Original Research Article

Towards an Ontological Understanding of Architecture
(Focusing on Mystical Experiences of Ibn Arabi)*

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Abstract
Problem statement: It is needless to say that Iran's original Islamic architecture after several centuries is still catching the eyes and minds. To study this continuous influence and desirability, one of those items that seem to be important is the existence of forms, which can be frequently found in these works. It seems that some of these forms have always had validity and originality and represent particular concepts. But there are few studies in the theoretical literature as regards Islamic architectural works that are devoted to the study of the true relationship between these forms and meanings (from an ontological point of view).

Research objectives: The present essay aims to provide the ground for understanding the true relationship between forms and meanings of architecture relying on the rich wealth of Islamic mysticism (intellectual school of Ibn Arabi). In doing so, it struggles to be an effort towards understanding the truth of architecture through the reading of sources of Islamic mysticism from the perspective of a more general horizon.

Research method: This study is composed of two document-analysis-based and inferential parts and its main "strategy" is based on "logical argument".

Conclusion: Relying on the implications of Ibn Arabi's mysticism, one can see an architectural work as a living and hierarchically existential entity just like the totality of the phenomena in the world. Thus conceived, an architectural work can be of vertical expansion in the system of the universe ranging from the essential or primordial level to the external or superficial level. Meanwhile, the essence or "spirit of architecture" can be considered to be its incorporeal form in the world of quiddities which has no form and matter and represents the existential origin of architecture insofar as this essential quality determines the life span of the work and in one sense, it is the very existential cause of the work as a whole. Then, the life span of architectural works is relative. "Body of Architecture" is also equal to the emergence of the work in the sensory world and material body. These formal and semantic levels are interdependent, co-originated, and existentially related and represent the rings of a chain and are continuously present in architectural work.

The other point is that the thing that is created by man including architecture is influenced by his internal belief and perspective of the universe. In the mystical field, an understanding of the world and its phenomena is presented in which the presence of Absolute Truth plays the main role in evident and hidden layers. Then, since the man who has been cultivated by Islamic ontology with his vertical vision sees the world as a hierarchical entity, Islamic architecture is also seen as a vertical chain the sensory form of which is of a vertical and existential relation with its essence and meaning. Moreover, in this perspective, forms of architecture are interpreted in relation and interaction to/with the Origin of Existence and just like all other phenomena, the virtue of architecture has a perfect share of existence and a higher level of life. One can state that Muslim architects struggle in line with their ontological doctrines to design a living and perfect work as a mirror of Truth and express the existential and evolving meanings within the framework of an appropriate and desirable form.

Keywords: *Existence, Meaning, Form, Architecture, Ibn Arabi's Ontology.*

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Introduction and problem statement

It is needless to say that Iran's original Islamic architecture is still enchanting the eyes and minds. We should truly say that the rich and transcendent taste of a Muslim architect has created such monuments, the design, and preciousness of which are magic and indeed of eternal desirability. In this line, one of the keys and vital factors involved in the influential and desirability of these works is the existence of forms that are frequently seen in the rich Iranian-Islamic architecture. For although the value of Iranian architecture lies in the worldview and spiritual states of the creators of these works, the intended qualities, and meanings of these artists have been expressed in specific forms. The evidence of this claim is also the continuation and lack of fundamental change in these forms in different places and times. Therefore, it seems that some of these forms are valid and original and indeed convey specific meanings.

Now for the explanation of the relationship between these forms with the meanings hidden in them, if we think of this relationship like the one between the container and the contained, it cannot be stated that there is no relationship between these or these forms have a contractual value enacted by the Muslim architect. Rather upon even a short review of the sources of Islamic thought, it appears that these forms are transcendent and in other words, they have their origin in the world of divine truths and meanings; and this relationship is in a way that one cannot attribute every form to those meanings. Thus, one can state that these sensory forms serve as a symbol for the expression of those esoteric meanings and the audience by the presence at the spaces of such works acquires an intuitive understanding of those meanings. The core of this research has taken form as an effort for reflection of this problem as well as understanding these relations from the perspective of Islamic mysticism. If Islamic mystics had intended to speak of architectural forms and meanings directly, what reading would they have offered?

Research background

No doubt, the starting point in every study cannot be reached without the knowledge of the ideas of the researchers and theoreticians in the domain of the problem at hand. Thus, in this part, we will provide a short review of architectural literature concerning the issue. It needs to be mentioned that since the problem of the relationship between the form and meaning is considered to be one of the fundamental notions, and thus it is of a considerable extension and depth; different researchers have made direct or indirect theorization in this field, the review of all ideas of whom seems to be impossible in this essay. But given the formation of the primary context for research in the domain of the works of Islamic Architecture and the goal of the present essay, we will review the ideas of such writers as Titus Burckhardt, Henri Corbin, Oleg Grabar, Nader Ardalan, and Laleh Bakhtiar.

Titus Burckhardt (Ibrahim Izz al-Din) can be considered as one of the influential representatives of "traditionalism". One of the key features of Burckhardt's intellectual system is that he believed in the unity of the whole traditional world (including the Islamic world) and explained this unity in two domains of content and form. In addition to the reference to the common substance and themes between the traditional and sacred arts, he has also enumerated certain features for the form of this art. Thus, he stated that to call an art sacred, it is not enough that the subject of art to have been originated from a spiritual truth; rather the formal language of it should testify the existence of the same source. For there is an indisputable similarity between the form and meaning. Spirituality is undoubtedly independent of form, but this does not mean that spirituality can be expressed in every form. According to Burckhardt, every form is a vehicle for an amount of the quality of "existence". In other words, form because of its quality is in the level of sensible entities while it is a peer of Truth in the level of intelligible entities (Burckhardt, 2013, 7-8). Burckhardt's belief that traditional art including

Islamic art is symbolic has its origin in his mystical cosmology. He believed that the idea of symbolic of visual art is based on the doctrine of "gradation of existence". Thus conceived, every part of a being in one way is a manifestation of the Reality of Existence itself. Therefore, the symbol in the levels of epiphany is a manifestation of its sense. Then, the symbol is not based on a contract as devised by this or that, rather it is ontological. He believed that the birth of art like Islamic art is concerned with a manifestation of wisdom, i.e. monotheism. In Islamic thought, nothing should put any veil between man and the invisible presence of God. Therefore, space is of such quality in Islamic architecture. Space is seemingly void. But it dominates the whole soul and heart of man and is a sign of the ubiquitous presence of God.

