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## An Analysis of How to Criticize and Evaluate Avant-Garde<sup>1</sup> Architectural works

Elaheh Rahmani\*

Iraj Etessam\*\*

Mostafa Mokhtabad\*\*\*

### Abstract

One of the most important issues of our age is to find a way to keep up with the uncontrollable pace of the time. The works of avant-garde architecture which are in turn the product of rapid development of contexts, needs and spatial-temporal circumstances of each era can be considered as a turning point in the historical evolution of architecture and style transfer. The progress of contemporary art and architecture history is greatly indebted to the avant-gardism. Thus, it is of utmost importance to criticize and evaluate these works compared to the ones following society's conventional mainstream. One can say that in many cases, the criticism and evaluation of these works has been faced with a lot of disputes and challenges. So, we begin the study with the following questions: "what are the requirements for a correct criticism of avant-garde architecture works?" and "how do the two elements of time and place affect the criticism of avant-garde works?"

The present study is an applied research in nature performed using interpretive-analytical methods which tries to analyze and explore how to criticize and evaluate the avant-garde architecture works based on theories of "language games", "cultural semiotics", "post-structuralist semiotics" and "critique as a behavior" which make up our theoretical framework. Then, as an historical evidence, examples of avant-garde works critiques throughout the history of architecture will be addressed which could confirm that the answers given to the questions raised are correct.

The findings suggest that criticism and evaluation of avant-garde works is characterized by qualities including "relativity", being "time-bound" or even "place-bound", that is, the outcomes of reviewing such works are highly dependent on time and place. In order to offer an impartial criticism, the proportionality between avant-garde architecture work and how to read it seem desirable which should be taken into account by architecture critics. In the end, we came to the conclusion that if the purpose of architectural criticism is to make changes and pave the way for a move forward in the history of architecture, predetermined criteria won't be an efficient and fair choice to assess the avant-garde works. When building avant-garde works, therefore, outcomes obtained from criticism of the project based on approaches with definite rules and standards such as positivistic and structuralist critique cannot be accepted.

### Keywords

Criticism, Relativity, Language game, Avant-garde, Semiotics.

\*. Ph. D. Candidate in Architecture, Science And Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.  
e.rahmani@srbiau.ac.ir

\*\* Science And Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. Corresponding author. i.etessam@srbiau.ac.ir

\*\*\*. Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran. mokhtabm@modares.ac.ir

## Introduction

It can be seen that in each era, architecture has been manifested as the resultant of a set of values and ideas lied in the spatio-temporal features of that age which emerged in the architecture works on the one hand and based upon designer's subjective and individual beliefs and thoughts on the other hand. To create an innovative work, the designer employs the values above mentioned with regards to their freedom to choose a specific form. Sometimes, however, the architect's ideas and creativities weigh more than community's conventional values and beliefs through designing process. Such architects who try so hard to disrupt the ordinary conventions and create a new language are known as the avant-garde. Avant-gardism does not aim to deny the past but seeks, with a radical viewpoint, to create transitional changes to get rid of repetitive and stereotyped patterns. Criticism and evaluation of avant-garde works plays an important and powerful role in changing the path of art and architecture history. Despite such significant impact, though, criticizing such works has always been faced with more challenges than seen in review of conventional works.

Hoping to reach a prospective view in his book "Architecture and Critical Imagination", Wayne Attoe (2005) writes: "criticism can only be useful when traces the future instead of humiliating the past". In his opinion, critics should be more prospective and long-sighted and think of criticism as a means to enhance architecture. According to Manfredo Tafuri, through a broader understanding of the relationship between architecture and society, an "operating criticism" plans the history in such a way that could be used as a means to predict the future not to assess the present. Aiming to achieve a prospective criticism, the authors of this article try to analyze how to criticize and evaluate the avant-garde works. The study is done focusing on reading, criticizing and assessment of architectural works. The term intended from this point of view is the avant-garde architectural works which play an undeniable role in changing the dominant atmosphere of each era. Given

the importance of criticizing these works in evolution and development of architectural history, this article aims to investigate how to criticize and evaluate avant-garde architectural works from the perspective of different theories. In this study, the term "avant-garde" refers to progressive architectural works with innovative or experimental nature which are created differently than conventional patterns of the time and pave the way to develop the new designs. The term here includes all kinds of modernization over any age in general and does not point to a particular contemporary time and style.

## Methodology, questions and hypotheses

The study begins with the following questions:

- How do the two elements of time and place affect the criticism of avant-garde works?
- What are the requirements for a valid avant-garde architecture works criticism?

This study is an applied qualitative research which aims to analyze architectural theorists' authentic comments and opinions focusing on the concept of criticism through an interpretive-analytical approach and semantic interpretation of data. To collect the data, library and documentary methods were used to examine how to criticize and evaluate avant-garde architectural works relying on logical deduction. Research hypothesis created in response to the first questions is as follows: "criticism of avant-garde works is a relative and time- and place bound matter". The authors attempt to prove this hypothesis and answer the second question using four theories including Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein's language games, cultural semiotics, theory of post-structuralist semiotics and Wayne Attoe's theory of critique as a behavior. It should be noted that these four theories used to perform the analyses here are rather based upon architecture posteriori readings which are reader-oriented than priori readings.

After the research hypothesis is confirmed and the second questions is also answered through the theoretical framework, examples of avant-garde works critique in the history of architecture

(as historical evidence) will be reviewed which can provide support and confirm the hypothesis and answers given to the questions.

### Literature

The study's background is presented in two parts: first the history of avant-garde art and second the literature on avant-garde criticism. Avant-garde movements which began with the 19th century's industrialization clinging to the uncontrollable pace of the time aimed to achieve something new by continuous destruction of previous works. In this process, everything is unremittingly discarded waiting for the future and the next thing. Peter Berger's avant-garde theory one of the modern art's prior theories can be distinguished from others by the interpretation that avant-garde is a historical phenomenon which is the counterpoint of an aesthetic phenomenon. Historical avant-garde attacks art's autonomy and independence and institutionality and combines the two areas of art and life. With a subjective skepticism towards cultural production totality systems, both Manfredo Tafuri and Peter Berger wrote about radical Marxism that doubted the role of aesthetic resistance and inability of the historical avant-gardes in the political and economic interactions of contemporary society. Inspired by Karl Marx's implicit dialectical method, Peter Berger's avant-garde theory argues that avant-garde is a set of accumulated strategies that is assembled to protest against an established cultural production model. Berger defines art - emphasizing on its functions, as an affirmation of the inherent values of the society that produces them. In every era, avant-gardism has overshadowed all the fields of aesthetic productions including architecture. So, architecture is stabilized as a special avant-gardism strategy. Avant-garde in art and architecture is referred to as a leading cultural phenomenon. The avant-garde are artists with ideas ahead of their time in a certain era who attack society's dominant conventions and use the most leading styles or themes in their work. They are often the erectors of novel movements taking steps towards new territories in

