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Phenomenology: A Methodology for Understanding Traditional Architecture

Samaneh Emami Koupaei[1], Vida Norouz Borazjani*[2], Mohammad Javad Safian[3]

1. Ph. D. Candidate in Architecture, Faculty of Architecture & urban planning, Islamic Azad University, central Tehran branch.
2. Faculty Member, Department of Architecture, Faculty of Architecture & urban planning, Islamic Azad University, central Tehran branch
3. Associate Professor, faculty of Literature and Humanities, Isfahan University.

Abstract

Problem Statement: This article aims at disclosing an authentic essence of traditional architecture and show how it can be approached. Not much exists on this issue and our knowledge is limited to misconceptions. As a result, we have faced absurdity and chaos in contemporary architecture. This problem has been exacerbated by an inappropriate method and superficial responses.

Objective: The goal of this study is to present an appropriate and comprehensive method to examine the traditional architecture and to uncover its truth. We assume that phenomenology can address the methodological issues regarding the essence of traditional architecture.

Research methodology: After reviewing pertinent literature systematically and interpreting them, we attempted to use logical reasoning to find an appropriate method for traditional architecture and fill the gap in the existing literature on the phenomenological method.

Conclusion: The results of this research indicate that conceptual thinking and scientific and quantitative approach to works of architecture will not guide us to architecture's fundamental. Instead, we need to refer to the artworks and approach them with empathy to find a common language with those works to uncover their fundamental concepts and hidden implications. The way we choose to reach a better understanding of traditional architecture consists of seven steps or stages: (1) Wonder and search, (2) Revelation of the universe, (3) Mental refinement, (4) Environmental identity, (5) Phenomenological grasp of the environment, (6) Finding a language for assertions, and (7) Uncovering the hidden meanings.

Keywords: *Qualitative method; Phenomenology; Traditional Architecture; Hermeneutic phenomenology.*

Problem Statement

The major concern of our era is to find a way

to capture the true meaning of our traditional architecture. Such architecture is historically disassociated from its traditional roots and is

*.Correspondin author: Vid.Norouz_Borazjani@iauctb.ac.ir
+98121752268

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unsettled between the formal imitation of the West and vain return to the past. The problem is exacerbated by the absence of proper epistemic backgrounds and thinking systems. Although it is impossible to return to the past, it is necessary to recollect the invaluable, original, and fundamental architectural data. The reason is that our architecture is suffering from absurdity because of such absence.[1] Lack of tradition or history can lead to indetermination. We belong to a tradition and we need to dig deep to reach its roots if we want to be thinking and rational architects. The Iranian past architecture has so far been studied by researcher of this field from chronological and typological[2] perspectives. Although invaluable studies have investigated the nature of traditional architecture, most of them have been purely theoretical and have not focused on architectural works in a real context. Therefore, our knowledge about the meaning and proper explanation of traditional architecture is quite scarce. Therefore, a new viewpoint and method is required to address our misconceptions and pave the way for grasping the true nature of our past architecture.

Considering the necessity of understanding the true nature of traditional architecture and finding a capable method for explaining the architecture of that era, we seek to answer the following questions (1) Can phenomenology help us understand traditional architecture? and(2) What kind of strategies and operational or practical approaches can be used in combination with the phenomenological method to reveal the nature of traditional architecture.

Literature review

Phenomenology is a qualitative method based on the Philosophy of Phenomenology. Theoretically speaking, it is open to various interpretations and variations. A large of part of this philosophy is influenced by works of Edmund Husserl, the founder of this thinking school, and then works of philosophers like Heidegger, Merleau Ponty, Sartre and other phenomenologists. Various methodologies are influenced by one of those philosophers[3].

Also, researchers like David Seamon have tried to apply this method to architectural studies[4]. Since phenomenology generally concerns with individuals' lived experiences, an important question which occurs to mind is how to examine and investigate those lived experiences in the artworks which belong to the past. In other words, considering the fundamental changes in a modern man's attitude towards the world (compared to the past), how can we apply the mentioned methods in the studies of old and pre-modern works of architecture? There have been a few surveys on this topic[5]; none of them has offered a clear and precise answer. Moreover, another concern is that phenomenology as a method may diverge from its philosophical roots. This study attempts to offer an appropriate method to explore the works of architecture while complying with the philosophical roots.

Traditional architecture from a Western viewpoint

Our traditional architecture has developed in a context whose understanding is of urgent necessity to develop an in-depth knowledge about its development. This period, the era of tradition', is different from (and prior to) the modern age, and unknown to us. Without having a valid knowledge of any age, we cannot grasp the architecture of that period. Thinking and wondering about that era and its architecture today, means that we are not present in that period anymore. We are disconnected from that age and the theoretical bases of traditional architecture'. Thus, we cannot return to that era nor can we have a traditional apprehension of it. Along with the termination of the traditional movement, our traditional architecture has also suffered from historical disconnection and has never recovered from it. Furthermore, we live in a period of time much different from the era of tradition. Since we are under the influence of modern thoughts, we cannot investigate the past from a traditional point of view. Any interpretation of the traditional architecture will be made from a modern viewpoint. "Tradition is like an absolute unknown

for us, which emerges and manifests only in the light of modern thoughts" (Firahi, 2013:36). Hence, the question is how to appreciate those (old) concepts using today's metaphysical language and modern thinking paradigm.

