

(Epistemological) formalism and its influence on architecture: A Concise review

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Abstract:

Despite the term's bad reputation in architecture, formalism, at least in its specific conception, refers to a respectable "body of thought" that has also been influential on architecture. The referred "body of thought" can be coined as "Epistemological" Formalism that is tied to two related but distinct formalist traditions: German Formalism that was flourished about the late 19th century and Russian Formalism persisted between 1915 and 1930. The present study reviews some of the essential ideas of so-called "Epistemological" Formalism in their roots in German Formalism, and Russian Formalism, and searches for and follows the traces of these ideas in architecture, aiming to shed light onto formalism's influence, and the nature of that influence on architecture.

Keywords: *Formalist epistemology, (architectural) formalism, Russian Formalism, German Formalist Tradition*

*Formalism is now a battered, blunted term, used most often to imply
absence of something else: social responsibility, emotional content, or
originality.
—Judith Wolin*

*Today, "formalism" is a negative term to which it is almost embarrassing to
refer.
—Peggy Deamer*

1. Introduction

What is formalism? Providing the most widely used and often accepted connotations of the term, Merriam-Webster's dictionary gives the following definitions: "the practice or the doctrine of strict adherence to or dependence on prescribed or external forms," and "emphatic or predominant attention to arrangement, style, or artistic means (as in graphic art, literature, or music) usually with corresponding de-emphasis of content." In architecture,

formalism is an ambiguous term that might point to quite different things, often, parallel to its generally accepted meaning, something negative: some essential component missing in a work of architecture, such as meaning, function, in favor of form, or as it was expressed in Judith Wolin's (1994: 62) words, lack of "social responsibility, emotional content, or originality."

Formalism's bad reputation in architecture is often associated with "composition," where "composition" primarily refers to "two-dimensional, vision dominated prescription." Peggy Deamer (1994: 60) argues that "composition" is actually a relatively "recent phenomenon," of Anglo-Saxon origin, descendant from the works of "formalists," such as Roger Fry, Clive Bell, and Clement Greenberg representing a certain genealogical line for formalism. Reyner Banham (1966: 68), provides a more expanded conception. He proclaims, in architecture, reliance on any prescribed order, or abstract geometrical discipline, such as "composition, symmetry, order, module, proportion, 'literacy in plan, construction and appearance,'" is formalism, whether this prescribed order, or abstract geometrical discipline is of Platonic origin or derived from some type of tradition. Sanford Kwinter (1994: 65), argues, one must distinguish between "poor" and "good" (or genuine) formalisms, where the main characteristic of "poor" formalisms, for him, was the conflation of the notion of "form," with that of "object."

Despite the term's bad reputation in architecture, formalism, at least in its specific conception, also refers to a "body of thought" in Modernism and modernist tradition that has also been influential on architecture. The referred "body of thought," can be coined as "epistemological" formalism that is tied to two related but distinct formalist traditions. Representing the mainline of European Formalism, first of these traditions is the German Formalism that was flourished about the late 19th century, in the studies of Hans von Marées, Conrad Fiedler, Adolph von Hildebrand, Alois Riegl, and Heinrich Wölfflin. Second is Russian Formalism, a short-prevalled but influential school in literary scholarship, which was developed in the works of scholars such as Boris Eichenbaum, Roman Jakobson, Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Tomashevsky, and Yuri Tynyanov, between 1915 and 1930^(1, 2). Originally formulated for visual arts, and literature respectively, these traditions addressed the specific problems and problem situations of their own time and their own field. Still, from a wider perspective, they can be interpreted as the two branches of the European Formalist Movement in art scholarship [Kunstwissenschaft], essentially developed in the same set of conditions and in the same ideological horizon in art (Bakhtin & Medvedev, 1991: 41). These traditions were not merely two representatives of superficial "formalist" trends that resurface on and on in artistic creation and in art criticism; they present quite a different agenda; a body of thought, comprising a "formalist epistemology." This is not unexpected that, for example, seeking to provide an alternative epistemology, German Formalism was actually developed as a response to the crisis of Idealism and Positivism, long reigning in art and in art criticism at that time. Russian Formalism was not essentially a response to Idealism and Positivism, but in terms of epistemology, their treatises presented no less than their German counterparts did. The "formalist epistemology," entailed in the treatises of these schools, was indeed powerful and rigorous in many aspects, and many of the ideas they possess were readily applicable to other fields, such as architecture. Especially after the fall of Modern Architecture, both in architectural practice and in architectural theory, we have witnessed more

conscious and direct attempts to adapt ideas from “epistemological” formalism to architecture, and to architectural criticism ⁽³⁾.

The present study primarily reviews some essential ideas of so-called “epistemological” formalism in their roots in the German, and Russian Formalist traditions, and searches for and follows the traces of these ideas in architecture, seeking to shed light onto formalism’s influence on architecture.

