

MODULE TITLE: Cultural Context of Architecture VII

MODULE CODE: ARC 731

HAND OUT No: 30

Essential Reading:

Read the Marcuse extract given:

Marcuse H, Towards a Critical Theory of Society, London, Routledge, 2001 – pp.1-2

The introduction is actually written by Kellner D

The Institute for Social Research was established at Frankfurt-am-Main in 1923 as the first Marxist oriented research institute in Germany.

It was exiled in the United States from 1934 into the 1940's

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

The initial purpose behind the accumulation of academics seems linked to the desire to use the writings and ideas of Marx in order to mount a critique of society in which must be seen as a modern world of air travel, radio, subliminal thought and serendipitous surroundings.

The argument can be put in what is perhaps an oversimplified way as a statement comparing social and cultural hegemony of a social sort with a history of people who know each other, link up with other and share a history together and an alternative in which technical excellence commands subservience in order to achieve perfection.

Unfortunately the hidden provenance lying behind or beneath both is spiritual in kind being metaphysical in the sense of non material, beyond material or physical explanation. This is because the understanding most people have of time and space is very limited and tends to privilege humanity as somehow made for earth or special to earth rather than as evolved with earth.

The problem (for us as architects) emerging out of the split between Vienna Circle and Frankfurt School was noted by C P Snow

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C._P._Snow

in which he contrasted the language used by scientists and literary intellectuals. His notion of a split between the whole of society based on differences between what they found interesting was not much different from what we now call science and art as opposites and obtuse opposites at that. If we simply take the terms science and art as words we can introduce them into narratives that easily combine art as science and science as art, given the chance.

In fact the obtuse use of science and art was exactly the criticism made of the Vienna circle and indeed of the notion of naming or identifying things or being that Heidegger criticises as what he calls the loss of the pre-socratic philosophy in which what mattered was the relationship of people (Dasein) to the world in which they lived as a flowing interaction (Heraclitus – the river) rather than as people

living in the world as thinking sentient beings who observe a world as separate from them and yet known to them by way of representation.

The problem was, of course, that we do access the world by representation of several kinds, including the perception of it in terms of our several senses and our perception of marks (text) and sounds (spoken words for example) that we go to work on in order to perform within constructs in which we behave in certain ways when exposed to them NOT BECAUSE THEY MAKE US behave in a specific way but because we acquire a skill in making it seem that way to others and even sometimes to ourselves. For this refer to Erving Goffman - Goffman E, *Behaviour in Public Places*, Free Press, 1966

The work done by the Frankfurt School and also the work done after the Vienna Circle by way of Wittgenstein – (Scruton offers a very good revelation of Wittgenstein’s contribution) – prompts much of what is referenced as the post-modern school of thought which is extremely varied in how it is interpreted so that much of modern academic life has become transdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary, individuals even discuss how to describe the mix of disciplines see Thompson – (Thompson B, *Architectural Hermeneutics XIII: The Missing Link, IN, Crossing Boundaries*, Craig T (ed), Scott Sutherland School, Aberdeen, 2003, pp.27-34).

The illustration below is from Lacan showing his representation of the addition of the imaginary onto the representational and the real adding semiology to Freud’s contribution to the model of human mechanics that is accessed by representational symbols and acted upon according to social rules negotiated or acquired by interpersonal transactions. Most of this thinking occurred in the early 20th Century but it has been repressed by the large scale orchestration of power politics and the incredulity of most people who find such explanations far too complex and therefore believe them to be profoundly unhelpful in their daily lives – far better to believe a simple lie than struggle with a series of unfortunate truths.

Lacan’s optical model

