

David Sciulli

# Revisionism in Sociology of Professions Today. Conceptual Approaches by Larson

(doi: 10.2383/28765)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 3, novembre-dicembre 2008

**Ente di afferenza:**

()

Copyright © by Società editrice il Mulino, Bologna. Tutti i diritti sono riservati.  
Per altre informazioni si veda <https://www.rivisteweb.it>

## **Licenza d'uso**

Questo articolo è reso disponibile con licenza CC BY NC ND. Per altre informazioni si veda  
<https://www.rivisteweb.it/>

# Revisionism in Sociology of Professions Today

## Conceptual Approaches by Larson

*by* David Sciulli

doi: 10.2383/28765

From the 1930s to the late 1970s, sociologists of professions, particularly Anglo-American functionalists, tried but failed to distinguish professions from expert occupations. At first, in an effort to match Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy with one of profession, they compiled lists of "essential" empirical traits.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, Talcott Parsons took a more analytical turn, particularly from 1963 forward, endeavoring to distinguish professions on the basis of more abstract distinctions. He, too, failed.<sup>2</sup> Irrespective of these failures, however, this entire initial stage in the sociology of professions nonetheless revolved around two related, explicitly presented propositions of received wisdom. The first proposition, on which this entire literature rested, is that professions and their associations *are* distinct, both analytically and empirically, from all other expert occupations or middle-class occupations and their organizations. The second proposition was presented most forcefully by Parsons in particular: whether historically or today, the presence of professions, among all other occupations, contributes uniquely to "social order" under modern conditions and, likewise, to a benign (liberal-democratic) trajectory of social change.

Many early contributors to the sociology of professions were excruciatingly specific (but mistaken) in elaborating on the first proposition (see note 1). However, in

<sup>1</sup> These list-makers included Greenwood [1957], Goode [1957], Millerson [1964], and Wilensky [1964].

<sup>2</sup> Parsons' most sophisticated statement about professions, rarely cited in the sociology of professions and literally never discussed methodically, can be found in Parsons and Platt [1973].

elaborating on the second, Parsons and everyone else who went this far was noticeably vague. For instance, Parsons proposed that professions contribute uniquely to “social integration,” to a social order which rests on broadly shared cultural orientations and social psychological convictions he called a “service orientation” – as opposed to countenancing untrammelled acquisitiveness. Likewise, he also held as a corollary that the absence of professions in civil society (or in the state) results in social orders becoming more controlling than integrative: more mean-spirited economically than equitable or more domineering administratively than accountable.

More than any other postwar Anglo-American sociologist, Parsons tried valiantly across his career to identify specifically the integrative consequences stemming uniquely from the presence of professions in civil society (or in the state), and failed. By the 1970s this failure in particular set the backdrop for a veritable sea change in the sociology of professions, a second stage of very different theorizing and empirical inquiry. Anglo-American sociologists adopted a revisionist approach to professions which, at both conceptual and empirical levels, increasingly became narrowly socio-economic. On this basis, they soon rejected both propositions at the core of the earlier functionalist received wisdom, which had been more broadly cultural and social psychological than socio-economic.

Still, we must keep in mind that revisionists’ *explicit* rejection of both propositions of functionalist received wisdom did not surface as a piece at any one particular moment during the 1970s. To the contrary, revisionism unfolded piecemeal, step-by-step, across four distinct phases. Moreover, the concepts and empirical inquiries of the last three phases remain active today, rather than each phase entirely eclipsing its predecessor. In addition, we will see that some revisionists today independently attribute anew to professions (expert occupations) cultural and social-psychological qualities and consequences which far exceed their original socio-economic concepts. Indeed, here their writings become as expansive and vague as anything in Parsons’ body of work. In itself this backsliding *unawares* by revisionists already suggests there is some great deficiency at a conceptual level in their outright rejection of Parsons’ entire approach, during the third phase.

## 1. Revisionism in Four Phases

Early revisionists were initially critical of Parsons’ apologetics regarding both professions and social order, but otherwise retained both propositions noted above. They argued that Parsons (and others) treats as value-neutral “evidence” the “heroic” accounts and characterizations of occupational upgrading provided by profession

leader themselves, as opposed to studying independently and presenting more critically professionals' actual behavior on the ground. Likewise, they added Parsons' (and others') very use of the term "social order" is apologetic on its face: it obscures the deficiencies of capitalism in advanced societies rather than drawing attention to them.

Yet, irrespective of these criticisms, early revisionists were nonetheless reluctant to abandon or reject outright either proposition at the core of functionalist received wisdom. This first phase of revisionism is exemplified by Eliot Freidson's many writings of the 1960s on the medical profession (republished in a 1989 collection). Like Parsons and the list-makers, Freidson endeavored to distinguish professions from other expert occupations. More than anyone else, he did so by stressing that professionals exercise greater workplace autonomy than do other occupational practitioners – without ever stating explicitly from what or whom professionals are "autonomous." Equally important, Freidson also explored repeatedly whether and how professional autonomy supports or enervates what he called a "free society."

In a second phase, exemplified by Terence Johnson's *Professions and Power* of 1972, revisionists explicitly abandoned the first proposition, but still remained reluctant to disregard the second. Unlike Freidson, Johnson explicitly collapses "profession" into a more generic category, "expert occupation." Yet, he nonetheless explores at length the larger social consequences of expertise. Do experts gain and retain control over the delivery of expert services? Or do they lose control, whether to powerful patrons (such as corporations), to meddling consumer collectives (through "insurance schemes" or "benefit clubs") or to officious third parties (the state). It is notable that as Johnson endeavors to describe and explain the social consequences of each possible variation of control (devoting a chapter to each), his accounting of the putative connection between professions (expert occupations) and "social order" becomes every bit as nebulous as Parsons' various accountings.

The third phase of the revisionist response to Parsons is exemplified by Magali Sarfatti Larson's *The Rise of Professionalism* of 1977, to which we turn momentarily. More than any other single publication before or since, this book established revisionism as a new received wisdom in the sociology of professions. It accomplished this by presenting a quite different approach, one with three bases which displace *nearly* entirely the two propositions of functionalist received wisdom.

First, Larson rejects outright as apologetic and ideological Parsons' conjecture that professions contribute in any way, let alone logically or intrinsically, to social integration as opposed to social control. Second, she agrees with Johnson that pro-

fessions are ultimately indistinguishable from expert occupations.<sup>3</sup> At best, they *may* manage, by one clever or insidious means or another, to establish and maintain somewhat better-patrolled monopolies in the labor market for expert services. Third, she argues explicitly, but not always consistently, that whatever consequences professions (that is, monopolistic expert occupations) introduce into civil society, these consequences are *a*) largely deleterious and *b*) confined to the occupational order and stratification system. Monopolistic expert occupations, that is, do not contribute uniquely to social order, let alone to an integrative one. At best, they exacerbate occupational hierarchies and socioeconomic inequalities in civil society, leaving it to the state to ameliorate these larger social consequences. Or, alternatively, “new social movements” pressure the state to address these defects, and thereby contribute to social integration *despite professions*.

Larson, in short, forcefully criticizes both propositions of functionalist received wisdom, and yet reservations regarding the second proposition nonetheless linger in her book. At times she is reluctant to *reduce* all consequences of expertise to those confined exclusively to the occupational order and stratification system. We will see how these reservations increase across her writings.

Finally, in a fourth phase, revisionists treat professions (expert occupations) simply and solely as part – indeed, a minor part – of a rather prosaic sub-discipline, the sociology of work and occupations. Professions have nothing whatsoever to do with political sociology or institutional sociology, the comparative study of social order and social change. This phase of revisionism is exemplified by both Randall Collins’ *The Credential Society* of 1979 and, more notably, by Andrew Abbott’s *The System of Professions* of 1988.

Collins and Abbott are both adamant that it is utterly wrongheaded to envisage professions or any other expert occupations as major intermediary associations in civil society, and then to propose that they contribute in any way, let alone uniquely, to social order or social change. As Collins put the matter in 1990, Parsons and other functionalists had approached professions with an eye to social breakdown or “a mass society,” and thereby sought sources of social integration. By contrast, revisionists approach professions with a much narrower focus, namely on “the structure of privilege.” They thereby suspend or table from discussion the entire issue of social breakdown because, in their view, such shop-worn fears of the 1940s and 1950s can only inhibit a robust exploration of “progressive” alternatives beyond the capitalist

<sup>3</sup> With this new consensus revisionists ultimately collapse professions into this more generic category, and thereby initiate, altogether inadvertently, a line of inquiry into the occupational order consistent with even more general studies on the Continent of the *Burgertum* (middle classes) and *Bildungsburgertum* (cultivated middle classes) [Sciulli, 2005].

status quo [1990, 13-14].<sup>4</sup> As Andrew Abbott [2002] puts the matter today, the sociology of professions is “a branch of the sociology of work concerned with the analysis of expert occupations.” It is not a branch of a sociology of intermediary associations concerned with social change.

Today, revisionism in the sociology of professions spans the last three phases above and is now fully in place literally as received wisdom in the Anglo-American world.<sup>5</sup> This means that a narrowly focused, strictly socio-economic study of workplace monopoly, and then of the latter’s immediate consequences for the occupational order and stratification system, has largely displaced both propositions underlying the earlier literature. Sociologists literally no longer see any qualities distinguishing professions from other expert occupations. Equally important, sociologists deny explicitly that any contribution by professions (or other expert occupations) to an integrative social order is possible, let alone identifiable and salient. Whatever consequences accompany expert occupations, they are deleterious, “elitist,” whether confined exclusively to the occupational order and stratification system or extending to “ideological” cultural understandings and social-psychological convictions regarding “merit.”

## 2. Why Functionalists Failed

Considering the premises upon which the sociology of professions had been founded and consolidated and yet where this literature has since evolved, we may review retrospectively two reasons why Parsons and other functionalists failed to distinguish professions from other expert occupations. First, they developed their listings and analytical distinctions by generalizing, seemingly logically, from four occupations which undeniably provide *the* exemplars of professionalism in *modern society*, namely law and medicine, science and engineering. Moreover, in tracing the rise and consolidation of professionalism within these exemplars, they tended to focus exclusively on occupational developments in Great Britain, during the mid- or late Nineteenth century, and then in the United States, at the turn of the next century. For various reasons they largely neglected instances of occupational upgrading on the Continent, to say nothing of the Pacific Rim, Third World, and Communist bloc.

<sup>4</sup> Collins accepts Parsons’ view that professionalism counterbalances bureaucratization, in that it favors horizontal authority as opposed to vertical commands or decrees. But he rejects as ideological Parsons’ view that professionalism introduces “altruistic elements” – a service orientation – into otherwise acquisitive “capitalist occupations.” By definition, the latter revolve around self-interestedness [Collins 1990, 11-12].

<sup>5</sup> Again, see Sciulli [2005] for the situation on the Continent.

One reason, for instance, is that the very term “profession” is strictly a product of English usage; no continental language developed a synonym indigenously [Sciulli and Halley under review]. For that matter, until the 1980s European sociologists did not employ the English term with much frequency [again, see Sciulli 2005]. Another reason is that the role of the state and then also the dynamics of class politics seemed much more salient in instances of occupational upgrading on the Continent than any seemingly class-spanning initiative taken by occupational and associational leaders independently of the state.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, beyond restricting their inquiries both occupationally and geographically, these same sociologists also limited their historiographic inquiries to an equally restricting timeframe. Aside from taking their bearings from *a*) instances of occupational upgrading within the four exemplars *b*) in the English-speaking world, they also found that they could not possibly trace the origins of professionalism *within these exemplars in England* any earlier than *c*) the mid-Nineteenth century. For sound reasons, they failed to find unambiguous evidence of professionalism during the *ancien régime* in either law or medicine (to say nothing of the other two exemplars). At the same time they never envisaged the possibility that such evidence might be found *a*) much earlier in the historiographic record, *b*) outside the Anglo-American world, and *c*) independently of law or medicine – namely in mid-Seventeenth century narrative painting and sculpture in Paris [Sciulli 2007a,b; Sciulli 2008a; Sciulli 2008b].