...interest in art begins only at the moment when interest in literary content vanishes...

—Konrad Fiedler

...we only see what we look for, but we look for what we can see

—Heinrich Wölfflin

...the art wants what it wants.

—Woody Allen

2. (Epistemological) formalism: History of ideas

One can start the history of (epistemological) formalism with Plato, with reference to his “theory of forms,” and especially to his formulation of eidos, to that degree, with Immanuel Kant, with reference to his definition of “aesthetic judgment” and his conception of the self-sufficiency and the autonomy of the aesthetic object. It is well known that Kant’s epistemology has been highly influential on German Formalism, and, indirectly, on Russian Formalism ^(4,5). However, a true history of formalism should begin with the works of a group that came together around the artist Hans von Marées: art scholar Konrad Fiedler, and sculptor Adolph von Hildebrand ⁽⁶⁾.

In *Ueber die Beurteilung von Werken der Bildenden Kunst*, Fiedler distinguishes between understanding, judging and explaining the “products of nature” and the “products of the human mind” (i.e. works of art) (Fiedler, 1949). In the book, he proposes that understanding the “products of the human mind,” requires a different mindset and a different faculty, and they must be read, understood, evaluated and explained in a different manner which has its own specificities. He proposed that, “...besides scientific, conceptual cognition, there is still another relationship of the human mind to the appearances of the world.” It is called the “perceptual cognition,” which was no less valuable than the first one (Fiedler, 1949). Of course understanding and evaluation begins with perceptual experience, but this experience fades away by time, by means of the “conceptual thinking,” as soon as one “draws out of perception that which all too often he believes to be its one and only essential content” (Fiedler, 1949). Hence, the experienced phenomena are not seen and sensed anymore, but only recognized. Such a change in states might be essential to scientific comprehension, but, in understanding and judgment of the products of the human mind, one should “remain at the stage of perception rather than to pass onward to the stage of abstraction,” maintaining a certain distance, that is essential “...to keep open other roads [to] arrive at cognition” (Fiedler, 1949). It is a state, when one gains capability to distinguish and evaluate good and the significant aspects of a work that could lead to true (to that degree creative and multiple) reading and judgment of works. Apart from its post-positivist implications, this formulation points to the birth of two great

formalist ideas which were later conceptualized and elaborated by Russian Formalists, as “estrangement,” and “opacity of a work of art.”

“Estrangement,” and “opacity of a work of art”

Almost departing from where Fiedler left, in 1914, in the essay titled “Resurrection of the Word” Shklovsky (1973) proposed,

When words are being used by our-thought-processes in place of general concepts, and serve, so to speak, as algebraic symbols, and must needs be devoid of imagery, when they are used in everyday speech and are not completely enunciated or completely heard, then they have become familiar, and their internal (image) and external (sound) forms have ceased to be sensed. We do not sense the familiar, we do not see it, but recognize it.

This was a step towards Russian Formalists’ reformulation of Fiedler’s original idea which would be fully elaborated in a follow-up seminal article: “Art as Technique” of 1917. In Shklovsky’s (1965) formulation, thought has had an abstractive character. Once, our response to an object and our experience of it becomes habitual or mechanical, there emerges a shortcut which bypasses the process of seeing and perception; a point where the object cannot be perceived in its essence. In formalist terms, gaining a “transparency” it “fades away” from our “awareness.” Following his German counterpart Fiedler, Shklovsky, too, put the primary emphasis on the perceptual experience, in “understanding” and “knowing” the products of the human mind. Actually, it was the purpose of art, “to lead us to knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition” (Shklovsky, 1990). As a device, art accomplishes this by “estranging objects and complicating form;” by making them opaque, enabling, even forcing, the perceptual process “long and laborious,” extending the experience to “the fullest.” For Shklovsky (1990) art stands for “...to make us feel objects...to make a stone feel stony.” In turn, literariness or artfulness of an object is dependent on its ability to make strange or estrange what is habitual and automatic. As it was emphasized later by Rosalind Krauss (1987) for Formalists, this “...distinction between transparency and opacity was crucial to the differentiation between everything that was not art and everything that was.”

The theory of “opacity,” now fully elaborated, allowed for a second, and perhaps a more valuable, interpretation: operationally, “estrangement” implied a special type of transformation which turned what is habitual into strange, what is transparent into opaque, to make us regain our ability to see what is already recognized in a fresh light, enable new and unforeseen “readings” of man-made objects, new and unforeseen ways of “knowing” and “understanding” them. From this point of view, the main concern of the formalists was not the “objects themselves,” but rather the way they were experienced.