Traditional architecture represents a world, a lifestyle and a sense of humanity, which no longer exist. Reviving this dead tradition is necessary to restore our historical identity and take a reliable path. Therefore, in the absence of methodology, the only effective tool which can help us deal with traditional architecture is looking at ourselves through the lens of western thoughts[6]. "Such a selection is natural because we are epistemically disassociated from the tradition and we are unable to critically recur and return to the tradition or reproduce it[7]" (Ibid, 33). Although due to different intellectual and theoretical origins, our answers will not be entirely original and faultless, under the current circumstances we have no other choice but to cling to a method with western origin. In the following section, we will explain the characteristics of phenomenological method and compare it with other qualitative approaches and justify our preference for this method (over others) in response to the fundamental questions about traditional architecture.

Methodology: In this essay, considerable emphasis has been put on reviewing the available sources and interpreting their content. To carry out the analysis, we extensively studied available sources and used logical argumentation to reach the fundamental premises and practical steps required for the phenomenological method for the study of architecture particularly at the era of tradition. We will examine and compare the two different phenomenological approaches in order to present a fruitful strategy for grasping the essence of architecture. However, it is worth noting that the phenomenological method is itself evolving and contrary to quantitative and positivistic research methods, it doesn't consist of a predetermined or definite framework. It is a methodology (rather than a framework) in which the research

steps and methods are chosen depending on the subject. Therefore, the researcher's ability in developing an innovative approach to the problem and his command of phenomenology can influence his research plan and the progress of his research.

Theoretical foundations
●Qualitative research: Philosophical paradigm, methodological characteristics
The qualitative approach is rooted in interpretative and critical paradigms[8]. The qualitative researchers hold that the universe has no separate existence form any individual in the universe. The main goal is to understand the sense those individuals assign to their everyday lives. The qualitative researchers study hands-on experiences of human beings, events, and their meanings to find precise explanations, explore overlooked aspects and identify its practical implications. In fact, when a researcher uses a descriptive and interpretative approach to examine cultural events or occasions and individuals' lived experiences in their natural contexts (without making any changes to those contexts), he or she is doing a qualitative study (Mansourian, 2015:5). In this method, the case study will not be separated from its everyday life environment and local affinities or any of its cultural, social, geographical, historical and other attributes. All different qualitative approaches share the methodological communality emphasizing that patterns, concepts, and their meanings should emerge in their own natural ways. Reliability and validity[9] of the research depend on the expertise and competence of the researcher and his or her sensitivity towards the phenomenon.

Necessity of qualitative research method in architectural studies
Perhaps the most important reason to use qualitative methods by researchers is the failure of the conventional approaches in grasping the lived experiences (Partovi, 2013:235). The qualitative research methods also deal with descriptions, concepts, and theories which are rooted in the

experiences, behaviors and conceptions in the real world. There is no doubt that any research on the essence of architecture should consider the time, its cultural and social context. This is feasible only in the form of a qualitative study. Furthermore, adopting a fundamental approach to architecture, and understanding its basic and ontological concepts require examining the architectural artworks in the real context and interacting with the context of the architectural works. Since the quantitative approach pays little attention to cultural backgrounds and historical aspects or the merits of inner values and aesthetic concepts, it can never unfold and disclose the fundamental attributes of architecture to us. Qualitative research, on the other hand, will lead us to a deeper knowledge as it does not merely examine the surface of events. It is not just a framework or instrument for investigation; it is rather a method which changes our perspective of architecture and results in qualitative thoughts.

Phenomenology: Basic methodological concepts

The term 'phenomenology' consists of two parts: (1) 'phenomenon' derived from the Greek word 'phainomenon' which means ''that which appears, and 'bring to light'. (2) The Greek word 'logos 'stands for, reason, speech (Heidegger, 2015). Phenomenology is (the art of) letting phenomena emerge by themselves (Ibid:133). Phenomenology was introduced as an approach and a method attempting to uncover the essence of all phenomena with the famous slogan of 'back to the things themselves' (originally introduced by Edmund Husserl the founder of this school of thought). Exploring does not occur through a purely theoretical and abstract approach, but rather an objective method. In other words, we unfold the essence of the phenomena by establishing a direct relationship with them and when there is no dissonance between us and the phenomena.

The first step in the methodology of phenomenology (which can be considered as an intermediate link between the philosophy of phenomenology and the

method based on it) is epoche. In epoche, every thought, judgment and knowledge is suspended[10] and the intact phenomenon is revisited objectively from the standpoint of a pure and transcendental self (Mohammad Pour, 2013:273). In epoche, the observer's assumptions, as well as any existential assessments about the subject under study (proposition that are not about the object's essential properties) are refrained. Epoche has a negative nature and is a prerequisite for the next stage, which is called reduction. After the reduction, the phenomenon will find the opportunity to emerge (Nad'Ali, 2014:53). The term reduction stands for unfolding the meaning of the phenomenon when it emerges by itself. These two aspects are correlative. They set the framework of research.

Phenomenology as a qualitative research method

The phenomenological research paradigm is 'interpretive'. According to this paradigm, 'reality depends on human's experience and interpretation. The researcher gains knowledge about the subject of research through interaction with it; the knowledge here is not objective, but rather multivalent and multi-dimensional' (Bazargan, 2012). To understand the essence of a phenomenon in this method, the researcher discovers the essence of the human experiences of the phenomenon as they are described by the participants in the research and by establishing a close relationship with the participants tries to uncover the patterns and relations of the phenomenon's meaning (Cresswell, 2015). Phenomenological researchers often highlight three procedural steps when analyzing descriptive accounts: First, identifying the phenomenon in which the phenomenologist is interested; second, gathering descriptive accounts[11] of the phenomenon; and third, carrying out a careful study of with the aim of identifying any underlying commonalities and patterns (Seamon & Gill, 2016:123).