order to expand the boundaries of art. However, the conservatives keep holding onto traditions. After reviewing the historical, social, psychological and philosophical aspects of avant-gardism in his 1965 book, *The Theory of Avant-garde*, Renato Poggioli<sup>2</sup> extends his generalization scope beyond art's unique examples to show that the avant-gardes are a group of people with shared goals and values which are reflected in the rebellious lifestyle they have chosen and that the avant-garde culture can be considered as a branch of this lifestyle. The strength of avant-garde art lies in the fact that it is the context where the most important and fastest ways to change political, economic and social reforms are developed. Believing that all modern aspects of modern culture are influenced by avant-garde art, Renato Poggioli examines the relationship between avant-garde and civilization and pictures how avant-garde is both a "sign" and "cause" of many extra-aesthetic trends of our age and that contemporary avant-garde is unique and authentic. In contrast to the universal reactionary standpoint on avant-garde in his book, *The Return of the Real*, Hal Foster claims that avant-garde art includes predictions of the future given to us at the present time through countless creative exercises and thus provides a "retroactive" model of art and theory. Now that a brief history of avant-garde art is presented, the architectural criticism models proposed will be reviewed to discuss the background. An overview of the proposed models indicates that various experts have different ideas on architecture works critique measures and valuation. In his book, "The Ten Books on Architecture", Vitruvius, the Roman architect developed the first written standards of architecture criticism<sup>3</sup> during the first years of the AD era which have dominated over the architectural theories and critique more than 2000 years and is still accepted by experts as a review system - though by different interpretations. Another system developed by Bill Hillier, Musgrove and Sullivan (1972) in the 20th century which is significantly different from Vitruvius system and readings oriented from it introduces the buildings as a "climate moderator,

modifier of behavior, culture and resources” which can be a criterion and a framework to assess architectural works to determine the success or failure of each one (Attoe, 2005). In his book, “How to Look at the Architecture”, Bruno Zevi (1948) explains on how to judge the architectural works: “more than anything else, the architecture history is all about spatial perception”, he explicitly states that “whatever lacks space is not architecture”. David Gebhard also offers six principles on criticism among which lack of simulation of the past in contemporary buildings, having high artistic values instead of lowbrow popular architecture and meeting people’s needs instead of architectocracy are the most important ones.

In his book, “The New Paradigms in Architecture, Charles Jenkins, one of the most famous architectural critics and historians of all time opens up new horizons on architecture assessment and evaluation. According to Jenkins, human’s perception of the world is reflected in architecture and that outstanding architectural works throughout the history have always been based on scientific paradigms and man’s idea about the universe. Paradigm is as water that architects are immersed in. Thus, architecture of every era has no choice but assessing itself compared to the external issues and a bigger world it is a part of. Although, people like Philip Jodidio, author of two-volume book, “Architecture Now” (2001) takes a stance against Jenkins statements and knows better that architecture assessment is dependent on simple and constant issues such as costs, site requirements and application rather than science paradigm. Kenneth Frampton is another prominent figure whose ideas are clearly in alignment with Jenkins’ (with different viewpoints though). He adheres to new structural rationalism and is of advocates of analytically return to the architecture’s specific physical and structural environment that’s why he addresses the architectural works so precisely. Unlike Jenkins who’s always reflected his individual taste and insight in his works, personal and intuitive comments cannot be found that much

in Frampton’s works (Diba, 2002). Robert Venturi whose main concern is to regard the context, people, popular culture, environment, memory, symbol and richness complexity explains on some architecture’s contemporary historians and critics as follows:

“... They don’t go so deeply. Jenkins is looking for controversy and Frampton is even worse as he’s got a number of known patterns and stereotypes in mind upon which he criticizes and evaluates the architecture which is so boring. Peter Eisenman on the other hand is mainly looking for modern styles and methods so he moves in line with today’s waves and makes sure to impress everyone with his works ... Zaha Hadid is truly horrible just like a pop singer ... Tafuri’s writings are all one-dimensional relied on rigid political and ideological perspectives. On the contrary, I believe that the world of architecture is much wider, more humanistic and comfortable than such ideological debates. I have no interest in political remarks on architectural criticism and think that we should provide social designs but not based on ideological and political views. For example, Jane Jacobs illustrates some facts about social life in England in her historical studies. I feel I have perfectly understood Jane Jacobs’ book. Her writings can be interpreted as a serious reaction to Le Corbusier’s pure ideological and intellectual theories. We’re talking about human beings not robots created by an absolute and pure intellect. My thoughts are a response to the environment and I respect this process ...” (Diba, 2003).

Eric Owen Moss that Paola Giaconia<sup>4</sup>wrote a book about called “The Certainty of Doing” believes that when an art of any kind poses a question or makes humans think, it’s completed a part of its mission on meaning of life. In his view, thus, a worthy architecture can only be achieved by avoiding monotone designs, anti-cliche movements, opening new horizons, processing of avant-garde architecture, using new materials and technologies, detraditionalization (due to traditions cumbersome), using natural morphologies, inventing strange designs through distinct spatial approaches and dealing with

the challenge of broadening closed intellectual borders. In his view, what architectures need most is innovation and to this end, we are to understand the history of architecture to make changes. Today, man is thirsty for innovation and excitement and an odd sight. He says:

“We are tired of everything and of all political regimes too. Here, I tend to highlight the distance between myself and all existing dogmatisms. We have been so focused on context, culture, economy and such data and that’s why our environments and buildings are horribly boring and uniform”.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to argue all kinds of architectural criticism and cases mentioned above are only a few examples in this regard proposed by various theorists. However, considering this brief review of the history of ideas and theories related to the criticism, differences and diversity and sometimes even contradiction between architectural criticism and valuation criteria and standards by various experts can be specified. In the meantime, Hamidreza Khooyie has provided a highly flexible path-breaking model and believes that criticism measures should be chosen in accordance to the work itself. Thus, criteria vary by the work and design. In line with Khooyie’s idea, Iman Raisi also acknowledges that all kinds of architectural works cannot be criticized using a number of predetermined and fixed standards but each work requires its own criteria to be developed. Following Khooyie’s flexible and efficient model, authors of this article has tried to resolve the uncertainty in the field of avant-garde works criticism and set the hypothesis presented in the previous section. It is worth noting that the difference between this article and other studies performed on architectural critique lies in its analytical approach used here to examine how the avant-garde architectural works should be criticized which has been neglected by many researchers in this area. To this end, the authors employ four theories including language games, cultural semiotics, post-structuralist semiotics and critique as a behavior. Before the analyses are done, the phenomenon

of “avant-gardism” is explained based on Hegel and post-structuralist philosophies. Then, analysis process of how to criticize and evaluate avant-garde works is performed through the four hypotheses.

