

ATINER CONFERENCE PRESENTATION SERIES No: ARC2019-0167

ATINER's Conference Paper Proceedings Series

ARC2019-0167

Athens, 25 November 2019

Architecture as a “Thing in Itself”

Luís Manuel Serro

Athens Institute for Education and Research

8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10683 Athens, Greece

ATINER's conference paper proceedings series are circulated to promote dialogue among academic scholars. All papers of this series have been blind reviewed and accepted for presentation at one of ATINER's annual conferences according to its acceptance policies (<http://www.atiner.gr/acceptance>).

© All rights reserved by authors.

ATINER's Conference Paper Proceedings Series

ARC2019-0167

Athens, 25 November 2019

ISSN: 2529-167X

Luís Manuel Serro, Professor, CITAD – Lusíada University, Portugal

Architecture as a “Thing in Itself”

ABSTRACT

This article proposes to understand the architectural object as "thing in itself" so it is necessary in the first place to define what is a “thing”. One thing is a determination of the idea and this when perceptible falls in space and time *"one thing is this thing. We try to understand in a more rigorous way the essential character of the thing we find"* (Heidegger, 1992). So, the essential character of "this thing" needs to be configured in a structure with four main characteristics:

- I. Appearance, that in which the thing is manifested, in its gestaltically perceptible nature
- II. Form is the way in which the internal elements of the structure interconnect and manifest themselves;
- III. Matter, matter can be said to be what "supports" the form, that which allows the form to manifest and organize;
- IV. Substance, substance is what allows a thing to be that "thing" and cannot be another "thing" is the essence of being.

So, the architectural object as a thing in itself in its unit must be analyzed according to these four conditions.

- I. The appearance is the configuration of the architecture that is embodied in its physical, technical and decorative aspects in a general way what in art history is called "styles".
- II. The architectural form corresponds to the way in which spaces, interior or exterior interconnect in their internal coherence
- III. The matter of architecture is in itself space as the support of form and as place in its signification.
- IV. The substance of the architecture is the geometry, which makes possible the three previous conditions.

As a conclusion of this analysis it will be seen that the unity of these four conditions integrated into a single object is that it is the essence - "Being" of Architecture.

Introduction

Architecture as an object is the determination of the “*ideal*”. However, the thought is the determination of the “*idea*”. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish both of these aspects from the same “*reality*”. As an object, architecture is a phenomenon, something perceptible, which possesses a sensible limit. When it comes to the determination of the “*idea*” the “*thing in itself*” is the origin of the phenomenon and thus like *númeno*. There is this duability that unifies the subject. As an object, architecture is a thing. “This thing”, which can from its complexity emerge from the predication of the idea, stands for a “reflexion” of the subject “in this thing” As a thing itself, it reaches an ontological dimension of the intelligible limit of the actual subject.

This article has, thus, two distinct parts. The first part will address the concept of “thing” in its phenomenal dimension and in its dimension of *númeno*. The second part will analyse the way architecture manifests the “thing” and the “thing in itself”.

The Concept of Thing and “*Thing in Itself*”

“What is a thing?” Heidegger answers: “*A thing is the support of the proprieties and the truth that from it is corresponded, it has its place in the statement of the proposition which is a connection between the subject and the predicate*”¹.

It consists on a determination, a perceptible object, the result of a sensation.

“*The effect of an object on a representative capacity, as far as from it we are affected, is the sensation. The intuition that relates with the subject via sensation is called empirical. The indeterminate object of an empirical intuition goes by the name of phenomenon*”.²

The actual origin of the word “thing” can be explained through two different, but complementary, ways:

- Derived from Latin, “thing” means judicial process
- Or “*Rés*” – substantial thing of a whole that exists as a determined being.

The term “phenomenon” possesses, in the Kantian philosophy three fundamental meanings:

“*it is primarily what’s sensibly known, the object of the sensible knowledge and yet, the manifestation of something occult behind the manifestation itself.*”

¹(Heidegger, 1992, p. 45)

²(Kant, 2010, p. 61)

Finally, it is given in the sensible impression after being submitted to the “á priori” forms of sensibility and the understanding, after being objectified.”³

Now, what is given to the understanding, in other words, the “objectified” is what can be categorised, structured in the reason’s analytical process.