When revisionists began challenging functionalist received wisdom in the sociology of professions, they simply adopted at the outset – without reflection, let alone argument – all three of the restrictions just noted. This remains the case today. Thus, even as revisionists became increasingly contemptuous of the list-making enterprise, they nonetheless adopted unquestioningly the very same historiographic, occupational and geographic restrictions within which the lists had been gleaned. They thereby perpetuated as received wisdom the same three-pronged delimitation of the baseline empirical record. Revisionists simply drew alternative conclusions from this baseline, and then dutifully endeavored to generalize these at conceptual and theoretical levels.

Thus, both Freidson and Larson, for instance, focused their inquiries more or less exclusively on the United States and then, more particularly still, on American

<sup>6</sup> Marxists have always had difficulty bringing professions into class analysis. On the one hand, professionals do not typically own the means of production, and so fail to qualify unambiguously as bourgeoisie. But, on the other, they frequently employ assistants or staff and also “own” a scarce service, expertise, and so fail to qualify unambiguously as proletariat. For Weberians, the insoluble question is: are professionals a class group, a power group or simply a status group? We will see that American revisionists also frequently have difficulty sorting out these issues.

medicine. Collins, in turn, focused exclusively on how the American system of higher education supports and perpetuates what he takes to be unwarranted monopolies in the labor market for expert services. By 1988 Abbott finally cast a seemingly wider net, both occupationally and geographically, by referring at least in passing to instances of occupational upgrading *a)* on the Continent *b)* in livelihoods other than the four exemplars.<sup>7</sup> He nonetheless remains loyal to received historiographic restrictions, tracing professionalism no earlier than the mid- or late Nineteenth century.

Still, even in sharing the three-pronged restrictions of functionalist received wisdom, revisionists nonetheless had remarkably little difficulty finding sufficient numbers of cases to present as counter-examples. They demonstrated handily that the lists of putatively “essential” professional qualities failed to account for professionalism always and everywhere. Rather than identifying universal and invariant factors which distinguish professions as such from any and all other occupations, the lists simply drew attention to strictly phenomenal variables, salient in some cases, irrelevant in others. Revisionists then fairly concluded that the entire list-making enterprise was more impressionistic, apologetic and ideological than analytical, incisive and disinterested.

Here we find a third, more general reason why sociologists failed to distinguish professions either ideal-typically or analytically. The list-makers had treated variables as essences, as qualities constitutive of a putative ideal type of professionalism, rather than as strictly phenomenal – thus unreliable as indicators. As this insight steadily took hold in sociology, received wisdom shifted dramatically from functionalist to revisionist. Collins later acknowledged, in 1990, the suddenness with which this happened during the late 1970s, adding that the “revisionist” challenge to Parsons gained adherents so rapidly that it soon thereafter “slipped into an unexciting routine” [Collins 1990, 14]. Revisionism, that is, was only developed sufficiently at conceptual and empirical levels to topple Parsons’ airy references to the putatively benign cultural and social-psychological consequences of professionalism. We will see that it was not otherwise developed sufficiently at a conceptual level to re-launch the sociology of professions on the basis of any identifiable social theory capable of

<sup>7</sup> Abbott refers only in passing to expert occupations which move his discussion beyond the four exemplars and outside the Anglo-American world. When he finally gets to his “three case studies” (in chapters 8-10), where he can elaborate at any length on the merits of his systems and jurisdictions approach, these cases only marginally exceed the occupational restrictions noted above, and none breaks at all from geographic and timeframe restrictions. His cases are: American librarians and other “information professionals,” including American and British accountants, “documentation” specialists, and computer programmers; English and American legal professionals; and American psychiatrists, psychotherapists and other “personal problems” professionals (including early “gynecological neurologists.”)



rivaling the sophistication of Parsons' AGIL schema. Likewise, it also was not developed sufficiently at an empirical level to yield particularly profound or incisive lines of historiographic or cross-national inquiry.

Our point is that by failing to distinguish professions from other expert occupations on any grounds, sociologists invariably fail to grasp, first analytically and then in historical and cross-national studies, the range of short-term and long-term consequences which professions *uniquely* introduce into civil society or the state. Precisely because this obstruction to inquiry originates at a conceptual and theoretical level, the deficiencies in empirical findings which follow simply persist, irrespective of the "facts" on the ground. That is, even when some social consequences of professionalism are palpable, at once institutional *and invariant* (both historically and cross-nationally) and thus readily identifiable and explainable in principle, they nonetheless literally go unseen.

The concepts at the core of revisionist received wisdom are even more confining at conceptual and theoretical levels than those they displaced. They direct sociologists' attention first and foremost to narrowly socio-economic distortions which expert occupations putatively introduce into the occupational order and stratification system. At best, this point of departure at a conceptual level then allows sociologists, such as Larson, to allude only vaguely to larger, deleterious social consequences of professionalism. Worse still, here is where revisionists smuggle cultural and social-psychological factors into their otherwise narrowly socio-economic approach (as opposed to relying instead on structural and institutional factors). That is, revisionists return unawares to Parsons' broader approach, and blithely recapitulate his vagueness. They simply convert what he alluded to vaguely as benign cultural and social-psychological consequences of professionalism into what they, equally vaguely, consider deleterious cultural and social-psychological consequences of expertise.

### **3. Larson's Revisionism**

What is fascinating about the more recent contributions of Magali Sarfatti Larson to the sociology of professions, those since her 1977 book and transition writings of the early and mid-1980s [e.g. Larson 1984], is that she is today re-introducing, in ever more explicit ways, Parsons' second proposition about professions, the one regarding the connection to "social order" and social change. That is, Larson today is breaking quite dramatically from the narrowly socio-economic concepts at the core of her path-breaking book of 1977. This is the case, as we will see, even as she seems initially simply to be building on this core.

### 3.1. *Basic Definitions and Conceptual Lacunae*

In 1977 Larson defined “professionalization” before defining “profession.” She treated the former, narrowly socio-economically, as a process of *a)* “controlling a market for expertise” and, equally important, *b)* converting control over abstract knowledge and esoteric skills into tangible economic and social rewards. By this accounting, professionalization tends not only toward monopoly in the labor market for expert services. It also tends toward unwarranted status differentials in the occupational order and then also toward artificially inflated incomes and discretionary wealth in the stratification system [1977, xvi-xvii; also 40, 50-52]. Thus, she later proposes confidently that “professionalization [is] a collective project which aims at market control,” the “core” of which “is the production of professional producers [that] tends to be centered in and allied with the modern university” [*ibidem*, 50].

Rather than ever following with a succinct definition of profession, Larson instead offers various definitions across her book. Professions are a “means of earning an income on the basis of transacted services;” in this regard they are indistinguishable from all other service occupations. Similarly, the founders of professions consolidate their places in the division of labor by offering clients “homogeneous guarantees of competence” [*ibidem*, 10, 13]. This fails to distinguish professionals from other experts. At best, it simply distinguishes all modern experts from any aristocratic elite, which during the *ancien regime* was believed to possess an innate “virtue” and “natural insight” literally passed by bloodline.

With these preliminary definitions we can see that Larson retains the restricted historiographic timeframe of functionalists, treating professionalization as a manifestation of modernization. In drawing this connection, however, Larson takes pains to emphasize that she is taking her historical bearings from Karl Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation* [1944], not from later modernization theory (whether of Parsons or Seymour Martin Lipset, David Easton, Gabriel Almond and others). Sounding very much like the great historian and philosopher of science, Larson proposes

professional modernization [is] a project of market control [which] underlines the central role of the state in the development of this project, most particularly its function of sponsoring monopolistic education systems [Larson 1977, 18].

By drawing attention to the role played by the state, she believes she is updating Polanyi’s study of the state’s role in Eighteenth century England: when it helped to promote commercialism and acquisitiveness across civil society.

A decade later, in 1989, Larson cites her 1977 book when she defines professions with similar vagueness, as

relatively organized groups of mental workers who produce and apply specialized knowledge in protected markets” [Larson 1989, 427].

She also defines them as

occupations that claim autonomy [she doesn’t say from what or whom] and special rewards in the name of their monopolized competence” [*ibidem*, 451].

However, by now Larson also appreciates some notable respects in which her earlier approach to professions had been too confining both geographically and occupationally, and thus distorting.

In 1977 Larson focused exclusively on the United States and then, more particularly, on American medical and legal professions. A decade later she appreciates that “the organization of medicine was by far not the most compelling model” of professionalization available; it was law. She adds in passing, without elaboration, that the earliest alternative model of professionalism was likely the officer corps of absolute monarchies, an assertion which is simply indefensible empirically. Similarly, she also asserts elsewhere, equally in passing, that architects of the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* had tried and failed later, during the Nineteenth century, to attain comparable prestige [Larson 1990, 27-28]. This is a bit more defensible empirically but largely irrelevant to the entire history of professionalism.

During the *ancien regime*, as earlier, law, medicine, architecture, “science” and “engineering” were elective occupational activities, both structurally and socio-culturally. That is, aristocratic patrons routinely undertook their own legal defense and routinely concocted their own medicinal therapies and participated in their own health care. They also dabbled in “scientific” (experimental natural philosophical) and “engineering” activities, including by avocationally designing architecturally their own residences as well as military fortifications. For these reasons, aristocratic patrons could indeed dismiss or replace at will legal, medical or other “experts” without at all jeopardizing their own wellbeing. They did indeed exercise unalloyed socio-cultural power over *these* commoner-practitioners, power which stemmed from the positions bequeathed to them by bloodline in a rigid status hierarchy. *This is why architecture as well as military command resisted professionalization.*<sup>8</sup>

The situation was very different, however, with regard to ambitious painting and sculpture, and particularly in France and Paris as opposed to Italy and Rome

<sup>8</sup> For extended discussions supporting these criticisms of Larson, see Sciulli [2007a] and Sciulli [2007b].

and Florence, Venice or Bologna. Across Europe during the *ancien regime*, ambitious ceremony and decoration were structurally and socio-culturally primary concerns of the *noblesse*, and thus facility in these matters was considered mandatory, not optional. Facility here was believed universally to reflect the inborn virtue noted above; correlatively, lack of facility was considered literally to reflect an ontological deficiency. However, for reasons which exceed the limits of this paper, *noblesse* in Paris in particular, unlike those in Rome, Florence and elsewhere in Italy, were simply incapable of exercising unilaterally in painting and sculpture the same sort of socio-cultural power all *noblesse* across Europe routinely exercised in law and medicine, architecture and “science,” as well as literature and letters. This is why the *Academie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* in Paris, founded January 1648, is the site of the first professionalism project in Western history, not any corporate body of law or medicine in all of Europe, nor the earlier *Academie francaise* in Paris, founded 1635, nor the later *Academie royale d'Architecture*, founded 30 December 1671.

Our point in noting these historical distinctions, albeit in passing, is that similarly passing remarks by Larson, such as the ones above, reveal that she flounders whenever she tries simply to identify professions as such. This failure spans all of her writings because it originates at a conceptual level. Her revisionist response to Parsons leaves her with concepts incapable of distinguishing professions from other occupations on any grounds, whether socio-economic or other. As a result of this deficiency, she is then simply incapable of being systematic at an empirical level, whether in historical inquiry or in cross-national comparisons.

