Teaching the Value of Work

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Abstract
Within the architecture profession, issues of pay inequality, lack of diversity, the rising cost of architecture education, and the stagnation of wages has led to research and advocacy from the perspective of the 'Architect as Worker'. This paper explores the complexities of the value prescribed to architecture work by considering three different value systems – economic value, professional value and personal value – to suggest practical ways that the architecture design studio teaching can be augmented to better provide students with skills in the learning environment that will help them thrive in the labor environment.

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The phenomenon of architecture as a 'profession in crisis' is well documented and supported by generations of evidence and research. The lack of diversity, high dropout rate of women, low-pay, long hours, rising costs of education, massive student debt, and the alarming prevalence of mental health issues in schools and in the profession at large are just some of the bad news for the future of a profession that is also facing the global challenges arising from automation, climate change and soaring rates of social inequality. These problems are collectively shared, affecting members of the profession as well as the built environment created through the architect's work. The lack of diversity in the profession renders our collective urban environment as a product creation of a mostly white, upper middle class male experience. The lack of control over investment capital and financial independence for architects leaves them less able to take risks and innovate. The high cost of education and low cost of incoming architect's salaries reduces a young architect's ability to explore new and different modes of practice, and encourages an exodus of the best and brightest to more lucrative fields such as UX design instead of expending energy to change architecture for the better. The rampant prevalence of overtime without commensurate pay means that architects do not have the time to engage with the very world in which we work, dedicating less time to volunteering or social and political engagement around issues that affect our work. Combined, it results in a profession that is slow or unable to innovate and adapt to change, destined to be a subject to external forces rather than a leader.

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If this is the labor environment that architecture students are entering upon graduation, how do educators better prepare them in the learning environment? Architecture schools are keen to discuss 'alternative practices' – bespoke, craft-led, small architecture enterprises (often represented by members of the faculty who finance said enterprises through teaching contracts), while pound for pound, the world is designed by architects who do not control the means of production. How can we give our students the tools to not only thrive, but also bring about the much-needed change to these practices and the profession at large?

This paper proposes that one of the ways that students can be better prepared is by being taught in school about the value systems placed upon architecture work, externally and internally. This begins in the architecture design studio, the context in which students learn how to work and 'practice' architecture, and where the value of their work – to themselves, their tutors and the school's licensing board – are taught. The conflict between work[1] and different forms of value within the profession – economic value, professional value and personal value – contribute to this ongoing crisis within the architecture profession. And while educational and professional revolution may be required, action must be taken today to turn the tide. This paper suggests practical ways that the architecture design studio teaching can be augmented to provide students with the skills to negotiate between the 'personal and architectural value systems' taught in schools and the 'economic value system' used by clients in the profession.

1 - Considering Arendt's distinction between 'work' and 'labor' in *The Human Condition*, Kenneth Frampton described the architect in terms of Arendt's *homo faber* who is engaged in both the process and product of his work and whose ambiguity is reflected in the ambiguity of architecture practice (Frampton, 2002). In this paper, I use work to mean what is done in everyday practice and labor to situate these actions within the economic context in which they exist.

Architect's work

In the *Ten Books of Architecture*, Vitruvius declared that the work of an architect was to create a structure that exhibited the qualities of *firmitas, utilitas, venustas* or 'firmness, commodity and delight'. Thirteen centuries later, Leon Battista Alberti is credited for separating thinking from making in architecture practice, thus refashioning the architect as a designer who does mental work, and distinctly separate from the engineer and builder who do manual work. Both Vitruvius and Alberti's images of the architect continue to define contemporary architecture practice, though the clear distinction between manual and mental work has lost its relevance as, similar to other professions, they both have expanded to encompass aspects of each other in everyday work. To embrace the wider breadth and depth of contemporary architecture work, Maurizio Lazzarato's definition of 'Immaterial Labor' has been used as the starting point of recent scholarship from Peggy Deamer and The Architecture Lobby, who have sought to reframe the sociological analysis of the architect away from Bourdieu's 'Architect as Cultural Tastemaker' to 'Architect as Worker' in order to take on the issue of professional marginality and subjectivity as a problem of work.