The problem of tradition

The theory of opacity and estrangement intrinsically carried a new conception of (artistic) tradition. For example, Friedrich Jameson (1972) suggested that with the help of the theory of “opacity” and “estrangement”, a new concept of history came to fore:

...not that of some profound continuity of tradition..., but one of history as a series of abrupt discontinuities, of ruptures with the past, where each new literary present is seen as a break with the dominant artistic canons of the generation immediately preceding.

Perhaps standing on the opposite corner, Shklovsky (1973) provided the following argument

As a general rule... a work of art is perceived against a background of, and by means of association with, other works of art. The form of the work of art is determined by the relation to other forms existing before it... a new form appears not in order to express a new content, but in order to replace an old form, which has already lost its artistic value...

This was also the case for Wölfflin and Riegl; their models intrinsically demanded certain continuity with the past, an established artistic tradition that could work as a basis for the identification of a historical change, and for understanding the nature of the concerned change. Although these aspects of the model were not so explicit and they were not the main concern at the time, this was quite an interesting issue, making Formalism a model allowing any type of change, “revolutionary” or “evolutionary,” and permitting both “tradition” and “innovation;” epistemologically, making the new conception of tradition a brilliant formulation.

Material/architectonic structure to material/technique

6 years after Fiedler’s book, in 1882, Hildebrand published *Das Problem der Form in der Bildenden Kunst*. In the very beginning of his book, Hildebrand (1945) argued that, despite painting and sculpture is often taken as imitative arts, imitation of nature is and can only be a part of a work, where, actually, imitation depends on artist’s perception of nature. Beyond this imitative aspect, a work has and should have another, more important one, what is called its “architectonic” structure.

In Hildebrand’s (1945) conception, “architectonic,” referred to “...a unity of form lacking in objects themselves as they appear in nature” and the way an artist raises the imitative part of his or her work to a higher plane. Architectonic (conception) was a process, but to that degree, architectonic (structure) was an aspect of a work. He argued that

Material acquired through a direct study of Nature is, by the architectonic process, transformed into an artistic unity. When we speak of the imitative aspect of art, we are referring to material which has not yet been developed in this manner. Through architectonic development, then, sculpture and painting emerge from the sphere of mere naturalism into the realm of true art (Hildebrand, 1945).

It was not the imitative aspect of a work, but precisely “the problems of form arising from this architectonic structure ...” was seen as “the true problems of art” (Hildebrand, 1945). And it was this aspect; the architectonic structure what makes a work autonomous and self-sufficient, but more important, a piece of art.

The “material/architectonic structure” can be seen as a predecessor of Russian Formalists’ formulation of “material/device” or “material/technique.” In “The Theory of the ‘Formal Method’”, Boris Eichenbaum (1965) proposed that perception does not refer to “psychological concept,” but, “since art does not exist outside of perception, as an element in art itself.” Here, means of technique is seen as a content in itself, where “the notion of ‘form’ ...acquires a new meaning; it is no longer an envelope, but a complete thing, something concrete, dynamic, self-contained, and without a correlative of any kind” (Eichenbaum, 1965). He further argued that the main problem of Formalists was to find “...specific formulations of the principle of perceptible

form so that they could make possible the analysis of form itself,” where “the analysis of form” here is understood as content itself (Eichenbaum, 1965). For example, if we consider cinema, for the formalists, “...the people and objects displayed on the screen could not be considered as a simple reference to, or reflection of reality.” These were taken as “cinema’s material” which has been “...constructed, through various devices [techniques], into a signifying system” (Eichenbaum, 1965).

Device (priyomy) or technique is an important concept for Russian Formalism, the agency of “literariness” or “artfulness,” as seen in many essential formulations, such as “Art as Device,” “The Device of Making Strange” (Priem ostranenija), “a device laid bare” (obnazenie priema), “the literary work is sum-total of devices employed in it”, where “material” refers to “raw stuff,” which becomes “...eligible for the participation in the literary work of art only through the agency of the ‘device’” (Erich, 1973). This was a new interpretation, which can be seen as an advance on Hildebrand’s original idea of “architectonic structure,” and apparently a brilliant formulation sought to eliminate the age-old form-content duality.

External conditions (as determinant of form)

Fiedler and Hildebrand’s studies provided the theoretical and conceptual basis of new lines in formalist thought. Their successors, Heinrich Wölfflin and Alois Riegl’s works were known to be highly affected by Fiedler and primarily by Hildebrand, representing such a genealogical line of German Formalist tradition.

