

Pro Fashion or Profession?

– on ethics for architects

by Björn Klarqvist

A CODE OF ETHICS is designed to guide the architects in their professional work. Is the code a requirement for a sustainable profession? How do architects look upon their profession and how does the Swedish code relate to it? What responsibility do architects have to the second client, living now or later, living near or far? What will the qualification criteria for the European Community mean to the Swedish architects and schools of architecture? How can we turn the code to a sharp professional instrument?

What is the meaning of an architect?

The architectural profession is now and then put under question. Some claim that architects have ruined the tacit knowledge from the laymen how to build a house. Some see architects as representatives for the vested interests in the society unable to design buildings for the people. Some mean that architects are introspective divas trying to become more wealthy than the other artists. Who are we?

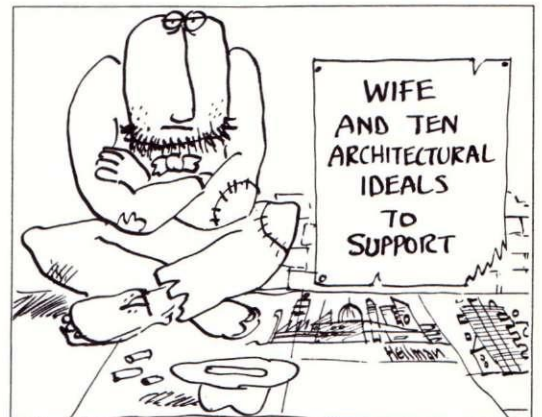
In Sweden we are now in a deep recession with a high rate of unemployment in our profession. It is now about 15 years since we last had a downward trend among architects. As a consequence then the government cut the admission to the Swedish schools of architecture. The following is a quote from an article written by the governmental investigator proposing a cut:

There is hardly no necessity to have architects, but it is practical. ... If architects are needed, though, is finally – at least partly – a question

of the content and the direction of the architectural education. ... But I want to emphasise that only a combination between social consciousness and technical craftsmanship makes architects necessary. If this is merged with a dash of creativity, or more preferably of genius, they will be attractive.¹

From the quotation you can read that it is something special with architects. When R. Buckminster Fuller in 1961 spoke to the UIA's sixth congress on the task of the architect, he said:

... I propose that the architectural departments of all the universities around the world would be encouraged by the UIA to invest the next ten years in a continuing problem of how to make the total world's resources serve 100% of humanity through competent design. ... At the present moment in history, what is spoken of as foreign policy by the respective nations consists of their plans to bring about conditions which would uniquely foster their respective unique kinds of survival in the malthusian 'you or me-ness'. For any one of the foreign



policies of the nations or groups of nations to become a world plan, would mean that approximately half of the world's nations have to surrender, and would mean the development of a highly biased plan as applied to the whole. In the nature of political compromises, it is logical to assume that the foreign policy of any nation will never succeed in satisfying comprehensive world planning. ... The next Congress should then be almost completely preoccupied with reviewing all such inventories and plans – with this first stock-taking of what man has to do, and what he has to do it with! What will appear will unquestionably be world news of the first order, and not only world news but the news that men all around the Earth have waited for. The common goals for all to work toward will be reduced from empty words to simple physical objectives.²

Bucky Fuller's visions are really comprehensive, pushing and fabulous. He believes that architects, technicians and scientists will take the responsibility to make the world liveable to all mankind. It is just a problem of engineering – and good will.

UIA is seldom concerned about the problems of the world, but at the fourteenth congress in Warsaw 1981 a declaration tackled the global issue and it addressed all architects of the world:

We must assume a greater scope of professional responsibility. Architecture is the complex art and science of creating a setting for human life. The architect should seek to integrate both existing and new elements, natural as well as man-made, and to enhance the quality of the cityscape through the design of spaces sensitive to human scale. He should protect and develop the heritage of the society for which he creates new forms and maintains the continuity of cultural development. This approach transcends the traditional understanding of the profession and the architect's responsibility only for his own commissioned work. It constitutes a new order of challenge and social responsibility for the design professions. The

architect should see himself as a servant of society.³

The conclusion of the declaration reads:

The process of development today reflects a constant confrontation between traditional cultures and emergent values and technologies, which threatens the existing order. Architecture, an art closely interrelated with technology and connected with the social sciences, is near the centre of this struggle. History proves that balance may be achieved at different stages of civilisation. In the contemporary world we must seek such balance between technical means and social values and aims. We must face different solutions and problems, using different tools and methods in our profession. We must educate the next generation of architects in full understanding of all these challenges and foster their imagination to meet them. Our responsibility is of universal character. We are to build new environments for Man.⁴

These last quotes obviously show that architects – at least some of them – are convinced that they as professionals have a mission and an ability to solve the global problems; ethnocentrically they are “near the centre of this struggle”. It is also clear that the main way to achieve this is to educate the new generation of architects. My impression, however, is that these texts implicitly say that the problems can not be solved by architects of today. The mission has to be delegated to the next generation.

There are several ethic issues involved in these texts. What makes the architect think he is the one to design the world to the benefit of mankind? Does the professional job of designing the environment of man justify the architect to design the life of man? Has the architect a greater responsibility than the average man for the survival of mankind?

Let us tentatively, though, assume that the architects have a great responsibility. My first question is then: What does the existing code of ethics say of the architect's responsibility?

The Swedish national code of ethics

There are several agents involved in the environmental game. For my discussion I define three parties. It is *the first clients* representing the proprietors and those appointed by him or her to materialise a building or a plan. To this group I also assign banks and builders. The second group is *the architects*. To this I assign not only the designers and planners but also those who are moderators in the design process, e. g. scrutinising officials and approving politicians. The third group is *the second clients* or "the users". To this I assign all the end users of the building and its surroundings and the users of the plan in the town or countryside. The end users are the first tenants and all the tenants in the future. It is also those who pass by and see or are influenced by the building. I also include all those affected by the enterprise living now or in the future, living nearby or somewhere else on Earth. The second clients are sometimes called the third party.

It is perhaps somewhat "ethnocentric" to classify the architects as an extraordinary profession. Sociologists studying professions distinguish among others architects and physicians to have a special mission in the society. Psychologists, accountants and lawyers are other examples. Specific for these professions are that they have ratified codes of ethics and must sometimes be registered to be allowed to practice. The profession is in some way protected by the society but the protection is at the same time a type of guarantee that the "consultant" should not be detrimental to the first and second clients. All these professions are seen as knowledge-based and they are often in direct contact with the first client, mostly a layman.

The code of ethics for Swedish architects was ratified by its association (SAR) 1991. It consists of two parts: a *professional ethics programme* and *rules of professional conduct*. The rules of conduct are ten criteria stating what is good behaviour between architectural colleagues and between architects and their first clients. Com-

pared to other countries the Swedish rules are extremely short and distinct. None of the ten criteria, however, regulate the conduct between the architect and the second client.

The professional ethics programme discusses the relation between the architect and the second client. It is short enough to be quoted here at full length:

When exercising his profession, the Architect should at all times protect and promote a good environment. This makes it necessary for the Architect to broaden and deepen his experience and the results of research.⁵ The guiding principle in the work of an Architect should be to uphold and safeguard long term public interests and to aim at satisfactory overall economy. An integrated approach, consideration of third parties and respect for the constant changes in human values, for natural and cultural values, tradition and the need for renewal, are all part of the endeavours of the Architect to carry out a commission well. In his professional activity, the Architect should take part only in contexts where the traditions are such that results of good quality can be achieved.⁶

These 780 characters represent the only stated guiding principles an architect can follow in the delicate relation to the second client. Of course, a code of ethics is nothing an architect keeps in mind in every action. It should, however, be implemented in his or her everyday work, which means that the substance of it shall be obvious. I question whether the short Swedish professional ethics programme is of any value without comments and explanations.

There is a working party within SAR trying to explain and make the ethics programme clear. Concerning protection and promotion of a good environment they say:

An architect knows spontaneously what is a good environment when he or she is in it. The architect can make it clear to himself what the good environment is composed of by making a sketch or by describing it in words to distribute it in discussions with colleagues and to

save it in a binder for future use. The most important thing is always to be hunting for good examples.

