Autonomy and the socialisation of architects

Article

Accepted Version

Autonomy and the socialisation of architects

Abstract

The socio-cultural production of architects' identities, and their professional personas, is a lively source of continuing debate. At one extreme, there is the claim to autonomy that highlights the distinctiveness of architecture and its cultural and disciplinary specificity. This view is challenged by those who emphasise architects' dependence, for acting and actions, on their embeddedness into collective, social, settings and relationships. In the paper, we consider what it may mean to be 'autonomous of' and 'dependent on' in relation to the actions of architects. There is limited specification in architectural writings about what autonomy and dependence are, and we suggest that there is a need not to discount such terms, but to reformulate them by recognising that the socially constructed self is an integral part of individual action. In this respect, we seek to amplify, and evaluate, the concept of relational autonomy that distances the notion of autonomy from individualistic, under-socialised, accounts of architects and their practices. Referring to three empirical examples of practice, we amplify this understanding by, firstly, outlining what a relational autonomous approach to architecture might entail, and, secondly, assessing how far it may enable a conception of the practices of architects in ways whereby, following Tony Fry's observations, they are conceived as much broader than 'the specificity of any particular activity' that expresses their existence.

Key words: autonomy, dependence, relationality, inter disciplinarity, structure-agency

(1). Introduction.

This paper is a reflection on a period of research and writing about architecture where, more often than not, we have been perceived as outsiders and not qualified to comment on the activities and actions of architects. In one instance, a referee of a book proposal we wrote, about the interrelationships between architectural practice and regulation, said that our peripheral status, as non-architects, was such that the subject matter was 'the kind of thing that only an architect could write about incisively'.[1] Another referee questioned the methodological basis of the book proposal, in particular, the perception of its grounding in our 'outsider status' as social scientists, by saying that 'I distrust non-designers who try to reach conclusions about the design process from questionnaires that they themselves have devised'.[2] While these comments seemed anachronistic to us, they were reminders of the continuing importance, and power, of disciplinary knowledge in the crafting of architects individual and collective values and identities.

The (re) production of architects' identities, and their professional personas, is well documented in the literature. [3] At one extreme, there is the claim to autonomy that, in Eisenman's terms, conceives architecture as 'a representation of itself, of its own values and internal experience'.[4] Such sentiments highlight the distinctiveness of architecture and its cultural and disciplinary specificity. For Gondalsonas, this is reflected in the transcendent nature of architectural knowledge, 'a force in itself…and which does not communicate ideas other than its own'.[5] This view projects an

atomistic model of human agency and interaction, and it is challenged by those who suggest that 'architecture depends'.[6] Instead of the autonomy of architecture, and the moral and ethical distancing of architects from the objects/subjects of their practices, what is emphasised is practitioners' dependence, for acting and actions, on social relationships and competing discourses about what design and building processes are or ought to be.

The counterpoising of autonomy and dependence maintains a dualism that is unhelpful in developing knowledge of/about the actions of architects. In the paper, we draw on, and develop, debates that reject an either/or position and, instead, interrogate what it means to be 'autonomous of' and 'dependent on'. There is limited specification in architectural, and cognate, writings about what autonomy and dependence are, and, following Christman[7], there is a need not to discount such terms, but to reformulate them by recognising that the socially constructed self is an integral part of individual action. In this respect, we seek to amplify, and evaluate, the concept of relational autonomy that distances the notion of autonomy from individualistic, under-socialised, accounts of architects and their practices. This may facilitate the development of a conception of human agency in which the capacities and opportunities for autonomous action are, as Christman[8] suggests, 'fundamentally and irreducibly relational'.

Instead of being shackled by a disciplinary knowledge, underpinned by the pre-occupation with instrumentalism and aestheticisation, a relational autonomy of architecture can enable the excavation of what Fry[9] refers to as the 'being of the building'. This 'being' is inextricably part of the spatial-temporal relations of design and building practices, the substance of which has the potential to highlight the political, and moral, content of the design process, and the, intrinsically, socialised and geographical nature (s) of the practices of architects. In the rest of the paper, we amplify this understanding by, firstly, outlining what a relational autonomous approach to architecture might entail, and, secondly, assessing how far it may enable a conception of the practices of architects in ways whereby, following Fry[10], they are conceived as much broader than 'the specificity of any particular activity' that expresses their existence.

(2). Towards relational autonomies and the socialisation of architects.

One of the persistent, socio-political and ideological, features of western societies is the persona of individuals as autonomous agents, acting more or less independently of social relationships, and loosely held together by voluntary ties.[11] This is the projection of what the feminist writer Jennifer Nedelsky[12] describes as 'the liberal vision of human beings as self-made and self-making men'. Such features are redolent of the values of many professional organisations, intent on developing their members' social and cultural status by highlighting their distinctive, and unique, attributes and qualities. Here, the emphasis is the interior qualities that are

significant in delimiting a profession's boundaries, defined, in part, by its subject-specific foci and claims to a disciplinary specificity. Such specificity is part of the basis of/for personal autonomy, defined by Christman[13] as behaviour that is able to facilitate a person's 'true' or 'authentic' self.

There is wide documentation about architects and the authentic self, characterized by the heroic figure and the understanding of their craft as the design and production of aesthetic objects[14]. It is assumed that the locale or context for design activity is a tabula rasa, a blank-slate metaphor that serves to highlight the critical role of the architect's mental and intellectual capacities in crafting new environments[15]. These are based on the search for beauty, or what Leon Alberti[16], in his architectural treatise, conveys as the pursuit of 'firm and graceful preordering of lines and angles conceived in the mind'. This pursuit is the interlinking of architects' autonomy with images and representations based on a Cartesian conception of space, in which spatial relations are 'inside the forms – the interior'.[17] The object of the architect's practice is understood as the building, or a physical space that expresses the art of architecture through its visual elements, from the form of its façades to the decorative details of doors and windows.

