EXPRESSION IN ARCHITECTURE, 48-341, Fall 2015   Prof. Gutschow, **Seminar #3**

(9/10/15)
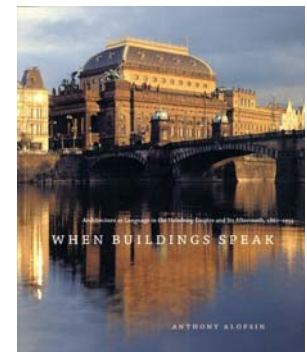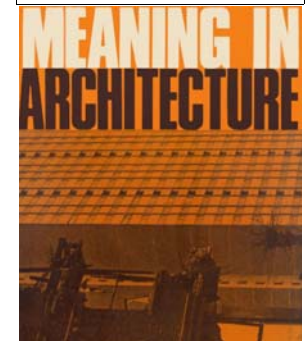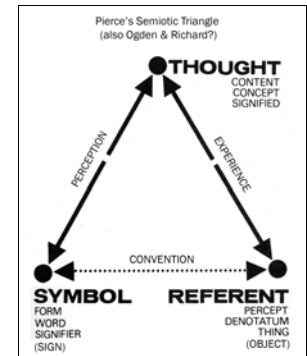
LANGUAGE & SEMIOTICS

Required Readings:
* Forty, A. "Intro." and "Language Metaphors," in <u>Words & Buildings</u> (2000) pp.10-16, 63-85.

  Harries, K. "The Language Problem," in <u>The Ethical Function of Architecture</u> (1997) pp.84-96.

  Markus, T. & D. Cameron, "Why Language Matters?," <u>The Words Between the Spaces: Buildings and Language</u> (2002) 1-17

  Broadbent, G. "A Plain Man's Guide to the Theory of Signs in Architecture," <u>Arch'l Design</u> 47:7-8 (1978): 474-482; also in Nesbitt, ed. <u>Theorizing a New Agenda</u> (1996).

Suggested Readings:
  Collins, P. "The Linguistic Analogy" in <u>Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture</u> (1965) pp.173-184

  Jencks, C. "Modes of Architectural Communication," in <u>Language of Postmodern Architecture</u> (1977) skim p.39-59, read pp.60-85

  Colquhoun, A. "Historicism and the Limits of Semiology," <u>Op.Cit.</u> (1972); also in Colquhoun, <u>Essays in Arch'l Criticism</u> (1981); and in <u>Classic Readings in Architecture</u> (1999) pp.120-131

  Broadbent, "Architects and Their Symbols," <u>Built Environment</u> (1980); also in <u>Classic Readings in Architecture</u> pp.96-120

  Alofsin, A. "Intro.: Issues of Architecture, Language, and Identity," in <u>When Buildings Speak. Architecture as Language in the Habsburg Empire...</u> (2006) pp.1-15

  Gandelsonas, M. "From Structure to Subject: The Formation of Arch'l Language," <u>Oppositions</u> 17 (1979); also in <u>Oppositions Reader</u> (1998) pp.200-223 (On Eisenman)

  Venturi, Scott Brown, <u>Architecture as Signs and Systems: for a Mannerist Time</u> (2004) pp.7-40.

Other Readings:
 Eisenman, P. "Architecture as a Second Language: the Texts of Between," <u>Threshold</u> 4 (1988)
  Scruton, R. "Language and Architecture," <u>The Aesthetics of Architecture</u> (1979) pp.158-178
  Zevi, B. "Introduction: Speaking Architecture," <u>The Modern Language of Architecture</u> (1978) pp.3-6
  Pallasmaa, J. "The Two Languages of Architecture" (1980), in <u>Encounters</u> ed. P. Mackeith (2005) pp.24-45.
  Kepes, G. <u>Language of Vision</u> (1944) pp.8-16, 66-68
  Eco, "Function and Sign: Semiotics of Architecture," in <u>Via</u> 2 (1973); also in <u>Rethinking Architecture</u> ed. N. Leach (1997)
  Norberg-Schulz, "Kahn, Heidegger & the Language of Architecture," <u>Oppositions</u> 18 (1979): 28-47
  Broadbent, G., R. Bunt et al. <u>Signs, Symbols, and Architecture</u> (1980)
  Meunier, J. ed., <u>Language in Architecture</u> ACSA Proceedings (1980)
  Preziozi, D. <u>Architecture, Language and Meaning: the Origins of the Built World and its Semiotic Organization</u> (1979)
  Mitrovic, B. Excerpt from "Philosophes and Philosophers" in <u>Philosophy for Architects</u> (2011) pp.142-153 (on Saussure)
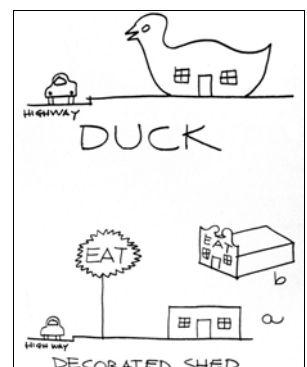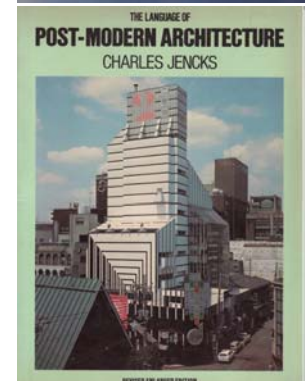
87 The language of ARCHITECTURE

Louis Hellman

Drawing on semiotics and current linguistic philosophy, critics in the 1980s evoked a traditional 'language' of architecture as part of the critique of the alleged 'failure' of the Modern Movement. They suggested that, historically, architecture developed its own specific language complete with syntax and a grammar of signs, symbols and meanings.

