

Chapter 2

The Theory of ‘In-Between’

The aim of this chapter is to provide a thematic overview of the theory of Critical Regionalism as a theory of ‘In-Between’. I explain how Kenneth Frampton’s project of Critical Regionalism combines the two traditions of phenomenology and critical thinking to establish a constructive dialogue between Habermas’s unfinished project of Modernity and Heidegger’s insistence on being as becoming. There follows a thematic overview of the central concepts of Critical Regionalism, incorporated into the body of a set of dichotomies which create a ‘site of confrontation’, such as place/space, tectonic/scenographic, and *avant-garde/arrière-garde*. I will argue in conclusion that Critical Regionalism presents itself as ‘the theory in-between’ and hence produces a generative space for exchange, dialogue, and simultaneous presence enriched with the never-ending process of reinterpretation or new creation (*Khalq-i Jadid*).

2.1 Two Lines of Critical Thought

Frampton’s critical approach to architecture combines two traditions of phenomenology¹ and critical thinking and establishes a constructive dialogue between Habermas’s ‘unfinished project of Modernity’ and Heidegger’s insistence on ‘being as becoming’. On this parallel interaction he writes:

Anyone who is familiar with my writing will at once detect the influence of two different lines of critical thought which in the main are German in origin—lines stemming from Hegel and Marx and culminating in Gramsci and the Frankfurt School; and another line, stemming from Nietzsche and Husserl, the school which encompasses in its range both

¹Although Frampton never employs phenomenology in a classical way, his architectural thought is permeated by themes and concerns that are essentially phenomenological, thus making a constructive, though indirect, contribution to the phenomenological discourse in architecture. I have highlighted Frampton’s contribution to the phenomenological discourse in Shirazi (2013).

phenomenology and existentialism and stretches to the writings of Heidegger and Hanna Arendt (Frampton 1989: 79).

Nonetheless, at the first glance, the influence of Hanna Arendt and the Frankfurt School is much more evident than that of the others. In the introduction to his book *Modern architecture, a critical history* (1992), Frampton states that he is like many other scholars of his generation influenced by 'a Marxist interpretation of history', though he never follows a distinct method of Marxist analysis. He notes that the critical theory of the Frankfurt School has deeply coloured his thought and made him 'aware of the dark side of the Enlightenment which, in the name of an unreasonable reason, has brought man to a situation where he begins to be as alienated from his own production as from the natural world' (Frampton 1992: 9). For Frampton, the Frankfurt School is 'the only valid basis upon which to develop a form of (post) modern critical culture'² (Frampton 1988: 63). Hanna Arendt and her ideas are a major source of inspiration for Frampton: '*The Human Condition* (1958) was and still is an important reference for my work. It's not a Marxist thesis, but certainly a political one' (Frampton 2003: 42).

This influence grants a twofold flavour to Frampton's architectural thinking recognizable in his works and writings. On the one hand, his works advocate a critical approach to the overwhelming tendencies and patterns of thought supported by the master narrative of techno-science. On the other hand, he carves out the superficial and catches the essence and origin of things and sheds light on the phenomenological aspects of the environment. Ultimately, this twofold departure point culminates in a mediatory position which benefits from the advantages of both traditions but stands somewhere in-between: a space of dialogue and confrontation.

2.2 Hybrid World Culture

The paradox of becoming modern but returning to sources, that is, inheriting an old, dormant civilization but taking part in universal civilization—as highlighted in Ricoeur's argument in Chap. 1—is interpreted by Frampton as a core and central theme for Critical Regionalism: to be modern and traditional, universal and regional simultaneously. Since the beginning of the Enlightenment, Frampton suggests, 'civilization' has been concerned with instrumental reason, but 'culture' with the specifics of expression, the realization of the being, and the evolution of its collective psychosocial reality.

²It needs to be mentioned that Frampton's interest in developing a postmodern critical culture does not mean he is in favour of postmodernist architecture. As will be elaborated later in this chapter, Frampton criticizes postmodernism for its superficial historicism and populism.

