JKWIS Block 4 Essay
How significant a figure is the individual architect?
How do you see architecture's impact on the individual evolving over your lifetime?

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Over the course our research for JKWIS, much has been heard of Frank Gehry's disdain for the term "starchitect". Gehry's rationale is that the term signifies the increasing fetishization of personalities in mass media. In cementing a brand image usually reserved for film actors, "starchitect", in the words of architect Stephan Jaklitsch, "undermines serious discourse regarding architecture and urbanism" and is" a sloppy, derogatory term that doesn't serve any real purpose except to denigrate a few individuals and the profession in general."[1]

Gehry and Jaklitsch's contrarian stance to pop culture is admirable in its defense of cultural integrity but is a minority view. Few can deny how mass media has elevated the cult of the personality; personalities have been used to sell everything from war to toothpaste. Similarly, renowned architects attached to projects are able to raise publicity, both for the project itself and the community surrounding it.

On the role of individual architects, we explored two themes: firstly, the extent to which starchitects are necessary for a project and the area around it to flourish and secondly how changing trends in architecture will shape the role of the individual architect. In the first theme, there is extensive evidence that starchitects are explicitly targeted to attach their brand to emblematic projects in the hope of urban rejuvenation. A project designed by Gehry or Daniel Libeskind leaves an indelible mark on the city that cannot be matched by similar buildings of similar functionality. The "Bilbao Effect" is attributed to the creation of unconventional landmarks of renowned architects that are instrumental in providing a face-lift to the city. Masterpieces created by these architects not only signal prosperity in the areas where they're built but also catalyze an economic and cultural renaissance in that area.. This correlative effect between starchitect buildings and socio-economic vibrancy is highlighted in a report in which London, New York and Paris, hubs of creativity, business and progress also have the largest concentration of emblematic buildings. The individual architect's role is important because in iconic buildings such as the Royal Ontario Museum (Libeskind) in Toronto, the buildings have their architects' distinctive imprints on them. Since these

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architects exercise the greatest role in bringing their vision to fruition, it can be argued that they deserve primary credit for the positive benefits accrued from the creation of their building. In fact the significance of the individual architect is such that they receive priority in conceptualizing urban rejuvenation. Recently, the contract to gentrify a part of San Francisco was won by renowned architect, Rem Koolhaas's firm[2]. Partly, due to San Francisco wanting to associate itself with Koolhaas's emblematic buildings and partly because starchitects have the accumulative advantage of being in top-tier firms who have extensive resources necessary to successfully bid for the most high-profile projects.

However, there are both principle and practical rebuttals to this stance. On the practical side, it can be said that while starchitects may provide the creative impetus behind their buildings, the reason their unconventional buildings have such an impact is not solely due to them, but is due to, among other things, the acceptance of modernism as a part of a culture, the decline in popularity of conservative projects and the decline of historical and religious iconographies that follow some form of linearity. Principally, detractors of "starchitects", such as celebrated architect, Moshe Safdie, feel that starchitecture is a "socially irresponsible" spinoff of Modernism[3] which doesn't respect that fact that "architecture has constraints" and instead gives architects the liberty to create "meaningless buildings". Hence, Safdie clearly feels that starchitects divert from the core essence of architecture in pursuit of brand image.

Regarding the future role of the individual architect, we see a shift in the next 10 years where being an architect alone will not suffice. For most ordinary architects, their role will be diluted by contactors and creative agencies and to compete in the market they'll have become more commercially savvy, branch out into becoming consultants and cultivate a distinctiveness based on operating principles in a climate of commercial consolidation for architectural practices.[4]

Both authors of this essay have decided to answer the second question independently and juxtapose their views together; reflecting the lively discourse one encounters in the study of architecture. Whereas both of us agree that the convergence of high-tech design features and a focus on sustainability will make buildings and homes more convenient and cheaper to live and work in, we differed on future impact on human psyche and interaction. With spatial constraints and population growth necessitating the growth of mixed-use vertical skyscrapers, one author felt that with most facets of life and an emphasis on green living,

[2] http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Rem-Koolhaas-picked-to-design-S-F-residential-5325809.php **"Rem Koolhaas picked to design S.F residential tower"**

[3] http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2012/06/moshe-safdie-architecture-of-today-bilbao-effect "
"Habitat for Harmony: Celebrated architect Moshe Safdie ponders the Bilbao effect, "starchitects," and what buildings really want."

[4] Much of this opinion is corroborated in a study conducted by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)'s think-tank **Building Futures** called **"The Future for Architects"**

residents will be more invested in their local community and environment; reducing urban sprawl. On the other hand, one author felt the ascendancy of skyscraper living, residents would be cocooned with the concrete jungle around them and this cocoon would extend into a wider sense of alienation with the environment around individuals, especially with urbanism encroaching on green spaces.