
FORCES OF CHANGE: PAST AND PRESENT

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INTRODUCTION

Richard M. Bennett begins his article entitled, “The Direction of Architecture,” by outlining the forces of change in architecture in 1946:

Although concern with its [architecture’s] future direction must begin with the social and economic forces that activate our time, the final considerations that seem most provocative today are: (1) change in the architect’s scope and methods; (2) greater concern on the part of architects with city and regional planning; (3) a more organic relation to nature; (4) new materials and technologies....¹

His observations were based on the time in which he lived, but they could easily be applied to architectural education or practice today. Unemployment among architects, sustainability, digital tools, and transformation in building technologies have led us to a point where architecture and the role of the architect are said to be on uncertain grounds. In January 2011, *Architectural Record* asked, ‘What Now?’ and author Clifford A. Pearson provided an insight into the mood of the profession, “...the start of 2011 seems like a particularly confusing moment with architects facing a crossroads in terms of social and professional priorities, economic concerns, and design approaches.”²

Both of these examples, one historic and one contemporary, question the state of architecture and the future of the profession. In addition they illustrate that change is a recurring topic in architectural literature. Are the current themes of change new? What does change mean in architecture? Can today’s architects develop better answers than those of the past? And, what can be learned from the profession’s previous endeavors?

This paper examines change in architecture by reviewing and analyzing selected articles from periodicals such as *Architectural Record* and *Journal of Architectural Education* over the past century. These sources will be used to identify important issues, look for patterns within the professional environment, and examine the discourse of change itself. The goal of this paper is to provide context for the current discussion of change and see if there are indicators for the timing of the articles such as economic conditions.

Methodology

Change in architecture is as complex as architecture itself. There are many ways to identify and evaluate change within the field. Focusing

on the profession alone, subfields can indicate the different ways that practice is being conducted. For example, professional contracts, models of practice structures, market value/fee structure, tools used in practice, who practices architecture (who is allowed), and salary in relation to economic class can all be examined over the last century. For the purpose of this paper, a scope must be defined. Rather than looking at the topic by focusing on a very specific area like contract development, a broader approach will be taken to look at change when it is raised in the architectural press. The argument here is that along with specific conversations, the idea of change percolates through the field at certain instances and is in the forefront of a collective consciousness. By identifying common themes and the volume of occurrences of the ‘call for change,’ the discourse of change can be evaluated and one can determine if the questions raised are similar from generation to generation.

The sources used in this study are a combination of trade and scholarly English language journals. This selection was based on the premise that change is sensitive to time and circumstance. In theory, weekly or monthly periodicals are more receptive to topical conversations and more likely to capture it than books which appear less regularly.³

Approximately one hundred twenty journal articles were examined. In the United States, the periodicals with the most number of titles examined were *Architectural Record*, the *Journal of the AIA*, *Progressive Architecture*, and the *Journal of Architectural Education* (JAE). In the United Kingdom, the *Architects’ Journal* and the *RIBA Journal* addressed the topic most frequently. Journals of professional architectural institutions and popular trade magazines were more likely to address the subject of change than those journals focused on design. The authors of the articles varied and included practicing architects, architectural critics, educators, and presidents of professional institutions. The qualifications of the authors are by no means uniform. Nor do all of the authors claim to speak for everyone. However, the publication of the various contributions is used to indicate a general mood of the field at different points in time.

Articles were found using index searches of ‘Architecture and Change’, ‘Architecture as a profession’, and ‘Architecture in Crisis.’ While several indexes were used, the Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals and the RIBA Online Catalog were the most useful. It also should be noted that a majority of the articles found occurred

after 1960. One reason for this is that the number of architectural publications increased in the last half of the twentieth century. As the printing technology advanced and railroad access and agreements with the post office occurred, the number and quality of periodicals increased.⁴ The start of American architectural periodicals was small and took a while to establish. In 1859, the American architectural journal, *Architect's and Mechanic's Journal*⁵, was published. It was the first of many of the early American publications that would be modeled after existing London journals.⁶

Themes

A survey of the articles found that there were multiple issues raised by their authors. Four primary themes were identified that encapsulated many of the concerns of the authors: the idea that the pace of change has never been so rapid; a concern with public perception; that profound change is needed to save the architectural profession; and that education is in need of reform. Twenty-five topics or sub-themes appeared five or more times. Some of topics were country specific such as legal liability in the late 1980s in the United States and deregulation of architects in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s. A discussion of the main themes and subthemes follows.

