Truth in Architecture

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1. Introduction: Architecture, Truth, and the Visual

One of the striking features of much architectural discourse, at least from the perspective of an outsider, is its apparent tendency to prioritize the visual, and so to focus on the built primarily as it is visually presented and understood. One way to put this might be to say that the primary means by which the identity and character of an architectural design consists is conveyed is the diagram the picture or even the model, so that these also become determinative of the design, but one might also say that what is at issue is the way in which buildings and architectural spaces present themselves primarily in terms of the way they engage with our sense of vision, rather than with any of our other senses – something reflected in, and undoubtedly reinforced by, the enormous power of the photographic image. I was particularly struck by this some years ago when visiting the new Scottish Parliament Building in Edinburgh. Not only was much of the criticism of the building focused on what was taken to be the visual complication of the design ,[1] but Mirelles's own explanations of the building placed particular emphasis on the building as a sort of visual metaphor – piles of leaves, a huddle of boats, and a set of claims about the way the building draws the Scottish landscape together by incorporating elements of the landscape within it through its use of Scottish materials (materials seen in the building, but also shown in the main reception area)

This tendency towards what I shall call the visual aestheticisation of architecture (since I think it is also associated with a certain aesthetic turn) is not an explicit one, nor is it absolute or universal, and it exists alongside other tendencies that sometimes run counter to it, but it certainly appears as a feature of architecture when viewed from outside. Moreover, it is not a claim

without precedent: from within architecture, Juhani Pallasmaa, has argued a similar point, although more restricted to modernist architecture, claiming that architectural design prioritises sight and intellect, neglecting the other senses.[2] From a different perspective, the general tendency at issue here was captured in a question recently put by one of my colleagues in philosophy to another colleague in architecture: "are there any blind architects?" The architectural colleague to whom the question was put was not sure how to answer, and the question certainly has a certain oddity to it that is perhaps more important than the factual answer itself (in fact, the answer in the affirmative[3]). How would one practice architecture if one were blind? (and I don't mean simply how does one design for the visually impaired) – or perhaps better, what sort of architecture would result if one were to abstract from the visual?

I want to explore this emphasis, or possible emphasis, on the visual, but I also want to connect it with the question of truth in architecture – what does it mean to talk of 'truth' in relation to a building, or to a design? One reason for connecting these two issues is that there is an already existing philosophical discourse that explores truth in relation to the visual and the re-presentational (while it also questions that relation), and I want to draw on some of that material in my discussion here today. However I also want to use this as a way of making a small foray in the direction of the ethics as it relates to architecture, and this will involve saying something about the relation between truth and ethics, as much as about the relation between these terms and architecture. Let me begin, then, with the question of truth, and then we can see where that leads us in relation to the visual.

2. *Architecture, Assertion, and Authenticity*

The most familiar sense of truth, and a sense that may suggest difficulties in the architectural context, is that truth is a matter of correctness between a representation and that which it represents. Thus, truth is paradigmatically associated with sentences, and more specifically, with assertoric sentences –

sentences that make a claim about some subject matter. Philosophers argue about what more we can say about truth – whether, for instance, we can clarify the relation of correctness by reference to any more basic concept, with the usual candidates being some notion of correspondence or else of coherence – and there is also a much-debated question, although often poorly formulated, concerning whether truth is relative or absolute (this last question seems to me to me to be mistaken – something I have discussed elsewhere, and will leave to one side in the discussion here). If we think of truth as a matter of correctness, then there is an immediate problem, it would seem, in making sense of truth in architecture, since how can a building or an architectural design, be 'correct' – more specifically how can the notion of the accuracy of a representation to that which it represents be applied to a building or a design?