The autonomous field of architecture is contested by alternative ideas that suggest that the actions of architects are shaped by heteronomy, defined by the social and cultural contexts in which practice is manifest.[18] Here, Leon Alberti's[19] classical

conception of architecture, as the perspective of 'whole forms in the mind', is supplanted by socio-cultural and materialist understandings of the actions of architects. These range from conceptions of architects' actions as derivative of impersonal, economic, forces, to the understanding that architecture is, in Michael Hays[20] terms, 'an instrument of cultural values'. In both interpretations, the scope for architects to exercise (self) control, that is, the possibilities for socialized forms of autonomy, is denied by conceptions that regard architects' practices as an epiphenomenon, dependent on, and derivative of, prevailing socio-economic, technological, and political relations.

Neither the asocial notion of autonomy nor the structural, materialist, conception of architects' practices as epiphenomena are tenable in facilitating an understanding of the actions of architects. Both are limited by conceiving architecture as part of a linear process of cause and effect, bound by a functionality that, as Fry[21] suggests, fails to "perceive 'space in action' or as 'lived'".[22] The 'lived' nature of architecture is one whereby designed artifacts are not ends in themselves, but are redolent of fluid relationships co-constituted by the contingencies of time and place. Jacobs et al[23] suggest similar by encouraging scholars to look beyond the building to the 'diverse gatherings of contingently formed associates and associations', a sentiment that draws attention to the connectivity of phenomena, or the understanding of architects' practices as constituted by 'mutual, partial, or contingent dependencies'.[24] This is a

rejection of conceptual dichotomies and of architects' actions as part of a closed, interiorized, system.

The significance of these perspectives is the challenge to, and potential displacement of, reductive claims to autonomy that fail to situate the autonomous self within what Elias[25] describes as 'the structure of the relations between individuals'. This is not to diminish the architect, or their capacity to act and influence, but, rather, to situate them, and their actions, in what Christman[26] characterises as 'relational experiences as an integral part of individual actions'. Architects, or any professional, are not disconnected from social contexts, and are co-constituted by their emplacement in networks or what Hunt and Ells[27] describe as 'indefinite sets of multiple connections…that inform and shape what is connected'. Thus, unlike the static conception of the autonomous practitioner, which emphasizes the separateness of the architect, relational accounts consider autonomy to be constituted through, and, crucially, enhanced by, the collective interactions with other actors, and by the social contexts in which such interactions unfold.

Here, autonomy is part of a social process in which to exercise agency, and self-determination, depends on the recognition of one's embeddedness into collective social formations whose operating may be 'a source of autonomy as well as a danger to it'[28]. This (relational) view of autonomy highlights how the architect is positioned *in relation to* other (networks of) actors, their resources and systems of knowledge

and practice. This is not to regard autonomy as freedom from constraint but rather, in Perkin et al's[29] terms, as a fluid process that enables an actor's sense of self to be developed and exercised, 'and reconfirmed in context to daily interactions and experiences'. In methodological terms, this understanding, of what constitutes the persona of the architect, leads to less of a focus on the building as a representation, and more on what Lees[30] describes as 'the active and embodied (design) practices by which it is produced, appropriated and inhabited'[31]

Such ideas direct attention to the transactional nature of knowledge, and emphasise the constitutive nature of individuals' practices and actions. Such thinking is influential in spatial disciplines, such as planning and geography, and, as Jones[32] notes, relational approaches reject both absolute and relative conceptions of space since, 'objects are space, space is objects, and moreover objects can be understood only in relation to other objects'. The importance of relationality is also recognised in some practice and professional contexts, and Edwards'[33] call, for a 'relational turn in expertise', is recognition that professionals, such as architects, work 'in and between work settings and interact with other practitioners and clients to negotiate interpretation of tasks and ways of accomplishing them'. For Edwards[34], expert or professional knowledge is not the preserve of any group, but it is distributed across social systems, and necessitates new configurations of practice that 'may destabilise established pathways of collaboration'.

These observations draw attention to the shaping of architects' sense of self through practice, or what Kimbell[35] refers to as *design-as-practice* and *designs-in-practice*. These concepts convey an understanding of practice in relation to what people do in their everyday interactions with each other, and with material objects and non-human artifacts. *Design-as-practice* directs attention to the embodied nature of design and the 'habitual, possibly rule governed, often routinised, conscious, or unconscious', nature of practices[36]. Far from a rational, problem solving activity, or the preserve of a heroic figure, *design-as-practice* is characterised by material and discursive activities that constitute the basis of the practices of architects. Such practices, including the development of a design for a building, are dependent on what Reckwitz[37] describes as the existence and specific interconnections of the elements that comprise them, 'and which cannot be reduced to any of these single elements'.

Designs-in-practice is the understanding that designing is never complete or finished but is part of emergent activities that may become transparent as they are enacted in-practice. Such practices are not reducible to a specific knowledge or practice-type, and designing is much more than the activities of those ascribed as designers, or (their) actions defined as part of a delimited, discrete, process. As Tony Fry[38] suggests, designing is integral to pre-figured human activity, including the everyday inhabitation of space by what Lucy Kimbell[39] describes as both known users and those who are not known. *Designs-in-practice* specifies the ordinariness of designing, the multiplicity of those involved in it, and the crafting of architects autonomy, or

sense of self, as part of a dynamic of situated and contingent practice. We now turn to consider how far, and in what ways, architects' practices are interconnected to the multiplicity of contingent things, the inter dependencies of which, we suggest, are significant in shaping the practices of architecture.

