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## **"Remember I'm the Bloody Architect!" Architects, Organizations and Discourses of Profession**

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**ABSTRACT**

There is a growing consensus that professional work faces an uncertain future. However, debates have tended to take a macro focus, underplaying the role of individuals' accounts of their working lives. In this paper we focus on UK architecture, examining how public and private sector architects construct the purpose and process of their occupation, using the concept of discourse to investigate the different versions expressed in individuals' accounts. We argue that architecture is constituted as creative endeavour, business activity and public service. The discourses mobilised and the occasions of their production reflect architects' orientations to the diverse challenges facing their profession, particularly concerning the role of creativity in the purpose and practice of architecture.

**KEYWORDS**

Architect Profession Discourse

## **Introduction**

Professional work seems to be facing an uncertain future. There is an emerging consensus that globalisation, deregulation, the diffusion of managerialism, rapid technological change and ever more knowledgeable and empowered consumers have significantly altered the contexts in which the traditional professions operate (Reed, 2000; Leicht and Fennell, 2001; Dent and Whitehead, 2002). There is vigorous debate concerning the extent to which these changes are undermining the power and status enjoyed by professional workers and whether professionals are being increasingly 'managed'. However, much of the existing research into this and related issues has taken place at the level of the macro system or the organization, leaving individual meaning-making relatively unexamined.

Whilst writers have warned against taking a determinist stance, emphasising the importance of *agency* of situated actors within real organizational contexts (MacDonald, 1995; Larson, 1990; Wallace 1995), in practice the ways in which individuals understand such imperatives are under-theorised. Furthermore, Watson argues that the concept of the "professionals" is all too often both reified and homogenized (Watson, 2002), with studies offering few insights into the challenges and constraints faced by members of particular professional groups in their daily working lives. What is largely missing, then, is an understanding of how situated professionals account for the work they do in their changing contexts, both in terms of what they see as its fundamental purpose and how they see it as being enacted on a day-to-day basis.

In what follows, we focus on one professional community: architects. Architecture has remained relatively neglected within the literature on the professions, and yet its diversity

in terms of organizational context, its role within the construction industry more generally and its vulnerability to changes in the political, economic and social climate make it a highly appropriate research focus. We investigate the ways in which architects located in different organizational settings talk about the purpose and process of architecture. We take as our starting point the proposition that social reality is constructed and that language is fundamental to this process. As Oswick et al (1997: 6) assert: 'Language does not merely "name" or passively describe reality, but frames it, and in so doing promotes particular attitudes and discourages others'. Using data generated in semi-structured interviews with architects working in both private and public sector organizations, we show how practitioners explain their work through the adoption of a variety of sometimes antagonistic, sometimes complementary discursive strategies. We argue that these discourses are both reflective and constitutive of 'architecture' and its practice.

### **Architecture: providing creative expertise or functional solutions?**

The history of architecture in the UK has been one of change and division. Indeed, conflict between the professional bodies charged with the regulation and monitoring UK architecture has, according to MacDonald, 'ensured the Balkanisation of architecture which has bedevilled the occupation from the outset' (1995: 109). This fragmentation and factionalisation still exists today, with the Architects Registration Council (ARCUK), the Architects Registration Board (ARB) and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) all trying to have their say in the definition of architectural standards and prescriptions for practice.

The role of the architecture profession has recently been subjected to intense scrutiny, change and potential erosion. The Egan Report *Rethinking Construction* (Egan, 1998; RIBA, 1999b) recommended a commitment to continuous improvement of the construction process with the involvement of the whole supply chain. This has been a critical driver for change in the industry and has led to innovations such as multi-disciplinary practice, Local Authority works departments with integrated design and construction, systems buildings, prefabrication, standardisation and dimensional/modular co-ordination. Much change in the construction industry is being driven by larger clients, with the support of the UK government's Treasury. The broad agenda is that architects need to be part of the production process of buildings. Since the late 1980s, there has been a growth of procurement methods other than the 'traditional route' (where the building is fully designed, and the contract administered, by an architect). Less than 40% of UK construction (by value) was procured 'traditionally' in 1998, as compared to over 70% in the 1980s. The contractor's managerial role and the proportion of building work carried out by sub-contractors have increased. The Private Finance Initiative has transformed the procurement of larger public sector projects. In addition fee bidding and compulsory competitive tendering, including the 'Best Value' initiative have eroded the traditional relationships based on trust.

RIBA has tried to respond to these developments. Its 1999-2003 strategy document, *Meeting the Challenge* (RIBA, 1999a), outlines the steps the profession must take to ensure its long-term survival. Of central importance are raising the status of creativity and design expertise within society at large, and positioning architects as the construction professionals best placed to deliver such expertise and to thus to fulfil their diverse clients' requirements.

While academic writers have examined various facets of architectural work, (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933), (Winch and Schneider, 1993), (Pinnington and Morris 2002); (Spain, 2001) (Blau 1984). However, to date there is only limited research into the accounts of individual architects themselves.

