

**ARC 553 Theory and Research**

**Assignment:**

**Theory forum essay**

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## ***Introduction***

Architecture is often said reflection of society. In this sense, architecture is always socially passive object responding social demands, technologies, economic activities, political symbols, and infrastructure. According to Tahl, agency conference panel, in 1970s architecture was subject to discuss its role in social sphere (Kaminer, Tahl. abstract, 2008). By rethinking a relation of the building to society, thinkers and architects proposed their thought how architecture can be vital element of social organ in terms political, economic system of the world. A notion of relation of the building to society is important in designing building before realizing in reality as an architect. In the paper of Tahl, although, proposition of the relationship is declared in his conclusion paragraph, the idea is seemed to be rather concealed behind complex theories. To begin with the idea of relation of the building to society, this paper reinvestigates a relation of the building to society based on the lecturer's paper as first step.

## ***Two types of society***

Before thinking of the relation between architecture and city right away, it is important to look at basic social system background where architecture takes place, because the background enormously affects the relation with building.

In Tahl's paper, broadly saying, two types of society system are mentioned: one is a society buttressed by Max Weber theory; the other is Marxism society supported by Karl Marx theory.

In primitive Marxism society according to Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, separating from their will, people have to be a part of economic circulation as a source of producing commodity. Totality of workforce extracted from people and the relation of production leads to an economic circulation, which is referred to 'base'. The 'base' predominantly defines its two-layered apparatus: the politico-legal and ideology such as religions, ethics, politics, and other activities, so-called 'superstructure'. (Preface, Marx, Karl, 1977) In the relation of 'base' and 'superstructure', for cultural, intellectual development, 'base' permanent growth persuasion is inevitably essential. 'Superstructure' is rather by-product of 'base' system existence.

However, regarding on the fundamental social apparatus, Louis Althusser adds vital discovery through keen observation of 'the reproduction of the conditions of production'. (p.123 Althusser, Louis. 2001) Following a production systematic circulation process, he investigates how to reproduce labour power, because labour power is one of essential parts of economic system. For example, children of current workers will be next generation labour power, and they are trained to adapt to work environment, or will give innovative impact on economic system through learning social skill from school, church, and all kind of social activities. As previously mentioned, these activities are regarded as 'superstructure' sphere, thus on the contrary to primitive Marxism social system, he, Louis Althusser actually implies that 'superstructure' can steer its 'base', economic system. Therefore, Marxism society is not one-sided game, economic system dominance, but rather mutual closed set of social system.

On the other hand, proposed society by Max Webber is, as Tahl describes on his paper, 'society is primarily constructed by ethics, morals and ideals'. (p.1 Kaminer, Tahl.2008) From the citation, economic system where architecture practice is taking place, doesn't seem to be clear its position, but according to Max Webber, he presumably explains in his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, that the capitalism ethos is developed through the development of rationalism which is possibly based on ordinary life problems. In addition, he implies Protestantism effect prior to constitute rationalistic spirit. (p.76 Webber, Max. 2002) Protestantism is deeply rooted to life: ethics, ideals, and culture. In this sense, it is considered the three elements, ethics, morals, and ideals as factor of economic system. Therefore, in Marxism society, economic system is treated as one of separated structural element organizing society, while in Max Webber's theory, economic system is incorporated in social entity as integrated fusion element of social organization.

Now, two society types show their difference in structural organization. To avoid complex relation between the building and the societies, common idea should be introduced to them.

### ***Profit in economic system***

Two societies are proposed to pursue different ideology: on the one hand, in Marxism, as proposing abolition of capitalist society based on keen anticipation of capitalism. Marx thought the main cause of exploitation is competitive free market. Thus instead of the free market, he believed equal profit distribution system would help people from exploitation. On the other hand, though Webber denied that a characteristic of seeking profit is only nature of capitalism, he admitted that pursuit of permanent renewed profit as the nature of capitalism and the pursuit will be conducted in rational manner. (p.17 Webber, Max. 2002) Profit seek lies in both of economic model, but describing its difference in other words, worker would ask his/her employer "How long do I have to work to earn for £100?" in Marxism. On the contrast, worker would ask his/her employer "How much can I earn for 7 hours working?" The former remark implies that there is a certain profit rate per hour, but the latter suggests possibility that how much the worker can earn is depending on how much the worker can do job effectively. This idea induces competitive environment in economy.