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Immaterial labor is important to understanding architectural work because, as Reyner Banham remarked, '…what distinguishes architecture is not what is done – since, on their good days, all the world and his wife can apparently do it better – but how it is done'.

Lazzarato defines immaterial labor as 'the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity' (Lazzarato, 1996: 133). Immaterial labor encompasses different activities that are not traditionally considered work – such as "defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion" (Lazzarato, 1996: 133) – and blurs the distinction between manual and mental labor, incorporating other skills such as intellectual and entrepreneurial skills into the definition of work. Immaterial labor is important to understanding architectural work because, as Reyner Banham remarked, '…what distinguishes architecture is not *what* is done – since, on their good days, all the world and his wife can apparently do it better – but *how* it is done' (Banham, 1990: 294). Immaterial labor blurs the division and contents of labor by incorporating the client/consumer into the production and creative process, which becomes about social relationships and communications rather than pure commodity production. As a contingent practice, architecture work is done and redone in a dynamic manner over the course of the project in collaboration with a rotating series of consultants, subconsultants and public entities. As the building industry has grown, the shifting of other professions have significantly impacted what architects have jurisdiction over today such that '… in fact the architect often becomes a broker negotiating a general design through a maze dictated by others' (Abbott, 1988: 50). With increased complexity of building systems and development methods, interprofessional competition between building professionals has taken its toll on the architect's duties as architects continue to try to negotiate their eroding role in the space between the technical and poetic, subjective and objective knowledge. This interprofessional competition from new professions emerging around architecture, 'have reduced the profession's connection with building even further, as Robert Gutman warns (Gutman, 1988: 45), turning the architect into a design subcontractor, whose decision are limited to aesthetic arbitration' (Crawford, 1991: 42). In losing influence over building, engineering, and planning to other professions, the role of the architect has been tailored so that now it is only responsible for *venustas* ('delight'), the only

quality that has not been claimed by other building professions (Crawford, 1991).
Dynamic changes in building technology and global capital in the last forty years have led to the further marginalization of the architecture profession as the profession has failed to adapt with the new economic, social and political context in which it works (Crawford, 1991). Of the many changes, a few – the rise of speculative development and design build contracts, the abolishment of fee scales, rise of digital technologies – have had massive impacts on the nature of architecture work, altering the type of clients, fees, contracts, liabilities, workflow and hierarchies in offices. This will continue to accelerate as BIM becomes the norm for project delivery for all private and public clients and automation continues to decouple value from work across all fields. Despite these massive changes in the nature of architecture practice and work, architecture education has not changed at the same rate, leaving students wholly unprepared for the labor environment that they enter upon graduation.
Given the complexities of types of work and the inability to easily separate them from each other, defining the value prescribed to an architect's work can be difficult as value changes throughout a project. Architecture is both a process and a product, and the word 'architecture' is used to mean both of these things. While the economic valorization of architecture by architect and client tends to focus on the built product and is clearly identified in a contract, the personal, social and ethical values that the architect places on her work covers both architecture as a product and as a process. As such, in architecture work the use value and exchange value distinction set by Marx is not particularly helpful since the building that is created by architecture labor is both used and exchanged for capital. Below is an attempt to interrogate three different value systems applied to the work described above.

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Economic Value
'The value of the product is not what it costs to provide or produce, it is the value the customer puts on it.'
RIBA 'Fee Calculation, Management and Negotiation for Architects', 2013

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The direct indication of how the architectural product is valued by the clients is the fee billed to the client, which is most commonly calculated as a percentage of the total building cost. This was established as standard business practice to set the architect apart as an 'elite creative' professional, separate from members of the building trades and to establish the unique services that the architect would provide for their client (Kubany, Linn, 1999). Consistent across all sectors and contract types, as the cost of construction increases, the percent fee charged decreases (Mizra, Nancy, 2014). While this is an easy way for the client and the architect to assign a fee to a project, this payment structure does not take into consideration the amount of variation in work required for a project type (Tombesi, 2015) (Mizra, Nacey, 2014). It also links architecture work directly to the building material costs and short term market forces out of the control of the architect, and creates a conflict of interest between the architect as the owner's agent who works (sometimes more hours) to keep the building cost low for the owner and the architect who would like to be well-compensated for her work. Compensating work based on the material value of a finished product also does not take into consideration quality or expertise of work done by one architect over another (Kubany, Linn, 1999) and expects the architect to take on more risk. In order to ask for an accurate fee, the architect is required to have a good idea of the complexity of the project and its context as well as market trends. By tying the economic value of the architect's work to the finished built product, work is only valued in relation to the short-term economic goals of the client – the leasing or selling of the building after completion – without incorporating the long-term economic or social value of the building.