(3). Design (s) as/in practice and relational autonomies.

To develop, empirically, our observations about architecture, autonomy, and relationality, we refer to three contrasting practical contexts that illustrate the potential for design-in-practice and designs-as-practice to shape, and be shaped by, the (relational) autonomies of architects. The first relates to the interrelationships between pedagogy and practice in which the scope for architects' autonomy is enhanced, potentially, by their acculturation into practice-based discourses that underpin the techniques of building and construction. The second considers architects' interactions with building users, not as essentialised categories or objects, but as embodied, living, subjects that are co-constitutive of design practice. The third is legal rule and regulation of design practice by planning and building control that, in distinction to orthodox assumptions that conceives regulatory control as anathema to freedom, may be the basis for enlarging building quality and the scope of the (relational) autonomies of the architect.

To illustrate our arguments, we draw on, selectively, data generated from a range of different research projects conducted between 2000 and 2011, each dealing with

different dimensions of architects' influence on the design process.[40] The projects deployed a range of research methods, including interviews with architects, project managers, building control surveyors, engineers, and other personnel involved in the design and construction of buildings. We particularly draw on architects' (self) testimonies as illustrations of the various ways in which they understand their practices, often articulated as part of a relational matrix whereby their scope for (autonomous) action and practice is predicated, precisely, on their entwinement with, and dependence on, others. Documentary material was also gathered, including photographs, drawings, and plans; in one project, which we briefly refer to in this paper, archival data, relating to the architecture of the American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright were gathered.[41]

(a). Architectural knowledge and the relevance of architecture.

The acculturation of architects into the profession of architecture is anathema to free thinking and autonomy because it restricts, potentially, the scope and scale of experience, and delimits, by managing the boundaries of the 'architect's field', what is, or ought to be, permissible practice. This is recognised by a range of commentators, including Doucet and Janssens[42], who suggest that architecture's relevance is threatened by its introspective, disciplinary, tendencies, or what Perez Gomez[43] refers to as the retreat into 'self-referential, structural determinism'. For Doucet and Janssens[44], the danger is that architecture 'has isolated itself inside its black box, has progressively internalised discourse, and has put its entire focus on the building and

technology'. This is, for Jenson[45], akin to architects' voluntary 'withdrawal from the social realm', in the pursuit of a false sense of autonomy, and leading some observers to view architects as the purveyors of fanciful and unreasonable ideas that may be irrelevant to the building process[46].

The risk of the architectural profession becoming a residual element of building and construction is acknowledged, albeit belatedly, by professional bodies such as the Royal Institution of Architects (RIBA)[47]. The RIBA[48] highlight the 'erosion of traditional architectural skills to other players', and the need for skills acquisition and training to reflect the heterogeneous nature of building and design. Similar observations are part of a recent government review of architects' education[49], which calls for an overhaul of the disciplinary basis of architectural training in favour of inter-disciplinarity. The review seems to suggest that architects' education, in its present form, is antithetical to autonomy because what is taught, including its manner of delivery and governance by accreditation, may reinforce architects separation from the world[50]. Such separations ought not to be confused with autonomy because the implication, of separation, is the potential side lining of architects in the production of the designed environment.

Despite the recent observations by, and protestations of, the RIBA, the distancing of architects from 'the nature of construction', or the manifold contexts of building practice, is related, in part, to the boundary-policing role of professional institutes.

Here, processes of accreditation, in defining what legitimate architectural knowledge is, can be implicated in restrictive practice, and inhibit relational autonomies (of architecture) from emerging. This was the view of an architect who, in interview, expressed disquiet with the policing of the Urbanism Group within the RIBA. As he recalled, 'what was impeding its progress was the fact the RIBA made it more difficult for us to bring people in on an equal standing from the other disciplines that are very much involved in urbanism'. Others felt that boundary policing was evident to the detriment of a broader knowledge base emerging in design education, or as an architect said, 'I find the RIBA irrelevant in that respect. It's a terrible thing to say'.

These observations resonate with many architects and, in interviews we have conducted, there is more or less unanimity that architects' education, including its regulation by the RIBA and the professional discourses it imbibes, contributes to inhibiting autonomy of practice. As an architect said, 'my education was instilling the creative impulse, so I learnt a lot about art history but not much of practical use'. This reflects the problematical assumption that architects' autonomy is facilitated by the inculcation of distinction or what Weingart[51] describes as the 'disciplinary criteria of validity'. One architect suggested that the pursuit of validity was 'a diversion'. He referred to computer-aided design (CAD) as an example, a technology and technique that he felt was reinforcing a focus on form, and not enabling an understanding of 'how a building is put together'. For another architect, CAD creates a false sense of space or no sense of how spaces will perform: 'it discourages dialogue in a

team…they {trainee architects] can use the computer, no problem…but when it comes to putting the elements together of the building ...they're hopeless'.

These views reflect experienced architects who are 'street-wise' in relation to what it takes to make a building. One interviewee referred to practical engagement as requiring architects to acquire, necessarily, the bodily dispositions of other, significant, actors in the design process, partly by self-management to overcome the potential for negative comment or questioning of their competence. As he observed, part of the process is to fit in and 'get on with the [project] team and show them that you're knowledgeable about their point of view, their way of seeing things'. For another architect, gaining credibility and enhancing, potentially, scope for influencing practice depends, in part, on acquiring the skills to understand, and communicate, the interdisciplinary nature of building. As he said, 'I think it's important that you have a level of understanding of all the issues involved in designing a building, even if you need to employ consultants to get specific technical input…you can only influence others if you can speak their language'.