Change has never been so rapid

Many authors suggested that as architecture is linked to the era in which it was created, so can societal or technological change impact the profession. As one author reflects, "Society, through complex individual and group motivations and decisions, determines the kind of building an architect can build, decides its value in the scale of over-all objectives."⁷ In addition, the pace of this change is cited as being extraordinary and unlike anything that has come before. An article from 1920 in the *American Architect* proclaims "In all the world's history, there has been never an epoch like that to which we are come."⁸ Given that this statement was made in the aftermath of the Great War, there is truth in this statement. However, thirty percent of the articles reviewed from each of the last nine decades raise this same issue. Is it possible to have dramatic change constantly? The claim of rapid change does give the authors the ability to speak of the uniqueness of their current situation. As society has never been so dramatically changed, no one who has come before could understand what this generation is facing. *Architectural Journal* demonstrates this position with one piece titled, "The Crisis of the New Profession"(1981). "Since 1945, the architectural profession has changed so profoundly that its present form has neither historical precedent nor foreseeable future."⁹

Included in the pace of change discussion is a focus on technology. Advances in technology have brought to the architect a working environment that is different and more challenging than that of the past. The growth of information and the technology employed is too complex for one person to handle. This is a statement that could easily be said today, but it has been said before. In 1958, an article from the *Journal of Architectural Education* pointed out:

"The *practice of architecture* has changed over the years. In 1900, one man could know practically everything required for architectural practice. Today, one man can be thoroughly proficient in only a limited area, and consulting engineering services are needed."¹⁰

Yet the same argument thread can be found in an 1899 article:

In all the above classes of buildings¹¹ the knowledge requisite for the proper execution of the buildings is very considerable: constructional knowledge covering masonry with various methods of laying foundations to carry great weight, complicated engineering problems, steel construction, timber work, joinery and plastering and other trades; besides these a knowledge, both practical and theoretical, of laws of sanitation, of heating and ventilation, of electric work and its application for power, light and heat; this knowledge the architect must himself possess or *must pay some one to apply for him*.¹² (Emphasis added)

Technology does change and architecture as a consequence. A 1987 article, "A Time of Relentless Technological Change,"¹³ lists changes in materials, structure and services over a seventy-five year period—two examples being the advancement of concrete construction and steel frame systems. Also, there is a broad literature on technology and the changes that have occurred. Why then is there the need to continue this broad-stroke discussion of technological change in relation to the architect? And, why has it not varied with time? In part, the reflection on new technologies in comparison to the previous ones is a romanticizing of the past. By dramatizing the challenges of technology, it is easier to believe that a better architect could make better architecture when things were not so difficult. The architect as a professional was seen to have more stature when an architect was able to do everything himself.¹⁴

The concern with public perception

Another major theme is the concern within the field about the public perception of the architect. The topic is discussed in the terms of gaining and losing position in society, finding clients, and in the remuneration of architects. Thirty-five percent of the articles reviewed deal with these ideas. Early discussions on the topic yielded hopeful yet serious evaluations on the view of the architect. "The high standing, well earned by the architectural profession by its past acts and proved and tested by long years, is a precious asset that must not be lightly ignored," said the *American Architect* in 1920.¹⁵ Later publications commiserated about the loss of stature. "In the years after World War Two, the architectural profession achieved a measure of public acceptance of its importance which it has since lost, in a process akin to the devaluation of currency."¹⁶ Public perception is an internal discussion within the field, yet it is perceived by those in it as having real impact on the community of architects.

One important reason for the concern regarding loss of the public perception is that the 'public' in the form of a client hires an architect. An early AIA report stated, "Architectural success, in the highest sense of the term is dependent not only on the merit of architects, but also on the capacity of the public to recognize such merit."¹⁷ If the public appreciates the skills of the architect, then more business will come. This idea is repeated often in the litera-

ture over time, but no studies conducted to validate the real impact found their way into the articles.