The reality of this economic value system is not good for architects. When compared to other professions, architects fees have been found to be fundamentally too low (UK Office of Fair Trading, 2001), with some blaming this on the removal of the fee scale. Despite the standard benchmark percentage fee for architects widely considered to be 5%, a 2012 survey by UK magazine "Building Design" found that only 21% of architects surveyed received fees above 5% of total building cost, while 55% of architects received fee levels of

4% or less (Rogers, 2012). The economic illiteracy of the profession is evident in the fact that 60% of architecture practices do not have business plans and 39% of practices are not measuring the number of non-billable hours of work that they do (Colander Associates, 2014). On top of this deficit, the same report showed that 62% of UK architecture practices do speculative design work for clients for free – oftentimes to beat out other architects for a job in a kind of 'race to the bottom'. This may be the only excuse for the fact that 82% of Architects regularly work overtime, with an average work week of 46 hours. (Mizra, Nacey, 2015). As the economic value applied to architect's work does not allow room for the contingency that is inherent in it, some architecture practices make up the difference by undermining the economic value of the work of their employees. Some firms do not pay their interns (Note: it wasn't until 2011 that RIBA changed their charter to require that student placements are paid at least minimum wage (Dezeen, 2011)) and many do not pay overtime – both scenarios exploiting their employees in order to make the business profitable. Even for those who do pay, wages for year out students between Part 1 and Part 2 have stagnated, increasing only 2.5% between 2000 and 2013, after inflation, compared to partner salaries in non-solo practices increasing 11.5% (Mizra, Nacey, 2014). During this same period, the average cost of architecture education increased by as much as 240% (Fulcher, 2011).

How do we educate young architects about the potential wage exploitation and the economic value challenges ahead? For one, we need to teach them the true value of their time. Time is the most valuable thing that architects have because it is tangibly finite. Architecture schools expect students to give their time freely and work more hours than any other degree (Howarth, 2017). The sheer volume of hours promotes the idea that 'Architecture is not a career. It is a calling!' (Deamer, 2015: 61) and teaches students that their time is expendable and relatively worthless, a belief and work ethic that employers later exploit. To combat this trend, Peggy Deamer has her students at Yale University sign a contract at the beginning of the year stating that they will not do any 'all-nighters'. Though enforced by the honor system, it sends the message to students that working through the night

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is not condoned, nor is it smart practice. In the spirit of promoting just labor practices in practice, The Architecture Lobby's Just Design certification program collects information about the working conditions at US architecture firms and publicly awards firms with a certification of best labor practices. Creating an industry award that rewards good process not just outcomes is one way to educate recent graduates (and all architects) about which firms value their work while serving as a tool for responsible practices to recruit the best talent. This will hopefully continue to turn the tide on what students will expect their working conditions to be after graduation so that when they are asked, or expected, to consistently work late for no pay, they will have the ability to refuse. Architects will have the tools to say 'no' to their employers who are exploiting them by setting unachievable deadlines and promising the clients more than they can deliver for less than it costs.

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Professional Value

To become an architect, like many other professions, is to learn the distinct language, attitude and culture that is taught in the 'studios' of architecture schools and replicated in the profession. Architecture is determined by a specific, narrow and 'secret' value-system that privileges aesthetics and proper style and protocol over substance (Banham, 1990). The tight control on the profession (i.e. the regulation of the title 'Architect') kept by bodies such as RIBA maintains the dominance of this culture and perpetuates its existence.