Blau (1984) and Winch and Schneider (1993) depict architectural work as contested terrain. Blau argues that contemporary architectural practice contains contradictory features that 'create inconsistencies between architects' intentions and their accomplishments; and they generate inescapable dilemmas for firms that inevitably compete for design awards, commissions and for sheer survival'(1984: ix). Nearly a decade later, Winch and Schneider note that: 'financial success, size and market share and how to achieve them are not always the goals of partners in architectural practice, and, indeed, may at times be in conflict with success on the aesthetic dimension' (1993: 934). These studies are instructive because they elucidate the inherent diversity within architecture, and emphasise the importance of organizational and market contexts and also point to the potential conflict between creative, business and management imperatives. This is where our interests lie.

Blau (1984) also emphasises the importance of the social context in which architectural design and production take place. This includes the profession, firms, clients, and practitioners. All these stakeholders have strong ideas about how buildings ought to look and function but they don't always agree. Blau highlights the factors that restrict and stymie the practice of architecture, arguing that: 'architects' intentions to improve the usefulness of buildings are thwarted by multiple constraints – clientage, the market, and the organization

of architectural practice'. (1984: x). However, Blau ignores the organizational and sectoral contexts, apart from the private firm. Notwithstanding the introduction of private sector practices in the UK public sector, on an ideological level the local authority context is characterised by a distinctive set of interests and values, including public service, inclusion, community and citizenship (Halliday, 1987, MacDonald, 1995). Focusing on architects operating in both public sector local authorities and private firms, we seek to provide a more inclusive picture of architecture and its practice.

Architecture is distinctive for its intrinsic creative dimension. Discussing occupations generally and restaurant chefs in particular, Fine (1992) maintains there has been a tendency to neglect issues of creativity, to focus attention on the technical, functional and goal-directed activities of workers rather than questions relating to style and form. Fine refers to this dimension as the 'aesthetics of work: the sensory component of production that is distinct from instrumental and efficiency concerns'. He suggests that:

The creation of objects of 'aesthetic value' is not merely a topic of philosophical speculation, but is a distinctly sociological activity. Each occupation maintains a sense of superior production (an occupational 'aesthetic') that is not reducible to organizational demands (1992: 1268).

In our view, much of the literature on architecture does precisely this – in Fine's words, it reduces creativity to the demands of the organization – be they strategic, market, managerial or any combination of these. We would agree with Fine when he argues that neglecting this creative dimension of work gives a 'distorted picture of the workplace'



(1992: 1270). In contrast, we attempt to provide a more nuanced understanding of architectural work by examining how this creative element is understood by architects, what it means for practice and how it is experienced as intersecting with other organizational imperatives.

### **Using discourses in researching occupations**

In this paper we ask *how do architects account for the purpose and process of their work?* Here the concept of discourse is a useful vehicle for exploring these processes of meaning making and action. We see Watson's definition as particularly relevant to our interest in architects' understandings of their working contexts. He describes discourse as:

A connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitutes a way of talking or writing about a particular issue, thus framing the way in which people understand and respond with respect to that issue... [These statements] function as menus of discursive resources which various social actors draw on in different ways at different times to achieve their particular purposes – whether these be specific interest-based purposes or broader ones like that of making sense of what is happening in the organization, or of what it is to “be a manager” [or an architect] (1995: 814).

Currently within organization studies there is wide-ranging debate on questions of identity construction, regulation, maintenance and transformation (Hall and DuGay, 1996; Alvesson and Wilmott, 2002; Collinson, 2003; Kunda, 1992; Alvesson, 2001; Dent and Whitehead, 2002). As Casey argues: “People in modern societies continue to significantly define themselves, and are socially defined, by the type of work they do, and often the

organization for which they do it" (1995: 202). With regard to professional workers, commentators have examined the extent to which traditional meanings of professionalism continue to resonate (if indeed they ever did), or whether they are being supplanted by more contingent, or perhaps more organizationally-based conceptualisations (MacGregor, 1995; Leicht and Fennel, 2001; Cohen et al, 2002).

The concept of discourse as defined by Watson (1995) offers a useful way of approaching the question of professional identity. Dent and Whitehead (2002) argue that to become a professional, one must mobilise the discourses which are seen to frame that particular occupational world: defining issues of membership, context, purpose and practice. They suggest that professional identity must not be seen to reflect a single discursive frame, but rather to 'occupy multiple subject positions and shift, manoeuvre, and negotiate within and across these' (2002: 10).

We contend that the above analysis leads to four important empirical questions. First, what discourses can be identified as framing architects' accounts of their work? Second, how are the purpose and process of architecture expressed within these discourses? Third, how do these discourses relate to one another in individuals' accounts and across the dataset? Fourth, what can be learned from examining instances where individuals draw on multiple discourses?