Almost in line with this intellectual trend, it would be better to refer to the ideas of Henri Corbin the French thinker and philosopher. He is a thinker who despite his presence in the middle of the philosophical center of the west found his lost one in the tradition of Islamic philosophy and Shia spiritual wisdom. One of the key principles of Corbin's theoretical perspective is the issue of "imagination" which he has adopted from Sohrewardi's philosophy of illuminations and Ibn Arabi's mysticism. This theory is based on the acceptance of the "world of ideas" as an existence higher than the world of sensory entities and lower than the world of pure reason. He thought that the world of ideas is a real-world that includes the eternal essential form of things. This world is the place where the True Dreams and revelations occur. The mystic takes advantage of his so-called perceptual faculty of active "imagination" to understand this world. Corbin believed that the existence of a vertical relationship between the worlds is a requirement of the ideal interpretation. He contended that man by taking advantage of imagination is not limited to the worldly time and space and finds the kingdom of heavens and trans-historical geography before himself. One can state that Corbin resorts to the idea

of the world of ideas to overcome the problem of the dualism of the material and the immaterial (form and meaning) which are two separate realities in western philosophical thought to know the spiritual and esoteric truth of phenomena (Fadaei Mehrabani, 2013, 388-390).

Corbin argued that the hermeneutical interpretation of the sacred text is the counterpart of revelation and refers to "tracing something back to its origin". In the course of sacred interpretation, the essence of the phenomenon is revealed through passing from one level of existence into the other levels. He referred to this as "Uncoveredness" [Unverborgenheit] in the sense of tearing off the veils from what remains hidden in its essence while becoming revealed in the appearance (Corbin, 2013, 64). In this hermeneutical situation, the esoteric meaning is revealed to the man, and realizes his existence.

He argued that the creation of cultural, artistic, and literary works requires ideal thinking which is not possible without a symbolic language. In this state, the symbolic forms created by man represent the forms of the world of ideas or imagination. Thus, works of art are multi-layered phenomena that by hermeneutical interpretation one can make his way through their appearance into their essence. To put it otherwise, Corbin believed that cultural, artistic, and spiritual works are the domain of manifestation of the ideal forms grasped utilizing the faculty of active imagination of the mystic arts. The other hand, the audience of such works can tread the reverse course utilizing the method of hermeneutical interpretation and the arc of ascension. In this state, the audience of these allegorical forms decodes the phenomenon because of his existential level to reach its truth and meaning and at the same time, he fulfills the truth in himself.

One of the other prolific researchers and historians in the domain of Islamic art is Oleg Grabar. He criticized the approach of traditionalists like Burckhardt who highlighted the existence of the trans-historical beliefs and truths in Islamic art and believed that the endorsement of such things depends on historical

documents and evidence (Qayyumi Bidhendi, 2011, 316). The most important difference in Grabar with the traditionalists lies in the type of relationship that he establishes between the forms of Islamic art and the meanings underlined by Islam. He believed that this relationship is not essential rather it is historical and even in some cases relative and accidental. Thus, he described the eternal features of Islamic art as follows: "semantic ambiguity or ambivalence is one of the key features of the works of Islamic art. It seems that the apparent form does not have any meaning behind itself or it reveals its meaning through other ways" (Grabar, 2000, 230).

Accordingly, the most powerful and systematic theory that has been developed by Grabar is the theory of "mediation of ornament". This theory suggests that in Islamic art and architecture, the design is based on the use of ornaments that are just intended to be a vehicle of beauty and creation of pleasure; and they do not have any other goal but making the art better. Mediation of ornament in this context means that ornament as such does not have any clear and fixed meaning and it can be different depending on the type of the viewer. In other words, the ornament is the catalyst for visual perception. Thus, as regards the relationship of ornamentation and mystical meanings and Islamic religious beliefs, he stated that this relationship if any is not causal. In other words, he believed that these meanings are not essential for these forms and the mind of the beholder plays a key role in the understanding of the meaning (Qayyumi Bidhendi, 2011, 335-339).

But the other work that should be taken into consideration in our review of the past studies is a book written by Iranian authors entitled The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 2001). As to the way of formation of this book, one should say that simultaneous with the formation of efforts for rediscovering and protection of the originality and identity of Iranian architecture in the middle of the twentieth century, Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar wrote a book in which they sought to highlight the interdependence of the traditional cultural visions of Iranians and art and architecture. They mostly focused on the esoteric and epistemic aspects of the architectural works because of their cultural or geographical conditions. Thus, one can state that their intellectual principles are closer to those of the school of traditionalism.

In this book, they suggested that the mystical aspect of Islam be found in mystical initiation that has grounded the principles governing Islamic art, particularly architecture. The basic hypothesis of initiation is that in everything there is a hidden meaning that complements its external form. In fact, the appearance of one thing is indeed its sensory form that insists on its quantitative and easily accessed aspect while the essence of one thing is its essential or qualitative aspect.

These authors provided a short outline of the fundamental perspective of Islamic mysticism according to which the universe is of a hierarchical makeup in which all phenomena are manifestations of the unique absolute truth. They suggested that our perfect knowledge of the meaning of these appearances depends on our ability to trace them back to their origin and this is handled employing hermeneutical interpretation. Ardalan and Bakhtiar introduced interpretation as a bridge between the appearance and the essence that provides us with a key to understanding the secrets of the material world and making one's way into the origin of these appearances through a trans-historical language. They also believed that reason in its traditional sense is the tool that makes interpretation possible. Reason in this sense is enlightened by the inspiration and divine revelation and it complements discursive reason.

They continued to discuss the hierarchical makeup of the universe in Islamic mysticism and suggest that artistic forms are dependent on authentic unity through different aspects and stages of existence and in a structure based on hierarchy. These forms are manifestations of the Absolute in the limited entities and their relationship with the origin is as close as the relationship of a leaf of a tree with the roots of the same tree. In this way, the art forms can lead

the deep thinking mind from the appearance of the design towards the hidden truth and indeed to the higher aspects of existence. They believed that the examination of forms of species is useful because it can provide help for the practice of contemporary designers and give rise to new combinations that represent originality and truth.