This explains why across all of Larson's publications, her references to “professions” are uniformly superficial, not incisive. In her passing references, such as those above, she reveals a lack of grasp of the occupational order during the *ancien regime*. She lacks the concepts with which to distinguish the place and purpose of military leadership, architecture, law or any other occupational or avocational activity from that of ambitious painting and sculpture and then that of ambitious literature and letters. In her references to architecture more particularly, whether in passing during the 1980s amidst her accounts of law or at length in 1993 in her book dedicated to American architecture, Larson simply presupposes that architecture professionalized sometime during the Nineteenth century. That is, she literally does not see why it matters actually to establish *where, when* and *how* this actually happened: Did architecture professionalize in France, Germany or the United States?<sup>9</sup> Did this happen

<sup>9</sup> Florent Champy, a Paris sociologist, compares the situation of French landscape designers and industrial designers to that of architects on the basis of his premise that architecture is an “old” profession. This premise is false, both historically and today; architecture has always marked

during the mid-Nineteenth century, or earlier or later? Did it happen with state support or independently of the state?

Larson simply uses this presupposition as a convenient point of departure from which to argue that architects' claims to professional status were not based historically, and are not based today, on technical mastery or scientific methods but instead hinge on design aesthetics and innovativeness in using new construction materials. We will see below that this approach to architecture is strictly ad hoc. She applies it to this particular expert occupation simply because it seems convenient. This approach cannot possibly be generalized, as conceptual foundations suitable for any credible sociology of professions.

### 3.2. *Complexities of Comparative Law*

A decade after her path-breaking book of 1977 Larson found it necessary first to turn more centrally to the legal profession, and to account not only for developments in common law countries (including England and the United States) but also in civil law countries (including the Continent). Only then could she take what she learned here, namely the necessity of moving from a narrowly socio-economic approach to a broader cultural and social psychological approach, to her lengthier study of contemporary American architecture.

However, one of the first things Larson found in turning from medicine to law was a fact on the ground which she found dismaying, namely that "the diversity of what lawyers are and what they do" cross-nationally is so "overwhelming" that this already presents profound difficulties at conceptual and theoretical levels. How can a sociologist possibly move from a phenomenal level, of country and case description, to a conceptual level of generalization and then a theoretical level of explanation and prediction? Proceeding cautiously, Larson acknowledges that she found herself entering the sociology of law as "a novice."

a case of ambivalent or uneven professionalism at best. Indeed, Champy's own text confirms this in several places. He points out, without appreciating the contradiction, that France did not "protect" architecture legislatively until 1977 [Champy 2006, 650]. In addition, he footnotes [*ibidem*, 659 note 3] that "the trend concerning French architects is rather towards deprofessionalization" in that around seventy percent of building activity is undertaken without them. Moreover, "increasing norms" in the construction industry favor engineers in the division of labor. Champy also notes: "Since the collapse of the system inherited from the Academy, after the events of May 1968, architects have never succeeded in giving a clear definition of what should be taught in architectural schools" [*ibidem*, 652] Finally, he acknowledges: "The architectural profession has not got a very good reputation in France" [*ibidem*, 658].

Larson begins by posing “certain questions about the relationships of lawyers to law and politics within the framework of the liberal state.” Even at the outset she assures readers that these questions remain part of her continuing interest in how “modern professions” more generally alter the stratification system *and “political and cultural life of capitalist societies”* [Larson 1989, 427, my emphasis].<sup>10</sup> Yet, simply with this wording Larson is already conceding a rather important point to Parsons’ earlier sociology of professions which fellow revisionists, such as Collins and Abbott, refuse to concede. She is conceding that the full range of consequences for society of the presence of professions (expert occupations) likely far exceed those for the occupational order and stratification system alone.

### 3.3. *Centrality of Legal Representation*

In light of the concession just noted, Larson approaches European legal professions with the following “exploratory hypothesis.” Even though the

function of representation [of client interests] that lawyers [on the Continent] perform in the Roman legal tradition [is] only a small part of what lawyers do, [this function nonetheless] distinguishes lawyers theoretically from other professions and draws our attention to *the political core* of their historical role [*ibidem*, 427, my emphasis].

Why, however, does Larson think legal representation is so central to the lawyer role? All other legal activities – in codifying, adjudicating and interpreting the law – are done on behalf of the state. By contrast, the activity of representing citizens within tribunals or in other legal forums is more independent, and thus can either legitimate or threaten the state. That is, legal representation can either lend support to or challenge existing legal boundaries. Thus, unlike other legal activities, this one always implicates the state, always situates the state as an interested third party [*ibidem*, 432-433].

There is also an additional quality of legal representation which captivates Larson, because she believes it draws attention to distinctions within a larger sociology of professions: The function of legal representation places lawyers “halfway between substitution and trusteeship.” When lawyers represent clients they are unlike any other professionals, in Larson’s view, in that they simultaneously stand for their clients and act on their behalf, on one hand, while remaining responsive and accountable to

<sup>10</sup> More is said later about Larson’s rhetoric but for now we may note that she constantly uses terms of disparagement favored by the left – “capitalist societies,” “capitalist industrialization” and “industrial capitalism” – rather than more neutral terms typically employed in the social sciences.

them, on the other. That is, lawyers are not simple proxies who passively follow client preferences, as do stockbrokers.<sup>11</sup> But they also do not prescribe courses of action unilaterally, as do “fully autonomous experts” such as physicians and engineers.

Larson then brings these two lines of inquiry together by noting that the client interests lawyers represent at law are to some extent predefined politically, before particular clients or particular lawyers enter the picture. This reveals why the function of legal representation strikes Larson as inherently consequential *far beyond* the stratification system and occupational order. In the first place, it “constitutes an embryonic nucleus of citizenship” or, put differently, it ineluctably contains a “citizen-constitutive dimension.” Even more broadly, at the limiting case this “recurrent dimension” of the lawyer role can be literally state-constitutive, constitutional in the grandest sense imaginable [*ibidem*, 427-28].

With this, Larson is clearly retrieving Parsons’ second proposition in the sociology of professions. She is clearly moving considerably beyond the narrowly socio-economic consequences of the legal profession for the occupational order and stratification system. Larson’s thesis here, designed to inform historical and cross-national generalization in this light, is that as the lawyer role “diversifies” across any economy, civil society and state, the two constitutive dimensions distinctive to legal representation – citizen-constitutive and state-constitutive – decline in salience. They come into play less frequently [*ibidem*, 428-29].

Addressing first the citizen-constitutive dimension of legal representation, Larson offers a sub-thesis, namely that this dimension is inherently ambivalent, and thus always and everywhere contingent, unsettled. That is, a particular society at a particular time may or may not develop a popular or widespread belief that law is “something that not even the powerful can manipulate” – irrespective of whether this belief is strictly ideological or epistemologically warranted. Yet, this is indeed a possibility in most complex societies, past and present, because even as lawyers are compelled to operate within a received legal system, neither they nor anyone else can anticipate a particular legal outcome in any particular case. Thus, even in Eighteenth century France, Larson points out, local corporations challenged the power of landlords through litigation, invoking “whatever standardization of procedure” royal tribunals recognized [*ibidem*, 435-37].

To be sure, Larson quickly interjects that such popular beliefs are frequently ideological. But she is already no longer remaining consistent at a conceptual level

<sup>11</sup> As we saw earlier, Larson has no clear basis at a conceptual level by which to exclude stockbrokers or any other experts from the pool of professions. We will see, however, that on structural grounds stockbrokers are much like couturiers and chefs: none of them are professionals or can ever become professionals.

with her basically Marxist (or neo-Weberian) approach of 1977, which back then led her to the conclusion that formal legal equality hardly compensates for substantive social inequality. Rather, Larson is now employing concepts more consistent with, for instance, Habermas' approach to "juridification." That is, she now appreciates that a legal system can open "a different arena of struggle" than class struggle which nonetheless also affords the less powerful "some possibility of redress."

Larson sees three preconditions being necessary for a legal system to open such an extra-class arena of "struggle." First, the legal system must purport to respect formal equality as well as allow weaker parties to invoke legal protection. Second, weaker parties must have sufficient economic resources to secure legal services and, accordingly, sufficient numbers of surplus lawyers must be available for them to employ. Third, the larger ideological and political "milieu" must facilitate, rather than obstruct, weaker parties in supposing that the powerful might accept legal outcomes which challenge their interests [*ibidem*, 437].

Even with this backdrop, Larson nonetheless *simultaneously* questions *and* perpetuates traditional Marxist condemnations of "bourgeois law" as ideology or window dressing. Questioning, she appreciates with Habermas that law historically often has served "as a potential weapon in a political constellation" [*ibidem*, 439]. Indeed, social movements which experience "injustice at law" may mobilize new recruits simply on this basis, namely by articulating a vision of "true law," a vision of a "universal order of social justice under law" [*ibidem*, 440, 467 note 17].<sup>12</sup>

However, and now perpetuating traditional Marxist reservations, Larson notes that legal representation, whether of individual or corporate clients, also reveals conditions or contexts which limit liberal-democratic citizenship in substance. Not only does legal representation in "capitalist societies" ultimately adumbrate a grander, citizen-transcending representation of interests, that performed eventually by professional politicians ("political experts"). Larsons' point is that for two reasons *both* forms of representation – legal and citizen-constitutive, on the one hand, and political and citizen-transcending, on the other – ultimately end up being depoliticizing. First,

<sup>12</sup> One problem here is that more recent leftist critics of "bourgeois law" or "capitalist law" go much further, promoting a quite different vision of "social justice." They seek a legal order which, on explicitly particularistic substantive-normative grounds, benefits the weak or poor exclusively, and thus abandons any pretense of procedural integrity because this would only place obstacles in the way of a new Sozialstaat [Soussa Santos 1995; Soussa Santos 2005; Dezalay and Garth 2002]. They then disregard, as an altogether secondary and unimportant concern, whether any such alternative could possibly be kept consistent with any democratic-constitutional polity or would invariably lapse into one version or another of political authoritarianism [e.g. Soussa Santos 1995, 517]. Boaventura de Soussa Santos, for instance, dismisses Habermas' efforts to reconcile Marxism or leftist progressivism with legal universalism by saying the latter is an "imperial universalism," invariably harming the weak and poor in the South (Latin America) [*ibidem*, 507-508].



they both privilege specialized competence over grassroots self-help. In addition, they both also “weaken the image of substantive public interest by contrast with private interests” [*ibidem*, 441-42].

Given this ultimately jaundiced accounting of the citizen-constitutive dimension of legal representation, Larson turns next to the even grander, state-constitutive dimension. Here, too, her discussion again exhibits the same ambivalence toward traditional Marxism. Questioning the latter, she proposes that the growth of juridical memory is vital to establishing a public domain or public authority. Indeed, even when this domain or authority remains utterly subordinated to a sovereign’s will, Larson believes it nonetheless still broadens and deepens the “autonomy” of jurists and the field of legal representation [*ibidem*, 443]. Jurists may well initially conduct themselves as mere agents of the sovereign. But as state power penetrates civil society *through a legal medium*, a juridical memory invariably develops which “inevitably” results in a rationalization of legal procedure; this, in turn, further stimulates “autonomous” legal representation.

However, and again perpetuating traditional Marxist reservations, Larson acknowledges that legal instruction and training nonetheless remain connected to the language of power. But here her discussion becomes dissonant, as opposed to flowing with logical consistency (or historical accuracy).

