National Television and Historical Architecture:

Example of Iran

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Abstract

It is believed that a national television channel should contain national contents in order to have acceptable representation for its own nation through history and culture. Novel aesthetic approach to television besides modern intellect of architecture, as will be argued in this paper, opens a way to compare television with other arts such as architecture. In this paper, following the mentioned argument, Iranian national television and Iranian historical architecture have focused as example. By concentrating on Iranian historical architecture, one of the most influential Iranian architectures was specified and was suggested to Iranian national television staff to consider it in their programs. This article draws a line for a more comprehensive research and makes a foundation for television evaluations based on aesthetic elements as well as national contents. In our future papers, we will introduce a computational based evaluation method to compare Iranian national television programs with Iranian architecture based on aesthetic elements.

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1. Introduction:

1.1 National Identity and national television

In "national identity", it is suggested that a sense of belonging or unity is felt by inhabitants regarding to their residence in a common national space and even in contrast with the cultural and social differences of their nation [1]. In Benedict Anderson viewpoint a nation can be considered as an "imagined community" due to a sense of communication between members of a nation who "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them" [2]. The imaginative links between people reviles the cultural nature of "national identity" and emphasize that it is not purely physical or biological process in which something is learned consciously or even subconsciously [1]. In this stream, the importance of media in constructing a common sense of unity or national belongings in a nation can be understood which becomes increasingly significant in the particular case of television because of its outstanding capacity. The significant increase of selling television programs to overseas markets in recent years is a successful practice of adapting them to the target national sensibilities [3].

A national television channel (as a government-funded public broadcast) could be defined by national contents with national identity of its own culture. There is a need of national contents in national television channels even hide or unhide to have a better connection with their own audience. In this stream, Price in "Television: The Public Sphere and National Identity" [4] stated that:

"Each nation thinks it is important to teach its own history to its children. Monuments constructed in public squares are important for more than their time. They are temples of remembrance, building loyalties for the future… Even in a world exploding with information, there is a role for a government-funded public broadcasting system that will enrich and help to define and reflect the national identity."

These contents could be appeared in each program of television by elements or symbols in textual contents and spaces which that program are sited on it. Depletion of national contents in national television programs is considered a serious lack for television organizations and studies in this respect are necessary. For instance, at the first decades of the twentieth century, there were many influences of US border broadcasts on Canadian television and this, diminished the audience for Canadian television. Since 1952, three main reforms made the historical development of television in Canada: 1) threat of American influence; 2) language division (as a national identity); and 3) government's response to both of these. After these improvements, number of audience of Canadian television was drastically increased [5]. In other part of the world, in Iran, there is a big gap among Iranian traditional art (architecture, literature, music, painting and theatre), television, and cinema. Since television and cinema were born and developed along with technological advancement in the West, they carry the Western identity; therefore television and cinema have great discontinuity with the concepts of Iranian national culture [6].

1.2 Television as art and architecture as mass media

In general, television organizers or managers are expected to examine whether their programs fulfill their willing purposes [7]. Since many scholars consider television as a medium to deliver message to audience or observers, audience themselves should play the role in evaluating television programs, as well literary based content evaluations, are normally used [8, 9]. In traditional view, television was considered as a medium to deliver other arts but nowadays, only since the late 1990s, scholars have started to express that television is not just a medium but rather a form of art and to consider television itself as an art regarding to aesthetic elements. So, television programs are comparable with other arts, sharing with them 'representational or artistic' and often 'fictive or imaginative' qualities [10, 11]. This viewpoint leads to a study that analyses the fundamental units of television programs such as colors and lights, cameras, editing, and audio to explain their collaboration in producing programs. This approach also, highlights the fundamental compositional principles of programs to examine the various production techniques in the areas of staging, lighting, audio, and editing [11]. By looking from perspective of television and cinema to other arts, architecture, literature, music, painting and theatre make dimensions of television and cinema. For instance, in the field of architecture, studio set and stage, as architectural and physical space in television and cinema, are indebted to aesthetic concepts of architecture [6].