Necessity of research and its goal

Generally speaking, what one can infer from the literature in this field of study (related to the works of Islamic architecture) is the lack of theoretical discussions in the field of the problem of the present study with a fundamental approach and based on an ontological perspective. In fact, in the course of theories related to Islamic architecture, if there is a discussion of meaning, semantics but in few cases (e.g. ideas of traditionalists), have turned to discussions of perceptual and epistemic processes of man in his encounter with the architectural works. Among these, one can refer to psychological approaches with semiotic and semantic approaches that have made their ways into the domain of architecture from literature and linguistics. In fact, "meaning" in these discussions is related to the category of human perception and knowledge; and in this state, not the esoteric or essential meanings of architecture, rather the mental and relativistic notions of it form the horizon of the researcher and the audience.

Thus, one can argue that what a scholar like Grabar understands of meaning in terms of epistemology is different from the transcendent notion of meaning based on traditional and mystical doctrines, e.g. Corbin, Burckhardt, and the authors of "Sense of Unity". One can say that the meaning of architecture in most works of contemporary authors has not been explained based on an ontological perspective and as a result, the model of the relationship between the form and meaning of architecture has been neglected. Thus, it seems that a conscious and effective effort for expansion of the epistemic limits as regards the problem at hand (and for completion of the ideas of such scholars as Burckhardt) will be valuable.

Accordingly, the present essay is aimed at providing the ground for understanding the true relationship between forms and meanings of architecture relying on the strong and rich basis of Islamic mysticism.

Here it is necessary to mention that although the main concern of the author and the starting point of the present study was the desirability of works of Islamic architecture in Iran, the discovered principles in the domain of mysticism allow us to pursue our discussions in the domain of "architecture" as a whole. Thus, our perspective of architecture is more general and we look at the form and meaning of architecture as a phenomenon. This is a phenomenon that is a creature in the universe and a human creature. It is needless to say that if this is accomplished, the existing ambiguities and questions regarding the works of Islamic architecture will be addressed. Then, in a more general horizon, the author struggles to understand the truth of architecture through a reading of Islamic mysticism. But the answer to this possible question of the relationship between theoretical mysticism and architectural discussions is that here mysticism is seen as an intellectual basis or support for research. In other words, by this we struggle to explain a new perspective of architecture in the domain of the problem; a perspective provided by the help of the glasses of Islamic mysticism. Of course, one needs to know that anyway, our thought is relative concerning understanding absolute truth.[1] Therefore, the author does not have any claim of the seamlessness and perfection of this research and expects this essay to be a small contribution to this field.

Research method

Since in this research, we have approached form and meaning in architecture as a phenomenon, a phenomenon that is present in the universe as a human creature and is a container for human existence in the world, the answer to the question of the present study is dependent on a correct and comprehensive understanding of true form and meaning in the universe. In other words, since in this study,

architecture is not only considered in its sensible layer rather as a whole from all possible perspectives, we first need to enter the domain of Islamic mysticism as a supporting or interpretative theory.

But given the extensive scope of mystical sources, the point that is important to be noted here is the exact demarcation of the intellectual base and residence of the author's thought. Accordingly, it should be noted that the author has grounded the main foundation of the present study in the ideas of the great mystic Sheikh Muhy Al-Din Ibn Arabi and the works of his commentators and interpreters.[2] For although Muhy Al-Din Ibn Arabi has not directly discussed the philosophy of art, by resorting to his intellectual system, we can provide strong principles for the philosophy of art and architecture.[3] Thus, the key terms, commentaries, and vocabularies of the present study have been derived from this intellectual system.

Thus, after the determination of our question and review of the existing literature, we identified the sources that could help us in the explication of our course in this study. In the next step, the inferred findings were analyzed through the prioritization of sources and their examination and were presented in a rational and logical form. Then, the achievements of our journey into the domain of mysticism were classified and used in the domain of architecture. Then, the method of the present study is of two parts: documentation and inference.

Having said that, the question of the present study lies in the domain of fundamental concepts, and its answer is acquired through a journey into the domain of Islamic mysticism and then based on the truth of architecture, it is discussed; one can state that the main "strategy" of this study is based on "logical argument".

Ontology in the mystical school of Ibn Arabi (architecture of the universe)

• **Divine creatures**

To understand the relationship between form and meaning from Ibn Arabi's point of view, we need to begin our discussion with the problem of "existence" which is one of the most fundamental issues and themes of this intellectual system.[4] According to Ibn Arabi, true existence is one and the diversity that one finds in the world has its origin in the emergence of this existence. Divinity in the Transcendent Oneness of His Essence is transcendent and is purified of all diversities. But on other levels, the creatures are not separated from the Divine Essence, rather all creatures are considered to be manifestations of this existence.

Thus, in this intellectual system, God is flowing through every entity in the world (Qeysari, 2011, 216) and it is the Divine Essence who gives life and existence to everything. But Ibn Arabi speaks of different levels of existence and worlds in his depiction of the way of "the emergence of existence" or quality of makeup of the universe.[5] The True Existence that is the First Rank or Divine Essence has become manifested in different levels and worlds based on what is appropriate for every one of these worlds (ibid., 55). Here we do not intend to explain the details of the levels of manifestations of pure existence in different worlds; but based on the main question of the study, we need to shortly refer to some of these stations.

As we previously mentioned, in the sphere of Ibn Arabi's mysticism, existence is the origin of the unity of things. But the point that should be added here is that the quiddities of beings are different aspects of this Absolute Existence that has become manifested in the first levels of existence and led to the difference between things and their diversity. As Qeysari in his commentary to Ibn Arabi's Fusus Al-Hikam writes: "there is no place where God does not have a manifestation, and the latter is indeed the truth or essence of the thing" (ibid., 612). Then, quiddity in this context refers to the essence or substance of every object. Ibn Arabi has used the term "Immutable Archetypes" to refer to these quiddities because he believed that these objects and entities are of immutable existence in the knowledge of Divine Essence (ibid., 49).

Thus, every existence in the world is of an immutable archetype or an essence that constitutes its meaning and truth. Moreover, all creatures and of course, their meanings and quiddities are manifestations of the Divine Essence and depend on his existence. Accordingly, one can state that Ibn Arabi presents an intelligible worldview or a system of the universe in which all objects are coexistent; then the main problem in his thought is "existence" not merely "existent". But the question that is raised in this context is why quiddities distinguish the objects from each other.