On the one hand, Larson notes that historically the field of law established “parallel” career paths for men of gentle or privileged birth.<sup>13</sup> Over time, these career paths weakened the received prerogatives of feudal nobility while simultaneously preparing the groundwork for a modern civil service. Somewhat later, they also stimulated a rise of commercial markets for legal services. A “bourgeois state,” whether constitutional or authoritarian, routinely delegates to legal specialists “its core functions,” namely those of regulating property ownership and acquisition. By Larson’s accounting this means legal representation “is inescapably conservative.” She adds that its state-constitutive dimension also binds everyone – practitioners as well as clients – to a common legal discourse, one which promotes a shared ideological vision of equal rights under the law despite obvious material inequalities [*ibidem*, 444-448].

One irony of the rise of commercial legal services, however, and here Larson again questions traditional Marxism, is that the very cupidity of legal specialists is

<sup>13</sup> This was hardly the rule within the aristocratic societies and dynastic states of the ancien regime, but Larson seems to think it was. The magistracy (sitting in tribunals, including parliaments) did indeed tend to be men of gentle birth, but the latter tended to resist formal legal instruction and training, not embrace it. For this reason, the most successful lawyers in England and France, barristers and avocats, tended also to play down their knowledge of the law. Following the lead of the magistracy, they then disdained even more lowly legal practitioners, as pedants and “legal technicals” [see Sciulli 2008a and Sciulli 2008b].

what makes them available, acquisitively and thus strictly self-interestedly, to challenge existing law by adopting and employing “counterhegemonic legal discourse” on behalf of some clients.<sup>14</sup> In the first place, the presence of commercial legal services means practitioners are able to earn a livelihood by serving private client needs. They need not serve the state or local ruling factions in order to survive, or to prosper. In the second place, and here Larson breaks dramatically from traditional Marxism, the courts are not exclusively instruments of the state regardless. They instead occupy a more ambivalent position in what Habermas earlier called a “public sphere.”

For these two reasons, if not others, Larson is convinced that legal discourse within and around courtrooms can potentially be reformulated into a broader political discourse of “counter-hegemony.” Aside from influencing the bar and bench, this political discourse can stimulate and help constitute new client interests. Larson’s point is that at certain times in history the bar and bench continue to perform a state-constitutive function. First and foremost, they identify a political and legal boundary between public (state) and private (counter-hegemonic) domains. Then, second, they patrol this boundary, seeing to it that the state does not transgress it. Larson thereby proposes, with considerable irony for traditional Marxists, that commercial legal services simultaneously follow logically from the bourgeois public sphere and pose counter-hegemonic alternatives to it [*ibidem*, 449-451].

### 3.4. *Social Consequences of Legal Representation*

From this discussion of legal representation in particular, Larson seemingly endeavors to speak more generally about the place and purpose of professions in the larger social order. She proposes that the “constellation of factors” which determines the degree of professional autonomy – again, she does not say from what or whom – is beyond the control of individual professionals and their associations. These factors include: the dominant mode of production, the nature of the state and its apparatus, the typical family structure and other “basic characteristics” of civil society, and broader cultural idiosyncrasies.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, instead of following this listing of factors with a general discussion of professions, Larson instead simply returns to the legal profession. The state, she proposes, is the first element in the constellation of factors which affects the law. But she

<sup>14</sup> More is said later about Larson’s rhetorical excesses, but for now we may note that she finds “hegemony” everywhere, including (in 1993) from architectural styles (of the past) and architectural firms (today).

<sup>15</sup> Inscrutably, Larson [1989, 470, note 34] remarks in a footnote that this listing of factors is “comparable in generality, although not necessarily in content, to Parsons’ pattern variables.”

acknowledges that it is not necessarily always the most important element. With this in mind she points to three “significant trends” unfolding today “in the liberal state.” First, levels and fields of welfare vary greatly. Second, the economic units which indirectly encourage additional state intervention into the economy are themselves concentrating, rather than dispersing. Third, and following from these first two trends, the politico-legal boundary between public and private domains continues to blur, rather than becoming more bright line.

The major implication of these three trends, by Larson’s accounting, is that “the functions of legal practice” are losing “their axis and thus their political meaning and clarity.” But here her discussion again becomes dissonant. She says that, absent their axis, all legal activities are becoming explicitly politicized. But then she adds that, alternatively, *even as many legal activities continue to perform political functions* they are nonetheless losing their previous (historical) potential to convert specialized legal discourse into general political discourse. For example, she writes: “Much of what corporate lawyers do for their clients must be political, in the broader sense of an exercise of power and skill that affects large segments of the public” [*ibidem*, 452-53].<sup>16</sup>

The second element in the constellation of factors affecting the law follows from this way of thinking about the large corporation. The influence of corporations, Larson proposes, is “of the same order” today as that of the state. Inside corporate counsel orchestrates external legal services and all corporate law practitioners are functionaries, bureaucrats in her view – not “autonomous” professionals. Meanwhile, large corporations penetrate social life through their products even more than through advertising.<sup>17</sup> In both respects, the corporation helps to marginalize, render “residual,” the earlier (historical) citizen-constitutive dimension of legal representation.

Larson’s point is that lawyers today, unlike in the past, rarely intervene on behalf of *citizen* rights, whether as civil rights against the state or as private rights in opposition to “invasive” corporations. Instead, lawyers typically earn their livelihoods defending, actualizing and advancing the “diffusion of property.” In passing, Larson

<sup>16</sup> Without elaborating, I would put this quite differently: Much of what corporate lawyers do is to remind corporate officers of their fiducial responsibilities, and this is inherently political because it speaks directly to the institutional design of the larger social order. However, this is the case only as long as these legal professionals are seen providing expert services within structured situations, not simply as commercial exchanges (see Section VI in the text). In the United States, it is Delaware courts in particular which continue to portray corporate officers as performing not only a production function but also a governance function, exercising positional power within structured situations in civil society.

<sup>17</sup> Following on note 16, we see that Larson is again neglecting any and all fiducial responsibilities to which corporate officers routinely are held at law.

adds that increasing rates of crime and divorce affect “the practice of life” even more directly than do these activities by lawyers. But then she hastily returns to discussing property and the blurring of the politico-legal boundary between public and private domains. She proposes that this boundary is so blurred today that lawyers can no longer use the issue of whether state power or corporate power retains legitimacy to mobilize larger constituents within the “public sphere” [*ibidem*, 453-463].

If Larson’s discussion of legal representation in particular and of the social consequences of the legal profession in general seems strained, dissonant, there is a reason. The concepts with which she is trying to describe and explain the practice of legal professionals, and by extension that of professionals more generally, are a poor fit. Rather than acknowledging the strain between concepts and findings on the ground, and initiating a Copernican shift in her conceptual framework, as Habermas has done in discussing law from the 1970s to the 1990s [see Baynes 1995], Larson simply soldiers on. She perseveres with a now tired and stale revisionism. That is, the concepts upon which she most depends are first and foremost narrowly socio-economic even as she is trying to describe and explain consequences of legal professionalism that are cultural and social psychological and far exceed the occupational order and stratification system.

Given the dissonance that now invariably marks Larson’s analysis and commentary she finds it necessary to construct endless Ptolemyiac epicycles – simply in order to provide some accounting of evidence on the ground. We can illustrate this simply by posing an issue vital to any credible sociology of corporate law which Larson’s concepts can only neglect or distort, as opposed to addressing directly and clarifying.

When shareholders bring corporate officers before the corporate judiciary with a derivative suit, they thereby initiate what legal scholars call a corporate governance dispute. How can this phenomenon possibly be addressed and clarified by pondering at the outset whether the discourse involved in these disputes is “hegemonic” or “counter-hegemonic?” Indeed, does it make sense to ask whether corporate governance disputes support or enervate “capitalism” or the “liberal state?” After all, which side in derivative suits is supposed to represent – structurally or purposefully – the interests of “capital,” or “elites,” or the “liberal state:” corporate managers or shareholders? More grandly, how do we explain the following *fact* on the ground? Some judicial decisions in corporate governance disputes impose fiducial duties on corporate officers even when their actions had increased *both* shareholder equity and corporate growth. How do such judicial decisions support “capital?” But in what respect can these judicial decisions possibly be called “counter-hegemonic?”

The point is that this entire lexicon is too crude for the task at hand. It occludes far more than it reveals. It perpetuates unthinkingly bromides of the left and political correctness (as we will see) rather than establishing lines of criticism capable of challenging, strictly on the merits and with consistency, the dearest prejudices of left, right and social science mainstream.

#### 4. On Expert Occupations More Generally

A year after discussing the legal profession in particular, Larson turned to professions more generally, and began by acknowledging forthrightly that her book of 1977 did not contain a theoretical alternative to functionalism: It instead revolves more narrowly around an interpretation of modern Anglo-American professions alone. Because her focus in 1977 was so restricted, Larson now believes that when defining professionalization she had exaggerated the importance of protected markets for expert services. Larson adds that her critics also rightly pointed out that in 1977 she also exaggerated, and thus distorted, the discontinuity of professional practices before and after the Industrial Revolution [Larson 1990, 24-25].

In response, Larson says she now believes it is not productive to seek a general theory of professions as such, as functionalists had endeavored to provide. She instead turns to what she considers a more important, broader line of inquiry: the construction of expert knowledge more generally and its *social* consequences – beyond its narrowly socio-economic consequences for the occupational order and stratification system. Here we see that Larson continues explicitly to reject the first proposition of Parsons' functionalism, distinguishing professions from other occupations, while she nonetheless continues to embrace forthrightly the second, the linkage to "social order." She continues explicitly to propose that some consequences of expertise, those constitutive of citizen and state, extend far beyond the occupational order and stratification system.

The problem with accepting Parsons' second proposition while rejecting the first, however, is obvious: to the extent that the presence of *professions* in particular *uniquely* introduce consequences into civil society or the state, then even Larson's new compromise position is ultimately as unhelpful as revisionism more generally. It becomes as indefensible at conceptual and theoretical levels, and then also as constricting empirically.

Yet, we will see that Larson nonetheless remains distinctive among other major revisionists (such as Collins and Abbott) in her very effort to identify the larger social consequences of expertise at all. Moreover, *any* such line of inquiry suggests at least

indirectly why Parsons' first proposition still matters. These consequences point to the *possible* importance of distinguishing professions from other expert occupations at conceptual and theoretical levels.

#### 4.1. *From Commercial Monopoly to Specialized Knowledge*

In any event, in reacting to the criticisms noted above, and in having a year earlier explored the larger social consequences of the *legal* profession's presence in civil society, Larson begins her more general 1990 discussion of professions by re-considering why it is so difficult to distinguish professions from other expert and middle-class occupations. That is, she takes on directly Parsons' first proposition, endeavoring to show why it is a dead end.

Larson notes that back in 1977 she had deliberately ignored the military and clergy, and instead limited herself to occupational services provided commercially in markets. This then led her to account for how these sorts of markets were created and then protected from laissez-faire competition [*ibidem*, 25]. Her thesis of 1977 followed from this essentially Marxist line of inquiry: the "true" drive or intention of professionalization is monopolistic [*ibidem*, 45, note 3]. At the same time, Larson also notes that she nonetheless had appreciated in 1977 that profession leaders typically justify their monopolistic activities by citing or asserting non-acquisitive principles. In particular, they proclaim principles which Larson in 1977 said they derived from the *noblesse oblige* of the gentry: disinterestedness, gentlemanly comportment and social status, superior learning and, most important, certified knowledge (*ibidem*, 26-27).

Larson says that she now appreciates one problem in trying to generalize about professions from such a baseline, this combination of monopolist striving and seemingly principled legitimation. There are so many different ways of attaining status closure using this combination that, viewed in both historical and cross-national perspective, "profession" must be inherently a particularist or "specific" concept [*ibidem*, 30]. Still, she remains confident that if *any* general meaning of "profession" were ever provided in the future, it would likely include a central function that she insists is shared by *all* occupationally ambitious expert occupations "in most advanced societies." All expert occupations "organiz[e] the acquisition and certification of expertise in broad functional areas, on the basis of formal educational credentials held by individuals."