The objective of phenomenology is to study the existential relations between people and the

world in which they find themselves, a world with environmental and architectural features (Cf. Seamon, 2008:1). Phenomenology is the description and interpretation of human being's lived experience. As Robert Sokolowski has correctly pointed out, phenomenology is the study of human experience and the way objects unfold before us through those experiences (Seamon, 2013:143). The mentioned experience is a direct and immediate experience, which is not based on intentional thinking or conceptualization but rather consists of obvious and commonplace things. The aim is to study the world of life re-examine the indisputable experiences, and unfolding new or neglected concepts (Imami Sigaroudi, 2012). Lived experiences can be collected in a variety of different ways. According to Van Manen , the ways for collecting lived experiences include: describing experiences[12], gathering experiences, interviewing experiences, observing experiences, reporting fictional experiences[13], and imaginary experiences[14] (Nad'Ali, 2014). The researcher can make use of all these experiences depending on the subject of the study and the method he or she has planned and chosen.

Significance of phenomenology in under-standing architecture

One important question is why phenomenology can be a better choice to approach the essence of architecture than the positivist methods. We will attempt to scrutinize certain viewpoints, which are also criticized by phenomenologist thinkers and we believe that those points of view need to be revised to have a correct approach to architecture.

Criticism of the dispositional modern think-ing of the human-world relation

An important assumption which is criticized by the phenomenologist thinkers and must be addressed is the 'naturalistic approach', (i.e. the positivists assume there is a world independent of human beings' minds, whether they perceive it or not) (Khatami, 2008: 56). The one-sided viewpoint that

considers the world as a set of comprehensible objects in front of human and its opposite standpoint which looks at the world as subjective through human's mind used to be in agreement on a priori existence and the common nature of life world in the pre-modern age. Later, Descartes added a radical and immensely unusual perspective to that equation. He tore up the world's existence into two opposite parts, the object and the subject; a standpoint in contrast with the traditional viewpoint which had a holistic definition of the relation between man and the world. Phenomenology, too, challenges the modern standpoint and denies any dualism between the subject and the object and doesn't concur that the world exists beyond our minds[15]. This approach maintains that the contemporary architecture can be saved only if lifeworld is revived[16]. Unlike empirical sciences which separate objects from their qualitative backgrounds, phenomenology does not consider human beings as confronting objects but rather in connection and association with them. Phenomenology tries to observe and understand the meanings of human experiences in an earnest way for reaching a balance between the individual and the world, between the researcher and the phenomenon, between sense and sensation and between experience and theory. This phenomenological stance (in contrast with the modern view) is close to the conception of the relation between human and the world in the era of tradition.

Criticism of the superficiality and over-emphasis on visual perception in a modern age

Historically, a visual perception has always been considered the most original and important sense (among the five senses) in the western culture. Consequently, human thought has been mostly dependent on his visual sensation. After renaissance when visual representation was introduced human's eye was taken as the center of his epistemic faculty and the visual sensation turned into the main tool for scientific research. This renaissance perspective suppressed all other human faculties and became

the dominant doctrine to represent reality, thought and the modern science (Pallasmaa, 2009). In recent decades, some phenomenologist thinkers have done new surveys[17] to criticize the modern architecture for the mentioned dominance of visual sensation over other human faculties (a problem which caused people feel isolated and disconnected us from our environment) and for lack of depth and superficiality which made the world look diverse but equally meaningless at the same time[18]. These opinions are very similar to the stances of old-school architects. Paying attention to all sensory faculties was paramount in traditional architecture but totally neglected in our constructions today. Architecture should be liberated from its meaningless shell, should be able to express lived experiences and free us from being residents of an unreal world of frameworks. A phenomenological interpretation of architecture goes beyond mere formal and abstract analyses and digs deep into the artworks themselves to describe their character and atmosphere. In order to discover and express that atmosphere and character, all human faculties must get involved and restore the constructions to life.

Problem of the negligence of the flow of life in architecture

Architecture is physically associated with life. On this relation, Peter Zumthor, the phenomenologist architect states: 'I do not think of it (architecture) primarily as either a message or a symbol, but as an envelope and background for life, which goes on in and around it, a sensitive container for the rhythm of footsteps on the floor, for the concentration on work, for the silence of sleep.' (Zumthor, 2015a). Phenomenology aims at reviving the relation between art and life (and architecture and life) as it sees art in human life and for it and opposes the doctrines which consider art to be free and aimless[19] or alternatively take it as something purely spiritual and disconnected from the empirical and concrete world. A crisis of today's architecture (in contrast with traditional architecture) is neglecting the flow of life and the users' experiences. Today's modern architecture is formalistic and ignores human existence and presence in architecture. Traditional architecture, on the other hand, was an answer to human existence and being together.

Criticism of the modern quantitative view of the phenomenon

The aim of phenomenology is to reach the truth or essence of objects and events. This is what has been neglected in the modern age for the dominance of quantitative approach and the conquering view of the modern man and the modern science[20]. The one-sided scientific approach has disconnected man from 'things themselves' and only a phenomenologist view will be able to bring back 'them' to us[21]. What Husserl is saying in his famous slogan 'Back to the things themselves' is that the individual should support the phenomenon and (in return) the phenomenon can be clearly and properly known. Phenomenology helps us think about the artwork itself and provide an opportunity for its emergence. It also prevents us from imposing our perceptions and thoughts onto it[22]. Our understanding of architecture comes from our intimate and close connection with the architectural works. Our knowledge of architecture will not be attained by our mental conceptualizations as that can at best represent our own pre-conception of architecture. Our knowledge should be achieved by reference to the works in real context. Our method should be entirely tangible and our only sources for inferring fundamental concepts should be the artworks themselves. To put it in other words, phenomenology criticizes the architectural research studies which solely rely on theory than the architectural works in real context.