The conflict between civilization and culture increased dramatically from the mid-twentieth century and affected the structure of cities at the expense of the old urban fabric, which was progressively overlaid by the free-standing high-rise and the serpentine freeway. This victory of universal civilization over the locally inflected culture culminated in a mixture of residential stock with tertiary and secondary industry transformed to a *Bürolandschaft* cityscape. In this context of extensive universalization, Frampton advocates a ‘hybrid world culture’ as the result of cross-fertilization between rooted culture and universal civilization. A regional culture may transform to a rooted tradition only if it is open to the influences of foreign culture and civilization (Frampton 1983: 148). This transition could be fulfilled by means of a Critical Regionalist approach, which stands against the Populism, sentimentalism, and ironic vernacularism of the postmodern culture. While vulgar Populism aims at functioning as a ‘communicative or instrumental sign’ and sublimates immediate desire through a simulation devoid of any critical perception of reality, Critical Regionalism is a dialectical expression: ‘It self-consciously seeks to deconstruct universal Modernism, in terms of values and images which are quintessentially rooted, and at the same time to adulterate those basic references with paradigms drawn from alien sources’ (Frampton 1982c: 77).

In this sense, the idea of Critical Regionalism³ is an essentially cultural strategy entailing both *world culture* and *universal civilization*, and is contingent upon a process of double mediation. “In the first place, it has to ‘deconstruct’ the overall spectrum of world culture which it inevitably inherits; in the second, it has to achieve through synthetic contradiction, a manifest critique of universal civilization” (Frampton 2002a: 82). Deconstructing the world culture implies preventing any formal and explicit derivation of the cultural signs and motives, but reinterpreting them newly and implicitly. In fact, the attempt to create a ‘hybrid world culture’ out of the ‘rooted culture’ means being both local and universal:

Local in the sense that there is a modern necessity to reinterpret native tradition without degenerating into kitsch historicism; universal in the sense that the cultural ‘void’ (aporia) of the developed or developing countries arises out of the fact that the innocence implied by the continuum of the vernacular in any profound sense is irrevocably lost (Frampton 1982d: 106).

As Kelbaugh notes, Critical Regionalism is critical in two senses: it is a critique of extensive universalization and modernization, and a critique of sentimental and nostalgic practices of regional culture (Kelbaugh 2007). Here, a set of themes and principles are introduced which illuminate the central principles of Critical Regionalism in Frampton’s opinion.

³The term Critical Regionalism was first coined in 1981 by Tzonis and Lefaivre in 1981 but later developed by Kenneth Frampton who endowed it with its distinctive character. For these authors’ interpretation of Critical Regionalism see: (Lefaivre and Tzonis 1985, 1990, 2003; Tzonis and Lefaivre 1991).

2.3 Resistance on the Margins

Production of 'world culture' in the above-mentioned sense is to be found not in the dominant cultural and communicational centres of the world, but rather, on the 'periphery' of the so-called developed world, in places with a traditional cantonal identity, or 'on the fringes which have not been conquered by consumer society' (Pallasmaa 1988: 28) to use Pallasmaa's interpretation, because 'these peripheral nodes were able to sustain a more multi-layered complexity of architectural culture' (Frampton 1988: 55). These 'borderline manifestations' characterized as 'interstices of freedom' (Frampton 1983) are strong enough to establish a self-conscious and local expression based on the 'sensuous, concrete and tactile elements of either a topographic or tectonic nature' committed to the modernization process on the one hand, and capable of quantifying "the received consumerist civilization through a consciously cultivated 'culture of place'" on the other (Frampton 1988: 55).

By these explanations Frampton points to those regional 'schools' which aim at representing and serving particular constituencies. They advocate a strong sense of identity and follow 'an anti-centrist sentiment—a discernible aspiration for some kind of cultural, economic and potential independence' (Frampton 1982c: 77). They are not a collective effort, but a series of talented individual works with a profound commitment to a particular culture.

This marginal manifestation produces a kind of 'architecture of resistance'; an architecture which stands far from the mainstream of 'starchitecture' and resists its ambitions of dominance. The architecture of resistance, for Frampton, means challenging the progressive myth of the *avant-garde* and turning towards the *arrière garde*, to the strategy of revealing differences. This 'difference' lies in the architects' 'different approach to the task of place creation in late-capitalist urban economy' and their resistance to the placelessness of Megalopolitan development (Frampton 1982d: 85).