With this, Larson approaches expert occupations on the basis of their ability to link credentials to occupational practices and perquisites (as Collins had done in

1979), as opposed to their securing monopoly more directly. Moreover, adding this to her admissions above, we see that Larson is now essentially forsaking the entire Marxist thrust of her book and, even more generally, her book's indebtedness to Polanyi's argument in *The Great Transformation*. All of this reflects the deficiencies in her basic concepts to which we drew attention above: her descriptions and explanations of "professions" are *always* ultimately ad hoc, always lacking firm conceptual orientation let alone conceptual grounding.

Proceeding tentatively at first, Larson proposes that "if this [connection to credentials] is accepted," then we can identify a "general structure" of professions (expert occupations). We can explain the *source* of labor market monopolies independently of any contingencies of politics, social status or nominal labels. Correlatively, Larson is equally confident that if this sort of structural connection, between higher education and desirable occupational positions, is ever severed, then the concept of profession will indeed become meaningless, "no longer operative." Here, by her reckoning, is the structural (thus, generalizable) key to professionalism as such, to what modernizing professions attempted to achieve historically, during the Nineteenth century, and equally to what contemporary professions aspire to achieve today [*ibidem*, 30, 47, note 17].

Larson's new thesis, in short, is that professionalization involves translating one order of scarce resources into another. It translates expertise attained through standardized training and testing at higher levels of the formal educational system into labor market opportunities, workplace privileges, and either social status or bureaucratic rank. Thus, "profession" is simply a label we attach popularly to occupational "forms" which are quite specific, both historically and cross-nationally today [*ibidem*, 30]. That is, by including formal higher education in the very definition of profession, we are now essentially dealing exclusively with societies which have some modern concept of a university.<sup>18</sup>

One benefit of both forms of shelter from strictly market-mimicking behavior (lofty formal education and lofty occupational position), Larson proposes, is that professionals operate "autonomously" in fulfilling their specialized instructional and

<sup>18</sup> This use of the modern university as a proxy for advanced formal education does not follow necessarily or structurally. It certainly does not obtain historically. This proxy cannot account for the professionalism project of the Paris visual Academie during the Seventeenth century and, for that matter, it cannot account for legal professionalism in England through the middle-third of the Nineteenth century. In both cases a modern university was not yet present and yet professionalism proceeded apace. The proxy above also cannot account for the lack of professionalism, or uneven professionalism, of many expert occupations on the Continent across the Twentieth century. Here a modern university was present, particularly in Germany, and yet professionalism frequently failed to take hold.

occupational functions. She adds that this factor, autonomy, has long occupied a special analytical place in the sociology of professions [*ibidem*, 31; see also Larson 1984, 28].<sup>19</sup> Never indicating from whom or what professional autonomy is attained, Larson nonetheless proposes that it cannot possibly be legitimated solely on the basis of cognitive superiority. Rather, the key is the organization of compulsory and hierarchical systems of public education. This is what lends to a meritocratic justification of privilege or inequality “all the force of institutional objectivity” [Larson 1990, 31].

#### 4.2. *From Marx, Weber, and Polanyi to Foucault*

Where Larson in 1977 had focused on privilege flowing from labor market monopoly, and thereby drew theoretical inspiration from Marx, Weber and Polanyi, now she is focusing on privilege flowing from specialized knowledge. Her theoretical inspiration, therefore, shifts accordingly, now to Foucault. Of course, her use of the terms “hegemonic” and counter-hegemonic” only a year earlier adumbrated this more explicit declaration in 1990 of reliance on Foucault [also see Larson 1984:34-35]. Larson is convinced that a turn to Foucault, and more particularly to his notion of discursive field, is literally unavoidable – once a theory of professions rests no longer on commercial monopoly but instead turns on the conditions under which “knowledge is produced and then applied in ways which alter the lives of others.”

Larson points out that professions (expert occupations) approximate far more closely a discursive field in Foucault’s than, say, a “scientific field” in Bourdieu’s sense. This is the case, first, because professional (expert occupational) practice is more “open” than scientific inquiry, more exposed to external inspection and oversight. After all, experts’ *applications* of knowledge bring them more directly into contact with the public, which in turn brings their occupational activities within the purview of state regulatory agencies.

Foucault is also superior to Bourdieu, in Larson’s view, because the notion of discursive field is so equipollent as compared to that of scientific field. It can better accommodate both highly defended “core” regions of professions and “outer” regions, those more accessible to different experts as well as to speaking subjects more generally. Discursive fields, in short, are richer “battlefields” than are scientific fields. Here is where experts of different kinds, trained in different scientific disciplines,

<sup>19</sup> Actually, autonomy came rather late to the earlier list-making enterprise in the sociology of professions, during the 1960s. Only then was it promoted independently, most notably by Freidson.



fight it out for preeminence and, in addition, where interested non-experts also frequently intervene [Larson 1990, 32-34].<sup>20</sup>

With this, Larson [like Abbott 1988, see note 20] abandons entirely any possibility of distinguishing professions from expert occupations, whether empirically or analytically, in addition to abandoning Marxism.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, she says flatly that we cannot compare expert occupations by their degree of monopoly in the labor market but only by the “nature and structure of their discursive fields.” On the one hand, we can compare different expert occupational fields *a*) by the degree to which their core discourse “pretends” to approach scientific validity, and then *b*) by the extent to which the core region of any particular field commands outlying regions. On the other hand, we can also study quite similarly the *internal* organization of each expert occupation, namely by examining how different participants relate to the production of core discourse.

What matters most at the core is the discourse producing true knowledge, along with defenses of an expert occupation’s “manner of address.” Larson considers such core discourse a necessary means to accumulate symbolic capital. Expert truth, Larson proposes, is a matter of authorization and power, including the power to assemble and undertake scientific demonstrations. The “core regions” of discursive fields are social locations from which the truer discourse (that which is more parsimonious theoretically and more valid epistemologically) is issued in defense of dominant codes of expert practice. These social locations tend to be “protected” from outsiders and thus, in the case of expert occupations, coincide with the research and training system [*ibidem*, 37-38].

But outside the core, discourse is quite different. For example, the discourse of administrators of workplaces is not directed to truth in the sense above. It is instead directed to justifying the codes of practice administrators currently employ, through which they gain resources as well as power over personnel. As another example, the discourse of professional practitioners delivering expert services in different workplaces frequently confronts multiple “truths,” presented by experts trained in different disciplines. One set of practitioners cannot simply assert its truth but instead must constantly renegotiate with workplace colleagues its *claims* to true discourse [*ibidem*, 38-39].

<sup>20</sup> It is evident that Larson is also informed by Abbott’s excellent accounting two years earlier, in 1988, of the “system of professions,” of how different sets of experts compete for occupational “jurisdictions” within the same workplaces.

<sup>21</sup> Therefore, from this point forward in the text I replace all of Larson’s lingering uses of “profession” with the term “expert occupation.” This conveys best the thrust of her argument because she does not and cannot draw a distinction between these two terms.

Amidst this discussion of discursive fields, Larson introduces a new variable into her sociology of expert occupations which accomplishes two things: it lends additional support to her linkage of modern expertise with formal university instruction and it reveals some *social* consequences of “professionalization” (“expertization”). She says that the constituting of modern expertise presupposes a parallel constituting of a suitable lay public. That is, broad sectors of the public must be capable, first, of recognizing and understanding marks of expertise and then, second, of developing shared understandings of transgressions of “professional” behavior. “The presence of a lay public is what distinguishes modern professional expertise from other forms of scarce and esoteric knowledge: it is, in principle, available to the broadest public” [*ibidem*, 36].

Larson calls the constituting of a lay public a “parallel constituting process” because it can be traced in large part – not entirely – to the very same system of compulsory, hierarchical public education which, at its peak or highest level, selects and then constitutes credentialed experts. “I believe that a lay public is constituted by the combined effect of a ‘personalized’ experience of education and a distracted and impersonal relation to the [mass] media.” Some sectors of this public mobilize themselves sufficiently to enter a pertinent discursive field as speakers. They thereby challenge expert practices and the “alleged truth” of the discourse justifying them [*ibidem*, 36-37].

With these lines of analyses of discursive fields and lay publics, Larson literally explodes revisionist received wisdom’s rejection of Parsons’ second proposition in the sociology of professions. She challenges directly any notion that all consequences of expertise in civil society can possibly be confined exclusively to the occupational order and stratification system. These consequences instead extend across entire discursive fields, including outer regions where various sectors of the lay public and the mass media participate as speakers. Larson is thereby proposing that the contributions expert occupations make to the larger social order are broadly cultural and social psychological, not narrowly socio-economic. They contribute broad cultural understandings and social-psychological beliefs which are in principle accessible literally to anyone in lay publics who is interested in or affected by expert activities.

However, with this Larson becomes as vague as Parsons had ever been in describing or characterizing the consequences for social order, or for the direction of social change, of such cultural and social-psychological contributions. Indeed, we propose that *any* cultural and social psychological approach to professions will invariably remain vague in characterizing whether and how professions (or expert occupations) affect the larger society. The alternative, which we present briefly below (in Section VI), is to adopt a structural and institutional approach to professions which first and foremost distinguishes professions from all other expert occupations and

middle-class occupations. Such an approach retrieves both of Parsons' propositions in the sociology of professions *but on completely different conceptual grounds*.

One example of Larson's vagueness is that she says an expert occupation should be seen roughly – impressionistically – as a complex program of research. It cannot be grasped more precisely or analytically, as an abstract concept capable of being “used” unambiguously either in historical research or in cross-national comparison. Expert occupation is simply a linkage, at an empirical or strictly phenomenal level, between two distinct yet broad sets of activities or discourses. In one set, it links codified knowledge and specialized practice, on the one hand, with the larger world of less knowing and not-knowing laity, on the other. In another set, it links a hierarchic educational system with a hierarchic occupational order.

In both sets of activities or discourses, an expert occupation seeks institutional guarantees of protection against interlopers which only the state can offer and deliver. Because Larson does not say why such institutional guarantees are necessary or what is at stake in either successfully attaining them or failing to attain them, her discussion here seems to revert to her earlier Marxist notions of unwarranted monopoly. The only difference is that Larson now characterizes the state “as a positive agency.” Rather than portraying the state as permitting or instituting unwarranted monopolies in the occupational order, she now portrays it as using expert occupations – in both linkage functions noted above – to perform an additional linkage: expert occupations can provide a “material linkage” between the state itself and *its* deployment of specialized knowledge in civil society.

Equally vague in describing or characterizing the consequences of professionalization (expertization) for social order, Larson proposes sociologists compare struggles and conflicts in expert occupational fields in terms of whether any of them challenge core regions or fall short of this. Thus, she says that historically (but does not refer specifically to any particular historical period) expert occupation can provide a bridge between “aristocratic knowledge,” which privileges theory over practical application, and “bourgeois knowledge,” which privileges vocational results over theoretical warranting.

With this in mind, Larson adds that expert occupation is a discursive field in which we can analyze fruitfully relations between an apparent continuity of forms amidst unambiguous discontinuities of content and meaning. Most inscrutably, she concludes by saying that expert occupational practice is the locus par excellence where lies can be revealed, never indicating what sorts of lies she has in mind [*ibidem*, 39-45]. Is it fair to ask equally rhetorically in reply: Might professions be the field in which the leftist prejudices of sociologists, and rather jejune conspiracy theories flowing from them, are best exposed to view (see Section 7)?

