

Architecture and the accumulation and circulation of capital

Although very interesting relationships have been proposed between architecture, the building industry and processes of capital *circulation and accumulation* (Harvey, 1975; 1981; Lefebvre, 1970), their actual operation remains to be documented, and the proposed relations have, for the most part, still to be operationalized and empirically validated. The links between the building and construction industry and overall postwar growth in *consumption* are widely acknowledged, as are the distinctive characteristics of the building and construction industry. For a variety of reasons, the organization and division of labour in the industry seem not to have followed general trends. As Marco puts it:

In contrast to goods like cars, electrical appliances or even furniture (products for houses, for which there is a very close link between the extension of the market and the growth of productivity), the development of construction has been subject to a logic 'exogenous' to the dominant economic process. The extension of the market has been much more the result of general economic conditions than of gains in productivity implemented inside the sector. That is why it is possible to say that the action of the worker in construction has been rationalized and not industrialized (Marco, 1984, 31).

At the same time, the significance of land and land ownership means that fixed capital which is invested in construction tends to remain subordinate to circulating capital; and the overall productivity of the construction industry has been declining as a result of compositional changes in the types of structures that are being built (Bowlby and Schriver, 1986). In this context, any means of adding exchange value, stimulating consumption and fostering the process of capital accumulation is critical.

The architect, by virtue of the prestige and mystique socially accorded to creativity, adds exchange value to buildings through his or her decisions about design,

so that the label 'architect designed' confers a presumption of quality even though, like the emperor's clothes, this quality may not be apparent to the observer (Darke and Darke, 1981, 12).

The professional ideology and career structure which rewards innovation and the ability to feel the

pulse of fashion (see below) also serves to promote the circulation of capital. The upper middle classes, in short, can be encouraged to move from their comfortable homes into new ones through the cachet of fashionable or distinctive design, and part of the architect's role is to 'manufacture' new designs: style for style's sake, the *zeit* for sore eyes. In some US cities, new housing for upper income groups is now promoted through annual exhibitions aimed at selling 'this year's' designs, much like the automobile industry's carefully planned obsolescence in design. As one of the key arbiters of style in contemporary capitalist society, the architect is in a powerful position to stimulate consumption by merchandising the up-market end of the built environment. As Rubin observes:

in the ideology of American aesthetics, it is understood that those who make taste make money, and those who make money make taste (1979, 360).

Mattson's study (1982) of main street storefront remodelling in America provides a good example of a very direct link between architectural style and the circulation of capital in one particular context. His research shows how main street storefronts have been repeatedly remodelled in order to stimulate business. In the 1930s, an amendment to the National Housing Act insured lenders up to 20 per cent of \$50 000 for loans to up-date any kind of income-producing property. 'In line with the tenets of Modern architecture', writes, Mattson (1982, 42), 'the new store fronts displayed smooth, clean functional surfaces. . . . By the end of the decade, streamlined forms with sweeping, curvilinear lines had become the fashion'. The style became known as 'Depression Modern'. After the second world war, main street merchants were once again impelled to remodel store fronts in order to entice busy, automobile-riding customers back from the new commercial strips and shopping centres. New storefront designs now focused on merchandise visibility, with exuberant features such as vertical fins, glass-encased display islands and cantilevered window displays to attract passers-by; facings became more like giant billboards advertising the names of businesses in huge, easy-to-read lettering. Later, in response to the same social forces as the fast food chains described by Langdon (1985), main street storefronts were remodelled again, with pastiche, neovernacular motifs, mansard roof 'equipment screens', rusticated brick and stone veneers, and ersatz carriage lamps, imitation cedar shingles and