### **The research context and approach**

This paper is based on our study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) into professionals' understandings of management. We investigated architects and

solicitors working in public and private sector and professional contexts in the United Kingdom. This paper focuses specifically on the architects. This research is concerned with individuals' understanding of the nature of their own reality: their perceptions of their roles as professionals, expectations about the ways in which their work should be undertaken and the extent to which their organizations fulfil these expectations. The research aim was to elicit rich data upon which theoretical frameworks for understanding professional work could be constructed.

We draw on data generated in interviews with 42 architects working at varied levels of seniority across 15 diverse organizational settings (see Table 1 below, in which the names of the organizations have been disguised). These organizations were situated within the East Midlands of England, and were engaged in a variety of specialties and market sectors. We chose organizations (and in a few cases sole practitioners) to approach on the basis that collectively they covered a broad range of architectural work across the contexts that interested us (see below). The organizations were identified using a mixture of prior contacts (3), commercial promotional material and telephone directories (16), and 'snowball' referrals by other participants (2). Of those 21, two organizations declined to take part, and four never replied to our invitation. Our respondents ranged in ages from early twenties to late fifties. Seven of the 42 respondents were female, and all but one were qualified architects.

**TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE**

The architects worked in four nonprofessional organizations (two local authorities, a building contractor and a property developer) and eleven professional organizations (nine architect practices, RIBA, and a School of Architecture). Here we are using Wallace's definition of nonprofessional organizations as those in which professionals are in the minority, working in small, subordinate subunits or departments within a larger bureaucratic organization (1995: 229). Conversely in professional organizations, the majority of the workforce is professional and the professional content of the work is central to the mission of the organization (*ibid*: 229). We take Wallace's distinction between professional and non-professional organizations as our starting point. We would argue, however, that other distinctions may also matter - for example between niche and multidepartmental organizations, and between public/private sectors – and that these settings are themselves in flux. A further issue is the extent that professionals seal themselves off from their organization to form their own sub-culture, such that there is a 'shared system of values between... the professional and their external counterparts that transcends corporate values...' (LaNuez and Jermier, 1994: 56).

Our interviews typically lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours. Interviews discussed the participant's career history, their perceptions of what architecture is fundamentally about, their organization's position within the profession, the relationship between managerial and professional roles and responsibilities, and the extent to which participants feel the work of architects is changing. Interviews were taped, fully transcribed and coded thematically (King, 1994) using inter-rater collaboration (Fisher, et al, 1986).

We identified three dominant discourses: architecture as creative endeavour, architecture as business activity and architecture as public service. Notably, we are *not* claiming that there are different types of architects who fit neatly into these categories – we are not talking about *architects as artists, business people or public servants*.

These discourses are not objective entities, but analytical constructs. As such they are local and contingent: the products of certain times, places and people.

### **Architecture as creative endeavour**

Cutting across our dataset, across organizational contexts and hierarchical levels, was a sense that the essence of architecture is creative, that what differentiates architects from other partners in the construction industry is their aesthetic sensibility and skill. Three-quarters of the architects in our sample expressed this view. Not only did this discourse frame respondents' ideas about what architecture is fundamentally for (*its purpose*), but also about how it happens – its *process*.

As regards questions about the purpose of architecture, over half of our respondents made reference to 'beauty', 'high aesthetic value', 'lovely designs', 'flagship buildings', 'style', 'making something exciting... [with] light washing down walls... rhythm and space'. As the associate architect from Carlton's explained, the goal of architecture is to create aesthetically pleasing spaces, whatever the scale or scope:

I do think that it is about creating a nice environment – on a small scale which is just how you design somebody's downstairs loo, or on a large scale which is how cities are

organised, or perhaps how you design in the countryside now which is quite difficult. I think without the creative side the rest of it is just nuts and bolts, in a way. I think it's our job to come up with creative solutions.

Subsumed within this creative discourse is technical expertise. This is what differentiates the purely conceptual artist from the architect. In the words of the Carlton's associate: 'I think that the best architects are very much aware of the building side of it as well, and not just a pretty picture on a piece of paper. It has to go beyond that.' However, it is not technical know-how for its own sake that is important. Rather, technical expertise is seen to support creativity, and to facilitate its realisation.

### *Implications for practice*

The discourse of architecture as creative endeavour has implications not only for what is seen as the purpose of architecture, but also for its *process* – how architectural work is carried out on a daily basis. Here there are four important points to note. First, within this discourse there is a suggestion that architectural departments and firms are characterised by a unique set of values that set them apart from other construction professionals:

Anybody could do our job... Say somebody who's technically competent could draft, could do the work of architects, could offer architectural services, but they don't necessarily have the same values as architects (senior partner, Radcliffe's).

