. Andrew Freear mentioned Alberta, who has lost both her legs to diabetes, as an example of extraordinary optimism. “She is struck down by diabetes and has lost both of her legs. But I never wish to meet somebody with a greater sense of humor, greater dignity than this woman” (Freear, in: Tippet, 2007). Mockbee described Shepard as “a gentle old man who’s had a difficult life by most standards, but he accepts life, lives and let’s live. He’s not bitter, and he’s not mad about anything” (Mockbee, in: Dean, 2002:13).

One of the students recalled his encounter with Bryant, who became a role model for him:

I saw a man who would get up every morning and go fishing, not just for fun but to feed his family and the people of that area. He always had a lot of fire going for us in the winter to make sure we were warm. (Cooper, in: Dean, 2002:13)

The process

This project established the working method of the Studio. The goal was to provide an individual design solution addressing specific family needs and wishes, while at the same time responding to the given conditions of the region.

The basic needs of the family were: indoor plumbing, a septic tank, and a comfortable bedroom for each of the three grandchildren (each bedroom needed to accommodate both a bed and a desk).

The example of the Bryants indicates that the Rural Studio does not impose its ideas on clients. Shepard did not approve an initial two-story scheme, saying that he is too old for climbing stairs. Alberta convinced Mockbee and the students to change the siting of the house, since she “wanted the folks to see it” (Dean, 2002:13). The Bryants also wished to have a spacious front porch where they could spend time with neighbours and family.

All these suggestions were included in the design.

An important part of the Rural Studio approach is the using of inventive building methods and donated or recycled materials.

The Bryants’ House was constructed from eighty-pound hay bales, stacked like bricks, secured with wires, and covered with several coats of stucco. This method allowed them to create inexpensive, well-insulated
walls. The Bryants were initially skeptical and nervous about the use of hay, but it quickly appeared that the solution worked very well. The house is sheltered by a large roof that creates a great southern porch.

Shortly after the house was completed, a student built as a thesis project a smokehouse for Shepard—a round, little structure covered by a curved roof. The material was mostly donated: broken concrete provided by the Hale County Highway Department, beams from a local barn. The roof was made of salvaged road signs. To admit light, glass bottles were embedded in the walls and they glow when seen from the inside.

**The outcome**

Mockbee and his students designed for the Bryants an inventive, individually tailored home, a solution diametrically opposed to typical institutionally-generated low-income housing.

The design seems to work well. The family spends a lot of time on the porch. “You will usually find Alberta there in her armchair surrounded by buckets of plants and fish, her husband’s catch of the day from the nearby Black Warrior River” (Dean, 2002:18). She said, “I was glad to get my house. […] The children was glad; even the chickens and dogs was glad. I’m proud of my house” (Dean, 2002:18).

Bryant said about his smokehouse, “the light shines through the bottles, so it looks like a little city at night” (Dean, 2002:18). Mockbee described the small structure as the “Alabama Ronchamp.”

Andrew Freear, in a radio programme, described the building:

It’s a project that very much has Samuel Mockbee’s hands all over it. It’s very, very clever. It’s a kind of, I would say, it’s sort of got the classic Southern porch, the great family room on the exterior. It’s very, very simple inside—two very simple bedrooms and a bathroom. And then, these sort of three wonderful little sort of wagon wheels that stick out of the back that have very, very small circular rooms so the nephews and nieces could come and sort of lay down in.

It’s very smart, you know? They sort of—they can be used for stories; they can be used in different ways. But fundamentally, they were about the extended family. And even today, I don’t know which generation it is that’s running in and out of that house. But if you go down there, you’ll find the kids in those little sort of nooks in the back
of the house, enjoying them. It’s very beautiful. (Freear, in: Tippet, 2007)

Aesthetically, the house refers to local forms, interpreting them in a modern way:

[…] a deft composition of rugged and fragile materials and opaque and translucent ones. Sturdy and low-slung, the house mainly takes its cues from the region’s simple sheds and other ordinary buildings. But its porch – especially if called a verandah—suggests local antebellum mansions. (Dean, 2002:18)

Mockbee’s earlier work with Coleman Coker may be described as a “celebration of the commonplace, even as it exemplifies the highest aspirations of high-art culture, in a gentle and almost mystical mix” (Ryker, 1995, quoted in: Dean, 2002:18). These characteristics are also relevant with regard to the Bryants’ House.