Insecurity about the status of the profession is seen throughout the time period covered by this study. The notion that the public can bestow social status on the architectural profession raises a particular concern. Bluntly said, it is an issue of class. The relevant articles discuss the 'rank' of architects. Architecture defined as a profession implies a level of education and social position. Two points address this issue directly. The first is the comparison with other professions. "Should not architecture, which can claim so much as a concrete and lasting contribution to the best instincts of mankind, as well as a vast field of utilitarianism, command at least a position equal to that of other professions?" one author asks.¹⁸ If architects are seen to be on equal footing with doctors and lawyers, then they have succeeded in obtaining a certain stature. The second point is that without the appropriate level of respect, the architect will not be compensated appropriately to maintain a position in society. "Not only is the remuneration inadequate to the skill required and the actual labor expended ..." but, "The conscientious, hard working architect, endowed with a fair degree of talent, usually gets from his profession an income less than the earnings of a small contractor."²⁰ It is clear from the discussions that architects seek to maintain a certain position in society and to separate themselves from 'builders.'

The Profound Need for Change

A call for the complete reform of the architectural field is one of the most common themes in the articles. The profession needs to change design processes, add skills, increase services offered, decrease scope, modify the way they practice, change the role of the architect, and protect the 'professional turf' of the field. The directions are numerous and at times contradictory. Forty-three percent of the articles give such advice. One interesting discussion thread is the need to see the definition of architect reestablished. Articles like, "Whither the Profession," "Can this Profession be Saved?" and "The Profession is Dead: Long Live the Profession"²¹ look to "...initiate the debate as to what the architectural profession should be, and what it stands for."²² The other side of this discussion points out that because the industry is not able to define what the responsibilities of an architect are, neither can the public nor can the field advance.

Professional turf, a phrase from Thomas Fisher, is a subtheme which echoes the seeming decline of the architect. The erosion of stature is due to "a variety of disciplines from engineering to interior design to construction management... [that are] increasingly competing with architects as equals."²³ What was once under the auspices of the architect is, as some articles suggest, being removed. As a consequence, architects are responsible for less and their impact is declining. "On even the simplest question [the architects] acquiesced to their engineer. It is a small wonder that this great retreat has at last brought us to searching query. What have we left to sell?" states the editor of JAE in 1947.²⁴ In "The Architecture Profession: Can it Be Strengthened?" Roger Tijerino argues that

until architects realize that professions are defined by turf, or professional jurisdiction, the problems are going to continue for the field. Architects are doomed to have the same conversations about change, because few resolutions can occur without understanding the underlying cause of a majority of the problems.²⁵

Reforming education

Included in the repetitive call for change is a subtext that architectural education needs complete and absolute reform. It is a theme that authors have recognized mainly in the last fifty years, and is mentioned in thirty percent of those articles. Topics range from stagnation at the universities to the idea that education reform is the greatest hope for change. Carl Feiss, at an ACSA gathering in 1958, was optimistic but cautious in his thoughts on the matter:

I urge therefore a reappraisal of architectural education. We sometimes forget that it is education and research which shape professional practice.... Looking at the status of our profession, there is little question that you in collegiate schools have today, as never before, this heavy responsibility to train architects for the comprehensive role they have yet to assume.²⁶

Often the harshest critiques come from practitioners who believe that educators are out of touch with practice. One such statement by the 1960 president of the AIA demonstrates this:

I would submit that most schools of architecture have a single objective. They have pictured an architect, they have created a mould, and for better or worse they are trying to cast every student that comes to them in a single mould...This I submit is a limited objective and I would also submit that the schools have notably failed to meet even this goal.²⁷

Seldom do arguments from these architects go beyond stating their utter disappointment in education. Professors of architecture do address the subject of education reform often with great seriousness and depth.

Improved research is another branch of educational reform. An editorial in the first issue of JAE stated, "[Educators] have failed in large measure to see that our teaching lacks forthright factual basis. We pay lip service to the magic word, research, but actual projects and results have been negligible."²⁸ Forty years later, Tom Woolley of the AA, echoed the same theme stating "There has been a failure to establish research and theory," in education.²⁹ This topic is again current and discussed at recent ACSA events.

Economic Conditions in the Time of Change

Looking for patterns on the timing of discussions of change by the architectural press led naturally to an investigation of the economic environment of the past century. Using available data, the first task was to identify recessionary periods in both the US and the UK.³⁰ Each country has a distinct method for defining a recession. In the U.S., the National Bureau for Economic Research (NBER) declares when the economy is in recession after a thorough review of a wide variety of economic indicators. For the U.K., a recession occurs when there is a decline in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for two consecutive quarters.