### **An explanation of avant-gardism based on Hegel and post-structuralist attitudes**

Avant-gardism is the term frequently used by postmodern theorists but it seems it can also be explained through Hegel’s theory. Hegel writes on aesthetics: “there is no fixed rules for beauty ...”. Hegel’s thought is in general based on the fact that each cultural form is unfixed and changes in time. The inner force of a cultural system is always inclined towards new areas of understanding. Changes made in visual features of the works are resulted from this quality (Groot and Wang, 2005: 145). The phenomenon of style transfer and impact of previous styles on new ones which is perfectly depicted in Hegel’s movement of spirit theory is a view that exerted influence on some architectural historians such as Sigfried Gideion and encouraged them to interpret the history of architecture through this standpoint. The concept of spirit of the time by Hegel (Zeitgeist) explains why different styles are categorized or why the styles of each particular period of time are so similar and have the same form. Influenced by Hegel, we see that Gideion, in his book “Space, Time, Architecture” opposes such divisions of architectural history into different periods and styles. In his view, correlation between various ages and specification of major factors that relate them to each other is of much more importance than making distinctions between them. There is no single self-originated event thus we should always be looking for connections between different incidents. Thereby, according to Hegel’s theory, history in an uninterrupted and continuous process and he addresses all phenomena through this point of view. Darab Diba (2007) also claims that leading architecture is not merely playing with shapes and forms or the visualization of art for art but it has some requirements and bases. Technically, the first

thing should be strengthened first in every business or profession or art is the bases and roots. The final step of experience and knowledge is the artistic improvisation.

Hegel heavily emphasizes on certain people as actors of change and introduces them as “world-historical individuals” (Groot and Wang, 2005: 146). According to Hegel, an artist, as the historical man, is someone who’s able to achieve the transcendental world and consequently can manifest this purpose in the form of a work of art. Hegel believes that conflicts and contradictions are the condition required to change and evolve thoughts and nature. Hegel’s dialectic explains that “everything contains within itself its own particular contradiction” and this idea of his paves the way for the theory of the movement of spirit and depicts historical continuity in Hegel’s theory. Hence, development of avant-garde works based on Hegel’s philosophical standpoint displays the movement of the spirit of the time and historical continuity rather than demonstrating a historical rupture. The formation of some avant-garde works in the history of architecture can be explained through a dialectic process (thesis, antithesis, synthesis). According to Hegel’s theory, avant-garde architecture is linked with the past but it explains this association through contrasts not similarities. According to this idea, the avant-garde artist is a historical man that expands architectural boundaries to new territories and perceives various demands of the collective spirit of his own time faster than others and exhibits them in the form of material and artwork. Anyway, it is beyond scope of this paper to discuss the point that Hegel’s theory fails to explain some topics. Despite the fact that Gideion, inspired by Hegel, exerted considerable influence on the history of architecture, but the era of space-time hypotheses is quite inevitably over.

Unlike Hegel’s belief in historical continuity in his theory of movement of spirit, post-structuralism negates such notion. As a matter of fact, post-structuralists don’t believe in the movement of spirit and do not describe new conditions based on previous

circumstances. Rather, they assume that phenomena are products of society’s dominant discourses and believe that history is a series of ruptures. Discourse is a complicated integration of linguistic and non-linguistic matters. No discourse will always remain dominant and pervasive. In other words, each discourse is associated with a certain culture and time from a specific political and social climate. The avant-garde works created through the post-structuralist approach play a vital role in changing the dominant discourse of each era as avant-gardism literally evokes a break from the past inside rather than a link with the past. The avant-garde architecture is the prediction of a new discourse on the one hand which accelerates the development and consistency of this new discourse on the other hand.

So it is seen that Hegel and post-structuralists provide different definitions of avant-gardism. In other words, Hegel’s theory links avant-garde works to the past through contradiction while according to the post-structuralism, avant-garde is completely separated from the past. To analyze how to criticize and assess avant-garde works in this article, four theories related including language games, cultural semiotics, post-structuralist semiotics and critique as a behavior are employed.

### **Analysis of how to criticize and evaluate avant-garde works based on theory of language games**

Wittgenstein’s theory manifested in the concept of language games is essentially a postmodern philosophical viewpoint of language which had the greatest impact on the expansion of linguistic relativity theory. According to him, the relationship between words and meanings is neither rooted in their limited compliance with objectives nor inner hidden meanings but their application in certain social situations (Abel, 2008: 169). Each linguistic game conforms with a form of life. Therefore, understanding a language game requires involving in the form of life where the language game occurs (Nederloo, 2011: 87) which can only be realized

when the internal rules and standards of the game are referred to. We only participate in a limited number of such games that constitute our language. These language games are in accordance with forms of life where we actively take part (Ibid: 99).

If we address this matter through a comparative perspective and take architecture as a language, we will see that as there are a variety of linguistic games in any language, there are countless language games in architectural texts as well each of which has its own rules. With that knowledge in mind, every architectural style can be considered as an independent game with its own internal standards and rules. So, what theory of language game emphasizes on the most is that there are no universal standard and measure to assess and survey an architectural work. Each language game in architecture has its own internal criteria. Thus, every architectural work and design which is born inside this language game will adopt the standards and criteria of that game. When we use a certain language we in fact perform a language game different from the one that we do when employing another language to communicate. For example, classical language of architecture is basically different from the language of an organic architecture.

The avant-garde architecture works, however, are a special case as they are placed on the border between various styles. These works usually lie between two different language games at birth over the transitional stage which are common language games and new and developing language games. So, there are two types of exposure for analysis when criticizing the avant-garde architectural works:

1. The avant-garde work is measured through standards and rules of common architectural language games.
2. The avant-garde work is measured through standards and rules of new and developing architectural language games.

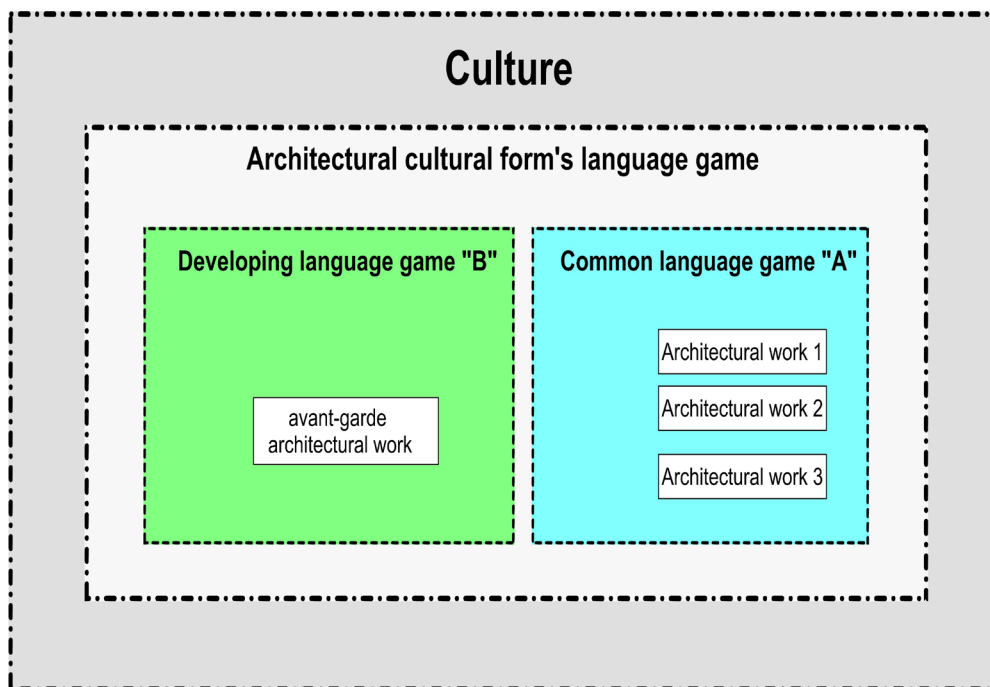
In the first case, when the avant-garde work is measured through standards and rules of common architectural language games, the results of this

assessment seem self-evident, that is: denial and rejection of the avant-garde work as it doesn't belong to the value system of common language games.

