

FROM AN EXPLANATION TO INTERPRETATION IN ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNING

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Abstract

This article assumes that the formal analysis of architectural works (often used in project teaching), with a descriptive character is not sufficient for your understanding. The hypotheses depart from the approach of hermeneutic philosophy, assuming that the architectural work is an expression of the human being and therefore subject to interpretation. Unlike the scientific works that have a literal and univocal sense, the architectural places are prone to multiple interpretations. In this paper, architectural work is beheld from two perspectives: one, from the traditionally used perspective in project teaching, as an object abstractly considered in relation to the context in which it is interpreted and other, with the approach of hermeneutics, as a work resulting from human activity, and produced by someone who is inserted into a particular cultural community and in a particular historical situation. Our conclusion is that the hermeneutic dimension of interpretation thus exceeds explanation techniques of work in order to be situated in a human horizon of sense. We propose that the reading of architectural works should not be limited to the description of a certain reality, but rather give greater intelligibility to explicative schemes that have so far been found and used in project teaching.

Keywords

hermeneutic; architectural designing; architecture; architectural pedagogy; place.

Introduction

The discussion about the quality of architectural places is frequently conducted around different aspects, such as the adequacy of the architectural work to the place, to the context, and to the environment. This question is not raised only in physical terms (considering the shape, climate, topography, accesses, views, etc.), but also in aesthetic and symbolic terms.

This article assumes that the formal analysis of architectural works (often used in project teaching), with a descriptive character and through its decomposition into parts, outside the context of its interpreter, is not sufficient for your understanding. The interpretation of a certain work refers not only to its formal description but also to its significance.

Since designing a building is thinking it in terms of its form, and also a response to a problem formulated by the order – the project – it presupposes an interpretation and, therefore, the possibility of a variety of possible answers.

So, the questions which arise emerge when, while trying to read certain contemporary workings based on traditionally used parameters (their formal analysis), we do not find appropriate responses to their understanding and interpretation. The

Conference topics

Aspects of improving the artist's "own" awareness of his/her own practice and the knowledge it incorporates;

Aspects of insight, understanding and knowing in the work;

Discussion of the processes of making the work/design/music in the context of own and other practices;

Discovery/definition of values in the process of designing/making/doing/performing;

Implications of uncovering the aspects considered as tacit;

Exploration of the tension between the understanding and emotional experience of the work of art or design;

Forms and frames relevant to represent knowledge based on creative practice;

Investigation of the relation between the creative work and its description – interpretation – explanation;

Inwards and outwards communication in designing/music/arts.

hypotheses depart from the approach of hermeneutic philosophy, assuming that the architectural work is an expression of the human being and therefore subject to interpretation. Apart from their material value as objects made up of walls, ramparts, stairwells, etc., there is a set of values that endow the architectural works and architectural places of a multiplicity of meanings, i.e., according to the terminology of P. Ricoeur, an excess of sense (Ricoeur, 2000).

Unlike the scientific works that have a literal and univocal sense, the architectural places are prone to multiple interpretations, being part of what Gadamer calls the spirit sciences, as opposed to the natural sciences. Due to the fact that shape, as it is usually reflected in the architecture disciplinary field, is dominated by the model of natural sciences (considering architectural places like objects in which the building's "objective" form that gave rise to it is the sole determinant) we thought it appropriate to introduce in the debate another point of view.

Therefore, in this paper, architectural work is beheld from two different perspectives: on the one hand, from the traditionally used perspective in the subject of project, i.e. as an object abstractly considered in relation to the context in which it is produced and interpreted and, on the other hand, with the approach of hermeneutics that is, as a work resulting from human activity, and produced by someone who is inserted into a particular cultural community and placed in a particular historical situation.

Similarly to what hermeneutics advocates for literary works, architectural sites and works should be subject to a humanistic understanding, which involves interpretation, i.e., the deciphering of the human brand that any work or place holds.

