

**THE ONTOLOGICAL RELEVANCE OF ARCHITECTURE ON
GADAMER'S THOUGHT**

[A RELEVÂNCIA ONTOLÓGICA DA ARQUITETURA NO PENSAMENTO DE
GADAMER]

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Dossiê Gadamer



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Abstract: In the first part of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer discusses art as one of the privileged spheres where truth occurs alternatively to the established scientific model. To describe elements of the experience of truth in the work of art, Gadamer presents architecture as a model because the same understanding of truth peculiarly occurs in it. In other words, the hermeneutic experience in architecture is a paradigm to explain a fair questioning of the event of understanding inserted in the ethical-practical sphere of life. This article aims to analyze Gadamer's approach to architecture, affirming its philosophically relevant character within the structure of Gadamer's thought. Thus, considering architectural works, we can perceive hermeneutic traits that support thought experiences that do not submit to the representative model of science, but, on the contrary, contest it.

Key-words: Gadamer. Art. Ontology. Architecture. Representation. Understanding.

Resumo: Na primeira parte de *Verdade e Método*, Gadamer dedica-se a discutir a arte como uma das esferas privilegiadas onde a verdade acontece alternativamente ao modelo científico estabelecido. Para descrever elementos da experiência da verdade na obra de arte, Gadamer apresenta a arquitetura como modelo, pois nela acontece peculiarmente a mesma experiência da verdade. Ou seja, a experiência hermenêutica da arquitetura serve de paradigma para a explicação de um justo questionamento do acontecimento da compreensão, inserido na esfera ético-prática da vida. Assim, esta tese tem como objetivo analisar a abordagem gadameriana da arquitetura, afirmando seu caráter filosoficamente relevante no seio da estrutura do pensamento de Gadamer. Assim, em relação às obras arquitetônicas, podemos perceber traços hermenêuticos que sustentam experiências de pensamento que não se submetem ao modelo representativo da ciência, mas o contestam.

Palavras-chave: Gadamer. Arte. Ontologia. Arquitetura. Representação. Compreensão.

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In *Truth and Method*, as in later writings, Gadamer discusses architecture secondarily. However, despite not having a central character in his reflections, some elements are treated in a relevant way, highlighting the experience of truth claimed by philosophical hermeneutics. In this sense, we were also able to find relevant hermeneutic traces in buildings, especially in those recognized as works of art.

At the same time, Gadamer's reflections on architecture, within the horizon of considerations about art, want to clarify an experience of thinking that considers architecture's interpretative intelligibility. As Paul Kidder says, "A hermeneutic approach to architecture has the hermeneutic model of thought and experience in varied areas of architectural endeavor. This can be found both in the creative activity of the architect as the aesthetic appreciation of architectural creations" (Kidder, 2013, p. 1). In this way, Kidder reminds us that both the practical and theoretical aspects of architectural activity are hermeneutically relevant, and must be considered ontologically, given the vast nature of architectural work as such.

Thus, we believe that Gadamer also assumes the philosophical task of elucidating the event of understanding specifically in architecture, which means a relevant point of convergence for philosophy and architecture. This elucidation is investigated in discussions about the profound relationship between art and truth throughout Western history. Gadamer sees the historical development of Western art based on a fundamental element in his thinking: the insistent attempt to justify art in its sense of truth, considering experience as a point of contact between subject and work, often taken as an object. Philosophical hermeneutics aims to elucidate this aspect on a new basis, even though it considers the architectural work, as well as the work of art, as a work.

Gadamer recognizes a fundamental hermeneutic character in this context of discussion: the same meaning inherent to works of art, which claims an interpretative and always current relationship, is also active in architectural work. This element, called ontological by Gadamer, highlights a peculiar affinity between our relationship with art and the hermeneutic model of thought, which seeks to recover an experience of truth that is not located within the limits of the modern subject and his method. In this sense, as says Wischke, "Gadamer cannot accept the idea that art is characterized by its 'in-itselfness'. Instead, he speaks of the 'mysterious presence' of the artwork that occurs through its presentation by which it is brought into its 'true being' (Wischke, 2010, p. 124).

The architecture has an exemplary character from the perspective of a new representation model - from which a more primordial truth is evident. According to Gadamer, about architectural works, we can also view essential aspects to understand, as well as what occurs within the artworks. In this sense, the assortment of architectural works that emerged throughout the history of the West, from the Greek temple to the most contemporary Niemeyer's design, have a fundamental and relevant ontological trace. Then, the hermeneutic character of the experience of truth granted by the mediation between past and present permeates the works of architecture.