For architects, by blending in, and developing a dialogue with project team members, the propensity for 'self development' is enhanced, or, as an architect suggested, the key to getting good work done is to 'talk with fellow professionals…our clients are very knowledgeable…so, you know, we learn from them as well'. Another architect felt that, whatever he was being directed to do by a client, that the quality of the

outcome depended on him listening to, and empathising with, other project professionals, and acting as a translator. As he suggested, 'the skill we're bringing is that we're listening to what they [the client] say… the trick is *to translate that* into something which is buildable, and gives them what they want but also gives you, you know, something that you think is a piece of good design' [emphasis added]. The act of translation is neither a passive activity nor reducible to any determinate subject/object but, rather, as the architect, above, hinted, it provides the possibility for indeterminate things to occur, including building outcomes not necessarily commensurate with original client briefings.

The evidence presented here indicates that the possibility for architects to practice autonomously, or exercising a sense of self in the field, is interlocked with the languages, values, and socio-cultural dispositions, of other project professionals involved in the development and design process.[52] This observation resonates with Tony Fry's[53]understanding that the freedom 'to be' and 'to do' depends upon 'acts of appropriation and recognition' by others, or the mutuality of autonomy and dependence as a basis of sociality. By this, Fry[54] is suggesting that 'in so far as we gain freedom 'to be', our being gains this possibility' from interactions with others, and the manifold contexts in which such interactions, as practice, unfold.

(b). 'Multiplying the variations' by embodying the building.

A significant part of the socialisation of architects relates to an abstract sense of place that is rarely populated by specific subjects. Rather, the social sense of space is described by the use of euphemisms, such as 'the user' or 'the occupier', but rarely in relation to individual subjects or persons that resemble living human beings. In part, this is conditioned by the nature of the capitalist land market and its propensity for speculative building in which space is conceived as abstract Cartesian coordinates, that, for Bachelard[55] leads to the loss of the 'tonalization of being'.[56] Architectural discourse augments this by reducing the complexity of space to a visual form, understood, and experienced, through visuality and the eye's appropriation of place. A potential implication is the (re) production of mono-sensual spatialities, or places rendered less than sensitive to the manifold ways in which bodies (inter) act in space.

Our argument is that architects' abstract, disembodied, conceptions of space, do not provide the latitude for them to self-express beyond delimited boundaries, and this forecloses the possibilities of developing an understanding of space as 'something that is always potential, never complete, and never perfect'.[57] By breaking down the hierarchies between architect and user, and seeking to (re) embody the former within design and building practices, new architectural possibilities emerge that may provide the basis for architects' to self express in ways whereby the possibilities for an 'inhabited geometry' may emerge.[58] While such inhabitation is manifestly part of a building's design, particularly the shaping of it through time by occupation and use, it is a rarity for architects to articulate the complexities of people's corporeal presence

in space, or the ways in which such presence is constitutive of the designed nature of buildings.

An example of seeking to embody design, and enlarge the scope of an architectural project, was evident in New Haven Downs House, a place comprising two-day centres and a 50-bed nursing home for frail elderly people and people with learning difficulties (see figure 1). The architect outlined his design philosophy: 'We are interested in the kind of shared project, rather than in delivering a carefully wrought precious object from a long way away. It becomes a way of working out the different and varied possibilities, it gives us so much more to work on'. For the architect, the sharing and the engagement was opening up his autonomy precisely by a process of de-centring that enabled otherwise abstract users to be known and embodied persons. The process of embodiment was the recognition of individuals' personal biographies, their needs, desires, and feelings, or what the architect described as 'letting each person into the process, sharing their lives with us, and giving us time to spend with them in their environment'.

Figure 1 here: New Haven Downs House

Source: Reproduced with the kind permission of Sue Barr

His knowledge of dementia was opened up by personal encounters and, as he recounted, 'I've been on walking trips in the Lake District with some of the residents,

as one of them, and so it's [i.e. designing] more than a desk exercise or replicating previous buildings'. The architect saw these encounters as much more than gathering information but rather as a constituent part of [his] self-learning to enable an embodied architecture to evolve. As he said, 'our role is far greater than making assisted bathrooms to be a particular shape and size…[it's] how the body should move through space and what the implications of that space are on the self…We need to constantly be wondering and talking about that, about what it means to be in those spaces'. By walking around places with people with dementia, and talking with them about their sense of space, the outcome was the production of 'localised geographies' by de-scaling the building to ensure that every part was legible and easy to interpret.

The architect felt that the project was a challenge to the 'tried and tested' approaches to the spatialising of design, or the formulaic ways reflected in much of his previous work. As he said, 'it all became very contextual and very specific, it challenged my thinking, and it made me approach the work very differently'. The embodied knowledges of dementia that the architect developed suggested the need to change the client's brief with its emphasis on fixity of design and the allocation of uses to specific rooms or parts of the building. As the architect noted, 'I learnt that residents don't take note of conventional design, so we mixed it all up'. Instead of separate spaces, such as a living room and dining room, 'we said wouldn't it be better if there were several sitting areas and several dining areas, more or less as interchangeable

environments…we made the dining areas destinations at the end of corridors, so you never came to a dead end, you always came to a light bright public room'.

