



GLASGOW.

radical collectivism.

d.adeyemo

"With unemployment levels amongst architects reaching almost 50% we are faced with an opportunity to rethink the scope and ambition of our professional practice. What can be done to enable architects to lead the profession into tomorrow?"

Harriet Harris

(Senior Lecturer in Architecture, Oxford Brookes)

For many students of architecture (specifically those graduating in the next few months) the prospect of 'tomorrow' is a daunting one.

This is especially the case for those determined to stay in Britain, where deepening austerity is making things look very bleak indeed. On exiting university, students suddenly find themselves on the one hand denied the financial cushion of student loans, and on the other hand offered nothing more reassuring to replace them than a series of unpaid internships. Considering how violently their safety bubble is pricked, graduates could be forgiven for believing that things are unprecedentedly bad.

The UK has of course been through dramatic downturns in the past that have generated groups of people who have revolutionised the direction of society and culture.

Twenty years ago, Britain was in the middle of its longest recession since The Great Depression. Thatcher's reign was nearing its tearful end and Tony Blair was still only a shiny-faced Shadow Secretary of State.

Outside of politics, a loose group of young artists in London compelled by the austerity of the times were organising themselves to create provocative warehouse shows as an alternative to the establishment's galleries. Led by Damien Hirst, and promoted by a rich patron called Charles Saatchi, this group would later be known simply as the YBA (Young British Artists) and their art would become the most publicised, expensive and sought after in the world.

As the boom times came around again those egos were swept to stardom, and with this boom came the realisation of what many have termed the *Randian Ideology of Radical Individualism*.

Ayn Rand was a radical right-wing thinker who had emerged out of a much earlier period of austerity, the Second World War. She believed in "objectivism" or "the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute".

Rand's philosophy placed pursuit of individual achievement as the purest virtue, and it was one that defined the zeitgeist of the new millennium: in economics through the wholesale deregulation of business and finance; in politics through the liberal interventionism of Tony Blair & George Bush; and in culture it equated with the cult of celebrity and ever more shocking artists. In architecture there emerged a new breed of architect, the Starchitect. Not since modernism's heyday, when post-war reconstruction reshaped whole societies, had the image of the architect so closely resembled that of the archetypal Randian hero, Howard Roark.

In her novel, *The Fountainhead*, Rand's architect (besieged by "lesser men") struggles to realise his vision of a truly modern building, refusing all compromise. Today his figure might appear a ridiculous caricature, and in this current climate our Starchitects look just as dated as Howard Roark.

Yet this myth of the architect had become a seductive one, glamorous enough for superstars like Brad Pitt, Justin Beiber and Barbie to get in on the action, and attracting record numbers of applicants to schools of architecture.

In the architecture schools of the early millennium there was a palpable neurosis amongst many students to produce ever more "radically individual" designs, with the desperate hope that one day they might climb the pedestal and emulate this image and become the creator, the celebrated!

The prolonged downturn is providing a release from tired ways of thinking, engendering a fearless "got nothing to lose" atmosphere.

One of the biggest trends emerging is the return of "the collective". As a student you are automatically part of one. The benefits of operating as a collective are clear: collectives can mobilise up to hundreds of people over a period of time who are happy to participate on a voluntary basis, as well as pool expertise, money and materials to make a project happen.

Some young architects are already taking advantage of these benefits and side-stepping developers and clients to execute projects. They exploit social media to crowdsource funding (as with the Plus Pool project on the Hudson, NY) or mobilise hundreds of people to help construct (as with *Assemble's Folly for a Flyover* in Hackney). New typologies for collective action are appearing all the time.

Most economists now agree that there is no hope of returning to "business-as-usual". We are tied in for a decade of slow growth and austerity. Preconceptions you may have held about your career path are almost certainly redundant, and when you graduate you will quickly have to commit to a place and way of working. You might wonder: "What kind of an architect do I actually want to be?" If you haven't thought it through beforehand this can be quite difficult to answer. The first few steps after graduation can be defining ones, so the more collaborations and experiences you can explore as a student the better. If you're already a part of a collective then get more organised, if you're not in one yet then get involved. We (Pidgin Perfect) believe that the next period of prosperity, when it does come, will be more democratic in its nature. And whereas the last movement celebrated heroes of individualism, the next will be one devoted to the radical collective.

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LONDON.

reject ayn rand.

fulcrum

There are many absurdities to Ayn Rand's philosophy — not least of which, her fervent belief that the ideal base of society is the selfish individual. So it is not without a certain irony that the term Rand gave to her circle of acolytes was the "Collective".

As Dele Adeyemo points out, the "collective" would seem to be the exact opposite of Randian thinking, and yet in the late 50s this band of young, staunch individualists was the crutch that underpinned Rand. She leant heavily on the 'Collective as a source of moral support, as a sounding board for ideas and a vent for her sexual frustration. Her affair with one of the group's members, Alan Greenspan, will go down as one of the most ill-fated romances in modern history.

Greenspan, who was for a short time Rand's lover, and for a long time Chairman of the US Federal Reserve, was listed by Time Magazine at #3 in their top 25 people to blame for the Financial Crisis. There isn't space to go into the details, but suffice to say the causal chain is this: Rand screwed Greenspan, and Greenspan screwed the global economy.

Rand's indirect contribution to architecture might have been the Starchitect, but it was also the collapse of distinction between *building* and *asset* that came with the rise of the iconic development. Luxury apartments in London are still massively appreciating, and 10% of all property investment in the capital is by Greeks and Italians. They are looking for somewhere safe to lock their money while the Eurostorm rages. For today's super-rich the value of architecture is only as a long-term, stable, asset.

As young designers we must challenge this woeful situation, and that means challenging the political and economic morality that underpins it. We must reject, in the strongest possible terms, the philosophy of Ayn Rand. JS.

THE FOUNTAINHEAD

- is Largely Responsible for the Mess We're in Today -

thanks a ton
Ayn Rand