

MODULE TITLE: Cultural Context of Architecture I

MODULE CODE: ARC115

HAND OUT No: 4

Reminder of Essential Reading:

- **Addis B**, Building, Phaidon Press, 2007

For those students who have not managed to relate to the book by

- a. purchasing the Addis or
- b. looking at it in the library (recommended) or
- c. borrowing the Addis from a friend

We shall attempt to provide a few of the important concepts made in his introduction to the book.

Those of you who have looked at the book can check their own experience with what is provided in this handout and they are welcome to raise issues during the meeting (class)

The point about being at university is to acquire not only the necessary skills for participation but also to achieve skill at coordinating your activities, your personal activities, with the changing requirements of the program so that you will remain successful. The concept of added value is very much part of the need to acquire necessary skills for work at present, the concept of value is rather more complex because values change so that what you learn to do during your own time at University will not always be valuable to others in the same way.

Space and Action

Because most people are only interested in coordinating their activities to the point of a successful existence for themselves and the ones they love or care for they relate to dysfunctional behaviour as good or bad for themselves and the ones they love. European Democracy as urban living and also as politics must explore the possibility of creating a functional relationship between many individuals. To some extent there must be agreement about ACTION and the use of space in order to have functional relationships between individuals. This makes it necessary to have some knowledge of physics and also of the ways in which other people know physics. Clearly physics implies more than just space and physics also implies and indeed has more than one interpretation.

The way in which architecture manifests its relationship is by forming built material to form spaces and forms. We can learn from history but the way in which we do that is to be critical of narratives that pretend history is a single linear progression through time¹The problem for us is that we have too few experiences of dealing with time as anything but a past and a future and thus a story based on time and progressive development seems to be sensible even though our interpretation of space and time ought to be different because of the dissemination of discoveries about physics. Addis manages to introduce some interesting concepts, which may be helpful:

¹ If you want to read more about this try Lyotard J F, The Post Modern Condition, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1994, in which Lyotard interprets the representation of events in narrative form (as if it is a story with a beginning and a middle and an end) as a political weapon.

Architecture is a professional discipline and the term cannot be truly applied within the construction industry (building) until the 15th Century. Prior to the 15th Century we should interpret the term architect as 'master builder'.

As master builders or as architects the value added by individuals to whom such terms might be applied is their knowledge of construction and/or their ability to coordinate space in ways not previously achieved and possibly also their ability to coordinate people in ways not previously achieved both in the making and in the occupancy of the made object. We could put it this way:- new games with new materials and new games for people to play socially and spatially.

The methods used in the coordination of people and materials and indeed in the coordination of raw materials into useful materials were not established to any great extent until the Renaissance commencing in the 15th Century.

The historical development of building is interpreted by Addis as closely connected to relationships between prosperity and people such that prosperous people tended to build for their needs and also to coordinate their activities to the point of a successful existence for themselves and the ones they love or care for and/or to prevent dysfunctional behaviour that is bad for themselves and the ones they love.

Addis concentrates on the making of buildings because he is interested in engineering and building rather than in the questions that a discipline of architecture has to ask. Without some knowledge of engineering and building the architect will not usually have a good enough vocabulary to add value to the making of buildings, however the architect must also add value by interpreting exactly what is being coordinated when making a building in terms of the social games of occupants, passers by and owners and even critical individuals interested in the subject of architecture.

In a book by Watkin² he suggests three approaches to architectural interpretation that he says are false. He does not say that game play is the basis for design although he says as much by suggesting that a liking for something tends to be followed by justifications. What I am suggesting here is that game playing can still be accompanied by management and economic outcomes so that political economic decisions are structurally coupled to games we play. However the three theoretical approaches denied by Watkin are these:

1. Religion, sociology or politics
2. The spirit of the age
3. A rational or technological justification

Watkin observes that these can be correlated to National (European) origins, number one English, number two German and number three French.

The underlying mechanics of these assertions will be difficult for first year students to grasp but it is important to firstly see the activity as game play and then see the correlation between say liking things and assertions about the meaning of what is liked, especially moral judgements of good and bad, as constructed by way of our ability to couple symbolic representations to actions and beliefs and that they become popular precisely because what is imagined as isomorphic to what is represented is not causally coupled but conditional on a variable scale that can be represented as incoherent, transitional, normative and obtuse and that these values on the scale can be applied critically, tribally or instrumentally. We could add that any understanding we may have of reality would require a critical value to any imagined relationship between any representation and social action and reality.

² Watkin D, *Morality and Architecture Revisited*, London, John Murray, 2001