Asked about what these values were specifically, answers included such aspects as a 'sense of space', 'aesthetics', 'beauty', 'a feeling for the built environment'. Second,

respondents explained how it was not only the final product that mattered, rather each and every stage in the building process, each draft and drawing had to be aesthetically pleasing in its own right:

I mean we won't send out drawings that are scruffy... And I think if you go to a meeting and the architect sort of shuffles through a pile of sketchy type drawings that's impressive. But send a bunch of sketches through the post in the naked light of day, an ugly drawing is an ugly drawing. It tells them in a subtle way that you're an ugly architect. (owner/manager, Carltons).

Third, amongst our participants there was a consensus that: 'to produce a lovely design you have to have the freedom of time'. In practice, apart from architects working at Sherwood's (see below), only six people in our sample described themselves as primarily involved in the creative process, and even they believed that they would have to give it up if they wanted upward progression in their organization. Our participants often discussed the creative aspect of work with a kind of sentimental longing. Whilst acknowledging its importance in terms of architectural history and cultural heritage, on a day-to-day basis there was a recognition that it was often subordinated to more pressing, business concerns.

In stark contrast to the other firms and departments studied, Sherwood's exemplified the creative dimension as a central and defining characteristic. The Sherwood architects in our sample explained that creative design was their focus and told us how they organised their work so as to facilitate it. From this vantage point other dimensions were seen as peripheral, though necessary. The Sherwood architects (and some others) distinguished

between 'architecture' and 'something else'. They used this distinction to differentiate themselves from commercially oriented firms who, in their eyes, were not doing 'real' architecture: 'There are probably only about half a dozen good practices in [city] who do architecture. The others are commercial practices who will do what they are told to do (senior partner)'. These respondents showed an awareness that this position was relatively uncommon in the provincial city in which they worked. Furthermore, they recognised that in the current market, theirs was a precarious position to take. For them the crucial issue was managing to maintain the integrity of the design in the face of numerous challenges:

I think it's the architect's job to convince the client that they want things... you're doing it because you know, it would be better for them, but they don't always know they want it or they can't understand it. The whole challenge of how do you put up a large building without it getting ripped to shreds... by a client who doesn't understand what the hell you are doing or from the contractor who is trying to make money out of it... So how you maintain some sort of artistic integrity through that process (senior partner).

Hence the real challenge for architects is to maintain control of the social relations of the building process. This leads to our fourth point. Here again our focus is on the architect's freedom and discretion, but derived from power and status, not time. Within the creative discourse, the architect is seen as expert. In our data this was emphasised through repeated references to well-known architects. Indeed, they were often described as 'godlike', as the 'gods of architecture'. Significantly, this was the view promoted by the RIBA, the Royal Society of British Architects (and vividly captured in its nickname, 'Remember I'm the Bloody Architect'). As the RIBA representative noted:



A lot of younger architects do aspire to be, you know, the next Richard Rogers... I think it's always been this way and it's been reinforced by the reputation of our architects, like Norman Foster, like Richard Rogers, and now people who are coming up through the ranks, you know, like Nick Grimshaw and people like that. You know, the British high-tech and their style is highly regarded as uniquely British.

This discourse appears to be reinforced in a variety of ways: through funding mechanisms and award structures and UK architectural education. Amongst our respondents there was a shared recognition of the salience of this traditional pecking order. However, whilst this was seen as a powerful and pervasive view, some sought to distance themselves from what they saw as an exclusive and outmoded view of the architect as dominant in the social relations of construction:

This is my design. We do it my way. I'll design you a great building... because this guy who thinks he's god has designed it this way, and all right, it looks like a wonderful building. It's got sailing roofs over it and it's got translucent sheeting over it and it looks stunning and costs five million (team leader 1, local authority 1).

However, whilst many of our respondents distanced themselves from this view of 'architect as boss', consistent with Fine's (1992;1996) chefs, three-quarters of the architects in our sample agreed that what architects added to the construction process was essentially creative. There were other experts to provide knowledge of materials, costs, equipment and regulatory guidance. On one hand, then, architects could be seen as invulnerable because

no one else in the industry could provide the creative element. However, paradoxically they saw themselves as highly vulnerable in the current climate because fewer customers prioritised this creative dimension over commercial concerns.

Whilst architects have always had to work within financial, technological, political and cultural constraints, our respondents described a raft of changes in recent years described in the Introduction section of this paper which in their eyes have put enormous pressure on the creative process. These, respondents suggested, had led to the entry of non-architects into the field and a shift from a focus on reputation and design to price and efficiency. Whilst seventeen architects specifically said that they supported these changes, there was at the same time a feeling that the creative dimension of the building process is being sidelined – and with that the power enjoyed by the architect is being eroded.

Six architects suggested that the most significant change has been cultural. With the burgeoning of the DIY (Do it Yourself) industry and home and garden ‘makeover’ UK television programmes such as *Changing Rooms*, *Better Homes* and *House Doctor*, it appears that people are taking on the design of their own loft conversions, en-suite additions and kitchen remodelling. With the extent of free advice on offer, potential clients question the value of the professional architect.