However, the phenomenon refers to something not sensible, as a support of the phenomenon “something *occult*”. It’s that occult thing which in its essence is the “thing in itself”, unknowable, but with the origin and support of the phenomenon as appearance, the actual substance of the phenomenon.

“Consequently, many things can be said á priori about these phenomena, but not even the minimum can be said about the “thing in itself” that may consist its fundament”⁴.

In this regard, the concept of “thing in itself” and the concept of *númeno* can be confused or associated. However, it’s important to clarify the fundamental difference between them. *Númeno* means something completely undetermined, about which nothing can be said, it does not belong to the sensible world, it can be represented. It’s in its substance a pure intuition “*á priori*”.

The “thing in itself”, as it was mentioned before, is the fundament of the phenomenon and, therefore, can be assumed as the *númeno*, in its positive sense, which means achievable, which grants an ontic meaning of existence, that is, the being as a being.

As its complement, according to Kant, *númeno* carries a negative meaning, unconditional, indefinite and indefinable, thus, having potential.

“consequently, every transcendental idea can be reduced to three categories from which the first one contains the absolute unity (unconditional) of the subject; the second has the absolute unity of series of conditions from the phenomenon; lastly, the third possesses the absolute unity of the condition of all the objects in the thought in general”⁵.

The *númeno* becomes, thus, the limit of knowledge and reveals itself as a trigger of unlimited negativity. The *númeno* is in itself, the absolute.

Appearance

Phenomenon means “appearance”, it’s the manifestation of the “thing”, assumes a sensible limit, a sensation that Kant names as representative capacity which affects the subject.

Therefore, we are in the relation’s realm: measurable, of colour, volume and of the “thing’s” designation. This designation implies the concept of unity, the

³(Morujão, 1981, p. 236).

⁴(Kant, 2010, p. 83).

⁵(Kant, 2010, pp.321, A 334, B 91).

same as singular attribute. “This thing” can have many components, but what individualises it is its unity, its singular character.

“Things are singular things (...) each thing is this thing and nothing else”⁶

Accordingly, this unity of various constitutive parts from the “thing”, which confers the singular character, is, in the present context, considered a structure.

It is, in the present context, considered as structure, that a “thing” will be analysed around the five different aspects which is composed:

- I. Internal Consistency – which the whole is more than the sum of the parts;
- II. Meaning – confers “value” to the object;
- III. Function – defines the purpose of which the structure is intended;
- IV. Internal Mobility – is what allows that the various parts from the structure acquire different importance or alternate importance in relation to the subject;
- V. “Open House” – allows the possibility of a structure to evolve or transform into another one. Alberto Ecco called this potential characteristic: absent structure.

However, apart from this analysis, structured like this, it lacks the definition of how its internal parts interconnect and that is what we call form.

Form

The concept of form is quite extensive and gains different meanings within human knowledge. However, in this article we will only discuss some notions that are selected as more significant.

The word form originates from two distinct terms:

-From the Greek “*eidos*”, meaning form that is derived from PIE “*weid*” which means to see, in other words, sensation.

-From the Roman “*morfē*”, which means form in the sense of external figure “we can distinguish thoroughly two concepts of form: the generic and the restricted. The generic concept, the form is the principle of the internal or external being which provides perfection to the “thing” (...) in the restricted sense, the form defines itself, according to the various object and structure’s analogical realms, what is the component of form”⁷

But, form as a configuration is the thing’s appearance as a phenomenon (*eidos*). It’s a determination of “*idolon*” which means image, what manifests the form in its internal concept. It’s not “this thing” anymore, but is applied in the phenomenon universe.

“However, to what enables the diverse of the phenomenon to be ordered according to certain relations I call the phenomenon’s form”⁸. As a result, form

⁶(Heidegger, 1992, p. 25).

⁷(Anon., 1997, p. 674).

⁸(Kant, 2010, pp. 64, B34).

can be described as the way internal elements interconnect and link with each other, and from which their function depends (ultimate end of any structure's existence).

