On the Value(s) of an Architect

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This paper situates architectural ethics in the context of practice by using stakeholder theory and the concept of professional judgment to describe the activities of architectural practice. Architects are taught the skills necessary to make ethical professional judgments in the contexts of design and professional service, but they are not necessarily taught how to effectively communicate the value of those skills to those outside the profession. Stakeholder theory provides a framework to describe the practice of architecture in a way that enables non-practitioners to appreciate value of the complex decisions and activities performed by architects.

> "There's a snobbery at work in architecture…The subject is too often treated as a fine art, delicately wrapped in mumbo-jumbo. In reality, it's an all-embracing discipline taking in science, art, maths, engineering, climate, nature, politics, [and] economics."
>
> —Sir Norman Foster[1]

Architects have held status as professionals for over a century, but literature on the profession laments the discounted value of their professional services. If professional services are interpreted by the public as "designing a building" without any further explanation of the broad knowledge or complex judgments underpinning the documents that serve as tangible evidence of design work, then construction engineers, design-build companies, and developers, who are all capable of making CAD drawings, can usurp the architect's domain. Foster's quote above hints at the breadth of knowledge required to successfully practice architecture, but the profession lacks a theoretical framework to describe its approach to professional judgment. Stakeholder theory, developed by business ethicists and management scholars, can effectively describe the nature of an architect's professional judgment, encompassing both the knowledge involved and the services provided.

WHY ARCHITECTS NEED TO COMMUNICATE THE NATURE OF THEIR PROFESSION TO THE PUBLIC

Architects earn professional degrees and are licensed, like doctors, lawyers, and engineers. However, architecture is the lowest paid of these four professions.[2] Although buildings are tangible artifacts of an architect's work, the *design* of a building is less easily understood by the lay person than, say, recovery from an illness. Often the public may value the architect's work based on the subjective evaluation of the

observer: they either like it or they don't. Architects earn professional degrees and are licensed, like doctors, lawyers, and engineers. However, architecture is the lowest paid of these four professions. Although buildings are tangible artifacts of an architect's work, the design of a building is less easily understood by the lay person than, say, recovery from an illness. Often the public may value the architect's work based on the subjective evaluation of the observer: they either like it or they don't. The profession cannot survive on the basis of the public's "like" of their work, as discussed in a 2015 article in *Forbes* magazine, which declared contemporary architecture to be ugly, irrelevant, and out of touch with society.[3] In support of this claim, the author offered up a description of the American Institute of Architects' effort at "repositioning" the profession, complete with references to marketing consultants and survey results. The "crisis of confidence"[4] described appears in much of the literature (not just the *Forbes* article), but can be overcome not by changing how buildings are designed, but by understanding and effectively communicating the value that architects contribute to the making of the built environment. The academy can and should equip architects with the skills to not only make educated professional judgments in the contexts of design and professional service, but also to communicate the value of those skills effectively to those outside the profession.

THE ETHICS OF PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT

This paper describes professional judgment as an ethical construct by using stakeholder theory, a business ethics model. This approach is inspired by the National Architectural Accrediting Board's inclusion of architectural ethics in the realm of professional practice.[5]

Professional practice is a construct of two terms (*profession* and *practice*) which will be separately discussed before they are examined jointly. Professional judgement as learned and practiced by architects is a unique and value laden set of skills that also creates value, and the duality of the term value (as an ethical term as well as an economic term) will also be discussed in order to make the case for the importance of the architect in the construction of our built environment.

WHY AN ARCHITECT IS A PROFESSIONAL

Professionalization of architecture only began in earnest in the 19th century. Architects, like other skilled experts of the time, wanted to protect themselves from having to compete for work.[6] In Britain, the United States, and Canada, architects

formed professional associations throughout the 19th century to protect themselves from the advent of free-market capitalist competition in their newly industrialized societies. "Professionalism developed in England during the nineteenth century as a means of affording the professional man security of employment in a free market economy."[7] Architecture was transformed from a noble pursuit into a profession primarily to protect practitioners who were losing their status as experts in a more egalitarian market-driven society.

