

DISCUSSION OF “PLACELESSNESS” AND “ACONTEXTUAL” CONCEPTS THROUGH JEAN BAUDRILLARD’S SIMULATION THEORY

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ABSTRACT

After the beginning of the modern period, understanding of place and context in architecture have undergone a radical change with the direct effects of mass media technology, advanced transportation networks and capitalist system. Since the architecture has begun to be designed as an object of consumption and fiction, buildings all over the world have started to be built without any strong concept of context and place.

The French philosopher Jean Baudrillard who examined this radical change, considered some modern architectural examples as simulated buildings detached from their architectural context and place. In this sense, Baudrillard stated that because of the strong impacts of simulation world on the discipline of architecture, buildings have been started to shaped by characteristics of the simulation world: illusion, consumption, capitalism and uniformity. Since these characteristic features of the simulation world are directly related to the concepts of "place" and "context" in architecture, it is thought that the discussions of 'placelessness' and 'acontextual' concept in architecture should be also read through the effect of characteristics of the simulation world.

In the scope of the study, basic principles of Baudrillard's simulation theory examined and the 'placelessness' and 'acontextual' concept in architectural design discussed in the light of Baudrillard's simulation theory. The evaluations in the study carried out through Beaubourg (Pompidou Center), Disneyland, World Trade Center and hypermarkets.

The aim of the study is reading the 'placelessness' and 'acontextual' concept in architecture with the help of basic principles of Baudrillard's simulation theory. In conclusion, the paper revealed the effects of Baudrillard's simulation theory on the architecture and contributed to the current discussions of 'placelessness' and 'acontextual' concept in architecture.

Key Words: Simulation; Philosophy; Architecture; Placelessness; Acontextual.

INTRODUCTION

A brief overview on the history of architecture reveals the fact that architectural design always is affected by other disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, physics, etc. From rustic huts at the dawn of the civilization to the skyscraper at the modern times, architectural design thinking uses strong connections between human understanding and environment which create the basics of all other disciplines. These important connections make possible the application of architecture through material, structure and form.

When the relationships between human understanding and environment evaluated in the context of architectural design, the philosophy of architecture is considered as one of the important elements. The significance of philosophy in architectural design can be traced back to ancient times. While the faith of the constant order of the universe in Ancient Egypt leads the human being to build permanent architectural buildings aiming eternity, perceiving the universe as a harmonious mechanism in Ancient Greece paved the way for symmetrical and orderly planned architectural buildings. Similarly, architecture in the modern period is influenced by wide range outputs of philosophical contents like a scientific understanding of the universe, modernism and post-modernism.

Undoubtedly, one of the critical effects of philosophical contents on modern architecture can be discussed by evaluating the topics of context and place which defines the relationship between architectural buildings and its surroundings. Since the characteristic of the physical, psychological, social and cultural context of the architectural buildings has strengthened quality of place, discussion of the 'context' and 'place' concepts in architecture has become a very major topic. In this sense, as a result of the inclusion of mass media technology, advanced transportation networks and capitalism to the everyday life, which emerges with direct effects of modern philosophy, architectural projects have started to be built without powerful notion of context and place, for architecture has perceived as a part of consumption and fiction reality. In this sense, 'acontextual' and 'placelessness' context which implies lack of strong connections between building and its environment socially, culturally and physically; should be interpreted through philosophical conditions of modern times.

The French philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), who studied on the human being's crisis of meaning in the modern period, argued that as a result of the new consumer culture, reality has changed very radically and for this reason simulations replaced with reality [1]. Based on this philosophical analysis, Baudrillard also stated that because of the powerful influence of the simulation world on every aspect of life, the architectural design started to be guided by the effect of illusion, consumption, capitalism and uniformity which characteristic of simulation world. By virtue of these characteristics of the simulation world, he regards some architectural buildings as simulated buildings detached from architectural context and place.

In this context, this paper reveals the strong interrelations between Baudrillard's simulation theory and concepts of "placelessness" and

"acontextual" in the discipline of architecture. The evaluations in the paper carried out through the architectural examples of Beaubourg (Pompidou Center), Disneyland, World Trade Center and hypermarkets.