Wölfflin’s most influential work *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* was published in 1915. In parallel with his Formalist predecessors, Wölfflin privileged the perceptual, and he saw the visual structure of a work as the primary content of the work to be studied. These underlying visual structures, not contaminated with “conceptual thinking,” were seen as universally applicable, providing an objective way of studying works of art. Under the influence of Hegel, along with determinist lines, he believed in a strong *Zeitgeist* theory, and he tried to show that works of art are actually the products of their epochs, not of the artists who created them. To illustrate his treatise, Wölfflin had to exclude the artists’ personality, psychology, lifestyle, and such elements from the equation, which in turn helped him to formulate his famous theory of “art without names.” For example he proposed that, “The transition from Renaissance to Baroque is a classic example of how a new *Zeitgeist* enforces a new form” (Wölfflin, 1932). It was the conditions, “as material elements,” provided by a certain epoch “...call it a temperament, *Zietgeist*, or racial character” that “... determine the style of individuals, periods or peoples” (Wölfflin, 1932). The “conditions” which Wölfflin mentions do not merely refer to what was cultural, but, also to the available technique, or the means of representation, of which everybody is “bound with;” in Wölfflin’s words, “not everything is possible at all times.” Departing from this point of view, Wölfflin’s work can be seen as an attempt “...to provide a general set of descriptive terms that could capture the artistic visual forms of an age without presupposing any further explanation” (Hatt & Klonk, 2006).

Although he was interested in a different period, what was said for Wölfflin was mostly the case for Riegl. At the “Introductory Remarks” of the *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts*, Riegl (2004) proposed that “...the work of art does not seek to replicate nature. Contrarily, the artificiality of the work must immediately recognizable, and this artificiality is a purpose in itself.”

Presupposedly, there exists “a work of nature,” behind every work of art, of which the work of art stands to “compete” with it. What was important for Riegl (2004) was the differential perception of the works of nature: While putting emphasis on the perceiver’s “relation to matter,” he argued that “...a person will perceive a work of nature with entirely different eyes.”

Internal conditions & autonomy

For the study of the “products of the human mind,” Riegl (2004) suggested that “beside the question of ‘what?’ (the motif),” one should also ask the questions, “...for what purpose it was made? ...From what ...Through what...” and “How?” which would lead us to the knowledge of purposes, materials, techniques, and basic means of expression in the visual arts. Perhaps the most popular idea developed by Riegl is *Kunstwollen*, namely, “the will of art” which basically referred to “art’s evolving formal or visual elements or language,” as compared to “impersonal social or historical will or ... intention or will of the artist...” (Binstock, 2004). Riegl acknowledged the importance of “function, material and technique” as providing conditions influential on the art history, but insisted that “all art history manifests itself a struggle with the material. Not the tool or technique has precedence in this struggle, but the creative artistic thought ... which wishes to widen its field of creation and intensify its formative power” (Binstock, 2004). Thus, still presenting a “teleological view,” Riegl proposed that, “...work of art [is a] result of a specific and consciously purposeful *Kunstwollen* that prevails in battle against function, raw material and technique” (Binstock, 2004). These conceptions were important in the sense that they put the emphasis on the idea of autonomous development (or change) in art. Actually, as it was already discussed, the autonomy of art forms was also resident in Wölfflin’s treatises. For example, mode of representation was one of such conditions, which determined the artistic forms. But, here it was implied that the change of formal aspects of art is dependent upon the inherent conditions, more than the conditions external to it, putting the emphasis on the notion of autonomy.

The question of whether Colin Rowe is a formalist can be understood as an objective observation, a compliment, or a pejorative accusation. As a compliment, it suggests that a formalist elucidates or creates a certain logic or beauty in the appearance, form or structure, or organization of something. As an accusation, it suggests that a formalist’s values are screwed up in believing that the logic of formal manipulations is the highest aspect of art and architecture, that meaning is irrelevant, or that formal manipulations are or can be the substance, meaning, or value itself.
—Steven Hurtt

3. Influence of (epistemological) formalism on architecture

As it was already stated in the introduction, providing a versatile and rigorous model, the treatises of these two formalist schools are known to be influential in other fields (of art), and architecture. Just about the fall of Modern Architecture, we see a set of attempts to adapt the ideas from epistemological formalism to architecture.

Rowe’s contribution

One of the representatives of such attempts is Colin Rowe’s studies. He is perhaps the most popular figure who sought to adapt formalist ideas to

architecture, but perhaps more important, his works constitute the basis and the backbone of a strong and well-established genealogical line of architectural formalism.

Perhaps the best known and influential application of formalism in architecture is Rowe's "The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa" of 1947 where he brings two distinct samples from architectural history together in an analytical comparative study. His comparative analysis can be viewed as the architectural counterpart of what Wölfflin and Riegl have done in visual arts. One of the important methodological and epistemological sources of the "Mathematics..." is Formalism, in terms of methodology, the references must go to Wölfflin's approach to the study of works of art. Actually, still less known, this was also admitted by Rowe himself. In his own criticism and defense of the original text in the "Addendum" dated 1973 he describes his work as follows:

A criticism which begins with approximate configurations and which then proceeds to identify differences, which seeks to establish how the same general motif can be transformed according to the logic (or the compulsion) of specific analytical (or stylistic) strategies is presumably Wölfflinian in origin ... a Wölfflinian style of critical exercise ... might still possess the merit of appealing primarily to what is visible and of, thereby, making the minimum of pretences to erudition and the least possible number of references outside itself (Rowe, 1977).

