

Introduction

Peggy Deamer

Because building a building costs so much money, construction—and within it, architecture—necessarily works for and within the monetary system. One could say that the history of architecture is the history of capital. But, while this is obvious, architectural history, especially as it is handed to us in the US, is oddly devoid of examinations of this relationship. Either it is assumed that this connection is less interesting than one which traces the relationship of one architectural style to another style or to a philosophic position, or the dominance of theories of architectural autonomy overtly exclude such an examination. After all, autonomy insists that architecture speaks and develops its own language in its own history relatively independent of world events. This anthology wants to make clear that there is a relationship, and not just to world events in general, but to the economic condition that enfolds those events.

Having said this, *Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present* starts from the position that this relationship is rarely direct; that the economy at a given time and place sets the stage for certain cultural productions to be desirable, with architects acting out their design positions accordingly. For all that Heinrich Wölfflin is disparaged today for his formal and formulaic approach to art history, he was wise in pointing out that certain periods of history can only “see” in certain ways, having no consciousness of alternative organizational, visual, or formal schemas. He certainly did not link the circumstances defining these limits to the economy, but he lays out the condition that we wish to pursue here: that it is our cultural desires that shape what architects talk about and see. This anthology suggests that capitalism, in different ways, in different cultures, and in different historical periods shapes those cultural desires and, indeed, makes those desires so desirable that they often seem to fill natural needs.

Another way of saying this might be that this anthology assumes, in the Marxist distinction between base and superstructure, that architecture operates as much in the superstructure as in the base. While the construction industry participates energetically in the economic engine that is the base, architecture (particularly as a design practice) operates in the realm of culture, allowing capital

to do its work without its effects being scrutinized. This position then mediates the above indication that this volume challenges the tenants of architectural autonomy. It suggests rather that the issues shaping architectural practice are particular to architecture *per se*, but insists that that particularity does not exclude the discipline from the effect of complex extra-architectural conditions, like money. But here, too, it has to be said that historically, the connection between capital and architecture has not been so mysterious; architects in the not-so-distant (European) past actually did build their practices around their overtly formulated economic positions. One of the things that inspired this book was the opportunity to expose how politically and economically engaged many of our admired historical architects really were.

If all of architecture is a manifestation of capital, what forms the selections in this anthology? The first consideration, the time frame and sequence, is determined by the advent of industrial society and with it, the self-conscious awareness of the working of capitalism. While this ostensibly begins with Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776, its connection to the built environment via the conditions of industrialization comes to the fore in the mid-nineteenth century with the work of John Stuart Mill (*Principles of Political Economy*, 1848) and Karl Marx (*Das Kapital*, 1867). Therefore, the anthology begins at this period and moves up to the present in a chronological manner. Capitalism is an unstable phenomenon—what it is and how it operates changes constantly and not just via movements between bull and bear markets, recessions and expansions, *laissez-faire* advocacy and regulation, but in its relationship to culture and power. If, as was mentioned above, the connection between capital and architecture is indirect, it is also nimble and mutant. The chronology is essential to grasping capitalism's changing character and, hence, its changing relationship to architecture.

The second consideration, the determination of what constitutes "architecture," is more dicey. Certainly, architecture excludes the world of construction that excludes architects; that is, it excludes those developments that are guided by a profit margin unable or unwilling to pay for professional architectural services. It also excludes the larger category of urban development that is so closely tied to politics and economics that it, again, would be a history of the built environment everywhere. Indeed, these chapters adhere to projects and productions that are, for the most part, squarely in the pantheon of "architecture history," the aim being to re-examine old stories, filling in information regarding the effects of the economic context. The intention is not to unearth new projects that expose links between power brokers, rather, the chapters here are meant as historiographical adjustments. In this way a conversation ensues; if the time frame and chronology are set by capitalism, the actual choice of stories is shaped by architecture history.