In an interview, when asked about what gave him most satisfaction within this project Mockbee said:

The most profound result of our efforts has been on their grandson Richard Bryant. This was a kid who didn’t have anything, but because of his relations with the students—we’ve watched him grow up over the eight years we’ve been building down there—he’s blossomed into a mature young man who’s just graduated from high school, and is going to go to college. He wanted to be like them, and now he’s going to be. (Mockbee, in: Libby, 2001)

Shepherd passed away in 2003 and Alberta continued to live in the house until 2007. Their granddaughter now calls the house home.

6.3.5 Conclusions

The aim of the case study was to demonstrate how the phenomenological concepts of lifeworld, lived experience, and interpretation can be integrated in a concrete architectural practice. Discussing specific design settings, the study indicated various meanings than can be associated with these concepts.
The Rural Studio’s focus on the situatedness of a given design and an effort to reinterpretate the cultural and historical heritage of the South echoes phenomenological assertion regarding the primordiality of the lifeworld and hermeneutic nature of our being. In this context, Mockbee stresses the importance of artistic experience. Art is seen both as a means of preserving the collective memory and a way of transforming individual lives, suggesting an authentic, non-reductive relation with reality, a way of being that is referred to by Heidegger as “dwelling.”

The users’ experience is always being addressed in the Rural Studio design processes. Yet, it is not considered only in terms of a direct feedback, but approached as a part of the lifeworld.

Mockbee shared Heidegger’s view that a contemporary, technologized, efficiency-oriented culture deprives human beings of the most important aspects of their lives. According to Heidegger (1951), the most important task of architecture is not to appease the “hunger” of houses, but to make “dwelling” possible, to enable individuals to realize their potential. In this perspective, the role of the architect is to help inhabitants to recover the lost dimensions of their existence. By finding exemplary stories and figures from tradition and reinterpreting them in the contemporary context, architects may assist inhabitants in developing a more authentic mode of being, a non-reductive relationship with reality. In this understanding, tradition is far from being a limiting condition in architectural practice. The design process may be viewed as a hermeneutic process of interpretation; a phenomenon characterized by a fusion of horizons, a negotiation among different perspectives, meanings, and objectives. It is not always an easy task, but when accomplished in some cases it is a life-changing experience both for clients and for architects.

In this perspective, architectural form is not an autonomous invention, but an embodiment of both a certain client lifestyle and an expression of culture. The individuality of design solutions is one consequence of such a view of design. Referring to Mockbee’s practice, Adams (2003) states:

Individuality, as expressed in the appearance of one’s home, has been described as being essential to the development of a sense of personal identity. At least one architect would take the concept of personal expression a significant step further, having architects design housing for each low-income family, individually. Relentless monotony, as contrasted with architecture that demonstrates individuality, deprives

---

251 See the discussion of the concept of “dwelling” in section 3.2.2.
Challenging the traditional understanding of the professional-client relationship, Mockbee’s approach is close to Schön’s model of a reflective practice. One aspect of a reflective contract that could be recognized in the practice of the Rural Studio is the “demystification” of professional knowledge, not in the sense of showing up the inaccuracy of designers’ claims to expertise, but in making their knowledge more transparent, opening it up to inquiry, and inviting clients into a conversation. This attitude also echoes Gadamer’s model of professional practice, exemplified in his discussion of medicine as the art of understanding and dialogue, capable of reconciling its various constituent parts—theory, techne, and the knowledge of how to be human.

Another characteristic of a reflective practice that has been identified in the design approach of the Rural Studio is the readiness to step back from one’s preconceptions and adopt an “attitude of wonder” toward a given design situation. This attitude characterizes artful practitioners in confrontation with puzzling or unusual phenomena. Here, it appeared foremost in the confrontation between designers and clients, where two different realities/cultures met. Furthermore, the Rural Studio exemplifies the model of design as a reflective “conversation with a situation.” In this conversation, the architects deal with the meanings of lifeworld, the voices of local inhabitants, and the physical characteristics of a given place.