2.4 Scenography of Postmodernism

According to Frampton, although the postmodern phenomenon was an understandable reaction to the extensive modernization of the time, aiming to escape from a contemporary existence dominated by scientific-industrial values, ironically it followed the rule of the production/consumerism cycle and thus "reduced architecture to a condition in which the 'package deal' arranged by the builder/developer determines the carcass and the essential substance of the work, while the architect is reduced to contributing a suitably seductive mask" (Frampton 1992: 307). Due to this general principal of postmodern architecture, namely the conscious ruination of style and the cannibalization of architectural form, which resulted from following the rules of the production/consumption cycle, the resulting architectural works of banal historicism—be it the AT & T building by Phillip

Johnson or the Portland Building by Michael Graves—come to much the same thing: the Populist format of Venturi’s ‘decorated shed’. Frampton writes that:

The impulse is scenographic rather than tectonic, so that not only is there a total schism between the inner substance and the outer form, but the form itself either repudiates its constructional origin or dissipates its palpability. In Post-Modern architecture classical and vernacular ‘quotations’ tend to interpenetrate each other disconcertingly (Ibid.: 30).

Thus, for Frampton postmodernism is a pseudo-avant-garde reactionary attitude which tries to present a ‘reconciliatory historicism’. Its approach is resuscitating or reinterpreting normative forms of the premodern bourgeois culture with varying degrees of irony and/or cynicism (Frampton 1982a: 25). As a populist attitude postmodernism advocates a simple-minded attempt to revive the hypothetical forms of a lost vernacular, but is not able to propose a critical attitude towards reality.

2.5 Dichotomies of Critical Regionalism

If Critical Regionalism is a marginal movement which resists the overwhelming values of the ‘centre’ (as characterized by the overemphasis on the one side at the expense of the other, for instance, the universal at expense of the regional; high technology at the expense of local crafts, and extensive modernization at the expense of tradition), the main task of Critical Regionalism would be not a naïve highlighting of the opposite pole, but rather to put both ends of the spectrum into continuous interaction through which a constructive dialogue may be born. As Frampton states, this approach ‘should be seen not so much as categorical opposites between which we must choose, but rather as the points of dialectic interaction’ (Frampton 1991: 38). These opposing pairs create a ‘site of confrontation’ where there exists the state of an ongoing tension and not a positive/good against negative/bad opposition (Frampton 1996a); they are as ‘irreducible poles which cannot overcome the state of tension which arises from their conjunction’ (Frampton 1988: 58). There now follows a discussion of the main dichotomies constituting the central concerns of Critical Regionalism.

2.5.1 *Place/Space*

Frampton criticizes the existing disability of architects and planners in creating ‘places’ and the growing placelessness which leaves few places we may significantly choose to be in. He writes, “In our ubiquitous ‘non-place’ we congratulate ourselves regularly on our pathological capacity for abstraction; on our commitment to the norms of statistical coordination; on our bondage to the transactional processes of objectification that will admit to neither the luxury nor the necessity of place” (Frampton 1996b: 443). This placelessness was formulated by Melvin

Webber, where he described future cities of interaction as 'non-place urban realms' untied to a specific location, a 'community without propinquity' in which traditional relations between people are not valid anymore (Webber 1968). Webber argues that the ideas of city and region, as well as the idea of community, have been traditionally tied to the idea of 'place'; they have been distinguishable by the fact of territorial separation. However, currently the necessary condition is no longer the propinquity aspect of 'place' but accessibility, a condition of permanent moving, relocating, and change. This understanding of the city and community is essentially critical for Frampton. This 'non-place urban realm', he argues, leads to a 'rush city' which leaves no room for a true 'place'. The 'mass' culture, the billboard facades, extensive technological rationalization, all indicate the loss of 'place'.

In this condition of placelessness Frampton advocates revitalizing capacities of place in creating belonging and interaction, and suggests that the central principle of Critical Regionalism is *place* in its Heideggerian meaning on the one hand, and the *space of public appearance* on the other. He writes:

If any central principle of critical regionalism can be isolated, then it is surely a commitment to place rather than space, or, in Heideggerian terminology, to the nearness of *raum*, rather than the distance of *spatium*. This stress on place may also be construed as affording the political *space of public appearance* as formulated by Hanna Arendt (Frampton 1983: 162).

Frampton's suggestion of a return to 'place' and 'defined boundary' in the context of the universal triumph of the 'non-place urban realm' and apocalyptic growth of the megalopolis is coloured by the ideas of Martin Heidegger (1993) who in his seminal work of *Building Dwelling Thinking* introduces the German word for space and place (*Raum*), contrary to the Latin or antique abstract understanding of space (*extensio*, *spatium*) as an endless continuum of evenly subdivided spatial components or integers.⁴ *Raum* designates a place that is freed for settlement. It means a space for which room has been made, a boundary. But '[a] boundary' Heidegger remarks, 'is not that at which something stops, but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing' (Heidegger 1993: 356). Based on this interpretation Frampton comes to the conclusion that "the condition of 'dwelling' and hence ultimately of 'being' can only take place in a domain that is clearly bounded" (Frampton 2002a: 85). 'Only such a defined boundary', he emphasized, "will permit the built form to stand against the endless processal flux of the megalopolis" (ibid.: 85).