At first glance, our findings seem to be consistent with the view that professional work is indeed changing and that architects’ exclusive position is under threat (Aronowitz and Di Fazio, 1994; Dent and Whitehead, 2002). Several questions then arise. First, given the pervasive view that the built environment is being driven by things other than architecture

and that architects are being sidelined, what other ideas about the purpose of architecture do architects mobilise in talking about their work? Second, what does this mean for architectural practice? Finally, what is the role of creativity within these alternative frames? These questions will be addressed in the sections that follow.

### **Architecture as business activity**

Although the majority of our respondents in our sample saw creativity as fundamental to architecture, most did not orient exclusively to this discourse. Instead, they drew on other discourses in accounting for the work they did. Many of the architects working in private sector firms constructed architecture and the architect in fundamentally business terms. However, two important points should be noted. First, whilst the private sector architects in particular acknowledged the salience of this discourse in the current climate, this is not to say that they necessarily liked it. Second, within our accounts there were significant differences in how this discourse was seen to be enacted in the workplace. Both points will be developed in this section. First, though, we will consider how the architecture as business activity discourse differs from that of architecture as creative endeavour in terms of what architecture is about and for.

In contrast to images of beauty and form, the use of terms like 'good spread of work sectors', 'good track record', 'commercial advantage', 'market niche', 'efficiency', 'partnership and teamwork', 'profitability' and 'the bottom line' connote a very different picture. The Director of Carringtons, a large, multi-departmental firm, illustrates this discourse. He had experience of working for a struggling firm, and then a merger (forced by difficult market conditions) with a rival firm to create economies of scale and an

accumulation of expertise that allowed them to 'specialise in everything'. It seemed that he was determined to avoid any further economic difficulty:

I think the biggest change is that our art is becoming much more of a business and less of a profession... We have to be far more proactive in creating [note different usage here] work and we have to run the office much more like a business. Otherwise we wouldn't survive because it's an increasingly competitive market.

Given the vulnerability of architecture to changing economic conditions, the impact of deregulation, changes in the conduct of relationships within construction contracts and an increasingly confident and demanding public, architects from eight out of nine private firms saw staying solvent as their main aim. Creativity was absorbed within this aim, as one facet of architecture alongside accounting and financial management, technical know-how and market sensitivity.

#### *Implications for practice*

In the accounts we collected, the discourse of architecture as business activity was manifest in practice in a number of ways. First, it looks simultaneously inward, to the activities of the firm, and outward to the market. As the owner/manager of Carlton's explained:

Over the years I've spotted little niches in the market and gone for them. And they were always that other people either hadn't recognized or thought worth their while... Even now I do things that people don't generally do as part of architectural practice.

Earlier we cited an extract from this respondent's account in which he expressed the creative discourse and distinguished himself from the 'ugly architects' with their 'scruffy' drawings. However, when it comes to the actual projects he takes on, this respondent adopts the business discourse to account for his activities. He speaks of his adaptability in relation to market circumstances, and appears quite comfortable about taking on work which is seen to fall outside the typical domains of the architect. In this extract, the architect is referring to the expert witness work that he had recently started to take on, and which was proving lucrative. Here we again see the distinction, noted previously, between what is and is not architecture. In this case activities considered to be outside of the boundaries of architecture are still part of the business. More generally, the notion of the profession as multi-faceted and the architect as multi-skilled, involved in a spectrum of activities and constantly pushing the parameters of what constitutes 'architecture' permeates the private sector data:

You have to be the best in every department. You've got to do things on time. You've got to be a good designer, It's got to cost the right amount. It's got to not leak and be reliable. You have to have everything... As far as I'm concerned it's all one big business. And this is a reflection of how the industry has changed. Now it's all part of being an architect (junior architect at Carrington's).

This speaker too was cited in our discussion of the creative discourse. In his account, he talked about his desire to do creative work and to 'produce a lovely design'. As a junior architect he had the time to do this. However, he predicted that upward progress within the

firm might mean leaving creative work behind. In the above quote, in a sense he goes further by describing (in the present tense) architecture as 'one big business'.

Third, as discussed earlier, each of the discourses we identified in our data framed the social relations of the construction process in particular ways. Within the creative discourse the architect was constructed as 'god-like'. Effective management of relationships meant convincing the client to accept the architect's ideas. In contrast, the business discourse frames relationships very differently. Notably, architects are further down in the pecking order, certainly subordinate to the client and often competing with the contractor for control and influence. As the senior partner at Radcliffe's (also quoted earlier) explained:

I think traditionally the architect was the person who ran the contract and therefore, basically, was the only person who could give instructions on site and would be very much in charge of coordinating activities and liaising with other consultants. I think now there are more flexible ways that buildings are being designed and the architect's role is becoming more blurred and perhaps isn't often the person who at the end of the day is solely in control.