Formalism in the hands of Rowe turned into such a powerful tool that it enabled him to bring together Le Corbusier's Villa Garches and Andrea Palladio's Villa Malcontenta, and combined with the anti-zeitgeist principles of Warburg School, it went beyond the original Wölfflinian modes of analysis. This was Rowe's advance on the model, actually such an undertaking would be attempted neither by the members of the Warburg School nor the formalists themselves. What Rowe did in the "Mathematics..." was not confined within a mere adaptation of Wölfflinian modes of formal analysis to architecture. Formalism is seen as a descriptive/analytical tool in the study of architectural form but also as it was identified by Judith Wolin (1994), in doing this, Rowe "...vehemently insisted that what could be seen by the eye was available to all viewers and required only acute attention rather than special knowledge." To the end, Rowe believed in the primacy of the perceptual (structures), namely the "material" that is accessible by pure vision, in studying works of architecture, presenting a special and objective type of knowledge.

From a certain point of view, Rowe was a part of the tradition descendant from Wölfflin and Riegl, and, "Mathematics ..." reveals the strategy that was employed operationally in the formal transition from the Classical Architecture to Modern Architecture. Yet from another point of view, projecting the formalist model, Rowe sought to illustrate a certain continuity between periods, and a certain inheritance involving visual structures those existed in works of architecture. But beyond all, his works represented an important illustrative case for the application of formalism to architecture as an epistemology. Rowe's succeeding "Transparency..." articles could also be seen as an advance on his treatise in this respect. Collage City, his later study completed in collaboration with Fred Koetter, is often seen as a shift in Rowe's worldview, and received as "different," than his previous studies. Actually, in Collage City, Rowe stays faithful to formalism, but it is inherited mainly as an analytical tool, where the resident formalist epistemology is

replaced with a more comprehensive, full-fledged one: so-called Evolutionary Epistemology.

The whites

Rowe's work was influential in architectural theory and it found many followers. Among others, so-called Whites, a group consisting of Peter Eisenman, Michael Graves, Charles Gwathmey, John Hejduk and Richard Meier, has a particular importance owing to their special place in formalist epistemology's adaptation to architecture. Whites are known for their interest in "stylistic aspects of modernism," and particularly in Le Corbusier. But as was identified by Peggy Deamer (2001), they are "distinguished" from Le Corbusier, in the sense that "their elevation of form from the condition of design to that epistemology." Deamer (2001) further suggested that "The true legacy of the Whites is not the formal vocabulary ... but the fact that we think these operations have systemic intellectual import at all." Rowe and Whites highly referenced Le Corbusier, but Le Corbusier's works did not merely provide a body of formal references, or they did not simply use Le Corbusier to illustrate their treatises. There was an inherent formalism in Le Corbusier's works, both as a part of his worldview, and utilized as an analytical tool, operational in his reading and interpretation of what existed prior to him, whether this "what" refers to Classical or Modern Architecture, or even to "complex machines." What Rowe and Whites have done essentially is that they identified, resurfaced and foregrounded such content. Whites were important not only they provided a reinterpretation of Modern Architecture, through Le Corbusier's works, but in doing this, relocating the formalism, or more specifically formalist epistemology, at the very center of architecture and architectural thinking. In this sense, they represent an important point of an ongoing tradition of formalism in architecture, which was descendant from the works of Rowe, and most important, before him, Modern Architecture.

Alan Colquhoun's contribution

Alan Colquhoun is perhaps one of the most important figures who imported Formalist ideas to architectural criticism, with references to both German and Russian Formalist trajectories. While acknowledging that the "opacity of the work of art," became an important ingredient of 20th century avant-garde, he identified that Modern Architecture, as a part of the larger movement of artistic avant-garde, was not free from the theory's influence (Colquhoun, 1983). Colquhoun conceptualized and promoted "opacity of a work of art," as an important aspect of architectural modernism as opposed to its two problematic contents: historical determinism and the problem of tradition. He argued that, while avoiding historical determinism, and "by giving priority to the autonomy of artistic disciplines [opacity] allows, even demands, the persistence of tradition as something that is internalized in these disciplines" (Colquhoun, 1983). Tradition, in this conception refers to "a body of objective facts," that could be taken and transformed by the creative act. Actually, "tradition" was not something formalism repel, but a valuable content which already existed in the initial model. But, this was apparently Colquhoun's discovery within the theory, which would perhaps never be enunciated as such by the original creators of it. At first, this might seem incompatible with the idea of *Zeitgeist*, possibly both Wölfflin and Riegl would never put it forward as such, but still, it was there in their treatises, and as it was illustrated by both Rowe and Colquhoun, without the idea of strong *Zeitgeist*, and without (historical) determinism, Formalism was still intact, and yet more powerful.

