

The Worshipful Company of Chartered Architects

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The future of the architectural profession: a question of values

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My proposition to you today is that the British architectural profession is in a crisis of values. This arises from the conflicting values of their roles as professionals and as artists and has caused a loss of effectiveness and of worth to society. The issues have become clearer recently and a number of opportunities are evident for architects to regain a stronger position, becoming more valuable to society and themselves. This analysis flows partly from two reports which I wrote or commissioned: Be Valuable, a guide to creating value in the built environment, published by Constructing Excellence in November 2005 (2), and Constructive Change, a report to the RIBA in December 2005 by Bob White, chief executive of Constructing Excellence(3). It has also been influenced by seminal new books by N. J. Habraken, Palladio's Children (4) and Nicholas Ray, Architecture and its ethical dilemmas (5).

Change is an insidious process. Catastrophic events like 9-11 come from long lead-ins barely perceived by the victims. Change slowly undermines the arrangements of the past and puts the future in their place. Sadistic schoolboys joke about the frog placed in a pan of cold water slowly heated. It reacts too slowly to the onset of boiling to escape. We are however all like that frog in relation to, say, climate change.

Architects have been froglike in relation to their role over the past two generations. I speak as an architect who went up to Liverpool University two year after the profession decided, in 1958, that all aspiring architects should go to University schools. I then saw the loss of the architects' quasi-judicial role in the building contract, the end of the right to choose contractors and specialists, the death of the scale fee and the ban on promotion, the rise of project management and design-build,

the end of the public sector office, and the ascendancy of PFI. All these changes undermined the professional role of the architect.

I also saw the rise of the 'signature architect' and their journalist fellow-travellers, pushing the model of the architect as, first and foremost, an artist. I saw architecture become the most attractive choice of career in the built environment, creative and cool. I saw the 2005 Stirling Prize award as a moment of definition, when a media circus chose a work of art as the winner, one more suited to the Turner Prize than to a professional accolade for that most practical art of architecture.

What is the value of architecture?

When I say there is a crisis of values, I mean that disparate value systems are at war, both within and around the architect's world. Judgements of value, including how much money the work of architects is worth, stem from these various values. We often see correspondence from protagonists of one set of values arguing with another whose values are clearly quite different.

Consider the following pairs of statements:

Architects feel marginalised. *Architects are arrogant*

Most buildings never see the hand of an architect. *Architects earn 3% of all UK construction spend.*

Architects are poorly rewarded. *Architects create enormous value.*

Society seems not to value architecture. *Public interest in architecture is at a high.*

Clients won't give work to new or small firms. *There is more work than ever before.*

Architectural education is splendid. *Architects' training is poor.*

Clients won't let architects lead anymore. *Architects have lost their leadership skills.*

Architects are not part of the construction industry. *Architects are a key part of the industry.*

Architects serve society. *Architects are concerned only about the opinions of other architects.*

Architects are artists. *Architects are professionals.*

A few recent quotations add flavour:

“Architects design most hotels. Our guests designed ours”: Marriott advertisement.

“Many architects will be concerned that client-centred practice will mean that they will no longer be able to design interesting buildings”: book review by John L. Heintz in the *Architectural Review*.

“Originality and innovative potential are more important than the actuality of its performance”: Zaha Hadid in the *Harvard Design Magazine*.

“By exaggerating the importance of design and the need for architects to remain outside the integrated industry, they (CABE) are sabotaging the modernisation of the construction process”: Colin Harding in *Building Magazine*.

A brief history of architects

The nub of these comments is a perception of the retreat of architects from the 19th and 20th century professional role towards their older role as artists. Professionals are expected to work for the good of their clients and society; artists answer to themselves and their peers and seek patrons rather than clients or customers.

The artist model of the architect is a renaissance one, defined by Alberti and Palladio. Before that we know of some master masons, but in the renaissance the architect emerged alongside painters and sculptors as the practitioner of what they called ‘the mother of the arts’. Only the rich and powerful could commission architects and kings were their logical patrons. Only a fraction of a percent of all buildings was designed by architects however. The vernacular ‘field’, as Habraken calls it, rolled on along age-old patterns by designer/craftsman/builders. Craftsmen ruled both high and low building, their huge skills with materials taking both novel and conventional ideas to fruition.