Within the discourse of architecture as business activity, there is a sense that these distinctive values no longer assure architects the privileged position they once enjoyed. This loss of control is linked to contract procurement. Sometimes the architect is the main contractor and acts as project manager, but increasingly architects work effectively as sub-contractors for large developers. Our architects saw this situation as potentially detrimental to design because quantity surveyors and contractors are more interested than architects in

limiting expenditure, and less interested in aesthetic design. From a business point of view, this loss of control is worrying as it could mean that architects are effectively passed by in the quest for cheaper buildings and a faster process.

Asked about the current challenges facing architecture, a Carrington's respondent highlighted the need to raise the architect's status, not only in the eyes of the industry, but most importantly in the eyes of the public: 'I think winning back the high ground to recognize the importance of architecture and what an architect has to offer'. Here the creative and business discourses appear to work in a kind of hierarchical tension.

It is important to note that while all of architects in our sample recognized the increasing dominance of the business discourse, not everyone subscribed to it. We have already discussed Sherwood's as fundamentally orienting to the creative discourse, positioning themselves in opposition to the increasingly salient business frame (but at the same time acutely aware of the precariousness of this stance). Similarly, the account of the sole practitioner at Meadows also poses a contrast to the business view. Interestingly, he also situates himself outside the creative discourse. This respondent described his approach as 'traditional' He told how he eschewed the trend to more and bigger clients, seeking instead to develop long-term relationships, based on trust, with a select set of loyal clients:

I was never a client catcher. I just work on reputation... I know a lot of people and the work comes in... It is quite a close relationship. My clients [largely ecclesiastical and domestic] are not looking for wonderful ideas. The bigger firms are businesses and they

have to be businesslike. I can afford to be a bit more old-fashioned and a bit bumbling and get away with it.

This architect had lived in the same city for many years, having worked for a firm and then made an ambitious but risky move to another firm which failed. Since then he had operated as a sole practitioner, using his deep knowledge of the area, and his many local contacts, to make a living. In this quote the respondent shows awareness of the alternative ways of framing architecture work, and his decision to forge his own path. Earlier, with his comment that now 'everyone is an architect', he positioned himself at the periphery of the creative discourse. Likewise here he represents himself as tangential to the dominant business view. As such, this transcript is an interesting contrast to suggestions in the literature that professionals are largely passive in the face of the widespread changes that are being imposed upon them (Blau, 1984; Leicht and Fennel, 2001).

### **Architecture as public service**

The accounts of ten architects working in two different local authority planning departments pose some stark contrasts to the private sector data. Their typical projects included schools and residential facilities as well as high profile civic buildings and state-of-the-art sports facilities. Permeating these local authority data was a discourse of architecture as being for the good of the public, and of the architect as a public servant. This depiction of architects as motivated by social values echoes Halliday's argument that professionals' interests extend beyond personal gain, financial remuneration and reputation, to the pursuit of the collective good (Halliday, 1987). As elsewhere, this public service



discourse had implications for what was seen as the purpose of architecture, as well as its practice.

Within the discourse of the architect as public servant, the client is seen as the public, and the goal of architecture is to enhance the quality of people's lives:

I'm a member of the local Labour party and I've got socialist beliefs, and I see working in a local authority as a way of helping people, you know, directly through homes and schools and social services facilities. So it's a personal thing. If you go into private practice you may work on things like that, but you also work for developers, building office blocks, something I don't particularly want to do (team leader 1, local authority 1).

This theme of enhancing people's lives was also apparent in the private sector data. However, whereas in those accounts this was described in terms of individual projects and individual clients, in the public sector interviews there was a stronger sense of the architect as contributing to the public good. Implicit within these accounts was a feeling of social accountability. Second, there appears to be a strong link between the organizational values of the local authority, and people's personal value systems. That is, there is a sense of personal engagement, not just with the building process itself, or even the final product, but with the values underlying the work. Third, the previous sections demonstrated the importance of looking at architectural work as being situated within particular economic and cultural settings. Here we see that it is also deeply embedded in political contexts.

Implicit in this sense of the architect as public servant is a rejection of the business imperative highlighted in the previous section. This was made explicit by one respondent as he explained his move from private practice to the local authority:

In the private practice I worked in it was all money oriented and I thought, 'No, I want to work doing buildings for people. So I made a decision that I wanted to design buildings that various groups of the public would be able to use. There are loads of buildings that really connect with people and I think we have to keep doing that and not let the pressures from people, to do with money and things like that, dull us down (team leader 1, local authority 1).

For these local authority architects, it was through their creativity that they could best serve the public. Creativity is certainly valued, but as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself.

### *Implications for practice*

Three important points emerge regarding practice: first, how the synthesis of creativity and public service is achieved through the management of relationships with clients; second, the negotiation of social relationships within the construction industry; and third, the social arrangements within the local authorities in which our public sector architects worked - in particular the impact of increasing managerialism.

