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Truth of Architecture as Rendition of Place: Christian Norberg-Schulz and Jeff Malpas on Authenticity

Truth in architecture involves theories of authenticity; it is an essential notion in artistic creation but sunk in obscurity. In Heidegger's late thought, the revelation of being in specific beings is called truth, constituting the phenomenological openness opposed to modern metaphysical thought. My commentary is limited to the thinking on this subject articulated by two different personalities: Christian Norberg-Schulz (1926-2000) – the Norwegian architect who introduced the notion of truth into architectural theory, interpreting the writings of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) – and Jeff Malpas (b. 1958) Australian philosopher who recently returns to the question of truth from a Heideggerian perspective, again addressing architects. From this point of view, my text is a second degree "cover" to what is already a "cover" on Heidegger's notion of truth in architectural theory and philosophy.

On the other hand, I believe that Jeff Malpas's current reflections can provide a critical review of Norberg-Schulz's thought, 24 years after the Norwegian theorist's death. This interpretation allows me highlight seven hypostases of truth in the discourse of the two authors: truth as visualization, symbolization and gathering of a world; truth as revelation of presence in openness and concretization; truth as original image; truth as tension between earth and world; truth as propositional correspondence in assertion; truth as honesty; truth as revelation of being. The conclusion orients us towards the truth understood as an inevitable fusion of these seven hypostases: this presupposes an interpretation based on a relational attitude, concerned with moderation and piety, attentive to the place, capable of revealing authenticity as appropriateness to the situation and appropriation of place through habitation. Architectural designing involves this appropriation of place and how the architect is actually "taken up" in the situation of the place rather than controlling or reordering the given situation.

Revisiting Norberg-Schulz's idea of truth in architecture implies Malpas' "topological thinking": thus, the truth of architecture can be understood again as a "rendition of place" in which the "art of place" through architecture will be relational enabling, multisensory and affective activation within concrete experience, appropriateness and taking over of being by the situation in "letting beings be".

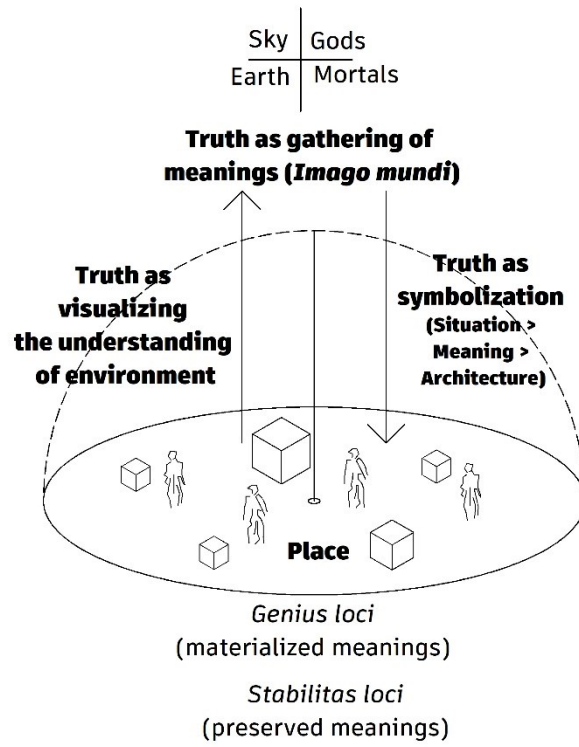


Figure 1 - Christian Norberg-Schulz's truth as visualization, symbolization and gathering of a world. Illustration by Cosmin Caciuc.

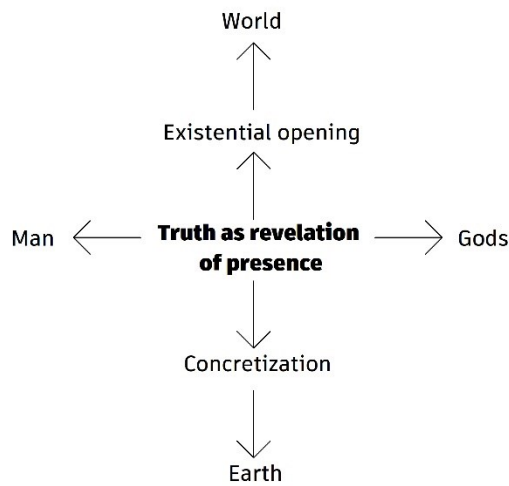


Figure 2 - Christian Norberg-Schulz's truth as revelation of presence in openness and concretization. Illustration by Cosmin Caciuc.