Observations by the architect indicate that the designed outcomes were based on an embodied method of knowing that was much more than pre-reflexive bodily engagements with, or knowledges of, cognitive disorders and the materiality of care home environments. As he said, the approach is a 'free thinking ideology where one kind of dispenses with the rule book...to how the body should move through space and what the implications of that space are on the self'. The method reflected the intertwined ways in which the architect became immersed into the embodied, practical, worlds of dementia and design, and, as he said, 'until I met these people, I did not quite realise how they saw the world or sensed the spaces that they move around and live in. Here, the architect's capacity to know, and his subsequent scope for practice, or the application of the relational 'autonomous self', depended upon both the physical and emotional interactions between himself and the care setting, in which 'the experience was one where you kind of learn to be more focussed on the person.'

The architect's approach to the design of the care home is also one which acknowledges the interdependencies between spaces, or what Schneider and Till refer to as the 'continuity of action and occupation'.[59] This views all agents involved in the production and use of a building as entwined in a 'temporal chain', and

requires that architects must always be 'alert to events further down the line over which they have some (but not total) influence'.[60] Noting the partiality of architects' influence over building form and function in this way need not be viewed as the diminution of their status or selfhood, or truncation of autonomous practice. Rather, we suggest that adopting an embodied, decentred, approach to design, as described by the architect of the care home, is integral to the co-creation of knowledge and understanding about form and function that is necessary for the flourishing of design practitioners.

(c). Regulating design and the enhancement of (relational) autonomy.

It is not only human agents that exert an influence over the production of the built environment, and the rules and regulations that govern design practice, such as planning and building regulations, are a co-constitutive part of the actions of architects.[61] The commonly held view is that regulation and rule relating to design is an external imposition that will reduce the scope of architects' creativity. A typical observation was made by the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who noted that 'codes are the mental limitations of short men, short of experience, short of imagination, short of courage, short of common sense…'[62] There is no end of similar statements to be found in the architectural press. In an exchange in *Building Design*, it is claimed that regulations relating to disabled people's access to buildings are 'stifling development',[63] while, in a related piece, the magazine's editor refers to the 'regulatory straitjacket' that 'demands that architects only use certain kinds of locks'[64].

In contrast to these, sometimes caricatured, observations, we suggest that the regulations and rules governing design can facilitate a liberalisation, or opening up, of practice, in ways whereby opportunities for creative engagement may be enhanced.[65] Regulation is not reducible to a technical, instrumental, object per se, but, instead, it is a socio-material construct embedded into a complexity of knowledge of/about building and construction. Its enacting is always part of place-based practices. While design regulation states a rule to be followed, the rule, in and of itself, is always part of an interpretative process and its shaping of outcomes is never pre-defined or determined. Our research highlights architects' complex, and sometimes surprising, relationships with regulatory requirements, and shows how, in practice, regulation may enable a widening of the possibilities of what architects can achieve.

An example is architects' interactions with Part L of the English building regulations relating to the conservation of fuel and power.[66] This regulation appeared in 1995, and sets energy efficiency requirements for new and old buildings, including measures to ensure that targets to reduce CO2 emissions are met. The Part L regulation has prompted discussion in the design and construction industry about its impact on a range of practices, including procurement and design team decision-making, innovation in design, and compliance.[67] While much of the focus relates to costs of adhering to Part L, and its capacity to reduce the use of glass in buildings, one of our interviewees felt that it offers, like all regulations, 'opportunities perhaps,

as well'. Another architect concurred in noting that 'the good thing about the regulation is that it is to do with insulating buildings or making buildings more sustainable, you can't argue that that's not a sensible direction to be moving…the regulation, you might argue, is in some ways liberating'.

Some architects felt that Part L was empowering them by providing a legal remit to pursue innovation in design that previously was 'off limits' or not welcomed or countenanced by clients. In one practice, committed to green design solutions, Part L has been 'a godsend…it's making it easier for us to influence the client'. For another architect, less concerned with green issues, Part L was opening up design practice to new possibilities. As he said, 'we do a lot of very glassy, light work, an awful lot of which is going to be very, very difficult to do. You know, we're going to have to really re-think things'. For the architect, the rethinking was one whereby potential for new and exciting design is made possible by the legal rule despite, in this instance, the client's reluctance to pay what are perceived as additional costs for energy efficient design: 'we're [architects] there but our clients aren't necessarily up with it, and they're, well, 'why do we have to do this?' And of course the attitude is, 'well, how can we get round it?''

Other architects saw Part L as, potentially, a productive part of a project brief. An architect described a project for a UK higher education institution in which Part L was facilitating what he described as 'more interesting spatial arrangements' than

would otherwise have been achievable within the project brief. He gave an example of dramatic internal atria that he had incorporated into the design of the building, in part, to facilitate the flow of air within the building necessary to meet ventilation requirements. The architect described how Part L had been used to help 'sell' his design approach to the client. He was of the view that telling the client that the atria would create a 'better building' would not have carried sufficient weight to justify the additional cost. Instead, he was able to justify what may have been dismissed as a luxurious use of space by showing how it added value both in design and function terms, and, crucially, in meeting statutory air ventilation standards.

The example shows how regulation is a constitutive part of the content of design and how it may be implicated in enabling what the architect outlined as 'an innovative approach, material or spatial configuration'. This observation takes one away from the scenario that 'architects depend', or that the scope for (their) acting is inhibited, necessarily, by broader social structures and relations. A relational view of action conceives architects' interactions with social structures, such as the building regulations, as contextual and indeterminate, and providing the possibilities for ways of acting that are not a foreclosure or predictability of outcome. The paradox is that while regulation, as legal fiat or rule of law, appears to be the basis of restraint, or one's unfreedom or capacity not to do, they reflect Levinas's observation that 'we must impose commands on ourself in order to be free'.[68]

(4). Conclusions.