As an answer to the latter question, one should state that these quiddities are degrees of existence or in one sense they reflect the "limit of existence" and their relationship with the essence of the truth (Sabzavari, 1982, 56). It is just this that serves as a reason for their distinction and difference between them as compared to each other. As Qeysari wrote that:

"Manifestation of Truth in each one of these objects is either strong or weak due to the nearness to or distance from Divine Essence and the number of mediations as well as the pureness of potency or it's being dark; for some the whole required perfections emerge and for some others lesser ones" (Qeysari, 2011, 50). The result of this difference is the hierarchy of life and existence or realization of a range of pure existence (fountainhead of good and beauty) to mere nothingness or annihilation among the beings or creatures (Sabzavari, 1982, 130).

But as we previously mentioned, in Ibn Arabi's thought, Divine Essence becomes manifested at different levels. Thus, creation has not been stopped in the world of quiddities and the latter are revealed in each one of the worlds (including the world of ideas or imagination) according to the requirements of the world at issue and in this way, they actualize the levels of objects, insofar as in the lowest level of the universe or nature, "every object is of an appearance that constitutes the form and direction of its revelation" (Fanari, 1995, 85). According to Ibn Arabi, every phenomenon or object in the sensory world in proportion to its truth and quiddity has a share of pure existence; and this existential aspect guarantees the existence of that object. Thus, in the sphere of his mysticism, the forms of the sensory world do also enjoy different degrees of Absolute Essence and True Existence, to the degree that the manifestation of every quiddity in the form of external existence is compatible with the essential potency of the same quiddity. Thus, Sadr Al-Din Qunawi in Misbah Al-Uns explained that "external truths and objective existents are the shadow, form, and manifestation of the Immutable Archetypes which are the truth and origin of the external entities …. Then, each one of the external objects is an immutable archetype in Divine Knowledge that is the original of what is in the outside world and the latter is the shadow of this archetype (ibid.).

Thus, one of the significant rules of revelation is the mutual interdependence of the appearance and essence (sensory form and quiddity). The appearance and essence of objects or their form and meaning are compatible or essentially united. Of course, in this sense, the form can never be separated from the meaning, rather they are simultaneously present in every object and each one requires the other for its revelation. Therefore, one can state that in the intellectual pattern of Ibn Arabi, the relationship between form and meaning of an object or generally speaking, different levels of it, is a shadow-like and existential relationship not mentally posited or accidental. As it is noted in the commentary to Fusus Al -Hikam, "every form that exists in the world is not separated from its truth, because as it exists in the outside world, it also exists in the rational, ideal and mental world" (Qeysari, 2011, 70). Moreover, in Ibn Arabi's thought, the secret of everything that constitutes its invisible truth becomes manifested in the form of that thing (ibid., 887). Then, one can state that sensible forms always allude to a higher meaning and in this way, one's knowledge of the appearance of an object can serve as an introduction to the knowledge of meaning and essence of that object.

But among the other rules of emergence is that

everything's form needs matter to be able to emerge in this world; this is why the sensory or visible world is also referred to as the material world. There is a term in the ideas of the pantheist mystics that can explain this. Accordingly, it is argued that the form of an object in the sensory world is equal to its "state". Moreover, in Ibn Arabi's Futuhat Al -Makkyyah, it is argued that "the quality or howness is a question of the state of one thing" (Ibn Arabi, 2002, 367). Relying on similar themes and terms in the ideas of the commentators of Ibn Arabi, the state or form of an object can be considered to be compatible with its qualitative mode and on the other hand, the locus or matter is understood to be tantamount to its quantitative mode. Then, one can state that everything in the outside world is composed of two aspects or poles of quality and quantity. Insofar as "quality" means state, form, and quality of an object, and "quantity" represents the "size and scale" of its matter.

But according to the totality of the ideas of the mystics of the school of Ibn Arabi, among the aspects of the sensory world, the state or quality of the object is of priority over its locus or quantity in terms of dignity, existence, and knowledge. Precisely speaking, it is identical with the truth or essence of one thing. As in the translation of Misbah Al-Uns of Sadr Al-Din Qunawi, it is argued that "something's quiddity or essence is a criterion for the emergence of the states of objects. On the other hand, an object's state is concerned with the essence and reveals the scale of determination of its essence" (Fanari, 1995, 95). Accordingly, one can state that the quality and essence of one thing is of vertical relationship with each other. Then, in the sphere of Ibn Arabi's mysticism, among the dualities of "form and matter" or "quality and quantity" in the sensory world, form or quality represents the transcendent aspect of one thing and changes it into what it should be (Rahmani, 2017).

• **Human creatures**
One of the worlds or spheres in the cone of existence is the world of "transcendence" or "ideas" which

sometimes mystics refer as the world of "absolute imagination". In the commentary to the book of Fusus Al -Hikam, the world of ideas has been described in this way that the existing forms in it are similar to the physical world because of their being sensible and quantitative while their luminous essence is similar to the world of rational incorporeality. Therefore, the world of ideas is purgatory and lies between these worlds (Qeysari, 2011, 73). In the world of imagination, there is no matter but quantities and forms exist in it. According to this definition, the purgatorial world of imagination is of a united-separated essence and combines the paraphernalia of the two neighboring worlds. In that world, the immaterial entities of the higher world become more corporeal and the sensible entities of the physical world turn incorporeal.[6]

The other point is that the world of imagination is divided into absolute and limited imaginations. Every man also has a faculty known as limited or connected imagination that is an example of the world of absolute imagination (ibid., 436). Sabzavari in his work Asrar Al -Hikam argued that recording forms in human knowledge after their absence is the reason that proves the existence of the faculty of imagination (Sabzavari, 1982, 226). But according to what is inferred from the ideas of mystics of the school of Ibn Arabi, imagination has another function; human creativities take form in the world of imagination. In fact, according to Ibn Arabi, man can be the creator and originator of forms, because he has been created in the form of God and as a form making entity (Ibn Arabi, 2002, 312); this form making faculty is the connected imagination.