In the eighteenth century a new kind of client emerged, the bourgeoisie. Where aristocrats had had no problem talking to their minions, the middle class sought to speak only to gentlemen like themselves. Architects began to work for the bourgeois by distancing themselves from the trade/craft background and in 1837 they defined architecture as a profession by founding the RIBA. An ethical profession, separate

from trade interests, emerged. It gradually developed the idea that all other professions were following, that of universal service. All building would benefit from the architect's services in bringing order and good taste to bear. Bernard Shaw remarked that professions were a conspiracy against the laity, and indeed the professions prospered by providing guidance to worlds which they themselves had made arcane. In the mid-twentieth century the UK architectural profession became strongly influenced by modern art on the one hand and by the public service ethos on the other. New, abstract forms took over from historicism and new social models defined an utopia in which the architect designed everything, the formal and the field. Pevsner, the author of so much of the post-war view, saw a distinction between architecture and the mass of ordinary construction, defining Lincoln Cathedral as architecture and a bicycle shed as building. Britain's architects however, attempted to design the entire spectrum as if it was all formal architecture. Professor Jeremy Till of Sheffield University thinks this is deluded: 'Cities are moulded by all of us, by all the people who live there, not just by architects and planners. Architecture is just a contingent discipline to the other forces at work' (6).

This new world was a designer's world and had no place for the maker as co-creator. Whereas earlier architects worked closely with their craftsmen, the move to new technology and materials destroyed the craft knowledge base. New technology had to be understood theoretically and designers needed to specify everything to the makers. The UK class system was especially prone to this polarisation of white and blue collar roles. 'Form following Function' gave a logic to this need for architects to define not only how buildings served their occupants but also how they were to be made, in detail. Architects chose and developed building products in the pre 1970 world, and they selected suppliers to put in the building contract.

Yet at the same time as architects claimed to design everything they were in long-term retreat from control of the process. The separation from constructors in the early nineteenth century was but the first step away from a comprehensive role. The steps away continued and ran far deeper than in other countries. Quantity surveyors inserted themselves into the tendering process in the mid 19th century, assisting the comparability of bids. They eventually flowered into the managing discipline, often appointed first. Civil engineers moved into building design to provide the frames and

foundations that ambitious architects began to need. Services engineers came out of the heating, ventilating and electrical trades. At any point where the architect needed to calculate or manage, they seemed happier to step aside for a less intuitive group to bring in professionalism.

Architects invented town planning; indeed I have a degree in it. Then we lost it in the 1970's as 'pure planners' redefined the subject as being more than design-based. Interior designers came out of art-school furniture design to seize space-planning, fitout and finishes, all expressions of the occupier's world rather than of the architect's. Lighting designers became electrical rather than architectural in background. Landscape architects, increasingly working as masterplanners, took important ground. None of these separations occurred in Germany for example, where architects do planning, landscape, interiors and lighting happily.

Big-time retreat started in the 1970s with the legally-led loss of the quasi-judicial role between client and contractor. At the same time the powers of the architect to nominate selected specialists and suppliers into the contract were suppressed, both in the interest of containing and clarifying client risk. Risk management, as we now call it, intensified as project managers replaced architects at the top of the food chain. Architects let it happen by neglecting the management side of their work. It was getting increasingly taxing and did not appeal to the profession's idea of itself.

Then the architects' grip on technology slipped. Construction technology advanced in the last 25 year largely through R&D by manufacturers, not through architects. Increasingly the architect, and indeed the consulting engineer, needed to let the maker of the system: lifts, sprinkler, controls, cladding, design the response to the specification then pass a warranty to the professional so that the consultants could continue to deliver 'design responsibility' to their clients. American architects never had to front this charade. They replaced the craft tradition with the maker as co-designer from the start. The maker provides the US building owner with an insurance-backed guarantee that the element meets the architect's performance specification.

In architects' offices the role of technological mastery was gradually delegated to an order of architectural technicians who founded their own professional body in the

1960s with the blessing of the RIBA, rather than forming a group within the profession. It became the Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists in 2005. There is a collaborative agreement between the RIBA and CIAT, but they are separate now. Meanwhile, enterprising engineers had set up as 'façade engineers', to help architects specify the cladding that they wanted but could not design.