On the other hand, Frampton reminds us of the importance of Arendt's statement where she writes: 'Only where men live so close together that the potentialities of action are always present can power remain with them' (Arendt 1998: 201). This is of high importance taking into account the social dilemma of the extensive modernization of the twentieth century which disintegrated the permanent values of

⁴Heidegger has never talked about architecture and urban planning systematically, but has made extensive use of architectural references for conceptualizing his approach to space, place, dwelling, and other architectural concepts. For more details, see Shirazi (2007, 2014).

society, atomized public buildings into a network of abstract institutions, disrupted the organic connection between the people, and generated an isolated society where the inhabitants leave separately and in a disconnected manner. Frampton argues that the ‘bounded place-form’ as a public sphere produces a ‘space of human appearance’ in which people live closely together and thus the potentiality for action is always present. The ‘bounded domain’ presents a vivid urban life full of social contacts and cultural awareness, in contrast to the ideological concept of ‘community without propinquity’ proposed by Webber (1968), in which a ‘non-place urban realm’ devoid of any public sphere is introduced.

This potentially liberative ‘bounded domain’ opens the user to manifold experiences (Frampton 2002a: 86), works as a ‘public sphere’, to use Habermas’s terminology,⁵ and is a political realm for the embodiment of the collective. The qualitative character of place, hence, not only arises from its social meaning but also implies establishing an articulated realm for our ‘coming into being’. Frampton concludes that ‘The receptivity and sensitive resonance of a place—to wit its sensate validity *qua* place—depends on its stability in the everyday sense and second, on the appropriateness and richness of the socio-cultural experience it offers” (Frampton 1996b: 444).

This defined boundary in the urban context could be realized in the form of an ‘urban enclave’, derived from reinterpreting traditional typologies of streets, urban blocks, quarters, and so on, an ‘urban morphology’ which may entertain “the prospect of creating or sustaining ‘cities within cities’” (Frampton 1982b: 45). This approach becomes more meaningful when one considers the existing extensive tendency to universalism, instrumentalism and commodification of culture. By means of creating ‘urban enclaves’ and establishing micro-environmental contexts, the rapidly growing sense of placelessness in megacity regions may be suspended and the inhabitants may have the opportunity to live close to the essences and origins. Frampton writes:

Critical Regionalism would seem to offer the sole possibility of resisting the rapacity of this tendency. Its salient cultural precept is ‘place’ creation; the general model to be employed in all future development is the enclave—that is to say, the bounded fragment against which the ceaseless inundation of a place-less, alienating consumerism will find itself momentarily checked (Frampton 1983: 162).

This strategy of place-form should be considered by every architect in every commission within the rapacious developing urban settlements and where necessary, ‘the work should create its own micro-environmental context’ (Frampton 1998: 15) in various forms from a single building to an urban complex. The urban pattern of ‘low-rise, high-density’ can be considered as the most suitable

⁵The idea of the Public Sphere (*Öffentlichkeit* in German) has been theorized by Habermas in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere—An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (German edition 1962, English Translation 1989). For Habermas events and occasions become public when, in contrast to exclusive affairs, they are available for all. Related to the notion of the ‘common world’ as suggested by Arendt (1998), the public sphere is a realm of our social life, open to all, in which something approaching public opinion can be formed.

morphology for urban enclaves. Frampton argues that in fast developing cities in which techno-commercial logic increases distribution of high-rise structures, shopping malls, and so on, the traditional city form, above all the 'low-rise, high-density' pattern, provides us with some helpful pointers.

