Traveling Professions: How Local Contingencies Complicate Globalizing Tendencies in the Standardization of Architectural Practice

GEORGE B. JOHNSTON Georgia Institute of Technology

The title of this paper, Traveling Professions, is inspired by cultural critic Edward Said's 1983 essay, "Traveling Theory," a reflection upon the tendency of ideas to travel beyond the limits and local meanings of their cultural origins. Said argues the necessity of taking account of the ways such theories and ideas are inevitably transformed as they move across historical and geographical boundaries. He writes, "Such movement into a new environment is never unimpeded. It necessarily involves processes of representation and institutionalization different from those at the point of origin. This complicates any account of the transplantation, transference, circulation, and commerce of theories and ideas."1 This paper sketches ways in which a culturally relativist approach to theory and in this case, theories of professions—must be factored into the framing of architectural professionalism—in both fields of practice and education. Such an approach is particularly necessary in the light of the apparent globalization of architectural practice even when considered within the narrow sphere of western democracies.2

While the traveling of theories and practices of professionalism from the east to the west, from Europe to North America, would seem to comport with historical and geographical developments, in fact a more complicated, and in a sense ironic, story of influence must be told. This inversion in the discourse about professions is due to the fact that the first comprehensive attempts at describing and explaining the development of the modern professions were taken-on by Anglo and American theorists and historians. In the process, they offered the Anglo-American model of profession-

alism as an "ideal-typical" model against which other cultural models of professionalism could be measured or compared. It has taken some time, therefore, to understand that historical and sociological approaches to professions must account for issues of cultural contingency. There is no universally applicable model of professionalism; rather, professional authority must be understood in terms of the relation between the power of the state, locally and historically derived variations in the division expert labor, and inter-linked mechanisms controlling the market for expert services.

As a means of assessing how claims about the globalization of architectural practice might best be introduced into discourses about professionalism, this paper first considers several framing contexts. First, an appeal is made to a socio-political models of professionalism that challenge idealized notions of professions issuing from earlier Anglo-American scholarship. Included here are brief accounts of the medical and engineering professions in the United States and France illustrating the variability of concepts of professionalism reigning across both professions and nation-states, even where closely linked by history and tradition. These examples prepare the ground for consideration of globalizing tendencies within the architectural profession, especially those promoted by the International Union of Architects in response to the dissolution of professional trade barriers in both the European sphere and through the mechanism of trans-national global trade accords. What critical considerations should we apply in our speculations about a such flattened earth approach to architectural practice?

APPROACHES TO PROFESSIONALISM

Historiographical and sociological approaches to the explication of modern professions must be understood in terms of changing analytical and critical frameworks reflecting the interests and assumptions of those particular scholars and the disciplines they represent, disciplines which are themselves constituted within an ideological frame of professionalism. Shifting terms of analysis convey the extent to which discourse about professions has alternatively promoted, naturalized, theorized, demystified, and attacked the privileged categorization of professions within the division of labor; these terms also reflect the historical, social, and economic pressures that specific professions, and professions in general, have experienced and mediated in the modern era, especially since the middle of the nineteenth century in both Europe and the United States.

It is now understood, for example, that the constitution of professions in relation to the state is distinct in each of the nations of England, France, Germany, and the United States because of the different assumptions about the role of the professions as extensions of state bureaucracy. Furthermore, the tendency of theorists to treat medicine as the definitive profession has merely reproduced a typological fallacy even within a single nation, where differences among disparate professions are interpreted as "deviations" from the norm or ideal of medicine. Other comparative approaches, such as cross-disciplinary and crosscultural comparisons, are now deemed necessary supplements—and in some cases correctives—to the "ideal-typical" analyses first advanced from a primarily Anglo-American point of view and derived from Weberian sociology.

In a highly analytical account of what he calls the logic of professionalism, Eliot Freidson has laid out a model for understanding contingent factors affecting the differentiation of professions when compared against a heuristic model of normative traits of professionalism.³ Drawing upon studies characterizing the degree to which states exercise their authority, he compares states whose policy orientation, on the one hand, can be contrasted in terms of *reactive / activist*; and on the other hand whose manner of policy implementation can be contrasted in terms of *hierarchical / coordinate*

(by which is meant undifferentiated). When arrayed in a matrix, these oppositional pairs yield a spectrum of degrees of state control over professions.

