

Article Submission to www.post-crit.com

Date: 14/04/2017

Title: Professionals Not Producers

Body text (467 words):

It was a lonely place, standing ankle deep in mud trying to find a setting out point from which I could prove that a steel beam had been installed too low. The contractor had been working on sites like this for years, and now I was telling him that the work had to be undone and the project delayed, all at his expense.

My time in practice had given me the skills to read structural drawings and spot defects, but the way to deal with the situation was not mentioned at any point in my academic or professional training. The defect was not complex, so its rectification should not have been uncomfortable, but I had questions. How do I document this? What tone should I take with the contractor? Defensive? Formal? Concerned?

While much of an architect's experience is acquired over time, understanding the basics of professional conduct should be more prominent in our education. If you were to ask them, most architects would agree that they are accountable, public facing and professional. So why are we not trained to act as such from the very beginning?

The current system produces talented designers that create high quality work, but advances in automation and data management technology are making much of this role obsolete. Now more than ever architecture needs professionals, not just producers. The question we need to ask is not how the education system will serve the profession in two years, but in twenty.

Complications during the construction process can be complex and cause tension between parties. Training graduates to communicate, negotiate and manage expectations will make their transition into professional practice smoother and benefit their future employers. Furthermore, understanding the trends, power structures and incentives of the industry that they are engaged with is vital to anticipating the future role of the architect. For example, there are few job adverts nowadays without a requirement for BIM experience, implying that the architect's responsibility for the manual production and curation of information is coming to an end.

Problem solving and independent thought should continue to be championed, but clarity of communication needs to be rewarded more. The education system would produce more versatile graduates if it were to place greater emphasis on pragmatism and adaptability rather than indulging fanciful academic discourse. The education system must devise a method to teach students the soft as well as the hard skills required to deliver a project from concept to completion.

The amalgamation of professional and academic experience is one of the great strengths of the UK architecture education system, but the two must be better integrated to improve the training of architects. The need for human judgement is the architect's lifeline, but our education system must adapt to this core shift in the industry. We need professionals, not producers.

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