

**MODULE TITLE:** Cultural Context of Architecture IV

**MODULE CODE:** ARC303B2

**HAND OUT No:** 13

Related Reading:

Addis B, Building, Phaidon Press, 2007

Lynch K, The Image of the City, Cambridge USA, MIT Press, 1960

### **Transport**

See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transport>

Apart from general descriptions of transport there are some questions that arise out of the need and desire for altering relationships between things so that new knowledge results.

There are other questions that arise out of concepts of identity and thus passing through what Kevin Lynch might call a boundary and an area along lines that are allowed – implying that free movement in an area may be prohibited.

There are also questions of comfort relating to transport and with them questions of poverty and excess. We seem to be particularly good at dealing with comfort but poor at realizing excess and positively lacking when it comes to poverty. Architects have never built for poverty and of course transport as a commodity must make a profit – however transport as a product of vehicular or even personal movement brings to life an intention. An intention is dead, like space, unless it moves and when it moves the intention is to bring space to life or to produce a profit which is partly what Debord describes as a spectacle, the commodification of the public realm <sup>1</sup>.

Addis is fairly helpful on early urban conditions brought about by levels of knowledge and its application regarding transport of sanitation away from and water and foodstuffs towards. The advantages of cities is the accumulation of knowledge by interaction between sentient beings both as learners and knowers. The growth of foodstuffs and harvesting of found and made products usually requires what can be called a market in order to exchange it for other goods or eventually money.

The growth of money as a phenomenon see

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-9050474362583451279>

The availability of money can be based on the production of interaction between people so that money becomes necessary or on the promise of people to pay debt plus interest so that work becomes necessary. The investment of work by people is made by the accumulation of material goods that have value in and of themselves as utilities unlike commodities that have no intrinsic value or have intrinsic value of limited periods. This is an aspect of production that to date has had little impact upon architecture but with the increasing discomfort over the future of the planet may become more talked about and even bring about changes in the way we live. The most important is the question raised by Arendt <sup>2</sup> which is the intent to create life and dictate what is worked upon and for what purpose.

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<sup>1</sup> Debord G, Society of the Spectacle, London, Rebel Press, 1992

<sup>2</sup> Arendt H, The Human Condition, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969

Historicist reduced versions of the history of transport  
[http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/transport\\_1750\\_to\\_1900.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/transport_1750_to_1900.htm)

this website is a good example of a reduced presentation of knowledge about the growth of transport. It is reduced because it ignores much of the history of people who existed and grew transport systems using different knowledge but with equally impressive results.

The Roman ability to make and make on a massive scale so that water and foodstuffs could be transported into major cities is quoted in Addis (2007), however the exertion the Romans made was of limited benefit to everyone and required more or less constant maintenance, an unplanned obsolescence. Knowledge was retained by the Romans and although they operated as a republic they invaded places constituted differently to theirs and exploited them so that they were effectively using knowledge to exploit and this would not have created a sustainable community.

Another useful question for us to consider is the term efficiency and its appropriate relationships to transport. In what way is it efficient to visit a library as a leisure activity, for example? Does the need for transport equate to a desire for transport?

Going back to Addis, he also describes the shift from Roman imperialism to the Medieval grouping of knowledge around small cities as well as the transport of Greek knowledge in texts via the Islamic Jihad effecting an 'invasion' (sic) of Spain and a consequent reaction at which time the texts were rediscovered and put to work seemingly around the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. Addis (p.80) suggests that the discovery of texts developed into a scholastic endeavour to think about ontology, the bringing into being of what might possibly exist, that would obviously escalate into metaphysical discourse that created the excesses of language application destined to put people off theoretical rhetoric in favour of nominalism and the more efficient use of language as labels indicating real time objects.

The questions of desire and achievement are closely linked to transport obviously because exploration and exposure provides us with mimesis, the copying of what we sense, as well as the chance to influence what otherwise would be literally beyond us. It also introduces the sense of uncertainty about what remains or becomes beyond us when we leave it. The question of the horizon of conscious knowledge and of interaction becomes rapidly less and less material and more and more imaginative. Is the studio the only place, in the universe, that can really tolerate such questions and such imagination? Is this especially true when the world of work is divested of any social control in favour of production for profit and the repayment of debt rather than the making of an environment fit for Homo Faber?

Finally on transport there are questions about transport in buildings, not just the placing of doors and equipment such as lifts, escalators, travelators, but also the use and arrangement of corridors and static spaces such as board rooms and conference rooms. These all have relationships that remain static until life is breathed into them by movement, obviously not of the building itself but of the people using the building. Is the very use of the building nominalist, i.e. functional and proscribed, or is it flexible and open to improvisation and change? In fact these last few questions are probably as much chance as architects that we get to influence the way people move around, except when we design airports and railway stations where the same questions are relevant and the same influences of profit and the public realm of infinite horizons hover at our sides.

Addis makes it clear that manufacturing was very much in evidence prior to what in the UK we refer to as an industrial revolution. It was only the use of controllable energy that altered what was already a shift from passive to active working on the world après Bacon 1214-94 and the interest in chemistry (alchemy) that managed to shrug off some of the superstition and violence in favour of Homo Faber.