

CHICAGO 1904: SOCIOLOGICAL DISCOURSES AND THE WORK OF SOCIAL REFORMERS AS VITAL PARTS OF SUBSEQUENT ARCHITECTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Abstract

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the enormous social upheavals in Western society caused by the machine age, industrialism, and exploitation by capitalism not only marked the birth of the discipline of sociology, they began concerning protagonists in architecture as well. Within the context of the St. Louis World's Fair and Chicago's Hull House, intellectuals across the disciplines were able to exchange their different proposals for solutions, because they understood this challenge as a Western one in general, regardless of their nationality and cultural background.

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1.1 St. Louis World's Fair Congress of Arts and Science

On September 9, 1904, the sociologist and economist Max Weber and his wife Marianne were on a train to Chicago, Illinois, where they were to spend eight days of their three-month trip in America. Weber's work was known to the American public through Albion Woodbury Small, the founder of the Department of Social Sciences and Anthropology at the University of Chicago—also known as the Chicago School of Sociology. Because Small had studied in Germany, it was he who had published several articles by European intellectuals like Weber in the *American Journal of Sociology*, of which he was editor-in-chief.

However, their stay, as well as the resonance of their work, was not limited to Chicago. They also visited the St. Louis World's Fair Congress, a hotspot of cross-Atlantic exchange. Other European invitees to the St. Louis World's Fair Congress were Ferdinand Tönnies, Werner Sombart, and Georg Simmel. The latter declined to attend.¹

The St. Louis World's Fair Congress of Arts and Science of 1904 was, all in all, an extraordinary intellectual exchange. According to Lawrence A. Scaff, the author of *Max Weber in America* (2011), there were "128 sections assessing the state of knowledge in the human, biological, and physical sciences; medicine; law; the humanities; religion; and education. Some three hundred papers were presented, not including the short papers and commentaries. Weber spoke in a social science panel concerned with rural communities on the afternoon of September 21. At the same time, Ernst Troeltsch delivered his paper discussing William James' 'The Varieties of Religious Experience,' a 'masterpiece' of 'remarkable richness' as he called James' lectures, in a session on the philosophy of religion. That morning, their colleague Ferdinand Tönnies had shared the stage with Lester F. Ward on a sociology panel dealing with social structure, commenting on the development of modern social forms and his theory of community and society, or in his terminology 'Gemeinschaft' and 'Gesellschaft.'"²

At the same time, the architectural "forerunners and founders of the Werkbund and the Bauhaus"³ participated in the "Varied Industries" section of the St. Louis Congress. Due to this, representatives such as Peter Behrens (AEG-Turbine Hall, Berlin-Moabit, 1909), Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer (Fagus Shoe-Last Factory, Alfeld, 1911), and Joseph Maria Olbrich (Marriage Tower, Darmstadt Artists' Colony, Darmstadt, 1908) were able to show their designs of buildings that were under construction at the time.⁴ Olbrich and Behrens, in particular, had quite an amount of exhibition space to do so, "the former with a complement of six rooms bordering a courtyard and the latter with a spectacular reading room."⁵

Marianne Weber was greatly impressed by these architectural exhibits: "At the Exposition there are more attractive things to see than I expected. But by far the most beautiful are the rooms and arts and crafts objects presented by the German artists. [...] The forms are appropriately functional and simple, without any embossed ornamentation, thus easy to keep clean. [...] The artistic purpose also consists of adapting the furniture to a specific space and designing windows in each room with an individual form and color."⁶

Another guest among the World's Fair visitors who shared Marianne Weber's enthusiasm was none other than the Chicago architect Frank Lloyd Wright. According to Anthony Alofsin, one of Wright's biographers, Wright commended his visit and encouraged colleagues at his studio in Oak Park, Illinois, to see the exhibition because it was "a liberal experience."⁷ Whether these European architects and their modern designs can be associated with his expression "liberal experience" is difficult to conclude. But it is likely that Wright was far more aware of their work, if not influenced by it, than he had ever admitted.⁸

Notes

1. Lawrence A. Scaff, *Max Weber in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 15.

2. Scaff, *Max Weber in America*, 54.

3. Scaff, *Max Weber in America*, 68.

4. Scaff, *Max Weber in America*, 68. Also: Anthony Alofsin, *Frank Lloyd Wright—The Lost Years, 1910–1922: A Study of Influence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 13.