Jean Baudrillard's Philosophy

Jean Baudrillard, who left his mark on 20th-century philosophy with his analysis of the modern understanding of the world, was born in 1929 in Reims, France. In 1956, Baudrillard began working as a professor at the French high school, and in the 1960s worked as an editor for the French publisher Seuil. Baudrillard entered the University of Paris in 1966 and became Henri Lefebvre's assistant while learning a language, philosophy, sociology and other disciplines. In 1966 he defended his thesis named "Le système des objets" in the sociology department of the same university and began teaching sociology in October of the same year. Baudrillard, who made important studies in the fields of social theory, semiotics and psychoanalysis in the 1960s, published his first work *Le Système des objets* in 1968 and *La Société de consommation* in 1970 [2].

In these early studies, Baudrillard explained the increasing importance and influence of the media on the societies, while he also focused on the consumption frenzy that cannot be prevented in daily life [3], [4]. Baudrillard's emphasis on consumption, which did not completely abandon Marxist concepts in both of these works, added a cultural and semiological dimension to Marx's project by focusing on culture and signs in addition to Marx's analysis of production [5].

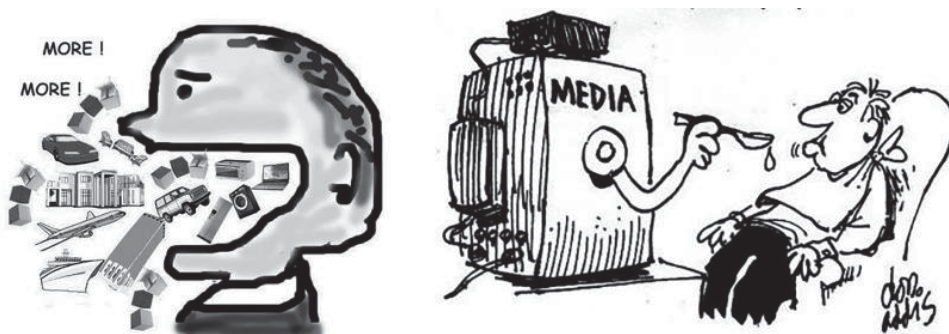


Figure 1. Images Describing the Impact of Consumption, Media and Television on Society.

In the mid-1970s, after Baudrillard wrote studies of *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* in 1972, *Le Miroir de la production* in 1973 and "*L'Échange symbolique et la mort*" in 1976; he clearly disconnect his ties with Marxism and said that Marxism, which claims to be at the center of life, is a mirror of bourgeois society [4]. In these studies, Baudrillard argued that people in modern times consuming the images, ideal and fantasies hidden behind the objects of consumption, because the code constitutes the essence of consumption [4].

In 1978, Baudrillard stated in his book *À l'ombre des majorités silencieuses, ou la fin de la social* that the people were too numb to react. For this reason, the old understanding of revolution has become irrelevant and the importance of developing a new form of resistance has emerged [4]. In 1979, Baudrillard published a book named *De la séduction* and interprets the concept of *seduction* as a strategy of evil and an irreversible destiny [6].

In his book *Simulacra et Simulation*, published in 1981, Baudrillard stated that as a compulsory result of the new consumption culture, reality has changed radically and therefore, there is no such thing as reality anymore because simulation replaced with reality [1]. In order to justify the claim that simulation replaced with reality, Baudrillard argued that in the postmodern world people spend most of their time communicating through electronic devices and the face-to-face relationship has gradually disappeared [4, 7].



Figure 2. Image of Baudrillard's Book "Simulacra and Simulation" from the Movie Matrix (1999).

In *Les Stratégies fatales*, published in 1983, Baudrillard proposes to Western societies to question everything from the beginning again, because the beginning is built on an illusion. Fashion, art, society, sexuality have become hyper-reality and have broken with reality [6]. In a universe of total disorder, where everything replaces everything, uncertainties are everywhere and everything has become nothing [1].