The example of the Rural Studio suggests that an architectural practice addressing the issues of lifeworld and lived experience is inevitably an ethical practice. Architecture is here a “social art,” a socially responsive activity which must rest on the cultural base of its time and place, manifesting care

---

262 In a similar tone, almost 30 years earlier, Bruce Allsopp argued that a deeper understanding of individuals—the users of architecture—is required than customary today. “Deep at the root of all problems of providing homes for people is the lack of concern among architects and the administrators, including town-planners, for people as they are and as they want to be. Inhumanity, lack of sympathy, lack of understanding, intolerance of ways of life which are different from our own—these are the worst sins of architects, even of those who are most socially concerned” (Allsopp, 1974:42).

Allsopp argued that architectural interventions must take account of human relationships, “and insofar as architect is concerned with re-housing he must think in terms of people and what they need in their new situation” (Allsopp, 1974:43). Understanding and sympathy for people should be more important than the plans for the future; “futurism is a confidence trick.” Yet, long-term aims are often an excuse for a great deal of humanity (Allsopp, 1974:43).

263 As discussed in sections 5.2 and 5.3.
for the individuals and their environment. Mockbee used to tell his students that as architects, “their goodness is more important than their greatness, their compassion more eventful than their passion” (Dean et al., 2002:3). He argued that the architectural profession should challenge the status quo by making responsible social and environmental design choices, as well as respecting the individuality of the client and specificity of a given context.

The professional challenge, whether one is an architect in the rural American South or elsewhere in the world, is how to avoid being so stunned by the power of modern technology and economic affluence that one does not lose sight of the fact that people and place matter. (Mockbee, 1998)

Yet, changing the prevailing, disengaged attitude within the architectural profession is not an easy task. How do we make architecture more humane? How do we increase architects’ sensitivity towards users’ perspectives? The role of architectural education is crucial in developing Mockbee’s view of architecture as a socially and culturally responsible, human-centered activity. In the documentary film, The Rural Studio, he described the educational concept behind the Rural Studio as follows:

Architecture is broad-based, but at the heart of architecture is a social order that has to exist that architecture works with. And, so, in order to expose students to that social order that exists, it becomes—at some point in their education it becomes necessary for them to leave the classroom, as I like to say, of the university and enter the classroom of a community, and to leave an abstract world to a world of reality. (Mockbee, in: Tippet, 2007)

Mockbee’s emphasis on the practical aspects of architectural education reflects a phenomenological assumption that practical engagement with the world is primary to the scientific rationality. As Gadamer (1960) asserts, understanding is not a task in itself, but always should involve applying the meaning understood in a specific settings. In this context appears the Greek

---

264 Further on, Mockbee stated “I do not believe that courage has gone out of the profession, but we tend to be narrow in the scope of our thinking and underestimate our natural capacity to be subversive leaders and teachers. In other words, the more we practice, the more restricted we become in our critical thinking and our life styles. Critical thought requires looking beyond architecture towards an enhanced understanding of the whole to which it belongs” (Mockbee, 1998).
concept of \textit{phronesis}, practical reason, which requires the experience of particulars, typically gained throughout the years of conduct. Aristotle observed that while young men become good scientists, “it is thought that a young man of practical wisdom cannot be found” (Aristotle, NE: VI, 8). Similarly, Mockbee pointed out:

Back in the ‘60s, we said don’t trust anybody over 30. Now I say don’t trust anyone under 50. If you take a look at the primo architects of the Renaissance, and the ones practicing today, you’ll see that they’re all over 45 and older when they do their major buildings. […] It takes years to accumulate the necessary abilities to produce a piece of architecture. […] I tell my students: You may be able to start practicing two or three years after you graduate, but you’re not really going to be an architect until you’re 45. (Mockbee, in: Libby, 2001)

Nevertheless, the majority of architectural schools seem to undervalue the role of the practical dimension in education. The following statements refer to the dominating model of architectural education in the United States, but they also seem relevant in the European context:

I don’t think the 100-plus architecture schools across the country realize how alike each program is, how interchangeable their curricula and faculty are. I’ve spoken at most of them. The faculty are usually all dressed in black. They all seem to say the same things. It’s all become redundant and very stale, unimaginative. What’s ironic is that you hear professors talk about how out of the box we need to be, how risk-taking is part of being an architect, yet the faculty is often guilty of sitting on their hands. (Mockbee, in: Dean, 2002:13)