In order for architecture to become a profession, many things had to happen:

> ...a group of would-be professionals [1] organize, [2] set norms of practice, [3] legitimize their knowledge base by making it part of an academic curriculum, [4] devise a means of controlling entry into the occupation, [5] secure governmental approval of their restrictive practices, and [6] demand public recognition of their professional status, thereby establishing their turf and protecting it against encroachment by other, would-be professionals.[8]

1. AND 2. ORGANIZATION AND NORMS
Architects did organize themselves to fulfill these requirements. In the U.S., the American Institute of Architects (founded in 1857) became the national organization for practicing architects, setting norms and standards for practice, and the Principles of Professional Practice agreed upon by the AIA in 1909 are echoed in the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct in place over a century later.[9]

3. CREATING AN ACADEMIC PLACE FOR ARCHITECTURE
The traditional method of education for architects in early history was apprenticeship, as it was for many of the skilled occupations. In 1793, the École des Beaux-Arts began offering formal academic architectural training in Paris, and became the model for early schools of architecture in the U.S., since many early American architects had themselves trained there.10 Finding a place for architecture in universities was not too difficult in the young American academic environment, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology started the first department of Architecture in 1868. By the start of the twentieth century, there were at least a dozen schools or departments of Architecture in the U.S. In 1912, the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) was founded to ensure quality in architecture curricula, and the ACSA joined with the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) in 1940 to develop a formal program to certify that accredited schools of architecture met standards for curricular content and rigor so that graduates would be prepared to enter the profession.[11]

4. CONTROLLING ENTRY INTO THE PROFESSION
Professional registration was a trickier challenge for architects' professional aspirations. Requiring architects to be registered meant requiring them to meet standards of education and professional conduct, but the members who developed the requirements, especially as pertained to education, did not necessarily meet them themselves, and so a certain amount of grandfathering was necessary to include practicing architects at the start of the process. Legal requirements for professional registration were slow to be adopted, and the first licensing law was not passed until 1897, in Illinois. Other states followed suit fairly quickly, however, and NCARB was founded in 1919 to coordinate licensing in the first 13 states to require it.[12]

5. GOVERNMENT APPROVAL
In the United States, the AIA's success has met with opposition from the government, which has sued them twice on the grounds that their restrictive practices violated antitrust laws by creating a monopoly for members. Although this was likely their intention in professionalizing in the first place, the AIA Canon of Ethics of 1909 enjoined members from competing against one another "on the basis of professional charges,"[13] which amounts to price-fixing in the eyes of the U.S. government. Since then, the AIA has tried to be more careful in its language, if not its intentions, regarding limiting competition between members.

Even leaving the sixth requirement for later discussion, architecture meets the definition of a profession. Oddly enough, achieving the status presents several dilemmas that architects faced less formally in the context of their pre-professional status. At the broadest level, the achievement of professional status requires the assumption of professional responsibilities: "professions are bound in a social contract with the public: they retain certain rights and privileges in society in return for bearing certain responsibilities."[14] These responsibilities form the basis of any profession's ethics.

QUESTIONS AND DILEMMAS OF JUDGMENT
One feature of a profession is that it has a proprietary knowledge base that is "highly specialized and sufficiently broad to allow the professional to choose among alternative courses of action. A high degree of competence is required to choose wisely."[15] The ability to choose between alternatives is *judgment*, and is developed though training in a profession's body of knowledge and the application of that knowledge through practice.[16] It not a coincidence that lawyers, doctors, and architects all practice their professions; it is only through practice that a professional develops and improves their capacity for sound judgment.

So what kinds of knowledge are involved in the capacity for sound professional judgment in architecture? Vitruvius recommends the study of almost every subject imaginable,

including medicine (in order to make buildings that are conducive to good health).[17] More recently, Francis Duffy describes architectural knowledge as "unusually combinatory and complex," involving "many other disciplines such as economics and history, information technology, mechanical, structural, and industrial engineering, art, all the social sciences from psychology to anthropology, business studies as well as the science of materials…interconnecting everything in the service of design."[18] In their current "Education Guidelines," NCARB lists education requirements including technical, quantitative, business, legal, history, and humanities courses in addition to design coursework.[19] This is a foundation of the architect's dilemma; the knowledge that informs the profession is broader than that needed by a doctor or lawyer.

