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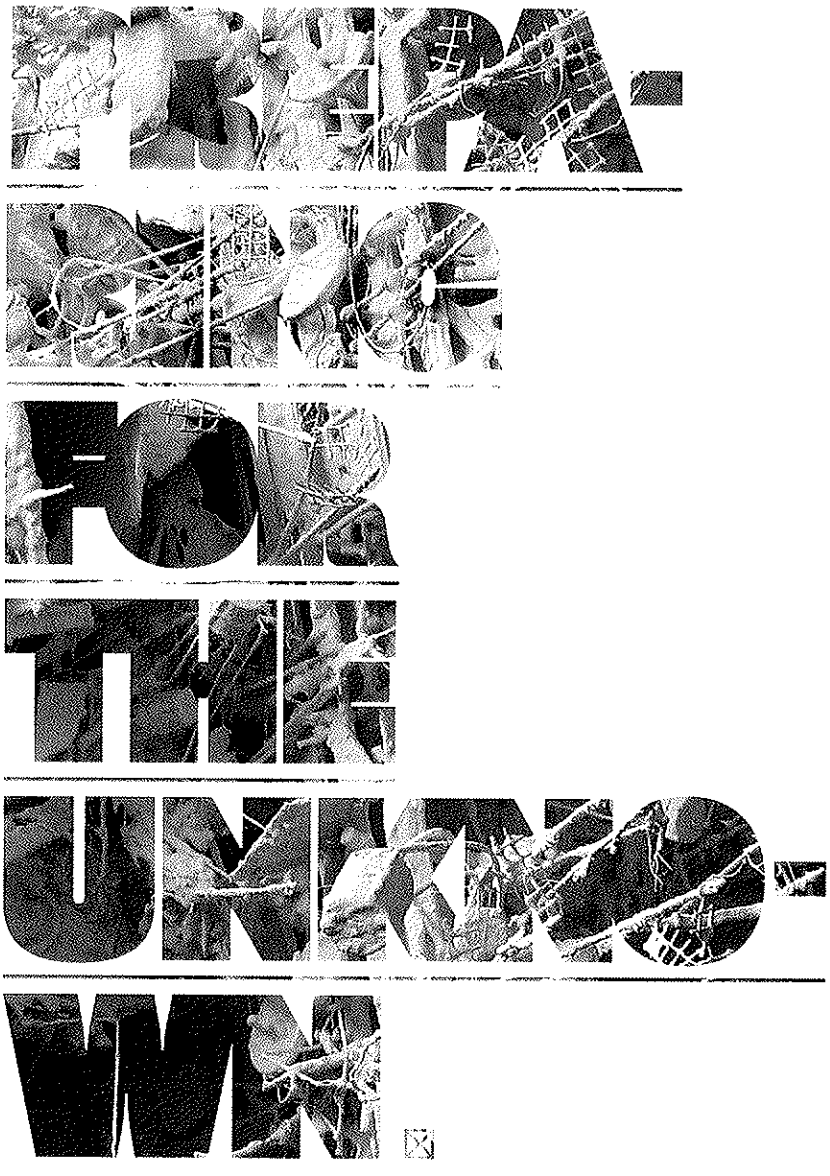

URE FU
S. STOCK

"The profession as we know it is in crisis!" We hear this often, in the western world at least, and most vigorously from those architects who feel wedged by contemporary developments of cities and the correspondingly diminished role for architects. To cite just one example, the recent RIBA "Building Futures" study describes a scenario whereby the medium-sized and boutique practice (which so dominate contemporary design discourse) might be obsolete by 2025, its space having been eaten away by large conglomerates from one direction and nimble single-skill consultancies on the other. This study and the related discourse around these issues suggests that we can barely cope with the "known." How then can we possibly anticipate the "unknown" as CONDITIONS has asked us to do, and how then can we possibly chart a course toward it?

URE FUT
S. SHOC

– the known and unknown

The "future" is something which manifests nowhere more potently than in our cities. The massive urbanization underway at present positions the city as the site which provides us with key evidence of change. Yet a substantial transformation over the past twenty years in the way cities are being made – both in terms of their economy and finance and the accompanying managerial approach to city making – has drastically altered the context for architects and challenged the way the profession itself is currently constructed.

It would thus appear that two issues are working together to reduce the traditional role of the architect:

1. The forces beyond architecture, which have positioned the profession in a marginalised role.
2. The extent to which the profession has been complicit in reinforcing its reduced role by responding slowly to these forces and/or adopting the role and rhetoric of a victim to forces beyond one's control.