In this context, in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer deals with architecture amidst the discussion on the issue of representation in painting. In the sections "The ontological valence of the image (*Bild*)" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 130) and "The ontological foundation of the occasional and the decorative" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 138), Gadamer clarifies the experience of truth in architecture as a hermeneutic experience, but amidst the discussion of the representative model of the hermeneutic experience of truth in art. By placing the architectural work together with the work of art, Gadamer recovers the artistic sense of architecture, often forgotten due to too much attention to aspects that are currently present around the production and discussion about buildings, namely, technology, engineering, environmental studies, psychology, neuroscience, among others.

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Thus, in the context of the artistic aspects present in architecture, Gadamer rehabilitates the ontological elements still present in the works, especially taken as historical heritage, the occasional and the decorative. These are two constitutive aspects of the work of art and were previously abandoned by aesthetic discussions. Gadamer enters the discussion about the relationship with built space, taken as artistic, as a basic relevant issue in architecture, going beyond the aesthetic consciousness that, according to Gadamer, often decontextualizes works of art from their world.

In this way, the revaluation of the concepts of occasional and decorative, inherent to any work of art and architecture, stands as a form of ontological account of art, in terms of mediation between the work and the context of actual life, as an interpretative experience and located within the work of art, here thought of in its architectural characterization.

To develop an interpretative ontology that considers the experience of the work of art, Gadamer questioned the use of the term 'image' (or frame/bild) as well as everything that is historically linked to it. This question seeks to dissolve the "naive concepts of image and sculpture", characteristic of experiential art in which the work of art is marked by reference to that subject who experiences and takes only himself as a criterion of understanding and evaluation. In other words, architectural work, due to its occasional and decorative aspects, allows for another way of dealing with the work itself, considering elements beyond aesthetic categories' limits. This allows for another meaningful relationship with the buildings.

Gadamer seeks to examine the mode of being of the image and, through her, clarify the ontological structure of the work, revealing the representative structure that does justice to the demands of understanding. In addressing this issue, architecture will be presented as an alternative to elucidate the understanding of the artistic sphere.

Considering the current developments of aesthetics fundamentally characterized by the crisis of image – the result of modern conditions of industrial life and functionalized – Gadamer diagnoses our moment as one in which we have no more room for pictures and, for this reason, they claim for one place. From the perspective of Gadamer, this place would not be limited to the museum but demands a return to their world: the totality of linguistic references in which the work itself emerges and makes sense.

To speak particularly of works of architecture, Gadamer turns to a discussion of representation in painting. To think the event of understanding as happens in the artwork could not fail to appeal to a new representative structure inherent in the same, as Gadamer has previously claimed. For Gadamer, the treatment of architecture would not be different in the discussion about art and its representation because the very structure representative of this new thinking model also operates in the mode of being of architecture itself.

To ontologically recover the notions of occasional and decorative within the horizon of the hermeneutic experience of works of art, Gadamer returns to the analysis of the notion of representation, not following the subjectivist model of representation (*Vorstellung*) which, in his view, is no longer appropriate to reveal such experience of truth, but considers another notion of representation that preserves the universality of the ontological-hermeneutic experience, with this conjuncture constituting the relevant character of the works.

For Gadamer, the common meaning of representation (*Vorstellung*) refers to the original image. However, the fact that the representation is an 'image' – and not the original – gives it autonomy to the original. Thus, the relationship between the image, as a representation, and the original, as represented, differs from what happens when it is a copy. The moment the image

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produced by an artist signifies reality from the point of view of the original, it receives what Gadamer called "representation in representation" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 131).

Gadamer presents the representative process as an essential part of his ontological research. In this sense, Gadamer suggests a more fundamental notion of representation (understood in terms of *Darstellung*), from which, in Gadamer's words, "experience is something addicting of being (*Zuwachs an Sein*). The content of the image is determined ontologically as an emanation of the original." (Gadamer, 2004, p. 132). Thus, the relationship between original and copy must be considered from the point of view of representation as re-presentation (*Darstellung*), emphasizing its ontological significance. Gadamer here is not interested in reaffirming the original character of the image but rather indicating the repercussions of the first image on the different possibilities generated by the copies, which means a reference to a first and original image. It would be interesting to consider the famous painting of the Mona Lisa by Leonardo Da Vinci and its repercussions in other works that have her as an image. I am referring to Botero's Mona Lisa, by Andy Warhol, among other appropriations or repercussions. In other words, Gadamer expands the relationship between copy and original, taking it ontologically.

By transcending the modern concept of representation (*Vorstellung*), from which the original scheme and the copy function as a way of understanding the work, Gadamer takes the ontological idea of representation (*Darstellung*), but no longer understood from a structure in which a subject is in front of an artwork, or even as an object to be dissected and classified, but as a revelation of the surrounding world itself which, in Gadamer's words, "is not a copy next to the real world, but is in this same world in its excellence of being". (Gadamer, 2004, p. 132).