As regards the first and second points, the idea of partnership permeated the public service discourse. The idea here is that architects' creative and public service aims could be achieved

through the establishment of positive relationships with clients and other construction professionals. As we have already discussed, the issue of managing relationships, the role of the architect in the construction sector pecking order, was of central concern to many of our respondents. As noted earlier, respondents spoke of the current UK government's support for initiatives that seek to encourage collaboration and cooperation amongst partners in the construction process. Within the public service discourse this was seen as a wholly positive change. In fact, several respondents saw the loss of the power traditionally enjoyed by the architect as a good thing:

Architects have lost some of their kudos and the way people used to revere them. They're seen now as much more, I think, more ordinary people and it's probably, you know, perfectly sensible that they should be seen like that... In partnering you're all equal, you're all a team (architect employed by contractor).

Within the creative and business discourses, the loss of architectural control of the building process was linked to a diminution of quality. However, here the replacement of hierarchical relationships with teams, and the architect's concomitant loss of status, are seen as potentially enhancing quality – putting teamwork at centre stage, and ultimately ensuring that the public gets a better service.

Turning to arrangements within the local authorities, whilst within the public service discourse there was a strong emphasis on architects' public face and their social accountability, there was also a focus on the large bureaucratic organizations within which public sector architects operate. Respondents who oriented to this public service discourse

explained that as they progressed up through the local authority ranks, from architect to team leader and ultimately to Service Manager, their involvement in actual creative work decreased to the point where it disappeared altogether. In practice, then, within this discourse there was tension between career advancement and opportunities for creativity. Here, as in the business discourse, it was suggested that only those who stepped off the established, hierarchical career track could fully realise the aesthetic dimension of the work.

Central to the literature on professional work are debates about the impact of managerialism on professional expertise. Amongst the private sector architects in our study, this was not seen as a major issue. First, managerial and commercial activities tended to be conflated, and both were seen as entirely consistent with the business of architecture. Second, the respondents with greatest managerial responsibilities also had the greatest financial and personal stake in their business – success (in both organizational and personal terms) was contingent upon excellent management. However, within the discourse of architect as public servant, management was not seen as part of architecture. On the contrary, in the majority of accounts it was portrayed as an obstacle to the practice of architecture. This clear distinction between management (which this respondent also described as “business”) and architecture is vividly illustrated below:

Local authorities promote professionals into managerial positions – like myself. I mean I’m an architect, but I’m now a team leader... [But] we need someone who can handle the business pressures and the financial side of it better because we struggle on things like budgets. You know, someone with a business brain rather than an architectural brain (senior architect, local authority 2).

Notably, whilst five of the ten public sector architects we interviewed talked about how business and financial matters had been foisted upon them, some made it clear that when these imperatives became too inconvenient, or were seen as unworkable within the public servant frame, they were simply ignored:

We are offering a service and if, say, we're designing a school and we've spent too long trying to work it out and get it right, then we can in some instances waive the fees and we do it to ensure that the building is right. Our primary motivation is the service (senior architect, local authority 1).

This quote serves as a vivid example of how individuals negotiate through discursive prescriptions, mobilising aspects of other discourses that fit in with their dominant frames, whilst rejecting others. However, not all public sector architects shared this sense of business as essentially incompatible with public service. Indeed, three respondents spoke positively about the increasing emphasis on efficiency. As a senior architect at the first local authority explained: 'There has been quite a change in thinking. I mean believe it or not, we are very business orientated.' Thus while within some private sector accounts such initiatives were valued when they were seen to enhance profitability, in this context they were legitimated from a public service perspective.

## **Discussion**

In this paper we have examined how UK architects accounted for the purpose and the process of their work. Using the concept of discourse as an analytical device for

illuminating these patterns of meaning making, we argue that not only do the three discourses identified (architecture as creative endeavour, business activity and public service) yield particular ideas about what architecture is for, but they also have implications for how it is practiced.

Significantly, there was not a one-for-one relationship between an individual architect and a discourse. Rather, as Dubinskas noted in his work on research scientists:

It is important to emphasise, here, that the culture patterns I describe [in this case the three discourses we have presented] are not innate properties of the people who exhibit them, nor do individuals only/always “belong” to a single cultural variant. The ... patterns I describe are more like repertoires of coherent possibilities for and permutations of action than like the “rules” of conduct or value-models. Each cultural variant permits choice and negotiation among an open-ended set of alternatives, which still appears as a loosely consistent, patterned system. Furthermore, individuals are not “glued” to any one particular cultural variant; and some people can obviously move between different systems with facility (1989: 181-182).

Nevertheless, it was noticeable that architects working in the public sector did use what we have called the public service discourse more than those in the private sector. They tended to see their clients as the public as a whole, and they saw themselves as helping to improve the built environment for everyone. Yet there were still connections with private sector viewpoints. To some extent, local authority architects embraced a business discourse

in welcoming efficient managerial practices, in their case because this improved the public's value for money (as opposed to their organization's profitability). They saw using their creativity as consistent with the public good, rather as architects in at least one private sector firm saw it as consistent with their company's financial standing. And of course the business discourse's emphasis on pleasing the individual client was paralleled by the public service one of pleasing the collective client.

