

MODULE TITLE: Cultural Context of Architecture VII

MODULE CODE: ARC 731

HAND OUT No: 33 – *Machiavelli and Hobbes*

Essential Reading:

Machiavelli N, *The Prince*, Penguin, 1981

Peters R, *Hobbes*, London, Peregrine Books, 1967

See also these web sites:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niccol%C3%B2_Machiavelli

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

and

<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=EKh1Rek0q0YC>

Why are these two names of any importance to architects?

Hobbes [1588-1679] wrote the book *Leviathan* in the 17th century and may be considered to be a good example of the basics of democracy but not of radical democracy since in the form Hobbes wrote it the state requires a ruler in order to provide control over what would otherwise be a free for all as individuals each struggle for power themselves. It seems, according to Peters (see above) that rationalism becomes the new science of democracy applied by Hobbes. However Scruton (see below) has a much more complex narrative on this.

See

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

in fact read the social contract site first!

Note that the social contract is commented on by Thomas Paine

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

that it is a contract between citizens and other citizens and not between citizens and a ruler, the latter version of which is how it has been generally used in democracy especially in the 17th century when we were still uncertain about the differences between animals and human beings and particularly unsure of mentality.

Discussions about the exact nature of human thought and the influences on thought by the environment, that are seminal to us as architects, tend to be quite complicated in the telling and you can get an idea of this complexity if you read Scruton

Scruton R, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy*, Routledge, 1995

One way of grasping the extent of the problem quickly is to imagine what dualism is, which is the concept of a mind that operates in between something that is essentially animal whilst linked to revelations about the world and facts about the world that arrive through having a body and the body being able to experience the world through the senses.

This area of philosophy is an extremely dangerous one for architects when they become philosophical because of the close links between architecture and the nature of hard space, material, the stuff we shape into buildings and our understanding of that stuff when it is linked to interpretations of behaviour and social action.

Machiavelli [1469-1527] "became synonymous with ruthless politics, deceit and the pursuit of power by any means" yet it seems he was clear about the responsibility involved in that the desire for power required the one desiring power to do whatever became necessary in order to have it and his purpose in writing the books seems to be to get a firm grasp of sustainable living. Apparently his book the Prince was not available in English until 1640 and then variously interpreted. Recently in the 20th century Machiavelli has been reinterpreted in the work of modern political theorists¹ as not resigning consciousness to either metaphysics or realism preferring instead to go not with unity but conflict as the usual condition of the mob or masses and thus resolution of conflict by political means as what the mob or masses require or demand.

Most of any confusion brought on by reading, for example, Scruton on these matters can be removed by acquiring an understanding of cognitive science and the workings of our brains and sense organs that commenced in earnest at the end of the 19th Century and continues today. One of the reasons for including Hobbes and Machivelli is to provoke students into a re-reading or a first reading of the philosophical background or history to modern cognitive science just to experience the profound confusion that even a well written account of it can bring on (Scruton). The suggestion of modern continental philosophy might be that any narrative would be an obvious sham except in cases in which the narrative is perceived as a construct in which the central perceptual determinates are taken as absent in order to re-create the central perceptual determinates actually available at the time in which the proposed narrative is said to be founded. Thus the situation is not that the narratives were untrue but that they are the same as narratives now but lacking the central perceptual determinates that enable us to be critical of them now and similarly prevented people at that time being critical in the same way, thus alternatives were produced (including metaphysical and empirical categories that would not now be admitted as true).

On philosophical dualism see

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dualism_\(philosophy_of_mind\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dualism_(philosophy_of_mind))

¹ Erfani F, Fixing Marx with Machiavelli: Claude Lefort's Democratic Turn, in *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol.39, No.2, May.2008