However, profit is a main purpose of goods exchange and profit is a fundamental power running economic system no matter where it is. Profit can be translated into 'surplus-value'. As the term implies, profit is exceeding value from its original. In two social models, both of them using capitalistic economic model, moreover both models admit its importance of reproduction of production force, thus basic surplus-value process can be thought as the same. Primarily, capitalist production is divided into two elements. One is fixed capital which consists of raw material, buildings, and the other is changing capital which is composed of price of labour power. Changing capital is regarded as creating new value which results in profit. (p.92-93 Althusser, Louis. 2001)

### ***The relation of architect to society***

If architect were the one who can add new value on product which is building, architect would be described as labour worker in economic system. Therefore, due to social structural matter, one can be said that the relation of architect to society is more understandable than that of building to society. In this sense, architect is entitled to give an impact by means of building as production through design. Tahl refers to John Summerson's citation from the book, *Architecture Reflection*, 'the source of unity in modern architecture is in the social sphere, in other words in the architect's programme'. (p.26 Summerson, John. 2001) Thus, the relation of architect to society is connected to programmed architecture. Architect are actually participating social environment and are affecting society through its designed programme even if architect were regarded as labour power and gained profit as a compensation of programme or design. In addition, John Summerson also specifically mentions about programme,

'a description of the spatial dimensions, spatial relationships and other physical conditions required for the convenient performance of specific functions'. (p.26 Summerson, John. 2001)

In other words, with ordinary drawing such as plan, elevation, section plan, so-called 'the spatial dimensions, spatial relationship', programme potentially ranges in variety of systematic sphere called 'other physical conditions'; construction method, material arrangement.

For examples of architect participation by means of programming architecture, one of modernism architecture movement can be this kind of instance. Internationalism stems from modernism. The principle of the idea is to standardize architectural style on foundation such as construction material, construction method, and structure. Its ambition is aimed to open architectural industry in all over the world. Before modernism era, architectural industry didn't fit mass production economy because of stressing too much importance on 'style'. Thus the industry halted its forward progress of effective economic circulation. For tackling this problem or not, architects proposed modernism architecture leading to internationalism architecture which is imposed of ambition to open up the world's architectural market for architects. As a result, modernism architecture spread all over the world, and the idea steered whole society at the time. Although the fierce impact on society was severely criticized, the accomplishment is undeniable. This action can be seen as industrial systematic programme participation of architects.

To make it easy to calculate building value and also ease building floor programme, architects, urban planner and authority cooperated creating 'abstract grid' in American cities such as Philadelphia, New York City. The experiments are conducted forming building plot in simple square shape on which building can be counted as the same simple square floor repetition. Besides, the abstract grid made it clear definition of building code in dense city as possible. Manfredo Tafuri mentions about this in the book, *Architecture Theory since 1968 that*,

'In the United States, absolute freedom is granted to the single architectural fragment, which is situated in a context that is not formally conditioned by it. The American city

gives maximum articulation to the secondary elements that shape it, while the laws governing the whole are strictly upheld.'(p.11 Tafuri, Manfredo. 2000)

European cities have a long history. Through the historical events, land plot might be distorted, or be including unclear boundary among buildings. These vague factors sticking on a site on which building is planned lead to multiple interpretations of building code. Various understanding about a site ends up affecting whole design process, cost calculation, and construction period. These are less productive, undesirable phenomenon in project. To avoid these interruptions as much as possible, introduction of the abstract grid is regarded as solution at the time.