The dialectic between explanation and understanding

To structure our idea, we employ the Paul Ricoeur textual interpretation theory as a valid paradigm for the interpretation of architectural works. It is from the dialectic between explanation and understanding that we built the reading axes - as a first step to understanding the explanation, and then in the reverse direction, from the explanation back to understanding. We designated the first stage *understanding conjectural*, the second stage *explanation* and the third stage *understanding like a mode of appropriation*. The objective is to extend the reading of places and Artworks and to introduce the human brand that characterizes them.

First phase - understanding / conjecture

The first reading arises from observation and produces a speech about the work. This reading builds on the literal meaning of the work and is born from what you see, of what is objectified and formally presented to us. This reading is a first conjecture or hypothesis, namely, an immediate understanding, thus portrayed as incomplete and inconsequential. So, conjecturing about a work is to build a literal sense and build it through the elements that are objectified. What substantiates the possibility of a first conjectural reading - as a possible scenario - is the fact that, departing from any work,

is possible to build a sense objectified as a whole from its parts. This understanding requires a unilaterality which in turn is the basis the conjectural character of the interpretation. Each construction of meaning will depend on reciprocal relations established between what is considered as a whole and its parts. The concept of conjecture lies here - a hypothesis departing from the importance that is given to one or more parts according to a certain perspective.

In the light of the textual interpretation of Ricoeur, in order to accept a conjecture it must be validated and, although it appears that the first conjectural reading departs from what we see, and what is there, and therefore presupposes objectivity, it is no more than a unilateral reading. It departs from a point of view and therefore implies a selection within a possible field of numerous readings depending on the importance that is given to the different parts that compose it. Thus, validation is no more than an argumentative checking: to show that an interpretation is more likely in view of what is known is different from showing that a conclusion is true. So, in its truest sense, validation is not verification, but rather a logic of probability. It's more an argumentative logic than a logic of empirical verification. Here lies the reason why for the interpretative reading of a work to be done in the utmost objectified and bickering possible way, it is necessary to move on to another stage (up to explanation).

Second phase - explanation

Explanation rests on what we designate as structural reading. By structural reading we mean an analysis of the work from the observation of its internal joints: the important thing here is to isolate the work in relation to any context. We start, then, with what is objectified, the factual data, which correspond to what we see at the moment we are. The understanding of the work through the explanation is viewed in isolation and results in an abstract view which has solely to do with formal aspects. In this situation one recognizes the work in general. The work is seen as a machine whose internal functioning alone matters.

Explanation emphasizes the objectivated aspects of the work. Their contribution allows an understanding of work in its formal aspects, enabling its description and representation. However, it is insufficient as an interpretation. Limitations of this type of analysis stem from two reasons: The first reason is because structural-explanatory analysis is associated with the decomposition of the work into parts, and it is precisely on the grounds that one of the characteristic traits of architectural work is that it is constituted as a whole. The second reason is related to the alleged neutral reading of the author and his interpreters. We question the impossibility of interpreting the work by isolating the historical context, both by the author and the interpreter, the latter being the investigator or the user. Recognizing this impossibility, we introduce a set of topics that extend this step, linked to time and the interpreters, and which lead us to the last step, *understanding as a mode of appropriation*.

Third phase - understanding / appropriation

In the phase of understanding as mode of appropriation, the reading of the work draws on the architectural concept of work as an event marked by different meanings. Beyond their formal aspects, the reading of the work includes a time component, its meaning in the present and the role played by interpreters along the lifetime of that place. The interpretation that is intended here assumes that the work is an event that occurs in a specific moment in history and whose reading arises from the situation in which it meets each interpreter. Thus, when the work is approached by someone it becomes detached from its author, it is rendered distant, and only when it is visited does it become close. Only in this way can it be appropriated, although always in a different way, since the appropriation translates into updating by the user from its position as receptor.