2.5.2 *Tectonic/Scenographic*

Frampton argues that under the current status of architecture which reduces the architectural expression to the status of a commodity, culture is more 'scenographic representation' than architectonic, and 'only serves to strengthen the scenographic or imagistic reception/perception of built form' (Frampton 1988: 60). In this condition, instead of recapitulating avant-gardist tropes or falling into a historicist pastiche, 'We may return to the structural unit as the irreducible essence of architectural form' (Frampton 2002b: 92). This indicates that building is more tectonic⁶ than scenographic, and is first and foremost an act of construction rather than a discourse predicated on the surface, volume and plan. He writes: "Building is ontological rather than representational in character and that built form is a presence rather than something standing for an absence. In Martin Heidegger's terminology we may think of it as a 'thing' rather than a 'sign'" (ibid.: 93). Tectonics synthesizes the two modes of the technological and scenographic: the former as the pragmatic response to a given condition and the latter as a mask or symbolic content embodied in the surface of a work, and thus, above all, 'a poetics of construction' (Frampton 1998: 231). Tectonics alludes not to a mechanical revelation of construction, but to the potentially poetic manifestation of structure in its original Greek sense as an act of making and revealing.

In contrast to the overwhelming scenographic character of contemporary architecture, there are some architects who go beyond the superficiality of scenography and produce a tectonic piece of architectural work. For example, Kahn's unique contribution to tectonics is rooted in this belief that 'tectonic structure, rather than mass form or type, must be pursued as the first condition of monumental form' (Frampton 1995: 209). In other words, Kahn's architecture rejects any relation to historical form, and instead inclines towards being modern but not utopian, referential but not eclectic. The geometrical essence of archetypal, universal forms imbued with the tactile presence of subordinate components such as the arch, window and door grants his architecture a tectonic character in which the

⁶A term of Greek origin, tectonic is derived from *tecton* and signifies a carpenter or builder, and this stems from the Sanskrit *taksan*, referring to the craft of carpentry and the use of an axe. Moreover, the Latin term *architectus* is derived from the Greek *archi* (a person of authority) and *tekon* (a craftsman or builder). The term 'tectonic' appeared in English for the first time in a glossary in 1656 meaning 'belonging to building'. This term appeared in the middle of the nineteenth century in a modern sense with Karl Bötticher's *The Tectonic of the Hellenes* and Gottfried Semper's *The Four Elements of Architecture*.

avoidances of how it is made may be seen and comprehended. Kahn's tectonic attitude is well incorporated in the Kimbell Art Museum⁷ where the interplay between tectonic form and changing light is manifested throughout the space in which 'one dominant tectonic element, namely a barrel vault, determines the overall character of the piece' (ibid.: 238). In this building, the stereotomic of the earthwork is integrated into the site in a proper way, and the rite of passage provokes a tactile experience through which:

We find ourselves returned to the tactility of the tectonic in all its aspects; to a meeting between the essence of things and the existence of beings, to that pre-Socratic moment, lying outside time, that is at once both modern and antique (ibid.: 246).

Jorn Utzon's architecture represents two interrelated principles, the constructional logic of tectonic form and the syntactical logic of geometry. These principles, according to Frampton, are united through a concern to topography, climate, time, material and craft, and give a particular character to his buildings, as we can see in the case of Sydney Opera House where the Semperian distinction of earthwork and roof work⁸ is clearly perceivable. In Bagsvaerd Church⁹ Utzon's tectonic approach is strongly present (Fig. 2.1). A combination of the occidental and the oriental, the Nordic Gothic Revival and the pagoda form, this church refers to the celestial vault of the Christian tradition in the shell form and presents the Semperian elements in the form of earthwork, hearth (altar), roof work and infill wall.¹⁰ Of Utzon's architecture Frampton writes:

⁷Kimbell Art Museum accommodates the art collection of the Kimbell Art Foundation. The main building, designed by Louis Kahn, manifests his individual and significant architectural thinking on space, memory, structure and tradition. Recently Renzo Piano, the Italian architect, who had once worked in Kahn's office, designed an extension to the museum that was respectfully in the spirit of Kahn's building.

⁸Semper distinguished between two separate material procedures in built form: tectonics of the frame (roofwork) and stereotomics of compressive mass (earthwork). While the former addresses members of varying lengths conjoined to encompass a spatial field, the latter is constructed through the piling up of identical units (the term stereotomics deriving from the Greek term for solid, *stereos* and for cutting, *-tomia*)" (Frampton 2002b: 95). This distinction has some ontological implications: "[f]ramework tends towards the aerial and the dematerialization of mass, whereas the mass form is telluric, embedding itself ever deeper into the earth. The one tends towards light and the other towards dark. These gravitational opposites, the immateriality of the frame and the materiality of the mass, may be said to symbolize the two cosmological opposites to which they aspire: the sky and the earth. Despite our highly secularized techno-scientific age, these polarities still largely constitute the experiential limits of our lives' (ibid.).

