

## ON “ETHICS” (FALL 2018)

**Kudos on your recognition** and celebration of the range of ethical behaviors embodied in the profession of architecture. Clearly each of us steps up to our professional responsibility to the public in our own way, setting goals for diversity in our practices and in our schools, for green buildings, for work within our local communities.

Last spring I identified a missing piece in the American Institute of Architects’ Code of Ethics and campaigned for inclusion of a statement against workplace harassment or discrimination and the creation of a fair and equitable working environment. I was delighted that the board voted in September to amend the code. But, as Jay Wickersham so clearly notes in “Profit or the public good?,” the code is merely a “set of aspirational goals.” What is still needed is the personal affirmation of those goals by each of us.

The 600 fellows of the Institute who signed my petition demanding amendment of the Code of Ethics were attesting to their own adherence to ethical standards. They were eager to go on the record. The gap between how we “should” behave and how we do behave remains. A student emerging from architecture school still has no way of discerning which firms actively embrace the code. The good news, reading through the “Ethics” issue, is that we are headed in the right direction.

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**The essays in “Ethics”** reflect on the complexities and nuances of ethical

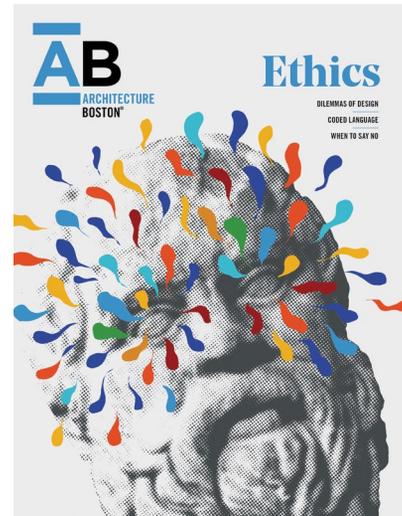
behavior in our profession, personal lives, and the public realm. Themes appear in each article that reinforce the architect’s professional obligations articulated in the Canons of the AIA Code of Ethics to standards of excellence, knowledge and skill, human rights and dignity, natural and cultural heritage, allied arts and industries, as well as specific obligations to the public, the client, the profession, colleagues, and the environment.

In particular, “Coded language” presented design professionals’ commentaries on Canon I of the code and their experiences in applying aspirational ethical standards to professional life. In fact, it is in professional life that personal commitment to ethical behavior lives or dies as we openly discuss and consider the implications of our choices with colleagues and clients. Open dialogue will advance the ethical obligations of our profession from aspiration to action.

As a member of the National Ethics Council, I am enthusiastic that the aspirational framework of the AIA’s ethics obligations has been reinforced with more explicit language in the recently adopted 2018 AIA Code of Ethics. For clarity, in Canons I, II, and V, existing rules and ethical standards were modified to specifically address harassment and equity in the profession. In Canons II and VI, new rules and ethical standards were added to address sustainability and environmental equity and justice.

With these explicit amplifications to the ethical obligations, architects will be encouraged to move boldly to sustain an innovative and equitable practice.

ELISE WOODWARD AIA  
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**The timing of the “Ethics” issue** was absolutely prescient. To borrow an overused but apt analogy, we seem to be in the midst of a perfect storm of social, cultural, and political unrest that is beginning to rival the upheavals of the 1960s. Out of this storm, questions for our profession are emerging: Where does architecture fit into this maelstrom? What is its role? Should architects work to effect change, or should we simply respond to changes around us? What’s the right thing to do, and how do we go about doing it?

Reading the issue recalled for me a favorite nugget of appropriated wisdom: Architecture is as much an ethical discipline as it is a design discipline. The issue is a timely and provocative clarion call to architects to recognize the ethical dimensions inherent in their work and their practices, dimensions that are evolving with startling rapidity. We read how architects are increasingly being called upon—indeed, challenged—to expand the range of their services and to understand the ethical impacts of their work. Striking evidence for this: Between 1979 and 2017, the AIA Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct underwent only four revisions. In September 2018, one year after the 2017 Code appeared, the AIA announced a newly revised 2018 Code.

Many of the revisions contained in the 2018 Code can be directly traced to a groundswell of focused concern from AIA members about architecture's role in the detention of immigrants; in the design of facilities for execution and solitary confinement; in issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, and harassment; and in the environment and climate change.

To quote from Lori Brown's opinion piece in a recent *Architecture* magazine, "Our built environment is where policy and reality collide. Architects cannot remain silent or apathetic."

THOMAS PARKS AIA  
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As a member of the Architecture Lobby and Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR), I was delighted with the issue, and the call for architects to contemplate the meaning of ethics for our contemporary profession. Jay Wickersham's essay points out the complicated nature of the "ethical" question in our profession, but more specificity would have given your issue more teeth. If we are truly concerned with our lack of an ethical compass, let's not hide behind platitudes.