In *La Transparence du mal*, published in 1990, Baudrillard evaluates the dissolution of the opposing categories within each other through the concept of transparency [6]. In *Le Crime parfait* published in 1994, Baudrillard describes the struggle between an attempt to complete a perfect reality of the world and an attempt to sustain nothingness. The perfect murder that gave the book its name; is the accelerated end of the world through the transformation of all actions and events into knowledge, the replication and destruction of truth [6].

In his book *L'Échange impossible* published in 1999, a continuation of his previous ideas, he developed the notion of *impossible exchange* between concepts and the world, theory and reality, subject and object [2]. In this context, Baudrillard stated that it is impossible for any thought system and

concept to comprehend the world and objects, and there is a gap between them because everything consists of simulation.

In his latest book, *Le Pacte de lucidité ou l'intelligence du mal*, published in 2004, Baudrillard discussed the subject of simulation, reality, hyper-reality, illusion, politics and contemporary art. In Baudrillard's opinion, since today people live in a universe where there is much more information but less meaning, the only way to resist against all these analyzed situations would be to reject the meaning [5].

In order to evaluate the relationship between Baudrillard's concept of simulation and the context and place in architecture, simulation theory needs to be examined in detail.

Baudrillard's Simulation Theory

The word of *simulation*, derived from Latin *simulationem* which means an imitating, feigning, false show and hypocrisy [8], plays an important role in Baudrillard's philosophy. The concept of *simulacra* developed by Baudrillard to show that the postmodern world is not a real society, but a virtual reality in which symbols and images replace with the real and the concrete [9].

For a better understanding of the concept of simulation, some of the terms Baudrillard is used must be defined [1].

Simulacra: The appearance that wants to be perceived as a reality.

Simulate: Trying to show counterfeit thing as a real.

Simulation: Artificial reproduction of operation of a tool, a machine, a system, a phenomenon, by means of a model or a computer program for the purpose of examination, display or explanation.

Contrary to the platonic meaning of simulation, Baudrillard understands simulacra not as false images, nor as obscuring truth behind a facade, but as that which hides the truth's non-existence [10]. Baudrillard classified the orders of simulacra in three-level. The first order of simulacra, ruler over from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution, is based on the natural law of value and characterized by the imitating [10]. At this stage, words and images are developed as reflections of reality [9].

The second order of simulacra appeared through the industrial revolution when production became mechanized and started to create infinite copies [11] that leads to abolishing the notion of originality [10]. In the second stage, the truth begins to be distorted, but there is no absolute break with reality [9].

The third order of simulacra dominates the consumer society, based on the 'structural law of value' and is characterized by simulation itself [10]. In this stage, simulation models compose the world and demolish representations [11]. In this sense, symbols and representations have nothing to do with reality, and even human relations are now completely symbolic [9].

These three orders of the simulacrum correspond to three-level in the history of value: first, pre-capitalist level of the natural law of value where land is transporter of value; second, the law of value under the effect of capitalism, where the exchange value of the commodity rule over its use-value; and third, the level of structural law of value which means capital eat up all the past definitions of value and their sense, goal and truth [12].

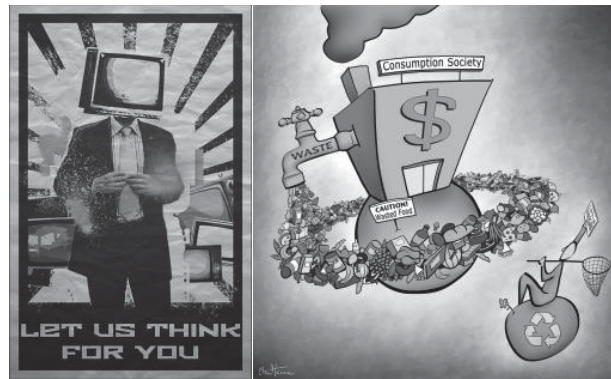


Figure 3. Images Describing the Results of the Consumption Society and Power of the Media.

From the point of Baudrillard's view, today all oppositions between appearance and reality, surface and depth collapsed into a functionalized and combined cosmos of the simulacra ruled by models and codes of simulation [11]. In this sense, Baudrillard's theory of simulation is a theory of disaster and nihilism [12].