⁹Completed in 1976, this church is located on the northern outskirts of Copenhagen.

¹⁰After seeing a model of a Caribbean hut in the Great Exhibition of 1851, Semper proposed 'four elements' as an anthropological construct comprising: (1) a hearth, as the symbolic, public nexus of the work, (2) an earthwork (podium), (3) a framework (structure) and a roof considered together and (4) an enclosing membrane (wall) or the woven infill framework. He also attributed certain crafts to every element: metallurgy and ceramics to the hearth, masonry to the earthwork, carpentry to the structural frame, and textiles to the art of enclosure, side walls and roof.



Fig. 2.1 Bagsvaerd Church, interior view (Author)

Utzon believes that the poetics of built form must derive in large measure from the totality of its tectonic presence and that it is this, plus an essential critical reflection on the status of the work in hand, that constitutes the mainspring of architectural form (ibid.: 292).

2.5.3 *Avant-Garde/Arrière-Garde*

Frampton criticizes different modes of avant-gardism, claiming that it presents a superficial attitude towards history, the past and even the present. For example, Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto was anti-classic, anti-Gothic and pro-industrial, intending to 'abrogate memory and to proclaim a new and universal culture which would be predicated on nothing other than naked instrumentality' (Frampton 1982a: 22). This brutal instrumentality, celebrating the triumph of the machine, denied that the past, or even the present, was oriented towards an absolute future based on the eternal omnipresent speed, and conceived architecture as a gigantic machine determined solely by the laws of material resistance, statics and dynamics. Consequently, the human being was reduced to a blind instrument for realizing this absolute destiny, without any relationship to the past; memory, tradition, history.

In the condition of extensive avant-gardism, Frampton states, making architecture is possible only through a critical practice with an *arrière-garde* attitude; establishing distance from the Enlightenment myth of progress on the one hand, and the reactionary return to the architectonic forms of the preindustrial past on the other. *Arrière-gardism* has to oppose intensive modernization as well as an unrealistic and formal return to the past: 'A critical *arrière-garde* has to remove itself from both the optimization of advanced technology and the ever-present tendency to regress into nostalgic historicism or the glibly decorative' (Frampton 2002a: 81).

Only through such a critical *arrière-gardism* are we able to establish and enrich a resistant but generative culture, at the same time that we take advantage of the universal technique.

2.5.4 *Topographic/Artificial*

The extensive technical and universal approach to the site in modern architecture, Frampton argues, culminated in a condition of placelessness, transformed the architectural work to a free-standing object, and thus turned the built form into a commodity free from any culture-based linkage to the topography. To resist commodification, instead of constructing a totally flat site through massive earth-works, achieved through bulldozing the existing topography, the work of architecture should propose a more dialectical relation to nature. It should do this by highlighting the topography of the site, or in Mario Botta's words by means of 'building the site':

The specific culture of the region—that is to say, its history in both a geological and agricultural sense—becomes inscribed into the form and realization of the work. This inscription, which arises out of 'in-laying' the building into the site, has many levels of significance, for it has a capacity to embody, in built form, the prehistory of the place, its archaeological past and its subsequent cultivation and transformation across time. Through this layering into the site the idiosyncrasies of place find their expression without falling into sentimentality (Frampton 2002a: 87).

This passage demonstrates the Critical Regionalist approach to the site. By means of 'building the site', the culture of a region, consisting of the 'prehistory' of the place, its 'archaeological past', and its subsequent 'cultivation and transformation' across the time, is embodied in the built form or put into the site. Thus, 'building the site' implies not only a physical construction, but also a 'cultural intervention'; constructing the existing site by means of a multidimensional rereading or reinterpreting of its 'history' devoid of any superficial and formal references. Therefore, 'building the site' opposes the optimum physical usage of universal technique and intends to create an optimum 'cultural landscape' rooted in the tradition and history.

A number of architects have employed this strategy to deal with the particularity of place. Luis Barragan's architecture is very tactile, sensual and earthbound, inspired by his childhood memories and his lived experience of nature, landscape and local architecture, 'An architecture compounded of enclosure, stelae, fountains and water courses; an architecture laid into volcanic rock and lush vegetation; an architecture that refers indirectly to the Mexican *estancia*' (Frampton 1992: 318). Grounded on the specific topography of the site and linked to the texture of the local fabric, Alvaro Siza's architecture is a response to the urban landscape of the Porto region. His works are based on a tight deference 'towards local material, craft work, and the subtleties of local light; a deference which is sustained without falling into the sentimentality of excluding rational form and modern technique' (ibid.: 317).