1 Jamieson, Clare. *The Future for Architects*, RIBA (Building Futures), London, 2010
2 Larson, Magali Sarfatti. *Behind the Postmodern Façade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth Century America*, University of California Press Ltd, London, 1993.
3 Larson, Magali Sarfatti. *Behind the Postmodern Façade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth Century America*, University of California Press Ltd, London, 1993. p14
4 Larson, Magali Sarfatti. *Behind the Postmodern Façade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth Century America*, University of California Press Ltd, London, 1993. p18
5 Larson, Magali Sarfatti. *Behind the Postmodern Façade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth Century America*, University of California Press Ltd, London, 1993. p18
6 Betsky, Aaron. *Out There: Architect Beyond Building* on http://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/history/11.html?back=true last accessed 28.04.2011
7 van Schaik, Leon. *Spatial Intelligence: New Futures for Architecture (Architectural Design Primer)*. Wiley, London, 2008.

The outcome is that the architect has gradually been replaced in the making of cities by the strategic designer, the management consultant and the futurologist. While these various consultants have skills and knowledge necessary for participation in contemporary city-making, they rarely have the capacity to spatialize this knowledge and then fully understand the implications of these spatial models as architects can. At the same time, massive changes have occurred within the traditional domain of architectural practice itself. The historically simple exercise of building has given way to a highly managed process relying on an exponential increase in the involvement of consultants who are specialized to address the technical, logistical and legal frameworks, which continue to increase with complexity. The result is a flood of new consultancy types onto the market, which in turn has driven a marginalization of the architect within what has been their professional domain. The continuation of this pattern could result in the end of the profession as we know it, as design services are added into the skillsets of large building services consultancies. This trend has already started as the larger engineering consultancies continue to expand via a range of acquisitions, which include landscape architecture and architecture firms. This sensation within the profession of being squeezed from all sides is not surprising given the way it has been constructed. Almost 20 years ago, Magali Sarfatti Larson wrote convincingly of the paradoxical bind between autonomy and heteronomy in the profession.[2] She noted that the "autonomous pursuit of architecture and the heteronomous conditions of its making insert a permanent contradiction into the heart of the profession's practice and even of its discourse"[3] – a contradiction that we have failed to convincingly address on a regular basis in either education or practice.

Larson suggests that not only have we failed to tackle this autonomy-heteronomy paradox, but we have further diminished the architect's role, retreating "from the aspiration of 'building cities' and instead have moved toward the design of single objects, however gigantic or prototypical."[4] As a consequence of this, Larson notes that "architecture has lost the connection with the organization of state power, a connection it had in the age of the baroque, but it still provides the most effective symbolic expression of the state's presence."[5]

Nowhere has this focus on autonomy and the retreat from the city been cultivated more so than in schools of architecture. The great advantage of a school – its own autonomy – has resulted in a culture of promoting the cult of the gifted form-maker at the expense of most other facets of the profession, and where the complex and dirty business of making buildings in a political and economic context is rarely addressed well. Outside the best schools – Harvard's recent exploration of "ecological urbanism" might be a case in point – political and economic issues are often dealt with as abstraction at best and studio projects are rarely grounded with precise cases or precise action. Further, students are often encouraged that the answer to these complex problems lies first in formal responses, rather than being taught to propose new conditions which in turn may generate formal opportunities. This tendency has been compounded by the fact that – again, with some exceptions – university structures tend to complicate the engagement of professionals in anything other than marginal roles. Subsequently, the primary engine driving most schools is staff on an academic career path which, by its nature, means that few have experience to teach about the pointy end of architectural practice and project delivery. Not surprisingly, study programs driven by a tangible engagement with the processes of either city making or building procurement are few in number, and interest in them is not cultivated. We are left with the bizarre situation in the Western world where architectural education programs contain very little content that can be related to the skillset on which basis the profession has been constructed in a legal sense.

Despite these challenges, I imagine a future where the architect re-appears in a position of consequence and relevance in regard to making the city. This requires that the profession is reconsidered and reconfigured. I suggest the appropriate arena in which to do this is education, as it is in those being educated that the future of the profession lies. There are two lenses through which I suggest this transformation of the profession can occur, both of which involve the ability to discuss our competencies

8 Reinmuth, Gerard (ed). *A Beaux Arts Education for the 21st Century*, B, Copenhagen, 2011. p22
9 Reinmuth, Gerard (ed). *A Beaux Arts Education for the 21st Century*, B, Copenhagen, 2011. p22
10 Reinmuth, Gerard (ed). *A Beaux Arts Education for the 21st Century*, B, Copenhagen, 2011. p21
11 Reinmuth, Gerard (ed). *A Beaux Arts Education for the 21st Century*, B, Copenhagen, 2011. P17

beyond the remit of building-making, but do not diminish the importance of building-making to our specific disciplinary knowledge.