Next, construction spending was examined as the demand for architectural services is closely aligned to construction activity. Construction data from the United States Census Bureau and the U.K. Office for National Statistics was plotted against recession data [figures 1 and figures 2] leading to a few observations. A decrease in construction spending usually occurs when a recession does, but this is not always the case. During the U.S. recession in 1953, for example, construction spending continued to increase. Also, a decrease in construction spending often bottoms out following the end of a recession as opposed to occurring at the same time. One possible explanation is that projects already in construction when a recession occurs may finish and new projects do not begin until confidence in the economy has returned.

In the articles, twenty-one percent mentioned economic problems directly. Extracting the dates of these articles and finding articles in the list with the same years, one can extrapolate the number

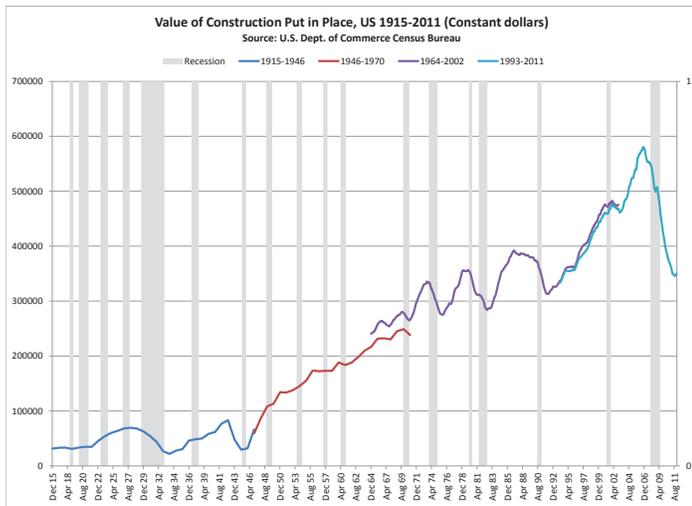


Figure 1. U.S. Construction Spending and Recessions

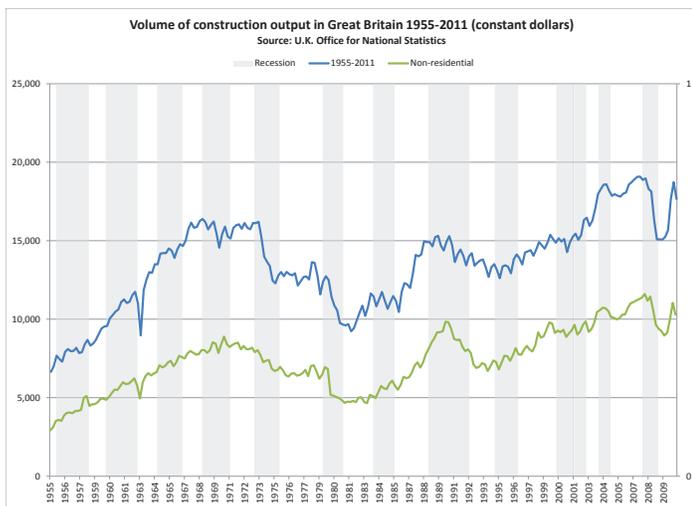


Figure 2. U.K. Construction Spending and Recessions

of articles written during financial difficulties to be thirty-seven percent. In search for a direct correlation between the discourse on change and the economic data, the dates of the articles were then compared both the periods of recession and the construction spending. Four observations were found here.

First, in this subset of articles, a majority of the occurrences coincided with a drop in construction spending, but not when a recession has been declared. In the United States, this can be seen in the 1920s, 1946, early 1990s, and in the last four years. For Britain the articles appear to respond to the lowest points in the construction spending curves such as the mid-1980s, mid-1990s, and early 2010s. Second, there are periods when the articles do not align with a drop in construction spending or a recession. However, there does appear to be an appreciative drop-off in times of perceived prosperity. Third, there are drops in construction spending figures that do not have articles on change within this set. This can be seen the early 70s and early 80s in the U.S. Also, there is one major anomaly in the data. In the 1930s, there was only a single article published in the United States in the collection. The cause of this paucity of articles during this time period needs further study. Fourth, there has been a significant drop in construction spending since 2008. This decline in U.S. construction spending is the steepest drop since the 1930s and may bottom out near the early 1990s values. In Britain, the decline is the steepest since the 1980s. As expected, this decline in construction activity has given rise to considerable introspection in the current AEC community.