In Mockbee’s view, changing this situation was the best way to transform the current model of the architectural profession. Architectural education

\textsuperscript{265} In a similar tone, Jeremy Till (2009) rasserts that “the main way that architectural education avoids staring the stasis of its own processes in the eye is by confusing radical making with radical thinking. Because things \textit{look} different from school to school, and from year to year, the assumption is made that the formative educational processes are equally different and equally evolving. The situation is exacerbated in the early twenty-first century by the extraordinary power made available by the computer. Technical determinism enters an unholy alliance with formal determinism, submenus of software programs producing ever more different shapes. […] The end-of-year exhibitions are often dazzling, quite literally; such as the shininess and freshness of the surface that one is seduced into believing that something genuinely new is happening. But scratch beneath the veneer and one finds void, a political and ethical void in which underlying processes and their social detachment are left unexamined” (Till, 2009:15).
education is where the values of professional practice are first established. It is important that students learn that drawing on paper and building models is not what architecture is about. Only by encountering the clients and the design settings will they start to understand the power that architecture has and the responsibility that they have. In this context, he reflected on the idea behind the Rural Studio:

The main purpose of the Rural Studio is to enable each student to step across the threshold of misconceived opinions and to design/build with a “moral sense” of service to a community. It is my hope that the experience will help the student of architecture to be more sensitive to the power and promise of what they do, to be more concerned with the good effects of architecture than with “good intentions.” (Mockbee, 1998)

It appears that the Rural Studio, for the most part, accomplished these objectives. Bruce Lindsey, a colleague of Mockbee who co-directed the Rural Studio after Mockbee’s death, described his experience with the Rural Studio as “life-changing.” Furthermore, he admitted that an emphasis on individuals and their needs instead of limiting creativity, extends the traditional, narrow disciplinary borders of architecture and opens up new possibilities.

It was life-changing for me, as it is for many of the students in the program. Before I first visited the school, I knew a little about the Rural Studio, but when I got there I saw how revolutionary it was in terms of architectural education. It was not just about the technical or aesthetic aspects of building or the experience of knowing how to frame a wall, even though these things are important. The Rural Studio emphasized the fact that when you advocate for something outside your discipline—like people and communities—it opens up the possibilities of your own discipline. In other words, when you advocate beyond narrow technical, aesthetic, or professional interests, the opportunities for every aspect of what you do open up. The innovative, expressive, and spiritual aspects of architecture are no longer confined. (Lindsey, in: Heathcott, 2007)
Lindsey’s remarks confirm Schón’s statement, that a move to a “reflective contract” awards new opportunities and new sources of contentment for professionals.266

266 See section 5.3.
7 FINAL REFLECTIONS

7.1 CONTRIBUTIONS TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

This study has undertaken an examination of the theoretical background needed for a more user-sensitive and culturally-responsible architectural practice in the present-day globalized conditions. This research contributed to the existing bodies of knowledge in several ways.

(1) One of the accomplishments of this study is a general overview of contemporary architectural theory with a focus on the position of user-related concerns and the subsequent linking of different views of subjectivity implied in paradigms underlying architectural theory to different approaches to users.

The preliminary analyses suggested that currently dominating positions within architectural theory tend to underestimate the significance of user’s perspective. Seeking the reasons behind this problem, this study examined the major theoretical perspectives in terms of their basic ontological and epistemological assumptions. These assumptions imply different views of subjectivity and on this basis generate different approaches to user and culture in architectural theory.

The conducted analyses indicated that the main reason behind the neglect of user’s perspective in positivist frameworks is their predominant emphasis on quantitatively measurable phenomena and scientific knowledge, resulting in a neglect of subjectivity as well as a reductionist approach to the sphere of human meanings and significations. In critical theory perspectives, individual autonomy and the concreteness of an individual experience can be obscured by a generalizing, ideologically grounded, and deterministic model of social mechanisms. Constructivist frameworks acknowledge the importance of an individual experience, but reject the existence of a shared background other
than a common interpretation. This rejection of universalism leads to relativism and incommensurability.