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There are many aspects to the Architecture Value System and this discussion will reference only three. Firstly, an architect's personal and professional reputation is above all built on creativity (Benedickt, 1999). Second is that architects are social changemakers and have an ethical responsibility to the greater public (Blau, 1984). Third is the strong history and theoretical framework within architecture that ties ethics to aesthetics (Till, 2009). These three narratives within the Architecture Value System culminated in the 1980s when the mainstream architecture profession disengaged from urban social issues, instead choosing to focus on form-making. While in recent years architecture's professional organizations have updated their

code of ethics to promote agendas of sustainability, the RIBA and AIA Code of Ethics do not include any responsibility of the architect outside of those to the client, the professional body, and to upholding the law in general. And though this hasn't changed significantly, the architect's clients have. According to the 2009 RIBA Building Futures report, 50% of architects were employed by the public sector in the 1970s compared to today's figure of less than 9%. Today over 50% of the construction value of UK architects' workload is for contractor clients (RIBA, 2009a) and the majority of income generated by architects is from private clients. This shift from working for public clients with long term social and financial goals to speculative private developers that rely on impatient capital to build for market trends means that today's architects are being asked to do a fundamentally different type of work. This work is often times tailored to a proforma that doesn't value 'the public good', relying on the private monetization of the public realm and taking on a higher amount of risk. Despite this, the vast majority of architects are concerned with issues of social and economic justice and believe that architecture has a role in those issues (Crawford, 1991). This leaves architects hiding their ulterior motives of design excellence, social responsibility, design innovation & attention to the public realm from clients, often not billing them for hours that are worked.

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Contracts aside, the truth is that all architecture, no matter the funding source, is an act of spatial and therefore social construction, which has ethical implications for society. As Jeremy Till states, 'A client may argue that they are not paying for an architect to address these broader ethics, and an architect may say that the whole idea of wider responsibilities smacks of idealism. But the point is that issues of social ethics are inherent in the design of any building, and just to ignore them does not mean that they will go away' (Till, 2009: 182).

There is no doubt that in order for the personal and social values that architects hold in their work to be incorporated into the design and be valued by clients and the public at large, the Architecture Value System has to be expanded to include a broader understanding of ethical and social responsibility. One way to approach this in studio is to teach students to incor-

porate ethical as well as commercial issues into their work. The new contexts in which architects work 'certainly demand new relationships and new methods, but even more importantly, updated ideals and ethics. Almost as dangerous as having no moral compass at all would be to attempt to cling to the wreckage of outmoded professional structures' (Duffy, Rabaneck, 2013: 121).

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As an anecdote, students in our undergraduate design studio at Oxford Brookes picked their own project sites in Marseille. A number of our students proposed building their private live/work studios in several public plazas in Marseille, effectively choosing to transfer public land to private ownership. Until we discussed in our studio desk crits the ethical and societal implications of what it means to privatize a piece of public land, none of them had any notion that this was a problem nor that land ownership mattered in a studio design project. My point is that if we do not introduce these issues during studio, when do students become aware of them and the role that architects play? Part of this is the fault of us as instructors for not briefing them better in site selection and part was the lack of imagination of some students to pick just any open space to build on. As instructors we needed to have done more earlier on to discuss these issues with every student and link what was being done in studio to what was being taught in history and theory about the importance of public space in society. In just this one example of ethical responsibility in the built environment, there are serious consequences for society if our students do not understand how architects are implicated in the stewardship of public space, how their actions affect the larger social and physical experience of place, not to mention the increasingly nuanced blurring of public and private land ownership and what that means for society.

In order to teach expanded ethics, we need to teach a more critical understanding of context in architecture that is not simply form based, but includes a sense of the global and local networks in which architects work and build. Architecture is a deeply social process and yet it is valued as an aesthetic pursuit, independent of the messy power structures inherent to it. Architectural form is seen both externally and internally as a reflection of the society that produced

it and architects must take a stand in regards to how their work affects themselves and others in society. One example of a practitioner doing this is South African Architect Jo Noero, who is committed to only taking projects that conform to the 1994 South African Bill of Rights. Given the lack of available housing and land closely connected to urban centers and the Bill of Rights declaration that all South Africans deserve a decent home, Noero has set both minimum and maximum standards for the size of home that he will design for clients – whether it is social housing for the poor or luxury housing for the wealthy. Minimum to improve the standard of living for the poor, maximum so that the wealthy few do not take more than their fair share at the expense of others (Noero, 2018). As architects, we can choose how we wish to practice and we can teach our students to engage with expanded definitions of ethical responsibility in to their work.