Concerning the use of tested experience and results from research:

It is said that Ivar Tengbom⁷ gladly used new materials – if they were tested for a hundred years. Who in the office read and supply the colleagues contents of the research reports? How do you resist when the proprietor insists upon a cheaper material, when you know it will damage the ozone layer but preserve the employment in the office?

Concerning respect for tradition and values:

Do not become a narrow-minded specialist, who accept everything. People feel good when the indoor and outdoor environment makes it easy to orientate oneself. Colours and forms should create comfort.⁸

These three examples are quoted from a report made by a journalist in the membership journal. Whether it is representative for the discussions in the working party I do not know. Though, ethics is too important to be spoiled by scamped work.

Registration and curriculum when facing EC

The Swedish government has (on behalf of the nation?) applied for membership in the European Community. We are now halfway in by the EES agreement. Whether we like it or not there will be a great change in the conditions for the Swedish architects. Maybe comparable to the present revolution in the professional conditions in East Europe. However, to be registered as an architect in EC the schools where he or she is educated must fulfil some explicit requirements in the so called EC Architects' Directive.

The Architects Registration Council of the United Kingdom (ARCUK) is the body, based on an act from 1931, that adopt architects. The EC Architects' Directive forms a part of the UK law

since 1987. In Article 3 of it there are eleven objectives concerning architectural education. ARCUK has produced a consultative document on the education policy in Britain according to the EC directive.⁹ The document is very interesting as it so clearly defines the curriculum on ethic principles of the architects' profession related to the second client. The constitution of the council board is laid down by Parliament and here three distinct non-professional perspectives are engaged besides the architects. The non-professionals "were probably intended to influence educational policy by defining the conventionally accepted skill – artistic, technical and managerial – more widely than the profession might define them for itself, and by introducing social knowledge as centrally as art, technology and management."¹⁰

The ARCUK working group analyses each of the eleven objects carefully and lay down a policy for the architectural education. The group finds that the objectives have a strong social orientation and emphasises this in its policy. The report says:

Besides being art, technical and investment objects, buildings are social objects. It recognises the legitimate aspirations of the public and building users to be more closely involved in the process of design, production and management of the building stock. It anticipates that any future changes to the Acts will further emphasise consumer rights and guarantees of competence to the public.¹¹

The group has also a global and long-term perspective:

The report sees the world-wide crisis in energy, ecology, climate and supply of raw materials, all of which are intimately linked to the building process, not only as problems but as opportunities for new directions. The position of the developing countries is specially relevant in tackling these issues.¹²

My experience from Swedish schools of architecture is that discussion about curriculum is

more depending on changes of fashion and adaptations to occasional offers than on long-term perspectives. I hope that we take the EC directives seriously and start a re-examination of the existing curricula. The ARCUK policy document is a challenge.

How to develop a new code of ethics

A code of ethics should not be made in spare time. It is too serious and too important. It is a document that cannot be designed by a single person. So I am not going to design one. There has to be a long process probably involving many persons. The members of such a committee should not be architects only. We need help of experts from other disciplines, e. g. a philosopher, a lawyer and a biologist.

I will just put down some ideas that may serve as a departure for a discussion. The process may include some of the following steps:

- Start a discussion on what should be included in a code and what complements are needed. Discuss also how you think that the code should be implemented into our profession now and in the future.
- Make a review of the principles used in national ethic codes of both architects and other professions. Note good phrases and ideas.
- Compare it to what international organisations have produced with a global and long-term view. See for instance the *Encyclopaedia of Human Rights*, compiled by Edward H. Lawson, United Nations Division of Human Rights. See also the Brundtland report and the reports to and from the UNCED conference 1992 in Rio.
- Study carefully the statements from the UIA conferences of the last decades.
- In *Keynotes for Concerned Architects*¹³ we have formulated some of the issues that might be included in a national code.