The first of these lenses relies on Aaron Betsky and his differentiation between architecture and building. This differentiation is important for the simple fact that Betsky re-thinks architecture as a practice which is intellectual and projective in nature and deals with complex problems that might be addressed via a range of outputs or actions. Thus the design and construction of buildings is not eliminated from the architect's repertoire but rather is understood in a new context as one of many tools at the architect's disposal.

Betsky's simple redefinition of architecture and building provides a conceptual trigger for re-thinking the profession. In his curatorial position for the 11th Venice Biennale of Architecture, Betsky noted that buildings are "just objects, and the action of constructing only generates built-objects; architecture has nothing to do with this. It has more to do with thinking and arguing about buildings. It is the way they are designed that matters."[6] The value of Betsky's clear delineation between architecture and building is two-fold. First, his idea that architecture might be thinking and arguing about buildings (or cities) suggests a repositioning of the role of the architect from "building designer" to that of "public intellectual in the field of city making" and in doing so allows the profession to recapture the field of thinking about and working with cities. Secondly, in regard to buildings more specifically, Betsky's position means that we can no longer look at a building and say

"what a great piece of architecture." Rather, we might now say "what a great building" as it is a building like any other but has an exceptional quality as a result of the architectural position and research instrumentalized in its making.

The distinction between architecture and building is important, for we can now question how to locate the significance of the spatial ability which so defines an architect's capacity to address complex problems and to clearly articulate spatial propositions to address them. Of the many ways this idea might be extended, I suggest that the concept of spatial intelligence as redescribed by Leon van Schaik is particularly useful.[7] Van Schaik's foregrounding of the term "spatial intelligence" gives specific focus to Betsky's distinction between architecture and building by isolating the key competency which underpins an architect's projective capacity.

Van Schaik's thesis is that the architectural profession formalized around the wrong body of knowledge (building) and instead should have professionalized around the concept of spatial intelligence. Since van Schaik is correct about the focus on building – in the western world at least, the title "architect" is designated after sitting through a range of exams that test a graduate's ability to address problems related to construction, contracts and consultant coordination – the autonomy-heteronomy distinction as laid down by Sarfatti Larson is complicated further. For if we accept that Larsen is also correct – that the autonomy of architecture lies in its artistic component – van Schaik's conception of architecture as having professionalized in the field of building points to a complete confusion in regard to our disciplinary boundaries. This confusion in describing the discipline leads to the current sense of crisis in the profession and is perpetuated by the inability of architects to explain their particular capacity to external.

The danger in both Betsky and van Schaik's positions is that the status of making as a core element in an architect's particular intelligence is unclear. Yet, with the recent appropriation of the term "material culture" within the professional discourse, there is clearly an awareness that the extension of the profession cannot occur at the expense of discarding what it is that so particularizes our ability to enact conceptual material. The interest in van Schaik's foregrounding of spatial intelligence is that it allows us to describe a key skill we already possess and which is fundamental to making buildings or cities, which, with Betsky's perspective enables the profession to expand its conception of what it does. Armed with a better understanding of the machinations of city making we can therefore redeploy these skills with greater potency.

In framing an approach to architectural education in light of these perspectives, I suggest that an answer might lie between the differing conceptions of architectural education at two universities where I am engaged as Professor: the Aarhus School of Architecture in Denmark and the University of Technology (UTS) Sydney. The two schools are not presented here as ideal examples but rather as exemplars of two traditions – Aarhus being an arts school while UTS still contains its legacy as a technical college. That the schools come from completely different traditions and contexts suggests that my blending of the two might at first seem like a recipe for a lack of cohesion. Yet I suggest the two approaches are in fact complementary and, if coupled, could constitute a reconsideration or reconstitution of the architect.

The Aarhus School of Architecture is conceived in the Beaux Arts tradition[8] and as such is founded on an educational premise based 'more on skill than on knowledge'.[9] This emphasis on skill, and the subsequent focus on one's individual creative talent, ties neatly into the concept of self-realization, which so profoundly underpins Danish education as a whole.[10] The vehicle via which this skill is cultivated is the design studio. Unlike most schools internationally – which understand the studio in the context of a range of subjects aimed at building expertise in related areas such as theory, history, structure and so on – the Aarhus School of Architecture positions the design studio as the sole subject in the curriculum with all other inputs occurring through this studio environment.