Architect's programme also contributed to add an extra value on architecture. Barcelona Pavilion is often paid attention to its luxurious use of material, designed disposition of architectural elements such as pillars, roof, and walls, and luxurious space. Until modernism era, luxurious room was decorated by hand crafted elaborate workmanship. Instead of precise devoting a lot of time decoration, Barcelona Pavilion is one of econ realizing luxurious space without such a workmanship decoration. This achievement was accomplished by architect's keen material investigation and study of material arrangement.

Architect has used programming for the method of participating to society, because architect plays a role as labour power in society notion. Sometimes, designed programme can steer social paradigm and can give firm impact on society. To summarise the relation of architects to society, it is unavoidable to be workforce in economic system, and secondly they have touched buildings through programme such as industrial system, urban programme, and material arrangement. The relation of architect to society is conducted in non-physical, rather theoretical, or programme based manner.

### ***City and Metropolis***

As previously examined two models of societies, there are two apparently similar ideas that city and metropolis. By comparing these two terms, city would be redefined its meaning. The definition of 'metropolis' in *Oxford Dictionary of Englis* is 'the capital or chief city of a country or region.' In this sense, metropolis means a large city. In the dictionary, the term 'city' is '<in Britain> a town created a city by charter and usually containing a cathedral. <in North America> a municipal centre incorporated by the state or province.' From these definitions, there seems to be similarity between metropolis and city rather than contrasting each other, but according to a book, *Architecture and Nihilism*, shows specifically the differences between metropolis and city.

'When the Geist(spirit - mind) abandons the simple and direct relations of production, it no longer creates the city but the Metropolis. It is the Geist, not the individual, that of necessity inhabits the Metropolis.'(p.4 Cacciari, Massimo. 1993) and 'definition of the function of the Metropolis: it dissolves individuality into the current of impressions and

reintegrates these, precisely by virtue of their constitution, into the overall process of *Veigeistigung*. In its first stage of evolution, the Metropolis uproots individuality from its conservative fixity.'(p.5 Cacciari, Massimo. 1993)

Here, 'simple and direct relations of production' excludes indirect relations of production. 'simple and direct relations of production' is potentially read as physical activities such as 'buying or selling production'. Thus, if people cut physical connection to economic activities, a road would be opened for city to be the Metropolis. In Metropolis, individuality would be sublimated to an abstract philosophical aggregate, and the entity would unite with the main constituent. It can be said that the Metropolis is similar with society, but the Metropolis is seen as total entity whereas society is systematic aggregation of subdivisions.

On the contrast, there are key citations to re-consider city. 'We are still in the "city" as long as we are in the presence of use values alone, or in the presence of the simple production of commodity, or if the two instances stand next to each other in a non-dialectical relation.'(p.7 Cacciari, Massimo. 1993) And also, 'the Metropolis is the place of those differences that , as the measure and calculation of value, integrate every phenomenon into the dialectic of abstract value.'(p.9 Cacciari, Massimo. 1993)

The meaning of 'dialectic' is a method usually used in finding the truth ideas by logical argument and by investigating contras ideas to each other. (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

If city is a situation in 'Non-dialectical relation', city can be understood as the relation in which each phenomenon is stable without interaction and comparison. If the Metropolis were the place of contrastive integration of any kind of phenomena occurring in social entities, city would be the place of linear relation of phenomena occurring in social sphere. Under stable linear circumstance, act and reaction that derived from social phenomena would be preserved its condition such as physical matter, meta-physical matter or abstract thought. For the reason, city is a good circumstance to look at the relation of architecture to city.

### ***The relation of architecture to city***

For further consideration, in this paper, as a premise, let's put society and Metropolis as abstract totality combining non-material matter such as politics, thought, intellect, economy and sublimated physical reality. In the premise, city is subdivided into two linear stages: firstly physical, man-made buildings aggregation place where architect's programmes are realized; in the second, phenomenon occurred from philosophical reaction or accumulation originated from physical contacts of people and buildings.