Following the logic of this scheme, the most activist-hierarchical state would be a highly autocratic one such as the old Soviet Union (or in a milder version, France) in which professional power is an explicit extension of state control. A more laissezfaire model, the reactive-coordinate state, would be most akin to the system of professions in the Anglo-American system, where the professions are essentially self-organizing but are then recognized and empowered by the state. In between these extremes, hybrids such as the reactive-hierarchical state would involve a kind of corporatism comprising "bureaucratically organized state ... agencies staffed by professionally trained officials who themselves establish and administer regulations ... designed to serve the interests of chosen occupations." 4 Germany would approximate such a scheme. The fourth example, the activist-coordinate state, would be committed to an activist vision achieved through non-hierarchical means, an ideal form that Freidson acknowledges having only axiomatic value. While Freidson's model is highly abstract, its virtue lies in its provision of a comparative framework within which relationships between state power and professional authority can be gauged. It also challenges earlier schemes of a unified trans-national professionalism.

Elliott Krause's work augments the state-power approach by drawing more historically and economically grounded contrasts between and among specific professions within their respective national contexts. In the United States, for example, the rise of professions in the late-19th and early 20th centuries transpired fairly independently of government pressure, and the professions themselves were in the position of lobbying the individual states to enact licensing laws for the benefit of establishing professional authority and market control. After World War II, however, with the greater concentration of central or federal control and with the dominance of the market economy, professions found themselves more often under scrutiny on matters of price-fixing and other monopolistic practices. Likewise, a consolidation of economic power within corporations and of expertise within the

universities meant that professions' influence was comparatively weakened.⁵

The medical profession is a dramatic example of such a rise and fall of a profession in this country. Largely in disrepute over the course of the 19th century, the medical profession was able to gain and maintain professional authority and autonomy with the rise of medical science. But as recent events illustrate, the interests of the state and the market are now overwhelming that professional autonomy as government and market interventions aim toward controlling costs and enhancing public access to healthcare. 6 Engineering, on the other hand, exemplifies for Krause a profession that has never risen to a high level of professional influence in the United States because it has been organized from the outset as a service to capital interests, to the maintenance of efficiency and economy against any other overriding public interests. Thus while its expertise is crucial for the ongoing growth and development of a technologically-oriented society, unlike the medical profession it has never been in a position to assert its autonomy or control of its expertise over those capital and state interests upon which it depends.7

A contrasting picture may be found in the account that Krause paints of the relationship among state, capital, and the professions in France. Growing out of the monarchical system of the 18th century and the rise of Napoleon I, the French system of government has historically been highly centralized with an extremely hierarchical bureaucracy comprised of an elite core of professionalized officials educated in special state schools. Those graduates of the state schools not employed by the state often take positions in corporations which are themselves highly oriented toward the aims of state policy, thus creating a highly integrated public-private economy. By contrast, the mass of students educated in the state-supported universities are considered to be of a lower professional prestige. The professionals serving the community rather than the state are nonetheless linked in a client relationship with those governmental ministries that exercise authority over them and establish their professional jurisdictional boundaries.8

The medical profession in France has been highly shaped by the state, and the organization of the

medical profession has been highly affected by historical events such as the passage of the loi Le Chapelier banning guilds and professional organizations in the aftermath of the French Revolution;9 the establishment of a national social security program in the DeGaulle era following World War II; and the removal of medical school entrance quotas following the uprisings of 1968. Regaining their right to monopoly at the end of the 19th century, and working largely on a fee-for-service basis, the professional medical union was able to effectively resist a wide-scale national system of insurance until 1958. The nationalization of health care, along with a large influx of medical students following 1968 has meant a significant weakening of the autonomy of the profession and a sharing of market control with the government.10