On the other hand, Beatriz Colomina in her book, "Privacy and Publicity; Modern architecture as mass media" [12], stated that architecture can be considered as a mass media. Colomina presumes architectural debate as intersection of many representations such as models, drawings, books, photographs, advertisements and films. Her argument does not mean to discard architectural object, building, but rather looking it at different way. The building is realized here as a system of representation in the same perspective as all the media which frame it. With vision of modernity, the location of architectural production exactly moved from street into films, photographs, publications, and exhibitions; a displacement which presupposes a new intellect of space; one described by images instead of walls.

The idea of "architecture as mass media", argued by Colomina, is remarkable since it draws an intersection between architecture and mass media (television in this paper). Architecture also has direct interaction with its own viewer in absence of sender and receiver, so it could be considered as a real media. On the other hand, television is a virtual media dependent on technology of sender and receiver with its own audience and therefore, both television and architecture could be considered as independent media [12]. These arguments show nobility and importance of this approach in television studies which may help people who are related to television in order to examine their products based on aesthetics view instead of communications approach.

2. Example: Iranian national television and historical architecture

2.1. Iranian national television

Hamid Naficy studied on private televisions broadcasted from Los Angeles [13]. He stated that each culture is located in specific place and time and also mentioned that culture of people who are away from their home country for long time is located in the interstices and at the intersection of other cultures. Their cultures are

affected too, in the stream of postmodernism era and create a permanent "other world" of disaffected people who are not fixed or do not want to be fixed in any national identity. Naficy focused on Iranian televisions produced and broadcasted by many Iranian people who are living in Los Angeles, a multi-cultural city, for a long time. These people created family many years ago and even have children with American native language; they have their own customs and culture; and they have their own business. As such, many private television channels are broadcasting daily shows with keeping Iranian culture such as Iranian language, pop music, and some of Iranian national celebrations like Nowruz and Yalda night. Although, these televisions keep some of their Iranian cultures but partially are influenced by the culture they evolved in.

Based on traditional media aesthetics theory, the evaluation, appreciation, and analysis of modern media products (how picturesque, beautiful, and sublime these products are) should be based on historical developments of the media exposing their functions within societies which have developed them [14].

Fahimifar in "the aesthetic identity of media television" stated that one can view to television studies with one of the three perspectives: 1) media or television management approach, 2) media aesthetic approach, and 3) philosophical approach; then, he focused on Iranian television and cinema with the aesthetic approach [6]. He emphasized that cinema and television were born and developed in a historical and ideological destiny of a certain geographical culture, the West. He also, compared the formation of television and cinema in West with the one in Iran and referred their differences to the origin and nature of television and cinema. It was suggested that referring to the national contents presented in traditional arts such as architecture, literature, painting, music and theatre is a convenient way for television and cinema to jump from a pure technological invention to a perfect art. This can underline the importance of inclusion of national contents which are represented in architecture, literature, painting, music and theatre in Iranian national television. In this stream, Beheshti emphasized that architecture in any nation, for instance, is extracted from culture of that nation and effect on it and is a mirror of human thoughts in close relation with space, aesthetics, and culture. Therefore, architecture of each historical period is considers as a reflection of the culture and art of that period and is relevant to the evolutions occurred in other aspects of life and art [15]. Hence, study on the most influential architectures in any nation is effective and important to evaluate national content of the television programs related to that nation. In continue, one of the most influential Iranian architectures will be specified as reflection of Iranian culture based on literature review.

2.2. Ali-Ghapoo Palace

There are more than 6000 years that architecture has continuous history in Iran which is divided into many periods based on political conditions, locations and etc. Accordingly, it has been divided into two major eras: 1) Pre-Islam and 2) Islamic eras. There are important historical architectures regarding both eras having great influence to other architectural periods and their styles [16]. It is believed that one of the most influential periods of Islamic era is Safavid period with the significant city of Isfahan. According to Agha Khan Award document [17], Naghsh-e-Jahan's square in Isfahan city (Figure 1) is the 6th largest square worldwide; which Ali-Ghapoo is one of the most important architectures located in it.
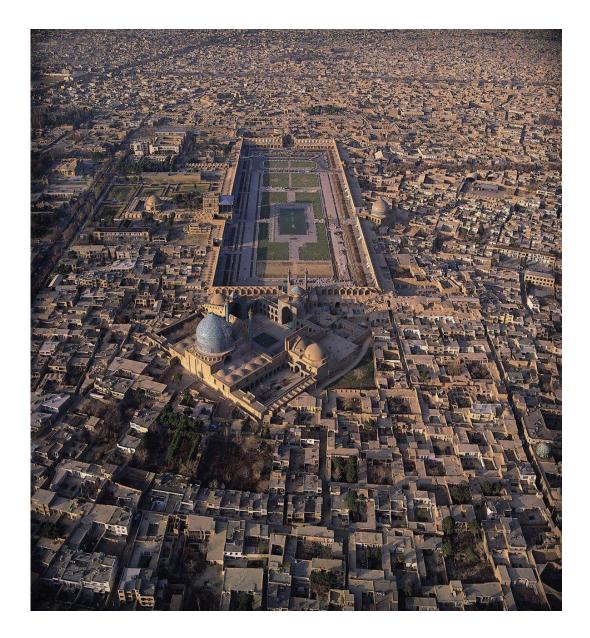
Figure 1. Archival picture from Naghsh-e Jahan square located at Isfahan city, Iran [18].

