
The social production of the built environment: architects, architecture and the post-Modern city

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[1987]

It has been clear for some time that processes of urban development in the world's core economies have been responding to a new and distinctive set of economic, social, demographic and political forces. Some of the major influences on this new phase of urbanization are the result of changes which have been developing throughout the postwar period as capitalism has entered a 'late' or 'advanced' stage (Mandel, 1975). These changes include a shift away from manufacturing employment to service employment, an increasing dominance of big conglomerate corporations, and an internationalization of corporate activity. These developments have precipitated important social transformations: the creation of a 'new' petite bourgeoisie (Carchedi, 1975; Giddens, 1973), for example. These social transformations, in turn, are being reproduced in space through property markets that are both reflected and conditioned by the built environment (Lefebvre, 1974; Gottdiener, 1985).

As these fundamental socioeconomic transformations have been gathering momentum, other shifts – in technology, in demographic composition, and in cultural and political life – have been taking place: the entry of the baby-boom generation into housing and labour markets, the changing structure and composition of private households, the development of advanced telecommunications and new high-technology industries, the articulation of the

liberal/ecological values of the middle-class youth counterculture, the retrenchment of public expenditure with the rise of the 'New Right', and the system-shock precipitated by the OPEC oil embargo of 1973, for example. Gappert (1979), noting both the uncertainty within major economic and political institutions and the altered mood and disposition of America's middle classes, has labelled the overall condition as 'postaffluent'. Lyotard (1984), writing in the wake of French 'post-Marxism', takes a still broader view of all these shifts and transformations. The world's core economies, he argues, now exhibit a 'post-Modern' condition, in which the economic rationality and cultural Modernism of industrial capitalism are widely rejected but have not been clearly displaced by a new aesthetics, a new economics, or new politics.

Theoretical orientations and labels notwithstanding, it is clear that urban change must be seen in relation to these major transformations and shifts. This paper – reviews the recent literature on architects and architecture – agents and outcomes of change in the built environment that have received surprisingly little attention from geographers – in the context of these broader changes. Compared with other related fields, research on this topic has for a long time been impoverished, with an overwhelming emphasis on microscale interactions between architecture and human behaviour and an