The third directive is to follow case studies rather than fill out general periods of architectural history. While this precludes comprehensiveness, it allows the specifics of the relationship between capital and architecture to be examined more closely. From the standpoint of architecture, the economy shows its effects in a number of ways. Money has implications for those who own the property,

who develop the property, who design the building, who actually build the building, who experience the architecture visually, who occupy the building, and who control its dissemination through media. The “subject” of architecture, like that of capital, is not stable, and the specificity of the case studies is instrumental in covering the various and differing ways in which economics affect architecture. In some cases, the architectural issue is labor; in others, it is affordability; in others still, image and propaganda. We could say more bluntly that sometimes the pertinent architectural condition is on the supply side and other times on the demand side. Likewise, the emphasis on case studies allows a specific examination of the political context in which a group of architects are working. If these various case studies aim to expose the particular connections between architecture and the economy, they also expose the particular way that each nation state, either overtly or not, administers the mechanisms of these connections.

Having said this, it proved less interesting (or less possible) to stick with an emphasis on architecture in all cases. Early on, in Chicago in at the turn of the century, the skyscrapers under analysis are as much a structural condition as they are one of design. And as the chapters move into the twenty-first century, practices that become interesting are often oblivious to the hand of the architect. Globalization obliterates national differences and it smooths out the distinction between major and minor architects as both are invited to design Asian and Southeast Asian towns from scratch, as the example of Gurgaon shows. The final chapter, “Liberal,” is seen as a coda because it leaves the case study model altogether as it discusses not architecture, but infrastructure, and reflects back critically on the terms that we today associate (even in this anthology) with the politics and economics of the built environment.

Despite all of this rationalization, the make-up of this book has to be largely arbitrary and certainly incomplete. For every chapter that is here, there are three others that rightly can be seen as absolutely essential. There are gaps in time and there are gaps in practices and certainly there are gaps in adjudication. The hope of this book is to act as a first foray that will initiate the production of a more thorough history of the relationship between architecture and capitalism. The timeline included in this anthology as well as the short introductions to each chapter are meant to bridge the gaps between chapters and contextualize the diversity of case studies within the history of capitalism. But they are meant as well as invitations to imagine and then write the stories that are left untold here.

Clearly, this book, while about capitalism, is indebted to those who have devoted themselves to its critique, Marx in particular. As analyses of capitalism’s multifarious modes of operation, Marxism, neo-Marxism, and the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School has informed the terms by which this editor and a number of the authors understand the subject-matter. It has as well shaped the thinking of the various cultural analysts who direct architectural debates in a given architectural era, influencing the intellectual arena of cultural production of their time. And finally, more than has traditionally been told, a number of the architects discussed *themselves* approach(ed) their work with a socialist agenda. For contemporary readers, especially in the US, it is still surprising to learn that many of

the masters we revere for their formal expertise understood their work as a critique of capitalism. Whether they were largely deceived in their faith in this critique, as Manfredo Tafuri claims, does not disallow the affect it had on their work. The hope is that this anthology will open up debates about the relationship of architecture and capitalism that include non-Marxist orientations. There must be a contemporary Ayn Rand out there that architecture could hear from.

All of this intellectual positioning shapes scholarly allegiances and the choice of authors invited to contribute to this volume; so does appreciation of the expertise of the authors in the relevant periods. Still, in almost every case, the authors brought something much newer and unexpected to both the topics and to their analyses than had been imagined, such that the book as a whole has taken on a life of its own, one that is considerably richer than the one planned and certainly much more fun to be a part of. I am indebted to all of them for both the wealth of information that they have brought to the table and for their enthusiasm and commitment to the topic of this book.

Chapter 1

Introduction

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Morality, progress, and criticism of progress: all of these were bound up in the architectural thinking of the nineteenth century, as witnessed by the moral fervor attending the Gothic Revival as it reacted to the Industrial Revolution. John Ruskin for his belief in the moral labor that seemingly attended the making of the Gothic; William Morris for his support of the vernacular epitomized by mediaval ad hocism;¹ Augustus Pugin for the Gothic style's link to Catholicism: these were varied projections put on the Gothic as the architectural community fashioned a way to take a stance against the physical indignities that accompanied the Industrial Revolution.