It is also important to mention that a structure's meaning is, always, an added value to its internal elements. These, because of their internal mobility can coincide in a unity and function on behalf of a common goal.

Therefore, meaning and function can coexist in an intrinsic unity. However, in that case, it is not the form that prevails, but in fact, it is its matter that does.

Thereby, form and matter are inseparably connected in an intrinsic and two-way dependence.

If matter is what supports the form and form, in return, can only be apprehended from matter, it is not the phenomenon that reveals itself, but in fact, it is its foundation that does.

Appearance and form remain in the sensory context of the phenomenon. Both constitute their sensible unit, but their unknowable foundation is the "thing in itself" which prevails as "númeno" in positive sense. It is formed in its essence by matter and substance, focusing on these two concepts.

Matter

*"I call matter what, from itself, is not something determined, or a quantity, or any other being's determination"*⁹

Such is the Aristotelian concept of matter, covered below, from its notorious definition:

*"I call, thus, matter (hyle) the first substrate of each thing, as the imminent beginning of which the thing emerges to the being, but not according to an accidental process"*¹⁰

We can point out that matter, as the foundation of the phenomenon is a receptable (chora) of form, something that remains beyond the accident.

As a result, according to Aristotle, every phenomenon is potency and act, thus, is subjected to change; the first matter (hyle) is the only one that does not shift with change, remaining in potency.

Now, what remains is the "númeno", in its negative sense, undetermined potency, which according to Kant is space and time.

"Space is therefore considered, as the condition of the phenomenon's possibility and not a determination that depends on them (...) "¹¹ *only space can make things to us, exterior objects* "¹²

In fact, while to Plato, space is a "Chora", receptable, (which Aristotle names as first matter Hyle), to Aristotle, space is a "Topos", in other words, a space full

⁹(Aristóteles, 2005, pp. 293 Z3, 1029 a1 - 26).

¹⁰Física aristoteles cap. IX 192A.

¹¹(Kant, 2010, pp. 65, B39).

¹²(Kant, 2010, pp. 69, A29).

of meaning. “Ceux qui disent que la matière est une substance, auraient raison, s'ils parlaient de la matière intelligible; le sujet des formes, là-bas, c'est bien une substance, ou plutôt c'est la substance conçue avec la forme qui est elle, la substance complète et pénétrée de clarté. La matière intelligible est-elle éternelle? C'est demander si les idées le sont; elles sont engendrées puisqu'elles ont un principe; mais elles sont non engendrées parce qu'elles n'ont pas de commencement dans le temps;”¹³

However, the intelligible and undetermined *númeno* can only exist in us through the understanding of not having anything determined besides its concept, the form. All sensible knowledge puts the subject in a passive position. The subject's perception is the matter.

*“matter is what corresponds as a sensation of the phenomenon; what enables the diverse of the phenomenon to be ordered according to specific relations (the form of the phenomenon)”*¹⁴

The reason the relation between form and matter is comprehended is because, Kant, in his transcendental aesthetic interprets time and space (*númeno*, in its negative sense) not as a structure (since that is originated from a determination), but as pure representations with no sensations.

Since the “thing in itself” is already the first predication of *númeno*, space is no longer a pure intuition “*á priori*”. It is an abstract concept of the sensibility “infinite space” and the correlation between form and matter, acquiring the already referenced two-way indissociably. The second part of this article will show how this correlation manifests in architecture.

Appearance, form and matter are manifestations or substrates of the phenomenon, which acquire an internal and ontological unity as substance.

Substance

In a segmented definition with postulate character, substance is what defines and individualises a “thing”. It is its essence, is true being, what defines a “thing” without making it another “thing”. “To better determinate ontologically substance, we say that it is in it and not in another, it is what subsists in itself (...) essence is what makes the being what the being is”¹⁵

So, every being has substance as well as matter and form. Aristotle turns them indivisible between one another, establishing for each its certain category. Therefore, to matter, he considers the existence of first and second matter; to substance considers four categories

¹³(Plotin, 2003, p. 59).

¹⁴(Kant, 2010, pp. 62, B34).

¹⁵(Anon., 1997, p. 1330).