Another focus of this survey of contemporary architectural discourse and its underlying paradigms was the relation between theory and practice. This relation determines the position of ethical concerns within a given framework. The theory survey revealed that, within an architectural discourse, there exists a tendency to interpret paradigms in a way that expands the distance between theory and practice, even if the understanding of paradigms within human sciences suggests a close relation between these domains (this is particularly true in the case of critical theory and constructivism). One consequence of the gap between theory and practice is the marginalization of ethical questions and the disregard of user-related concerns that follows.

Concluding, the initial part of the study disclosed the limitations of the currently dominating theory frameworks and suggested a need of adopting a paradigm that could support a more user- and context-sensitive approach. In this context, phenomenology was introduced.

(2) The central outcome of this research is reexamination of key phenomenological concepts in terms of their implications for the role of users in architecture.

The main focus of the study are the concepts of “lifeworld,” “lived experience,” and “interpretation.” These concepts reflect ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of phenomenology. The discussion of the three key concepts was extended with the issues particularly important in architectural context—phenomenological account of space as given in lived experience, and the views of art and ethics grounded in the lifeworld.

The examination of the concept of lifeworld and its sub-themes, “homeworld” and “alienworlds,” has suggested the need for a careful consideration of the social, cultural and historical context of architectural interventions, particularly in situations when an architect is working in cultural settings different from her “homeworld.” Another insight of this investigation has been the necessity of rethinking of some general assumptions undermining contemporary architectural discourse, which often conceptualizes the “user” as a person living in a global space. While for some of us, the global space is undoubtedly a part of the “homeworld,” others see it in terms of an inaccessible “alienworld.”

Furthermore, this study has proposed that the co-constitutive relationship of “homeworld/alienworld” establishes a relevant conceptual model for
approaching the dynamics of globalized urban environments, providing insights how to create a meaningful milieu in multicultural cities. In the phenomenological perspective this would mean to create normatively significant environing-worlds in the mutual communication with different, co-existing cultural worlds.

Eventually, this study has identified in the concept of lifeworld a compelling basis for architectural ethics, arguing that, while in the phenomenological perspective norms are not context-independent, they are not for this reason simply relative or arbitrary.

Addressing the user’s lived experience in a non-reductive way is one of the challenges of a user-oriented practice. A way to get closer to a user’s lived experience is to combine different ways of getting users’ response with a thorough interpretation of a specific design context. This study suggested that turning to visual arts and literature could be a relevant strategy here; it could both help users to express their experiences and help architects to reach the meanings of the lifeworld.

Furthermore, this study has revealed that the architect’s creativity has an essential role in a user-oriented, culturally-responsible practice. Yet, it is not the expressionistic model of creativity dominating contemporary architectural discourse and represented by modern aesthetics. In a phenomenological perspective, an artistic, innovative dimension of architecture emerges from and relates meaningfully to the lifeworld of the users. Art connects the sphere of individual experience with the larger sphere of common significations and thereby provides grounds for social interactions. Art also has a transformative role; it helps individuals to identify and develop their true possibilities, to adopt a more reflective and resolute stance towards their lives. This transformative dimension of the architectural experience is an important aspect of a user-oriented architectural practice.

Another insight inspired by phenomenological hermeneutics, is that the meaning of an architectural object extends far beyond the intentions of the architect. Meaning can be considered as a collection of sedimented significations continuously emerging from new interpretations. It then follows that meaning is never complete; it is open for sedimentations that may come from future perspectives. Accordingly, architects have to anticipate that the progress of time may bring out new aspects of the designed objects. Architectural artifacts should be perhaps designed with some openness, so as to provide space for a fruitful dialogue with the future. In this understanding, an architectural design process is the process of interpretation, incorporating the hitherto-existing meanings of the lifeworld into an edifice, at the same time providing room for prospective possibilities of a human
existence. Here, architecture is neither an end in itself, nor just a pragmatic “tool” satisfying specific functional demands. Instead, it is a means to preserve and sustain the lifeworlds, a way to enhance and even transform the existence of individuals. In this it has an essentially ethical agenda.

