To build is a straightforward proposition; in practical terms it involves no more than the design and erection of a structure for a specific use, within a certain time and to an agreed cost. If the use is demanding, the site difficult, the weather unusually harsh or material (or money) limited, then technical problems can become extreme, but the central proposition remains straightforward.

But the way in which this deceptively simple proposition is achieved has generated some of the greatest aesthetic, moral, and philosophical debates known to man.

For example, there are those who agree that the structure and construction process of the building should be honestly and literally expressed with no ornament that is not a direct result of its construction or function. Others argue that structure and materials can be concealed, or, indeed, concealed and denied by the application of a separate system of ornament. This, of course, raises the issue of authenticity in architecture; should a building be a clear demonstration of its construction and function, or can it happily assume the garb of a quite different building type and construction? Is the object of architecture to instruct, enlighten, and morally and spiritually improve by the display of intellectual vigour and artistic sensibility, or is it merely to amuse, entertain and to provide an agreeable background for the common niceties of life?

To focus a little, should an architect be a technician, ruthlessly and remorselessly exploiting all the possibilities offered by contemporary building technology to achieve the straightforward objects of building, or should he/she assume the role of an artist and poet, and trespass into the often mysterious and provocative realms of aesthetics and make clients pay not only for a building but for a work of art as well?

Also, what should be an architect’s response to the past and to the existing context in which he builds? Should they both be ignored in the belief that honest expression of contemporary design is always better than a pastiche of history which inevitably has an air of the self-conscious? Or should architects lovingly re-interpret and tinker with building traditions in an attempt to create architecture that manages to look sympathetically to both past and future.

All these approaches (and more) have been pursued — often cynically and often simultaneously, and many architects of genius have attempted to summarise their thoughts. Sir Christopher Wren concluded that beauty was of two types: ‘natural’ and ‘customary’. Natural was derived from geometrical and mathematical forms and reflected the harmonies, proportions and immutable laws of nature. Customary beauty was based not on intrinsic laws but achieved by association or by familiarity. In the 1830s, K.F. Schinkel wrote about the conflict between functionalism and historicism: ‘Very soon, I fell into the error of pure arbitrary abstraction, and developed the entire conception of a particular work exclusively from its most immediate trivial function and from its construction. This gave rise to something dry and rigid, and lacking in freedom, that entirely excluded two essential elements: the historical and the poetical.’

Something over a hundred years later Leslie Martin reached a strangely similar conclusion though, of course, with very different architectural results: ‘Science can produce the facts but... art must show us the way in which they can be used’ (AJ 9.10.91 p26).

The champions of differing approaches usually construct a theory of architecture that connects their particular approach with what they identify as the true essence of architecture, while also attempting to demolish conflicting theories. But can there ever be a single, correct approach?

The object of this series is to understand; to get to grips with and demystify the ideas that generate both architectural theory and in turn architecture. We begin with a series of articles by Peter Blundell Jones on the issue of authenticity in architecture.
In search of authenticity

In the autumn of 1990 and the first two months of this year Peter Blundell Jones hosted a series of lectures at the South Bank Polytechnic under the general title 'In search of authenticity'. The speakers were Colin St John Wilson, Ian Ritchie, Peter Smithson, Mark Whitby, Peter Salter, Peter Ahrends, Robin Evans, Giancarlo De Carlo, Eva Jiricna, Richard Reid and Florian Beigel, while the final discussion was chaired by Peter Davey. In this and three further articles Blundell Jones tussles with some of the difficult issues raised. This is in no sense a summary of the series; rather an exploration inspired by it.1

Authenticity is an emotive word. Ask a group of architects to lecture on it, and some boldly nail their colours to the mast. Ian Ritchie has since made it his rallying cry.2 Florian Beigel, who once ran a series entitled 'Sincere architecture', stood firm; Smithson even went so far as to declare it a biological necessity. De Carlo found it in a response to genius loci and cultural history, St John Wilson in the connection between aesthetics and ethics. Others were more doubtful; perhaps authenticity lies less in the architecture, more in the eye of the beholder. Ahrends, although one of the most socially committed of the speakers, had grave doubts about whether it can be attained, and whether ABK is even trying to attain it. Evans found the word easier to apply to a plaza, where clear reference can be made to the Italian original, but considered it too problematic to be useful in architecture. He illustrated his point elegantly with an analysis of Le Corbusier's Ronchamp and the rich mythology that has arisen around it: authenticity is clearly a teasing problem there. Most dismissive of all was Reid, who sees architecture as a constant borrowing and rehashing of past elements, thus inevitably impure. Those who think they escape the cycle are kidding themselves.
...word that crops up frequently in the Modern/Post-Modern debate. Simon Reynolds's recent review of Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism*, for example, links it directly with Modernism: 'In art, Modernism's themes of authenticity and meaning give way (under Post-modernism) to pastiche and a fascination for the surface...'

The implication is that authenticity is no longer obtainable, since we no longer share a common view of the world. God is dead, and with him died any kind of truth or certainty. Modern communications have splintered and fragmented experience further. We are condemned forever to live in separate subjective worlds, and meanings are no longer shared.

