

Modernism and modernisation in architecture and culture philosophy essay



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Discuss the various competing notions of Modernity, Modernism and Modernisation in architecture and culture in the writings of Robert Venturi/Denise Scott Brown using the writings of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas to support your discussion.

Introduction

To begin this essay concerned with the issues of Modernity, Modernism and Modernisation, I think it is a necessity to first define the term Modern, as it links all three terms.

Modern, according to Jürgen Habermas, was first used in late fifth century in order to distinguish the Christian present, from the pagan and Roman past. He argues that Modern can be used whenever the awareness of a new era developed in Europe through a change in the relationship to classical antiquity. For us people today, Habermas thinks modern begins with the Renaissance, however people considered themselves as ‘modern’ in the age of Charlemagne in the twelfth century and in the Enlightenment. (Habermas, 1996). Through this Habermas describes the term modern as one, which can be used widely and has no definitive time period, as the concept behind it is based upon one’s (or an era’s) perception.

Figure

Habermas explanation of modern is supported by Vincent Scully, as he explains that Le Corbusier’s, a pioneer of Modern architecture, “teacher” was the Greek temple (Figure 1), consisting of an isolated body, white and free in the landscape, its rigour clear in the sun. Le Corbusier during his early

polemics would have his buildings just as the temple, as time went on his architecture began to progressively more and more incorporate the Greek Temple's sculptural and heroic character. (Venturi, 1977) Scully's interpretation on the work of Le Corbusier directly, as Corbusier created a new direct relationship with the classical antiquity of Greek Temples.

Michel Foucault, according to Barry Smart, takes a slightly different perspective to Habermas and Scully's interpretations of the term modern, he interprets modern as a placeholder when a more definite description is not known. He goes on to explain that the modern (or present) cannot recognise itself as a period and that if you can outline the characteristics that make up a period is to already be beyond it and has become the past. (Smart, 1994). Foucault an interesting insight into the modern, as simply a title giving to that which is unclassifiable , the present, and that once you can classify a time period then it is no longer modern and is the past.

Modernity

1. 1 -

Habermas argues that Modernity is an expression that represents the consciousness of an era that relates back to the past of classical antiquity in order understand itself as the movement from the old to the new. What Habermas called the ' Unfinished Project' aims at a distinguishable reconnection of modern culture with an everyday sphere of the theory production process, which is dependent on living heritage. However, the aim of modernity can only be achieved if the process of social modernisation can be transformed into other non-capitalist directions, if the state of the current <https://assignbuster.com/modernism-and-modernisation-in-architecture-and-culture-philosophy-essay/>

world is capable of developing institutions of its own way currently withdrawn by the self-ruling system dynamics of the economic and administrative systems. (Habermas, 1994)

Venturi explains that Louis Khan's or orthodox modern architects' desire for simplicity, is satisfactory, when it is made valid through inner complexity. He goes to mention that the Doric Temple's (Figure 2) simplicity to the eye is achieved through famous subtleties and precision of its distorted geometry and the contradictions and tensions inherent in its order, so it achieves apparent simplicity through real complexity. (Venturi, 1977). Through this Venturi's point links directly to Habermas' notion of modernity, as he is relating the new Modern architecture desire for simplicity to the simplicity achieved in the old architecture of the Doric Temple, thereby highlighting a transition from the old to new.

Figure

Michel Foucault takes a different approach from Habermas as he denotes Modernity as something which is characterised by a combination of power/knowledge relations around the subject of life, a life that is now possible to master through science. He goes on to argue that the human race's problem does not only consist of a fear of destruction through chemical or atomic pollution, animal species extinction or depletion of natural resources; the idea that any malicious power could take over technologies for evil purposes, is only a false illusion to hide a genuine metaphysical anxiety that corresponds with the mastery of life. Through this Foucault states that this mastery of life, through science, transforms the

living, crushing it. As opposed to turning it into a knowledge base upon which could support us, thus making the living being more and more artificial.

(Jose, 1998)

Habermas produces a definition of Modernity, which takes a more of social/economical perspective, with his relation between social modernization and capitalism and between the world's institutions and autonomous economic and administrative systems. On the other hand Foucault takes an approach in which he addresses how important the scientific aspect of modernity is and how it has affected our outlook on life as a whole.

Figure

According to Habermas, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (Figure 3) was the first philosopher to develop a clear understanding of modernity. With the philosophers that came before him, Hegel located the core of modernity in the principle of subjectivity, which had previously been discussed by Kant, who saw subjectivity as the foundation of science, morality and art fields. Hegel argued that since modernity was based on subjectivity and the power of critical reflection, only philosophical reason could achieve the hoped-for reconciliation and overcome the doubt of modern subjectivity. This interpretation led to the articulation of Hegel's notion of "absolute spirit", which is the "consuming activity of self-discovery," the "unconditionally self-productive self-relation," interceding subjectivity and objectivity, nature and spirit, finitude and infinity. (Habermas, 1996, Pg. 6)

Modernity and the Enlightenment

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David Harvey describes Enlightenment thought as that which embraced the idea of progression and actively wanted that break with history and tradition which modernity adopts. It was a non-religious movement that sought the removal of obscurity and sacredness of knowledge and social organisation in order to free human beings from their chains. (Harvey, 1989).

The project of modernity, as referred to by Habermas, came into focus during eighteenth century. This developed an intellectual effort by Enlightenment thinkers to advance in objective science, universal ethics and law, and autonomous art according to their inner logic. The idea behind this was to may use of the knowledge gained by many people working freely and creatively in pursuit of human emancipation and the enrichment of daily life.

Harvey denotes Enlightenment thought as a thought process which strives to remove the unease about pursuing knowledge and social organisation so that we can remove the chains in our minds, which prevents us from gaining more knowledge. This links into Habermas, where he touches upon a characteristic of Enlightenment thinking, which is to advance and enrich daily life through the gain of more knowledge.

According to Habermas, through opposing the classical and the romantic to each other, modernity wished to create its own past in an idealised vision of the Middle Ages. During the nineteenth century the Romanticism produced a radicalised realisation of modernity that detached itself from all previous historical connections and understood itself solely in abstract opposition to tradition and history as a whole. (Habermas, 1996) I do not agree with this

statement as Habermas contradicts himself as he previously denoted modernity as an expression that represents

“ the consciousness of an era that refers back to the past of classical antiquity precisely in order to comprehend itself as the result of a transition from the old to the new.” (Habermas, 1996, Pg. 39)

With reference to this notion, it would impossible for a type of modernity to develop that not have historical connections and abstractly opposed tradition and history entirely.

Modernity as an avant-garde

The mentality of aesthetic modernity began to form with Charles Pierre Baudelaire and with his theory of art, which had been influenced by Edgar Allan Poe. This unfolded in the avant-garde artistic movements and then achieved its peak with surrealism and the Dadaists of the Café Voltaire. This mentality is characterised by a set of attitudes, which formed around a new transformed consciousness of time, which expresses itself in the spatial metaphor of the avant-garde. This avant-garde explores the unknown, thereby exposing itself to the risk of sudden and shocking encounters, conquering an undetermined future and must find a path for itself in previously unknown domains. (Habermas, 1996)

Modernism

Modernisation

Conclusion

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