Questioning the nature of change in architecture by projecting a Formalist model, Colquhoun (1981) proposed that, it involves a "dialectical process, in which aesthetic norms are modified by external forces to achieve a partial synthesis." Operationally, the process of change involves a process of exclusion, as it was illustrated in the works of Kandinsky or Schönberg where "traditional formal devices were not completely abandoned but were transformed and given a new emphasis by the exclusion of ideologically repulsive iconic elements" (Colquhoun, 1969). The process of exclusion was viewed as a device for seeing the forms "as if for the first time and with naiveté" and "it is a process which we have to adopt if we are to keep and renew our awareness of the meanings which can be carried by forms" (Colquhoun, 1969). Here once more we see a reference to formalism; the primacy of the perceptual, and an emphasis on a required distance from which was already known to us. This conceptualization further provided a definition of the nature of change in architecture. This was actually an advance on what Wölfflin and Riegl have done previously, providing a transformed explanation and a new conception.

Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre's contribution

Actually, both Colquhoun and Rowe, and consequently, their followers could be evaluated as belonging to the same circle; affected from same epistemological and conceptual framework, and from same set of problems and conditions operational in the formulation of their own version of formalism. Being apart from such a framework, and controlled by a different set of problems and conditions, Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre's (1987) work has its own unique contribution and has a particular importance in the history of formalism in architecture. The final chapter of their book *Classical Architecture: The Poetics of Order* could be viewed as a direct attempt for full application of a set of formalist ideas to architecture.

In questioning the formal patterns of the classical building, Tzonis and Lefaivre argued that, their "formal patterns" relate to reality in "a diametrically different, nonmimetic way." With reference to the ideas' conception in Russian formalism, this differentiation is called "foregrounding" and "strangemaking." In this sense "poetic identity of a building depends not on its stability, on its function, or on the efficiency of the means of its production but on the way in which all the above have been limited, bent, subordinated by purely formal requirements (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 1987: 276). Strangemaking enables reorganization of the existing reality "on a higher cognitive level." It provides a new frame within which one can "cleanse away the obsolete way of understanding reality." In their terms, "the means are formal, the effect is cognitive, the purpose moral and social" (Tzonis & Lefaivre, 1987: 278).

The implied model here is quite interesting; on the one hand, there is an explicit reference to the building's stability, to its function, or to the efficiency of the means of its production; and through tectonics without which architecture cannot exist. On the other hand, it was also proposed that, which makes a building a piece of architecture is not these aspects but the way it deviates from them. With reference to a core formalist idea, they argued that "what distinguishes a classical building as a poetic object from ordinary buildings is there, on the surface, in its formal organization," but, beyond it, "selected aspects from the reality of a building are recast into formal patterns." The resulting quality of architecturalness is not a portrait of reality; it is its critical reconstruction. This is actually a unique and excellent

reformulation of a formalist concept, literariness, to match the specificities of architecture without losing its essence in its conception in literary criticism.

In their model, Tzonis and Lefaivre did not exclude tradition out of the equation. In their conception, intrinsically “defamiliarization” or “strangemaking,” stands against “citationism” or what they call “samemaking,” or “overfamiliarization,” two new concepts introduced as a part of their formalist treatise. The concepts “samemaking” and “overfamiliarization” were great innovations, defining a special relation with the tradition, the one that freely quotes and imitates the past without a critical stance. As it was stated by Tzonis and Lefaivre (1987: 179) “This is the logic of deception, through the piecemeal reuse of classical components ... which sets up the building as a simulacra of reality, an ‘as if’ ‘scenographic’ reality in the place of the foregrounded reality of the critical worldmaking.”

Like Rowe, Colquhoun, and Whites, Tzonis & Lefaivre found Formalism as an attractive model before them. Their field of application was rather different, yet successful, showing the versatility of the model.

The truth is, if you're not a formalist, you're probably just asleep.
—Judith Wolin

4. Conclusion

Perhaps the first thing to say about formalism in architecture or architectural formalism is that, it cannot be interpreted as one of the genealogical line as the examined mainstream Formalist traditions. It must rather be evaluated as a “hybrid breed,” which was strongly influenced by the aforementioned mainstream formalist traditions, but to that degree tied to its own tradition, particularly the “formalism” within Modern Architecture. As we have already reviewed in the works of Rowe, Colquhoun, Tzonis and Lefaivre, many notions, such as opacity, defamiliarization, and literariness, were imported from German and Russian Formalist traditions to architecture, each import involving a certain deviation from the notion’s original formulation. This first showed that a strong conceptual inheritance persists, second, that adaptation of formalist ideas to architecture was not merely a problem of foregrounding and reinterpretation but more of an adaptation process: Apparently Architecture, by nature demanded a different version of formalism. Considering the specificities of their time and the specific problems they addressed, adaptations were generally successful, mainly providing a conceptual framework for these scholars for explaining and evaluating the situation within which they were embedded, and sometimes helping them to producing answers to the problems they were confronted.