But in the second case, when the avant-garde work is measured through standards and rules of new and developing architectural language games, the results will be different than we thought because the work will be confirmed due to its harmony with new value system. Besides, since the new game is not formed perfectly yet, its rules and measures of the new game are not revealed. So, the assessment process cannot be implemented immediately after the work is created in the latter case as it requires more time to be done. This is why avant-garde is also called a "pre-style", that is, what leads us towards development desired that will eventually be achieved (Fig. 1).

As criticism of classic buildings through internal standards of these language games (classic architectural games) ended their domination over the history of architecture, review of avant-garde via common language games will also result in nothing but continuation of such games due to the work negation thus community's architectural conventions won't change at all. Therefore, architecture will be entangled in a devastating cycle with no way out and no step forward could be taken. Criticism of avant-garde works based on propositions more suitable for a different kind of architecture ends in an obvious outcome: an unsuccessful building and therefore rejection. But if the avant-garde works are judged based on the new games' developing standards, it'll weaken the foundations of architectural common language games and pave the way for emergence of new language games more than ever. The reason is that in this way a basis will shape on which we could compare two types of architectural language games externally which provide us with the opportunity to choose and change the old styles. In fact, one of advantages of comparison process is innovations. Rules of the game won't change as long as comparison is not implemented. The assessment process can be carried out within a language framework. However, the language framework cannot be evaluated alone.

**Culture:** consisting of various cultural forms each of which can be considered as a basic language game



Internal criticism of architectural language game		
Criticism of architectural works and examples based on internal standards		
	Correct critique	Incorrect critique
<b>Criticism described based on figure above</b>	Evaluation of architectural works 1, 2, 3 based on internal criteria and common rules of language games A	Evaluation of architectural works 1, 2, 3 based on internal criteria and common rules of language games B
	Evaluation of avant-garde architectural work based on internal criteria and rules of developing language game B	Evaluation of avant-garde architectural work based on internal criteria and rules of developing language game A
<b>Critique result</b>	Growth and strength of language games A and B in architecture	<b>No result</b>
<b>Example</b>	Assessment of Mies van der Rohe's architectural works based on international style standards	Assessment of Mies van der Rohe's architectural works based on classic style standards



Fig. 1. Explaining how to criticize an exquisite architectural work based on Wittgenstein's theory of language game. Source: authors.

Adopting the new games, the norms will also be altered. What was once defined as a failure could be recognized as a success now.

According to the theory of language games in response to the second question of our study, we can conclude that predetermined criteria



(criteria based on the time's common style) cannot be the right and unbiased choice to assess the avant-garde works and we'll have to wait and see what happens in the future to find the appropriate standards for this matter. That's why no acceptable results could be derived from criticizing the avant-garde works based on positivism and structuralism critical approaches as the two philosophical systems employ predefined criteria and irrefutable rules. As mentioned in the background section, corresponding with Wittgenstein's theory, Hamidreza Khooyie also believes that the critique criteria should be chosen according to the architectural work that's supposed to be evaluated (Raisi, 2007). So, the critique measures can vary by the architectural work. Further, predetermined criteria are not efficient enough to be used to criticize the architectural works.

### **Analysis of how to criticize and evaluate the avant-garde works based on theory of cultural semiotics**

It is absolutely futile to analyze the architecture regardless of the cultural context in the society. Theory of cultural semiotics is a particular approach to the analysis of culture and a method to read the text to expand linguistic patterns within the scope of nonverbal cues. According to the teachings of "Tartu School"<sup>5</sup>, the aim of cultural semiotics is to develop a model to analyze a particular cultural realm. Conventionally, members of each culture consider themselves internal (insiders) and members of other cultures external (outsiders). On the inside of any culture, life is regular and meaningful while there is chaos on the outer side which is impossible to understand. Furthermore, the insiders are perceived as highly valuable people. A "text"<sup>6</sup> can be interpreted because it exists within the culture, this means that there is a system available in the society on which texts can be translated. A "non-text", however, cannot be interpreted. Under such circumstances, text cannot exist outside of the culture but at least it may be potentially possible for non-text to come to existence as it comes from the

outer side and can be converted into text. However, non-texts are usually eliminated or rejected through a special mechanism called "exclusion" that exists within every culture. Nevertheless, the accumulation of many deformed texts in due time may give rise to a new mechanism of interpretation which makes it possible to understand them. It also may lead to the formation of a mechanism that allows culture members to create their own texts of a kind that's only been made in the external culture (outsiders) (Sojoodi, Quoted by Gooran Senson, 2011: 76-77).

Art territory especially over the modernism era can be understood using "Tartu School" model in which "art and non-art" can be included instead of "culture and non-culture". To adopt this model, the world of art should be considered as a subsidiary territory or a sub-culture inside the entire Western culture which has a tendency to attract other sub-cultures into its own domain under modernism system (Sojoodi, Quoted by Goran Sonesson, 2011). All the rules on inclusion and exclusion, translation, impossibility of translation, and translation as deformation will work here. To make it more clear, an example of Marcel Duchamp is given on the process of inclusion in the art world. Fountain is a work of art produced by Marcel Duchamp which is merely a piece of porcelain urinal placed in an art exhibition. This means that this object has been transmitted from the realm of functional devices and equipment to the domain of aesthetic contemplation (Sojoodi, Quoted by Goran Sonesson, 2011).

The entire history of contemporary art and architecture can be regarded as a non-text into text transformation process. During this age, however, a second movement came to existence that was inclined to exclude the texts from the territory of art and tried to isolate what is known as true art and turn some texts into non-texts. If text is defined as anything that enters a culture or exit it, cultural semiotics, in an anthropological sense, will be referred to as a promotional model -though, it is of great importance what happens to what is perceived (exclusion, deformation or inclusion).

