

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

In the metropolises of the 21st century, it is increasingly seen that architecture has become an interaction between the architect and the general public. This has been made possible by the democratization of architecture – through the crowdsourcing of architectural ideas and more accessible architectural services. However, the significance of the individual architect as the “author” of architecture has always been questioned. We will argue that it is impossible to attribute architecture – as large and complex works of art – to single architects.

First, there are multiple individuals who influence the eventual architecture of any building. This is because it takes a lot of time and money to design a building, and as a result, many actors are involved in ensuring that its eventual design fulfills both its aesthetic and functional aims. From the start of this process, the client's requirements set the basic parameters for the architectural project. Engineering and designing consultants later provide advice that inevitably influences the architect's design. For instance, the eventual design of the 50 metre Supertrees at Singapore's Gardens by the Bay was radically influenced by engineering consultants who provided the concept of housing plants in man-made Supertree structures. This illustrates how other parties influence the eventual designs of architectural projects. Therefore, architecture isn't merely designed by an individual architect, but is instead designed with the influence of other parties who may play an equally important role as the architect himself.

Second, on a more philosophical level, meaning in architecture is co-created. This argument starts from the premise that architecture is like a language - in how it represents and communicates something to us. Like music or art, we interpret parts of a building in a particular way because we process and compare what we see, allowing us to find meaning in what we physically see with our eyes. Meaning in any particular piece of architecture isn't merely created by an individual architect because he is transmitting meaning through the language of architecture, rather than creating it. This is because a building means not what the architect intends it to mean, but what the users of the language of architecture allow it to mean. For instance, with Modernist public housing in the 1970s, many people compared it with “high-rise prisons”. The architects of those buildings may not have intended the designs to mean that, but no single individual can decide a building's meaning because the language of architecture is shared and its meaning negotiated over time. Therefore, architecture is not the expression of creativity by an individual architect.

In practice, as time progresses, architecture and the meanings it holds will begin to allow individuals to more intimately identify with the buildings around them.

Architectural works in the 20th century and before can be said to be the products of Great Minds designed for Great Men. Architecture up till the late 20th century remained the domain of the wealthy and influential. From the Saint Peter's Basilica to the Pyramids of Giza, architectural marvels have been commissioned by the elite and designed by elite architects. While the artistic merit of these structures is generally recognized as significant, it is conceivable that the common man may experience an invisible gap separating him from these buildings.

However, architecture in the future is likely to be characterized by an eclectic mix of styles gathered from across societies, instead of being dominated by singular movements. This is because society's conception of architecture is changing. No longer is architecture seen as only the preserve of the rich and powerful. No longer is aesthetics seen as a high-falutin concept of little relevance to the lives of the masses. The reason for this paradigm shift is increasing affluence, such that cultural and aesthetic pursuits become ever more accessible to the masses through increased wealth. The phenomenon of globalization has also resulted in a massive rise in cross-cultural interactions, increasing the exposure that people have to different meanings of architecture in different contexts. This breeds a greater appreciation and a greater desire to have a stake in the aesthetics scene. Revolutionary developments in communications technologies, like the Internet, also allow people to connect with many others, increase competitiveness in the architectural market and thus lowering costs.

The architectural scene has responded to this new market. This is why crowdsourcing of architecture is on a meteoric rise. Organizations like Arcbazar bring together architects, homeowners, governments and businesses from all over the world. Such platforms are cheap and accessible, such that individuals can design or request for designs for architectural projects. As of 2013, almost 10 000 architects work with Arcbazar. Many others work with other crowdsourcing organizations like Projexity and Open Architecture. The developments of the 21st century mean that architecture will never be the same again. Instead of architects dominating the architectural scene, the average person will have far greater access to affordable architectural services to design structures that they identify with. Architects all around the world who do not enjoy the benefits of a brand name can get in touch with a far greater market to find clients that best suit their architectural styles. This results in an eclectic mix of architectural designs in society. Thus, architecture will change in a manner that allows individuals to more intimately identify with the buildings around them.