Phenomenology also attempts to set aside any assumptions, conceptual, sociological and ideological perceptions and prejudices. We need this refinement to reach a new understanding of architecture's essence. Before we can ask a new question, we need to question our principles and presumptions. Only then asking a new question can lead us to learning
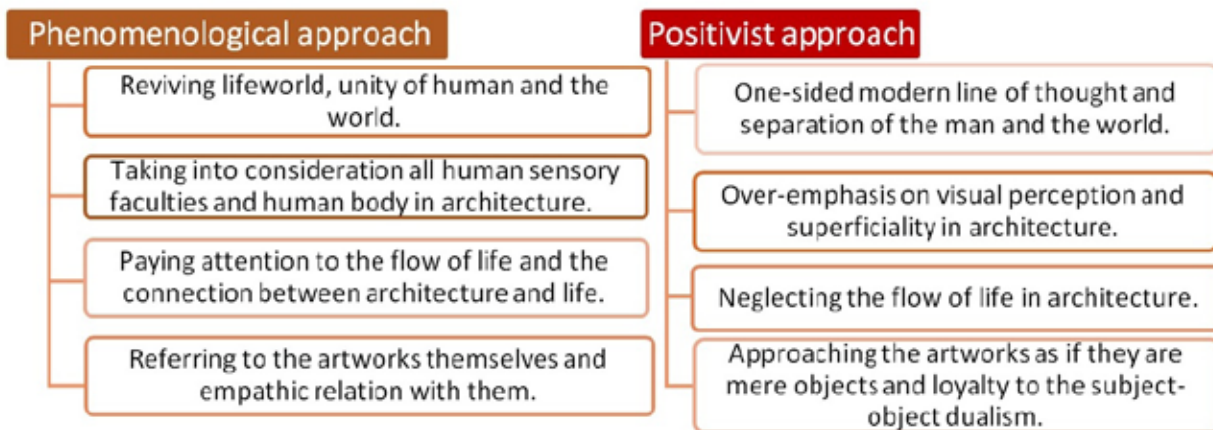
Fig .1. Comparing positivist and phenomenological approaches to architecture. Source: authors

something new. In what follows, we will compare two different phenomenological research methods and will introduce the more comprehensive approach to understand and interpret architectural works.

Descriptive vs. Hermeneutic[23] Phenomenology: similarities and differences

The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods has introduced five major phenomenology research methods[24]. But there is a consensus that there are two kinds of phenomenological methods[25]: Classic (traditional) Phenomenology (descriptive, experimental and transcendental), which starts with Husserl; and Hermeneutic phenomenology, which returns to Heidegger and to Gadamer. Husserl's aim was to describe the phenomena in order to reach a deep understanding of them and their essences. Heidegger added interpretation to it and pointed out that no description is actually possible without interpretation. Researchers have based their phenomenological methodology on the works of one of these philosophers.

The root of a difference between the two methods returns to the different definitions these two philosophers hold for phenomenology. The term 'phainomenon' meant apparent and revealed and

Table 1. Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: Some Thematic & Methodological Commonalities. Source: Seamon, 2014.

1. Both approaches work to be open to the thing studied; the aim is an empathetic awareness and engagement that allow the thing studied to be as fully present, describable, and understandable as possible.

2. Both approaches draw on qualitative evidence as a descriptive and interpretive basis for substantive discoveries and conclusions; examples of qualitative evidence include reports from in-depth interviewing; first-person descriptions of one's own experience or understanding of a text[26]; careful, prolonged observation of a place; careful, prolonged study of a text and other commentators' interpretations of that text.

3. Both approaches recognize that the thing studied can be explored and understood in a wide range of ways[27]; the thing studied is inexhaustible in its potential aspects, expressions, significances, and interpretive structures. The specific interests, sensibilities, and investigative skills of the researcher play a major role in establishing which specific dimensions of the thing are studied. The skill, persistence, and sensibilities of the researcher largely ground the comprehensiveness, accuracy, and quality of the research results.

4. Both approaches aim for accurate, trustworthy[28] accounts of the phenomenon or text.

5. Both approaches emphasize the crucial importance of finding "fitting language" to present the experience or meaning; the main vehicle for lucid, precise articulation is accurate, expressive writing.

for Husserl, 'phenomenon' also means obvious and given. For Heidegger, on the other hand, a phenomenon is initially both apparent and hidden. Sometimes it hides; other times it unfolds[29]. The mentioned difference in perspectives has influenced Heidegger's hermeneutic viewpoint. Heidegger revised the concept of phenomenology, chose a new method and inferred the conclusion that phenomenological method is basically and by origin hermeneutic. In other words, according to Heidegger, the Husserlian pure descriptive method was impossible and any description would require interpretation. Chronology was the other point of difference between the ideas of these two philosophers. Husserl denied the chronological order of events and life; whereas Heidegger believed that phenomenology can be a method to unfold the existence in all reality and with the chronological order of events (Palmer, 1998).