Last, but by no means least, the founding tradition of direct employment of the architect by the client was attacked. In the 1990s the rise of design-build accelerated. Used before that for utilitarian 'field' buildings alone, the contractor –led approach was praised by customers as inherently better because managerially integrated. By 1998 and the Egan report (7) it had become government policy to buy buildings on a single-responsibility basis, with the architect hired by the builder to ensure that the client has no risk from any gap between design and construction. The Private Finance Initiative also uses integrated teams inherently. Contractors found managing architects 'like herding cats', as Peter Druker put it about managing professionals. The role of 'design manager' emerged, invading the task of coordinating architect, engineers, cost consultant and other specialists with the contractor, a role the architect used to play as a matter of course.

Artist or professional? The education issue.

In 1958 the profession decided at the Oxford Conference that all aspiring architects should do a five-year degree at university. This decision came at a time when only two and a half percent of young people went to university and it was a powerful play for the high ground by an idealistic discipline. It also, however, kept architects close to the client class. The presumption was that the developing theory of modern architecture and town planning would blossom in a research-based teaching environment, replacing the haphazard training gained by articled pupils in offices. For a while all went well as most teachers and professors were also practitioners. Building science and construction were taught alongside history. Projects in design studio needed to be buildable.

But it didn't last. By the 1970s practice was more active and combining teaching with it, as is still the norm in Germany, became rare. Those that could practice did so; those who remained aloof taught the subject and distaste for practice, as commercially compromised, became common in schools. A theoretical world developed there, emphasising the art content of the subject as it has far more academic depth and respectability to it. Research into how buildings work largely disappeared and indeed at the last Research Assessment Exercise, whilst it was admittedly mishandled, no school of architecture was recognised for research excellence.

The students of this art-architecture are highly creative and the subject is a big draw compared to the dullness of teaching in engineering and construction departments. But students see the subject as about star designers working alone, with iconic building as their goal. They are rarely taught the industry context, civics, construction or practice subjects. The end of the Modern Movement in architecture in the 1970s blew away the moral and technological drivers of the earlier decades and into the vacuum moved theories with an art or literature basis. Education became defined as 'not training', since the mere accumulation of practical knowledge was neither seen as opening the mind, nor as lasting long. Training could follow once in practice. Today's buildings are often formally fabulous because of this trend, but they are not necessarily effective or professionally responsible. Sustainability, for example, is not an attractive source of design inspiration to all because it is thought to produce worthy but dull buildings, just as being client-oriented is thought to. The opinion of other architects, rather than that of clients or society, dominates the sense of worth of many. Our subculture has become introverted and dysfunctional. The flame of professional responsibility is not out and it often kindles as students take to the real world. But spending five years to acquire 'educated incapacity', as Daniel Bell described his overeducated Harvard colleagues, is wasteful. Rather we should be aiming to be Donald Schon's 'Reflective Practitioner' (8), able to see patterns and make good judgements from the fragments of evidence available. The onset of the student debt regime this year, bringing architectural students the possibility of a debt burden three times their starting salary at graduation, will destroy this 'five years in the sandpit' approach.

It is now RIBA Policy to swing the pendulum back to an education based on combined academic and practice-based activity. It is very likely that, for financial reasons, students will do a three year first degree, then move into practice for the remainder of their training. This will be a challenge to practices, but there could be a gain for professionalism, with practice and academic experience mixed and real world skills learned by using them. A 'College of Architecture' might emerge, parallel to the legal world's concentrated finishing course. Architectural graduates may choose to fan out into specialisms, especially the in-demand urban and sustainability skills, but also to go into construction, product and system design, management and facility consulting. Non-cognate students may cross into architecture at masters' level, a trend that has worked well in the USA. The definition of an architect will become much harder as the general-practice, chartered architect will be surrounded by hybrid forms.

The shape of the future.

What I hope will happen is that the profession will strike a new balance between its artistic and professional heritages. It should not be an either/or choice but one where a 'broad church' of talents covers society's needs, especially through teamwork. The ideal architect for the twenty-first century is a skilled knowledge worker who brings creativity, insight and ethical values to the meeting of customer and society requirements. The architect's is still the best skill set to act as the focus and holder of the big picture, capturing requirements and proposing solutions with an eye to the interests of all stakeholders. The ethics of artistic integrity need to be cross-fertilised with the ethics of professional responsibility and accountability.

What we need to develop is a more multi-dimensional concept of quality than we currently tend to use. The dominance of visual aesthetics in the definition of quality by architects has led to communication failures between the public and profession. Clients, users and the public value building which serve their needs and inspire them, in their terms, as working assets rather than as artefacts. These practical and adaptable structures are the buildings which are long-lived whilst once-fashionable but overly-precious buildings fall into neglect (9).