On the other hand, the engineering profession in France enjoyed, beginning in the pre-Revolutionary era, one of the highest reputes of that profession in any country. Elite polytechnical schools established in that time gained even greater importance during the rule of Napoleon, when the civil engineering of bridges, roads, and other civil structures was of strategic importance. So from the advent of the modern engineering professions, their position as part of the state bureaucratic apparatus was secure. However, the historical development of a stratified system of rank based upon differentiation within the educational system has meant that graduates of the polytechnics, the grandes écoles, and the petites écoles have been allotted a descending grade of prestige, responsibility, and job mobility. The relatively low level of professional organization of the various grades of engineers, the expanded weight of market forces over the last several decades, as well and the growing numbers of individuals entering the engineering fields, has meant that the position of the field has eroded in relation to the power of the state.¹¹

From these few examples, it becomes clear that attempts to define a universal model of professionalism are reductive and inadequate to the task of theorizing, or critically challenging, the optimization and globalization of the architectural profession. On the contrary, the framing of this exemplary social category has shifted over time from concerns for a normative *definition* of professions, 12 to an assessment of their *function*

within the division of labor, ¹³ to a formulation of professionalism as an *ideology* promoting its own dominance through market control and social mobility, ¹⁴ and now to the assertion of cultural differences in professional formations as a challenge to the normative, Anglo-American model of professional power. In that light, contemporary attempts to articulate unifying standards for professional practice within an encompassing horizon of the global marketplace for expertise reveal an entrenched approach towards this otherwise highly contingent occupational category, one that operates as one of many interlinked attributes in the organization of capitalist modernity.

THE STANDARDIZATION OF ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE?

One such attempt at articulating a unifying set of principles for professional practice in architecture is the "International Union of Architects (UIA) Accord on Recommended International Standards of Professionalism in Architectural Practice," concluded in 2002. The UIA is an international body of architects comprised, according to its website, of "the key professional organizations of architects in 116 countries and territories, and now represents, through these organizations, more than 1,300,000 architects worldwide."15 The United States, for example, is represented by the American Institute of Architects. The UIA is a non-governmental agency that operates nonetheless with authority as the solely-recognized professional organization of architects worldwide by such inter-governmental agencies as UNESCO, the World Health Organization, and the World Trade Organization. The purpose of the 2002 accord on standards of international professionalism in architectural practice is to "provide practical guidance for governments, negotiating entities, or other entities entering mutual recognition negotiations on architectural services on a bilateral basis." While the accord acknowledges "differences in the cultures, practices and conditions in different member sections," it articulates nonetheless a static view of professionalism, one that assumes a kind of universally applicable definition to nationally and vocationally distinct professional formations.16

For example, within the section laying out its "principles of professionalism," the accord describes four categories of defining characteristics

for the profession of architecture. These include descriptions of the requisite expertise, autonomy, commitment, and accountability associated with architectural profession and are, in a general sense, relatively uncontroversial. Even these basic characteristics carry with them, however, major assumptions about the disciplinary role of professions within society, ones filtered by the historical experiences and traditions of western democracies. Even within that seemingly homogeneous cross-section, differentiating distinctions come to the fore.

The UIA appeal to upholding "the interest of public health, safety, welfare, and culture," for example, while suggesting an international congruence on broad terms of professional volition, reveals nonetheless a tension between European and United States approaches to the question of "culture."17 In the U.S., for instance, state registration statutes typically emphasize states' interest "to safeguard health, safety, and welfare" while related questions of culture are left implicit.18 By contrast, the emphasis upon cultural expression as a basic justification for professional formation is explicit in the European Community, as in the first words of the first article of France's enabling law for the architectural profession stating: "L'architecture est une expression de la culture."19 It might be argued that the implicit treatment of culture in the United States assumes a position of dominance within the realm of popular culture, of culture as a global fait accompli, while the comparative degree of European explicitness on the topic could be seen in some regards as an effort to resist the totalizing effects of an acknowledged American cultural hegemony. Another point of view, however, might maintain a reversal of those dominant/subordinate positions when considered from an elitist cultural standpoint, one that would assume an elevated level of European refinement in contrast to an avowed American crudeness. What remains unquestioned in either case, however, is the consideration of whether efforts to shape international consensus on such justifying standards is not merely the extension of old colonial rivalries into the territory of Third World processes of professionalization under the guise of objectivity.