Evaluation: Hermeneutic phenomenology;

a comprehensive method for architectural research

Despite the applicability of both methods, they are different in some aspects. In what follows we will attempt to shed light on important aspects which make hermeneutic phenomenology a more appropriate and comprehensive method for the study of traditional architecture.

First: Importance of the chronological and historical aspects of artworks

In classic phenomenology, a non-temporal and abstract self, disconnected from any cultural and social contexts or even from the concrete world serves as a starting point for describing the works of art. On the other hand, from the standpoint of hermeneutic phenomenology, the analysis and description of artistic phenomena are not possible with the abovementioned view and one has to take the opposite policy (Khatami, 2008). Since architecture is a spatiotemporal art and narrates the culture and

Table 2.Phenomenology & Hermeneutics Phenomenology: Some Thematic & Methodological Differences. Source: Laverty, 2003.

Phenomenology	Hermeneutics Phenomenology
Phenomenological research is descriptive and focuses on the structure of experience, the organizing principles that give form and meaning to the life world. It seeks to elucidate the essences of these structures as they appear in consciousness - to make the invisible visible.	Hermeneutic research is interpretive and concentrated on historical meanings of experience and their developmental and cumulative effects on individual and social levels.
Phenomenology is foundational, as it seeks a correct answer or valid interpretation of texts not dependent on the biographical, social or historical position of the interpreter.	Hermeneutic phenomenology, in contrast, is described as non-foundational, as it focuses on meaning that arises from the interpretive interaction between historically produced texts and the reader.
In phenomenology research the researcher begins a process of self-reflection. For the phenomenologist, this is typically part of the preparatory phase of research and might include the writing down of these reflections for reference during the analysis process. The purpose of this reflection is to become aware of one's biases and assumptions in order to bracket them, or set them aside, in order to engage the experience without preconceived notions about what will be found in the investigation. This awareness is seen as a protection from imposing the assumptions or biases of the researcher on the study.	In contrast, a hermeneutical approach asks the researcher to engage in a process of self-reflection to quite a different end than that of phenomenology. Specifically, the biases and assumptions of the researcher are not bracketed or set aside, but rather are embedded and essential to interpretive process. The researcher is called, on an ongoing basis, to give considerable thought to their own experience and to explicitly claim the ways in which their position or experience relates to the issues being researched.

history of its time, it cannot be studied with a method which aims to analyze the artwork with isolating it from the background of its creation. Therefore, Husserl's approach which denies and ignores the importance of history and chronology could not be a proper method to interpret artworks. It is impossible to establish a proper understanding of an artwork created by a certain nation and people (who have displayed their own world in their art) without knowing their history and cultural background.

Second: Interconnection of experiences and meanings

Since language is our medium to create and experience meanings in our world, phenomenology is often closely related to hermeneutics (the branch of knowledge which deals with interpretation, especially of literary texts). In fact, since meanings and experiences in human life always overlap, the methodological and conceptual approaches of phenomenology and hermeneutics typically have many features in common. Having these similarities in mind, we can say that instead of using phenomenological or hermeneutic methods alone, hermeneutic phenomenology can be considered as a comprehensive way to approach architectural works.

Third: Revelation of the world of the artwork

Another important point about understanding an artwork in Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology is Heidegger's belief that "the artwork reveals a world[30] to us. A phenomenological research should uncover a world in which our experiences take place. Such an interpretation would include all necessary dimensions and aspects: historical, social, urban and etc. phenomenological projects are not formalist or abstract" (Cf. Dehghani Renani, 2014). This kind of interpretation should also reveal the world and the lived experience of the creator of the artwork, which in its turn is the manifestation of the artist's existence and the world (Mousavi & Yahyaie, 2011).

It is worth noting that in Heidegger's point of view, our confrontation with any phenomenon and our

understanding and interpretation of it relies on the pre-conceptions [31] (our premises and presuppositions). We never approach the phenomenon with an empty mind. Any time we are supposed to interpret a construction, such an interpretation will have a priori elements. Hence it is important for us to know and acknowledge our pre--conception (i.e. what we know or presuppose in advance) and that how close our pre-conception - is to the reality of the actual artwork. It is important to know what image we have in mind about the history, culture and architecture of the artwork in a specific period. We also need to answer questions about our definition of traditional architecture, our understanding of the era of tradition and see how close our answers to those questions would be to the answers of people who used to live in that period.

Findings: Hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology for understanding traditional architecture

Although we pointed out previously that phenomenology is a method which doesn't fall into boundaries of any rigid framework it is still possible to introduce steps and guidelines for a phenomenological research in architecture. To this end, the researcher has to define the research procedure, the subject of study, research conditions and his or her own expertise. These guidelines are presented in the following table (Table 3).

It is worth noting that even understanding and interpretation is subject to change. Our understanding and interpretation of architecture are evolving and there is no chance to reach a final and perfect interpretation[32]. Furthermore, the path ahead in such a research is not linear; it is rather like a cycle which requires re-evaluation at every stage.

Discussion

Adopting a qualitative approach to the studies in traditional architecture is of urgent necessity in our age. The reason is our age is characterized by absurdity, quantitative notions and we are

Table 3. Guideline for a Phenomenological study in architecture. Source: Authors.

1- Awe and Craving
Any research starts with a question or a problem; a question which rises up from the researcher's inspiration with awe, his or her interests and concerns of architectural works. It is a craving. It is a question which is connected to the researcher's lifeworld and his or her existence and the researcher refers and returns to it at every stage during the research. In phenomenology, thinking is thinking about something. That something must be given to us before we can think about it. Nothing will unfold to us if we don't regard and remark it.