*“substance can be understood as, if not more, at least four main meanings: it is considered that the substance of something is: the essence, the universal, the type, and the substrate”*¹⁶

However, these four categories or nothing more than determinations of the actual essence of the being itself, indistinct from the matter “Furthermore, in its term matter would be substance. As a result, if matter is not substance, we fail to understand what substance could be regardless, because once all the other determinations are excluded, there’s nothing left beyond it

*(...) I call matter what, from itself, is not determined, or quantified, any other determination of the being (...) thus, to consider the problem in that point of view, follows the substance as matter. However, that is impossible, since the characteristics of substance are overall, the fact that is divisible and something determined. For this reason: the form and the combination of matter and form seem to be more substance than matter”*¹⁷

None the less, Aristotle does not establish a difference between sensible beings and comprehensible beings as Plotinus refers in its “Enaude VI”

*“Encore une fois, est-ce que ce sont là des genres? En particulier la substance est-elle un genre unique? Car il faut en tout cas commencer par elle. Que, dans la substance intelligible et dans la substance sensible, il y ai tune chose unique qui serait le genre de la substance, c’est impossible, et nous l’avons déjà dit. (...) Mais dans les substances sensibles ells-mêmes, il faut chercher ce qu’il y a de commun à la matière, à la forme et au composé des deux, puisque, selon [les Péripatéticiens], «ces trois choses sont des substances»*¹⁸

Here is how, Aristotle and Plotinus differentiate the Kantian númeno in positive and negative sense, in its actual determinations which Plotinus considers being form the inferior level of the númeno (negative)

*“La substance est-elle une catégorie unique où l’on réunit la substance intelligible, la matière, la forme et le composé des deux? (...) au premier rang se trouve la substance intelligible; lesa utres sont au second rang ou à un rang inférieur.”*¹⁹

Therefore, as a common denominator, to Aristotle and Plotinus, regardless of particular effects, categories and natures of substance. We may say that substance is what is “by itself” and “in itself”.

In its universality, it is the númeno in its negative sense, unknowable and universal. It is the support of any predication. Moreover, in the positive sense, the

¹⁶(Aristóteles, 2005, pp. 291, 128b-35).

¹⁷(Aristóteles, 2005, pp. 293, 1029a - 15 a 30).

¹⁸(Plotin, 2003, p. 60).

¹⁹(Plotin, 2003, p. 61).

predication, is what determinates the ontological meaning of the being as far as affirming what it is “in itself”.

Architecture as “a Thing in Itself”

In the first part of this particle, it was established the difference between a “thing” and “thing in itself”, in other words, between the phenomenon and the númeno in its positive sense.

Phenomenon means appearance, empiric knowledge. In fact, “thing” has this characteristic of being “The thing acknowledges”, that implies the condition of perception of the object regardless of internal and external structure.

Architecture as a “thing”, as a phenomenon possesses tow characteristics: appearance and form.

Appearance

Architecture as a “thing”, a perceived object, has, first and foremost, the characteristic of appearance. This appearance pertains to volume, colour, ornamentation, the element’s dimension.

All in all, it is what we designate in general as style and where we date the architectonic object in its time.

Furthermore, appearance also concerns the constructive technique, the workmanship and the aging of it through time, simply because it is related to a phenomenon where the architectonic object is subjected.

This relation between its constituent parts, object’s internal relations and relations with its exterior space, with a unity “scale” referenced, are all subjected to the definite, to the apparent limit and, thus, falling under the Beauty’s realm.

Since, as an acknowledge “thing”, architecture is the embodiment of a culture, or civilisation. What is perceived beyond the sign’s plan of expression, is its meaning. Here is where architecture has its intuitive and inborn origin.

If architecture represents a certain moment of civilisation, what is perceived beyond the plan of expression is its plan of substance, the mindset of a time. Therefore, here, architecture has a rational origin.