As an epistemology, despite its potentials, one might think Formalism is an outdated model incompetent to deal with the present situation, or it was already explored and exhausted, and it has nothing much to offer. But one must also not forget that Formalism was one of the epistemological sources of the present post-positivist models, and still, it is not essentially alien to what we “rely on” at present. Actually, since it precisely came out of the specificities and problem situations of art (and architecture) and was precisely formulated as a response to the specificities and problems of the field, it is highly compatible with architecture.

All in all, beginning from its original formulation, Formalism was a rigorous model in many aspects which architectural theory and thinking held on to. It was then an attractive, versatile and successful model for architecture; a

cure for determinism, and positivism. Considering our present situation, it still could be.

Who is afraid of formalism anyway?

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Notes

- (1) Apart from the European Formalist tradition, of course, there are other important traditions of formalism, such as "New Criticism." New Criticism was a school in literary criticism, flourished in the USA, almost at the same time with Russian Formalism. They presented a set of ideas, which have many common points with their Russian Formalist counterparts. For a comprehensive comparative analysis of the two schools, see Ewa Thompson's (1971) book *Russian Formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism: a Comparative Study*.
- (2) The school consisted of two "strongholds." The Moscow Linguistic Circle, was founded in 1915, and the Petrograd "Society for the Study of Poetic Language" (Opoyaz) was formed in 1916 (Erich, 1973: 627).
- (3) Following a different path, many of the ideas of the "formalist epistemology," are inherited in the contemporary post-positivist epistemologies, making their way to the present day. For example, within the context of architecture, such a link has been made in Danilo Udovicki-Selb's (1997) article titled "Between Formalism and Deconstruction: Hans Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Aesthetics of Reception" where the author proposes that the works of the Russian Formalists is the epistemological origin of Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics.
- (4) This does not mean that Kantian and Neo-Kantian thinking is the only intellectual source of the formalist schools. First of all, these schools cannot be evaluated independent from a field-specific conceptual inheritance (i.e. the literary tradition). In addition, they were provided by the problems and problem situations of their own time and own field, in turn, seeking to address the specific problems and problem situations belonging to that field.
- (5) Neither Russian Formalists, nor research on their studies, establish a direct relation between Russian Formalism and Kantian or neo-Kantian thinking. However, there is a strong relationship, through the Symbolists, the predecessors of Russian Formalism, particularly the works of Andrej Belyj, from which they learned much. This was also observed by Leon Trotsky (1971), too, in his book "Literature and Revolution" where he argued that "the sources of [Russian Formalists'] movement are in Kant's theory of forms" (Thompson, 1971: 32). This was actually an accusation, rather than an objective observation, which later became a common argument against Russian Formalists.
- (6) Actually, Hans von Marées was a painter, and he did not write much. However, his thoughts and creative processes are known to be strongly influential on Fiedler and Hildebrand's studies.

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(Epistemolojik) formalizm ve mimarlığa etkisi: Kısa bir İnceleme

Formalizm (Biçimcilik) terimi, mimarlıktaki kötü itibarına rağmen, en azından belli bir anlamı ile mimarlığa da etkisi olmuş saygın bir “düşünce bütününe” işaret eder. “Epistemolojik” Formalizm olarak adlandırılabilir bu “düşünce bütünü,” iki farklı fakat ilişkili formalist geleneğe bağlıdır: 19.yy sonlarında, Hans von Marées, Conrad Fiedler, Adolph von Hildebrand, Alois Riegl, ve Heinrich Wölfflin gibi sanat eleştirmenleri ve kuramcılarının çalışmalarında ortaya çıkan Alman Formalizmi ve Boris Eichenbaum, Roman Jakobson, Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Tomashevsky, ve Yuri Tynyanov gibi düşünürlerin çalışmalarıyla 1915 ile 1930 arası gündemde kalan ve daha sonra zorla baskılanan Rus Formalizmi. Orijinal olarak görsel sanatlar ve yazın kuramı için formüle edilen bu gelenekler, kendi dönemlerinin ve alanlarının belli sorunlarını hedeflediler. Ancak gene de geniş bir perspektiften bakıldığında, bu gelenekler, sanat alanında aynı koşullarda ve aynı ideolojik ideallerden türemiş, Avrupa Biçimci Hareketi'nin [Kunstwissenschaft], bir parçası olarak görülebilirler. Aslında bu gelenekler, sanat ve sanat eleştirisi alanında sürekli su yüzüne çıkan sığ “biçimci” akımların aksine bize farklı bir gündem, “formalist epistemoloji” olarak adlandırılabilir, bir düşünce birikimi sunarlar. Bu biçimci geleneklerin “epistemoloji” ile birlikte anılması rastlantı değildir: Alman Formalizmi, dönemin uzun süredir hükümranlılığını sürdüren, İdealizm ve Pozitivizmin krizine karşı bir alternatif epistemoloji olarak formüle edilmiştir. Rus biçimciliği doğrudan bir epistemolojiyi hedef almasa da önerdikleri, bir epistemoloji olarak, Alman geleneğinin önerdiklerinden daha az değildir.