Much of the debate about architecture and autonomy continues to revolve around an unproductive either/or position that, we feel, is unhelpful in seeking to understand how the practices of architects are crafted and (re) produced. On the one hand, there are still those who proclaim that architecture is able to forge an identity, and modus operandi, more or less independently of socio-cultural and political contexts, while, on the other hand, there are some individuals, such as Robbins, who suggest that 'nothing could be less autonomous than architecture'.[69] We reject both positions, the former because of its fundamentally idealist, and idealistic, nature, the latter because it provides little scope for an understanding of how actors, such as architects, may influence social actions and outcomes through the context of practice. Thus, for Robbins[70] to suggest that dependence on social forces is 'setting the limits and the agendas' of architecture is to perpetuate no more than a deterministic frame of understanding of the actions of architects[71].

By drawing on relational accounts of social action, including the works of Christman, Gondalsonas, Nedelsky, and Brown, the either/or representations of architects' actions, that lend themselves to, and even encourage, reducibility to one side of the autonomy/dependence dualism, are, potentially, avoided. Instead, a relational account makes it possible to transform an understanding of the practices of architects

into ones whereby the emphasis is the co-constructed and conjoined nature of design practice. Such co-construction is the interplay of agency and structure, human and non-human actors, and part of processes that, in Fry's terms, 'points to the determinate designing consequences of situated 'things''.[72] Here, the understanding is that architects' dependence, or their 'socially constituted and interpersonally embedded selves', shapes the scope for autonomy [73]. In other words, dependence is integral to the social relations that comprise the conditions of autonomous activities and practices.

The autonomy of architects can be enhanced by recognising their dependence on the social conditions, and contexts, that frame their actions, and by developing a politics of practice that enables the relational resources necessary for autonomous actions to be secured. For Schneider [74], this may require architecture to be reconfigured and rethought as a 'field of questions and uncertainties', by challenging what she regards as the insular nature of the profession, and its adherence to accreditation procedures, educational regimes and introspective methods of valuing and judging design quality. Such views suggest that the creation of the relationally autonomous architect is predicated on the dissolution of architecture as a delimited or disciplinary field, in which architects are exposed to, and integrated into, the totality of building cultures, or what Frank Lloyd Wright referred to as designing 'from the nature of construction'.[75]

While some may perceive suggestions of a dissolution or dilution of the disciplinarity standing of the architect as a pessimistic diagnosis for the future of the profession, we argue that the opposite is the case. Instead, it is in acknowledging and, moreover *embracing*, the inter-disciplinary and collaborative nature of the design and production of the built environment, that the future of the architectural professional lies. As the empirical examples we have reviewed in this paper suggest, the skill of the architect is in being attuned to, and then interpreting and translating, the plethora of (non)human elements that shape design practice. This could include a creative response to a challenging client brief, being anticipatory of/sensitive to end-user needs, and working *with* (rather than against) codes and regulations.

As much is acknowledged in a recent review of architecture and the built environment in the UK, where the theme of inter-disciplinarity is recurrent, and which positions architecture as something 'that is owned by everyone, and created by many, not just architects' (75). Such a viewpoint goes someway to towards recognising the social embeddedness of architectural practice, in which, 'in reality, [architects] are now seen as team members rather than leaders, alongside the many parallel professions like project management, planning and cost consultancy, surveying and landscape design' (76).

(75, 76) Farrell Review, p.65 and p.14.

Notes and references

1. Rob Imrie and Emma Street, *Architectural Design and Regulation* (Oxford, Wiley & Blackwell, 2011).

2. There were other comments, including one individual reinforcing a sense of the disciplinary specificity of architecture. As this person said, 'it is difficult to see that it [the book] is actually *needed*, at any rate by practitioners. It appears to address only external regulation and guidance, and not the essential disciplines applied by architects in arriving at optimum design solutions'. Despite these negative, and sometimes hostile, observations, we secured a book contract with a publisher whose senior editor was able to see beyond the disciplinary chauvinism embedded into such viewpoints.

3. See Peter Eisenman, The end of the classical: the end of the beginning, the end of the end, *Perspecta, 21*, (1984), pp. 154-173. Also, see Patrik Schumacher, *The Autopoiesis of Architecture*, (London, John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2010); Gary Stevens, *The Favoured Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1998); Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 2009).

4. Ibid, p. 167.

5. Mario Gondalsonas, "Neo-functionalism and the state of the art", editorial in *Oppositions 5*, (1975), p. 8.

6. See Lee Stickells, The right to the city: rethinking architecture's social significance, *Architectural Theory Review, 16, 3*, (2011), pp. 213-227; Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends*, op cit.

7. John Christman, Relational autonomy, liberal individualism, and the social constitution of selves, *Philosophical Studies, 117*, (2004), pp. 143–164; John Christman, Autonomy, history, and the subject of justice, *Social Theory and Practice, 33*, (2007), pp. 1-26.

8. Ibid (2004), p. 144.

9. Tony Fry, *Design Futuring: Sustainability, Ethics, And New Practice*, (Oxford, Berg, 2009), p. 142. Also, recent writings on architecture and agency have emphasised the embeddedness of architects in situated contexts of dependence , or what Doucet and Janssens (2011) call, the 'being in the worldness' of architectural practice; see also, Florian Kossak, F., Doina Petrescu, Tatjana Schneider, Renata Tyszczuk, Stephen Walker, (Eds.), *Agency Working With Uncertain Architectures*, (London, Routledge, 2010).
10. Ibid, p. 22.