I have been working on the concept of value for Constructing Excellence, recently publishing 'Be Valuable, a guide to creating value in the built environment.' The report, from a high-powered task group, proposed that 'value-seeking' rather than cost-control should become the central behaviour of the industry. It also accepted that perception of value is the product of values and hence personal to the stakeholder. For any project, the pattern of stakeholder values needs to be identified and a 'value proposition' agreed which satisfies stakeholders. Quality is then definable as that which delivers value, either by enabling the goals of the stakeholders or by reducing the lifetime cost of the facility; ideally by doing both together, the concept of 'lean thinking' (10).

Buildings typically cost three times as much over their lives to run and maintain as they do to design and build. They support, on average, thirty times their cost in occupier value-added. Good design optimises initial investment to improve those ratios. A good hospital is a therapeutic device, speeding recovery. Indeed research (11) has demonstrated good design paying for itself by reducing annual patient care costs by more than the charge for the premises. A good office building enables its users to outperform rivals by stimulating occupier health, effectiveness, interaction and self-esteem whilst minimising cost in use.

Architects need to build databanks of how buildings actually perform for occupiers and communities, as a source for consultancy skill in briefmaking and design. The present vacuum of knowledge need filling through university and practitioner research. Concentrating on 'the end and the beginning' will give architects the knowledge to make provable proposals with confidence, rather than living on the optimistic assertions of today. The concept of 'Soft Landings', the design and build team staying with the new building during its shakedown cruise, to help the occupiers and facility managers bed down but also to learn how their ideas worked, is an excellent one (12).

The sustainability agenda is a huge opportunity for architects to regain relevance and respect in the community. Sustainability is triple-decked, requiring economic, social and environmental success. Economic performance will flow from the focus just described. Social performance is a matter of perceiving and advocating community

interests beyond those of the project paymaster, but also in the paymaster's interest in gaining permission and corporate responsibility points. Environmental viability is an increasingly crucial test which may change building design radically. Yet proposals have to be economically affordable and socially inclusive or they are not going to survive. Architects have always cared about social and environmental matters generally, but they have not backed their concern with depth of knowledge or inclusion of expert contributors, hence the frequent social failures of redevelopment and the shallowness of much 'sustainable' building.

Architects working to create value need to switch their reward concept to one based on the value created. Fees related to costs divide clients' and architect's interests and help to depress architects' income as well as keeping the focus on costs rather than on value. Relevant design effort can release many times its cost in performance raised or building lifetime cost lowered. Almost by definition there can be no innovation without investment in time beyond the norm. It will not be an easy concept and its methods will vary by sector, but a profession which shares an interest in the value margin with its clients will be far more welcome and well rewarded. Mr Micawber's principles can be restated in 'Be Valuable' terms in Prof Hennes de Ridder's diagram which shows projects aiming for a healthy margin of perceived value above price paid and another clear margin between price paid and the cost of supply (2,p44).

The profession should expect to reposition itself further upstream in the process than today. The majority of fee income is now generated at and after Stage E, the detailed design stage of the RIBA Plan of Work. Relatively little flows from Stages A and B, or before them, those project definition and feasibility areas where arguably we add most value and could add more. It will become important for value delivery that architects become more like business consultants to clients on how best to define their needs. Simultaneously, we can expect to lose much of the downstream role to a combination of supplier design, use of standard products and third world outsourcing. It is in the client's interest for constructors to enter the team earlier and take responsibility for meeting the specification. It is also in the client's interest to use as much generic product as possible in meeting that specification. Increasingly, both production information and product design will flow from Asia, the future dominant

market for building demand. Low cost, high quality components are as likely to be globally traded as appliances or cars are and will drive down the cost of building here.

The logical position of the architect is as the customer's value champion, defining, proposing and defending the value proposition through the process of creation, and indeed through the life cycle. ICT will be a core tool for doing this. Stronger capture of requirements, coupled with better simulation of proposals, will increase the power and acceptability of design and with it customer satisfaction. Multi-dimensional building information modelling (BIM) will then act as the shared resource of client, design team, constructors and facility managers over the life cycle. Architects should seek to be the intellectual property holders, the masters of the model for the team, coordinating all contributions so that the building can be made without surprises on site (worth 10% of total cost today) and later maintained and operated from the database. Indeed buildings will be increasingly self-aware, referring to their mental model. They will be manufactured, erected and serviced by robots and actively self-managing. They will produce performance reports to feed the consultancy skills of their authors and justify their performance bonuses. Artificial intelligence is the knowledge workers' power-assistance, saving much of the 'grunt work' and enabling much higher levels of aspiration. Frank Gehry's astonishing buildings are testament to the power of ICT even now, making the 'impossible' possible.