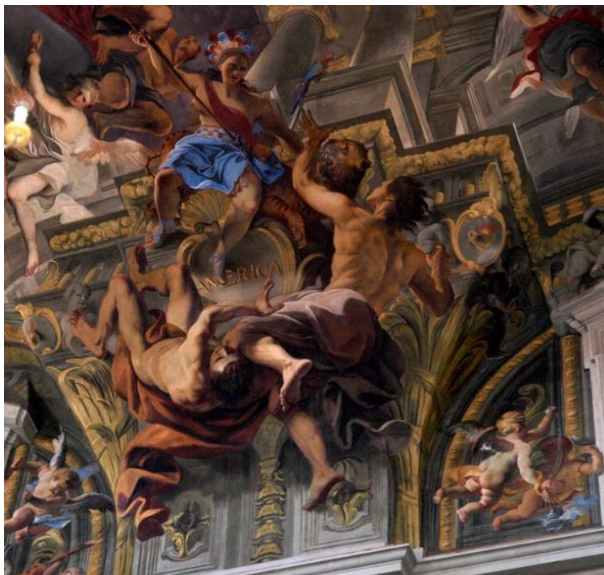
Apart from the diversity which composes the architectonic object, it possesses the concept of unity, acquiring a superlative value in relation to the elements of its content, thus, manifesting as structure.

Figure 1. *Khajuraho Temple Pattern Detail*



Source: www.incrediblefotos.com.

Figure 2. *St. Inácio Church, Rome, Alegoria da América - Andrea Pozzo (Foto: Leon Reed)*



Source: italianarte.weebly.com.

In Figure 1 we see the Manifestation of the architectural object, with volumetric and linear composition. Differentiation of "style." Revelation of a culture through plastic expression.

In Figure 2 the Appearance resulting from the plastic expression evocative and symbolic. Spatial illusion through perspective and linear representation.

Form

It was claimed that form is the way internal elements of a structure interconnect. Then, the following question appears: What element can be the common denominator to every structure's characteristics?

Only one appears as possible: The space.

Not a space as pure intuition *á priori* such as Kant defines it in *Critique of Pure Reason*, but as a perceptible space, a delimited space by its continent plans, as an experimented space and utilised.

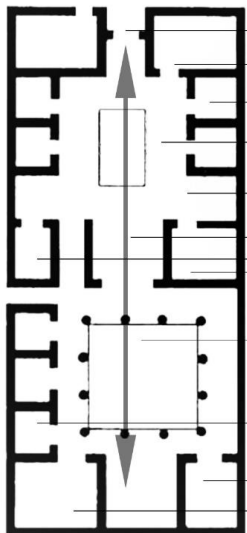
It is the relation between the various spaces that form the object's structure, residing a connection with the internal congruence, the meaning and the architectures function.

Moreover, still in the relation between these spaces, is where in its hierarchisation it is experienced the "internal mobility" and the "open house" through the potential possibility of expansion.

It is this relation of interdependency between spaces that constitutes the architectonic form which falls in space and in time, forming the phenomenon

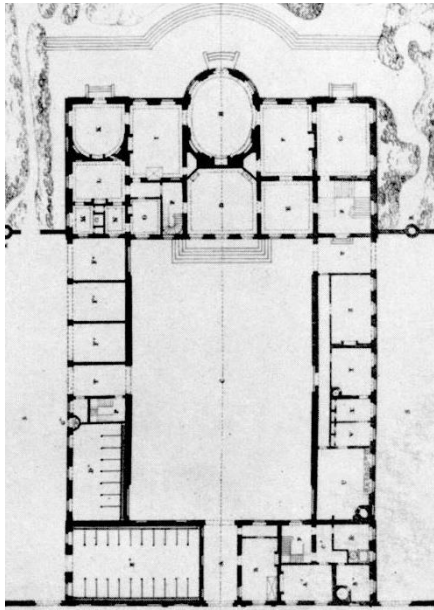
As a result, the perception of space and the concept of space as itself are two different things. Thereunder, we already transposed the limit of the phenomenon to *númeno*. It is about the positive aspect of this *númeno* that we will refer to space as a constituent of the architecture's matter, being geometry its substance. It is them that constitute the "thing in itself" of architecture.