The dilemma begins when the architect tries (or, indeed, does not try) to communicate the scope of knowledge and volume of information involved in making professional judgments. When the architect subsumes all of the considerations implicit in the creation of a building under the title of "design," the lay observer or client does not have a way to grasp the complexity of the judgments involved in the design process. It may be that the architect's education teaches her or him to do this; reconciling multiple factors into a coherent design solution is one task of the architect, but presenting a design as a "solution" without clearly communicating the breadth or complexity of the "problem" implies a certain level of ease that might lead clients to value design services less than the work involved warrants.

DESIGN JUDGMENT
The act of designing space is central to the architect's task, but explaining how an architect makes judgments about the beauty, quality or fitness of a design is not a simple task. The majority of time in any program of architecture is devoted to the practice of design, in a studio/laboratory environment, so it is clear that design skills are valued and carefully cultivated within the profession and its education system. Architectural theorists have debated this area since Vitruvius, but have not come up with a lasting formula for creating a beautiful or good building. This is not a failure on the part of the profession, rather it is an acknowledgment that the architect's professional judgment relies on different kinds of knowledge and an understanding of culture and context that prevent a single prescription for beauty or goodness from being appropriate for the profession. Furthermore, philosophers have long debated the meaning of the words "good" and "beauty" without consensus, so it is possible that architects' lack of agreement is a sign that neither word can be defined in a single way.

PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT
Professional judgment for an architect, then, is the considered application of a wide variety of knowledge to a client's need for a particular built space. This is not the full extent of professional judgment because there are other facets to the architect's role in making the client's built space happen. An architect must be well-versed in the various other professions and trades involved in realizing the building project. That knowledge also forms part of the architect's professional judgment, since she or he may assemble a team, collaborate with, and often coordinate the activities of a variety of contributors to the finished building. Although daily project management is sometimes undertaken by others, the architect still bears a responsibility for representing and reconciling the interests of owners and clients with builders and engineers, and is additionally responsible for accounting for public interests. The architect must have strong ethical reasoning skills to be able to develop resolutions for conflicting interests and agendas, and this skill is also a critical part of his or her professional judgment.

THE PROFESSIONAL ARCHITECT
When a client contracts with an architect, what are they hoping to receive in exchange for payment? Nominally, the architect's job is to provide instructions for the construction of a building that suits the client's requirements. An architect's job does not begin or end with a set of construction documents, however. The architect provides many other services in connection with and in addition to the instructions for constructing a building. Before the plans can be designed, the architect must carefully evaluate the client's needs in order to create a building that will serve those needs.

An architect's approach to programming encompasses not only the client's wishes, but also incorporates aspects the client may not be aware of or focused on. Community standards for safety and use, as expressed in zoning and code requirements, are mandatory inclusions. Economical use of scarce resources and environmental considerations are part of the package, and it is the architect's breadth of knowledge and practice of judgment that teaches her or him to weigh these various and sometimes competing aspects of a program in the development of a final scheme. Aesthetic considerations (design judgment) are also part of the project, although they cannot really be listed as a budget item. Architects should be emphasizing that ethical professional services include all of these aspects in in the development of a building project.

The architect's role in coordinating the activities of the various professionals and tradespeople necessary to complete a building project has shifted many times over the course of history. In early times, the architect was a "master builder"—a sort of first among relative equals when constructing a building. Even in the professional period, the role of the architect has bounced between obligations to their clients and impartial mediation roles between trades,[20] so it is not surprising that this aspect of the profession is not well understood by clients or the public. A contracted architect is likely expected (at least by the client) to protect their client's interests above

all others (by virtue of the contract and the client's control over the architect's paycheck), but public officials, building trades, and the community expect architects to represent their respective interests in cases where they disagree with the client's agenda. Ethical professional judgment includes the expertise of the architect in balancing and satisfying these competing constituencies during the course of the building project. This professional judgment is a significant source of the architect's value, even though the client may imagine that the building design is the primary value that she or he has contracted from the architect.

VALUES AND VALUE

The semantics of the word value are often overlooked in the discussion of the architectural profession. Many authors in the field regularly discuss the ethical meaning and the economic meaning simultaneously rather than treating them as separate questions for the profession. Distinguishing between the two is necessary to explain the role of the professional architect.

