

Part Two - The incommensurability between perception and knowledge

The constructivist perspective of knowledge — Constructivism and aesthetics — The problem of the observer — The principle of reality

Short Panorama

Starting with Jean Piaget's notion that we construct our sense of reality at the same time as we create our notion of language, a number of authors conclude that we only can have a sense of understanding or a sense of a 'world' when we start to think about this entanglement between language and construction of our direct environment. This idea of 'thinking about how we think' has been identified as radical constructivism or philosophical constructivism.

The 'minimalist' approach constructivism offers has been one of the reasons of its effective argumentation, together with the fact that all General Philosophical Systems (such as Marxism, Phenomenology, etc.) are no longer able to generate concrete answers to present problems. These systems were important due to the fact that they were considered as the ultimate Reference or Main Background of the European culture. This disappearance is what Jean François Lyotard calls 'the end of the Great Narratological System'.

The so-called 'problem of the observer' has to do with this lack of general system of references and that is why the meaning of what is happening everyday, as Virilio indicated, is so difficult to be placed in the old traditional frameworks, this is the case, for example, of 'history'.

From the point of view of philosophy or epistemology –understood as 'science studies'– this situation creates a sense of present (or becoming) which constantly poses a problem: our perceptions of the present are not in correspondence with what we understand as knowledge. Moreover, they seem to go into a different direction. This situation is what

some authors have identified as 'postmodern time'.

Target

The purpose of this second lecture is to have a panorama of why it is so difficult to establish a conceptual framework for our present, especially when we try to establish a certain notion of 'European culture'.

Key Questions

Do you think that the so-called constructivist perspective has any connection with your way of understanding our present visual culture?

If we accept the dominance of visual elements in our culture, how do you think aesthetics can be assessed? Do you agree with Virilio's judgment of the 'end of the traditional sense of aesthetics'?

Do you think that the definition of reality, as a notion grounded on the physical systems, is still valid?

If we accept that we cannot separate the observation of a particular phenomena from the observer making it, what do you believe are the consequences for our idea of knowledge, language or understanding?