

making a 90° triangle had the same properties in the days of Pythagoras as they have now. A triangle may acquire additional and new meanings as in El Lissitzky's street poster of 1919 – 20, 'Beat the Whites with a Red Wedge', where it became a weapon of attack without losing its original attributes. The meaning is dependent on the visual context and in this case, as in so many others, on the adjacent words.

What seems to be relevant is that although we frequently and fruitfully think non-verbally, we almost always need words to make precise those thoughts when they require to be communicated. I can produce a drawing showing a design and someone else can produce a different design solving the same problem. We can put these drawings side by side but then need words to argue why one should be preferred to the other. We may then, separately or jointly, return to non-verbal thinking to produce further alternatives. Or to put it another way, I cannot make the above statement as a drawing just as I would find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to invent and present unambiguously a plan and section of a house in words.

Such a statement may seem a truism. It nevertheless needs making in view of the verbal discussions of architecture which too often neglect the existence of buildings, of buildings as objects resulting from non-verbal thinking.

The influence of the past is inescapable and a total absence of continuity is therefore inconceivable. We cannot purge ourselves of the effect our surroundings have on us; we simply cannot be blind to the existing world, present and past. In any case the present state embodies the trials of millennia and it would be foolish and wasteful to ignore experience which has accumulated since Adam and Eve.

Even the most radical artist works in some tradition and certainly starts by doing so even if departing from it later in life; the work is part of a changing continuum in which the rate of change may vary but is always there. No one has yet been able to step outside the existing visual – and cultural – environment and suddenly invent a wholly new visual language.

The opposite assumption, namely that there is no innovation, seems equally untenable. Such an absence could be explained by the supposition that there are no new problems or, alternatively, that even new problems can be solved satisfactorily with old solutions. History and our everyday experience, however, deny this as a workable proposition even though some more extreme heritage lobbies act as if it were true.

Part of the difficulty arises from the symbolic content that is enmeshed with all stylistic answers; the connection was the basis of Pugin's fierce polemic as much as Le Corbusier's pronouncements in *Towards a New Architecture*. Style is related to a particular period and becomes synonymous with the cultural indicators of that time. Thomas Jefferson while third President of the United States, for instance, hoped that there would be an indigenous architecture development that would run parallel with that of the new republic. He encouraged Latrobe, the architect of the new Capitol building in Washington D.C., to create an 'American Order'. Latrobe sent him drawings of capitals based on corn, cotton and tobacco plants; a modest innovation on an ancient form that preserved the notion of a continuity with an admired republican Rome.