METAPHOR: SIMILE:
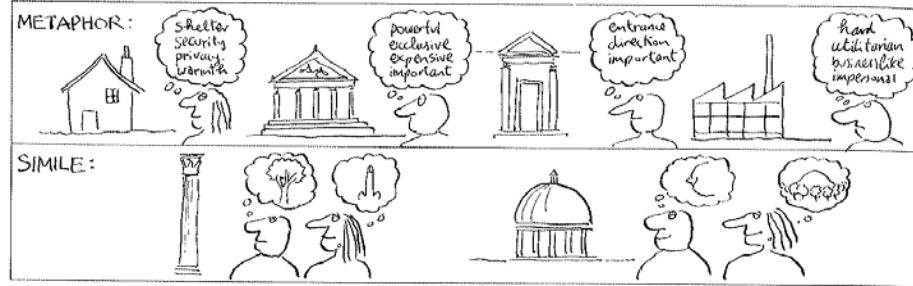
Many of these symbols and meanings relate to the human body (anthropomorphism). We say buildings 'lie', 'rise up', have 'fronts', 'backs' and 'faces' (façades) with 'silhouettes' or 'profiles' and windows which 'look out'. Historically buildings had tops (heads and hats), middles (body) with 'wings' and bases (feet). Like people they had shape seen from a distance and individual features close to. Modern buildings often look alike from a distance and have no details to relate to. People refer to them as 'faceless', 'inhuman' or 'alien'.

FRONT   FRONT? BACK? SIDE?
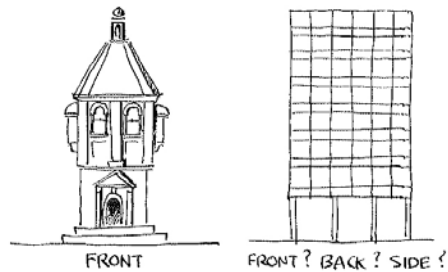
The Modern Movement rejected the old language as outdated and cliché-ridden, and sought to develop a new language based on 'functionalism' and scientific rationalism. Form would result from applying advanced technology to building problems without the need for consciously applied symbolism or aesthetic 'rhetoric'.

In practice the Modernists took as their model buildings which *symbolized* 'efficiency' or 'utility': factories, industrial warehouses and engineering structures. The repetitive, gridded appearance of these buildings became merely a metaphor for scientific rationalism. The buildings expressed the *process* of construction, linear, sequential and additive, as paradigms for machine production or literal rationalization. In other words, Modernism became another style, a machine style, without the truly rational principles it started out from.

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The result has been confusion, a communication breakdown between architect and public.

A later source of Modern Movement symbolism was the mechanical machine itself: the aeroplane, the locomotive, the automobile and, particularly, the ocean liner. As machines these were seen to be functional and efficient, and when their appearance was transferred to buildings they in turn seemed to have these characteristics. Early machines often expressed their constituent parts or separated out their functions, for example stairs, flues, ducts and pipes, and buildings followed suit.
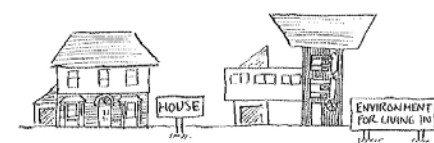
Le Corbusier's famous description of the house as 'a machine for living in' reinforces the attempt to break with the language of the past. Since then machine-image euphemisms have been rife in modern architecture. Access balconies become 'decks', plans 'work', elevations are 'articulated', stairs are 'nodes', and so on.

HOUSE   ENVIRONMENT FOR LIVING IN

Much of both the aesthetic and actual language of modern architecture also mirrors bureaucratic jargon, cold and utilitarian with no spiritual content. Homes are 'dwelling units', 'low-rise, high-density complexes' or 'point blocks'.

Recent attempts to return to the so-called traditional language of architecture are personified in the 'post-modern' styles: Post-Modernism itself, which grafts old symbols onto modern bodies; pseudo-vernacular, which apes and inflates hand-made traditional buildings for large-scale developments; and reproduction classicism, which clothes supermarkets and computer centres in eighteenth-century garb. This is the architectural equivalent of 'illiteracy'.

TAUTOLOGY: MIXED METAPHOR: BATHOS:

MICRO CHIP FACTORY

POST-MODERN   PSEUDO-VERNACULAR   REPRO-CLASSICISM

Defining architecture in terms of language is inherently limited, and it is no coincidence that it emanates from critics and writers rather than designers. The language of architecture is not static. Modern Movement terms and symbols have been absorbed into the old grammar: 'skyscraper', 'picture window', 'open-plan', 'patio doors', and so on. Airports, office blocks, geodesic domes and other new building types have entered the visual language, and sometimes modern symbols have even replaced archaic ones – a flat-roofed, large-glazed typical school, for example.

HOUSE   CHURCH   OPERA HOUSE

The language of architecture is not limited to symbols or signifiers but includes space, time, form, atmosphere, texture, colour, and so on. Using this vocabulary a great architect can create poetry and evoke a spiritual response, whether dealing with a new or old building type, without recourse to mimicking played-out clichés.