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Personal Value

Finally, as with other creative professions, embedded within an architect's practice is the personal value of doing good work. In *The Craftsman*, Richard Sennett defines craftsmen as people who are engaged in practical work but 'are dedicated to good work for its own sake… their labor is not simply a means to another end' (Sennett, 2008: 20). It is this 'drive to do good work [that] can give people a sense of vocation' (Sennett, 2008: 267).

This desire to fulfill an individual purpose is particularly understandable in the context of a profession as contingent as architecture, one that requires a team to work together and make compromises. Despite a desire for individual agency through meaningful work, it is near impossible for the architect to exhibit self-expression in the finished product. The architect's personal value is ignored in the context of the capitalist system while the professional value system is purposefully designed to be opaque, unknown outside of the initiated and therefore misunderstood external to the architecture profession (Banham, 1990). Lazzarato identifies this involvement of the personal in work as a key characteristic of immaterial labor, which requires its subjects to be active participants of a team. Instead of simply disregarding the Taylorist hierarchy of subject and command through the blur-

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ring of work responsibilities and active participation, immaterial labor relies on a management that 'threatens to be even more totalitarian than the earlier rigid divisions between mental and manual labor (ideas and execution), because capitalism seeks to involve even the worker's personality and subjectivity within the production of value' (Lazzarato, 1996: 136). The worker (subject) becomes responsible for managing his own work and subjectivity through his drive for personal agency and desire to do good work.

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This subjugation of the architect relies, in part, on the blurring of power structures within architecture firms so that total ownership and responsibility are felt at the bottom. In an interview with *Dezeen*, Architect Bjarke Ingels said that it was not realistic for his employees to follow the Danish 37 hour work week because architecture is a 'creative profession where you are designing something … and where there's deadlines, and where it's not a function that you're fulfilling but you're taking something that doesn't exist, and you're making it exist there those rules don't apply. So that's the price you pay but the reward you get it that you do something incredibly meaningful if you actually love what you are doing and you're doing meaningful work' (Mairs, 2017: § 33). Ingel's valorization of creative work being beyond standard labor practices – hours as well as pay – and the endorsement of architectural work as the source of personal meaning is at best naïve and at worst manipulative. Deadlines are not preordained, they are set by management and the architect-client contract. Within that contract, every hour worked is financially compensated at the negotiated price to someone – though often not to the overworked intern.

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The rest of the Ingels interview frames another important component of the inherent power structures in architecture: the identity of the profession as a heterosexual white male discipline. Unfortunately, there is not space in this essay to do the topic justice, but it is worth noting that the statistics are stark. In 2014, 92% of UK architects identified as white and 79% as male (Mizra, Nacey, 2015) and in 2017, of the biggest 100 architecture firms in the world, only 3 were led by women and only 10% had women in the highest ranking jobs – even fewer in design roles at that level (Fairs, 2017). While gender of incoming stu-

dents to architecture school has been roughly even for generations, the number of women completing Part 1 was 41%, while only 13% of women are partners or directors in architecture firms (Colander Associates, 2014). This drop off is now evident during school, with the 2017 Ethel Day Study showing that prior to starting their course, 85% of female students and 88% of male students said that they planned to become licensed architects. After the course had started, that number dropped to 63% of women and 79% of men (Braidwood, 2017). In the same study, 47.7% of female students reported experiencing some kind of gender discrimination in school – putting gender discrimination above race, religion or sexuality discrimination. For the profession to be able to adapt and change to current and future challenges, it needs to be generating greater diversity of thought faster. This requires a greater diversity of architects – most importantly, minorities, women and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds – in firms, in schools and, more importantly, leading both architecture firms and schools. We are doing the women and men we teach a great disservice by ignoring not only the subject of work in our teaching, but more importantly the value of diversity of experience and thought and the power structures inherent to practice.