At the first phase, architecture is appeared as a result of production activity. Its shape, height, colour of building is exposed to city, and disposition within a site combining with its shape is casting a space in city space. Man-made aggregation of building, city, gives

buildings conditions to fit in its physical or custom context. According to a book, *Oppositions Reader*, the author, Leon Krier says,

'in postwar Germany, classical architecture, characterized as reactionary, nostalgic, and Fascist, was officially repressed.' (p.411 Krier, Leon. 1998)

Then the author accused architects of changing the country into 'concrete desert'. This is an example of physical effects from architecture to city as a final product through architectural process. Especially in this case, an extreme reaction against its historical incidence, consciously or unconsciously, architects abandoned and experimented appropriate totally new shape, colour, material for designing buildings. This tendency had last for decade, and the city is replaced to the concrete desert.

Drawing the result, above example also clearly shows that architecture's physical conditions such as shape, colour, material and the rest of appearance certainly contains a specific cultural or abstract meanings. Aldo Rossi, the author of the book, *The Architecture of the City* says 'the city itself is the collective memory of its people, and like memory it is associated with objects and places.'(p.130 Rossi, Aldo. 1999) On the contrary, architecture can be said that architecture is a memory cell of city. Building stores memories receiving from people, and it releases memories of people to city. It also can be said that architecture is a machinery switch for people to make a memory. Architecture offers a place or space of things happening, and then people remember events they had. Once the building contributed to memory vanished, as time goes, people would forget what had happened or even totally forget what there existed without any key thing to remember. Architecture is a physical reality, and cooperating with space created by architecture is lived experience leading to people's memory. The idea of storing memories derived from events, activities, leads to history of the city and to culture of the city.

Culturally or historically important buildings have been giving a notion of conservation. The book, *The conservation of European cities*, describes the importance that city without memory is like person wandering about because of amnesia. (p.17 Appleyard, Donald. [ed.], 1979) The reason why architecture relates to culture is not only ignition of people's memory but also reflecting of the way people live, so-called, a custom. More specifically, each person has memories that are originated from each certain building, and these memories are participating to organize his or her identity, as the personality. Therefore, preserving buildings connecting to the memories is essential. Furthermore, as the piled up these memories case would be identical culture for the people live in the city.

The first building conservation proclamation was made in 1560 by Queen Elizabeth forbidding demolition of any ancient monuments for memory. (p.9 Delafons, John. 1997) This is very description of, 'Architecture is not political; it is only an instrument of politics.'(p.411 Krier, Leon. 1998)

All buildings called monument or symbol gathers people's philosophic attention, and then they become to have political meaning. Now in the first stage, physical building realized in city space, at the same time becoming machinery switch for memory. Consequently, people give meanings, abstraction, to architecture in return.

***Conclusion: the relation of architect / architecture to society / city***

To sum up, three different continuous relations have been seen in this paper. At first, the relation of architect to society tied with economic system using programmatic method. Secondly, the physical relation of architecture to the city, aggregation of architectures engraving space inside and outside of building, and giving certain effects from their shape, colour, material. In the third, the abstract thought, cultural relation of people to architecture, people giving meanings to the architectures in terms of personal identity, national identity, symbol, or culture. Socially as a whole, preserved condition of action and reaction derived from phenomena that occurred in city are sublimated into total integration in society and then the resultant will affect not only economic system but also architects programme. Therefore, the relation of the building to city can be divided into roughly 3 different stage circled connection.

In addition, from the circled relation, two important notions can be drawn. On the one hand, architect's programme no matter what it is such as building inside plan, elevation, section, or local engagement process scheme, construction method design, are able to affect physical city space and people's lived experience by means of economic activity as compensation of profit. On the other hand, after realizing architect's programme in any form, released programme will return to affect their work in terms of the sense of value that determines amount of profit. Therefore, architect is required to recognize architecture's public effects to city and the effect leads to social sphere, while even architect is a one of tiny parts of economic circulation.

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