## 5. On Architecture: Preliminary Comments

Larson's point of departure in discussing architecture is that "in capitalist societies" this expert occupation is both "art and profession." That is, architecture uniquely spans three dimensions of occupational activity: artistic (aesthetic design), technical (engineering mechanics), and social (incarnating and marketing symbols, whether of power, elegance, taste or other enviable attributes or qualities). By contrast, engineering is an expert occupation dominated by a "strictly technical concentration."

When Modernism took hold in architecture, during the early and mid-Twentieth century, it kept all three dimensions above in balance, connecting both aesthetics and symbolism to construction and function. It also created a new International Style based on abstract geometries and industrial forms. Finally, even as Modernism finally dislodged the classicism lingering from the *ancien regime*, it nonetheless shared with classicism a common ground. It shared *disegno* (ambitious design) as a "meta-pattern" transcending both technique and utility. "The image and identity of modern architecture remained centered on the subordination of technology to design." Only when buildings can credibly claim the status of incarnating *architectural design*, as opposed to engineering soundness alone, do they enter "a system of interpretation and justification that is the core of professional discourse" [Larson 1993, 4-7, 219].

### 5.1. *Architecture's Irreducible Heteronomy*

With this Larson gets to one of her core theses: architecture is grounded upon a structural contradiction not found at all in other professions, let alone salient. On the one hand, the discourse of architecture, like that of every other profession, is exclusionary. It *ultimately* disregards the views of outsiders, at the core. But, on the other, the discourse of professional architects in outer regions, *in seeking commissions*, is compelled always to address outsiders: prospective clients and other laypersons that influence them.

This means that architecture as a profession (expert occupation) must convince outsiders of the credibility of a "premise" or "syllogism" which is inherently "contested" and, ultimately, strictly "ideological:" Only architects produce architecture; architecture is an art; architects are necessary to produce art. Despite being contested and ideological, this syllogism insinuates itself into the very core of the discursive field of architecture, by way of the field's canon, the exemplary built-structures which orient both advanced instruction and enviable occupational designs. That is, the canon at the core of *this* discursive field does not and cannot revolve around instructor or

practitioner discourse exclusively, as strictly abstract principles. It revolves instead around *built-structure* exemplars. Thus, the very canon itself presupposes lay support: architects cannot move from instruction and design to construction independently, in the absence of clients who commission them. By contrast, artists can and do operate independently in this way.

Larson's point is that wealthy laypersons insinuate themselves into the *core* region of this profession (expert occupation), unlike others, and in two ways: first occupationally, through commissions, and then instructionally, as built-structure exemplars. At times Larson overstates the case a bit by saying client wills, tastes and finances "control commissions." At others she portrays the architecture-patron relationship in more balanced, credible ways. At still others she reverts to overstatement.

More balanced, Larson says clients exercise "control" only in the sense that if an architect does not secure commissions for built-structures, or is commissioned to build only trifling structures, he cannot expect his standing to rise within the field. Peer recognition alone, independently of built-structures, is seldom sufficient for an architect to be recognized as an innovative designer. Moreover, professional standing is inextricably tied to commissions from *ambitious* wealthy patrons, as opposed to apprehensive, cash-strapped or risk-averse clients [*ibidem*, 105-106, 111].

Still, even this distinction between clients can frequently blur in practice. On the one hand, the second set of clients noted above is hardly capable of dictating every aspect of design, for no client can possibly anticipate every detail of a commission. On the other hand, even the most ambitious patron provides architects with a building "program," and the latter invariably imposes constraints upon design, first and foremost according to building type or function, the built-structure's "social reason for being." It matters, after all, whether a commission is for a downtown office building or an urban walk-up, a suburban residence or a rural church, an upscale restaurant or a discount retail store.

The most basic problem, from architects' point of view, is that the typical client seeks architectural services for strictly pragmatic purposes, not in the service of aesthetic ambitions. Indeed, most clients find the artistic part of architecture threatening, for flights of design can expose them to whimsy or idiosyncrasy. On the upside, architectural design can boost their honor socio-culturally far beyond the investment they are making financially. It can transform even a modest built-structure into a local icon, attracting critical acclaim as well as tourism or other sources of approbation or revenue. However, on the downside, design can just as well expose a grand built-structure to depths of ridicule its owner never imagined experiencing.

Of course, financiers who lend money to clients are likely to call greatest attention to the hazards of commissioning any “artistic” design. They are also likely to encourage cost savings in any event, at the expense of design innovation and construction quality. Thus, financiers typically reinforce client caution, as opposed to counteracting this by highlighting the potential socio-cultural upside. All of this means that when architects deal with clients *they* become vulnerable to “abuse.” They can see the aesthetic components of their designs being disregarded, compromised or removed from play at the very outset. Only a tiny cadre of clients exhibits any concern for built-structure aesthetics [*ibidem*, 8-13, 98].

Given all of the obstacles to actually incarnating novel designs in built-structures, all elite architects appreciate that “an element of luck” invariably enters into any enviable career. Indeed, this helps to sustain among them notions of a “charisma of genius,” which they also share as an occupational identity [*ibidem*, 104-105].

Larson’s thesis is that because commissions for built-structures are so central to architects’ very occupational identity, the discourse of *these* experts cannot possibly reach the level of “autonomy” typically attained by the discourse of others called professionals. Architects cannot disregard entirely the financial limitations, practical interests and subjective tastes of particular laypersons. By contrast, the discourse of all other professionals, most notably that in medicine and law, engineering and science – and also that in fine art – never countenances this degree of input from outsiders. Only architecture suffers what Larson calls “dependence heteronomy,” and thus lacks the “autonomy” she believes is *constitutive* of both professions and the fine arts.

Of course, once a commission is completed as built-structure, a more autonomous discourse of architecture can resume, now with a new artifact to consider, both on its own terms and in its relationship to the received canon of built-structure exemplars. The task of architecture instruction, criticism and historiography is continuously to transform dispersed built-structures into an identifiable system of exemplary architectural designs, and thereby to organize architectural ideas discursively at the core [*ibidem*, 13].

With this, Larson notes explicitly a fundamental polarity which the very core of the architecture discursive field spans without ever completely reconciling.<sup>22</sup> At the profession’s discursive center we find Art, Architecture and Immortality whereas everywhere else its discourse becomes dominated by service, building and business. Worse, this polarity is recapitulated quite nakedly *within* the profession’s graduate

<sup>22</sup> Larson draws her substantive data from two sources, her interviews of twenty-nine architects in strong-idea firms (as opposed to strong-service firms and strong-delivery firms) and her analysis of annual design awards by the journal *Progressive Architecture* [Larson 1993, chaps. 4, 7-8].

programs. Some architectural programs are affiliated with fine arts faculties, others with engineering or other technical faculties. Of course, the profession also spans additional venues, those providing some bridges at least across the polarity just noted, namely schools, studios and journals of design. These are the profession's "research tools," which simultaneously promote an idealized notion of architectural activity while bringing students and assistants into direct contact with the heteronomy of actual architectural employment [*ibidem*, 9-10].

## 5.2. *Fine Art as Lodestar of Professionalism?*

We can see already that Larson not only has difficulty establishing that architecture is in fact a profession, rather than a failed or incomplete professionalism project. Equally important, she has even greater difficulty establishing the basis upon which she can possibly rebut the proposition that fine art provides *the* exemplar of professional "autonomy" as such, beyond architecture.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, as her argument unfolds she treats fine art first implicitly and then explicitly as architecture's lodestar of ultimate professional success. She proceeds in this way at first implicitly because at no point in her book does Larson feel compelled to discuss methodically why fine art qualifies as a profession in the first place, and thus can serve any expert occupation, including architecture, as a lodestar of *professionalism* – rather than as a lodestar of showmanship or self-promotion, marketing or deceit (as we will see).

Regardless, Larson explicitly plays up the distinction between architecture's "dependence heteronomy" and fine art's "autonomy" because she appreciates, rightly, that changes in architectural ideas and styles – even major changes – cannot be traced to any logic or trajectory unfolding strictly at architecture's discursive core. The ideas and styles hinge also on "structural changes" which experientially or phenomenally affect ambitious clients, "strategically located groups of people." After all, as new clients for architectural services enter the marketplace, their commissions can introduce into the field new built-structure programs. These programs, in turn, can present to architects "new problems in both the social and the aesthetic aspects of design," which can thereby yield "new or different outlooks." For that matter, some clients can disrupt the profession even more directly, namely by initiating design competitions for selecting architects which "lift the barriers of specialized practice."

<sup>23</sup> Florian Kreutzer [2003, 37], a German sociologist, also treats artists as exemplars of professionalism today.

Open competitions can disrupt the distinct niches into which the field otherwise lapses [*ibidem*, 14-15, 117].

However, because these interjections constitute external – heteronomous – stimuli of change, they cannot explain how *the discursive field* of architecture actually evolves over time. That is, the “professional ideology” of architecture will invariably downplay, or deny outright, the significance of new clients as it defines internally “the cultural significance of building.” The discourse internal to architecture is what, by an account of Suzanne Langer which Larson employs, converts an actual built-structure into a visual representation, an exemplar of the canon which exists only as “artistic illusion.”

For Larson this means that the discourse of architecture is what invariably identifies and articulates the *public* properties of built-structures. That is, it detaches these public properties from the “personal and private requirements” which otherwise characterize client programs. Here Larson notes how architecture’s “eminently public character” differentiates it from both the fine arts and other professions: Architecture contributes to culture through *artifacts* that are simultaneously useful, beautiful and accessible, not through discourse and codified practices alone. Precisely because the output of architecture is at once functionally useful, intimately linked to economic investment, and contributive to the fate of entire locales, the social consequences of architecture are frequently far more expansive than are those of the inutile fine arts.<sup>24</sup> Correlatively, when architectural aesthetic preferences and designs change, this is never traceable exclusively to any one source, whether: architects succumbing to client whim or trendiness, or architects incarnating idealized, visionary client programs, or architects unilaterally imposing design integrity upon recalcitrant clients [*ibidem*, 6-8, 12-16, 251, 261, note 16].

### 5.3. *On Larson’s Rhetoric and Prejudices*

We can conclude this initial discussion of Larson’s approach to architecture (there is more to follow below) by taking note explicitly of her rhetoric, her writing style and the degree and extent to which her arguments and conclusions retain conceptual rigor. There are several parts of the book which are illuminating, balanced in rhetoric (rather than hyperbolic) and informed conceptually. These include her

<sup>24</sup> Anyone denying that architecture matters even in the most basic, quotidian activities of the lowliest urban residents need only compare the feeling one experiences walking the streets of Warsaw compared to those of Krakow. Even more generally, see Gieryn [2000] on the pervasive yet illusive impact of “place” in everyday life.



narrower discussion of gentrification, the entry of baby boomers into the labor force, and the life-style characteristics shared by gentrifiers [*ibidem*, 90-92]. The same is true of her discussions of challenges facing the design elite (ch. 4), the elusive quest for meaning in architecture (ch. 5), and the politics of design implementation (ch. 6).

However, there are just as many places, including within the three chapters just noted, where Larson's writing loses all conceptual bearings and gleefully adopts the worst sorts of unreflexive political correctness and left faddishness imaginable. She insists that the societies about which she is writing (predominantly the United States) are narrowly utilitarian, single-mindedly dedicated to production, and blind to both injustice and alienation [*ibidem*, 96]. She portrays American suburbs not only as racist and spatially segregated but xenophobic, endeavoring to incarnate "a socially homogeneous Arcadian myth" [*ibidem*, 72]. She is infinitely apologetic of New Deal liberalism, from its inception through Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, notwithstanding all empirical evidence of its failures and contradictions. "The tragic irony is that urban liberalism, having solved neither the problems of the Democratic party nor those of the cities, accelerated instead the flight of business toward the safer political areas of the South and the West" [*ibidem*, 79-80]. She refers to the Carter presidency as an "interlude" between Republican administrations, Nixon-Ford and Reagan-Bush (rather than ever imagining doing the reverse).