- Develop a strategy for how drafts made by the "committee" can be referred to a number of architects for consideration.
- Use an author and a lawyer to upgrade the committee texts to become good literature. As the document, to my opinion, must be a piece of art, it is necessary to avoid it comes out as a dull and mediocre official text loved by nobody.
- The code of ethics should not first of all be evaluated by the profession itself. It is a fundamental principle that it should be analysed and discussed by representatives from the first and second clients, by those who produce what we design and by those who finally have to suffer from or enjoy the results of our profession.
- Develop a strategy to implement the new code of ethics to the existing professional architects and to educate the architectural students – and teachers – to incorporate it in their spines.

My vision is that a code of ethics should be like Chinese boxes or Russian dolls. In the very centre is a short, but extremely well formulated, kernel of ethics. The next layer is a development of the kernel structuring the code into different aspects. The third layer is an explanation to the aspects adding flesh to the bones (cf. explanations by Martin Luther to the ten commandments): The fourth layer is a number of examples from practice adding blood to the body of ethics.¹⁴ I think that the code of ethics should consist of all these layers – and perhaps some more – to be comprehensible. To this I hope that ethical problems should be included in some way or another in the curricula of our schools. Ethical dilemmas exist both in Construction and in Urban Planning, in Basic Design and in History of Architecture.

Rules for good behaviour should have reference to the ordinary design problems that architects have. Architects must be taught to think globally when they act locally. Each stroke of the

pencil has an ethical consequence. The ethics should not ruin the creativity, and my true believe is that ethics rather will support it. You do not have to think ethically all the time. An architect should be so well trained that each design consideration he or she takes the “sustainable solution” will be the most self-evident.

Professional ethic dilemmas

I often meet a conviction that architects “by definition” are working for a good environment in the society. A quotation from the book “Humanistic inquiries into architecture” can illustrate this:

... it is true of art in its entirety that it can represent and express life of all kinds, evil and negative as well as good and positive. But it is also true, *a priori* that art cannot will evil. Now architecture, thanks to its twofold reality, implies volition. As an art it cannot extend itself to willing evil. So obviously all architectonic problems are tied up with good and positive sides of life.¹⁵

I doubt if this is true. May I remind you that architects freely designed concentration camps. They would probably justify what they did by saying that somebody else might have designed it even more inefficient and inhuman!

Walter Gropius discusses 1956 the task of the architect in a chapter called “Architect – Servant or Leader?”:

The pioneers of the new movement in architecture developed methodically a new approach to the whole problem of ‘design for living’. Interested in relating their work to the life of the people, they tried to see the individual unit as part of a greater whole. This social idea contrasts strongly with the work of the egocentric *prima donna* architect who forces his personal fancy on an intimidated client, creating solitary monuments of individual aesthetic significance.

By this statement I do not mean that we architects should docilely accept the client’s view. We have to lead him into a conception

