MODULE TITLE: Cultural Context of Architecture I

MODULE CODE: ARC115

HAND OUT No: 5

Reminder of Essential Reading:
- **Addis B**, Building, Phaidon Press, 2007

These are all in the library
- **S Guy, S A Moore,** Sustainable Architectures, NY + London, Spon, 2005
- *Chapter 9 pp.256-291 of* **Gelernter M**, Sources of Architectural Form, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1995

Concepts of Perception

We can start with Heraclitus 535–475 BC

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heraclitus

see Gaskin J (ed), The Epicurean Philosophers, Everyman, 1995 for more writing on this but generally the concept of the pre-socratic philosophers was that of an early version of phenomenology, the arrival of consciousness out of the mechanical working of the nervous system and cosmological determinism that simply exists. We experience our existence because we are part of the cosmos.

 Descartes 1596 – 1650 is considered seminal in questions of consciousness

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren%C3%A9_Descartes

see Scruton R, A Short History of Modern Philosophy, Routledge, 1995 for details of most philosophers of European society from Descartes on but treat it as more than you need if you read the entire book and be prepared to be more confused than enlightened as you go through it all since Scruton is discussing the idiosyncratic rumblings of individuals which then have to be pasted into some kind of understanding which are often plural and concurrent, i.e. different and existing at one and the same time, a bit like being a sweety in a sugar drought.

The next landmarks for this particular understanding are Leibniz 1646-1716 and Hume 1711-1776

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gottfried_Wilhelm_Leibniz
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Hume

whom Scruton refers to in his opening account of Kant and it is Kant who we must all get a hold of because of his huge influence over modern philosophy. He recognised that the logic of Leibniz and the empiricism of Hume had to be merged in order to produce a coherent theory of knowledge. This quest for knowledge as a product of our immersion in the world shifted away from the pre-Socratics who were content to appreciate existence as being alive so to speak and from Socrates onwards people wanted to know the truth as something that could be pointed at which indicates the significance of the declarative and procedural actions of pointing and knowing.

MEANWHILE

The 14th and fifteenth centuries were the site of humanism after finding the lost texts of the Greek and Roman writers including our very own Vitruvius who wrote about architecture.

2008-9 handout 5 revision A

The way we can construct narratives to link all of these parallel developments varies according to who is doing the constructing and which audience is receiving the construct and thus licensing its analysis and synthesis and resultant axioms as found in the construct. It is possible to refer to constructs that are not totally material (which might be called things or objects) as paradigms which is an attempt to refer to a performance boundary in which declarations and procedures are licensed under certain conditions by individuals who work on the paradigm to sustain and maintain it. Unfortunately there are many paradigms that work well enough to make people want to sustain and maintain them even though they do not work well enough to convince the entire population of the world. Similarly there are conditions locally that allow paradigms to work which will not be found everywhere around the world in which we live. Add to that the confusion about 'blood and soil' issues and we have the causes of complexity.

However the major difficulty remains and that is the need to point at common value and to find the provenance of value. The latter discovery is the basis of philosophical explorations following on from the transcendentalism, so called, of Kant. If we take the transcendental to be one of an interpretation of reality into an expression of it by way of declarative and procedural action, be that thought or movement of the body, the individual has to somehow read the world it is in and act in accordance with an entirely appropriate set of possible interpretations and expressions. If the world was already and only perfectly organised and if we were tuned in perfectly to that perfection then we would still have the problems associated with the accumulation of our own products, much as crustaceans become chalk rock which then alters the geology of the planet. Galileo noticed this problem following Copernicus.

See Gillespie C C, The Edge of Objectivity, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973 for a full account of Galileo's contribution to what we know about the world we are immersed in.

Galileo noticed that movement occurred within something that was not meant to allow movement which meant that movement was local as well as global. In other words the possibility of change occurs locally as well as globally, not an overall plan or grand narrative but several narratives told by different authors.

What this indicates for Kant's transcendentalism is that each of us is an author, or at least each of us is capable of becoming an author once we learn how to read and write and those talents are axiomatic to our species rather than specific to any language, which must be seen as a manifestation of our talent for representation and interpretation and allows us to create a cultural hegemony and the aforementioned paradigm in which it is appropriate to force social action to be this and that according to the necessity of the belief. This alteration of beliefs is manifested by an alteration in value systems corresponding to an alteration in life practices manifested as alternative declarations and procedures so that in effect there is a change in the meaning of language according to the morphological changes in belief. Put another way it means that what points at something and also what is pointed at as imagined and as real is ephemeral according to the belief or paradigm in use and the extent of the performance boundaries within which the paradigm is 'said' to work in order to have the value it claims to have. Indeed it might be said that the use of language is to maintain and sustain and alter values that would otherwise remain fixed. What this means is that when fixed languages are fixed by obtuse attitudes of the users or by an exact match with reality, which is which is perhaps the basis of the value in that it is a balance of users needs and desires with reality.

These issues are helpful to architecture but not without a considerable amount of effort!

2008-9 handout 5 revision A