If this sense of truth is indeed to make sense in relation to architecture then one must make sense of the idea of a building or design making some claim. Sometimes, of course, buildings do include statements – they may appear as features of a façade or a portico, chiselled into stone, painted onto wood, or in the form of signs or placards themselves fixed to some feature of the construction. For the most part such explicit forms of statement are not integral to the design of a building, although modern advertising is such that one might be led to think that at least some buildings are less important than the messages they carry. There are some interesting questions we might pursue about the role of advertising in building, or perhaps of the role of building in advertising, as well as in commoditisation and consumption. Yet it is not so much the appearance of statements *on* buildings that ought to be here, at issue here, but rather the idea of the building as itself, in some sense, declarative or assertoric.

For pre-modern thinking, of course, the entire world was part of a symbolic order. Important buildings were themselves woven into that order, and intended to embody and express it. Nowhere is this more evident than in the medieval cathedral. Since the rise of semiotics, especially in the work of

Roland Barthes, we have all become familiar with the idea that, in the modern world no less than the pre-modern, even the most mundane things may function as signs.[4] Indeed, semiotic analysis to one side, it seems clear that buildings have always operated in ways that combine the symbolic and the utilitarian – even the most ordinary building has a set of meanings woven into it that combine conscious and unconscious elements. Yet there is also a way of thinking and writing about architecture that goes somewhat beyond this idea of the building as part of a larger symbolic order, and takes the building to itself represent a deliberate exercise in something akin to the creation of a text that contains assertions and statements within it. This way of thinking about architecture may be thought to pick up on the post-structuralist assertion of the ubiquity of textuality, and this is certainly involved here, but notice that what is important here is not some general claim to the effect that a building *can* be construed in textual terms, but rather that it is indeed intended and consciously read in a way that takes up a specific representational and assertoric content, and this is more than to assert its implicit textuality alone.

Certainly, inasmuch as architecture has entered into and become party to what may be thought of as a broader socio-cultural and political discourse, and as making contributions to such discourse, then one might well be inclined to attribute to architecture, that is, to particular architectural constructions or designs, the capacity to make assertions and so to make assertions that can also be judged to be true or correct – or as false or incorrect. For the most part, the claims made by buildings in this regard turn out to be fairly banal, and so are often trivially true, if they are true at all. The idea that the use of glass in a government building, a notable feature of some of Norman Foster's designs for public buildings (the Greater London Council Building and the Reichstag Dome), is an assertion of the 'openness' and 'transparency' of democracy (which might be interpreted either symbolically or declaratively) is one example of an assertion that seems to have become so commonplace in much recent public architecture as to be almost empty.

Whether the declaration these buildings attempt to make is one that is indeed so true as to be banal, or whether they may actually show something else about the real opacity of contemporary democratic claims is another question.

The use of glass to make a claim about the nature of democracy is indeed a fairly banal level of assertion. But there are many other examples of a more sophisticated set of claims that architects take their buildings to express. Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin is designed on the basis of Walter Banjamin's essay 'One-Way Street' and contains a complex set of textual elements within it. At the other side of the world the Australian Museum in Canberra, itself inspired by Libeskind's work, also contains a declarative content relating to the history and nature of the country whose museum it is. The building is intended to function as a set of knotted ropes that pull the various elements of Australia together – apparently almost literally since the building is supposed to contain these elements. Indeed the Museum contains explicit textual elements throughout, including a 'Garden of Australian Dreams' and a set of messages in Braille on its walls (this is itself an intriguingly contradictory use, since the messages cannot be read *as* Braille – they cannot be *touched* – but could only be read as *visual* symbols; after construction, these messages were also seen to be politically problem and so the messages were later deliberately garbled by the addition of randomly inserted dots).

The idea that a building may carry some assertoric content seems to be particularly evident in much contemporary architectural theory and criticism, and in many architects own exegeses of their work. Often this is part of a conception of architecture as driven by a particular conceptual content, such that the aesthetic quality of the building is itself determined by its conceptual content. This seems to me particularly true of much of Robert Eisenman's work, but also that of Rem Koolhaas. The work of these architects often seems designed to convey a set of argumentative claims and forms of contestation – challenging the expectations of the users of their buildings at the same time as they also seem to assert the autonomy of the building over

an above any claims of functionality or utility. Indeed, in the writing about these buildings one often finds claims being made about the assertoric content of the buildings as a whole or about certain features of those building, in the case of Eisenmann, for instance, about the connections between spaces, or about the role of and nature of elements of architecture itself. Significantly, the assertoric content at stake here is typically conveyed visually – in and through the elements of the design as these are *seen*.