Indeed, promotion of "the extension of the boundaries of architectural practice" and "increasing the responsible mobility of architects and their ability

to provide services in foreign jurisdictions" are the stated motives of these efforts to extend the logic guiding the liberalization of international trade policies concerning commodities to those governing trade in professional services.20 While collaboration between foreign and resident architects is mandated as a necessary cultural condition of border crossing in architectural practice, the UIA policies governing something as basic as the procurement of architectural services vary in fundamental ways between the European and American spheres. Accepting as an international norm of professional practice that architects are "traditionally remunerated in accordance with either mandatory or recommended professional fee-scales," the UIA accord ignores anti-trust provisions in the U.S. legal environment which proscribe such feesetting as a monopolistic practice in conflict with the public good.21 Thus, competition for commissions on the basis of price, an inevitable if problematical outcome of several consent decrees between the U.S. Department of Justice and the American Institute of Architects since the 1970's, is eschewed by the European Union and the World Trade Organization as an approach potentially "compromising design quality and therefore the quality, amenity and social/economic value of the built environment."22 If such basic considerations as these are in dispute in the assumptions governing relationships between U.S. and European architectural practice—one forged from so much common history and tradition—then how can it be expected that such overarching principles and policies as those promoted by the UIA could apply across even more divergent cultural and juridical lines? While taking up such a complex research question is beyond the scope of this paper, it is evident nonetheless that the promotion of Euro-American conceptions of architectural professionalism, a reformed ideal only slightly modifying the old Anglo-American paradigm of professions, is at the root of universalizing standards. Is the inevitable outcome of such efforts merely the reproduction across the world of the same dilemmas and dialectics that bind-in both senses of the word—architecture in the western tradition?

The jurisdictional competition over areas of expertise has been especially evident in the history of architecture in the west, where knowledge of the meaning and the technics of construction—sometimes united, sometimes divided—has been

in dispute for ages. As a complex enterprise requiring organization, division of labor, and specialized skills, the frustrated efforts of the Tower of Babel serve as a potent allegory symbolically justifying the necessity of singular vision in directing the efforts of many hands. Whether that guiding spirit belonged to God or to the patron or to some intermediary between the conceivers and the executors of the work has fostered a thorny problem of attribution. The Italian Renaissance model of the visionary artist supported by the patron and directing the efforts of the manual laborers, suggested in part by Vasari's The Lives of the Artists (1550), has proven to be an influential model, one embodied in the institution, following the French Revolution, of the École des Beaux-Arts. But equally significant for the development of the modern "profession" of architecture was the articulation of a clear distinction, manifested in the establishment of the Ecole Polytechnique, between the intellectual spheres of the artist/architect and the engineer. The double division of knowledge about building—first between conception and realization in the differentiation of architect and builder; and then between art and science in the separation of architecture from engineering—has left the architect with a highly circumscribed role to play.

Magali Sarfatti Larson, a sociologist who studies and has written extensively on the profession of architecture, focuses upon several of these issues in her examination of the historical definition of the architect's role.23 Larson reframes this bifurcation of knowledge in terms of what she calls the telos and the techne of building, roughly meaning "conception and execution, symbolic intention and materialization."24 Tracing the historical role of architecture as "an expression of social stratification," she associates the telos of building with charismatic authority of the patron, for example the special role of architecture in symbolizing the king in a monarchical society. In such a case, the charisma of the king is transferred, with the architect serving as mediator, directly into the architecture, and it is that same charisma which is the quality differentiating architecture from mere building. In that process of transference, the architect in effect "borrows" the charisma of the king in order to imbue the edifice with that special quality. The structure of relations between artist/architect and patron in the Renaissance, however, allows the tables to be turned. In effect, the artist/architect has taken possession of the charisma, through the process of artistic creation, which the artist then lends to the patron through the possession of the work of art. With the proliferation of private clients, architecture then becomes mere status symbol; as architecture becomes thus commodified, the *telos* of architecture, understood here as its pure symbolic intent, becomes essentialized as architectural discourse.²⁵