Although the architects in our sample drew on different discourses in talking about their work, our data revealed there is a shared understanding of the *possible* versions of UK architecture at the current time. That is, even though they may not personally subscribe to all three discourses, participants recognised their relevance. Furthermore, they were aware that these different versions of the profession were not always compatible, but that they co-existed in a state of uneasy tension: as one version became dominant, another was re-cast to fit in, or pushed to the margins. In addition to presenting these discourses, with reference to how they constitute both the purpose and the process of architectural work, we have noted instances where individuals drew on multiple discourses – sometimes at different points in their accounts, and at other times within a single answer.

First, respondents drew on different discourses to describe and explain different aspects of their work. Second, our data illustrate how architects positioned themselves in relation to these three discourses, constructing a sense of identity in and around these discursive frames (Watson, 1995; Dent and Whitehead, 2002; Alvesson and Wilmott, 2002). By examining these instances of overlap and manoeuvring between discourses we get a snapshot of the different imperatives facing architects, which exert most pressure on

architects at the present time and which struggle for legitimacy. In our data, this interplay was most striking in those instances where creativity was seen as being subsumed within a business or public service discourse. Whilst the salience of this discourse was apparent, there was a strong sense that it was often legitimated within alternative discursive frames.

It is significant that the architects in our sample continually described creativity as the legitimate core of architecture – its defining and differentiating feature. Paradoxically, in spite of its prominence, only a minority of architects oriented to this discourse as the dominant organising principle in their accounts. As noted, for the majority, creativity was subsumed within other discursive frames, legitimated in business, or public service terms. However, when this happened creativity did not simply disappear from view. On the contrary, architects talked at length about how it had been ‘engulfed’, ‘squeezed out’ and ‘eclipsed’ by the pressures of the day. In this sense, in our data its presence still loomed large.

Our architects' data present a mixed picture of the world of professional work. On one hand they depict change: a profession under threat which sees its creative core as systematically undermined by a raft of economic, political, managerial and cultural pressures. However, this either/or view takes little account of how architects incorporate these current pressures into their existing ideas of what architecture is for and how it happens. An analysis of how individuals talk about their work reveals a picture that is less about wholesale change, and more negotiation and accommodation. It illuminates the elasticity of notions of professional work, and how situated individuals construct versions of their work which make sense and are viable at particular moments in time.



Whilst we have emphasised the extent to which our findings must be seen as local and contingent, we argue that their implications are more general, with relevance to other professional communities. The evidence presented in this paper leads us to conclude that in debates about what is happening in professional work, we must be wary of talking about any profession as unitary (Hanlon, 1999), or through a single interpretive frame.

The three discourses we examined in this paper are specific to architecture. However, we argue that, viewed more generally as expertise, business and social values, these could usefully be applied to other professional communities. Together they constitute the resources which professionals use to make sense of their work. Of course these discourses are themselves located within particular socio-economic, political and cultural climates. As conditions change in the future, the discourses in use are likely to change, reflecting and constituting new meanings and prescriptions for action. What is needed now is more longitudinal research that tracks the interplay of these discourses, the disappearance of some and emergence of others, over time.

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**Table 1 Participants in the Research**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Work Undertaken</b>	<b>No. interviewed</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
Local Authority 1	Midlands, city authority	Health, education, public, residential	7	Team leaders (2), senior architects (2), architects (3)
Local Authority 2	Midlands, county authority	“ “	3	Senior architect (1), architect (2)
Meadows	City centre based sole practitioner	Residential, ecclesiastical	1	Sole practitioner architect (1)
Carltons	Owner/manager with associate, suburb-based	Residential	2	Owner/manager (1) Associate (1)
Aspleys	Town based	Education, health, residential	3	Director(1), architect (2)
Carringtons	City centre partnership	Commercial, transport, residential	5	Director(1), associate director (2), senior architect (1), architect (1)
Radcliffes	Town based Partnership	Leisure, conservation,	4	Partner (2), architect (2)

		residential		
Sherwoods	City based partnership	Residential, public	3	Partner (2), trainee (1)
Southwells	City based partnership	Industrial, commercial	2	Senior partner (1), technologist (1)
Radfords	City based developers		1	Director (1)
BGP	Multi-site partnership	Industrial, commercial	6	Senior architect to associate architect (6 total)
R Thomas	Town based sole practitioner	Domestic	1	Architect (1)
RIBA			1	Educational/training advisor (1)
Greens Partnership	Contractor specialising in special needs housing	Domestic, special needs	1	Architect (1)
School of Architecture			2	Lecturers (2)
<u>Total</u>			42	