The elements of exclusion, deformation and inclusion in this process are given special attention. What's so remarkable about this model is that innovation seems to be always coming from outside of the community as a non-text which is eventually translated into that culture's special language (Zakariayie Kermani, et. al., 2013). So, one of the areas cultural semiotics can be employed is analysis of leading and avant-garde architectural works. The avant-garde work enters into a culture after being created and gets evaluated based on systems apart from the ones by which it is produced and known as a non-culture, non-text or non-art. The insiders find this non-culture primitive, natural or primal while take their own culture as familiar, relaxing, reasonable and humane. Cultural semiotics review steps an avant-garde work experiences to go from the realm of "non-culture" to the land of "culture" or from "non-text" to "text" or from "non-art" to "art" and be located in the center (Fig. 2). Yuri, M. Lotman found that codes detected in a certain culture are much more complicated than the ones identified in a language. According to the structuralism semiotics which is based upon architectural language rules, codes of avant-garde constructions are usually of non-textual kind which do not signify anything explicitly while the main purpose of cultural semiotics is to explore implicit significations of the architectural work rather than its objective meaning. Besides, implicit significations are mainly responsible for human emotions and relationships and developing special ideologies. Thus, according to structuralism semiotics, new forms and objectivity in avant-garde works based on may be meaningless without an explicit signification. When it comes to cultural semiotics, however, they won't be necessarily meaningless and can invoke explicit significations. Then, it is more possible to transform a non-text into a text through cultural semiotics than by structuralist semiotics which produces a semantic signification. So, after the avant-garde work is located in the center of the cultural semiotics domain over a period of time and transformed from

a non-culture into a culture, then the preliminary steps for giving meaning to the work created through the structuralism semiotics could be commenced. Producing new texts based on creative and avant-garde work, this innovation can be turned into a model language thus provides clear significations through the structuralist approach. So, according to the theory of cultural semiotics, an avant-garde work, when it is being built, cannot be read through a common code (structuralism semiotics) but is done via a cultural sphere or semiosphere.

In the Fig. 2 and on the basis of the theory of cultural semiotics, the first question of this study is answered as follows: criticism of avant-garde works is characterized by features like relativity, being time-bound or even place-bound (the place refers to the cultural realm) and that evaluation of such works, as seen in Fig. 2 results in different outcomes over the first to the forth steps. Therefore, it can be said that the result obtained is time- and place-bound thus the research hypothesis is confirmed.

### **Analysis of how to criticize the avant-garde works based on the theory of post-structuralism semiotics**

In this section, research questions will be answered based on the theory of post-structuralism semiotics which is one of posteriori methods of reading the architectural works. Discourse semantics is one of modern's semiotics approaches (post-structuralist semiotics) which is applied to analyze nonverbal or artistic works or texts in contrast to the linguistic semantics (structuralist semiotics). Semantics examines the meaning through discourse which is broader than sentence and covers both texts and elements other than that (such as text producer, text reader, and a wider spatial-temporal context like culture). What is desired in this semantics approach is to achieve a wider production or interpretation meaning. What is basically addressed in discourse semantics is the verbal meaning and other interpretations and nonverbal effects within a larger framework (discourse).

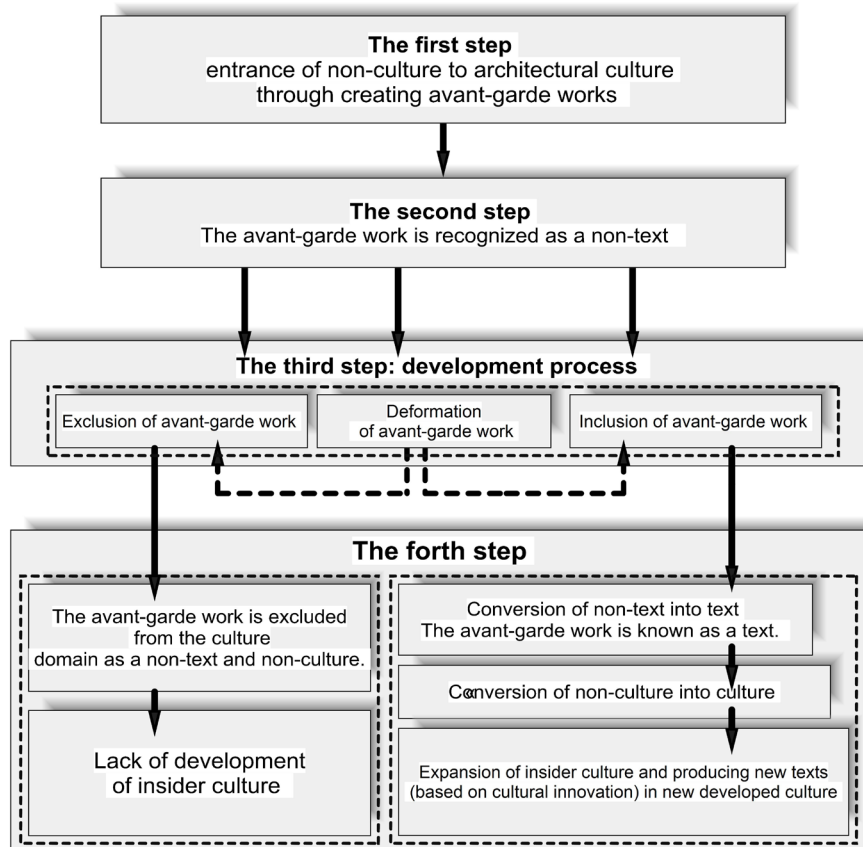


Fig. 2. Various stages of reading an exquisite architectural work over time based on theory of cultural semiotics. Source: authors.

There are four pervasive factors (meta-factor) in the discourse semantics affecting formation of each reading, interpretation, explanation and meaning including text, producer of text (as an author or architect), spatial-temporal context (covering both immediate and macro contexts) and reader who could be a critic or any audience. As a matter of fact, these four factors constitute discourse of semantics (Sasani, 2012: 80). Thus, such combination of producer, text, context and reader in discourse semantics to criticize the architectural works is quite evident and rereading the text over and over again is desired (Fig. 3). Unlike structuralist semiotics, post-structuralist semiotics examines the contrast between Langue (codes) and Parole (text) in which codes and texts are mutually related. Further, codes here are not an absolute and static concept but a relative and transformative system which are relatively associated with other codes and texts and textual layers (Sojoodi, 2012).

As explained in post-structuralism semiotics, there is an ongoing dialectic relationship between codes and text (langue and parole) when reading the avant-garde works and unlike the image illustrated in the structuralist semiotics to represent these concepts, there is no precedence relationship between langue (codes) and parole (text). In other words, langue (codes) does not take precedence over parole (text). The avant-garde work makes deconstructions in conventional patterns of architecture thus is taken into account as a text (parole) that does not follow the common codes (langue). After a period of time, the parole itself produces a new langue or code. So we can make this deduction on the avant-garde works that langue is affected by parole way before parole follows langue.

Although, the avant-garde work may be a product of some codes accepted, the text develops new styles in architecture that would change the codes conventions of the time. But architectural scholars

cannot accept the new innovations as they believe that the architectural codes of their era are definite and unalterable. After a short time, however, the innovations will become part of accepted codes and bring new rules with them to the architectural codes, then new innovator texts will rise and such continuous dialectic between code and text will go on. Accordingly, langue will not have the same precedent metaphysical status and becomes a relative concept whose existence depends on parole. It actually both forms the parole and is formed by it (Sojoodi, 2012: 65). In general, the rules of architectural codes which allows the formation of

new texts are always exposed to crumble. Codes make it possible to create texts and texts on the other hand change and transform the codes.

