

MODULE TITLE: Cultural Context of Architecture I

MODULE CODE: ARC115

HAND OUT No: 6

### Signifier & Signified

#### Essential Books for the course

- Baird G, The Space of Appearance, Cambridge Ma; London, MIT Press, 2003

#### Essential Book/s to take a look at:

- De Saussure F, (1915), Course in General Linguistics, Duckworth, 1983
- Fodor J, The Mind Doesn't Work That Way, MIT Press, 2000
- Hawkes T, Structuralism and Semiotics, London, Routledge, 1992

#### Important reference books for the very keen

- Chomsky N, Syntactic Structures, Mouton, The Hague, 1957

The problem of thinking is a difficult one because it seems as if it is something separate from other forms of doing – however it is best described as our conscious awareness (of doing something with our brains and/or our bodies and/or of something being done to it/them).

Remember if you will the quote from Marx in which he suggests that the ideal form of worker is one whose hands and feet are put to such kinds of repetitive work that there is no need for the worker to use their brains. The resources developed for the human existence include machines that can remove the need for human effort/power of a kind that uses simply the brawn of the body so that work can be politically resolved rather than reduced to labour which is ultimately a form of slavery.

The major feature of brains as well as what is called proprioceptive awareness is that skill arrives within our control when we are recursive with an action such as drawing a line with a pencil or a mouse or provoking or conjecturing boundaries of past and future experience according to personal, local and global outcomes.

The usual way in which we understand something is to construct a relationship between appearances that become known to us through subliminal and serendipitous interaction with the world in which we are immersed, and we can use the term phenomena to point at the vague notions that become cognised and then recognised and then used more or less as individual, local, global, social and cultural resources.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phenomena>

Phenomena may be perceived through a person's senses or with their mind (which is a difficult term to use because there is no mind as such but like several other words such as 'me' for example it is useful as a pointer to something, in the case of mind to mental action of some kind). Phenomena may also be assumed extant in various ways that relate to our immersion in the world so that cognition and particularly recognition and thus use as resource may be achieved. It would be ridiculous if phenomena were vapid ethereal unsubstantial relationships however the fact that some phenomena (words) are used to point to other phenomena (e.g. mind) there are problems with metaphysics that arise quite quickly when we acquire language.

The complex relationships between a phenomenon that points to other phenomena is particularly articulated in the specialism known as *semiotics*

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semiotics>

Please take careful note that there is a situation within a 'union of knowers' – which is to say a group of individuals who know certain relationships between phenomena in a way that can be said to give rise to individual concern because it also relates to social licensing at local and perhaps global levels and may be part of a cultural hegemony of local and global interest amongst the knowers) – that is very different to a situation of general interaction between individuals in which individuals act idiosyncratically to each other. This is the paradox of the sign, the term that points to something and may be said to 'signify' (represent) a phenomenon according to an individual and also to others so that it becomes a resource for interaction between individuals a.k.a. social. The term or sign may be licensed along with a context for the sign that can assist the user by pointing to the license for the sign, and so on.

Take for example the notion of a car amongst 20<sup>th</sup> Century individuals that signifies the vehicle for personal transport – behind which there are a number of makers – Ford, Renault, Citroen, and so on, and a number of categories, 4+4, town, sports, and so on. The word car points at the vehicle. For pre 20<sup>th</sup> century individuals it would have meant less or even nothing at all and for post 20<sup>th</sup> Century individuals it now takes its place is several hegemonies that point to social actions that are in conflict over the value of the concept as well as local social interactions that point to values in conflict with global values and so on.

Those who study semiotics tend to also link to structures and systems

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Structuralism>

There is a misconception that meaning must be attributed to the sign rather than to a particular person, system, or culture because of the value given to what is signified. This attributed meaning is mistakenly taken to provoke the thoughts and actions of individuals and groups so that outcomes are isomorphic to input by way of signage. In its most recent manifestation, structuralism as a field of academic interest began around 1958 and peaked in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is perfectly feasible to study a cultural hegemony and the rules and relationships upon which it relies but that is not the same as attributing value to the parts analysed as parts of the complete system.

It is more accurate to say that individuals can construct understandings that rely upon such structures in order to satisfy the conditions of reference that may then present themselves to others so that structural coupling between thought and action can be established, manifested and maintained. The actual structure is a fact because it exists and the individuals make use of it, thus it appears to have meaning as if an immaculate conception, but it is simply the manifestation of the values given to or made by individuals and if individuals terminate the licensing of sign and its correlations the system falters and ultimately fails.

The term paradigm is often used to describe a system created by knower's in the form of a union because the system is not one that acts like a machine but as an organism whose operating parts are people.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paradigm>

an important name in connection with the paradigm is Thomas Kuhn.

For those who are keen see - **Fuller S**, Thomas Kuhn, University of Chicago Press, 2000

## Four Categories of Knower

It is possible to categorise unions of knowers in four ways, obtuse, normative, transactional and chaotic.

The general understanding of interactions between unions of knowers, often using the term 'horizon' has been considerably helped by Gadamer – again for those who are keen see - Gadamer H G, The Beginning of Knowledge, New York; London, Continuum, 2003 – who built up his work alongside Heidegger who in turn worked on the thoughts of Husserl, Brentano and Wundt.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gadamer/>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_Heidegger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Heidegger)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmund\\_Husserl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edmund_Husserl)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz\\_Brentano](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Brentano)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm\\_Wundt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_Wundt)

please do look the web sites up and give them a quick glance at the very least!