Knowledge as Revealed in Built Form: 

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Abstract
The term knowledge can be ambiguous, and has been largely appropriated by scientific method to signify the accumulation of verifiable facts. But this kind of knowledge formation is only a part of how we understand ourselves and the world in which we exist. Although it greatly impacts on the world and our lives, it lacks the tools to reflect on that impact. That is not to say that it does not have value. But its value does not warrant the subjugation of other kinds of knowledge formation and neither is it a universally appropriate method.

The work of Álvaro Siza is widely recognised as, not only being sensitive to its context but also, highlighting and often intensifying elements of its surroundings. This kind of ‘making’, which draws on memory and tradition, reveals elements of its situation and contributes to our understanding of that situation. When framed in this way it becomes apparent that it is a valuable source of knowledge formation in relation to how we ‘make’ (poiesis) and how we ‘live’ (praxis). The design of Siza’s saltwater pools at Leça da Palmeira (1961-66) reveals elements of the landscape, built environment, and social and cultural situation. The work reveals these things in the way it transforms the environment and represents the world of which it is part. It is, therefore, valuable in its own right in the formation of knowledge. And research into it and other works can further reveal the processes through which this is achieved both in relation to its poetics and the lived world it transforms.

Drawing on Martin Heidegger’s concept of truth as ‘unconcealness’ (aletheia) this paper explores how transforming our environment through ‘making’ has the potential to reveal elements of the historical tradition in which the ‘making’ is situated. The historical nature of existence necessitates that the sense-making structure that is the world is always encountered within a particular horizon. Understanding, therefore, always takes place within a particular application. Understanding in this sense is not a movement towards an absolute truth or complete knowledge. However, the processes of understanding are revealing in their individual applications. In relation to the world that we ‘make’, if we are conscious of the horizon through which we encounter the world our transformations of the environment have the potential to cultivate the collective understanding of the built environment and the world in which it exists.

Architectural knowledge is manifest precisely in the application and adaption to particular circumstances. Siza is fond of saying that ‘architects are not inventors but rather they transform the reality that surrounds them.’ Through this transformation architecture has the potential to reveal elements of that reality. What architecture has to offer the practice of scientific research is an awareness of its
situatedness, through revealing elements of the historical tradition in which it takes place. The potential of architecture to reveal its situation can be realised through the practice of critical architecture, which Jane Rendell describes as ‘a form of design practice that occupies the territory between form and culture.’ The concept of knowledge as revealed through the transformation of the environment can lead to a greater understanding of ourselves and the world in which we exist. It, therefore, has the potential to ‘transvalue’ research cultures in ways that move away from the false objectification of evaluation-controlled-knowledge-production.

**Keywords:** Siza, situation, interpretation, transformation, reveal

**Key references**