I want to come back to some of the issues at issue here, but before I do I want to move on to consider a second sense of truth that also seems at play in architecture. This sense of truth concerns the connection between truth and the notion of that which appears or shows itself. It is the sense invoked when we say of someone that they are a 'true' friend or that the yellow metal in our hand is 'true' gold. Here truth is used to mean a certain convergence between how something appears and what something is so that its appearance shows what it is, without dissembling or hiding – truth as authenticity or genuineness. It is this sense of truth, it seems to me, that has most often been taken to be involved in architectural discourse concerning truth and that is most often explicitly acknowledged as perhaps playing a part in architecture. It is this sense of truth that we find in Ruskin, for instance, and one might argue that some such notion of truth or authenticity is also at work, if in a different way, in the rejection of ornamentation, and the emphasis on functionality, in the work of Loos and the Bauhaus movement in the first part of the twentieth century. Interestingly, one can also assimilate this conception of truth, at least as apparent in architecture, to the idea of truth as correctness, since the idea of truth as authenticity can be taken to depend on the idea of a correlation between what shows and what is shown that is analogous to the correlation, in the case of correctness, between the representation and that which it represents.

3. Truth and the Primacy of the Visual

The sometime appearance of the notion of truth as authenticity within architectural discourse, whether in Ruskin or elsewhere, might be thought to present an especially direct connection to the idea of the primacy of the visual in architectural discourse. But the emphasis on the visual may also seen to reinforced by the very idea of truth, whether as correctness or as authenticity, as tied to some form of assertion or the making of a claim. Here I want to make a more broadly philosophical point to the effect that the visual possesses a capacity for abstraction and separation that is crucial to the possibility of the representational or assertoric mode as such. One might go further here, and claim, even if somewhat tentatively, that the linguistic (if this is used as a term to capture what is at issue here) is tied to the visual in a way that it is not tied to any other sense. My point here is not dependent on any claim about the possibility of error, but rather about the experience of vision as such. Vision enables a grasp of a field of connections at the same time as it also enables a grasp of oneself as both within and yet also as separate from that field. Hence the idea of the gaze within twentieth century theory that enables the transformation of things into objects, but which is also itself connected to the nature of linguistic engagement, and so to certain conceptions of truth, in a particularly direct way. We might say then that the primacy of vision is essential to the possibility of a spectatorial perspective, even though the spectatorial perspective is not identical with the visual.[1] As soon as we begin to talk about truth then, we already begin to prioritize the visual – at least so long as we talk of truth in the senses identified so far.

[1] This is an issue I explore form a rather different perspective in 'Place and the Problem of Landscape', in Jeff Malpas (ed.), *The Place of Landscape* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, forthcoming, 2011. In the latter essay my concern is to argue against a narrowly spectatorial construal of landscape (both as an artistic genre, including a genre of painting, as well as a mode of place), and much of my argument rests on showing how even the visual implicates more than the visual alone. In the case at hand, the problem is rather different: the way in which the visual seems to be prioritized in architecture is precisely in a way that seems to move towards a more strongly spectatorial orientation in spite of the way the visual is itself embedded in a richer phenomenological context.

