

MODULE TITLE: Cultural Context of Architecture III
MODULE CODE: ARC301B1
HAND OUT No: 10

Essential Reading:

Gelernter M, Sources of Architectural Form, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1995

Synchronic and Diachronic

Synchronic refers to the way things move together whilst diachronic refers to the way things move over time. As usual the exact description has a few forms. Synchronic is perhaps the spatial relationships at a point in time whilst Diachronic are spatial relationships over a period of time.

The use of Synchronic and Diachronic is often found in linguistic studies also known as semiology.

The most, or one of the most, well used contributors to semiology is Roland Barthes who wrote 'Elements of Semiology' ¹ although the development of semiology itself is attributed to Ferdinand de Saussure ² whose work was published posthumously in 1911.

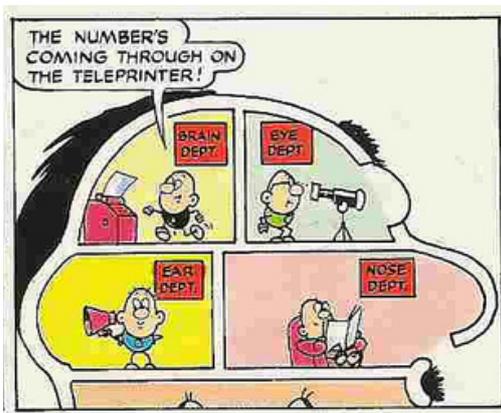
There are issues to raise about the simplicity of a split between what could be equated to a snapshot of something and a history of something, a point in time and a period of time. The concept, the sketchy model, of it is apparent enough but the separation of time and space are problematic.

As is often the case the problematic parts of linguistics put people off but the basic working model turns people on.

As a result of the turn on part many individuals are aware of signs and the idea of a sign as the combination of signifier and signified – so that to say dog indicates an animal with four legs that looks like a dog.

It is not a problem that dogs differ. The problem is the separation of time and space so that the body can be modelled as a mind that has access to the world by way of a body.

Gelernter models this relationship in his book ³ such that mind and world are shown as opposites.



this immediately makes it possible to model small thinking persons inside us as if they are quite separate from the body that contains them – Susan Greenfield uses the example of the Numbskulls comic characters to ridicule such as idea – the reason it will not work is that each of the small thinking persons would require their own compliment of small thinking persons.

The other problem, more sophisticated than the first, is that some causal relationship between the signifier and the signified is put forward as a solution to the first problem, so that space is connected up by synchronic

¹ Barthes R, Elements of Semiology, New York, Hill and Wang, 1977

² Saussure F de, 1911, Course in General Linguistics, Duckworth, 1983

³ Gelernter M, Sources of Architectural Form, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1995

links. The mental image of dog is signified by the signifier 'dog' and relates to the visual image of dog, not necessarily exactly the dog of the mental image but a dog of some sort.

As far as I have read to date Lacan suggests that we take this latter model as some basis of understanding the correct nature of what is happening. Which is that we have a real dog (somewhere) and the reference to a dog, the signifier or perhaps the sign itself (the fact that dog refers to dog) and an image of dog that is ours alone.

This widens language and allows us to think of language as imprecise rather than causally linked. There is the relationship between sign or symbol, reality and imagination that can be manipulated according to the political and economic circumstances [for which read social historic circumstances]

Books on Philosophy

These are not recommended for now but for summer or winter reading if you feel like it

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

Rorty R, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Oxford, Blackwell, 1980

Russel B, 1946, History of Western Philosophy, Allen and Unwin, 1983

Tarnas R, 1991, The Passion of the Western Mind, Random House, 1998

Note,

Just as we still say that the sun rises we also say that we can use our minds, but the sun does not rise and we do not have minds like we have noses.

In the **Gelernter** you will see what he calls theories are causal relationships [pp.3-15]

1. An architectural form is shaped by its intended function
2. Architectural form is generated within the creative imagination
3. Architectural form is shaped by the prevailing spirit of the age
4. Architectural form is shaped by the prevailing social and economic conditions
5. Architectural form derives from timeless principles of form that transcend particular designers, cultures and climates.