Baudrillard states that the orders of simulation that surrounds every aspect of life have a profound effect on the discipline of architecture. In his opinion, many buildings designed in the postmodern period are located in the built environment as part of the simulation order. These buildings direct people through their powerful images and codes, under the control of the simulation order. As a direct consequence of this situation, buildings are detached from their architectural contexts and thus the social, physical, psychological and cultural connections between the place and the building disappear.

In this context, this paper demonstrates the effect of the simulation world's characteristics on the notions of *placelessness* and *acontextual* through architectural examples of Beaubourg (Pompidou Center), Disneyland, World Trade Center and hypermarket.

Reading of Placelessness and Acontextual Concepts through Baudrillard's Simulation Theory

In Edward Relph's definition, placelessness defined as an environment without significant places. In this sense, for the Relph, placelessness, arrive to the profound level of the place, cut roots, consume symbols, replace diversity with uniformity and experiential order with conceptual order [13]. Similarly, Harvey Cox defines placelessness as an abstract geometric appearance of the place deprived of human meaning [14].

In the dictionary, the word *acontextual* is defined as not occurring in, relating to, determined by, or conforming to a particular context [15]. In this sense, in architecture, *acontextual* means that the social, cultural, imaginary, physical and perceptual connection that the building establishes with its environment is weak or absent. From this perspective, each phenomenon that disrupts the strong relationship of the structure with its environment can be evaluated within the scope of *acontextual*.

When these two concepts are analyzed through Baudrillard's simulation theory, it is thought that a new and original reading will be possible in the discussion of the concepts of *placelessness* and *acontextual*. In this paper, this reading carried out concentrating on the effect of characteristics of the simulation world on the architectural examples of Beaubourg (Pompidou Center), Disneyland, World Trade Center and hypermarket.

Baudrillard evaluates some modern buildings in his books as a simulated architectural example that creates illusion under the effect of simulation world characteristics; illusion, consumption, capitalism and uniformity. In his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) he stated that people come to hypermarkets to get objectified answers to the questions they can ask themselves and that objects expect to be approved by the codes they carry in these places. From the eyes of Baudrillard, hypermarkets are time-spaces in which social life, settlement and traffic orders are produced by operational simulation like a core and even a modern city cannot absorb it [1].

When the role of hypermarkets in social life is examined in this respect, it is seen that it brings a new perspective to the concepts of place and context in architecture. The influence of hypermarkets on the consumer society, its structure shaped by capitalism and media, its illusion-based atmosphere that encourages people to buy things and its aim of uniformity; creates the simulation that affects the whole aspect of daily life.

This order of simulation affects the space's sense of place and its strong contextual relationship with its environment. In this context, consumption, illusion and code-based simulation created by hypermarkets undermine the sense of place in these buildings. Moreover, as Baudrillard points out, the inward functioning of these buildings destroys the context that needs to be established with the external environment and makes them indestructible in terms of the urban fabric.

One of the buildings Baudrillard explores through simulation theory is Beaubourg (Pompidou Center). Perceiving the building as a symbol of flow, stocking and redistribution, Baudrillard also states that the building resembles a puzzle consisting of various networks and circuits equipped with light and signs [1]. Designed as a monument of mass simulation games, the building is described by Baudrillard as a cultural hypermarket [16]. As the objects of consumption in hypermarkets, the purpose of cultural objects in this building is to keep people in an integrated mass [1]. In this context, the building is a time-space that includes operational simulation specific to social life, modeling any kind of controlled socialization [17].

As Baudrillard states, this building, which has all the features of a virtual social discourse today, reveals that our culture consists of hydrocarbons, refining, filtering, the disintegration of cultural molecules and making these parts a synthesized product again [1]. While the Beaubourg Museum tries to conceal this fact, Beaubourg's outer skeleton makes it clear [17]. In this sense, Beaubourg is nothing but a tremendous effort to give the meaning-based traditional culture the appearance of a random sequence of signs of simulation in the third stage, which can be considered the kind of fluid and pipes that form the exterior of the building [1].