Figure 2. *Roman Typology*



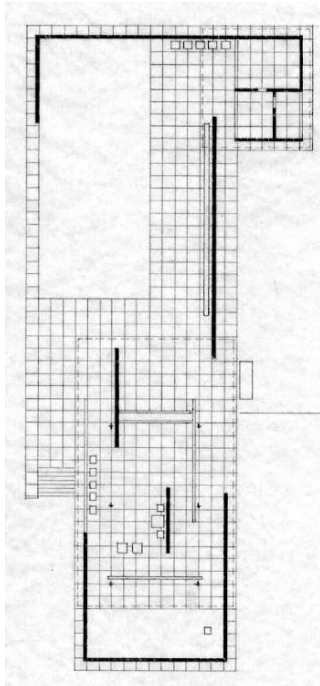
Source: <http://ipat2013ganeaserban.blogspot.com>.

Figure 3. *Hôtel_de_Bourbon-Condé*



Source: en.wikipedia.org.

Figure 4. *Barcelona Pavillion*



Source: <http://mkales.com>.

In *Figure 3* we see a Concentric spatial organization along an independent internal circulation.

In *Figure 4* we see a centrifugal Spatial organization in which the circulation is integrated in the functional and autonomous spaces of the architectural composition.

In *Figure 5* we see an Organic experience of fluid space defined by path surfaces.

Matter

Aristotle considers the first matter “hyle”, a substance, but its unknowable nature is, to Kant, equivalent to the reason of the phenomenon/a númeno.

*“Space is a necessary representation á priori, which underlies every external intuition (...) considering, therefore, space as the phenomenon’s condition of possibility not a determination that depends on them.”*²⁰

Space is not the thing’s property, but its condition of existence.

Thus, space assumes itself as the architecture’s matter, since it makes it possible as sensible object.

“Space is nothing more than the form of every phenomenon of the external sense, the subjective condition of sensibility, the only one that allows external intuition”.²¹

Now, we already say that this form is the perceptible space and even Kant himself affirms: *“The thing in itself cannot be known through its intermediate”*²²

Therefore, we put the phenomenon aside and can only focus on the positivity of the númeno, in other words, its possibility of predication.

This possibility, even concerning the unknow ableness of the númeno, is fulfilled through geometry.

Figure 5. *William Turner Sun Setting over a Lake*



Source: www.tate.org.uk.

²⁰(Kant, 2010, pp. 64, A24).

²¹(Kant, 2010, pp. 67, A26, B42).

²²(Kant, 2010, pp. 70, A3).

In Figure 6 we see the space "in itself" does not represent any quantitative determination. The mathematician sublime.

Geometry

Geometry is not only a relation of quantitative measurements and the numbers figuration. It is the possibility of the *númeno* as an infinite power of predication. Nicomachus de Gerasa affirms in the preface of his Introduction to Arithmetic.

*“everything that nature sorted in the universe, seems, in its parts, as a whole, to be determined and sorted according to number, through supervision and thinking of the One that created all; Because the model was set as prelaminary sketch, through the numbers realm pre-existent in the God’s spirit, creator of the world, the ideal and pure number, intangible above all aspects, but at the same time, the true and eternal essence (...)”*²³

This true and eternal essence is the number’s substance put *á priori* as the condition of space’s existence.

Therefore, geometry assumes the substantial importance in the perception of space, as well as its properties.

*“Geometry is a science that determines synthetically and, although *á priori*, the properties of space (...) As a result, the geometric propositions are all apodictic, entail the conscious of its necessity, for instance, the space has only three dimensions”*²⁴

Consequently, if the phenomenon are representations and the figurative elements of geometry are empirical, there needs to be an “*á priori*”, in the human spirit, the possibility of that intuition.

*“Therefore, only our explanation allows to comprehend geometry’s possibility as synthetic knowledge *á priori*”*²⁵