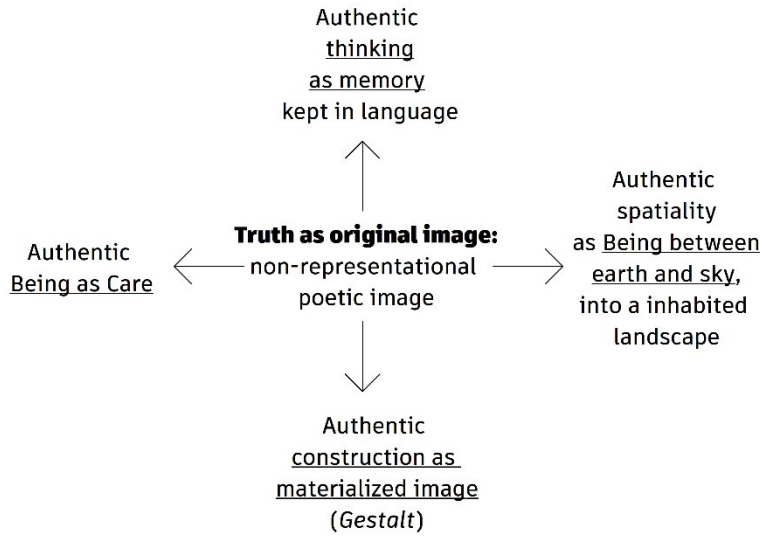


Figure 3 - Christian Norberg-Schulz's truth as original image. Illustration by Cosmin Caciuc.

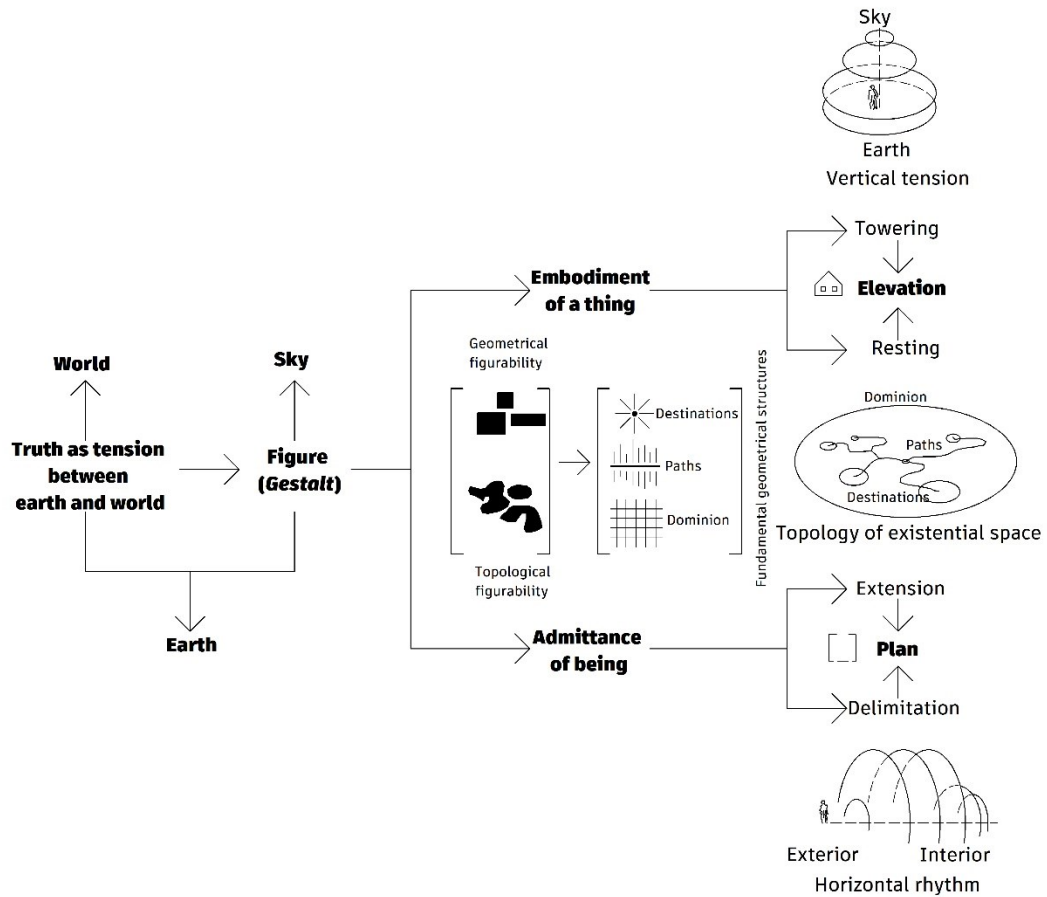


Figure 4 - Christian Norberg-Schulz's truth as tension between earth and world. Illustration by Cosmin Caciuc.

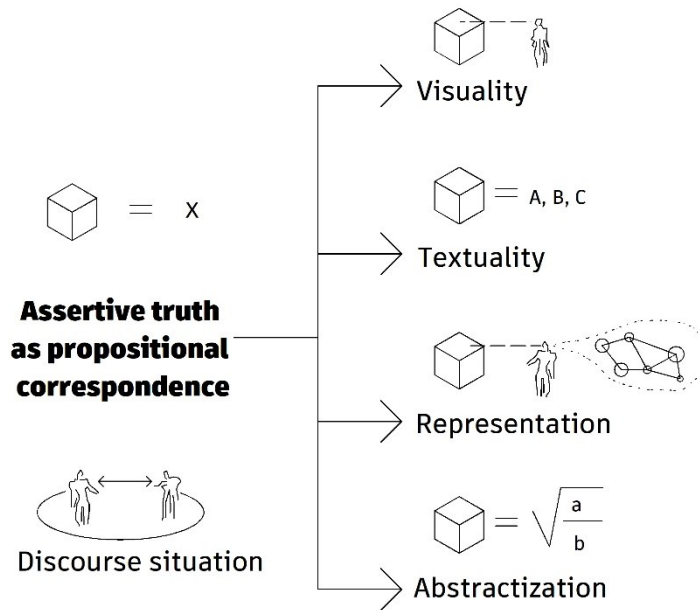


Figure 5 - Jeff Malpas' truth as propositional correspondence in assertion. Illustration by Cosmin Caciuc.