This view, to which we shall return in the concluding article, would be a gross exaggeration. After all, the relativity crisis has been with us for a very long time, and Modernism was supposed to be responding to it, so we should perhaps by now have learned to live with it. Relativity may invalidate authenticity as an absolute concept, but it de-thrones other absolutes, not as a relative state.

For example, we all know what is meant by calling a brick wall more authentic than a plasterboard one covered in brick wallpaper. This can stand for the time being as a starting point, and will be taken up in the subsequent article.

An alternative recent usage of the word authenticity — suggestive in a different way — is found in the text to a cartoon published in *Private Eye*. We are the London Consort of Surgeons, and we perform authentic operations with original instruments. The reference is to music, and the humour depends on the observation that in some other areas of life and experience, such authenticity is not desirable. Even within the realm of music, though, authenticity remains problematic, as experts argue about the correctness of instruments or techniques, and the interpretation of scores. We can never be quite sure how the music sounded in its day, and even if we get the sound right, the context and the expectations of listeners have changed. It has clearly altered our perceptions. For example, to be brought up on a world of music has taught us a lot, increasing insight and appreciation. It has definitely proved worthwhile.

**Architectural equivalent**

What would be the equivalent in architecture? One obvious parallel is the open-air museum, where farmhouses are reconstructed as precisely as possible and preserved in a fixed state, to endure for ever. A strict authenticity is certainly the aim.

1. Log houses at Skansen, Stockholm: the first open-air museum, opened in 1891.
2. Epping town hall, designed by Richard Reid Architects.
3. Ronchamp by Le Corbusier: a complex and suggestive building constantly subject to reinterpretation.
4. Skansen interior with guardian in period costume.
5. Artificial village with reconstructed houses at the Hessen open-air museum near Frankfurt. The interiors are mainly shops and modern exhibition space.
but within distinct limits. Much trouble is taken to get the materials and details right, but the whole context has changed, becoming almost theatrical. We know we are visiting another world, not living in it, and we also know that nobody lives or lived there, at least since the move into the museum. In the best examples such as Stockholm's Skansen, the guardians are dressed in period costume, and one can eat a traditional meal at the inn. Paradoxically, this is the complete opposite of the practice with Japanese temples, where the use and context remain the same, the ritual carries on, but the building is periodically renewed down to the last peg, allowing continuity of form but a total change of material.

Evidence of decay
With the open-air museum both use and context are changed and the clock is stopped at a certain moment, even if the objects can be said in some measure to be authentic. Perhaps, then, a greater authenticity can be found where there is no intervention, and the passage of time is allowed to make itself felt. Smithsonian suggested the example of the derelict airfield left over from the Second World War. The crumbling buildings both show what they were and display their age, while the period to which they refer is still warm in recent memory, and thus thoroughly known to Smithsonian generation directly, though these buildings have become almost as familiar to those of us born post-war through the war films made in the 1950s. The feeling of authenticity depends on knowing the context in comparison, for example, we have but fancy and inaccurate notions of how medieval cathedrals were used and experienced.

The ageing of buildings is something we are also intensely reminded of by Peter Salters, who designs for decay and uses materials that spoil or dissolve. For several projects he has proposed steel which rusts away, and in his Tokyo folly he used earth walls. This is more than allowing for a little inevitable weathering; it is the acceptance of a timescale, a limited life with a changing face. His example throws up a strong contrast with the work of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe or Norman Foster, who seem to make no provision of this kind, and expect (or at least imply) that the work should stand unblemished for eternity. Perhaps the Japanese temple solution is the way for them: the dissection of the Barcelona Pavilion, and the Sainsbury Centre re-cladding already suggest it.

Holiday fantasies
The open-air museum makes an illuminating comparison with the holiday village of Port Grimaud type. Here fishermen's cottages, harbours, alleyways, streets and squares are created in the image of traditional villages to accommodate the growing tourist market. Some examples are clearly more authentic than others, in the limited sense that they follow local planning habits and construction details more closely, and that they get closer in their formal language to the original. Some might even be taken for the real thing at times. However, the life in such villages bears little resemblance to that in the traditional ones on which they are modelled. Holiday flats are only occupied for short periods even with timeshare, so the population is constantly changing, allowing limited contact only. Further, unlike the traditional village there is little interdependence on exchange of services, so little opportunity to build up any kind of community, even if an architecture hinting at community values proves comforting. Such hints, of course, depend on the visitors having a nostalgic view of what a traditional village is. When all such memories pass out of the public consciousness, the meaning of the holiday village will change.

Heaven and hell
Portmeirion, Clough Williams Ellis' fantasy village in North Wales, now seems to have been ahead of its time, post-modern before Post-Modernism. A picturesque creation borrowing from a variety of sources, it was never intended to seem authentic, but perhaps rather more charming and dreamlike, a place to escape the cares of the world. That this heaven can also become a burden inverting the reading was neatly demonstrated by the rise of...
An abandoned farm in southern France seems particularly authentic because of the lack of intervention. Evidence of decay confirms age.