Concluding, one of the major findings of this part of the study is that the question of user involvement approached within the phenomenological framework extends far beyond addressing the opinion of user. Respect towards the perspective of an individual is here inseparable from the appreciation of her lifeworld. Pointing out the relational nature of understanding, phenomenological hermeneutics asks for a thorough consideration and acknowledgement of the social, cultural, and historical context of architectural interventions. In this perspective, the design process is not primarily guided by abstract objectives, but by the lifeworld and the ways of life of the users of architecture. What follows, a user-oriented architectural practice ultimately refers to architecture's participation in the culture.

(3) This study has demonstrated that phenomenology—although sometimes accused of being a conservative, even a nostalgic position—offers a worthwhile contribution to architectural discourse in the present-day conditions. Tradition—as viewed by phenomenological hermeneutics—does not present an obstacle to a critical reason, since it is a “living” tradition, always mediated by our situatedness in a specific social and historical context. In a phenomenological perspective, contemporary technology-related transformations affecting architectural practice are observed from a reflective distance, with a reference to the lived-experience and the lifeworld of individuals. The main challenge for contemporary architectural theory and practice is here to find a satisfactory relationship between technology and the sphere of non-instrumental needs and values of inhabitants. The role of the architect is to interpret the existing practices, enter into discourse with traditions, and eventually propose evolutionary change. Architectural education has here a crucial role in providing prospective practitioners with “intellectual tools” allowing to enter an informed discourse.

Exploring the contemporary challenges of architectural practice, this study argued that mediating, anti-dualist character of phenomenology makes it a relevant framework in the search for a more inclusive conceptual basis for sustainable architecture. Phenomenology calls for a rethinking of environmental issues in terms of its influence on our everyday lives (the sphere of human significations, cultural meanings, everyday practices). In this view, the natural environment is a part of the lifeworld, and can never be
fully apprehended from the “outside.” Sustainability issues are, in the phenomenological perspective, part of a wider network of meanings and apprehensions. These concerns emerge from the lifeworld—the environments, in which we are daily engaged—and are directed at whatever threatens to separate us from these “homeworlds,” in the sense of making them alien.

(4) Another conclusion of this study is that phenomenology inspires a reformulation of architectural practice and calls for a departure from the traditional professional-client contract, where an architect holds an unquestioned authority of an expert or a genius-artist. Instead, it suggests the idea of an architect as a partner in a dialogue, a responsible member of a community concerned with the common good; i.e., a sense-maker. In this context, Donald Schön’s concept of a reflective practice was found relevant. Consequently, it was suggested that a reflective practice based on the phenomenological framework would be one of possible ways towards a user-oriented architectural design. A new insight of this study is derived from the examining Schön’s seminal work in the perspective of phenomenology.

(5) A case study examining the architectural practices of the Rural Studio utilizing the perspective of phenomenology is another contribution of research to the existing body of knowledge. The aim of the case study was to demonstrate how the phenomenological concepts of lifeworld, lived experience, and interpretation can be integrated in a concrete architectural practice. The Rural Studio’s focus on the situatedness of a given design and an effort to reinterpretate the cultural and historical heritage of the South echoes phenomenological assertion regarding the primordiality of the lifeworld and hermeneutic nature of our being. Furthermore, the case study has shown how art may help to access lived experience of users and the meanings of lifeworld. An additional outcome of the case study was the emphasis on the role of architectural education in transforming the currently dominating disengaged model of architecture in a socially and culturally responsible, human-centered activity.

(6) On a more general level, this thesis—by situating architectural discourse in the perspective of human sciences—has demonstrated how the discussion of user involvement within architectural theory may be approached by analyzing different ways of “framing problems,” i.e., the most basic conceptual underpinnings of different positions. This type of research has a crucial importance for professional development – it makes explicit the ways
in which practitioners conceptualize the problems and the reality in which they act. Accordingly, it encourages their critical reflection on the existing practices and entrains the awareness of alternative possibilities of dealing with a problem.

### 7.2 INDICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This thesis addressed the question of user’s perspective in architecture on a fairly general level. More specific considerations of the category of “user” would be advantageous in order to influence a real-world architectural practice. Different types of users may be further discussed in particular contexts. This may include a categorization of individuals according to the way they use a given architectural artifact, i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary users (Eason, 1987). In this context, the possible links between the kinds of users and the types of subjectivity discovered in the lifeworld may be established.

