



The Factory-Made House

**A Critique of Factory-Made Houses from the Early Twentieth Century with
Reference to the Philosophy of Technology**

Thesis submitted for Master of Architecture

by

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Abstract

This thesis is a critique of the factory-made buildings, mainly houses, which appeared in Europe, England and America during the first half of the twentieth century. Its aim is to look beyond conventional, technical reviews of these buildings, to investigate underlying causes for their development and to place the phenomenon in a cultural and historical context. Additionally, a theoretical and philosophical interpretation of these technologised buildings is proposed which questions the conventional conception of technology as instrumental and neutral.

The central aim of chapter one, *Destination House-Machine*, is to situate the appearance of the factory-made house within the context of the Modern technologically textured world of the early twentieth century. Several exemplars throughout the development of the Modern era which indicate important paradigmatic shifts are highlighted. For example, the development of a Modern conception of time and consequent appearance of the mechanical clock are shown to indicate the shift towards a technologically mediated view of the natural world. This may be seen as a manifestation of the deeper fascination with quantification and measurement responsible in part for the emergence of early modern science.

Chapter two, *Use-Meaning*, describes several early twentieth-century building systems, and locates the material setting of the work. Conceptual and practical differences between nineteenth and twentieth-century prefabrication are highlighted. While hundreds of European, American and English factory-made, industrialised building systems were developed, only a very limited number are discussed here but their social, historical and to a lesser degree their political contexts are highlighted.

Chapter three, *The Essence of Technology*, contains the major theoretical and philosophical elements of the thesis. It proposes two interpretations of Modern technology and therefore of technologised, factory-made architecture. The first, by referring to the work of philosopher Don Ihde and anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, argues that technology is culturally embedded and cannot be properly understood outside its cultural setting. The second, with reference to Martin Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology," reveals Modern technology to be the manifestation of technologically enframed thinking.

The conclusion drawn from this study of technologised architecture is that while making dwellings is a defining quality of human-kind, some Modern modes of making actually diminish our humanity. Factory-made houses represented such a threat by obscuring other more meaningful ways of making buildings.

This work contains no material which was been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Roger Samuel Ridgway

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