In architecture, and particularly the architecture of the last one hundred years, this prioritisation of the visual seems to have been reinforced in a variety of ways. One of the most obvious is, of course, the ubiquitous use of glass in modern and contemporary building, and with it a language of refection, of mirroring, of transparency and opacity. This was already evident with the new forms of construction that developed in the mid-twentieth century, and the associated buildings of the so-called 'International Style' that developed in the United States. In 1958, Alison and Peter Smithson noted the aesthetic qualities of American architecture of that period as tied very much to the visual and to the effects upon light: "Glass and metal faced buildings give the maximum light reflection into the street and this in itself is a contribution to the city. And there are, moreover, magical distortions when two straight up-and-down buildings are opposite one another. A blue glass city, no matter how organisationally banal, is never optically boring".[5] The Smithson's were themselves less focussed on the visual than many other critics, but their focus on the optical here exemplifies what is perhaps a twentieth century obsession with light as refracted and reflected through glass, and with the ideas of visuality that are part of this. The modern city, as Ken Lynch and Richard Sennett have pointed out, is above all a city of glass, even if not always a city that is therefore easily *seen*.

Of course, as I noted earlier, the role of the diagram and also the drawing, in architectural practice can also be taken as a further indication of the priority of the visual in architecture. Yet in recent years, the drawing and the model have given way to a new mode of architectural representation that also constitutes a new architectural tool – and like all tools, the tool is never simply there to serve a set of prior uses, but instead shapes the very activity in which it is employed, so that the tool itself shapes the uses to which it is put as well its user. The rise in digital design techniques within architecture – including developments in parametric design – has given a new impetus to the role and nature of visual representation in architecture [image #15 – digital]. The digital space, for all its creative possibilities (and they are

certainly enormous), is also a space that is primarily a space of visual abstraction (even the drawing, as a drawing, retains a closer connection to the concreteness of action in making a line on paper). Moreover, the digital enables increased realism in representation of a built form at the same time as it also enables a realism that is removed from the locatededness of the building itself – the space of the digital is a completely controllable, closed space. The digital also has another effect – it removes the designer from any connection to scale. The small becomes large and the large may become small (although the usual direction is towards magnification rather than reduction). This is actually an effect, not merely of the digital, but is already present in photography, as Benjamin points out (see 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'[6]). The photographic is not only allied to the emphasis on visuality, but also itself reinforces the abstracted character of visual representation.

The emphasis on the visual in architectural discourse and even in the practice of design is not, as I noted earlier, something uncontested nor is it the only salient aspect of such discourse or practice. Indeed, there can be no doubt that the emphasis on the visual is part of the architectural concern with spatiality, and the shaping of spatiality in and through building. Yet the emphasis on the visual in architecture, reinforced as it is by a range of developments, also has certain significant effects of its own in terms of the sorts of spaces that are consequent upon it. Many of the best-known examples of contemporary architecture are well-known, apart from the engineering or financial achievements that they embody, for the visual spectacle they constitute. In many cases, architecture asserts its own autonomy through the way in which it presents itself as an aesthetic object in its own right – buildings thus jostle for dominance of the urban skyline in a way that itself reflects the character of the corporate interest that contemporary architecture so often represents, while contemporary architectural forms are often judged as if they were purely aesthetic objects – and often this means that the very functionality of the building is itself refused or contested, for instance, in

Eisenmann's work, in aspects of Koolhaus', and also Libeskind's – although, in the case of his Jewish museum, it results in a building that actually seems to fulfil its memorial role very effectively – and also in Bernard Tschumi's designs . Tschumi is an especially interesting example of an architect who has often been quite explicit in his rejection of functionality, and in promoting a view of architecture as a tool for social and political critique, in a way that sometimes seems to over-ride issues of the concrete architectural situation in its entirety.[7]

The emphasis on visual spectacle here, and on a purely aesthetic appreciation of the architectural, also comes with a mode of formation of the urban landscape that is often designed to render that landscape in a certain clean, rationalised and almost formalised fashion. Thus John Portman's hotel complexes, which often involve redevelopment of old parts of the cities in which they appear (such as in the case of the Atlanta Marriott), while appearing slick and impressive, involve the creation of visually spectacular buildings (usually in their creation of an internalised 'exterior'), but also buildings that establish a completely formalised, rationalised space – a fully controlled, corporatized space, the mall, that is also striking in terms of its emphasis on a visualised spatial culture, a culture of consumption and conspicuous appearance. These aspects of the style of Portman's buildings are duplicated in mall and hotel developments around the world. Here the visual is allied with the representational understood in terms of the commodified, the managed, the quantified (indeed, the way in which the visual is thus associated with a mode of contemporary culture focussed around systems of commodification and quantification as these are themselves tied to a mode of spatiality is itself worthy of further discussion).