But for the faculty of human imagination, the term "connected" is used, because this faculty is capable of getting connected to the world of absolute ideas and it is through this connection that man can create those things that do not exist in the world of sense and matter. Then, human imagination does not have the power of creation ex nihilo and this is the difference between the creativity of man and Divinity in whom all perceptible forms exist and is composed

of the forms of worlds of nature and beyond. But connected imagination is human imagination. Man perceives the forms of the creatures created by the creative power of God (its initial data are limited to the phenomena of the world of genesis). He deconstructs and reconstructs them and in this way, he can create unlimited combinations of creatures. Thus, connected imagination depends on the disconnected imagination and the action of human imagination is a type of intervention in disconnected imagination.

As a further explanation, one can state that human understanding of the outside world firstly includes the function of the human senses and direct understanding of the outside world; and later the particular forms created through the encounter of the senses with the external world are recorded, protected and classified in human faculty of imagination and in this way the relationship between the intelligible and the sensory is established. This means the substitution of notions and attribution of meanings to the sensibilia. Then, imagination is a faculty that creates the replacement of the limits. In other words, it establishes similarity and identity between the two entities. Here one needs to take it into account that although man's initial understanding of everything is true, every human judgment does not have its origin in truth; in other words, it is not necessarily compatible with true judgments. For here the relationship between the subjects and predicates is mentally posited and hypothetical. Thus, sometimes the extension that is a creature of human imagination does not exist but in the container of "illusion" of the extension of the intended concept.[7]

Therefore, the status of human creatures and judgments is different from true relations and rules and each one should be perceived within the limits of their domain; and one should not confuse them. The basic difference between these two is the distinction between divine status and human creativity. Human creatures despite their ontological origin are mere mental positions. Since they are the

result of human internal feelings and in line with his active faculties, they are a function of them because of their immobility, value, and existence. Then, something's state of being mentally posited does not imply its absolute meaninglessness or Valuelessness; rather its dependence on truth is dependent on the way of function of the human faculty of imagination. Generally speaking, one should note that human creatures are among those things posited by the human mind that can be related to the truths utilizing human choices.

Achievements
• Ontology of architecture (world of architecture)
Architecture is primarily defined as a phenomenon that is the result of the human act of creativity and is born in the sensory world. But if in Ibn Arabi's thought, every phenomenon including the natural (divine creature) or the fabricated (human creature) acquires their existence from the unique source of existence and have different levels and domains in the cone-like system of the universe, a work of architecture would not be an exception to this rule. Then, in the first place, architecture can be deemed as a living creature, because it exists within the circle of existence. In the second place, relying on the current ontological approach to the world and its phenomena, we cannot speak of the world of architecture. Rather "truth of architecture" is also multi-layered; it includes a layer that serves as its appearance as well as a hidden essence. Thus, this essence determines the life span of the work and is in one sense the cause of its existence. Then, works of architecture have a relative life span.

Having said that, we need to mention several points as regards the "levels of architecture":

Firstly, a work of architecture unavoidably has a sensory or apparent domain and internal domain. Meanwhile, the essence of architecture can be equal to its incorporeal form in the world of quiddities that is without form and matter and is considered to be the existential origin of architecture. This incorporeal essence can be regarded as the "soul

of architecture" that is closer to the brain and life of the world. Life of a work of architecture flows through the level of its life to other levels including its sensory form. Meanwhile, the sensory form of architecture is equal to the emergence of the work in the material body and with a special form and size that can be considered as the "body of architecture". Secondly, levels of architecture are existentially related to each other. In this sense, the body of architecture depends on higher levels for its existence while the soul of the architecture needs the lower levels for its emergence. These different existential domains are inseparable as rings of a chain and are of a simultaneous presence in the work of architecture.

Thirdly, according to another rule that governs the universe and the whole phenomena, the appearance and the essence of a work of architecture are each a manifestation and reflection of each other and are existentially matched. Meaning and essence of architecture influence the quality of the sensory form. In this sense, every quiddity does not become realized in sensory form. Having said that, one can state that there are consistency and similarity between different levels of architecture. The body of architecture is identical with its soul and the other way round.

Fourthly, one needs to consider is that like all ontological phenomena, architecture in its sensory level or extensional emergence is combined of "quality or form" and "quantity of matter". Of course, among these two sensory aspects, the quality is higher and subtler and is vertically connected with higher levels of the work of architecture. One can state that the quality of a work of architecture is considered to be an essential and fundamental feature for it and thus it is of paramount importance from this perspective. For quality is the vehicle through which the soul is breathed into the body of architecture.

Fifthly, the essential sphere of architecture is of existential priority as compared to its superficial sphere. But since this essence becomes manifested through its body, the sensory aspect of architecture

is of cognitive priority as compared to other levels. In other words, knowledge of the sensory level of architecture is before the knowledge of its essential or semantic aspects but it should be considered as just a starting point for reading the work of architecture. Accordingly, exploration of the form of a work of architecture aimed at the revelation of its levels and meanings can be understood as overcoming the veils and returning to the subtle truth of the work.

• **Architecture from a mystical point of view**
Creation is always intended to fulfill the enthusiasm for expression; expression of what is precipitated in the deep existential layers of the creative man and one sense is implicitly accepted by him. Thus, architecture as a human creature is also influenced by his internal belief and perspective of the universe and in line with the aperture through which the world is understood, it owns different existential attributes and states. Then speaking of the essence of a creature is possible by reference to the ontological system of its creator. Having said that, it seems that the extensional presence of the concepts of Islamic mysticism in art and architecture is also a reflection of this clear perspective. Of course, one cannot state that architecture is directly related to these theoretical foundations. Rather one can only argue that the act of architecture has been understood in the context of Islamic tradition and different ruling conditions in that society.

Accordingly, one can state that since the man having been cultivated by Islamic ontology has a hierarchically fashioned perspective of the universe and in his eye, every form carries a meaning related to the higher spheres of existence, architecture can be understood in the form of a vertical chain the beginning of which is determined in the world of quiddities and then it becomes embodied in the sensory world. However, every sensory form in architecture establishes a vertical relationship and an existential relation with its meaning or essence.