Bu okulların söylemlerinde filizlenen “formalist epistemoloji,” bir çok açıdan aslında o kadar güçlü ve işe yarardır ki, temel düşünceleri mimarlık da dahil olmak üzere birçok farklı Alana uygulanabilirler. Dolayısı ile Modern Mimarlık'ın çöküşünün hemen sonrasında hem mimarlık pratiğinde hem de mimarlık kuramında “Epistemolojik” biçimciliğin bazı temel düşüncelerini mimarlık alanına uygulama yönünde daha belirgin ve bilinçli çabalar görmemiz şaşırtıcı değildir.

Bu çalışma, Formalizmin mimarlık üzerindeki etkisine ve bu etkinin doğasına ışık tutmak amacı ile “Epistemolojik” Formalizmin bazı temel düşüncelerini Alman ve Rus Formalist geleneklerindeki kökenlerinde gözden geçirerek, bu düşüncelerin mimarlıktaki izlerini arayıp, takip etmektedir.

Bu amaçla, biçimci geleneğin bazı temel düşünceleri ve bazı temel kavramları altında, Alman Biçimci geleneğinin ana figürleri olan Conrad Fiedler, Adolph von Hildebrand, Alois Riegl, ve Heinrich Wölfflin'in temel bazı eserleri incelenmiştir. Bu incelemede, özellikle biçimci geleneğe öz bazı düşünce içerikleri ön plana çıkarılıp tarihsel bir perspektifte ilişkisel olarak ele alınmıştır. Bu temel düşüncelerin Alman Biçimci geleneği içinde olduğu kadar, Rus Biçimci geleneğinde Boris Eichenbaum, Roman Jakobson, Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Tomashevsky, ve Yuri Tynyanov gibi düşünürlerin bazı temel söylemlerinde yeniden nasıl yorumlandıkları, yeni bir alana ve yeni bir sorun durumuna nasıl adapte edildikleri, bu bağlamda nasıl evrildikleri incelenmiştir.

Biçimciliğin mimarlık alanına etkilerinin incelendiği bölüm ise tartışmayı, mimarlık alanında Colin Rowe, Whites, Alan Colquhoun, Alexander Tzonis ve Lianne Lefaivre gibi bazı temel figürler altında devam ettirir. Bu figürlerin söylemlerinde biçimci geleneğin bazı düşüncelerinin nasıl yeniden yorumlandıkları, biçimci düşüncenin mimarlık alanına nasıl adapte edildiği ve bu adaptasyonların doğasına yönelik bir sorgulama geliştirir.

Sonuç olarak, mimari biçimciliğin, ana biçimci kuramlardan çok etkilenmekle birlikte, kendi geleneğinden (ve özellikle Modern Mimarlığın içindeki biçimcilikten) etkilenmiş, kendine has bir tür olduğu söylenmiştir. Rowe, Colquhoun, Tzonis and Lefaivre, gibi mimarlık alanından kuramcılarının çalışmalarında incelendiği hali ile opacity, defamiliarization, ve literariness (opaklık, anlaşılmaz kılma, edebilik) gibi biçimci düşüncelerin Alman ve Rus biçimci geleneklerinden alındığı ancak bunları mimarlık alanının özelliklerine adapte edilirken bu özelliklere göre yeniden yorumlandığı

belirtilmiştir. Bu sebeple arada güçlü bir kalıt ilişkisi olsa da mimarlığın “farklı” ya da “özel” bir tür biçimcilik talep ettiği vurgulanmıştır.

Biçimciliğin özellikle bir epistemoloji olarak mimarlık için hala söyleyecek şeyleri olduğu, taşıdığı potansiyelin bir zamanlar Modern Mimarlığın belirlenimciliğine, tarihsiciliğine ve alanla uyumsuz pozitivismine çare olduğu, günümüz koşulları göz önüne alındığında bunun hala geçerli olabileceği vurgulanmıştır.