VALUES

"Values," in the plural form, refer to the ethical principles and standards that guide architects in the execution of their professional duties. The standards by which architects "should" act have been described by various writers—these values pre-date the existence of the profession. Vitruvius, for example, states that architects should be creating buildings that embody *firmitas*, *utilitas*, and *venustas* (design values), but the architect himself should be "courteous, just, and honest without avariciousness...[and] incorruptible" (professional values). [21]

Why are design values different from professional values? Design values are far less constant or even determinate than professional values, ranging from "beauty" to Foster's category of "mumbo-jumbo." Inhabitants of the built environment can reduce design values to "like" or "dislike." Design values are not easily measured or classified as right or wrong. They are also distinct from principles and standards of conduct, or the execution of professional work.

Professional values have been a challenge for the AIA: the U.S. Justice Department's threats over anti-trust issues forced the AIA to take a hard look at their values.[22] Design values guide architects' vision of the built environment and may be effectively shared within the discipline through education, but professional values are the expression of the profession's intersection with everyone outside itself. These are the principles and behaviors by which architects are judged, and by which they can claim the privileges of professional status.

The AIA's 2017 *Code of Ethics and Professional Practice* is labelled at the top as originating "from the office of the General Counsel" and addresses antitrust issues before listing any principles that should guide architects' professional behavior.[23] It is not a promising sign when the code of ethics for a profession is developed by an attorney to remind members not to violate the law.[24] Canon II in the AIA Code discusses "Obligations to the Public" almost exclusively in terms of the law; for example Rule 2.101 states "Members shall not, in the conduct of their professional practice, knowingly violate the law." Reducing ethical conduct to the minimum standard that does not violate the law sets a very low bar. The AIA's low standards have been extended to the academy because the NAAB requires only that accredited schools demonstrate that students have an "understanding the role of the AIA Code of Ethics in defining professional conduct."[25] Contemporary business ethics study has revealed that customers expect more from businesses than this minimum. Clients and the public expect professionals to be honest and sincere in their efforts to fulfill professional duties, something that falls under the umbrella of professional integrity, and architects are bound by that expectation as professionals.

VALUE

"Value" in the singular refers to economic value, a very different entity than ethical value. Economic value encompasses both the costs of the architectural project and the economic compensation for the usefulness of the services rendered by the architect. The architect's client is often primarily concerned with economic value in terms of the cost of the project, and relies on the architect to safeguard his or her budget in the execution of the project. Honesty and integrity are critical professional values in this context, and so values and value do intersect in architectural practice.

STAKEHOLDER THEORY AS A MODEL FOR DESCRIBING ARCHITECTURAL JUDGMENT

The business ethics and management field developed stakeholder theory to explain that the manager's role is to create value for multiple constituencies of a business simultaneously.[26] Stakeholder theory posits that businesses depend on many groups (stakeholders) for their economic success, and that only by increasing value for all of these groups can a manager achieve lasting success for the business.

The structure and mechanics of stakeholder theory has parallels to the architectural profession as described so far, and can be helpful in explaining the how the architect generates value.

The classic diagram used to explain stakeholder theory is presented as Figure 1.[27]

Classical stakeholder theory separates stakeholders into primary and secondary groups: primary stakeholders are directly connected to the operation of the business, while secondary stakeholders may impact a firm's success even though they are not directly interacting with the firm. For
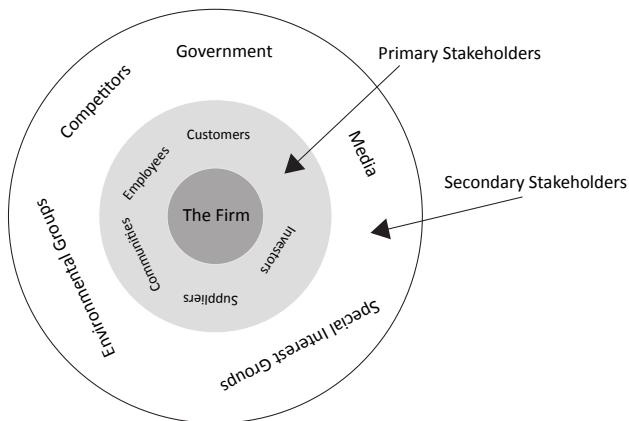
Figure 1: Classic Stakeholder Theory diagram, from Freeman et al.[27].

