

MODULE TITLE: Cultural Context of Architecture II

MODULE CODE: ARC116B2

HAND OUT No: 7.1

The Space Between

Essential Books for the course

Arendt H, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969

The extract below is taken from the given url accessed in Feb.2009

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

*In his classic work *The Gift*, Mauss argued that gifts are never "free". Rather, human history is full of examples that gifts give rise to reciprocal exchange. The famous question that drove his inquiry into the anthropology of the gift was: "What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?" (1990:3). The answer is simple: the gift is a "total prestation"¹, imbued with "spiritual mechanisms", engaging the honour of both giver and receiver (the term "total prestation" or "total social fact" (fait social total) was coined by his student Maurice Leenhardt after Durkheim's social fact). Such transactions transcend the divisions between the spiritual and the material in a way that according to Mauss is almost "magical". The giver does not merely give an object but also part of himself, for the object is indissolubly tied to the giver: "the objects are never completely separated from the men who exchange them" (1990:31). Because of this bond between giver and gift, the act of giving creates a social bond with an obligation to reciprocate on part of the recipient. To not reciprocate means to lose honour and status, but the spiritual implications can be even worse: in Polynesia, failure to reciprocate means to lose mana, one's spiritual source of authority and wealth. Mauss distinguished between three obligations: giving – the necessary initial step for the creation and maintenance of social relationships; receiving, for to refuse to receive is to reject the social bond; and reciprocating in order to demonstrate one's own liberality, honour and wealth.*

Marcel Mauss is one of a group of workers who suggest that **common space** is not in itself free but made free by the transactional relationships between people.

The concept of common space as a space in which people transact a relationship between themselves and other people such that they license other people in that space is something akin to the "space of appearance" mentioned in Baird's book of the same name² that in turn refers to the Arendt book (see above) in which Arendt proposes a link between labouring, working and social action that brings the struggle to eat and drink into a familiarity with particular work practices that then suggest particular shared interests that could be loosely called social.

As students of architecture we should be careful to notice that simply calling a space social is not good enough since for example any space may be labelled as social but if we apply Mauss' suggestion it will

¹ A payment of money; a toll or duty; also, the rendering of a service.

² Baird G, *The Space of Appearance*, Cambridge Ma; London, MIT Press, 2003

not be so unless and until there is some kind of knowing interaction between people to make all actions transactional, ie, gifts and reciprocal responsibilities and bonding, structural couplings.

According to Hillier and Hanson's book *The Social Logic of Space*³ a term for general space suitable for people is

Carrier space

This would allow us to refer to specific transactional spaces as common space but we would need to examine what this might actually be in terms of a specification for those people who would be licensed to be within it – but this does allow architects to specify a range of behaviours that the architect suggests as expected without needing to guess what people may do – the specification may be checked against expectations of local people perhaps?

Common space

In addition we have two other kinds of space

These are

User space

And

Occupant space

and in these last two spaces we can specify much more the kind of behaviours we anticipate and the kinds of behaviours users and occupants might wish to accommodate.

The Space Between

This is a term suggested by Martin Buber⁴ as a phenomenological space in which we exist along with other sentient/sapient people that is not our space individually nor a common space ideologically or in a perfect representation of the ideal (utopian space) but a negotiated space in which we share our existence and our ideals with other people who exist with other ideals, thus engaging with the possibility of difference and lack of conflict.

You will find much of this thinking set out in the book *Confronting Culture*⁵ reporting on the work of people such as Raymond Williams

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

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stuart_Hall_\(cultural_theorist\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stuart_Hall_(cultural_theorist))

and Stuart Hall who were confronting concepts of culture as questions of difference and lack of conflict as opposed to the hegemony of class consciousness in the form of good taste (what to read and how to be well read)

³ Hillier B; Hanson J, 1984, *The Social Logic of Space*, Cambridge University Press, 1990

⁴ Buber M, *Between Man and Man*, Fontana Library, Glasgow and London, 1961 (1947)

⁵ Inglis D; Hughson J, *Confronting Culture*, Cambridge, Polity, 2003