The radicalism of this approach is what makes the Aarhus School of Architecture (AAA) so distinctive. Anders Gammelgaard and Anne Elisabeth Toft who developed the current first year program at Aarhus have noted that "emphasis is placed on the students' working out an independent architectural expression, a response or suggestion for problem-solving the issues raised by an exercise or assignment."[11] This independent architectural expression is developed via a series of techniques aimed at instilling a deep aesthetic sensibility, a familiarity with materials and an insistence on quality. You could say that the first year course at Aarhus is an ultimate primer in the development of a personal spatial intelligence as understood by van Schaik, without losing the connection with making as a fundamental driver in developing this intelligence.

Where Aarhus is less convincing is at the moment where the strength of UTS is at its greatest. This is the space between the development of a deep sense of one's own spatial intelligence and the delivery of strategies and perspectives that locate this intelligence in a contemporary practice context.

A negative aspect of the complete dominance of the studio at the Aarhus School of Architecture is that theory, history and professional studies are marginalized to the point that they barely exist. Further, there are no studies about the profession of architecture and its practice, running a business or positioning the architect in the city, despite the fact that half of graduates from the school still move into the profession, and those who don't often take roles in building procurement or in city councils and similar organizations.

At the University of Technology in Sydney the studio is balanced by a suite of subjects on professional practice which dissect the various aspects of the profession as it is constructed now and could be imagined in the future. Further, many of the studios at UTS are run in dialogue with the issues being raised in the professional practice stream in an attempt to instrumentalize these lessons in the design of objects and thus integrate the course.

The professional practice stream at UTS has not only been recently transformed in response to some of the issues I have outlined above, but has insisted that these four subjects – the Profession, Finance and Project Management, Advocacy and The City – are understood as a core part of the Master's degree. In "The Profession" students are taught to reflect on the profession as it is currently constructed via interviews with architects, comparisons with other professions, and projections about how the students might best tackle the future (and whether they will even call themselves "architects" in this future). Complementary to this projective subject are Finance and Project Management. These subjects deal with the skills that must be gained to pass the exams, which in the western world are the path to being conferred the title of architect. It is these skills – management of contracts, construction documentation, coordinating with subcontractors and so on – that have let down the profession over the past 20 years. The view is that as long as these competencies remain part of our professional remit we should endeavour to excel in them to avoid losing further ground.

"Advocacy" turns again to the projective potential in the architects' role and how architects might better understand how to frame their arguments in the various public arenas where they may be able to exert the influence that contributes to the making of the city. Finally, in the subject titled "The City," the role of the architect is examined in the broad context of city-making. Via a lecture series and assignments, the students are made aware of the various forces acting in the city and where the architect currently sits in the context of the decision making machinery that drives city development. Politicians, economists, planners, developers and strategic designers all address the students, after which some leading architects are invited to give their perspective. Students can of course see that even leading architects are part of a sticky environment where much of the ground is laid down by others before architects are invited to be involved. Students are then asked to imagine a different future for the architect and to consider how they might reposition themselves in the political and economic structures related to city making.

By this very simple exercise – coupling the Bachelor component of the Aarhus degree and the master's component of the UTS degree – we can start to see how the education of the architect might be reformed around Betsky and van Schaik's positions. Bachelor students would be invited to develop a deep aesthetic sensibility in the context of their own spatial intelligence and through the realm of making things. In the master's program, the platform provided by this spatial education would be reinforced by a professional degree that includes a comprehensive analysis of the profession from a number of perspectives. By confronting students who have developed a strong spatial sensibility with a thorough dissection of the role of the architect now and by asking them to imagine different futures, we can start the chain of events whereby we start to see the profession differently, and in turn develop the skills to encourage others to do the same.

Radically – in the western world at least – the professionalization of the architect may become irrelevant as a new breed of spatially literate and competent graduates enter the market with the spatial and intellectual tools to make a difference at various points within the political and economic systems driving city making. Future graduates can then enter the business of making cities and the buildings within them, armed with the ability to articulate and demonstrate the power of spatial thinking while also having a broad perspective on how cities are made and how their spatial intelligence can make a significant contribution. We may not be able to predict the future, but by teaching students to value their spatial ability and to be critical thinkers, we will have prepared them for the unknown.

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