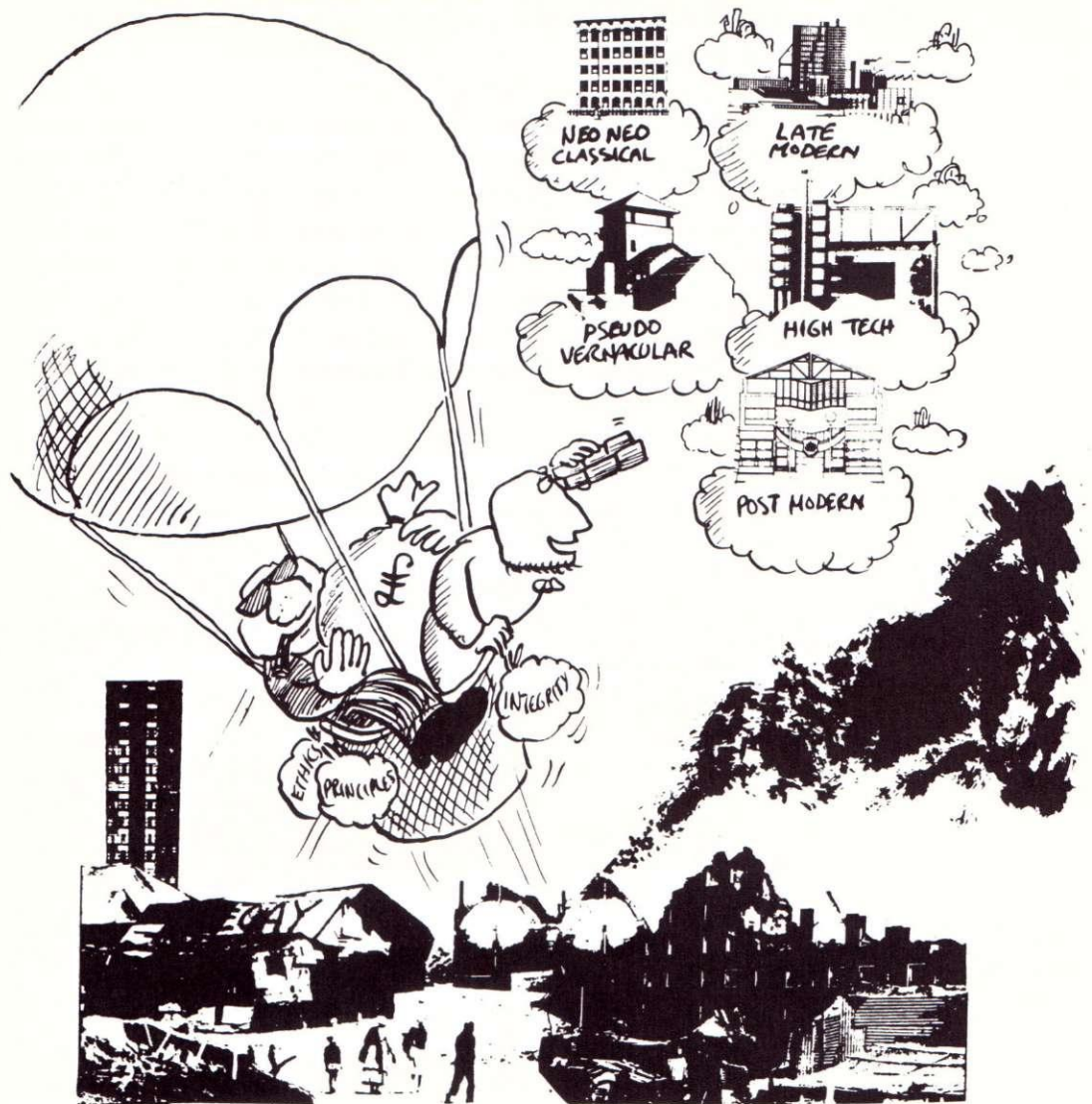
which *we* must form to fit *his* needs. If he calls on us to fulfil some whims and fancies of his which do not make sense, we have to find out what real need may be behind these vague dreams of his and try to lead him in a consistent, over-all approach. We must spare no effort on our part to convince him conclusively and without conceit. We have to make a diagnosis of what the client needs on the strength of our competence. ... Architecture needs conviction and leadership. It can not be decided upon by clients or by Gallup Polls, which would most often only reveal a wish to continue what everybody knows best.¹⁶

Gropius comes to the conclusion that the answer to the question “servant or leader?” is that the architect should be both servant *and* leader.¹⁷

Gropius claims that architects should be servants to both society and the client. Architects should on the other hand use their professional knowledge and skill to lead and foster people. There must be an intrinsic conflict here. It is for sure not easy to be servant and leader simultaneously. The model for Gropius’ architect is probably the enlightened despot. If he or she is enlightened it will work, but who are?

To the modernists (or functionalists as we call them in Sweden) of the 30’s the industrial production had a positive loading. Today economy and industry are comprehended as the opposite to ecology and nature. This is a misleading contrast. The industry is producing a lot of goods that are ecological in almost all meanings. Of course we have to be very careful when we choose what to do and how. In our booklet, *Keynotes for Concerned Architects*, we plead for an extended Environment Impact Analysis and we call it “Sustainability Assessment”. This method does not solve the conflicts – and the ethic problems – existing in every design project we are involved in. It just makes the conflicts and problems explicit and thus possible to discuss.