According to John Sallis, Gadamer's "rehabilitation of mimesis that does not just mean in the sense imitation copy, imitation but rather as a presentation (*Darstellung*)" (Figal, 2007, p. 53). To identify the Gadamerian notion of representation as a way of reframing mimesis ontologically, Sallis observes that the Gadamer option does not want to go beyond representation but rather remains within it; he wants to open up new and renewed possibilities to elucidate the event of understanding in the current representative horizon.

The ontological character identified by Gadamer from overcoming the original epistemological scheme and copy and its representation presented in artwork provides a kind of "radical transformation." In other words, the representation of a work of art happens when something more than adequacy or harmony with something familiar occurs in the relationship with it. There is something that transforms us, that provides us with a complementary meaning. Gottfried Boehm explains that, "the prefix" re "in" re-presentation means intensification. This enhancement adds something more to the existence of the defendant". (Boehm, 2007, p. 17)

According to Gadamer, as an ontological event, the image could not be conceived only as an object to be apprehended by an aesthetic consciousness but rather understood in its "phenomenality," that is, as it shows itself, as it has something to say to someone, inserted in the immanent horizon of the praxis of life. For Gadamer, even though works of art are commonly considered as something that represents, according to the original x copy scheme in the classical sense of representation (*Vorstellung*), they still have something to say, which means affirming their ontological character of representation (*Darstellung*). This aspect of "phenomenality" refers to the inability to dissociate it from the historical-effective world, that is, from vital praxis. In a nutshell, the work of art has a resistant temporality and is ontologically linked to the world, which is a fundamental part.

From Gadamer's perspective, the relationship between the temporality of the work of art and the surrounding temporality indicates the character of occasionality. Focusing on the

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ontological valence of the image, this notion is the “time of his coming to the representation that makes its meaning experience increased determination.” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 139). The meaning of the work continues to be determined from its creation to the present day, when some types of renovations occur that make it go beyond its original historical condition. The nature of a work of art is to be “occasional” and the moment of execution reveals what is in it; It is as if the work had its own occasional temporality that reveals itself in its relationship with others in the world. Although it has an original reference that is more essential than the copy, it never fails to recover its meaning in relation to the world that surrounds it.

From Gadamer's perspective, the consideration of the occasional should be subject to an ontological questioning of the meaning of the work in its current execution, always referring to its historical moment of creation, which is somehow identified with temporal or historical analyses of the work.

From the ontological point of view of shared space, Gadamer thinks of the notion of 'presentation' (*Darstellung*) as decorative. Rehabilitating this aspect, previously neglected by modern aesthetic consciousness and still misunderstood, constitutes a return treatment of the artwork from its belonging to a place.

Gadamer's return to the decorative dimension indicates a reaffirmation of an aspect of the work of art that, in Walter Crane's historical view, is not related to its use or the materials that constitute it but rather to "its connection with everyday life and social conditions." (Crane, 1892, p. v). Here, the relevance of architecture is highlighted, as in the work of architecture, both the occasional and the decorative constitute decisive ontological aspects, which are the basis of the execution and performance of architectural works. Such elements support a horizon of meaning in which architecture brings together place and time. As says Weinsheimer (1985, p. 126),

The work of architecture is, moreover, a world not only of time but of space. It creates space and gives a place to all other arts. (...) For this reason, architecture is an omnicomprehensive art that assimilates all other arts to itself and concerts them, as it were, into its own decorations. Although a picture asserts its self-identify by a frame and a statue by the pedestal on which it is erected, architecture comprehends even the frame and the pedestal, and thus reintegrates even closed artworks by opening their self-reference onto a larger context of life.

According to Gadamer, the ontological-hermeneutic point of the relationship between art and architecture occurs at a time of crisis in the art space caused by the modern industrial and administrative state and its functionalized public life, little adherent to ontological discussions about truth. In aesthetic terms, this historical-political situation, the crisis of the place of the image, caused simultaneously by the emancipation and the framing of the image and its consequent isolation, is sufficient for rehabilitating occasional and decorative traces that must be reaffirmed. In other words, there is no in-depth questioning on the part of philosophical aesthetics about this crisis and its consequences for the representative thinking of the work of art.

Thus, the occasional and the decorative contribute decisively to understanding art and architecture as ontological experiences, fundamentally historical and situated. If we consider architecture strictly, it must be considered in a complementary way to market demands to the extent that it can find a foundational, fundamental, and comprehensive character that offers a place for

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all other arts. There is a promise of shelter in architecture. This aspect refers to its philosophical relevance, as it becomes the basis for the experience of art in general.

Therefore, based on considerations of the occasional and the decorative, architecture acquires a paradigmatic character because it attracts everything to itself as a work of art. At the same time, it refers beyond itself to the entire context of the praxis of life. In Gadamer's view, this double movement of attraction and projection towards historical life is the essence of the decorative. In other words, these aspects refer not only to the appearance of buildings, but also to the way of being of architectural works, considered from now on as "architectural monuments". The decorative essence – attraction and reference beyond itself – occurs comprehensively in our relationship with architecture from the perspective of the spatial configuration around it. And it reframes our relationship with works of art.