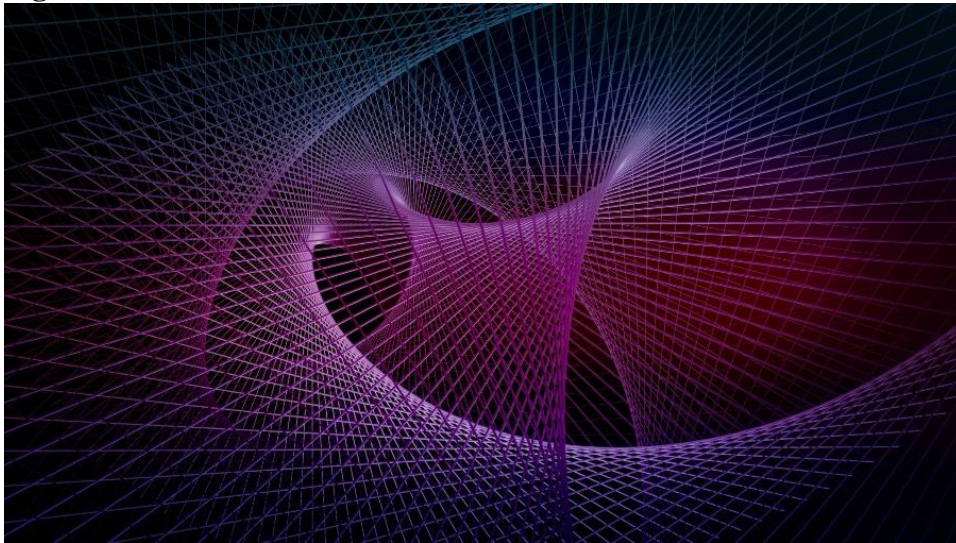
It is in its sensible determination that geometry defines form in its substance “true and eternal essence”, affirming itself as *númeno*, as “thing in itself”. Substantiating space as phenomenon.

²³(Ghyka, 1976, p. 22).

²⁴(Kant, 2010, pp. 66, B40, B41).

²⁵(Kant, 2010, pp. 67, B41).

Figure 6. Geometria



Source: pixabay.com/pt.

In Figure 7 we see Space as a support for dynamic geometry. The action without determination. Geometry as "thing in itself".

Conclusions

Through the exhibited analysis, we conclude that is the basis of the phenomenon. In other words, "a thing" is based on the "thing in itself", in what determines, motivates and, finally, reveals its essence.

Now, "a thing" is defined by appearance and form, in the multiplicity of elements that compose it.

However, the appearance is based on matter and substance as *númeno* in the positive sense, as "thing in itself" in its simplicity, in its pure intuition *á priori*.

Therefore, the architectonic object "a thing" manifests through:

- Appearance, the symbol's plan of expression, empirical sensation of its components, the clarity its structural organisation, to, despite the internal diversity, be able to be known as unity.
- Form, which is the way perceptible spaces organise themselves, being the common denominator of all the internal elements of that structure.

Just like the "thing in itself", Architecture has a limit and a quantitative relation between its parts. We are in the Beauty's realm.

The architectonic object as a "thing in itself" is based on:

- Matter, which is the unknowable space of the architectonic forms base;
- Substance, which is geometry as a universal determination and necessary to the intuition of space. Its unknowable essence requires that what

determines it also becomes it. Also, what determines it is geometry as the realisation of movement, power and number as eternal essence.

In conclusion, as “thing in itself” architecture surpasses the limit’s configuration and extends potentially in the infinite, in the non-limit. We are in the sublime’s realm.

References

- Anon., 1997. *Enciclopédia Luso-Brasileira de Filosofia - Logos II*. [Portuguese-Brazilian Encyclopedia of Philosophy - Logos II]. 4 ed. s.l.:Verbo.
- Anon., 1997. *Enciclopédia Luso-Brasileira de Filosofia - Logos IV*. [Portuguese-Brazilian Encyclopedia of Philosophy - Logos IV]. 4 ed. s.l.:Verbo.
- Aristóteles, 2005. *Metafísica - volume II*. [Metaphysics - volume II]. 2ª ed. São Paulo: Edições Loyola.
- Ghyka, M. C., 1976. *Le Nombre d'or*. s.l.:Gallimard.
- Heidegger, M., 1992. *Que é uma coisa*. Lisboa: Edições 70.
- Kant, I., 2010. *Crítica da Razão Pura*. [Critique of Pure Reason]. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.
- Morujão, A., 1981. *Fenómeno, númeno, coisa em si - Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia Tomo XXXVII, Fascículo 3*. Braga: Axioma.
- Plotin, 2003. *Ennéades III*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- Plotin, 2003. *Ennéades VI*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.