

How far do you agree with Frank Lloyd Wright, that architecture is the truest record of life as it was lived in the world yesterday, as it is lived today, or ever will be lived?

*'Architecture is life; or at least it is life itself taking form and therefore it is the truest record of life as it was lived in the world yesterday, as it is lived in today or ever will be lived'*

*- Frank Lloyd Wright*

This is a very bold statement which really categorises Architecture as a whole, this is also very difficult to achieve as Architecture is so many things, so to define it is a very tricky conceptual challenge, which I think Frank Lloyd Wright has almost accomplished. However, even his definition of Architecture can be understood differently, depending on which viewpoint you take.

Architecture is most certainly a record. It is this because it spans throughout history, and has always been seen as a key aspect of any civilisation, as it very quickly and obviously demonstrates the power and capability of that empire or region. This may be due to the difficulty of the construction, rarity of the materials used, or just the sheer scale. Architecture also shows how prosperous a civilisation is too.

Another aspect that Architecture highlights is the way that it very clearly reflects feelings and emotions in the society of the settlement at the time. For example, in Georgian England it was all about the facade, so on many buildings, especially the ones owned by the social-climbing-middle-class, there would be a beautiful front wall facing the street, but behind that, a warren of small, badly designed rooms and alleyways. Only the very rich could afford to have Architects to figure out all of the room layouts, most would just leave it up to the local builders!

Each individual building reflects something different because of the materials used, the circumstances in which it was built, etc. and in a way, Architecture could be, as Frank Lloyd Wright put it, 'the truest record of life'. What he meant by that may not have been that the architect was using his work to reflect its environment, but that anything is affected by its surroundings whether we like it or not. There is no bias because we cannot control what has already been recorded in the very brickwork of (in our case) the building or structure. How we perceive the data may be biased but that would already be us telling the story, not the piece of Architecture. What happens to the building or the structure after its conception is purely based on its environment. Perhaps it doesn't

even reach completion, like Westminster Cathedral, London which was never completed due to there not being enough money. This could be a reflection of a grim economy in Britain during its construction from 1895-1903 but then, the fact, or belief, that this was the case, is arguable because historians are basing this only on what they can see and everyone sees things differently. The truest record of what happened must be imbedded in the environment of which Architecture is definitely a part.

To emphasise Frank Lloyd Wright's point, if we look at something as small as the stone slab that lies upon the resting place of Jane Austen in Winchester Cathedral we'll find that it had a purpose, which is in itself a reflection of life be it the beginning of life, the passage through life or in this case, the end of life. However, that only makes up a minuscule section of the amount 'recorded' by that stone slab alone. From above the ground, millions of shoes belonging to millions of people brush against the slab. Each shoe contains information about everything it's encountered and that is transferred onto the stone. The words are chiseled back into the tombstone every now and again using a different chisel and possibly by a different person each time, both leave behind information. So much has happened around that single slab that not even the human brain could possibly process the amount of information it carries within it and even then, Winchester Cathedral is made of tonnes of stone all carrying just as much data or more! Architecture, which encompasses every single building and structure created, is a database of all this information in its truest state, untampered by bias and could therefore not just be a reflection/record of life, but possibly even be life itself.

Architecture can be read like a book. For example, in the instance of London, a city which has been formed and reformed throughout hundreds of years, there is still an enormous collection of buildings from throughout time: from the Roman ruins, to The Tower of London, to St Paul's Cathedral, to Buckingham Palace, to the Shard of Glass; this fantastic record is fundamental to understanding the real essence of London itself. These buildings mark the constraints of what can be built in the future, as well as how we determine how people felt at the time. To build is not the same as to write, both are valid skills for documenting life, but I do think that when someone constructs an edifice with consideration, its meaning far surpasses that of words and actions. With this reasoning, you could also say that Architecture is not life, nor the truest record of it.