From another point of view, Critical Regionalism resists the universal approach of Modernism towards the artificial—for instance, artificial light and climate. For example, against the modern attitude toward light which favoured the exclusive use of artificial light in art galleries, ignoring the very character of the local light—a static application of universal technology—Critical Regionalism would employ top-light, to avoid the injurious effects of direct sunlight, while gaining the benefit of the changing ambient light of the exhibition space under the impact of time, season, humidity and so on. This phenomenological approach to light would guarantee 'the appearance of a place-conscious poetic—a form of filtration compounded out of an interaction between culture and nature, between art and light' (Frampton 2002a: 87). Similarly, the universal ventilation system of remote-controlled air-conditioning prescribed for all times and all climatic conditions is essentially refused by Critical Regionalism since it neglects the particularity of 'place' and its 'characteristics'. For instance, the fixed fenestration of buildings in hot-dry or even moderate climates is intended to maximize the efficiency of air-conditioning systems, but in fine weather, they cannot be opened for natural ventilation (Frampton 1998). Thus, Critical Regionalism highlights the natural characteristics of the site and avoids the imposition of artificial features at the expense of the existing forces of the environment.

2.5.5 *Tactility/Visuality*

Western attitudes to perceiving the environment, Frampton argues, are essentially image-based and perspectively oriented, as is reflected in the etymology of the term 'perspective'. The word perspective implies 'rationalized sight or clear seeing' and neglects the contribution of the other senses of hearing, taste, smell and touch to the process of perception. The priority of vision and sight over other senses, on the other hand, reduces 'experience' to 'mere information, to representation or to the simple evocation of a simulacrum substituting for absent presences' (Frampton 2002a: 89). This one-dimensional experience or 'far-experience' leads to the 'loss of nearness'. This interpretation is reminiscent of Heidegger's discussion about new technologies where he emphasizes that the existing frantic abolition of distances conducted towards a 'uniform distancelessness' never brings us close to things, and nearness is more an existential mood than a physical one (Heidegger 1971: 166). To meet this challenge, Frampton advocates 'readdressing the tactile range of human perceptions' (Frampton 2002a: 89) as a complement to perception, resisting the historical privilege of vision and sight rooted in Renaissance architecture, and criticizing the 'rationalized sight' of perspective which underlines 'formal representation' at the expense of tactile experience (Frampton 1988: 62).

In fact, the supremacy of vision is not a modern phenomenon, but has a long history in western culture. As Pallasmaa suggests, classical Greek thought privileged the accuracy of vision. For Plato vision was the greatest gift to humanity, for Aristotle the most noble of the senses (Pallasmaa 1996). This ocularcentric tradition

was advocated in the Renaissance and even later in the ideas of prominent modern architects such as Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius.¹¹

To get beyond the dominance of the vision, the tactile needs to be highlighted, since the tactile gets close to the things, captures their materiality, and employs the entire body as the site of perception:

The tactile opposes itself to the scenographic and the drawing of veils over the surface of reality. Its capacity to arouse the impulse to touch returns the architect to the poetics of construction and to the erection of works in which the tectonic value of each component depends upon the density of its objecthood. The tactile and the tectonic jointly have the capacity to transcend the mere appearance of the technical in much the same way as the place-form has the potential to withstand the relentless onslaught of global modernization (Frampton 2002a: 89).

A number of architectural works provoke the tactile. In Aalto's Săynätsulo Town Hall (1952), for example, there exists a palpable tactile sensitivity. The brickwork of the stair—as well as the treads and risers—provokes the kinetic impetus of the body in climbing the stair, and thus our body feels or 'reads' this different character in contrast to the timber floor of the council chamber: 'This chamber asserts its honorific status through sound, smell and texture' (ibid.: 89) and leads to an existential, bodily experience of the space through the entire body. In Church of the Light by Ando, one observes a 'kinaesthetic character' not only as the result of the permanently changing pattern of light, but because of the sound of the footfall on the wooden floor, together with the smell of cement and wood (Fig. 2.2). Frampton writes: 'For Ando, the main hope for our survival resides in our tactile awareness rather than in distanciation effected by the power of sight, our ocular senses having long since been overwhelmed by mediatic abstraction' (Frampton 2002c: 317).