5. Scaff, *Max Weber in America*, 69.

6. Marianne Weber, *Max Weber Papers*, September 27, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, in Scaff, *Max Weber in America*, 68.

7. Alofsin, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 13.

8. Alofsin, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 11.

1.2 Chicago—The “Ur-Metropolis”⁹

When the Webers and Ferdinand Tönnies visited Chicago, their intention was to study these enormous challenges directly on the basis of the so-called “ur-metropolis,”¹⁰ which had become the epitome of industrialization and modernity, and could consequently be considered as a precedent for cities like Berlin.¹¹ One place they both visited were the Chicago Stockyards, which were vividly described by Baedeker’s¹² travel guide at the time. The stockyards and their assembly-line mechanization, with line-speed efficiency of killing animals and processing meat, were the hotspot of Chicago’s first unionized strike. Max Weber described the place as follows: “Everywhere one is struck by the tremendous intensity of work—most of all in the ‘stockyards’ with their ‘ocean of blood,’ where several thousand cattle and pigs are slaughtered every day. From the moment when the unsuspecting bovine enters the slaughtering area, it is hit by a hammer and collapses, whereupon it is immediately gripped by an iron clam, is hoisted up, and starts on its journey, it is in constant motion—past ever-new workers who eviscerate and skin it, etc., but are always (in the rhythm of work) tied to the machine that pulls the animal past them.”¹³ Days after their arrival, the Webers witnessed part of the “twentieth century’s first major strike by butchers, packinghouse workers, teamsters, and affiliated trades in the stockyards.”¹⁴ The Webers themselves reported “an unsuccessful strike, masses of Italians and Negroes as strikebreakers; daily shootings with dozens of dead on both sides [...]”¹⁵

At the same time, Ferdinand Tönnies, another visitor to Chicago who was also on his way to the St. Louis Congress, described Chicago as a “giant city” and as the “most typical American metropolis; one could say, the most typical modern city. And yet it is the metropolis of agriculture, i.e. of trade and industries that directly follow or serve agriculture. [...] There are the Union Stockyard’s immense export slaughterhouses with the mass and machine slaughter of animals; we read in Baedeker’s that the annual output amounts to 3–4 million head of cattle, 7–8 million pigs, 3–4 million sheep and 100,000 horses, with a total of 300 million dollars, and that the packing companies employ about 25,000 workers.”¹⁶ On the general situation, Tönnies reported a certain “uneasiness” toward the “ever more powerful commercialism and industrialism” in the country, and he saw “tremendous evil and danger” in the monopoly of the trusts.¹⁷ In American society, such developments had increasingly led to “serious concerns, unwillingness and resistance, stimulating theoretical and critical debates that call the entire social system into question. The success of the current President of the Republic, in his re-election, would not have been as great as it was if Mr. Roosevelt’s [Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.] personal reputation had not been complemented by the popular opinion that he would fight the trusts, even though he belongs to the predominantly industrialist Republican Party and was its candidate.”¹⁸

2.1 “Gemeinschaft” and “Gesellschaft”

The sociologist and philosopher Ferdinand Tönnies published his magnum opus *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*¹⁹ [*Community and Society*] in 1887. Not only was it the first German work on sociology, but it was also well-known within the discipline by 1904. In it, Tönnies categorized two dichotomous, theoretical “collective entities.”²⁰ He proposed two concepts for how a human being affirms him- or herself socially within a group, and how individuals are mutually dependent or connected among themselves: If the individual affirms him- or herself as part of the social entity, then he or she will align his or her actions with this higher entity—this is the concept of “Gemeinschaft.” Individuals living in a “Gesellschaft” want to live next to one another peacefully—like those in a “Gemeinschaft”; however, they do not want to be substantially connected, but rather substantially separated from each other. Hence, actions within a “Gesellschaft” do not take place with regard to an entity or a common good.

