

Mirror, Mirror....

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REFLECTIONS ON THE HIDDEN

The vast majority of architects are no longer independent designers, but part of complex design teams working with and across different disciplines. But there is resistance to professional and educational evolution ingrained in the enculturation and historic identity of architects as independent creative designers, the hidden curriculum. As long as we continue to look into the mirror for answers, are we really likely to change?

Sociological models of professionalism have the potential to provide insight into how the profession can redefine and realign academic and professional knowledge. From his field research in architecture, sociologist Robert Gutman observed that 'Most schools are still inclined to educate students as if every architect will be a designer', and that there was a strong belief in the profession that design is the core skill, which should be the aim of everyone working in the field (Gutman, 2010). Educational achievement and professional recognition did not result in a collegiate and egalitarian work environment. Gutman linked this to an oversupply of university qualified architects, and the value of artistry and design within the profession. He noted that although design was typically less than 10% of the time required in the tasks for a project, it was the driving ambition for most young architects.

Recent studies on anticipatory socialization (Sang et al., 2009) and applied psychology have suggested inwardness, 'otherness', loyalty to the discipline and individual artistic design informs early professional identity, in contrast to the regions of knowledge which inform practice. If this is a problem, why should the primacy of design continue to be promoted in Architectural education? What are the alternatives?

Sir John Soane defined the role of the 'Architect' as a designer, and as a cultured intermediary between his client and the construction industry, based on ethics, transparency, and impartiality (Duffy CBE, Rabeneck, & Du, 2013). A professional duty of care was inherent in the title, to exercise fairness in judgment between the competing claims of clients, builders, and craftsmen. Architects were deemed to have artistic, ethical and managerial roles, which justified professional status, and set them above physical labourers and makers.

As the architectural profession has expanded and evolved over the past two centuries, the idealistic advantages of Soane's writings have been set aside in pursuit of commerce, efficiency, and social status. Once the valued designer, and ethical confident of clients, the architect is often no longer the intermediary between those with money and those who construct — society now has professional project managers, contractors, and developers.

Gutman described the problem of architectural professionalism as a result of the dual identity of architects, as artists

committed to individual visions of what is important and real in building, and as practitioners committed to designing buildings that will meet client requirements, stand up and endure (Gutman, 2010). Ironically, as the profession has reached a turning point in status, it is the idealism identified by Soane, and the measure of potential benefits to society, public good, research and environment that could help redefine the profession.