From page 80 forward her discussion degenerates in still other ways from sound or defensible scholarship, beyond becoming even more openly ideological. Her reasoning loses any contact with logic, to say nothing of any tether to historical evidence. She asserts a direct causal relationship between urban renewal and "near insurrection" in black America [*ibidem*, 83]. She bemoans uncompromisingly the removal of the homeless from parks and shopping malls, for she believes the homeless had to be banished by "public architecture" because they are "ghosts of needs not served" by industrial capitalism [*ibidem*, 85, 96]. One wonders, by this logic, what possible legitimacy college towns might credibly claim, or the tenured havens of the professoriate.

Larson's concluding arguments in the penultimate chapter, from pages 235 to 242, are simply a jumble of scattered statements, not conceptually informed commentary and analysis. Such arguments include the following admission, quite startling in light of the orienting thesis with which she opens the book, regarding architecture being grounded upon a structural contradiction between core discourse and client input. "My analysis may have overstated the disjunction between [client] program and [architect] design *because I was considering the uncertainty about standards at the level of pure discourse*" [*ibidem*, 240, my emphasis]. Finally, in her concluding chapter Larson asserts: "I have shown throughout this study that architecture is special, both as an intellectual discipline and as a professional practice" [*ibidem*, 245].

But she has shown nothing of the sort. On what basis can we conclude that architecture is any more special as an expert occupation than, say, haute cuisine and haute couture? Or that any of these expert occupations qualify as a profession in the first place?

## 6. A Structural and Institutional Approach to Professions

We will return to Larson's discussion of architecture with an even more telling analytical line of criticism by first presenting in brief the alternative approach to the sociology of professions with which we are operating. We propose that all qualities constitutive of professions uniquely, as opposed to all other expert occupations and middle class occupations, are first structural, thus invariant, and then institutional. Being constitutive and invariant, these structural qualities are found in all professionalism projects without exception, both historically and cross-nationally today. Correlatively, the most important of these structural qualities are not found elsewhere in the occupational order, whether in failed professionalism projects or in non-professional expert occupations such as haute couture and haute cuisine.

Being constitutive and invariant, the structural qualities of professionalism projects appear empirically irrespective of whether the instances of occupational upgrading being studied are found in the Anglo-American world, on the Continent, or in the Pacific Rim or Southern Hemisphere. They also appear empirically irrespective of whether we are studying prototype professionalism projects during the *ancien regime*, or purposeful professionalism (in England and the United States) amidst industrialization, or inadvertent professionalism in corporate governance today. These structural qualities, in short, provide sociologists and historians with a grounded – invariant – conceptual basis on which to distinguish professions from all other expert occupations, both retrospectively and prospectively. They allow sociologists, therefore, not only to identify professionalism historically but also to explain and predict its rise, trajectory and outcome today and in the future.

For instance, the structural qualities constitutive of professionalism permit sociologists and historians to explain why haute couture and haute cuisine in Paris never embarked on professionalism projects during the Nineteenth century, despite the fact that they are both clearly expert occupations. Similarly, they permit sociologists and historians to explain why law in Britain and medicine, science and engineering in Germany and France did embark on professionalism projects during the Nineteenth century. It also permits them to explain why professionalism on the Continent un-

folded more unevenly and ambiguously, and why this was consistent with the institutional designs spanning the state and civil society – which tacked between formal democracy and autocracy.

### 6.1. *Invariant Constitutive Qualities*

For purposes of brief overview and orientation, we can present as a concise listing, from most to least important, all of the structural qualities and social consequences constitutive of professionalism. Following this listing we then elaborate briefly only on the first item (given the confines of one journal article), the most important structural quality distinguishing professions from other occupations.

All professions provide expert services within structured situations, as opposed to fluid sites of commerce and embedded exchanges.

All professions successfully assert and exercise an independent socio-cultural authority within their respective fields of expertise.

All professions are held structurally to two fiducial responsibilities: purposeful ones for client or patron wellbeing, some of which are invariant, others variable; and inadvertent fiducial responsibilities for the institutional design of the larger social order, which are invariant.

All professions introduce two sets of consequences into the larger society: immediate ones, which either harm or benefit client or patron wellbeing; and longer-term consequences, which either harm or benefit institutional design.

A *dividing line* within the occupational order goes here: everything above this line is exclusive to professions whereas everything below can be adopted or feigned by other occupations. However, everything below is invariably found within professions. Overlap here accounts in large part for why first functionalists and then revisionists have had difficulty distinguishing professions from other expert occupations.

Two occupational orientations: epistemological and didactic; as behavior, both occupational orientations are invariant in professions, but in content both evolve historically and vary by field-specialty.

Procedural-normative integrity and collegial form in both internal governance and external regulation: this institutionalizes a threshold of rule clarity and consistency which permits dispersed professionals shared cognition of:

- positional one-sidedness;
- principles and precepts of the independent socio-cultural authority;
- the substance of the fiducial responsibilities and occupational orientations;

- the evolving and varying content of instructional and occupational activities; and
- disinterestedness and deliberation, as substantive-normative standards of behavior.

## 6.2. *On Structured Situations*

One analytical and empirical quality distinguishes professions and their associations at the very outset from all other occupations and their organizations. This quality is decisive in that it distinguishes professions first structurally, as we will see now, and then institutionally (which exceeds the scope of this paper). Being structural, this quality's presence within professionalism projects is invariant because it is literally constitutive of professionalism as such.

Only professionals, whether practitioners or researchers, earn their livelihoods by providing expert services within what contemporaries believe universally, as a literal cultural truism of *their* society and era, to be *structured situations* in civil society or the state. All other expert practitioners, including as examples those engaged in haute couture and haute cuisine provide expert services at one or more of three sites or venues which are quite different.<sup>25</sup>

1. Sites of embedded commercial exchanges, the repetitive market relations idealized by network analysts and economic sociologists. These exchanges typically yield social relationships and thus emergent norms of behavior, but they never contain entrenched positions.

2. Sites of simple commercial transacting and contracting, the arm's-length market relations idealized by neoclassical economists.

3. Sites of elective diversion, of discretionary leisure and entertainment.

The relationship between structured situations and professionalism holds true in all instances of professionalism without exception, whether historically or cross-nationally today. It is present unambiguously, for instance, in the major instance of prototype professionalism during the *ancien regime*, the Paris *Academie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*. It remains present in all subsequent instances of professionalism from the Nineteenth century forward, whether those of purposeful professionalism in the Anglo-American world or those of inadvertent professionalism on the Continent and in the Pacific Rim and Southern Hemisphere.

<sup>25</sup> See Borgatti and Foster [2003] on the first two sites. There are also two other sites or venues, those of formal contracts and those of patron-client networks.

On the other hand, not all structured situations necessarily yield successful professionalism projects. For instance, no Italian visual *Accademia* professionalized during the *ancien regime*, nor did any literary academy anywhere in Europe (including the *Academie francaise*). Today we see uncertain success in American corporate governance. Moreover, professionalism is typically unsuccessful even in law and medicine, science and engineering, both today and historically, when civil societies are riddled with patron-client networks. Such networks prevailed during the *ancien regime* and, today, they remain prominent across the East, Middle East and Southern Hemisphere. We explore elsewhere why clientelism and professionalism are literally structural antonyms.<sup>26</sup>

Our point here is that all complex societies, from antiquity and the late Middle Ages forward, distinguish structured situations from all other sites and venues of exchange and interaction. Of course, societies differ both historically and cross-nationally in the substance of occupational (or avocational) activities undertaken respectively in structured situations and at other sites and venues. Moreover, only under certain conditions does professionalism unfold within structured situations, and the first time this happened was during the mid-Seventeenth century in the Paris visual *Academie*. *It has never happened as unambiguously in architecture*. Moreover, from the mid-Nineteenth century forward fine art became redefined: as either an embedded exchange or fluid sites of commerce and diversion, no longer a structured situation (see below).

Today this same analytical and empirical quality happens also to be present in the governance structures of publicly traded corporations and yet professionalism here has not reached a tipping point. This quality nonetheless explains (in part) why Delaware judges are encouraging professionalism in corporate governance, at times purposefully, at others inadvertently [see Sciulli 2001]. We can only assert here that the future success or failure of professionalism by corporate officers will carry with it the same longer-term – institutional – consequences for the larger social order today as have past successes or failures of professionalism in other occupations, at other times.

<sup>26</sup> Kritzer's distress over what he calls "post-professionalism" is largely misplaced because he associates professional autonomy and control with clientelistic entry, a complete misreading of history in both Paris and London [Kritzer 1999, 726]. Clientelism certainly did linger in all early professionalism projects, as culturally aristocratic societies gave way to culturally middle-class (*Burgertumlichkeit*) societies. But a more anonymous and universalistic meritocracy is certainly the more significant factor in the rise of professionalism, not personalism and particularism. Parsons appreciated this across his career as does Gunther Teubner [2003] today in his more general analysis of how bilateral "expertise contracts" bear on third parties.

Our point now is that the relationship between structured situations and professionalism is invariant precisely because it is structural, not socio-economic and not social psychological, cultural or ideological. Not being social psychological or cultural, the relationship between structured situations and professionalism does not depend upon nor vary with occupational *practitioners'* or occupational *researchers'* definitions of their situations, with their social constructions of meaning. Being structural instead, this relationship remains in place irrespective of whether these practitioners and researchers are even aware social-psychologically that they are professionalizing. It also remains in place, for that matter, irrespective of whether they desire to professionalize, whether they believe subjectively it is in their self-interests to professionalize.

As the Paris visual *Academie* demonstrates, the relationship between structured situations and professionalism holds true even when an awareness of "profession" is completely unavailable culturally, let alone an ideology of professionalism. The notion of "profession" was anachronistic during the *ancien regime* (as was the notion of fine art, by the way). Today cultural understandings and ideologies of professionalism are frequently unavailable outside the English-speaking world and yet some occupations on the Continent and in the Pacific Rim and Southern Hemisphere have nonetheless professionalized, at least in part.<sup>27</sup>

Not being narrowly socio-economic, the relationship between structured situations and professionalism also does not depend upon, nor vary with, such factors as a capitalist mode of production or, in modern societies, the path-dependence of any particular occupational order and stratification system. Being structural rather than socio-economic, the relationship between structured situations and professionalism holds true in the complete absence of capitalism. Thus, it appears prior to the consolidation of capitalism, such as in mid-Seventeenth century Paris, and, we propose, it will remain equally evident in the future should capitalism ever be displaced by some alternative mode of production.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, the relationship between structured situations and professionalism remains invariant even as the truism underlying contemporaries' distinction between structured situations and other sites and venues is itself a variable, because it is cultural. This cultural truism of a society and era does indeed evolve historically, and it

<sup>27</sup> Teubner's analysis of "expertise contracts" exemplifies the continuing difficulties European sociologists have in identifying professionalism projects on the Continent, whether within the state or within civil society [see Sciulli 2005].

<sup>28</sup> This is why our analysis of professionalism can accommodate and supplement general suggestions in Cohen and Arato [1992] regarding the likely structural contours of post-capitalist civil societies (without, however, sharing their lingering utopianism, or that of Habermas).

also differs cross-nationally today much as it did in the past. This is why the *substance* of the occupational activities undertaken within structured situations is always and everywhere also a variable. It evolves historically and varies cross-nationally, along with cultural truisms.