We in ADPSR are pressuring the AIA to take up a position insisting architects not design places that abuse human rights. To many of us, this is a no-brainer. But those of us in the Architecture Lobby want to stress a less obvious issue: the link between our unethical modes of producing/practicing architecture and our indifference to the ethics of what we produce.

Hansy Better Barraza's annotation

to Rule 1.401 in "Coded language" extends Frances Halsband's #MeToo argument beyond gender to race, class, and age, and stresses the need for workplace overhaul. But we should also question unethical labor practices that preclude overtime pay, sanction unpaid internships, deny workers control over their schedules, and assume workers should suck up the costs of bad fees. One cannot blame the AIA for these abuses, but we can be clearer about our workplace euphemisms.

"Emerging professionals"—and the AIA's (meager) support of them—is a term that obscures the fact that some of us are employees and some of us are employers, robbing both of the opportunity to address their mutual obligations. We seem so fearful of recognizing what other professionals long ago acknowledged: that the biggest favor a boss can give a worker is the right to act as a worker, acknowledging its legal and ethical importance. The link between this camouflage and its lack of respect for the individuals in the office and our lack of concern for others who are subject to our work is not a mystery. As long as we ignore workplace "ethics," it is easy to slip into an ideology of "If I don't, someone else will"—they both reek of getting the job at all cost with no thought of its upstream or downstream damage.

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Jason Forney's discussion of ethics from the Living Building Challenge (LBC) perspective ("Breathing lessons") was

particularly interesting. I have also been involved with the LBC—the world's most stringent building standard and the source of the JUST program, noted in Gregory Minott's "Do the right thing"—which addresses climate change as solely the result of greenhouse gases. Although greenhouse emissions exacerbate the problem, they do not cause it. Our climatic problems are the result of a far wider disruption of the living systems of the planet. As architects/planners, we are responsible for much of that disruption; addressing that will expand on the ethical issues Forney identifies regarding the LBC.

Human actions have been warming the climate and creating deserts since we first built settlements. The built environment's share includes water drainage that disrupts water cycles and increases the proportion of solar energy that converts into sensible heat, which is the heat that greenhouse gases reflect. It also includes the use of hard materials that create excess sensible heat, deforestation from material harvest, and destroying soil biodiversity in site and landscaping design. Humans' oldest habitation sites, picked as fertile gardens, are now mostly deserts. Our current codes and practices continue the paradigm and create the same results.

To restore the climate, architects will need to expand their understanding of ecological systems, biology, biodiversity, thermodynamics, and hydrology, just as they have had to learn about energy and building science, and then demonstrate a masterful creativity with this newfound knowledge. In this far more complex and nuanced context, climate

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restoration will require an even wider and deeper ethical foundation, where ethics may be the best and perhaps only compass.

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**In his fine column about** the transformative power of the Living Building Challenge, Jason Forney closes by saying, “Obviously, not every building can be a Living Building.” On the contrary, I believe that is exactly our goal as a society. Have we grown so accustomed to waste, hazardous chemicals, destructive forestry, and climate pollution that we cannot envision a world without them?

According to the United Nations, “near-zero energy, zero-emissions buildings need to become the construction standard globally within the next decade” if we have any hope of meeting the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement. I am savvy enough to understand that supply chain realities and budget constraints will still hold sway. But that does not mean we should settle or become complacent.

The AIA Code of Ethics asserts that “architects should promote and serve the public interest,” which fighting climate change most certainly is. At a time when dramatic change is desperately needed, society should expect the building sector to move with urgency toward truly restorative Living Buildings.

BRAD KAHN  
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**In the union world** where I now work (I am on leave from my teaching position in order to serve as vice president of the Massachusetts Teachers Association), we like to say that the best organizer is a bad boss.

While I have to agree with Jay Wickersham that architects have been transformed from “sheltered expert into a marketplace competitor,” I see hope in the resistance to President Trump, including within the architecture profession. The powerful pushback against the AIA’s bear hug for the new administration and the robust challenge to the idea of the border wall, as examples, has helped lead a broader range of architects to move beyond what Gregory O. Minott nicely calls “our service relationship with clients.”

But this must only be the start. I am reminded of one of the sayings of the organization City Life/Vida Urbana: “You should not be able to profit off of my shelter.” Until we are able, as built environment professionals, to challenge the dominance—I’d like to use the word “hegemony”—of the marketplace, we will have avoided confronting the fundamental source of inequality in our society, the elimination of which should be a central ethical responsibility we accept.

To develop and become advocates of alternatives to the all-seeing eye of the market is not some utopian ideal for which we need someone to travel to distant lands and bring back to us. We only have to look to moments in our history, and our own city, for inspiration.

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