A further contextualization of this thesis’ findings may include addressing the major problems, challenges, and opportunities related to user involvement at national levels, in specific social, cultural, and political settings. Additional and more extensive case study research can contribute to the testing and improving of the findings of this thesis.

Problems connected with a phenomenological approach toward user involvement in architecture are mainly of epistemological and practical nature. One difficulty is the inconsistent and often arbitrary application of phenomenological observations and descriptions which can hardly be validated. In design practice and architectural enterprise, phenomenology and hermeneutic methods are often time and resource consuming; thus they are difficult to perform for companies, especially small- and medium-sized enterprises. The development of guidelines for companies and organizations that include methodological suggestions is definitely a desirable direction for further research.

A possible way of extending the present project would be to focus specifically on the contemporary urban condition. Cities are places where people learn to live with diversity, where “differences” are thought to be the core of urban progress and freedom (Sassen, 2006). Yet the constantly growing diversity and complexity of urban landscapes frequently leads to the alienation of the individual and intolerance. A relevant question in this
context is how to approach the design of global, multicultural urban environments from a phenomenological perspective, i.e., how to create a meaningful milieu in contemporary, multicultural cities. This is essentially a question of how to negotiate among different lifeworlds. The co-constitutive relationship of “homeworld/alienworld” provides a relevant conceptual model for approaching this problem.

A more general topic for further study would be to continue the project of developing the foundations of “hermeneutical architecture”—i.e., to carry on a process of drawing out praxial consequences for architecture that are implicit in hermeneutic phenomenology. In this context, it would perhaps be worthwhile to focus on the model of rhetoric (with its emphasis on sensus communis, phronesis, and metaphor) and ask whether it could provide a foundation for developing more concrete strategies of engaging users into a design process.

This project investigated a primarily Heideggerian-Gadamerian framework. It could be also relevant to extend the research with alternative models of hermeneutics, such as that represented by Paul Ricoeur (1981), which was only briefly mentioned here. Ricoeur’s emphasis on the necessity of critiquing ideology, while at the same time maintaining a strong conviction that the only way to pursue this critique is via the renewal of the cultural heritage, could provide a mediating background for architectural debate, which seems too strongly polarized by the advocates of critique and tradition.

7.3 REFLECTING ON THE ROUTE

Not unexpected in perhaps any research, this study has been a process of learning and exploration. Starting from the concept of the user, this venture extended with a whole set of questions, all equally important for architecture. Consequently, the concept of user, initially central, at times may seem marginal in the study. Yet, this is not accidental; instead, it shows that a consideration of the user alone is not

267 In a similar way, Madison (2001) extends the perspective of Gadamer in a new direction, drawing out the implications for political theory that are implicit in hermeneutics and rhetoric. “Because for hermeneutics true reason is social reason […] hermeneutical theory should in the final analysis be viewed as a Theory of Democracy, as […] [a] theory in the service of democratic praxis” (Madison, 2001:6). Madison understands the political realm as the realm of human coexistence. In this perspective, architecture undeniably belongs to the domain of politics.
possible in the phenomenological framework. Starting with the user, one has to address a complex net of interrelationships, encompassing different dimensions of the lifeworld—social, cultural, environmental, etc. Similarly, starting from any other category, phenomenological research will unavoidably come to address the individual experience.

Ending the work on a PhD project, it is presumably not unusual to have a feeling that there is so much more to say. Jeremy Till (2009) recollects the writing of his work:

   I am at the stage in writing […] where the basic argument is in place, but, in the paranoid matter of academics everywhere, I am worried about the loose intellectual ends that critics might delight in unraveling. I am therefore, in the self-centered manner of academics everywhere, pleading with my publisher for a later deadline in order to give me time to tie up those ends. (Till, 2009:195)

Yet, in human sciences research, “tieing up the loose ends” is often an impossible task. Furthermore, such an attempt may appear incompatible with the spirit of the work. In the case of phenomenology, the argument could never be complete anyway, because that would presume to all the certainty and universality that it aims to resist. As Madison (2001) argues, the main objective here is not to give the complete answers, but rather to pose the right questions.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


274


276


Husserl, E. (1979) [1936]. The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, Eavaston, IL: North Western University Press.