Figure 4. Exterior and Interior of the Beaubourg (Pompidou Center).

From Baudrillard's point of view, characteristics of Beaubourg like being a symbol of flow, stocking and redistribution, its properties of being a cultural hypermarket which aims to keep people in an integrated mass, reveals its relationships with context and place in architecture. In this sense, Beaubourg has a weak connection of context with the environment as it reveals the consumption, illusion and sign based characteristics of the simulation world and exhibits different characters in the exterior and interior of the structure. Moreover, the building's exoskeleton and operating style under the control of the simulation universe is not a place where harmonized with its surrounding but an example of "placelessness" which show a contradiction with the environment, because this building tries to impose characteristics of simulation world to the society, while disregard existing ambiance.

One of the places where the orders of simulation work deeply and detailed is Disneyland. According to Baudrillard, Disneyland, a flawless model in which orders of the simulation are intertwined, is a play of illusion and fantasy that expresses the miniaturized version of America's contradictions and beauties [1]. With all of these features, Disneyland's most important role is that it is a third-level simulation that hides that real America looks like a Disneyland. Baudrillard likens this to the construction of prisons to conceal that everyday life resembles a prison [17]. In this context, Los Angeles and America surrounding Disneyland do not belong to a real universe but to a hyperreal and simulation [1].

Disneyland isolates itself from the contextual relationship with the outside world by creating a simulation of entertainment and fantasy-based imagery for visitors entering the space, because the mechanism inside the building is different from the outside. In this sense, Disneyland, with its illusion and

dream-based simulation, has a concept of space and context which don't have strong connections with the environment around the building in terms of culturally, physically and socially.



Figure 5. A Photo from Disneyland, Los Angeles.

In his writings, Baudrillard states that architecture today cannot monumentalize anything and is in a problem of *truth* [16]. In this context, Baudrillard argued that World Trade Center, one of the products of modern architecture; expresses, imitates and translates the context of a society in which a sketch of a hyper-real era has already been formed [17]. Baudrillard, who claims that the two World Trade Center buildings are copies of each other, states that the buildings have already entered the cloning period to be shaped in the future [16].



Figure 6. World Trade Center.

The World Trade Center does not have a strong contextual relationship with its surrounding as it is shaped by the characteristics of the simulation world's capitalism and illusion. In addition, the large scale and uniformity of the structure prevent a strong sense of place. The fact that these buildings are copies of each other seems to be the result of the uniformization effect of the simulation world. These buildings easily can be built anywhere in the world because of their lack of sense of place and context.

CONCLUSION

Architecture, which has existed from past to present through relations with other disciplines, has undergone major changes in terms of both theory and practice with the beginning of the modern period. Due to the great influence of scientific method, mechanization, industrialization and modernism, discussions of place and context in architecture have been brought up rapidly. In the continuation of this situation; as a result of a life based on capitalism, media, consumption and illusion, the concepts of placelessness and 'acontextual' which express the lack of sense of place and context in architecture have begun to be discussed.

Within the scope of this study, firstly information about Jean Baudrillard's philosophy is given through his works, to build basic elements of the study. In the second part of the study, after the definitions of *acontextual* and *placelessness* concepts are given, simulation theory constituting the evaluation criteria of the study and its effects on society are examined in detail.

In the final part of the study, the placelessness and acontextual concepts in architecture are evaluated with the help of basic principles of Baudrillard's simulation theory through architectural examples of Beaubourg (Pompidou Center), Disneyland, World Trade Center and hypermarkets.

In conclusion, the powerful impact of illusion, consumption, code, sign, hyperrealism, uniformity and capitalism, which are the components of the simulation theory, on the relationships of architectural structures with context and place is revealed. In this context, it is determined that the influence of the characteristics of the simulation world on the buildings pave the way for the creation of *placelessness* and *aconxtetual* concepts. As a result of evaluations, Beaubourg (Pompidou Center), Disneyland, World Trade Center and hypermarkets can be considered examples of placelessness and acontextual, as they are shaped under the strong effect of simulation world's characteristics.

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