In fact, in light of this perspective, the general truth of a work of architecture due to its hierarchical nature can be developed and finally become

connected to the center of existence. In this sense, since architecture is present in the circle of existence, it can be living, and just like all other phenomena, it has an essential relationship with its center, i.e. absolute existence. This relationship determines the life span of an architectural phenomenon and this life span is flowing through all levels and layers of it. Then, every "space" can open a window towards truth as large as its essential capability through which it receives the light of life. All things considered, one can declare that every work of architecture is a space; because it is the place of emergence of life and someplace for life.

Then, in this intellectual system, architectural forms can be interpreted about and in interaction with the origin of existence and find an existential aspect. Thus, just like all phenomena in the world, the virtue of architecture has a perfect share of existence and is being attributed to a higher degree of life and in fact manifestation of truth. In other words, the further the "soul" of architecture is, the more desirable it is. Having said that, it seems that Muslim architects in line with their ontological teachings, try to depict the truth through the creation of living work and express the existential and genetic meanings through creative action and in the form of appropriate and desirable forms. This is why one can declare that according to the law of cognation between forms and meanings, the "tradition of Islamic architecture" is full of objective rules and immovable patterns (including qualitative and quantitative) that in the material world are a place for the emergence of existence and act as cords for connection to the world of meaning. Forms serve as keys of emergence that should express the transcendent absolute truth of the world of form based on existential law.

Thus, the truth of desirable architecture can be deemed as a "Reversed Tree", the root of which lies in the higher levels of the universe including the world of quiddities, and finally, becomes connected to the origin of the universe. The trunk of this tree passes through the middle worlds and finally, the branches and leaves emerge in this sensory world.

It is needless to say that these leaves are fed on the root and trunk of the tree. Meanwhile, the root is the source of freshness, life, and in one sense, the existential cause of the fruit and leaves of this tree; and this life and freshness are acquired through the trunk of the tree.

Although the root has great stability, in the level of branches and leaves many changes to happen. For under different contextual conditions, new leaves are sprouting and emerging on different branches of the tree. Tree of desirable architecture continues to grow thanks to man's embarking on the path of living architectural creation and the use of the language of creation based on truth. This growth is flowing through the whole tree.

Theoretical discussion (modes of thinking of architecture)

According to our previous discussions, one can state that the mystical perspective of the world is different from the contemporary Cartesian view of the world. The mystics do not see the world through the glasses of the Cartesian duality of object and subject. Rather they provide an understanding of the phenomena in which the presence of the Absolute Truth plays the main role in the manifest and hidden layers. This type of vision can be compared with the general approach of modern architecture and aesthetics.

Accordingly, our study of the ideas of contemporary thinkers shows that the epistemological perspective dominates the ontological view of the world and its phenomena including the phenomenon of architecture.[8] Generally speaking, following the emergence of humanism and subjectivism in the modern era, man has replaced his inside with the outside as his foothold and this has led to the domination of an instrumentalist perspective of phenomena in architecture. As a result, most of them in their encounter with the works of architecture analyze their meaning, not from the perspective of its nature of essential features rather from a psychological point of view. They see architecture

not as an independent phenomenon rather as something belonging to human knowledge.

Secondly, if these thinkers try to explain the truth of architecture from an ontological point of view, they would merely rely on their historicist or quantitative method and in this way they remain just in the level of the body of architecture and never touch the semantic layers of it; this is an indication of the negligence of understanding as a whole by them. Insofar as one can state that today in most cases, the meaning of the hierarchical structure of the world has been lost utilizing its clearing of all hierarchical quality. Thus, material entities are considered to be the only possible existents in the universe.

If they have been struggling to study and explain the meanings of architecture and its effects from an epistemological point of view, they would have just reduced the knowledge into the mere function of the partial reason (first stage of reason) and in one sense the consciousness of discursive reason is separated from the intuitive consciousness. Insofar as one can state that following the domination of this scientific thinking and marginalization of intuitive reason, a line has been drawn between the objective and the subjective and the truth of the object is no longer in line with something that is provided by the immediate intuitive knowledge shared by humans. In fact, in most cases, the meanings are taken to be relative and they are merely referred to as human discursive reason. Thus, one can state that in most theories of the modern era, the common effects and deep esoteric and spiritual effects of architecture are neglected. For they merely rely on the "Methodism" and "Logicism" of rationalism and lost their touch with the limitless invisible world (Hekmat, 2014, 95).

Having said that, one can claim that modern theoreticians in particular and modern man's thought, in general, have reduced all dimensions and aspects of the universe whether as regards the existential levels of architecture (in an ontological perspective) or as to the perceptual possibilities of man (in an epistemological perspective) into the most external and lowest level of it. In the words of Fritjhof Schuon,

modern science is a rationalist of its subject and is a materialist of its object (Akkash, 2015, 42).

Therefore, if we want to have a comprehensive horizon, we should not interpret the whole reality of architecture relying on the discursive reason and within the domain of our surroundings, i.e. material world and only because of its exclusive features. In this sense, we should begin with the knowledge of forms relying on the hierarchical system of the universe and the phenomenon of architecture and gradually move towards the understanding of meanings. In this course, nearness to truth is gradual and it is this that leads to full understanding. Of course, the rule of gradual understanding is also the case with the epistemological approach to the world, including architecture. Different forms of thinking should complement each other in the course of the acquisition of true knowledge and understanding. Here mystical understanding or intuitive perspective is not working alone; rather different forms of knowledge including sensory experience, discursive reason, and intuitive reason should lead the human mind step by step through the ladder of understanding.

One can state that from a mystical point of view, true knowledge refers to the "One" and has its origin in unity. Knowledge is a unique and integrated entity and belongs to the One and becomes realized in the One. It gathers and resolves everything in itself and gives meaning and direction to everything. Thus, this movement can be understood as an "initiation" (Hekmat, 2014, 81). Such a thing puts the correct, comprehensive method of knowledge before us, for understanding the truth of the architecture works, criticism, and theorization of them. Having said that, one can state that theorization and criticism of works of architecture serve as a path to recognition of their truth; this true understanding should become realized in all existential levels and spheres of the architectural phenomenon relying on all human epistemic levels from empirical consciousness to rational and intuitive consciousness.

For further clarification, we return to the ideas of a

scholar of Islamic architecture to which we referred at the outset of the current study. Of course, it needs to be mentioned that we do not intend to challenge all theories or efforts of this scholar. Rather we think that now we can compare his views in the light of the defined geography of architecture and its levels merely from the perspective of the nature and type of perspective.