8 Port Grimaud. Holiday village in the south of France inspired by the model of Venice.
9 Cleverly contrived Mediterranean fishing village on a virgin site for wealthy tourists at Nerja, Costa del Sol.
10 Portmeirion: an escapist fantasy which played host to 'The Prisoner'.
11, 12 Mazorbo housing by Giancarlo De Carlo. De Carlo's houses, in a layout reinterpreting the traditional calle and campo, 11; traditional houses at adjacent Burano from which De Carlo attempted to distill some design principles, 12.

Portmeirion as the set for the cult television series The Prisoner, where the hero is caught in a web of lies and illusions without reference to any substrate of reality, and whenever he thinks he is about to escape or to find some certainty, finds he has returned to the beginning. As Portmeirion prefigured Post-Modern architecture, so this series prefigured the nightmarish Post-Modern world described by Jameson* and others, a world quite devoid of authenticity.

Genius loci
At first light, Giancarlo De Carlo's housing at Mazorbo in the Venetian Lagoon seems not unlike Port Grimaud, 12. But it is not a holiday village, nor does it follow slavishly the local vernacular in forms. Through a process of consultation with the local people and analysis of existing buildings and spaces on the islands of Mazorbo and Burano, De Carlo extracted what seemed to him the essence of the local architecture, and based his new development on it. He followed the pattern of canals, streets and squares, the calle and campo, and gave high priority to the surface treatment of these public spaces. He also followed the local type of three-storey terraced house with entrance at street level, and a roof terrace, finding new ways of articulating the facades in sympathy with the traditional ones. He reinterpreted the local tradition of painting rendered walls, using the same bright colours that appear on their boats. Most importantly, he reproduced the threshold condition which marks the link between public and private realms in a manner special to these islands. The result is evidently architect's architecture, with a
consistency and formality beyond that of vernacular buildings, and it belongs visibly to the 1980s, but it is deeply imbued with many qualities specific to the place, and therefore seems to belong. It in many ways more authentic than Port Grimaud, for it is a reinterpretation of selected traditions rather than a direct borrowing; also the adopted features are structural rather than superficial, substance rather than mere style. And of course, unlike Port Grimaud, it is a real residential community, not a tourist haven; indeed, the people limit rather than encourage tourism.

**Un-Real architecture**

Richmond Riverside, 13,15,16, is office development rather than holiday village, but as with Port Grimaud, the story told by the buildings is greatly at variance with their role and content. The reality is comprehensive redevelopment for profit, providing office space to let to unknown users. This is a fairly standard kind of brief with little content to express, and therefore tends to get dressed up in these Post-Modernist times with every kind of decorative treatment. What is different about Riverside, however, is the use of a specific historical vocabulary, accompanied by an earnest claim from the author that it is authentic — Real architecture. The preferred justification is two-fold: first the validity of real solid brick walls and slate roofs, second the use of Classical architectural language, supposedly universal and eternal, and therefore never anachronistic. Terry even manages to trace the source of his architectural language back to the Bible, neatly squaring his architectural with his religious fundamentalism.

For those of us taking a more relativistic view, the historical models which Terry copies belong to particular times, places and technologies. They have particular stories to tell, both about how they were made, and about the lives lived within them. Their use for other purposes in a later age may be accomplished by conversion, in which case the disparity between use and image makes visible the layers of history, enriching our reading of the city. The artificial creation of old buildings for new purposes subverts this process, however. It is not only functionally inappropriate, but suggests a life that was never lived, a false history, like the confidence trickster who gives himself bogus qualifications. It does violence to the public memory and devalues the historic examples it copies. On this basis, Riverside can stand for the inauthentic, and the kind of authenticity which Terry believes in can be dismissed as a delusion.

**Conclusion**

This brief enquiry was intended to raise a range of questions and to demonstrate the complexity of the issue. Most of the above examples are concerned with the question of memory, with the demonstration of some kind of continuity through time. One can analyse them in terms of the different attitudes they take towards the four realms in which they might claim to operate: one, truth to the material object, two, truth to form or arrangement, three, truth to place or context, and four, truth to use and the meaning of use. Thus the open-air museum, follows the first two and violates the third and fourth, while the Japanese temple violates the first but follows the other three. De Carlo's Mazzorbo, a new place to which the first category cannot apply, makes selective claims about the third and fourth. Most other examples, like Port Grimaud or Richmond Riverside, can only claim interest in the second, and the claim is of doubtful validity. In many ways the purest example is the derelict airfield: this allows, without artifice and thus with total honesty, the steady disintegration of all four. The irony here is that eventually, if no one intervenes, nothing remains; there is no memory. Intervention involves artifice, for like memory, there lurks throughout the foregoing debate the notion of responsiveness — the building's attempt to respond in some way to the technological means and the purpose it serves. Two subsequent articles will address these issues: the first, sector, authenticity, will deal with notions of truth to materials, structural logic and processes of construction. The second, social authenticity, will deal with the cultural role of architecture in supporting human institutions. A fourth and final article will then attempt to tackle shifting realities, returning to the politics of Post-Modern despair, and the increasing problem of the alienation of people from buildings.