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One way to increase the amount of diverse representation in schools is by committing to hiring a diverse group of tutors, lecturers and invited critics and presenting case studies from diverse practices. In response to the lack of women speaking on panels and in studio design crits, Parlour in Australia started Marion's List, a public register of women in Australian architecture and the built environments, as a reference for those looking for experts to sit on juries, give public talks or teach. In an effort to raise awareness at institutions, Jeremy Till, Dean of Central St. Martin's, has committed to only speaking at events where at least 30% of the presenters are women (Till, 2011). We know that representation matters and yet, in my experience, of the 10 Brooks Year 2 Tech precedent case studies chosen by studio leaders in 2016, only 1 of them was by a firm headed by a solo woman architect – 9/10 Stock Orchard Street by Sarah Wigglesworth Architects (though a half point could be given for Diller+Scofidio's Blur Building). It is worth

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noting that on their submitted reports, almost half of the students labeled the architect as 'Sarah Wigglesworth and Jeremy Till', one just 'Jeremy Till'.

Teaching value

'[a]ll architecture is social architecture. All architecture is political architecture.'
Paul Jones, *The Sociology of Architecture*

The decline of the status of professionals to that of traditional working class definitions (Braverman, 1974) and the increase in (indebted) highly educated yet economically precarious workers not just in architecture but globally has forced professional organizations to respond. RIBA has launched campaigns that promote the idea that the hope for the architecture profession relies on the better articulation of architecture's value for clients and society, as defined by the client's definition of economic value (RIBA, 2015) (Warpole, 2000). RIBA presents the economic value of architecture mainly in terms of technical building solutions that are often not the sole responsibility of the architect and neglect the day-to-day immaterial labor and creative work that the architect does. To truly understand the value of architecture work – perceived externally by the client as well as internally by the profession and individuals doing the work – the definition of value must be expanded to include the professional value systems that are taught in schools of architecture and reinforced in practice, and the personal values held by architects.
If the current 'Architect as Worker' movement is not outright dismissed as a threat to the internally defined 'elite' status of architecture, it can be embraced as an empowering challenge to the profession to take care of its own as a first step to taking care of others. The majority of architects are, to use the language of The Architecture Lobby, precarious workers, and yet we are generally expected (by ourselves, by the public) to be the vanguards of the communities and environments in which we work. Architects are implicated in the social and spatial injustices of the built environment, though to quote Iris Marion Young, it is 'not my job' to be responsible for fighting injustice – it is the job of the state (Young, 2011). When more architects worked for public agencies, their ethical responsibil-

ities were ours by association, making it unnecessary to expand the architecture professions code of ethics. Today, this is a problem in cash-strapped, deregulating, devolving and privatizing cities, states, counties and countries around the world. These are the governing bodies that are expected to restrict our private developer clients looking for their 20% profit, to force them to provide social housing, good urban spaces, use sustainable and safe materials, all while freeing architects up to act as pure agents and extensions of our client's (private) interests. And they cannot cope. This dynamic will continue to be further complicated by the changing nature of work. As automation continues to decouple value from work across professions and workplaces around the world, in some ways, the architecture profession is already ahead of the curve. Value has already been decoupled from work. Architects have already not taken ethical responsibility for their actions, even before the machines and algorithms with which they work excused them from this responsibility. If it is our responsibility as citizens to fit against injustice, could we also take responsibility as professionals who are perpetrating injustice in our work?

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Because the architecture profession is ahead of the times and we have seen what this leads to, I believe there is real opportunity to rethink what our professional value systems could be. Ultimately, in order for architects to thrive in a posthuman world of automated work, the profession needs to embrace a practice embedded in humanist values. The value prescribed to architecture work cannot be from a purely capitalist system. But this change will need to come from architecture schools, the place where students first learn how to work. It is our duty to teach students the value of their work – current and future potentials – and to promote alternative practices and modes of working that can become mainstream. By expanding our value systems – in particular, our ethical value systems – the profession could be at the forefront of change to our internal and external work environments.

Ultimately, in order for architects to thrive in a posthuman world of automated work, the profession needs to embrace a practice embedded in humanist values.

To conclude, in the 1984 preface to *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Venturi wrote: "The architect's ever diminishing power and his growing ineffectualness in shaping the whole environment can perhaps be reversed, ironically, by narrowing his

concerns and concentrating on his own job. Perhaps then relationships and power will take care of themselves" (Venturi, 1984: 14). It's safe to say that has not happened. It is time to take a different approach.

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