2- Salience of the World (reference to tradition)
In order to describe his or her lived experiences about architectural constructions, the researcher needs to do in depth investigations in the era of tradition and the history and culture of that period of time. This includes referring to books, remaining artworks (photos, paintings and etc.), travelogues, biographies, novels, etymology of words and expressions or even writings and interpretations of other researchers about the intended works of architecture. It is also worth noting that 'language' is an important sources and elements in reconstructing the world of artworks.

3- Mental Refinement (purging irrelevant prejudices)
Study in traditional architecture requires us to revise our premises and presuppositions about that era. Any presuppositions, those we are aware of or those that may inadvertently affect our interpretations must be detected, examined and revised. Re-evaluating the artworks requires us to break down and revise our mental fore-structure about them. However, according to Heidegger, a researcher neither can nor should wipe out all of his premises; he should rather only clear out those presuppositions which are irrelevant to the artwork's essence. Such a necessary refinement is continuous and should take place during the research project.

4- Identity of the Mind and the Environment (empathy with the architectural environment)
The result of any research depends on our relation with the phenomenon. In confrontation and for interpreting an artwork, the researcher requires to be united with the phenomenon to be able to express his or her lived experiences in the purest and most honest ways. The researcher needs to put himself in the context of the phenomenon (architectural artwork) and become intimate with it. Such an acquaintance would require the researcher's presence and close attention to the related architectural environment. Other people's lived experiences can also help us attain an original understanding of the phenomenon only if they satisfy the same requirements of acquaintance and empathy with the environment.

5- Phenomenological Grasp of the Environment
Prior to any interpretation, we have an understanding of the phenomenon in advance, a knowledge which is based on our pre-having of the artwork and its fundamental elements. Our grasp of architecture is not simply the sum of its components. When we observe something we understand it in a web of designations. When we confront something, we usually understand it as something, but this may not be always true in the context of art. The artwork may become incomprehensible and may require us to have a separate language to grasp its meaning. Our understanding of the environment is partly a result of our lived experiences. Even the use of photos and sketches can be part of the researcher's lived experience. We don't remain in those lived experiences; they are rather only ways and means for us to reach a more authentic understanding. Other people's experiences (those who observe the environment from a phenomenological point of view and have similar concerns) can also help us have a better understanding of the architectural environments.

6- Finding a Language for Assertions
The researcher needs to take chronological notes of his or her lived experiences of the environment and must have the assurance and confidence that his or her accounts correspond with the artworks themselves rather than his or her own mental perceptions and imaginations. It is worth noting that any account or description of the essence of an experience is asserted or expressed through language; so it is important to find and have a communicative and revealing language. Any phenomenon unfolds through language, but it also remains partly hidden in the process. It is not possible to express every description is every language. The researcher requires to have command of both languages (of tradition and modern ages) to be able to express the concepts of the traditional architecture in modern language, even though there always a risk that some invaluable concepts may be lost in the process.

7- Uncovering hidden meanings (phenomenological bases)
A phenomenon always unfolds partially with periodic presence and absence. The researcher's job is not merely to describe what is uncovered to him in the initial stage and phase, but rather to find out the hidden layers of what is there to know in the architectural artworks and to grasp the more fundamental concepts which can be inferred from significant and meaningful propositions about the lived experience of the researcher and his team. Reaching the essential structure which gives meaning to the phenomenon and indentifies it in contrast with other similar phenomena would be the result of a phenomenological research.

disassociated from our identity and historical roots in architecture. Our understanding and knowledge of the era of tradition is very limited. In order to revive our dead tradition and in absence of any other appropriate method we have no other choice but to use the western approaches. Besides, the only sources that can help us reach a valid knowledge of the architecture of that time are the very architectural artworks of that era. However, we need to define our relation with those artworks on a different basis than modern thought, because the modern way of thinking would consider those works as objects totally separate from us. Heidegger argues that by changing the artworks to objects which are supposed
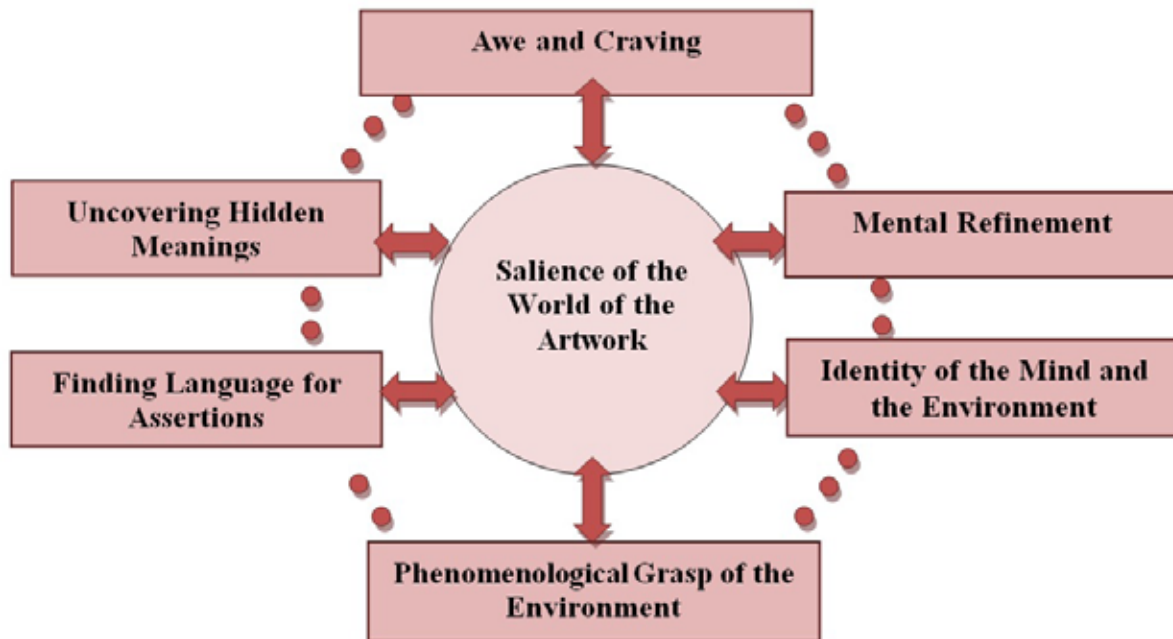
Fig .2. Conceptual and strategic diagram of a hermeneutic phenomenological research. Source: authors.