In a market economy, therefore, the significance of the telos tends to devolve while the emphasis upon techne, understood in terms of ever more efficient and economical technological means (Marx's constant revolutionizing of production) becomes the dominant concern. ²⁶ The result, Larson says, is the "superfluousness of architectural expertise." Her explanation of this tendency is not lain upon the head of "art" per se, but rather on the fact that in the value system of our time, expertise based upon art is simply more easy to discount and resist than one based upon science. The only thing exceptional about architecture as a profession, she claims, is the fact that architecture has been so incapable of establishing a monopoly in the marketplace because of its vulnerability to adjacent jurisdictions for services.27

While generally agreeing with Larson on the point of the relative weakness of architecture's professional jurisdiction, Eliot Freidson nonetheless disagrees with her on the full significance of the association of architecture with the arts. He feels that this very "association of the profession with the arts and with theory rather than with the merely practical, gains its practitioners much more public prestige than builders, developers, and construction engineers can attain and permits the more successful of them to have social and cultural ties with the economic and political elite."28 Furthermore, as others argue, prominent or "star" architects such as Rem Koolhaas or Sir Norman Foster who practice widely across geographic and cultural divides demonstrate the emergence of a new kind of global architectural practice. That practice extends beyond old categories of international professional prominence as previously understood. It combines the personal fame of an individual with the collective capacities of corporatized management along with instantaneous communications and marketing capacities to yield globally recognizable brands desirable in

their own rights as markers of institutional and international status.²⁹

Both Larson's and Freidson's points of view, in their respective focuses upon architecture as the special reserve of a cultural elite, seem to uncritically accept, however, a rarefied conception of art in society, ignoring what must be admitted, in their own terms, as the social stratification of the architectural profession itself. While it is granted that many bourgeois consumers of architectural services—whether for private, commercial, or institutional uses—are solely interested in the conspicuous display of their cultural credentials at the same time that others are primarily concerned with the economic optimization of building, it might also be demonstrated that there are cases in which the procurement of architectural services is understood as a deliberate attempt to resist the commodification of history, experience, and value through the construction of a more meaningful, particularized, and authentic environment for practicing the little arts and ideals of everyday life. Furthermore, it may be argued that the global marketplace for architectural services, and the institutions that educate architects, must necessarily inflect toward the special conditions of climate, energy and resource availability, and the socioeconomic division of labor that reign in real places at the local scale. Otherwise, as Paolo Tombesi suggests, "The focus on the local as determinant of culturally informed professional practice is replaced by specialized focus on practice's two universal components: technology and the arts. Instead of cuisine, we get a cart full of groceries."30

This overly schematic account of theories of professionalization is meant to suggest the range of differences that can complicate any unified typology of professionalism—even within a single profession such as architecture—when considered from the narrow perspective of western capitalist democracies. Yet the forces of economic globalization mean that these divergent forms of professional power now come into contact with each other on a regular basis. How should we prepare students to encounter, to understand, and to respect these differences even as the global rationalization of markets through unified trade communities encourages the dissolution of old protectionist barriers and the standardization of architectural practice? This paper is meant to

suggest that a critical approach to professionalism is essential to this task. Rather than a perfunctory review of the *Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, the very notion of professionalism must be challenged and stripped of its dogmatic assumptions. To modify only slightly Edward Said's prescription for theory, substituting instead the notion of professionalism, by which we mean "theory of professions," we come to this pedagogical proposition:

"To measure the distance between [professionalism] then and now, there and here, to record the encounter of [professionalism] with resistances to it, to move skeptically in the broader political world where such things as the humanities or the great classics ought to be seen as small provinces of the human venture, to map the territory covered by all the techniques of dissemination, communications, and interpretation, to preserve some modest (perhaps shrinking) belief in non-coercive human community: if these are not imperatives, they do at least seem to be attractive alternatives. And what is critical consciousness at bottom if not an unstoppable predilection for alternatives?"³¹

As architects, as well as members of other professions, travel today in whatever directions, we must prepare them upon their returns home to re-encounter their own professional practices and to recognize them anew not as unitary, not as dominant, but as part of some ironically-emergent, globally-engendered, yet culturally-specific professional ideal.