As mentioned, Grabar has suggested that the relationship between the forms of architecture and Islamic beliefs is contingent upon the historical evidence and believed that in some cases this relationship is not essential rather a matter of accident; he also insisted on the mechanisms of the visual perception of artistic forms. Accordingly, his aim of artistic theorization is referring to historical documents. But upon a closer look at the intellectual logic of Grabar regarding the relationship between forms and meanings of architecture particularly in the theory of "mediation of ornament", we can note that this scholar with such a theory creates a distance between the form and meaning of a phenomenon including a work of architecture, for Grabar in this theory has challenged the idea of essential meaning and denied the approach of coding in the interest of psychoanalytic approach that resides in the very essence of visual understanding. Then, one can conclude that the meanings inferred from an architectural work are relative and should be merely traced back to the personal understanding of the audience; in fact, this scholar strongly believed in subjectivism.

However, the author believed that the intellectual basis of the present essay does not allow real separation and duality between the form and meaning of an object, for different existential spheres of a work of architecture, are inseparable and coexist. But the other point in this regard is that coexistence of form and meaning in a work of architecture causes these forms to have eternal semantic effects for a man who is encountered with himself (using presential and common human consciousness). Symbolic of a form that has its

origin in the color of its truth cannot be interpreted based on one's personal views. For these forms are of existential potentiality and essential originality and due to the intensity of truth in them, they find a common language, the validity, and influence of which are not limited to the conditions. Thus, one cannot consider the understood meanings of them to be relative and refer them only to the mental background of the audience. This is what absorbs the borders of history, geography, color, tribe, and language and it certainly has effects beyond time and space; because it speaks of eternity. At the same time, it is the same thing that such thinkers as Grabar have raised objections of it in the study of Islamic art and avoided attributing eternal and general meanings to the forms of Islamic architecture.

Conclusion

The current essay struggled to provide a short outline of the ontology of phenomena in the mystical perspective of Ibn Arabi and use it as a basis for opening a new chapter in the understanding of the relationship between form and meaning in architectural works. This is supposed to create sparks in the minds of the authors and researchers of the necessity of thinking in this field.

As it was shown, in the mystical system of Ibn Arabi, all creatures are interpreted within a hierarchical framework and the truth of everything is interpreted and understood not only in the domain of the sensory world and the environment around man rather by taking its higher aspect in terms of final cause. He believed that if the man wants his epistemic movement to be an existential one and leads to the knowledge of his place in the universe, seeing things not merely as an object of knowledge rather as a part of the universe and understands their truth, the external knowledge cannot fulfill these goals. If someone wants to go beyond this, the resolution for this transcend movement requires an effort for finding knowledge of another type. This is a knowledge that has its origin in essence and permeates into the essence of things.

Having said that and relying on the mystical thought of Ibn Arabi, we should struggle to find the truth and meaning of architecture through internalization of this worldview in ourselves and in fact reaching a comprehensive and true knowledge. This is so important that if it is taken into consideration, it would undoubtedly open a new horizon of architecture before us.

Thus, in the light of hierarchical and centralistic perspective of Ibn Arabi of the world and its phenomena, the general truth of a work of architecture can be expanded based on its hierarchical layers and finally get connected to the center of existence. In this sense, since architecture is within the circle of existence, it is living and like all other phenomena is essentially connected to the center of it, i.e. Absolute Existence. This relationship determines the duration of life of the architectural phenomenon and this duration flows through all layers of it. In other words, every space represents a window towards the truth and light of life in proportion to its essential capacity. Of course, in this definition, space has a semantic nearness to the essence of all phenomena. Every phenomenon in this universe is a space because it serves as a container (vehicle) that contains existence or life. Every phenomenon is a manifestation that uncovers the presence; then it is a space. The other point is that a work of architecture is a space as far as it is existence or life. To put it otherwise, an architectural work's being space is of different degrees and depends on the size of its life.

Thus, following the law flowing through the whole universe and phenomena including the natural and fabricated, one can state that space is a living, hierarchical, and vertical entity. Accordingly, all terms and themes related to space will be hierarchical and find depth and extension referring to the vertical system of the universe. Then, the truth of "space" is layered; these layers are different levels of the general reality of architecture that by being set alongside each other constitute the totality of space. Then one can state that the relationship between "form and meaning of architecture" is a true and existential relationship and is based on the principle of "manifestation".

In this epistemic horizon, the light of life and existential value of architectural works (from an ontological perspective) seems to be very important. Thus, space can be living, purposeful, and transcendent and oriented towards truth or has a share of the light of life just as it can be deprived of the flow of existence and light of truth. The life and existential value of a space is the result of the choice made by a creative man. For the quality of the body of architecture influences its life span. In fact, according to the rule of consistency between form and meaning, the sensory form of a work of architecture should have special conditions so that it can be worthy of being benefitted from the light of life and truth of existence. This is just like the mirror that should be tarnished to be able to reflect the picture.

The other point is that following the hierarchical nature of space and the man who is its audience, the "interests" of space are also hierarchical. The function and benefit of architecture are not the only physical function of it about the man. Rather in addition to the vivid benefits of architecture, it has hidden functions that make their way into the circle of human perceptions. In this sense, architectural forms are the secrets that can express the invisible truths and higher meanings that lie beyond the limits of materiality. In other words, these forms reveal the layers of meaning; and in this way, they can establish a relationship with different levels of human existence. Thus, one can state that a deep and true understanding of the meaning of architecture is an internal affair and of intuitive nature the result of which is the domination of the existential levels of a space.

In this state, architecture can bring itself near to the transcendent level of its existence by the realization of these conditions, and by joining the eternal flow of life, it would turn to a manifestation of truth for its audience. The man who is an audience of such a space struggles to have an intuitive perception and presental understanding (and of course as far as his

potentiality allows) of the existential and esoteric levels of the work of architecture.

