MODULE TITLE: Cultural Context of Architecture III
Revision 0
MODULE CODE: ARC301

HAND OUT No: 8

Essential Reading:

Baird G, The Space of Appearance. Cambridge Massachusetts London England. MIT Press. 2003
Inglis D; **Hughson J,** Confronting Culture, Cambridge, Polity, 2003

Problems with the concept of Society

As architects we need to be aware of buildings as environments that include people as well as complex interactive processes of accumulation.

Architectural technologists are the ones who should take care of the interactive manufacturing process as a social event, the making of a building, working on the thing known as a building.

Architects, by choice, are not interested ONLY in the making of a building. We are interested in the decisions to build and the results of building. This is because in order to get to the point at which a building is made we need to negotiate through a space that a lot of people never experience. At the moment I am using a term by Baird[1] "**the space of appearance**". It is the space in which people string things together so that there is a causal fabric over which people struggle so that it has one singular pattern that eventually enables people to coordinate their activities.

I will be providing an explanation of the performance of building and so on but for now we are going to pay attention to the problem of the concept of **Society**.

For architects the problem of the concept of society, how we think in general, of society is that other people think of society as well. They too have ways of thinking about society and they imagine it to be different kinds of relationship.

You might think that by looking at the way other people think about society we can simply adopt the way they think, but you would be quite wrong.

Take for example the following concepts: [2]

- Man is an animal - examples   Lorenz, Hobbs
- We need leaders   Plato
- Everyone should discover who he or she is   Freud
- Everyone should BE in their own way   Sartre
- We must all share what we do   Marx
- There is a God   Religious Beliefs

I will talk about these examples in class and hopefully we will all contribute to that
For architects to practice then, we need to know that there are several different ways in which people understand other people.

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[1]   Baird G, The Space of Appearance, Cambridge Ma; London, MIT Press, 2003
[2]   I used this book to remind me of these categories of thought - Stevenson L, Seven Theories of Human Nature, Oxford Uni Press, 1987

I will constantly review our understanding of the way in which we actually experience our existence by showing you illustrations of the perceptual mechanisms we have on board, so to speak, that allow us to accumulate experience and then act on what is around us.

The rather difficult concept of space [3] is that it exists inseparably with time. When we separate the two as much as we can there is simply a representation of performance in the case of space, and encouragement or discouragement in the case of time. When we 'see' with the visual sense we actually anticipate or imagine performance, the combined effect of time and space. Obviously when we measure things we imagine they are purely spatial but they are not because they have an element of performance that we ignore temporarily whilst we consider the form they have by focussing our performance on that.

Phenomenology is a way of capturing the space-time understanding by encouraging phenomena to exist as things so that we can work on them. Because they are made up of space-time phenomena may be divided and joined which is why we refer to them as phenomena, signifying this rather peculiar quality of being and yet being capable of change, especially in the representation of performance.

When architects talk about society we need something specific. We will be thinking of (concept) society as phenomena (people and things) linked together. This will require us to understand society by defining what our representations are and what they encourage and discourage. In order to express this understanding we need to understand language and without another person there is no such thing as a language because it is an encouraging/discouraging relationship related to understanding a performance.

I hope that we will have some discussion on that.

However it is important that we end up with this thought; that for us society has to be seen as a lawful and rule based relationships including people and representations that allows a synchronous definition of parts coupled together in some way and a diachronic performance structurally coupled to the definitions. This is a space-time causal fabric in which individuals interact with things including each other.

We also need to consider the chronotope[4] that each individual has a unique accumulated experience and that they will apply that to interactive performances in one of four ways, idiosyncratically, normatively, transitively and obsessively. Obsessively here means that they reify or worship what they are involved in, and idosynchratically means that they pursue their own imaginative programme and ignore all other imaginative inputs that get in their way. By the way this is slightly different from robotic behaviour which is part of a critique of modern living, the insulated individual of modernity.

Obviously our experience of the world is not homogenous and as all of us have grown up we have witnessed what people do around us and copied it to a degree (mimesis). Our performance often becomes what Shutz[5] has called sedimented which we can imagine to be the fine tuning of our nervous system to become completely programmed into a near perfect performance amongst people and places when we understand them over a long period of time.

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[3]   A very good book for those who are interested is **Jammer M**, Concepts of Space, Harvard Uni Press, 1969

[4]   I am using this term which is derived from **Bakhtin, Mikhail**. Toward a Philosophy of the Act. Ed. Vadim Liapunov and Michael Holquist. Trans. Vadim Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993 and signifies in this usage a socio-historic identity – this is to say that amongst these people (socio) this chronology of events matters to them in this way.

[5]   Schutz A, On Phenomenology and Social Relations, Wagner H (ed),University of Chicago Press, 1975