Codes build all the conventions and background of a field and text - whose textual quality is indebted to the value it is given by conventions (customs) or codes through inter-textual relations - could pave the way for alteration of the existing conventions and codes. This continues until changes made become part of the territory of fixed codes (ie. they are accepted by community) and construction and deconstruction of new texts begins and this process never ends (Sojoodi, 2012: 65).

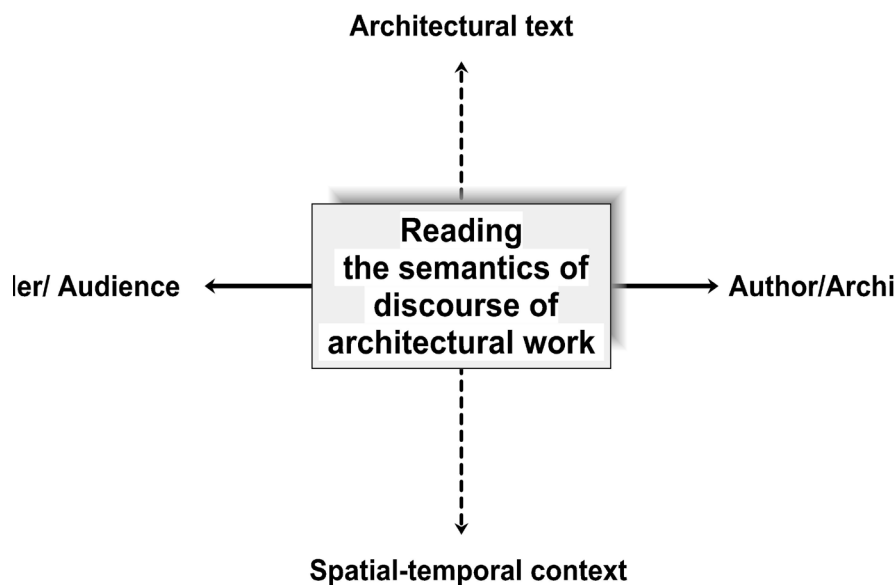


Fig. 3. Four pervasive factors affecting the formation of discourse semiotics readings. Source: author.

Via a more radical view on the avant-garde works, it can even be claimed that text (parole) takes precedence over the code (langue). In other words, text forms the code. This again leads us to the conclusion that structuralist reading is not an appropriate approach to criticize an avant-garde work when we begin to build it because the codes have not been created yet. According to the discourse semantics which offers an audience-centered reading, producer of the text

(author, architect) is of great interest not in terms of their ability to produce a text but merely on account of their influence and impact on the reader.

Different versions of readings of the same avant-garde work would be formed when the architect is famous, reputed and well-known compared to an unknown architect so it can be argued that this item could remarkably affect the acceptance of the work by the community and audience. Sometimes, when

the name of the architect is mentioned along with the avant-garde work, it won't just imply a person but a specific approach to architecture. Hence, the avant-garde work establishes an inter-textual relationship with part of history and theory of contemporary architecture which is undoubtedly involved in how to understand such works.

Post-structuralist semiotics also reviews the contrast between text and context. According to the traditional contrast of text against context, text is taken as the focus of meaning and center of interest while context is merely marginalized. While in semantics of discourse which somehow refers to layer semiotics as well, if an element of this so-called context is valid enough to act as a signifier, it will be characterized with textual features and turn into one of text's layers. This means that such layer is essentially located in the same signification process as other layers (Sojoodi, 2012: 63). In this type of semiotics, the boundary between context and text is unclear and architectural text is placed in the context as a continuum. Therefore, any alteration in the context can affect the meaning of the text. In other words, what a post-structuralism reading indicates is that it is futile to analyze an avant-garde work regardless of context especially a macro spatial-temporal context (cultural context). Accordingly, it may be claimed that adoption of an avant-garde work in a modern society is much more probable than in a traditional community.

Text and its various layers are materially manifested and this can be done through medium or media (channels). The medium in turn can be involved in text's signifying functions as a context or co-text or a signifier system (Sojoodi, 2012: 60). This is why the co-text or context surrounding a work should be taken into consideration when reading it. Some examples of contexts surrounding the text (co-text) that affect avant-garde text readings are provided below: A hall full of audience who gathered to introduce and acclaim an avant-garde work and are curiously gazing upon it makes the audience have a different reading compared to the time when it is introduced

to them through some photos in newspapers. Further, statements expressed by architectural scholars and experts to praise or criticize the avant-garde works also affect audience's reading by changing their pre-understanding of the work. Media's advertising and academic settings as immediate contexts affect audience's reading of avant-garde work and acceptance. Some large companies or architecture media giants and wealthy architectural critics whose life is tied together in a cycle of academic businesses try to accustom us to what they want to be known as a good or beautiful architecture. So, the ads they display in their publications and interviews on avant-garde works are to change audience taste and assessment of these works.

Another important point on the reader (audience or critic) from hermeneutics perspective is the matter of pre-understanding. According to Bultmann (German philosopher), no interpretation can be expressed without pre-understanding as long as interpreter is not a tabula rasa. In other words, interpreter turns to the text by specific questions and thus offering a certain idea about the subject (Sasani, 2012: 93). Pre-understanding refers to all prior knowledge, prejudices, presuppositions and assumptions of the reader when encountering the text which can affect reader or interpreter's perceptions and interpretations. People with various pre-understandings would probably gain dissimilar perceptions when dealing with the same text differently (Sasani, 2012: 94). The notion of audience's pre-understanding is taken as a very serious matter when analyzing avant-garde works. Because audience have already their own attitudes towards community's common architectural trends which brings them some predetermined criteria. These predefined criteria as a serious pre-understanding affect audience's perception and evaluation of the avant-garde works. This will be fully explained in the section on the theory of language games.

As explained above, four pervasive factors affecting the formation of readings of discourse semantics (post-structuralism approach) with regards to the avant-garde architecture all suggest that criticism ad

evaluation of these works can be very relative and even unpredictable and that the results of such reviews are not only dependent on architectural text but spatio-temporal context, architect and the audience are all involved. In the meantime, pre-understanding of audience is particularly of great importance and plays an effective role in assessment of avant-garde works. Moreover, time and spatial-temporal context as one of the four pervasive factors can be converted into a textual layer and change the critique results in favor or against the work. Almost three factors of the four (text, context and reader) are not fixed and change over time so criticism of avant-garde works based on post-structuralist reading is also time- and place-bound. This indicates that the hypothesis is confirmed.