to be known by us, we suppress the world of those artworks, the world in which the true essences of those works are reflected. Adopting scientific approach to phenomena and reducing them to isolated objects in an epistemic investigation (and in a framework of our self-chosen concepts) will only misdirect us and result in misconceptions.

We cannot understand architectural constructions in a conceptual framework; we rather need to refer to the artworks themselves. It is not possible to separate architectural works from their cultural and historical context and hope to understand them in-depth. We should return to the artworks with solicitude and empathy to uncover their hidden layers and fundamental notions. On this way, we will have to comprehend the intellectual patterns of that our forgotten world to revive it and reason out the wisdom behind it. Any understanding of the art and architecture of that age depends on our grasp of the ontological and epistemic stances of the traditional architects and artists and how people of that era would observe and understand architecture.

Conclusion

Our aim in this essay was to seek an appropriate approach and method to understand traditional (pre-modern) architecture. Phenomenological method and approach with a standpoint close to traditional thoughts (as opposed to and distinct from modern thoughts) seeks a unified pattern of the relation between the world and human. In regard to uncovering the essence and truth of a phenomenon, phenomenological approach refers to the phenomenon itself as the one and only reliable source of knowledge about it in order to discover the fundamental notions of the phenomenon and hidden layers of possible meanings and interpretations. Furthermore, this method requires all sensory faculties to get involved with the phenomenon to understand it. Following the traditional approach, the phenomenological method considers architecture an art for human life and aims to revive the close relation between human life and architectural artworks. The result of our research indicates that phenomenology can be a proper method to understand architecture.

On the other hand, our descriptions of the artworks depend on our premises and presuppositions, no matter how hard we try to ignore them or wipe them out. Hence, a hermeneutic reading of phenomenology which regards any description of the artworks as hermeneutic and considers our understanding of the architectural works as historical and chronological (as those artworks are spatiotemporal creations) can be a better strategy for us to reach a better understanding and interpretation of architecture and can help us establish an authentic grasp of the traditional architecture.

Lastly, our situation when we face traditional buildings and our endeavors to understand them can be compared to a translator who stands between two distinct worlds and tries to translate or interpret the unfamiliar world (which is unknown but appealing) to the language of our familiar world. Although the procedure of interpretation is endless and interminable, we can still introduce a guideline with seven steps to reach an authentic and acceptable reading of our traditional architecture: (1) Wonder and search, (2) Revelation of the universe, (3) Mental refinement, (4) Environmental identity (5) Phenomenological grasp of the environment, (6) Finding a language for assertions and (7) Uncovering the hidden meanings.

Endnote

1. Schulz, following Heidegger, holds that the disorder in the contemporary architecture is a product of meaninglessness and loss of identity and that the contemporary man has lost his affinity to places. In the modern world, quantity is the only thing which matters (Norberg-Schulz, 2014).

2. In his doctoral dissertation ,Pourmand, criticizes the chronological and typological studies by highlighting the following shortcomings
neglecting space, descriptive approach, ignoring concepts, not encouraging thinking approach, neglecting the main historical line of events and ignoring the theoretical origins of history to (Pourmand, 2007).

3. For example, Van Manen (under the influence of Heidegger's Hermeneutical phenomenology) introduces six operational steps in his methodology: (1) Turning towards the lived experience. (2) Investigating the experience as it is lived. (3) Data analysis with reflecting on the essential properties of the phenomenon. (4) Writing up a heuristic narrative. (5) Staying connected with the phenomenon. (6) Keeping contextual harmony between the whole experience and its parts (Manen, 1997).

4. The phenomenologist, David Seamon, in his environmental studies believes in three approaches in phenomenological research: First person phenomenological research, a mode of phenomenological inquiry in which the researcher uses his or her own first-hand experience as a basis for examining its specific characteristics and qualities. Third person

(existential) phenomenology in which the basis of generalization is the experience of individuals and groups of people involved in real situations (Seamon & Gill, 2016). Hermeneutic phenomenology (as a method) is based on interpreting texts (i.e. any physical object), which are somehow correlated with human concepts and the researcher should find ways to discover their meanings (Seamon, 2000).

5. Parvin Partovi's survey is worth mentioning, even though it is not exactly concerned with tradition.

6. We should learn methodology from the west. We need to learn from the west how to know ourselves using a critical approach and then we should customize those method and knowledge (Haeri, 2014:24).

7. Discussing a tradition is possible only after leaving it, which indicates the end of the tradition's living and productive presence (Firahi, 2013:34). In fact, it is impossible for a nation to ask any philosophical question about a tradition as long as it is functioning as a fundamental element of their cultural lives (Tabatabaie, 1995).