The work hence becomes contemporary – it is through appropriation that the interpreter can assimilate the meaning of a work. In this phase, there is the possibility of a new event in discourse - the ultimate goal of the whole process of interpretation, taking into account a range of factors previously excluded both from the first comprehension and from the explanation.

If comprehension is a subjective attitude because the interpreter is a subject that is neither closed on himself nor knows all things completely, this is a more truthful reading because it considers that any reading is done from the present, taking into account the historical and cultural situation of the interpreter. It is from that point that any interpreter can receive the work which is offered to him and open a new discourse. To appropriate means to take possession of the proposals that the works we visited provide us with and suggest to us.

Conclusion

What we propose includes two domains: one with an objective character - connected with explanation - and another with a non objective character - linked to understanding. From a first understanding we move on to an explanation, in order to finally obtain a new interpretation through understanding.

If an earlier understanding of the work is based on literal apprehension, of what we can see, resulting in a conjectural understanding of this apprehension, in the second stage, more elaborate than the first one, we intend to explain the work through objective data. We have divided this reading axis into nine topics - *form, figure, scale, function, tectonics, limits, accessibility, views* and *deployment building form*. Although we consider this type of reading to be insufficient, it is nevertheless crucial for interpretation because it allows the work to be represented, given its descriptive character.

Appropriation, i.e., the phase understanding that completes true interpretation, we will introduce a set of topics that make work contemporary. The interpretation of any work originates from an author, and a number of interpreters who receive it, and, in this chain of events, the tradition introduced by the first interpreters inspires the latter. Interpretation of the work and past interpretations about this work, in the light of the

historical consciousness of the situation in which we find ourselves, enable capturing work in its singularity and uniqueness. At this stage of understanding, the topics that define it have to do with space, time and interpreters, being *prejudging, past readings, timeframes, dimensional levels* and *relational value*. Consequently, the interpreter's perspective, changes in place over time (seen from our situation at present), past interpretations (viewed in terms of the consciousness of the special nature of each) and the particular setting make up the great lines underlying the comprehension of architectural works. (Diagram 1).

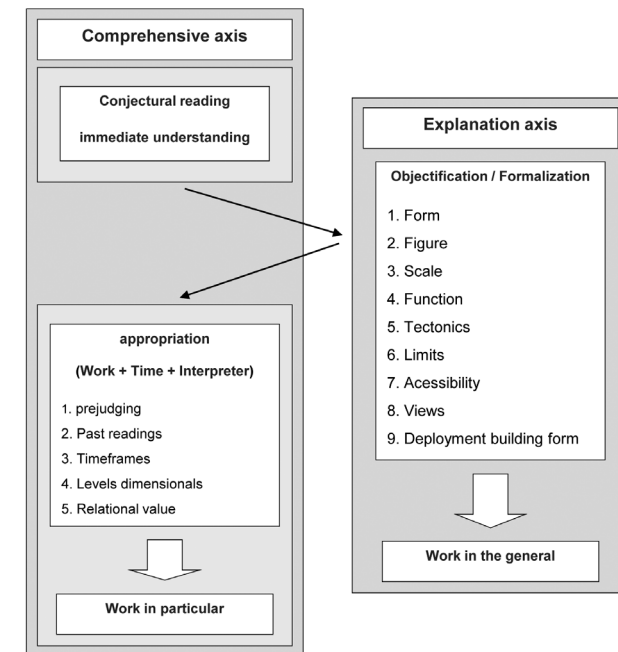


Diagram 1 - Interpretation model (from explanation to understanding).

Our conclusion is that the hermeneutic dimension of interpretation thus exceeds explanation techniques of work in order to be situated in a human horizon of sense. Based on this perspective, we propose that the reading of architectural works should not be limited to the description of a certain reality, but rather give greater intelligibility to explicative schemes that have so far been found and used in project teaching. As a result this article seeks to redefine the way sites and works should be described and interpreted, in a new fashion and through an array of common and anachronic characteristics.

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