

WEEK 04- IDEOLOGY

ARCH-572, ARCHITECTURE THEORY AND CRITICISM

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According to Althusser, 'ISA' (Ideological state apparatus) is an alternative to 'RSA' (Repressive State Apparatus), where the ruling class suppresses the lower class without having to use any kind of violent coercive means. The benefit of 'ISA' over 'RSA' is that it has no direct repercussions from the lower class, as it cannot be identified easily because of its plural nature. Althusser's advancement on his second thesis of ideology states that "Ideology has a material existence" [1]:155. Through schools, churches, media, newspapers and various other means that are personally connected to the civil society, it is not 'ideas', but 'behaviours' that are interpolated into people. The difference being that 'behaviour' is a practice created by free ideas in every individual's mind, not enforced into him.

A similar yield of 'Ideology' can be seen in the essay "The Poor Little Rich Man" written by Adolf Loos. The author talks about a wealthy man who had all the possessions that a happy man could think about. A good family, prosperity, respect in the society and yet he felt there was something missing in his life. He found his answer in 'Art'. It was 'art' (material) he thought, that would be his sorceress to charm people around him. He immediately commissioned a famous architect to redesign his house and bring 'Art' to him, which the architect successfully did. This made the rich man gain more praise, appreciation and sense of envy from the society, what was initially intended by him. However, it was soon to be realised by the rich man that he was entrapped in his own house by the same notion which got him all his admirations. All the rules that he had to follow, where to wear what type of slippers, what item needs to be placed where precisely, was all exacting a toll on the owner. He no more wanted to live in a house that had rules for everything! He began to miss his old items in the house that gave him comfort were thrown away by the architect. In fact, he was no longer allowed to accept gifts from his own family as that according to the architect, "robs me of total glory of my work!" [2]127. It was when that the rich man realises the how unhappy he has become. He could not anymore accept gifts, buy things that he likes, or even have any desires of his own.

What is intimidating the rich man so much that he cannot even act as he desires? Who could possibly have an influence on the rich man so much that he has succumbed himself to? Why would he even follow orders from an Architect who is being paid by the man himself? This is where Althusser's theory of ideology fits perfectly. It is not any physical or threatening coercion by one that the man is surrendering to. In fact, it is his own ideology that makes him bow to the architect's will without any repulsion. 'Art' is now the architect's sorceress to empower the owner. But where did this notion of accepting 'art' as the superior material come into the owner's mind? This ideology was infused in him through by the social institution around him. Friends, family, education, media, it was the society that he was living in. 'Art' in this case, was 'material ideological apparatus'. Since the day the owner let 'Art' come into his life, he had to follow a certain ritual describing his practices governed only through that material. Material(Art) was now governing the subject's (owner) behaviour. Althusser says that, "We cannot recognise ourselves outside of ideology, and in fact, our very actions reach out to this overarching structure" [1]168, which in this case, means that although the owner has no bounds to hold himself to that material that is keeping him unhappy, he still wilfully and freely surrenders himself to the material by declaring it to himself that this is how he is going to die. By keeping all his desires away from him, by not accepting any gifts even from his closest relatives.