The belonging of the historical architectural monument to time (occasional) and space (decorative) indicates, from Gadamer's perspective, that this work has always been ontologically related not only to the world of historical life but instead emerges as a configuration of meaning within it. Therefore, we could say that the notions of decorativeness and occasionality have the same perspective of mediation, such as between the artist and the meaning of the work in his time, and not as an object facing a subject but inserted in the same historically located sphere of shared experience. As says Udovicki-Selb (1997, p. 240),

Gadamer's hermeneutics is an effort to steer understanding away from two forms of alienation: that of aesthetic consciousness, and that of historical consciousness. Of primary interest for the understanding of architecture are the aesthetic alienation and Gadamer's proposition for overcoming it.

But we also couldn't ignore historical alienation, because architecture doesn't ignore it either. In this sense, the exemplary specificity of architecture is related to two fundamental aspects. Architecture is determined by its temporality and the space occupied. In other words, due to its temporal and spatial function. From design to construction, architectural work is marked by these two aspects, always aiming to adapt to the preconditions of nature and society. As says Meraz (2016, p. 176),

Gadamer instead believes that preservation implies artistic activity because for him architecture has the mission to mediate spatially between drawing attention to itself and redirecting it to the world that architecture accompanies. Architecture, for Gadamer, is not important as an attractive artistic object, but as the sanctuary of mankind's existence. Thus, the approach to the architectural work of art is different from that to other forms of art.

When the architecture constitutes a "happy solution," according to Gadamer's argumentation, it realizes its purpose by inserting something new in the visual space where it was built. Gadamer says, "Also, the construction is a real addition of being; it is a work of art" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 145). In this sense, every architectural monument performs a movement of 're-

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presentation' (*Darstellung*). From Gadamer's perspective, architecture is, from the ontological point of view, an artwork because the content itself refers beyond itself to the whole of its historical situation.

Secondly, Gadamer asserts that, by its nature, architecture must not only represent an artistic solution to a specific task, originally linked to intention and vital nexus but must also maintain these connections visible even when their original purpose is defaced. In Gadamer's words, "there is something in it [in the architectural monument] that alludes to the original" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 149), and that is present (*Darstellung*).

In this way, an architectural building could become incomprehensible when its original purpose is lost. In this aspect, Gadamer affirms architecture as a type of art that decisively points towards a meaning that is not identified with aesthetic distinction, as the building is not simply a work of art to be perceived by consciousness but finds its meaning in its place, that is, in the broader context of life where it is built.

Therefore, at the heart of the work of architecture is a relevant ontological aspect of mediation between past and present, between here and all the surrounding space, historically determined, which is never separated from its construction. According to Gadamer's arguments, this aspect is the main reason architecture corresponds to a single decisive and complete example of reflection on the task of philosophical hermeneutics. The character of mediation between past and present is sustained today in the work, in its 'presentation' (*Darstellung*), which always occurs and is restored in some way.

From Gadamer's perspective, architecture essentially reveals this new representative structure, highlighting its performance. In other words, it communicates with the subjects who frequent it, always attracting them towards itself. At the same time, it projects them to the entire praxis of life, an environment in which both the performer and the work are ontologically and historically immersed.

In this way, Gadamer, thinking of architecture as an ontological configuration of spaces, establishes the hermeneutic meaning of architecture as a model of art that, by its very constitution, is always referred to as the set of praxis of life. Its relevance is, on the one hand, the catalytic aspect of the mediation between past and present; and, on the other hand, it is the gathering aspect of the other arts, becoming a space par excellence in which radical transformation takes place, a central ontological-hermeneutic aspect.

Based on this Gadamerian reflection, we can say that philosophical hermeneutics, by incorporating a new representative structure that can be visualized in the experience of architecture itself, inaugurates an ontology according to which truth has a relational, temporal, and spatial character and can be experienced as an addition to the experiences that occur in life within the horizon of the immanence of practical life. Such is the scope of understanding that it cannot be ignored. What makes architecture a form of language, because its ontological relevance refers to the meaning to be not only captured but fundamentally lived. In this sense, as says Farrelly (2007, p. 8), "architecture is a language that we understand because we inhabit buildings, they surround us and create our world. To achieve a piece of architecture requires engaging with a process of thinking, drawing and designing, a process that ultimately produces a building". Thus, the connection between buildings and the praxis of life seems to be a central element in the ontological character of architecture, as this aspect refers not only to an interpretative ontology but also to a practical philosophy fundamentally linked to effective life that does not give up on questioning-about the meaning of things in general.

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