Figure 2: Stakeholder diagram for the architect

example, government is listed as a secondary stakeholder since it is neither a customer nor a supplier of the firm, even though environmental or labor regulations do impact firm operations and expenses. The term stakeholder has passed into common language and appears in the NAAB's requirement that programs demonstrate that students have an "understanding of the relationship between the client, contractor, architect and other key stakeholders such as user groups and the community, in the design of the built environment. Understanding the responsibilities of the architect to reconcile the needs of those stakeholders."[28] It is not clear, however, that architectural programs address the complexity of stakeholder relationships in the direct or intentional way originally defined in stakeholder theory.

A stakeholder diagram can be constructed that illustrates some of the various constituencies involved in the construction of the built environment. If the architect is at the center of the diagram, she or he has primary and secondary groups to manage relationships with and between, as illustrated in Figure 2.

The architect's role in this system is to coordinate the relationships between and among stakeholder groups in order to create value for all involved. Professional judgment is the skill or mechanism used to mediate competing agendas and accomplish value creation, but stakeholder theory conceives this as an exercise of ethical judgment.

VALUE, AGAIN
One aim of stakeholder theory is to explain how managers can create value while coordinating and accommodating stakeholder interests. In the context of business, this is assumed to refer to economic value, measurable in dollars and cents. Stakeholder theory includes more than profit or shareholder returns in its concept of value. Social benefits matter in value creation, for example. The broader definition of value is useful in the application of the model to architecture, because some of the services provided by architects are difficult to measure in terms of return on financial investment.
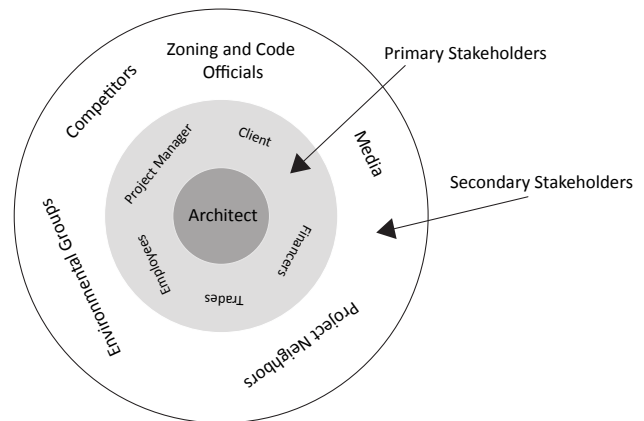
Applying stakeholder theory to architecture allows the profession to describe many of its less tangible services as value producing in a way that those outside the firm might be able to grasp. In business, stakeholder research looks for ways to describe intangibles in terms of economic value created and to measure that value to "prove" it's really there. The efforts in that arena may be applicable to architecture too, as a way to further demonstrate exactly what the "value of an architect" amounts to. Francis Duffy calls for this sort of research as a way to save the profession from irrelevancy,[29] saying that architects do indeed need to prove their value in a environment that has become increasingly capable of constructing buildings without the expertise of the architect.

What value can the profession claim to provide through an examination of the results of their efforts? A systematic evaluation of building performance, extending beyond the typical energy audits or life-cycle assessments into questions of tenant satisfaction or owner return on investment (is a beautiful building worth more to its owner?) might make a case for the value of the architect that clients and communities can understand and respect. The values "measured" in these evaluations need not be solely monetary (a company's pride in a well-designed headquarters would be valuable, for example), and the call for evaluation is not new: Thomas Fisher urged the profession to make the case for its value in 2000, saying:

> …design has been seen as a personal exploration, a signature of each individual aesthetic. [That] …has made it nearly impossible to analyze design or attempt to prove its value, since any such efforts are regarded…as a threat to the mystery of our art, as if art and analysis are mutually exclusive.[30]

RETURNING TO #6: PUBLIC RECOGNITION OF THE ARCHITECT'S PROFESSIONAL STATUS
Using stakeholder theory to conceptualize the types of value an architect creates in performing professional services can

be helpful in demonstrating that value to the public. The sixth requirement of the definition of a profession is critical in the preservation of that profession: without public recognition and respect for the value of the profession, there would be no reason for anyone to seek out or contract for the services of a professional. Architects must be more effective in communicating the complexity of the value of their profession, and stakeholder theory provides a framework for

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