Arthur Pope, one of the most referred Iranologist, mentioned that imaginative and colored details developed by Safavid dynasty and more especially by second king of Safavid gens, Shah-Abbas 1st (1589-1627 A.C) was unified into significant groups of grandeur [16]. Although Safavid period does not represent great structural innovations in whole Persia's supreme period; but, it shows the final expression and climax of Iran Islamic Architecture. Shah-Abbas 1st designated Isfahan as capital city of his kingdom and reconstituted it with many new palaces, mosques, bridges, parks, and avenues. "Half the world" is referred to Isfahan by European travellers who was raptured of its beauty and wrote in their itineraries. The great square of Isfahan, Naghsh-e-Jahan square or Maidan-e-Shah, was used as scene of processions, maneuvers, and games like polo. This square is surrounded by two arcades which concentrate on the recessed-portal of the Masjid-e-Shah. The north side of the square is the seat of government which is known as the Ali-Ghapoo Palace (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Ali-Ghapoo Palace from outside view; the restoration of the monument is seen in this figure.

Beauty and importance of Ali-GhapooPalce and Naghsh-e-Jahan square draw attention of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, to place this square in word heritage list No 115 [19]. According to the documents of UNESCO, the Ali-Ghapoo Palace forms a monumental entrance to a luxurious zone and to royal gardens which extend right behind it. The apartments of Ali-Ghapoo with wide exterior openings which are fully decorated with paintings are famous. Briefly, the royal square of Safavid dynasty, Maidan-e-Shah of Isfahan is the monument of the Persian socio-cultural life during Safavid period until 1722. Thus, the cultural property proposed by Naghsh-e-Jahan square and Ali-Ghapoo Palace motivate UNESCO to include it in the world heritage list which shows importance of these architectures. In addition, Hensel and Gharleghi claimed that Naqsh-e Jahan square is the largest historical square worldwide and the sixth largest square overall [20].

The architectural themes which were taken up in this period formed a sophisticated elaboration borrowed from the ancient period, mostly corresponded to the human endeavor, mundane, and various perspective of life. Ching, Jarzombek and Parkash stated that the interior of Ali-Ghapoo Palace is decorated with enchanting painted birds, naturalistic scenes, and several figures that many of them have been damaged or defaced over time. The well-known "Musicians Room" includes elaborate cut-out stucco work depicting all shapes and manners of vases (Figure 3) [21].

Figure 3. Ceiling of the musician room located at inside of Ali-Ghapoo Palace.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, Persian architecture, more specifically, Ali-Ghapoo Palace of Naghsh-e Jahan Square from Safavid dynasty were studied as an example, in order to specify one of the most influential Persian architectures. Naghsh-e Jahan Square, especially, Ali-Ghapoo Palace, as one of the most influential Iranian architectures, can be a representative of Iranian culture it and can be a reflection of their thought and aesthetic intellect. According to the mentioned matters, the artistic features used in this architecture can be useful for television staff in order to evaluate the national contents in their programs. The way that color, form, shape, composition, rhythm and harmony were contributed in this architecture can be helpful for television-aesthetic based evaluations. For future studies, Iranian national television programs can be compared with other influential Persian architecture based on each elements of art. Furthermore, television designers, managers or producers are able to assess national television programs in other countries with their own nations. In our future paper, aesthetic evaluation of Iranian television programs based on color comparison with Iranian historical architecture will be studied.

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