

Architecture: a reflection of its time and place

It is safe to say that the concept of architecture will exist as long as the human race does. No matter how technology changes or how society evolves, humankind will always retain a fundamental need for shelter. This essay will attempt to analyse humanity's interaction with architecture over time and predict the role that architecture will play in the future.

The central thesis of this essay is that architecture has always been a social construct; it is an entity that is made by humans, for humans. As such, architecture has evolved according to the evolution of the needs and desires of humanity.

Due to the fact that a vast plethora of societies and civilizations have existed over time, each with their own distinct cultures and beliefs, the range of different architectural styles that humanity has bore witness to is staggering. Therefore, this essay will not attempt to isolate one particular brand of architecture or one specific era as the epitome of architecture because it is impossible to do so. Instead, this essay aims to examine the relationship between architecture and society and how architecture has changed over time.

In pre-civilization societies, in the time of the Vikings, the Nomads and the Tribes, architecture reflected the functional need for survival. Most members of said society participated in survival-oriented tasks. The males traditionally hunted or tended to crops while females handled childcare and domestic duties. Clearly, in such societies, survival was a key priority. Architecture reflected such priorities, with structures being built in such a way that maximized their utility to promote survival. For example, the nomadic tribes of Central Asia lived in Yurts, a portable tent-like structure that can be dismantled and carried along when the community is forced to move to a new location. Such structures suited the peoples' way-of-life as wandering nomads. In another example, traditional Icelandic architecture built by the first Nordic settlers comprised of turf houses, where turf and grass will be planted on wooden frames to cover the entire house. This was done as wood and stone was relatively rare in Iceland, forcing settlers to turn to turf to maintain insulation in the cold climate. From here, it can be seen that in the earliest of societies, architecture was adapted to suit the people's need for survival.

As civilizations start to form and as societies became larger and more organized, social stratification occurred, creating class divides in society. Two distinct changes in architecture occurred at this stage.

First, as society became more organized, religious structures began to emerge as religion began to gain momentum as an integral part of society. Before the advent of the scientific method, the actions of deities were seen as the key reason being happenings in society such as natural disasters or war. Furthermore, more organized societies afforded the people more security in their lives; a military protected the people from external aggression and an efficient system of agriculture gave the people food security. This gave the people time and opportunity to pursue spiritual needs, thereby leading to the increased popularity of religion.

Through public or private funding, religious organizations are then able to invest in architecture for that religion. Indeed, the relative grandeur of religious structures in various ancient cultures is very

apparent, as seen in the Pyramids of Teotihuacan in Mexico, the Mahabodhi Temple in Bihar, the Karnak Temple Complex in Egypt and the Ziggurat of Ur in Iraq. The architecture of the surrounding city pale in comparison to these religious structures, showing the emergence of religious architecture in relation to the people's spiritual needs and the prevalence of religion in these ancient civilizations.

Second, extravagant residences for the ruling elite also emerged in the architectural scene. This is because social stratification has led to the emergence of an upper class that does is generally more wealthy and enjoy higher status than the rest of the society. The dwellings of the upper class also employ unique architectural styles as representations of their wealth and status. This is why the architecture of palaces and castles, regardless of cultural background, are usually united by the common characteristic of extravagance. Key examples of this include the Palace of Versailles which features, among other grand ornamentation, a Hall of Mirrors comprising 357 arches of mirrors and the Forbidden City in Beijing which spans 720 000 meters square. The emergence of an upper class led to the creation of structures which were extravagant.

As we move into discussing architecture in modern times, it becomes progressively harder to creation Universalist generalizations about architecture. This is due to the democratization of beauty. As people became wealthier, more people got involved in the process of appreciating and commissioning buildings. This meant that architectural designs are no longer determined merely by religion or by resource scarcity. With more opportunities to design buildings for varying purposes, architects are now freer to explore new designs. Therefore, architecture of the 20th and 21st century can be said to be largely directed by the architect's and the people's creativity and their beliefs. This essay proposes that the past 100 years have seen the emergence of more architectural movements than the past 1000 years combined. In most first-world societies, eclectic mixes of different architectural styles can be seen, from the Brutalist style of the Boston City Hall to the Italian High Renaissance style of the Reichstag to the Art Deco style of the World Bank Office, architectural styles are so diverse that oftentimes, the buildings' design bear little relation to the function its occupants serve.

But even amidst the sheer variety of architectural styles present today, the notion that architecture is an entity beholden to society's interests still hold true. This notion affects both present architecture and future architecture in the following ways:

First, our world is increasingly globalized. With the exchange of ideas and the movement of people to different countries, architectural styles are often brought across borders. This essay would argue that the influx of foreign styles is not a bad thing as it aids the evolution of architecture to keep up with society. With new population demographics in a globalized society, notions of beauty change as well as new people and new ideas enter said society. Architectural styles must evolve to keep up with these new notions of beauty to remain relevant to society. As the world becomes more interconnected in the future, various cities around the world may start to look more like one another with architectural styles spreading from one city to the next. Traces of this phenomenon can already be seen when world-renowned architects like Norman Foster or I.M. Pei are commissioned to design buildings all over the world. Just like society, architectural design will become more globalized.

Second, architectural designs will become more eco-friendly. With greater awareness of the impacts of environmental degradation, humanity has collectively begun to exercise more responsibility in their daily lives to care for the environment. This awareness extends to architecture as well. Just in Singapore, the Government has recently laid down a new policy which demands that new governmental buildings must attain the Green Mark certification from the Building and Construction Authority. This means that in the near future, we might see more green walls and skylights in our structures.

Finally, safety regulations are in place and will continue to be in place in the future. This restricts facets of buildings such as its height, weight, and structure in order to preserve the safety of its occupants and the surrounding. However, with progresses in technology, architects will become ever freer when it comes to designing buildings since technology can be used to increase safety instead of having to compromise in aesthetics. For example, architects are now free to design ever-taller buildings even in regions with strong winds or earthquakes because technologies such as the tuned mass damper have become available to mitigate the effects of wind on tall buildings. This allowed the Taipei 101 building to be built over 500 meters tall.

Looking at the architecture of the present and the future, we can see that while architectural designs have become more diverse and architects are freer to design buildings, architecture is still made to conform to the interests and needs of humanity.

And in conclusion, we see that architecture will always have a place in society. It has served the survival and spiritual needs of the people in the past, is serving the aesthetic needs of the people in the present, and will serve the varying needs of the people of the future. It reflects the needs, priorities and beliefs of society.