Whether architects are working directly for clients or indirectly as members of a contractor's team, our focus on client need will be the key to our relevance and value to everyone. Contractors have a long road to travel to achieve customer focus as they have always concentrated on delivery, not the thing delivered. Architects are the natural compliment to that, providing the customer, user and community interface which the supply team needs, whilst collaborating closely and early with the suppliers on how identified needs are to be met. We need to be the 'Greeks' to their 'Romans', the civilising influence to their energy and appetite for risks. We carry the ethics card, concentrating on doing the right thing rather than just on doing things right. But to hold that position, we have to know more, through research, about the value that we champion. What was, for example, the benefit to the BBC of the coffee break points cut out of Richard MacCormac's Portland Place HQ, compared to the cost saved?

Contractor-architect synergy seems to me to work best when an architect is a senior part of the contractor's organisation, relating them to the architects hired.

So, overall, where should the architectural profession go in the next decade?

- It should hitch its wagon firmly to the concept of sustainable value, economic, social and environmental
- It should, through research, deepen its knowledge of how buildings work and what adds or destroys value of all kinds
- It should move upstream in the process, consulting to clients on what their needs are and how best to meet them
- It should move its education and training concept towards a partnership of academic and practice-based learning, coupled with the rebirth of practical research
- It should engage strongly with the construction, property and facility management industries and professions, learning from them and bringing ideas to them
- It should be the model-holder in ICT terms, master of the virtual building on behalf of customers, supply team and occupiers, and as a source of feedback for the profession
- It should develop ways to be rewarded which are linked to value created, not construction cost. That cost will fall as Asia provides more of the inputs. Our economic value will rise as we liberate value for customers and fellow team members.

And what of the artist role? Is my message that the professional role must become completely dominant? No, without the artistic side to architecture it becomes 'surveying', the professional service for property. Marshall McLuhan, the media thinker, predicted that as economic activity in the west becomes more focussed on cultural products, so the world we occupy would become seen as one big artwork. Increasingly, there is an expectation of quality and style in our environment and people travel the world to experience the best of it. There is indeed a risk that the artistic dimension will be seen as the province of artists or designers adding things to architects' aesthetically banal work. Sculptor Thomas Heatherwick and fashion

designer Wayne Hemingway are both actively ‘doing buildings’. This is evidence of the values gap we face. Consumers want more beauty and resonance (in their terms) in their environment than many architects give them.

How then shall we balance the professional and artistic genes in our heritage? I suggest three ways:

- Teamwork. Many of the most effective architectural firms are partnerships between opposites. An artistically-driven architect in partnership with a professionally-focussed one will outperform a firm of like-minded people. Developers frequently team creative and executive practices to get this effect.
- Positioning. The spectrum of client aspiration ranges from cathedrals to bicycle sheds, with much of the present building programme squarely in the middle of the spectrum, where professionalism is expected and any art is welcome but not to frighten the horses. Architects should pick their position and shape their response to it.
- Synthesis. Creating practical artefacts with skill and artistry is called ‘craft’ in the world of the one-off, ‘design’ in the product sphere, and it is the values of the craft tradition, applied to design as well as to workmanship, that may bridge the gap to our stakeholders in many circumstances.

The great value of architects to the community lies in our generalist skills in a world of specialists and in our ability to see the big picture, empathise with stakeholders and imagine solutions to how we could live. These abilities come from artistic skills: informed intuition, pattern-recognition abilities and creativity. Our aptitude in crystallising the design need and the solution to a building ‘throws a six’ which enables the specialists to get started. We are then relied upon to coordinate everyone’s design input and to bring flair to the practical solution, to advocate for quality throughout the process and to inspire customers, co-consultants, and suppliers, as well as to convince the planning committee, an increasingly professional task list. Architecture attracts very creative, ‘crossover’ talent, both artistic and technocratic in its mind set. We inhabit both of C.P.Snow’s two worlds of sciences and arts. We need to steer back to a balanced view of our role and how we prepare for it and thus be better able to reward and retain talent.

If we get our values right, the future of architects as artist-professionals is bright, which would be good news for the quality of life of everyone.

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