11. See, Joel Anderson, Autonomy and the authority of personal commitments: from internal coherence to social normativity, *Philosophical Explorations, 6*, (2003), pp. 90-108; Holger Baumann, (2008), Reconsidering relational autonomy: Personal autonomy for socially embedded and temporally extended selves, *Analyse & Kritik, 30*, (2008), pp. 445–468; John Christman, Relational autonomy, liberal individualism, and the social constitution of selves, *op cit.*; John Christman, Autonomy, history, and the subject of justice, *op cit.;* Christopher MacDonald, Relational professional autonomy, *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics, 11*, (2002), pp. 282-289.

12. Jennifer Nedelsky, Reconceiving autonomy: sources, thoughts, and possibilities, *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, *1, 1*, (1989), p. 8.

13. John Christman, Relational autonomy, liberal individualism, and the social constitution of selves, *op cit.*

14. On this theme see, Peter Eisenman, The end of the classical: the end of the beginning, the end of the end, *op cit.*; Magali Sarfatti Larson, *Behind the Post-Modern Facade: Architectural Change in late Twentieth Century America*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993).

15. In an interview that we conducted with a past president of the RIBA in 2007, the dominant, ideological, projection of the autonomous architect was presented to us as more or less self-evident. He conjured up a picture of the active architect, proactive and acting over and above others: 'we start with a blank sheet of paper, so that we have to conceptualise and visualise and bring it all on, and then everybody else sort of feeds into that'. While similar statements have been made time and again to us in other interviews, they are illusory or, at best, partial representations of the nature of the practices of architects.

16. Leon Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, translated by Rykwert, J., Leach, N., and Tavernor, R., (Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1988), p. 1.

17. The quote is from Gail Satler, G., (1999), The architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright: a global view, *Journal of Architectural Education, 53, 1*, (1999), p. 17.

18. On these alternative ideas see the following writings: Rob Imrie and Emma Street, *Architectural Design and Regulation*, op. cit.; Paul Jones, *The Sociology of Architecture*, (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2012); Lucy Kimbell, Rethinking design thinking: Part II, *Design and Culture, 4, 2*, (2012), pp. 129-148; Magali Sarfatti Larson, *Behind the Post-Modern Facade: Architectural Change in late Twentieth Century America*, op cit.; Jeremy Till, *Architecture Depends*, op cit.

19. Leon Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, op cit.

20. Michael Hays, Critical architecture: between culture and form, *Perspecta*, 21, (1984), p. 16.

21. Tony Fry, *Design Futuring: Sustainability, Ethics, And New Practice,* op cit., p. 31.

22. Also, see the work of Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991).

23. Jane Jacobs, Stephen Cairns, and Ignaz Strebel, I., Doing building work: methods at the interface of geography and architecture, *Geographical Research, 40, 2*, (2012), p. 128.

24. This is an observation developed by the work of Wendy Brown, *States of Injury*, (New York, Princeton University Press, 1995).

25. Norbert Elias, *The Society of Individuals*, (New York, Continuum, New York, 2001).

26. John Christman, Relational autonomy, liberal individualism, and the social constitution of selves, *op cit.*, p. 144.

27. Matthew Hunt and Carolyn Ells, Partners towards autonomy: risky choices and relational autonomy in rehabilitation care, *Disability and Rehabilitation, 33, 11*, (2011), p. 903.

28. Jennifer Nedelsky, Reconceiving autonomy: sources, thoughts, and possibilities, *op cit.*, p. 21.

29. Molly Perkins, Mary Ball, Frank Whittingham, and Carole Hollingsworth, Relational autonomy in assisted living: a focus on diverse care settings for older adults, *Journal of Ageing Studies, 26*, (2012), p. 215.

30. Loretta Lees, Towards a critical geography of architecture: the case of an ersatz coliseum, *Cultural Geographies, 8, 1*, (2001), p. 55.

31. On this theme, see Tony Fry, *Design as Politics*, (Oxford, Berg, 2011).

32. Martin Jones, 'Phase space: geography, relational thinking, and beyond', *Progress in Human Geography 33*, (2009), p. 491.

33. Anne Edwards, *Being an Expert Professional Practitioner: The Relational Turn in Expertise*, (Dordrecht, Springer, 2010), p. 13.

34. Anne Edwards, Being an Expert Professional Practitioner: The Relational Turn in Expertise, *op cit.*

35. Lucy Kimbell, Rethinking design thinking: Part II, *op cit.*

36. Lucy Kimbell, Rethinking design thinking: Part II, *op cit.*, p. 135.

37. Andreas Reckwitz, Towards a theory of social practices: a development in culturalist theorising, *European Journal of Social Theory, 5, 2*, (2002), p. 249.

38. Tony Fry, *Design as Politics*, op cit, p. 75.

39. Lucy Kimbell, Rethinking design thinking: Part II, *op cit.*

40. The data we draw upon were generated through a series of research projects, including, amongst others, a Leverhulme Trust (ID19980496) funded project on 'Architects and the human body' (running from 2000 to 2001), and an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project (ID119248) entitled 'The codification and regulation of architects' practices' (running from 2006 to 2008).

41. Focusing on one of the leading architects of the 20th century, Frank Lloyd Wright, this research, funded by the British Academy addressed how far architects envisaged the inhabitation of their designed spaces, in relation to the multiple corporeal forms of the human body, and the implications for building form and performance. Evidence was gathered through scoping interviews with key actors, knowledgeable of the works of Frank Lloyd Wright, and by archival research in the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. This research ran for one year from December 2011.

42. Isabelle Doucet and Nel Janssens, (Eds.), *Transdisciplinary Knowledge Production in Architecture and Urbanism*, (London, Springer, 2011), p 8.

43. Alberto Perez Gomez, Phenomonolgy and virtual space. Alternative tactics for architectural practice, *OASE, 58*, (2002), p. 36.