8. Paradigms can be divided into four categories depending on their characteristics: (1) Positivist (2) Interpretive (3) Critical theory (4) Post constructivist (Constructivist) (Bazargan, 2012). The first paradigm is the basis for quantitative method and the three others are the bases for qualitative method.

9. Specific criteria for evaluating the relative validity of qualitative studies: Demonstrating sensivity and empathy, making use of triangulation, incorporating negative case analysis (Seamon & Gill, 2016:130).

10. The primary aim of phenomenologists is to reach a situation in which the phenomenon under study can be realized and described in a comprehensive and correct way without being hindered by any prejudices (Moran, 2005).

11. Relative criteria for reliable descriptive accounts are clarity, soundness, completeness, precision and elegance (Partovi, 2013).

12. With concentration on certain situations, the researcher tries to present direct and immediate descriptions of his own experiences as they are without causal explanations or philosophical generalizations.

13. Literature, poetry and other story forms like novels and short stories can serve as resources of fundamental life experiences.

14. Artworks (other than written arts) are one of the important resources of lived experience.

15. From a phenomenologist viewpoint, there is no dualism between human beings and the world or between people and the environment. There is rather intimacy and interconnectedness between man and the world (Seamon, 2013). As an example, phenomenologists study buildings and constructions as a part of lifeworld and ask questions like how a certain building's design can raise or lower the life quality of its residents or affect their everyday activities or needs (Seamon, 2017).

16. The crisis of the modern age is mechanical integration and the end of lifeworld. Heidegger believes that the way out of the crisis is to revive lifeworld (Shaygan far, 2012:30).

17. This phenomenological approach can be seen in works of thinkers like Pallasmaa, Zumthor, Holl and others. Pallasmaa declares that modern architecture has lost its communicative power. He holds that meaning in architecture depends on its ability to exhibit human's presence and the spatial experiences of the artwork (Pallasmaa, 2009:11). Steven Holl believes that architecture is associated with our direct sensational perceptions more than other kinds of art. Only architecture has the potentials to motivate all of our senses and our perceptual complexities. From Zumthor's point of view, a work of architecture can be called an artwork only when it associates with all of sensual perceptions and not merely the visual sensation (Zuthorm, 2015b:25).

18. 'The world becomes a hedonistic but meaningless visual journey' (Pallasmaa, 2009:33). As Heidegger has pointed out, the fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture.

19. Architecture is for our usage and reaches its highest level of quality only when it is considered as applied art. (Zumthor, 2015b:83).

20. Modern science with its one-sided approach to phenomena (or as Husserl has pointed out, starting with its own fabricated world) disturbed the world's balance in favor of predetermined laws it has compelled

to the world and has imposed the instrumentalist view on everything (Norberg-Schulz, 2014:16).

21. Schulz believes that the crisis of the modern world for human is caused by the dominance of abstract-scientific approach. The solution that he suggests is to return to the poetic aspects of life, which can be attained by returning to things themselves (Ibid:10).

22. 'Phenomenology recognizes the reality and truth of phenomena, the things that appear. According to as the Cartesian tradition would have us believe , that "being a picture" or "being a perceived object" or "being a symbol" is only in the mind. From phenomenological perspective they are ways in which things can be. The way things appear is part of the being of things' (Sokolowski, 2016:56–57).

23. Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. During this process, the phenomenon emerges to finally reach the stage of being understood in its due ontological level (Palmer, 1993:142).

24. Transcendental Phenomenology (Husserl), Existential Phenomenology (Heidegger), Hermeneutic Phenomenology (Gadamer), Linguistic Phenomenology (Derrida and Foucualt), Moral Phenomenology (Max Scheler) (Boudlaie, 2016:23).

25. Creswell refers to two kinds of phenomenological methods; hermeneutic phenomenology which is clearly noticeable in Van Manen's works and descriptive phenomenology which can be seen in Moustakas' methodology (Creswell, 2007).

26. 'Text' here refers to any more or less coherent human creations that evoke meaning, whether intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, visceral, or otherwise (Seamon, 2014); some examples of texts include novels, photographs, films, songs, dances, rituals, landscapes, or buildings (Seamon, 2013).

27. Some interpretations seem to be more attuned to the text than others. Three modes of understanding are (1) Absorption, metaphor; (2) Collaborative assessment; (3) Assignment (Bortroft, 2012).

28. There are four criteria for the reliability and trustworthiness of interpretation and description in hermeneutic and phenomenological researches: (1) Comprehensiveness; (2) Semantic depth; (3) Inclusivity; (4) architectural structure (Watcherhauser, 1996).

29. The purpose of hermeneutic phenomenology is to discover meanings which are not directly evident to our intuition, analysis or description (Shpiegelberg, 2013:1023).

30. 'World' here in Heidegger's terminology is a replacement for Husserl's 'lifeworld', albeit with several differences. World is everything that is given and revealed to us (objects and everything). Hence, there is a world based on me and I am the condition for that world to unfold (Rikhtegaran, 2014:132).

31. The fore-structure consists of three elements: fore-having, fore-sight & fore-conception. According to Heidegger's teachings, it is impossible to understand anything with an empty mind and with no presuppositions. Any interpretation is rather based on a brief conception of the subject (Tarighatpour and Safian, 2014), on something we have in advance, something that is already understood.

32. Any phenomenological inquiry is based on the idea that no text is ever perfect, no interpretation is ever complete; no explication of meaning is ever final, no insight is beyond challenge (https://www.phenomenololin. com).

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