### **Analysis of how to criticize and evaluate avant-garde works based on Wayne Attoe's theory of critique as a behavior**

In his book, "Architecture and Critical Imagination", Wayne Attoe stipulates this theory that "architectural criticism is a kind of behavior not a final judgment". He says: "Identification of critique methods and techniques turns the criticism from a means to threaten and intimidate into a tool to do better things. The secret to gain such perception of criticism is to take it as a behavior not a judgment".

According to his inclusive definition of criticism, any kind of reaction expressed by the audience to the environment built is considered as a criticism. Criticism is an activity which is not exclusively performed by the specialists but an array of different types of human behaviors (Attoe, 2005: 19). Thus, Wayne Attoe's theory with an emphasis on audience and behavior somehow corresponds with the theory of discourse semantics. Since human's behavior is not steady and unchangeable in relation to various phenomena and varies by internal and external factors (even the pre-understandings), we could take architectural criticism as a behavior which in this case evaluation of an architecture work will also change over time. This change is notably more tangible in

avant-garde works. In other words, criticism of an avant-garde architecture won't lead to the same results over time.

Various steps of critics behavioral change towards an avant-garde work is depicted in Fig. 4. As seen, "denial" is the behavior critics show in their first encounter with a magnificent work. At this point which is the beginning of the project, the architectural work does not come into sight much because of its separation from the time's common patterns or in fact due to the audience's pre-understandings and pre-assumptions about desirable architecture. Just seeing won't be enough to understand an architecture work which has been separated from the time's established cultural patterns.

To this end, new models and interpretation criteria should be developed. Taking such measure to understand the work requires time. So, the second step is "to create pre-criterion to criticize the work". The pre-criteria here are criticized individually as there is no consensus on reviewing them altogether. Over time, interpretation won't be done through the pre-criterion anymore but a single measure on which scholars have reached a consensus. However, some of these pre-criteria are forgotten in time and excluded from single-criteria interpretations (Attoe, 2005: 36). Hence, the third step is to "establish a criterion to criticize the work". This is the step where the architectural work is accepted by the society. The fourth step is called "interpretation to classify the work and increase the audience". Interpreting an architecture work will eventually end in accepting it as a member of a specific class or category. Criterion-based interpretations over this phase results in attracting more audience.

The acceptance occurs when the commentator can recognize the work's distinguished qualities may be found in other architectural works too which can be turned into a specific definition of a class (Ibid: 36). The fifth stage is "to forget the work". This is the time of silence when the work is ignored by the society. And finally the sixth stage is "to interpret the interpretations" (or extractive analysis). Reinterpretation is the

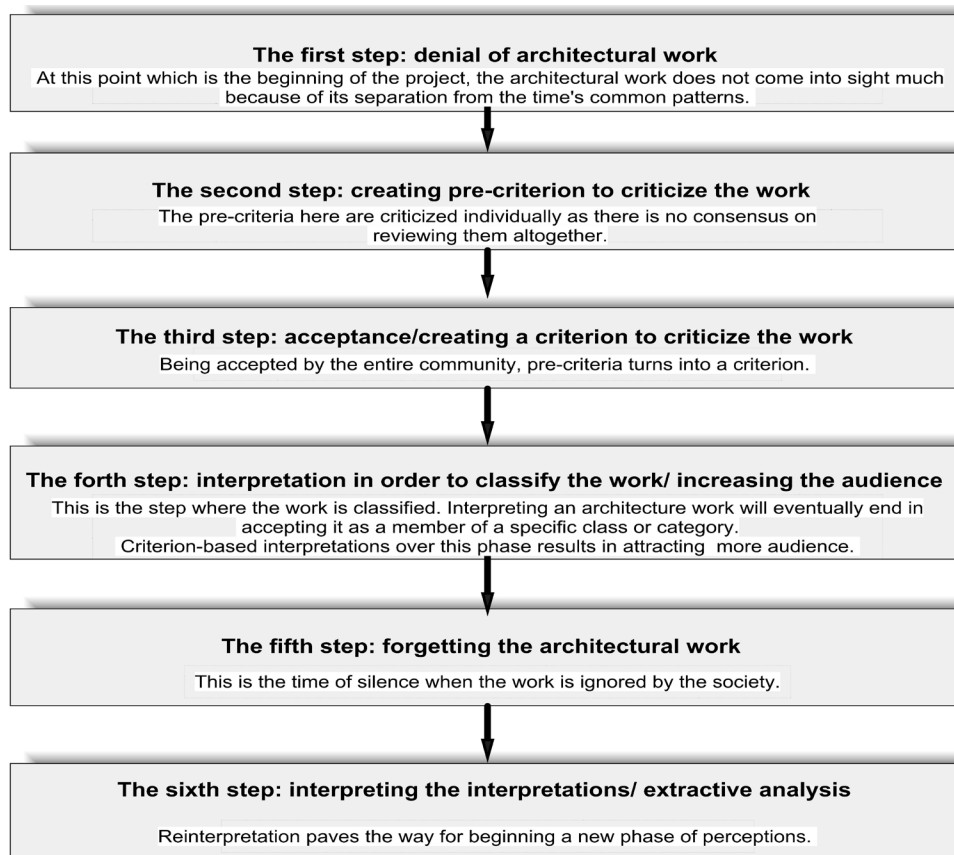


Fig. 4. Different stages of interpretation of an exquisite architecture work over time based on the theory of critique as a behavior by Wayne Attoe. Source: authors.

beginning of a new phase of perceptions. In this step, the work is reviewed disregarding the time and various interpretations provided in previous steps are evaluated and assessed altogether.

As shown in Fig. 4 based on Wayne Attoe's theory of critique as a behavior, audience (critic) behavior towards creative and outstanding works (buildings) changes over time. Valuations and assessment standards are constantly changing as these values are historical in nature thus can be altered or transformed. Jacques Derrida says: "there is no truth behind our views, attitudes and interpretations". This is why text cannot be regarded as having the same meaning because truth is not the same all the time" (Zeimaran, 2000: 7). People's consensus on the same work won't be sustained forever. There may come a day when outstanding architectural buildings won't be regarded as part of work of arts and people will treat them just as they did with ancient tablets and inscriptions.

Attributing beauty or ugliness to a work of art is not necessarily based on a sense of aesthetics but on social and even political and economic standards. In his book, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", Marx (1844) stipulates how ugliness is nullified by money: "As long as money could purchase everything and take the ownership of any object it is a priority to have it .... hence, who I am and what I can do does not depend on my individuality at all ...".

Kamran Afshar Naderi also explains:

"Innovations always pass three phases, first opposition, second matching and finally acceptance and gratitude. So, anything new may seem ugly at first with no identity but they slowly find their way to the society and stabilize themselves".

So, it can be stated that criticism and assessment of avant-garde works is a relative and time-bound process whose results (as shown in Figure 4) can change in time. As it is obvious, the hypothesis of study is confirmed relying on

Wayne Attoe's theory of critique as a behavior.