Tönnies describes the family, the village, the church, or a cooperative (“Genossenschaft”) as typical examples of a “Gemeinschaft,” whereas a city, a state, or a partnership agreement (“Gesellschaftsvertrag”) are typical examples of a “Gesellschaft.” Tönnies discussed this concept at the St. Louis Congress in 1904, and a year later, his lecture “The Present Problems of Social Structure” was published by Small in the *American Journal of Sociology*.²¹ The lecture’s title says it all: Tönnies postulated that “out of such a system will be gained a better and more profound insight into evolution of society at large, and into its historical phases, as the life of these collective entities.”²²

Accordingly, Max Weber also worked with Tönnies’ terminology. He developed it further (to “Vergemeinschaft” and “Vergesellschaftung”) in his principal work *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* [*Economy and Society*], which itself became another fundamental publication for the discipline.

9. The term derives from Alexander Eisenschmidt, “No Failure Too Great,” in *Chicagoisms—The City as Catalyst for Architectural Speculation*, ed. Alexander Eisenschmidt and Jonathan Mekinda (Zurich: Park Books, 2013), 151.

10. Note: With this in mind, it probably comes as no great surprise that Chicago and Berlin became two of the early centers of (urban) sociology.

11. Eisenschmidt, “No Failure Too Great,” 151, 156.

12. Note: Karl Baedeker was a German publisher who set the standard for authoritative guidebooks for tourists.

13. Marianne Weber, *Max Weber—A Biography*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York et al.: Wiley & Sons, 1975), 287.

14. Scaff, *Max Weber in America*, 40.

15. Weber, *Max Weber*, 286.

16. Ferdinand Tönnies, “Die nordamerikanische Nation,” in *Deutschland—Monatsschrift für die gesamte Kultur*, 4, no. 1, ed. Paul Graf von Hoensbroech (Berlin: Schwetschke, 1905), 576. Translated by Waltraud P. Indrist.

17. Tönnies, “Die nordamerikanische Nation,” 573.

2.2 Hull House—Social Reformers' Work, an Applied Answer

Next to the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, Hull House, located at 800 South Halsted Street and in the immediate vicinity of Little Italy, was another crucial institution within the Chicago School of Sociology. It became Chicago's first social settlement and was headed by social reformer and pragmatist Jane Laura Addams and her comrade-in-arms Ellen Gates Starr. Addams played a pivotal role within the sociological discourse in Chicago; her efforts in social work and her writings were well-known. The latter were recommended basic readings in Small's Department of Sociology.²³ Addams and other residents of Hull House regularly held courses in the department, and visitors to the department were sent to Hull House to see it firsthand for themselves. Living in slum-like neighborhoods, amidst immigrant workers, Addams, Starr, and other founders of such social settlements tried to reform child labor laws, industrial working conditions, and women's rights for the better. Furthermore, Hull House not only accommodated a kindergarten, a day nursery, and an infancy care center, but was also provided education to the workers. "One of the essential ingredients of this education was training in the crafts [...]. Classes and exhibitions in cabinet-making, bookmaking, weaving, and pottery were set up."²⁴

Their work and Hull House as a platform for exchange became fundamentally crucial not only for the still young discipline of sociology but for architects as well: Frank Lloyd Wright, for instance, was closely connected with Hull House through his Prairie School project. Hence, it comes with no big surprise that Wright held a lecture at Hull House in 1901. It was entitled "The Art and Craft of the Machine" and was promoting that "mass production was necessary if good design was to be democratically enjoyed."²⁵

Finally, it can be emphasized that the protagonists of disciplines mentioned here were united by their commitment to grasp "the evolution of society at large" in their daily thinking and practice.

Note: The second part of this article "Chicago 1904—First architectural attempts to seek solutions to socio-cultural fault lines caused by Western industrialization and capitalism" was pre-published at the repository of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2019. (<https://doi.org/10.21937/23648>)

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18. Tönnies, "Die nordamerikanische Nation," 573.

19. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft—Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie*, 1887 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010).

20. Ferdinand Tönnies [sic], "The Present Problems of Social Structure," in *American Journal of Sociology*, 10, no. 5 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1905): 570.

21. Tönnies [sic], "The Present Problems of Social Structure," 570.

22. Tönnies [sic], "The Present Problems of Social Structure," 570.

23. Cathy Eberhart, *Jane Addams (1860–1935)—Sozialarbeit, Sozialpädagogik und Reformpolitik*, 1995 (Bremen: Europäischer Hochschul-Verlag, 2009), 81.

24. Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 50.

25. Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 53.