Thus, the true discovery of such a space implies tearing off the veils and knowledge of the hidden secret. Meaning and true evidence in this context is indeed the truth and essence of architecture and as a result, "the true center of existence". Thus, one can claim that the deep influence that occurs utilizing presence at the spaces of Islamic architecture is firstly due to the relationship of the existential quality of them with the center of existence or the living essence of these spaces; and this amount of existence is expressed to the audience via the qualities or states of spaces and are perceived by them. In other words, the ecstasy that is created in people when they become encountered with the spaces of Islamic architecture has its origin in the "good mood" of space or multi-leveled and transcendent qualities of it that serve as chains connected to the living essence of space and the existential principles of the world. This is why these spaces are not understood merely as a sensory or external phenomenon, rather they turn to a secret and symbol of truth and are useful. Love informs reflected in these spaces is revealed, not in the sense of being attached to the superficial appearances of it, rather in the sense of internal enthusiasm for a presential understanding of these forms and knowledge of their meanings. Then, one can state that true meaning does not depend on any time, space, culture, or history. Such an interpretation of the meaning of architecture is very different from most of what is referred to in the contemporary world as meaning.

Finally, it should be mentioned that in this essay, we have just opened a path that needs to be further explored. This path if explored well can lead us to the truth of architecture or the creation of true space. One needs to note that the final goal is the creation of a motive for seeing correctly, thinking correctly and creating correctly, and at last, bringing the architecture near to its existential climax so that the soul of architecture becomes revealed in its form. This is an emergency that means a manifestation of the truth of existence in the body of space.

Absence of conflict of interests

Hereby the author announces that in conducting this study, there was no conflict of interest for him.

Endnote

1. Here it seems that we need to refer to a subtle difference that exists between this notion of relativity of thought and philosophical relativism that is prevalent in modern thought. Relativism implies the denial of existence of eternal and absolute aspects in the world. But relativity of thought in this context means the acceptance of the absolute and the unlimited that our thought due to its limitations is relatively distant from it.

2. Abu Bakr Mohammad Ibn Mohammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Abdullah Ibn Hatam Taei better known as Muhy Al -Din Ibn Arabi was born in 1165 in Mersyyah at Indolosia in a family of fame, knowledge and piety. One of his titles is "Sheikh Al -Akbar" [Magisterus Magnimus]. This is indeed a token of his great intellectual and mystical status. Among the mystics and poets who have been influenced by the ideas of Ibn Arabi, one can refer to Sadr Al -Din Qunawi, Davood Qeysari, Seyed Heydar Almoli, Aziz Al -Din Nasafi, Shah Nematollah Vali Kermani, Sheikh Mahmoud Shabestari and Shams Al -Din Lahiji.

3. To overcome the possible ambiguities regarding the selection of the ideas of Ibn Arabi as our intellectual basis, we need to note two points. Firstly, Ibn Arabi provides a wonderful explanation of the Sufi beliefs as well as a systematic exposition of the principles of theoretical mysticism and hierarchies of the universe. Secondly, this great Muslim scholar is of a unique influence among most Muslim thinkers. Thus, one can say that the school of Ibn Arabi has influenced most Islamic thinkers, particularly in Iran between 13 to 17 centuries when the tradition of Islamic philosophical thought reached its climax in the ideas of Mulla Sadra (Izutsu, 1985, 115). Moreover, undoubtedly he had been inspired by early mystics. Thus, perhaps it is wrong to generalize the ideas of Ibn Arabi to the point where it could be used as regards all Muslim thinkers, but this great Muslim mystic is unrivalled from many points of view. It needs to be mentioned that although Ibn Arabi's thoughts do not include all pure Islamic thoughts, it includes the common foundations of them.

4. Here one needs to note a point that seems to be necessary for further clarification of the issue and paying attention to the unity and commonalities of ideas in the world of Islamic philosophy and mysticism. Many of the principles of Mulla Sadra's thought in Transcendent Philosophy such as "Principality of Existence", "Gradation of Existence", "Unity of Existence", "Substantial Motion", and etc., are of mystical bent. The study of each one of these significant issues shows the influence of Ibn Arabi's mystical intuitions on Mulla Sadra's philosophical thought. Insofar as in every single line of the works and writings of Mulla Sadra, he quotes Ibn Arabi as evidence. Thus, one can state that in the problem of "princpiality of existence" and its unity, Mulla Sadra's intellectual stance and mystical taste are very close to Ibn Arabi's intuitions.

5. Of course, Ibn Arabi does not limit his explanation of different world to which he refers as "Manifestations of Truth" to the domain of Islamic thought. Professor Seyed Hossein Nasr in "Knowledge and the Sacred" wrote that all traditional cosmologies have sought to provide a rational presentation of the hierarchy of existence that is reflected in the system of the universe. Among these traditional cosmologies, one can refer to Hindu, Babylonian and Sumerian cosmologies and religions, Hermetian texts and Cabala and even the oral tradition of American Indians (Nasr, 2001, 167).

6. Here indication of a point as regards the common intellectual features in the world of Islamic wisdom and mysticism is interesting. Sheikh Ishraq Sohrewardi is the first theoretician of the "World of Ideas" in Islamic civilization. His significant views in "Hikmat Al Ishraq" and other works were influential in expression of the levels of the world in the

Islamic philosophy in demonstration of existence of a world between the world of lights and material world. He has also influenced the theory of "Five Archetypes" of Ibn Arabi. Sohrewardi discussed imagination both from ontological and epistemological perspectives. From an ontological perspective, the meanings and truths of the world of light are formed and are transferred into the material world by means of the sensory existence. According to Sohrewardi, these imaginary (ideal) forms are the source of the existing forms in human imagination (Shafei & Bolkhari Qahi, 2011).

7. Insofar as in the school of Ibn Arabi, some conditions have been mentioned for realization of intuition of truth and creation of appearances based on it by man that is concerned with the features of the limited imagination and possibility of its combination with deception. "When the wayfarer reaches the Absolute Idea in the course of his initiation, he transcends the limited imagination. This is accomplished through the correspondence of the ideal forms and rational forms in the Protected Slate that represents divine knowledge. But when he observes something in his limited imagination, sometimes he perceives right and sometimes wrong. This is because the observed entity is either true or not. If it is true, the observer has perceived it rightly otherwise it is a lie that has its origin in wrong imaginations insofar as the reason combined with delusion creates an existence for that entity and so on and so forth" (Qeysari, 2011, 75).

8. As in the view of Erick Newton, all thinkers of aesthetics struggle to study the mental states of man and none of them in practice looks at the beautiful things or listens to the beautiful voice insofar as their books rarely have pictures (Newton, 1971, 15).

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