### Historical evidence

Plenty of historical evidence has come to light to confirm our findings. Looking at the history of world's architecture over different eras, we can find the avant-garde works receiving various and even conflicting interpretations. Here, we will only mention three cases to prove the relativity of an exquisite architectural work. The first historical evidence is the Eiffel Tower that was first built to be displayed in a temporary exhibition but was subject to different judgments which changed its fate. In the beginning, the Eiffel Tower was considered as an outsider against French text (Mozayeni, 2011: 191). When construction began a group of artists wrote an open letter against the tower. On April 15, 1889, when the tower construction completed it gradually received lots of positive comments. And we can see it today that the Eiffel Tower is recognized as a symbol and honor of Paris. The second historical evidence is Barcelona Pavilion designed by Mies van der Rohe. Juan Pablo Bonta (1975) studied public's reaction to the Pavilion building over a 45-year period whose results perfectly matches with Fig. 4. The mansion was built in 1929 and received no attention due to its separation from common cultural at that time. However, it took decades to develop new patterns and gain public acceptance. When this process was managed and moving forward by some experts, there were others who just showed their back on changes made and avoided participating. In recent years, however, even the strictest critics have been reluctant to criticize Barcelona's mansion and it's been ignored by the public. Bonta's study is of great importance as it paves the way for examining various methods of criticizing the same building (Attoe, 2005). The next case is Georges Pompidoe's Cultural Center in Paris and how it was built which sparked intense debates in the country as the plumbing system, escalators, stairs and whatever used to be hidden in traditional designs were deliberately exposed. This earned the building a number of nicknames by Parisians such as plumber house of Notre Dame, Pompidoe house, bagpipes of art, gas factory, oil refinery, culture house, urban machines,

and avant-garde wart. Using such words and nicknames, people were trying to condemn a costly institute as one-seventh of the government budget had been spent on it in the opening year (Oprea, 2007:19, quoted from anthropology and culture). In the end, however, this center that had been expected to have five thousand visitors a day has been welcoming over five times.

### Discussion

According to the studies carried out on criticism of avant-garde architectural works, it can be deduced that certain predefined criteria proposed based on the community's common architectural language games are not suited and fair to assess such constructions. The reason is that results of such evaluation will strike out the whole avant-garde work. But if the criticism measures are chosen with regard to the rules of a new game which is being developed based on new discourse, the outcomes of assessment will probably change in favor of the work. Although, it takes time to develop these criteria based on new language game and we cannot achieve the measures immediately after the construction was built. Several models were presented in literature section for criticism purpose among which the critique model by Hamidreza Khoyie was introduced as the most proper model to criticize the avant-garde works. Because it is highly flexible and chooses the critique criteria based on the work itself. Afshar Naderi also explains on differences and distinctions between criticism and evaluation criteria:

"Art is hidden in artist's work, ideas and remarks. An employer asks country's best architect why your buildings lacks this or that quality. Or in other case, a designer whose avant-garde projects have brought them reputation in the world is asked why there is no sign of traditional architecture in your works. Some expect a traditional architect to present a modern design. It's just like asking Mozart to compose a song in Beethoven's style. We haven't reached the ability to accept distinctions as values yet".

As explained in the introduction, both Wayne Attoe and Manfredo Tafuri have generally acknowledged and the analyses conducted in this article also suggest that a



correct criticism is the one that is not retrospective and benefits future instead. In other words, the outcomes of such criticism could affect the future of architecture and its fate which doubles the importance of the avant-garde works critique. That is to say, criticism of avant-garde works is a means to predict the future not a tool to assess the present. Thus, goals and results obtained from the criticism of avant-garde works are quite different than the results of reviewing traditional architectural projects - designed based on common conventions. Different goals, then, are the reason why standards and criteria of avant-garde designs critique are different from measures

of criticizing an ordinary work. Avant-garde architecture is introduced as a discipline that frees itself from any specified structure or definite and fixed framework and methods. So, it can be concluded that criticism of avant-garde architecture cannot be done through a definite predefined framework or method. Considering the layer semiotics model (post-structuralist) and the effect of four meta-factors on reading a text (author, text, context and reader), it can be stated that there is no fixed method to use to criticize and evaluate avant-garde works and results of such criticism cannot be easily predicted.

### Conclusion

Radicalism is the major quality of any avant-garde art. The founders of new approaches strongly oppose to the common style to distance from the era they live in, a protest that requires a lot of efforts. Relying on the theories of language games, cultural semiotics, post-structuralist semiotics and critique as a behavior, it was observed that criticism of avant-garde works is a relative and time-bound process whose results will change over time. With regards to the theories of cultural semiotics and post-structuralist semiotics, it was also proved that criticism of avant-garde works is place-bound too. This means that spatio-temporal context (culture) takes part in reading of avant-garde work as a textual layer and greatly affects the outcomes of criticism. Wittgenstein's theory of language games was also employed to reveal that standards and criteria of criticism and evaluation are not universal. We live in an era where critics tend to review read and review architectural design through a relative approach. Contemporary critics have no interest in expressing deterministic comments on architectural designs. A design or building that seems weak and poor in a situation could be perceived valuable in another situation. A work that is considered to be powerful within a language game could be measured as weak by standards and rules of another language game. And this makes it even harder to evaluate avant-garde works that are on the transitio boundary between two conventional and new language games.

In response to the second question of this study, it can be stated that if the purpose of architecture is to make changes, take a prospective approach and pave the way to move forward in the history of architecture, predetermined criteria won't be the right choice to examine an avant-garde work. Thus, new measures should be sought with regards to the work being assessed. When starting to create an avant-garde work, structuralist reading won't be an appropriate approach to criticize it as no codes have been formed yet. Therefore, it can be concluded that positivist and structuralist readings are not quite proper to analyze, criticize and evaluate avant-garde works at the beginning of construction process. In these approaches, critique and assessment rules and criteria are fixed, predetermined and can be generalized. In fact, a kind of looking justified determinism is imposed here covered by a scientific undisputable classification. Thus, some irrefutable principles and unchanging equations are established as rules to investigate all architectural projects.

Study of architecture history unveils that many of the leading works gave rise to intense debate and protests at the beginning of creation. The reason is that criticism measures are mainly predefined while avant-garde works cannot be reviewed like this. Morteza Avini believes that "if men who are responsible for making changes in the history comply with standards of their own age, no development will happen".

### Endnote

1. Avant-garde is a French term meaning leader or leading emerged in 1850 as an artistic movement. In a military sense, it means a soldier who move ahead of everyone in the war. It also refers to the art that breaks all traditional rules and creates new styles.
2. Italian Academic / 3. Sustainability, utility and beauty / 4. Professor of Architectural Design, University of California
5. Tartu School is one of the most important schools of thought in the field of cultural semiotics that points to intercultural relations and examines the dissemination of cultural innovation or cultural renewal from anthropological viewpoint.

6. In the first encounter, whatever inside the culture that can be understood is taken as “text”. According to the cultural semiotics, text is referred to as anything enters or exits the culture (Sojoodi, 2011).

7. Here, text is employed in a pervasive sense including all verbal and artistic and even nonverbal and non-artistic works or everything could be read.

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