2.6 The Theory of 'In-Between': Critical Regionalism

Critical Regionalism could be understood as a contemporary interpretation of the regionalist approach to the built environment which has been manifested in various different ways through the course of history. In the way it is spelled out by Frampton, it combines together two lines of thought: the critical thinking of Frankfurt School and the phenomenological thought of Heidegger. Although it criticizes the modernist approach to the built environment for its reductionist attitude, it condemns Postmodern architecture for its scenographic interpretations from history and the past as well. Thus, Critical Regionalism is not disposed to produce starchitecture; rather, it is practiced by some regional schools which stand out from the overwhelming trajectory of styles and follow a marginal resistance that,

¹¹Juhani Pallasmaa provides a detailed and thoughtful discussion on the production of vision-oriented architecture through the course of history, with a focus on its philosophical origin. See Pallasmaa (1996).



Fig. 2.2 Church of the Light, Tadao Ando, interior (Author)

although critical of modernization, 'never abandons the progressive aspects of the modern architecture legacy' (Frampton 1983: 327).

Critical Regionalism stands against contemporary placelessness and calls for a return to the potentiality of *Raum* in providing a defined boundary, and to the public sphere and its capability for bringing people close to each other. It advocates a

'hybrid world culture' entailing a cross-fortification of rooted culture and universal civilization and their permanent exchange. Moreover, it observes architecture as a tectonic practice rather than a series of scenographic representations. It also introduces a critical *arrière-gardism* in its Gadamerian sense to restrain any vulgar *avant-gardism*. For Critical Regionalism, site-specific factors such as topography and natural forces are the means of highlighting tectonics and linking them to place. The tactile is as important as the visual; Critical Regionalism invites the bodily closeness and condemns the kind of visually based remote-experience advocated by information science. Finally, Critical Regionalism achieves these goals not through sentimental formal reference to the past and local elements, but by an indirect reinterpretation of them. "Critical Regionalism opposes the sentimental simulation of local elements, tending instead to reinterpret them. It may also derive those elements from foreign sources. It intends to create a contemporary place-oriented culture, or a regionally based 'world culture'" (Ibid., p. 327).

Two essential points make Critical Regionalism a significant departure point for our discussion: theorizing the 'in-between', and highlighting reinterpretation (what I refer to as *Khalq-i Jadid* in the Persian context: see chapter three). On the one hand, Critical Regionalism situates itself in a space in-between, setting a 'site of confrontation and dialogue' where two poles of extremes could exchange, interact and unite. And, it is this position in-between that makes this theory applicable to the context of Iran and the Middle East, where as shown in the first chapter, the confrontation of the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, has been, and still is, a decisive challenge. Dichotomous principles of Critical Regionalism provide a space in-between where two poles of dichotomy are present in a status of 'and-both' instead of reducing the challenges to a critical status of 'either-or'.

On the other hand, Critical Regionalism advocates authentic reinterpretation as a practical strategy produced out of the space in-between. In the process of reinterpretation, any direct and scenographic reference is avoided, since as Frampton points out, 'The fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism is to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place' (Frampton 2002a: 82). What is important in a critical regionalist approach is the process of reinterpretation by which the particularity of a given place is discovered and incorporated into the architectural building. As Woolsey spells out, 'Critical Regionalism is a dynamic balance between timeless universal architectural principles and the modifiers of people, places, and events...It is a process through which an infinite number of architectural solutions might be produced' (Woolsey 1991: 322).

Thus, Critical Regionalism as an architecture of reinterpretation goes beyond a set of solid construction codes and physical regulations derived from existing local materials, domestic crafts and vernacular forms, and creates ever-changing, but place-specific architectural interpretations. It is a regionalism of liberation, rather than a regionalism of restriction, to use Harris's terminology (Harris 2007: 58). Critical Regionalism is an exclusive approach, as well as an inclusive one, in the sense that it absorbs the emerging modes of thought of the current epoch, but reinterprets them to chime with the specific character of the region.

To summarize, Critical Regionalism is the 'theory of in-between'. It produces a mediatory space where dichotomous concepts negotiate, confront and reconcile. It presents architects, urban planners and urban designers with a number of general concerns with regard to the peculiarity of any given region, and makes it their task to peculiarize these general concerns by means of reinterpreting them in the light of the characteristics of a given region and place, to bring forth a never-ending stream of creations: *Khalq-i Jadid*.

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