The introduction of the connection between the visual and the spatial is significant, since one might be inclined to counter the claim regarding the supposed prioritization of the visual in architecture by arguing that architecture is primarily concerned with the spatial and that the visual is merely one of the ways, albeit an important one, by which we gain access to

the spatial and to a discourse of spatiality. In fact, it seems to me that this reinforces rather than counters the tendency that I have been discussing, since there is no doubt that there is a powerful tendency to associate the spatial with the visual over and above any other sensory modality. The prioritization of the visual in architecture might thus be viewed as an instance of a more widespread prioritization of the visual in our understanding of space as such.

4. *Architecture, Truth, and the Topographic*

If we look to the relation between the visual and the spatial, but do so with a regard also to the way truth has entered into the exploration in which we have been involved, then it seems to me we can also see the possibility of a different way of thinking about truth that takes up the spatial, but might be amenable to a way of thinking that, while it can be construed visually, can also be taken in a way that connects the visual to a wider set of modes of perception and engagement. So far I have discussed truth as it might be understood in terms of both correctness and authenticity. There is a third sense of truth that I have not so far considered: truth as that which *enables* the grasping or appearing of anything as true (or indeed as false). This is a sense of truth as, to use a visual term, disclosure or appearing, or, to talk in a way that need not implicate the visual alone, as *opening* – an opening that is always also a *placing*.

This might seem a strange and unfamiliar sense in which to talk of truth, but it is an important t sense nonetheless. What is at issue here is the sense in which, prior to any particular instance of assertion that may be true or false, prior to any question concerning the consonance of something as it appears with the thing as it is, there must already be the opening up of a space or place in which that to which the assertion refers us, or the thing as implicated by its appearance, is already made available; a space or place in which the possibility of questioning is itself enabled and freed-up; a space or place in which things are brought into a play of relations with other things.

This sense of truth as opening is just the sense in which we can think of truth as itself implicated with the opening up of that always indeterminate and inexhaustible whole that is the world. It is a sense in which truth as it operates in a building, for instance, is not only potentially about the correctness of any assertoric content or the authenticity of appearance, but also about the extent to which the building opens up relations and possibilities, and is itself opened up by those relations and possibilities – especially the way the building opens up a set of possibilities for action. The emphasis on action here is, I think, particularly important, since it is essentially in and through action and potential action that space is itself first shaped and formed. The problem with the focus on visuality is that it can easily lead us away from the active character of space and towards either a static conception of space (as in what Benjamin calls ''the attentive concentration of a tourist''[8]), or else to a form of abstracted and idealised space that is actually given over to a form of aesthetisization. This is, indeed, just what seems to happen in much contemporary, especially high-profile, architecture. Just as the sense of truth as correctness or authenticity can be associated with a prioritization of the visual, the emphasis on the sense of truth as openness lends itself to a more basic understanding of the character of spatiality as given in and through the possibilities for active engagement – which need not only be in the sense of movement, but also in relation to the other senses, in relation to bodily orientation, in relation to touch, sound, and also mood.

Attentiveness to other sensory qualities in architectural design, and so to a more active sense of the architectural, seems to me to have been evident in past architectural forms. The Gothic cathedral, for instance, while it provides a breathtaking visual experience, is also a building specifically geared to the functions of ritual, to a particular mode of bodily orientation, and to the experience of the acoustic. One cannot really imagine a Gothic cathedral independent of its character as a space for sound as well as for light and shadow. The way in which a space sounds is dependent, not only on its

shape, but also the materials from which it is constructed, and materials not only have an impact on sight and sound, but also on the sense of touch, and even to some extent of smell – my abiding memory of American houses is the smell of American oak, so often used for floorboards and furniture. All too often in many contemporary corporate and public buildings, however, the dominant smells are those that come from the artificial materials, including bonding agents and paints, that are such important elements in their finishing and construction.