44. Isabelle Doucet and Nel Janssens, (Eds.), Transdisciplinary Knowledge Production in Architecture and Urbanism, *op. cit.*

45. Michael Jenson, Process, representation and architectural agency in an age of complexity and change, *The Journal of Architecture, 13, 2*, (2008), p. 170.

46. One of the foremost observers included Frank Lloyd Wright who felt that the architectural schools were anathema to free thinking and autonomy by virtue of them 'professing and text booking and class rooming young life and giving it nothing to do out of its very self'; cited in Frank Lloyd Wright, *Letter from Frank Lloyd*

Wright to Raymond Durham, March 22nd, archive reference D019A01, (Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 1934), p. 1.

47. Royal Institution of British Architects, *The Future for Architecture*, (London, RIBA, 2010).

48. Royal Institution of British Architects, *The Future for Architecture*, *op cit.*, p. 4.

49. Terry Farrell, *Our Future in Place: The Farrell Review of Architecture and the Built Environment*, (London, Department for Culture, Media and Sports, 2013).

50. Ibid.

51. Peter Weingart, Interdisciplinarity: the paradoxical discourse, in Peter Weingart, and Nico Stehr, (eds.), *Practising interdisciplinarity*, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 29.

52. On this theme, also refer to the works of Rob Imrie and Emma Street, *Architectural Design and Regulation*, op cit. and Lucy Kimbell, Rethinking design thinking: Part II, *op cit.*

53. Tony Fry, *Design as Politics*, op cit.

54. Tony Fry, *Design as Politics*, op cit., p. 215.

55. Gaston Bachelard, The *Poetics of Space*, (Boston, Beacon, 1969), p. 231.

56. Also, see the work of Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, (London, Wiley & Sons, 2005).

57. Frank Lloyd Wright, *Frank Lloyd Wright: An Autobiography*, (New York, Longmans, Green and Company, 1932), p. 110.

58. See Gaston Bachelard, The *Poetics of Space*, op cit., p. 231.

59. Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, 'Beyond discourse: notes on spatial agency', *Footprint, Agency in Architecture: Reframing Criticality in Theory and Practice*, (2009), p. 99.

60. Ibid., p. 99.

61. Also, see Rob Imrie and Emma Street, *Architectural Design and Regulation*, op cit.

62. Frank Lloyd-Wright, *Genius and the Mobocracy*, (New York, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1949), p. 185.

63. On this claim, see Andrea Klettner, 'Building regulations are 'stifling development'', *BD Online*, (13 November 2012), available at: http://www.bdonline.co.uk/building-regulations-are-stifling-development/5045798.article [Accessed: 20.04.14]. In an interview we conducted with an architect, he reaffirmed the type of popular opinion described by Klettner, that 'the regulations are written by anoraks, technologists, in front of a computer, who have got no concept of real life and how a carpenter, a bricklayer, or whoever might actually interpret that, and actually have the skills to do it'.

64. See Amanda Baillieu, 'Architects must be at the heart of regulations reform', *BD Online*, (1st November 2012), available at: http://www.bdonline.co.uk/comment/architects-must-be-at-the-heart-of-regulations-reform/5045272.article [Accessed: 20.04.14].

65. For a fuller discussion of this point see Rob Imrie and Emma Street, *Architectural Design and Regulation*, op cit.

66. Part L of the building regulations relates to thermal efficiency standards and was subject to revisions in 2002, 2006, and 2010, with further changes coming into effect in 2013. Also, see HMSO, *Part L: Conservation of Fuel and Power*, (London, HMSO, 2010).

67. For discussion of Part L see Malcolm Bell, M. and Robert Lowe, 'Building regulation and sustainable housing. Part 1: a critique of Part L of the Building Regulations 1995 for England and Wales', *Structural Survey, 18, 1*, (2000), pp. 28-37.

68. Emmanuel Levinas, Collected Philosophical Papers, (Dordrecht, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), quoted in Tony Fry, *Design as Politics*, op cit., p. 216.

69. Bruce Robbins, ''Pathetic Substitutes,'' *Assemblage, 23*, (1994), p. 88.

70. Ibid, p. 88.

71. An interesting, potential correction to Robbins' view is outlined by Lee Stickells, who notes that the 'the significance of architecture…lies not in its autonomy, but actually in its social dependence'. Here, Stickells is holding out the possibility that dependence is a positive, and integral, part of the facilitation of autonomy, a point that resonates with the work of Christman and others within the 'relational school'. See, Lee Stickells, The right to the city: rethinking architecture's social significance, op cit., p. 223.

72. Tony Fry, *Design as Politics*, op cit., p. 189.

73. John Christman, Relational autonomy, liberal individualism, and the social constitution of selves, *Philosophical Studies, 117*, (2004), p 158.

75. Frank Lloyd Wright, *Modern architecture: being the Kahn lectures for 1930*, (New York, Princeton University Press, 1931), p. 241

74. Tatjana Schneider, Discard an Axiom, In Isabelle Doucet and Nel Janssens, (Eds.), *Transdisciplinary Knowledge Production in Architecture and Urbanism*, op cit, pp. 97-116.

Acknowledgements

Rob Imrie would like to thank the British Academy for funding his research about Frank Lloyd Wright, and providing the means to access resources from the Getty Research Institute (project reference SG-101364). In addition, funding from the European Union, for a European Research Council (ERC) project about universalism and universal design, enabled us to access relevant readings and materials to develop key arguments in the paper (grant agreement number 323777). Our thanks to the referees, who read and commented on the original draft of the paper, and to Sarah Fielder and Oliver Moore who read a version of the manuscript and provided very useful comments.