To finish the examination of when calls for change are likely to occur, an effort was made to look at employment data for architects to see if a perceived need for change has occurred due to decreases in employment levels. This work focused on American architects as there is difficulty finding consistent data in this area and one country was selected for ease. Employment data can vary due to the way the architects are defined and how the data is collected. Limited as it may be, data from the U.S. Census Bureau's decennial census (1850-2000) and Occupational Employment Survey was used here.

The increase in architectural employment since 1850s can be seen in figure 3. The chart shows that the number of architects in the United States increased by just over 900% between 1940 and 2000. Using data from the same source, the growth in comparable professions is determined. So, while the number of civil engineers increased in that same time frame, the relative increase was only 300%. For doctors and lawyers, the absolute number of practitioners is significantly larger than architects. However, proportionally, the increases in the professions were approximately 400% and 500% respectively. The overall expansion of the number of architects is the largest and in line with the increase in construction spending during that time. It can also be observed that there was not a significant decline in the population of architects during drops in construction spending noted earlier. There is only consistent

growth. Because of this, there seems to be no clear ties to the frequency of articles on change and the number of architects.

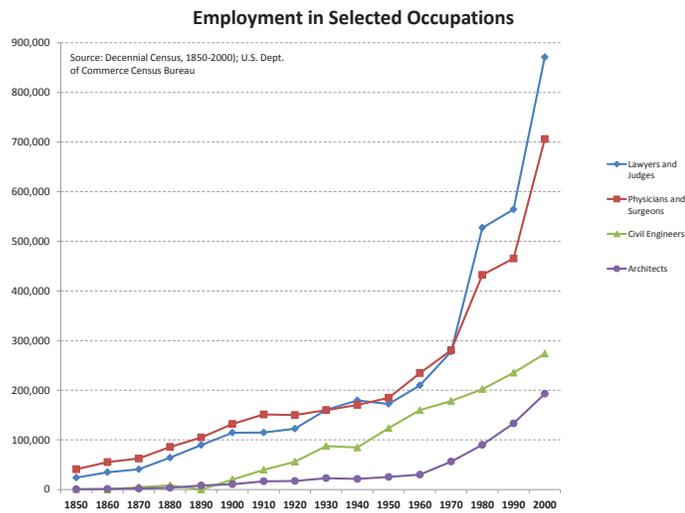


Figure 3. Architecture employment in U.S.

Collected annually since 1997, the Occupational Employment Survey tries to develop a current understanding of employment levels for various occupations. While the data collection is different, it provides a more sensitive examination of the number of architects. The chart in figure 4 uses 1999 as a base and illustrates the percentage change since that date. From 1999 until the start of the “Great Recession” in 2008, the number of architects increases steadily and exhibits the largest change relative to other professions. Interestingly, the curve of the architectural profession does not match that of this comparison group, but more closely resembles the curves of the building trades [Figure 5]. Since 2008, employment in architecture has contracted significantly with the employment of architects falling to below the level in 2000. It cannot be ruled out that the numbers of articles during this time could reflect the change in the numbers being felt around the community.

Further Research

A further step in the study is to identify periodicals that have regular publication over the time period examined and conduct a detailed scanning of the publications. This would catch the discourse on change that was not found due to the indexing of the articles as something other than the idea of change. Many articles discuss change but do not have change in the title or the modern key word search. For example, an article entitled, “A Plea for Beauty” in the August 1905 issue of *Architectural Record* discusses:

The last twenty-five years have witnessed greater changes in thought, manners and general mode of life than any other equal period of time since these United States became a nation. In nothing has the change been more marked than in the appearances of our cities.....Our great cities are generally undergoing a process of rebuilding with such rapidity that one wonders what the result will be.³³

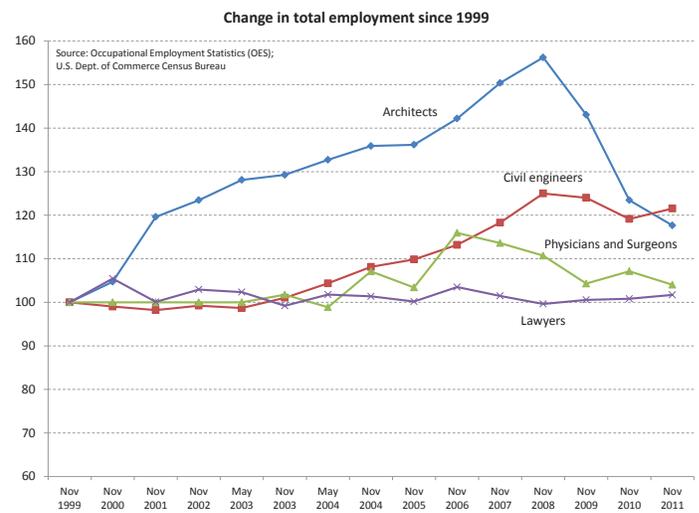


Figure 4. Comparable professions in U.S.