Even the visual engagement with a building can be understood in a way that connects it much more directly with our embodied locatedness in and experience of the built space than is often taken to be the case. Vision is one of the ways in which we orient ourselves, and one of the key features of buildings is precisely the manner of their own orientation, both in terms of the activities, habits, and modes of action they facilitate, and in terms of the way they themselves shape one's orientation to the surrounding environment. Here vision plays a key role – only sight enables this sort of specific multiple linear connection at a distance (although something similar is possible through sound, it operates in a very different way). But the role vision plays here is fundamentally to enable an orientation of the building, and of the agent to their surroundings. This occurs in particularly striking fashion, it seems to me, in Jorn Utzon's Sydney Opera House, which connects to its site through the way in which it is oriented to the harbour and the surrounding topography, as well as the manner of its placement on a headland standing out into the water of Sydney Cove.

The way a building orients itself is certainly not just a matter of how it looks, but also, in part through the way in which it configures the landscape around it – not simply in the manner of the picturesque, but in terms of the way it connects to and orders forms of activity and movement – as well as the manner of its own internal configuration and character. If architecture often seems to neglect other senses than the visual, then it also neglects that which is dependent on the senses, but also relates directly to our embodied

experience, namely our emotional responses to building. Yet if this is indeed something that often seems missing from many buildings, it has been taken up as an issue in the work of a number of innovative designers. Thus, to take two well-known examples, Peter Zumthor has consciously tried to address issues of mood and feeling, as well as memory, in the designs for buildings such as his well-known spa at Vals, while the work of Steven Hols also shows a sensitivity to similar concerns. From an earlier time, this attentiveness to the felt experience of a building is also evident in the work of Alva Aalto, and his Villa Mairea provides an excellent illustration. Moreover, while architects like Zumthor and Hols are often cited in these contexts, in Australia, architects such as Glenn Murcott and Richard LePlaistrier have also worked in ways that aim to connect buildings directly to their environments through the use of sliding walls, natural materials, and a strong sense of connectedness to garden and bushland.

It is worth noting, perhaps, the way all of the architects and buildings just mentioned seem to employ relatively standard architectural forms, and exhibit a similar concern with simplicity of line and form – one that might be thought characteristic of a certain form of modernist architecture – that is notably absent from the much more visually active work of so many other contemporary designers. Significantly, attentiveness to mood or emotional content is also evident in the work and the theoretical writing of the leading figure within modernism, namely, Le Corbusier – to quote from him once more: "The business of Architecture is to establish emotional relationships by means of raw materials. Architecture goes beyond utilitarian needs. Architecture is a plastic thing. The spirit of order, a unity of intention. The sense of relationships; architecture deals with quantities. Passion can create drama out of inert stone".[9] Modernism, in this form, can thus be seen to retain what can be understood as a form of 'humanism' – although one understood specifically in terms of an attentiveness to the space of building as indeed a *human* space or better a human *place*. In invoking the idea of place here, I mean to direct attention to the idea that the way architecture works is

not so much through the visual alone, but rather through the configuring of those multiple elements that are together experienced in the sense of the place to which a building itself responds, but which building also partly establishes.[10]

5. Conclusion: Ethics, Architecture and Topography

It is precisely in the topographic character of built form that it seems to me that one finds the primary sense in which truth operates architecturally,[11] and also, although I have not made much of this, the ethical character of the architectural. The essential concern of the ethical is precisely our mode of relationship to self, to others and to the world, and it is these relationships that are articulated in and through architecture in a particularly significant way. Understanding the ethical character of architecture must thus be to understand and to be able to articulate its topographic character. Moreover, this need not rule out the possibility of architecture itself performing a critical function, but that it may do so through establishing new modes of relatedness, which need not be dysfunctional or aestheticised, but may simply constitute and open up new spaces and places. This is not a possibility restricted to the signature or the iconic building, but can also appear in more everyday and pragmatic forms of architecture, and, indeed, in the new architectural developments that are occurring in areas like low-cost and sustainable design (also evident in the work of many Australian architects included those influenced by such as Leplastrier [12] and Murcott), one can certainly see a critical mode of architectural practice at work even though it is a practice also geared towards a set of functional concerns.