ENDNOTES

- 1. Edward W. Said, "Traveling Theory," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 226.
- 2. Indeed, it is likely that this appropriation of Said's words and ideas in fact proves his thesis pertaining to the tendency of theories to travel and to be irrevocably changed in their transit.
- 3. Eliot Freidson, *Professionalism : The Third Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 133-41.
- 4. Ibid., 140.
- 5. Elliott A. Krause, *Death of the Guilds: Professions, States, and the Advance of Capitalism, 1930 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 29-36
- 6. Ibid., 36-49.

- 7. Ibid., 60-67.
- 8. Ibid., 123-30.
- 9. See also Michael Burrage, "Beyond a Sub-Set: The Professional Aspirations of Manual Workers in France, the United States and Britain," in *Professions in Theory and History: Rethinking the Study of the Professions*, ed. Michael Burrage and Rolf Torstendahl (London; Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990), 153.
- 10. Krause, Death of the Guilds: Professions, States, and the Advance of Capitalism, 1930 to the Present, 130-39.
- 11. Ibid., 154-63.
- 12. See, for example A.M. Carr-Saunders and P.A. Wilson, "Professions," in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. Edwin R.A. Seligman (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1948).; Samuel Haber, *The Quest for Authority and Honor in the American Professions, 1750-1900* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).; and Bruce A. Kimball, *The "True Professional Ideal" In America: A History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992).
- 13. See, for example Talcott Parsons, "Professions," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills (New York: The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, 1968).; and Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).
- 14. See, for example Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism : A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).; Freidson, *Professionalism : The Third Logic.*; Keith M. Macdonald, *The Sociology of the Professions* (London: SAGE Publications, 1995).; and Krause, *Death of the Guilds : Professions, States, and the Advance of Capitalism, 1930 to the Present.*
- 15. U.I.A. General Secretariat, *Union Internationale D'architecture Working Bodies Commissions Professional Practice* [World-Wide Web] (U.I.A., 15 June 2007 [cited 3 December 2007]); available from http://www.uia-architectes.org/texte/england/Menu-4/2-Commissions-b.html.
- 16. U.I.A. Professional Practice Commission, "U.I.A. Accord on Recommended International Standards of Professionalism in Architectural Practice, Third Edition," (Paris: International Union of Architects, 2006), 9.
- 17. Ibid., 13.
- 18. See, for example, the statutes pertaining the practice of architecture in the State of Georgia.

- 20. U.I.A. Professional Practice Commission, "U.I.A. Accord on Recommended International Standards of Professionalism in Architectural Practice, Third Edition,"
- 21. Ibid., 19-20.
- 22. Cecil D. Elliott, *The American Architect from the Colonial Era to the Present* (McFarland & Co., 2003), 165-66.
- 23. Magali Sarfatti Larson, "Emblem and Exception: The Historical Definition of the Architect's Professional Role," in *Professionals and Urban Form*, ed. Judith R. Blau, Mark La Gory, and John Pipkin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).
- 24. Ibid., 53.
- 25. While insightful, Larson's scheme does not account for the jurisdictional variability of professional expertise across cultures which affect the division between telos and techne in architectural design. For example, a greater level of integration between architecture and engineering in, say, German education and practice as compared to those in the United States is a result of historically derived and philosophically differentiated attitudes toward the articulation of expert labor.
- 26. Larson, "Emblem and Exception: The Historical Definition of the Architect's Professional Role," 59-64.
- 27. Ibid., 75-6.
- 28. Freidson, Professionalism: The Third Logic, 171-3.
- 29. Donald McNeill, "In Search of the Global Architect: The Case of Norman Foster (and Partners)," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29, no. 3 (2005): 501-15.
- 30. Paolo Tombesi, "Super Market: The Globalization of Architectural Production," *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 17 (2002-2003): 30. See also Paolo Tombesi, Gharat Dave, and Peter Scriver, "Routine Production or Symbolic Analysis? India and the Globalisation of Architectural Services," *The Journal of Architecture* 8, no. 1 (2003): 63-94.
- 31. Said, "Traveling Theory," 247.