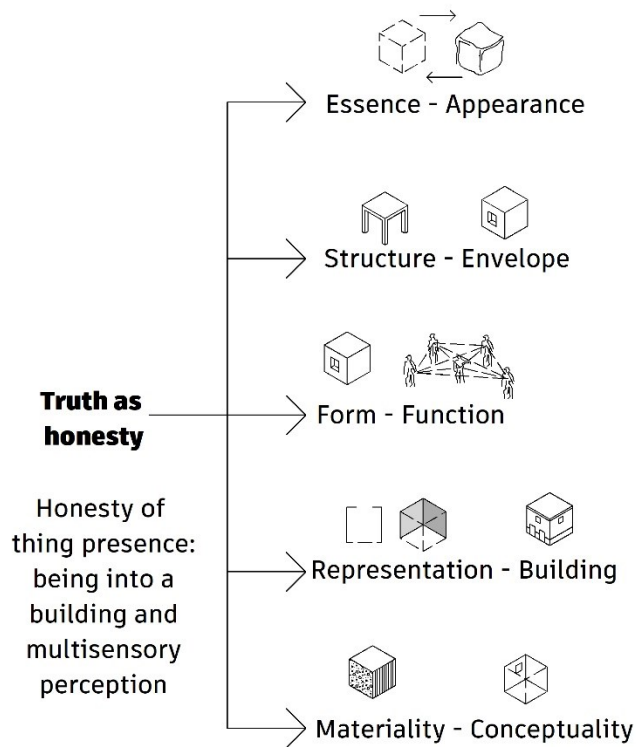


Figure 6 - Jeff Malpas' truth as honesty. Illustration by Cosmin Caciuc.

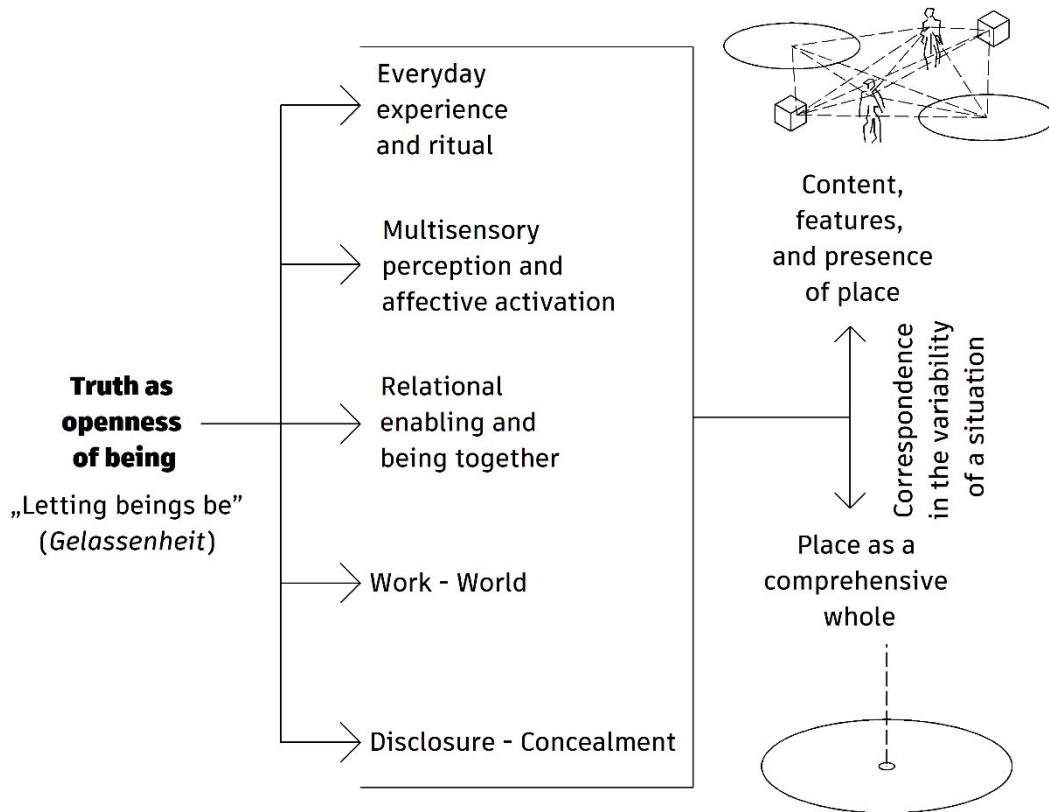


Figure 7 - Jeff Malpas' truth as revelation of being. Illustration by Cosmin Caciuc.