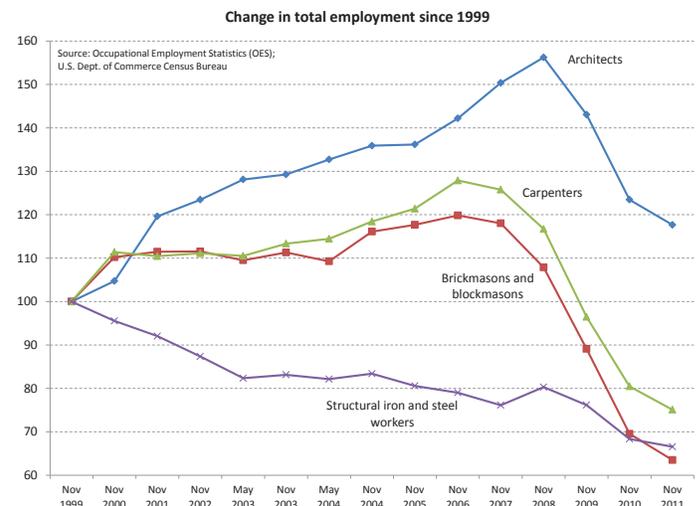


Figure 5. Comparable declines in U.S.

Also in 1906, in a piece entitled, “The Architect and the Critic” discusses the pronunciation of the death of architecture by the critics.³⁴ Both the change of external world at large and the death of the profession are topics that appear on multiple occasions in later years. Thus, an additional analysis of the discussion of change could be found by a examining the whole line of a publication during the last century.

Conclusion and Discourse Developments

Architecture is change. The act of building a new structure, redefining a space, or assembling materials is the movement from

one state to another – from a previous one to a new one. Educators, practitioners and users want to experience and contribute to this change. As a 1995 RIBA study found, “Nearly 90 per cent [of practitioners surveyed] agree that radical or innovative ideas are interesting and thought-provoking.”³⁵ Perhaps this is because of the desire of architects and educators to move the field forward for the better of society and architecture. What has not grabbed the attention of the community is the level of discourse on change.

The analysis begun here has displayed some of the challenges in the discourse. There are themes that are repeated with little variation in the level of enquiry. The issues are highlighted, similar catch phrases are used, and repeatedly, the need for change is called forth like a trumpet. Some announce the death of the profession, while others plead for saving it. As can be witnessed, change happens externally and rapidly, such as the advent of the computer chip, and internally, as the adoption of digital technology in architectural design. Architectural practice is susceptible to societal changes. As Henri Focillion has stated, “Architecture has to be: subject to the needs of society, rich or poor; faithful to a building programme and climate. It answers collective needs even in the construction of private dwellings. It satisfies old needs and begets new ones.”³⁶ Why then, does the conversation on change not transform as well? Is it because the field finds comfort in it?

More practically, architecture, in some way, will always be dependent on the economic conditions of society. The act of building is expensive. With a downturn in the economic condition of a country, or now groups of countries (the EU), construction spending can slow significantly. Of course, architects feel the pain of the decline and the profession suffers. As the existing stress within the field becomes more apparent, the entirety of architecture is questioned. Evidence of this can be seen in the correlation of the number of articles on the subject of the redefinition of the industry during the economic downturns. The challenge to architecture is for the profession to stay current, relevant, and as steadfast as possible. Reexamination of the profession enables this type of evaluation to occur.

An opportunity for progression is to critique the language used to discuss the concerns of field. This is important even for the general discussion of change. By keeping constant the vocabulary and sound bites of change, the architectural community keeps reinforcing the myths of the profession.³⁷ Also, if the perception of the challenges remains the same, perhaps it is because the problems being stated are not the root causes of the difficulties.³⁸ The discourse on change may be in need of reframing. Can new questions be asked? Can questioning move from general to more specific? General problems are large and amorphous. Specificity brings the ability to ask more probing questions, more in depth levels of understanding, areas for research, and potentially, a new framework in which to examine the problem. Instead of asking, ‘is this the end of the profession?’ can certain areas be identified as weak and the focus brought to areas of strength? Can the role of architects not be defined or limited by the field’s perception of the

public value of architecture? Instead, can architecture be defined by the profession values and its proven contributions to society?