The UN report from the Brundtland committee used a contradictory conception, “sus-



tainable development". This was pointed out by many countries from the third world at the UNCED conference in Rio 1992. There is sometimes a deep conflict between development and sustainability. Poor countries want to develop their economy and the wealth of the people by exploiting local natural resources. The exploitation may damage the global climate, e. g. when burning or cutting the rain forests. They accuse us correctly by saying that our wealth is based on similar exploitation decades ago, and why shouldn't they act likewise today. This is an

ethical and political problem on a global level. It is not easy to see the consequences of that problem in our specific design project, but it is there.

I am not saying that every global and long-term perspective should influence our job and give us a bad conscience if we are not able to follow the "sustainability commandment". You might sometime design an exclusive gorgeous villa even if it out of any perspective is an irresponsible act. My point is that the architects as a profession should act on the whole with greater responsibility.

Envoi

You may say that a Code of Ethics is an overestimated instrument, even if we were able to develop it into a coherent and carefully prepared codex. It is not at hand the very moment you need it for making a crucial decision. That is right, the codex has to be internalised in your mind or even into your backbone. The ethics should be learnt in school and developed by discussions when practising. Architects ought to be in frequent contact with representatives of the second client and discuss environmental design with them. Tenants, employees, school children, handicapped persons, etc. have a lot of experience to give. Architects shall be professional in their job to design for the first clients, but the way they do it ought to reflect a long-term and global view

Illustrations by Louis Hellman, my most influential teacher on architects' ethics, from his books All Hellman Breaks Loose (1980) and Architecture for Beginners (1986).

Translation from Swedish by the author.

I will thank Thomas A. Markus, Maria Kowalska, and seminar attendees for their valuable comments.

Notes

1. Anders Franzén, "Behövs arkitekter?" (Are architects needed?) in *Arkitektur* no 9, 1981. Stockholm.
2. R. Buckminster Fuller, "The architect as world planner". Cited from Ulrich Conrads, *Programs and manifestos on 20th-century architecture*. MIT Press 1987, p. 179–180.
3. *The Warsaw Declaration of Architects*. XIV World Congress of the International Union of Architects (UIA), 1981, p. 7.
4. Op. cit., p. 9.
5. The translation ought to be "and apply both tested experience and results from research".
6. *Professional Ethics Programme and Rules of Professional Conduct*, ratified by the Council of the National Association of Swedish Architects, April 17, 1991.
7. Ivar Tengbom (1878–1968), architect and professor.
8. (Kerstin Pålval), "Vad betyder etiken för arkitekt SAR?" (What does ethics mean to SAR architects?). *Arkitekttidningen* no 1, 1992.
9. Architects Registration Council of the United Kingdom, *The Curricular Content of an ARCUK Education Policy. A Consultative Document*. London 1992.
10. Op. cit., p. 2.
11. Ibidem.
12. Op. cit., p. 3.
13. Björn Klarqvist & Einar Hansson, *Keynotes for Concerned Architects in a responsible position for a sustainable future*. Swedish Arc Peace, Göteborg 1992.
14. Einar Hansson and I have written a synopsis to a book concerning the architect's responsibility to work for a sustainable global society. We designed a great number of ethical problems to make them comprehensible. As a friendly nodding to the Swedish modernist manifesto of 1931 with the title *acceptera* (to accept) we named our book *respektera* (to respect). Published in my department, SACTH 1990:5.
15. Elias Cornell, *Humanistic inquiries into architecture I–III*. Transactions of Chalmers University of Technology. Gothenburg. No 219, 1959, pp. 19–20.
16. Walter Gropius, *Scope of total architecture*. London 1956, pp. 96–97.
17. Op. cit., p. 99.

formed by discussions and by cumulated experience.

It is a promising fact that architects seize upon the ecological trend. "Sustainable future" was for instance the theme of the UIA congress in Chicago this summer. If architects are going to survive as a profession, however, we have to tackle the ethical, problems seriously and consistently. Let us develop a code of ethics for a sustainable profession. Swedish ArcPeace have several times invited our architectural organisations to discuss the Code of Ethics. We have failed, so far. Ethics does not seem to be of their highest priority. What about the readers of this journal? Ethics might be a good topic for scholars and professionals to meet in a theme issue. You are invited!

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