Placed in the context of a market economy, the Gothic Revival was a shock response to the full-blown emergence of capitalism, itself a latent reaction to the rise of mercantilism in England over the two centuries prior. Mercantilism is a nascent form of capitalism in that labor is contractual, and trade is made for profit. This early capitalist economy was preceded by the collapse of the medieval manorial system in England, which created a class of free tenant-farmers. Rather than relying on fealty and taxation, Lords had to hire labor to work their estates, thus creating incentive to invest in efficient production technologies.²

During a concomitant period of enclosure, public lands were transferred to these same large (aristocratic) landowners who used the surplus to graze sheep rather than produce food. As England's wool exports grew in the fifteenth century, the process of single-owner land expansion accelerated, forcing many tenants to give up farming and seek wage-labor.³ Yet commodities were still produced by non-capitalist production methods. Merchants operated within large monopolies backed by state (i.e. royal) control and state subsidies, such as the British East India Company, in which the state superseded local guilds as economic regulator. This period also saw overseas merchants "discover" new lands, resulting in the rapid growth in overseas trade.

Economic theorists, led by Adam Smith, challenged fundamental mercantilist doctrines. In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Smith sought to reveal the nature and cause of a nation's prosperity, therein introducing the terms and tenants of

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industrial capitalism. One of these was his famous dictum that the laborer is “led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention,” his intention being selfish but the outcome benefitting all in the expansion of the economy. Another lasting notion was his production of pins analogy supporting the division of labor: ten workers could produce 48,000 pins per day if each of eighteen specialized tasks was assigned to particular workers, but absent the division of labor, Smith pointed out, a worker would barely be able to produce one pin per day.

In the 1830s, reality caught up with these theoretical observations. England’s economy became characterized by a competitive labor market, the investment of capital into machinery, the division of labor, the routinization of tasks, and the replacement of the merchant by the industrialist as the principal player in the economic system. Industrial capitalism had now emerged.

This new form of capitalism emerged with further theoretical assistance. In *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), John Stuart Mill posits that capital has nothing to do with the actual product produced, but rather with the purpose to which the labor of the product is put, which is to say, *productive reinvestment*. He also described how the value of labor is not set by the product nor even by the sustenance of labor, but by the “convenience” of reimbursing skilled over unskilled labor. Mill was, in other words, expounding on the arbitrary nature of wages.

Karl Marx, a contemporary of Mill (but much less widely read; Marx *Capital* was not translated into a volume in English until 1887),⁴ also analyzed the arbitrary nature of wages, but saw in it not just a fact of capitalism but rather its degrading essence. Marx’s historical perspective—his Hegelian *dialectic* of thesis (agrarian serfs), antithesis (capitalist manufacturing), and synthesis (communism)—and his social agenda—his anti-Hegelian, anti-idealism *materialism* (man’s alienated material, labor existence under capitalism)—were part of a larger awakening regarding social “progress” and historical determinism, as seen in the contemporary Victorian work of Charles Dickens and Charles Darwin.

It is in this tumultuous context that Robert Hewison examines the lives and work of contemporaries John Ruskin and Henry Cole. The former may be distilled as the revivalist “romantic,” the latter as the modern “pragmatic,” but in fact each man had a nuanced view of the economy and of the role of architecture and design within it.

Notes

- 1 William Morris alone of these was a reader of Marx. He was a socialist in both practice—his workshop, Morris, Marshall, and Faulkner, being based on the guild model extolled by Marx; and in theory—his utopian novel, *News from Nowhere* (1890), speculating on a society where work was not paid for but voluntary and communally enjoyed.
- 2 Niall Ferguson, *The Ascent of Money* (New York: Penguin, 2008).
- 3 Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol I: *The Renaissance*; vol II: *The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

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- 4 Marx's initial volume of *Kapital* appeared in Germany in 1867, but did not appear in English until the journal *To-day*, under Hyndman's editorship, began to serialize it in 1885. *Kapital* lacked an English translation in one volume until the publication of Engels's edition in 1887.