Change in architecture will continue to be a theme in research, education, and practice. If the vocabulary of the topic itself is challenged, perhaps architecture can break free from the cycle of the last century, moving toward a more forward thinking, proactive, and secure sense of the profession.

Endnotes

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- 2 Pearson, Clifford A. “What Now? Architecture at a Crossroads.” *Architectural Record* (January 2011): 51.
- 3 Two significant examples being *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (1988) by Robert Gutman in the United States and *Architects and Their Practices: A Changing Profession* (1995) by Symes, Eley, and Seideil in Britain. However, their number is small in comparison to the journals.
- 4 Woods, Mary. “The First American Architectural Journals: The Profession’s Voice.” *Journal of Society of Architectural Historians* 68 (June 1989): 118.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 117-118. The first journal to continue for any length of time was *American Architect and Building News* (1876-1938).
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- 7 Anderson, Lawrence B. “The Architect in the Next Fifty Years.” *Journal of Architectural Education* 14:1 (Spring 1959): 3.
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- 11 The building classes are libraries, schools, town halls, and other public buildings.
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- 13 Wilson, Forrest. “A Time of Relentless Technological Change: Chronicling how it has Revolutionized Building during the 75 years.” *Architecture: The AIA Journal* 76:12 (December 1987): 115-119.
- 14 Architect is referred to here as ‘he’. When discussing architecture in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, architects are presumed to be male by the authors.
- 15 “The Public’s Faith in the Architect.” *American Architect* 17:1 (1920): 37.
- 16 Pawley, Martin. “Economics of Architecture: Crisis of the New Profession.” *Architects’ Journal* 173:25 (24 June 1981): 1195.
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- 18 “Professional Unity.” *The Builder* 118 (March 1920): 352-354.
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- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 Whitmore, Janet. “Whither the Profession.” *Architecture Minnesota* 22:3 (May 1996): 25, 78-79.
- 22 Fisher, Thomas. “Can this Profession be Saved?” *Progressive Architecture* 75:2 (February 1994): 44-49, 84.
- 23 Murray, Christine. “The Profession is Dead. Long Live the Profession.” *Architects’ Journal* 232:4 (13 Jan 2011): 18-29, 31-35, 37-45.
- 24 Murray, Christine. “The Profession is Dead. Long Live the Profession.” *Architects’ Journal* 232:4 (13 Jan 2011): 18-29, 31-35, 37-45.
- 25 Fisher, Thomas. “Can this Profession be Saved?” *Progressive Architecture* 75:2 (February 1994): 44-49, 84.

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- 24 "The Research Heritage of the Architectural Profession." *Journal of Architectural Education* 1 (Spring 1947): 10.
- 25 Tijerino, Roger. "The Architecture Profession: Can it be Strengthened?" *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 26:3 (Autumn 2009): 258-266.
- 26 Feiss, Carl. "The Future Role of the Architect." *Journal of Architectural Education* 13:1(Spring 1958): 16.
- 27 Will Jr., Phillip. "The Age of the Architect," *Journal of Architectural Education* 16:2 (June 1960): 45.
- 28 "The Research Heritage of the Architectural Profession." *Journal of Architectural Education* 1(Spring 1947): 12.
- 29 Startup, Hetty and John Nelson Tarn. "Education in Crisis." *RIBA Journal* (November 1983): 50.
- 30 Due to the limitations of available data, for the United States the period of 1915-2011 will be used and 1955-2009 for the United Kingdom.
- 31 Many articles give numbers indicating the populations of architects but none cite sources.
- 32 Questions arise such as: is an architect only a person who is licensed? Or do 'younger' professionals count? Does architect refer to building architects and landscape architects as one source suggests?
- 33 "A Plea for Beauty." *Architectural Record* 18 (August 1905).
- 34 "The Architect and the Critic." *Architectural Record* 19 (April 1906): 279.
- 35 Rogers, Louise. "The Anatomy of the Architect." *RIBA Journal* (March 1995): 8.
- 36 Jasdun, Sir Denys. "Architecture, Continuity and Change." *RIBA Transactions* 2 (1982): 34.
- 37 Robert Gutman is attributed to this idea in "The Vulnerability of an Architect." *The Architects' Journal* 203 (8 February 1996): 49.
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