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Acknowledgements:

Notes and References

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[1] See, for instance, Giles Worsley's comments in the Daily Telegraph: "Ultimately, the building has to be judged for what it is and here there is a sense of an almost paranoid terror of simplicity. You can see this just looking at the plan, which really does look like a bunch of leaves scrunched up on the forest floor. (Leaves were another Miralles metaphor.)…You can see it in the structure needed to support the extraordinary complexity of the central canopied area, with heavy, overweight steel and timber sections holding up relatively small areas of roof, and in the debating chamber…This is not an excessively wide span, but it is given a roof of a complexity that would baffle a structural engineer. And you can see it in the elevations, whether in the bizarre stencil-gun cut-outs that decorate the towers, or the perverse shapes of the windows that punch their way out of the members' offices… ", Giles Worsley, *Daily Telegraph*, 04/08/2004

[2] See Juhani Pallasmaa *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester, UK: Wiley, 1996).

[3] For instance, Carlos Mourão Pereira, working in Lisbon, Portugual (http://www.carlosmouraopereira.com/en/main.htm - accessed 10/11/09). It is significant that Pereira developed blindness after becoming established in architectural practice. I am not aware of any practicing architect who has been blind from birth.

[4] It might be objected that in my discussion here I do not give enough account to the idea of the semiotic as an alternative way of theorising meaning. I do not think that attending more closely to the semiotic would make a great deal of difference to my argument here (although I certainly use a narrower concept of meaning than does the semiotic), but I would also argue that, strictly speaking, the semiotic does not offer a theory *of* meaning, but rather a theory *about meanings* (and so a theory that assumes implicitly that meaning is already understood).

[5] Alison Smithson and Peter Smithson, 'Letter to America', in *Ordinariness and Light: Urban Theories 1952-60* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1970), p.141.

[6] See Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations: Essays and reflections*, trans. H. Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), pp.236-237.

[7] Tschumi's New Acropolis Museum, opened in 2009, has itself been criticised for its supposed failure to attend to issues of purpose, significance and site, in spite of its supposed attentiveness to context. Having visited the building recently, it seems to me that Tschumi has indeed chosen to attend to *some* aspects of the building's context, but has deliberately ignored or refused others – how and on what grounds that choice can and should be exercised by the architect is, of course, a major question at the heart of architectural practice .

[8] Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', p.240.

9 Le Corbusier, in Ulrich Conrads (ed.) *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-century Architecture* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1970), p.61.

10 For a discussion of this sense of place, see my *Place and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). One of the names that figures in this book, and elsewhere in my work on place, is that of Martin Heidegger. I would argue the notion of the topographic is what underpins the idea, so often cited and so little elaborated upon, of Heideggerian 'dwelling', and which is already clearly in Heidegger's analysis of the Greek temple in his famous 1935-36 essay on 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (in *Off the Beaten Track*, a translation of *Holzwege*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp.1-56) , in which 'truth' rather than 'dwelling' is the central concept.

11 I would argue that all architecture can be understood as instantiating different senses of truth, as well as engaging with different sensory and felt modalities, but that does not mean that all architecture engages with these in a direct or explicit way. Similarly, all architecture can be understood as working, more or less effectively, through its topographic character. Yet not all architecture understands itself in that way.

12 On Leplastrier, see Rory Spence, 'Heightened senses (Architectural works by Richard Leplastrier)', *The Architectural Review* 203 (1998), pp.69-76.