Thus, this substance once revolved, during the *ancien regime*, around occupational activities dedicated to ambitious ceremony and decoration, for these activities were assumed universally back then to incarnate weighty epistemological meanings and didactic principles. From the mid-Nineteenth century forward, it has revolved around more middle-class (*Burgertum*) occupational activities, including law and medicine, science and engineering. That is, the locus of weighty epistemological meanings and didactic principles in civil society has shifted. We address elsewhere how – and why – the cultural truisms which identify structured situations evolve historically and vary cross-nationally.

Irrespective of all such substantive occupational and cultural variations, the relationship between structured situations and professionalism remains invariant. Always and everywhere the demarcation between structured situations in civil society (or in the state) and both embedded exchanges and fluid sites seems *to contemporaries* bright-line, literally ontological. It seems more grounded than any social construction precisely because this demarcation rests so securely upon literal cultural truisms of a society and era. Always and everywhere this demarcation resists credible dispute, let alone open defiance or cavalier disregard. This remains the case even when contemporaries fully appreciate, such as is the case today that the substantive occupational activities affected by this demarcation vary cross-nationally and evolve historically.

During the *ancien regime*, ambitious decoration and ceremony were considered so compelling socially and consequential culturally that contemporaries believed universally that these occupational (and avocational) activities were retained and provided within a structured situation. But only in Paris were these activities not only demarcated from fluid sites of (retail) commerce but also from earlier embedded exchanges (a *brevetaire* system, of royal warrant-holders). By contrast, such exchanges continued to prevail in Italian painting and sculpture irrespective of the presence of visual *Accademia*. This is why painting and sculpture never professionalized on the Peninsula, irrespective of the extraordinary achievements of Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo (and their patrons).

Regardless, the cultural truism of the *ancien regime* noted above remained in place across Europe for generations, well after the French Revolution. It eventually did collapse, but not until the *second half* of the Nineteenth century. The Impressionist challenge to the visual-cultural authority of the *Academie Beaux-Arts*, as well as the challenge posed by Baudelaire and Flaubert to the literary authority of the *Academie*

*française*, at once reflected and helped to stimulate further a broad, ongoing altering of cultural truisms bequeathed by the *ancien regime* [see King 2006; Bourdieu 1992]. Simultaneously, these same challenges also transformed a received structured situation into embedded exchanges, at best, and then also into fluid sites of arms' length retail commerce and elective diversion. With this, painting and sculpture became indistinguishable *structurally* from various newer upper-middle-class occupational activities of the early and mid-Nineteenth century, including haute cuisine and haute couture (as we will see).

As another example, from the late Nineteenth century forward a quite different cultural truism gains salience and demonstrable potency across Western civil societies. Contemporaries increasingly believe universally that legal advocacy and medical delivery and research unfold within structured situations, no longer in embedded exchanges or at fluid sites. Moreover, universities, led by those in Germany, are increasingly privileging specialized research in both faculty recruitment and faculty advancement over liberal or classical exegesis and pedagogy. Structured situations are entering universities for the first time and are being recognized universally as such, consistent with the new cultural truism just noted. But not all faculties will professionalize within these structured situations, and here Germany and the rest of the Continent will increasingly lag behind the United States, as will Great Britain.<sup>29</sup>

Our point is that in these and all other instances, historical and contemporary, the cultural understandings contemporaries share universally resist credible challenge, until quite major cultural shifts are well underway. At their zenith literally no one of repute or influence defies them openly – personally or social-psychologically – including, for instance, Edouard Manet in painting and Gustave Flaubert in literature. These understandings are literal cultural truisms. Indeed, at the moment anyone of repute and influence openly questions a prevailing cultural understanding on the bases of what others of repute and influence consider to be credible grounds, this signals its impending collapse as a truism.<sup>30</sup> It also signals that a received structured situation is undergoing transformation into embedded exchanges and fluid sites. Accordingly, professionalism cannot continue or succeed under these conditions within the substantive occupational activities that had earlier been pro-

<sup>29</sup> Compare Bledstein [1978] to Ringer [1969], Jarausch [1990], and McClelland [1990].

<sup>30</sup> Bourdieu sees this, without employing our terms structured situation and cultural truism: "We may thus venture that the production of a good or service is the more likely to be controlled by the state the more indispensable that good or service is to what may be called mobilized or active opinion (as opposed to the ordinary idea of 'public opinion') and the less able the market is to deliver it" [2000:93]. What Bourdieu absolutely does not see is whether and how an Anglo-American sociology of professions speaks directly to these very goods or services, independently of the state, whereas the Burgertum approach of the Continent fails to do so.



vided in a structured situation. De-professionalization becomes inevitable, and irreversible.

This is what happened in the fine arts during the second half of the Nineteenth century. Moreover, we can imagine in thought experiment how this same process could eventually unfold in medicine today. For instance, should individuals of repute and influence openly characterize healing and health care exclusively as commercial services or elective diversions, medical delivery will no longer be provided within structured situations. These same critics, after all, would simultaneously deconstruct the significance of death and, correlatively, denigrate the importance of good health as a (seemingly ontological) foundation for any enviable or advantageous lifestyle. That this thought experiment seems improbable today simply reflects a prevailing cultural truism of our day, one which did not hold during the Middle Ages and *ancien regime*. Nonetheless, a cultural development such as the one just sketched could well unfold in the future.

We can also imagine in thought experiment an opposite process unfolding in various occupations of “first responders,” practitioners who provide expert services during disasters, natural or man-made. Should major terrorist incidents in the West increase in frequency and lethality, to say nothing of major natural disasters, all sorts of first responders will enter a new structured situation in civil society. They will occupy entrenched positions of power, discretionary judgment and trust. Moreover, a new cultural truism will readily take hold which legitimizes this new understanding, and it will indeed become literally universal in a society and era. Some, but not all, of these first responder occupations will likely attain an independent socio-cultural authority in civil society. And, as a result, they will initiate a professionalism project.

Among these first responder occupations, older occupations such as police and firefighting will finally professionalize, after nearly two centuries of failing to do so (for various reasons which need not detain us here).<sup>31</sup> Newer occupations such as emergency medical services (EMS) and hazardous materials units (Hazmat) will undertake professionalism projects much more forcefully and purposefully than heretofore. Advanced instructional institutions will become dedicated to advancing theory

<sup>31</sup> One reason is that police and fire have traditionally served as avenues of upward vertical mobility into the middle class for sons (and some daughters) of the working class. Were these occupations to professionalize, only college-educated or similarly credentialed candidates would be eligible for entry, thereby closing these avenues. In the absence of terrorism, many societies will choose not to go this far; in an age of terrorism, however, they will have little or no choice. In either case, firefighters in large metropolitan or high-rise areas are more likely to professionalize than their counterparts in rural or otherwise low-rise areas. The complexity and risks to life and property are exponentially higher in the first case.

and practice in these particular occupational activities, as opposed to continuing to leave this to cognate university disciplines.

Our general point, again, is that only on the basis of a bright-line demarcation between structured situations and all other sites and venues of exchange and interaction is it possible for sociologists to bring into view first at a conceptual level and then in empirical inquiry all other qualities constitutive of professionalism as such. Like the bright-line demarcation just discussed, these other constitutive qualities are also first and foremost structural and institutional, and then only secondarily socio-economic or social psychological, cultural or ideological. They include:

1. All norms of behavior and occupational orientations to which professionals publicly are held accountable and to which they openly hold themselves accountable;
2. all characteristics of professional instruction and training, including the continuing importance of theory or abstraction seemingly removed from occupational application; and, most important,
3. all consequences of professionalism, including those for the larger social order and its direction of change.

We show elsewhere that certain *invariant* consequences of professionalism are institutional, exceeding unambiguously the more immediate consequences affecting clients and patrons directly. They also exceed, equally unambiguously, those socio-economic consequences confined to the occupational order and stratification system.

## 7. Again, On Architecture: Analytical Criticisms

In discussing architecture, Larson defines profession and professionalism using two criteria quite alien to our focus on structured situations. First, she asks whether architects establish and maintain a common field of discourse (and practice) irrespective of the intra-occupational divisions noted above. Second, she asks whether architectural discourse (and practice) approaches an ideal of autonomy – self-definition and self-regulation – which she believes fine art today (as opposed to historically) exemplifies. Thus, she sees fine art – not medicine or law – providing architecture with its lodestar of successful professionalism.

### 7.1. *Fine Art Lodestar and Deception*

Given that architecture ultimately stands in equipoise between the obduracy of both engineering mechanics and client input, on one side, and the ethereality of aesthetic design, on the other, the second criterion just noted is particularly difficult for

practicing architects ever to meet fully, as we saw earlier. This is why Larson says “the common discursive field [of architecture] holds autonomy and heteronomy together in a permanent and constitutive contradiction.” Put benignly, this contradiction results in what she calls “double coding.” Put more conspiratorially, it imposes upon architects what she calls the “duty to deceive” which characterizes the entire world of fine art today [Larson 1993, 13-14]. Elite architects are compelled structurally, by their very positions, to speak to clients and the public in one way while simultaneously speaking to fellow elite architects in quite another. Presumably, they level with (at least some) colleagues but routinely deceive everyone else: “Elite entrepreneurial architects often engage in the ideological masking typical of the sellers of symbolic goods” [*ibidem*, 115].

It is in the context of discussing deception that Larson presents her grandest claims regarding the putative uniqueness of architecture as a profession (expert occupation). She acknowledges that debates within this discursive field – the first criterion of professionalism above – can be as esoteric and specialized as those in any other expert occupational field. But in her view the “visibility and public character of architecture” frequently lends to its debates “a metaphorical significance greater than in other arts and even other professions” [*ibidem*, 18].

Larson then gets even grander, moving to the second criterion which affiliates architecture with fine art as lodestar. Architecture “engages the sociology of culture” in ways broader and deeper than either fine arts or other expert occupations because the social consequences of architecture outputs can ramify literally across the entire social order. On the one hand, they can project the most visible image of magnificence of private and corporate wealth: architecture “still provides the most effective symbolic expression of the state’s presence.” On the other, they can also trickle down to the basest levels of civil society, to venues of retail commerce and mass housing. This is why Larson says “I believe that the ideas of architectural innovators have shaped the distinctive public face of our modernity” [*ibidem*, 18-19, 115, I convert past tense into present].

Artists are more “autonomous” within their discursive field than are architects precisely because they are not compelled structurally, by their positions, to participate in the double coding Larson sees as constitutive of architecture. Artists can simply disregard entirely the opinions of the lay public, and they are masters at deceiving everyone – themselves included. They can assess their creativity by referring rather

exclusively to standards of success strictly *internal* to their field.<sup>32</sup> The entire art world rests quite literally on deception.

All of this means, however, that architects, ultimately, are more duplicitous than artists because of their occupational field's heteronomy. They are hopelessly mendacious with clients or, at best, incapable of not prevaricating. The deception in which they engage is systemic, presumably mocking any apparent fiducial duty, whether to clients or to colleagues, much like a street gang's inside secret mocks apparent sociability.

Our point is that here we see what happens when the significance of structured situations in any professionalism project is overlooked or disregarded at a conceptual level: the sociology of professions devolves into some puerile conspiracy theory.<sup>33</sup> The behavior of profession leaders and practicing professionals cannot be explained in benign ways, as following from operating completely above-board, absent dirty hands or deceit. Any suggestion that professionals might behave disinterestedly or with propriety is simply removed from consideration, as naïve and ideological on its face. Any such suggestion simply fails to understand how evils of "capitalism" insinuate themselves into the occupational order.

The problem with this entire way of trying to describe and explain *professional* behavior, as opposed to the behavior of many other experts, is that it makes sense only by making a category mistake. One must begin by treating *contemporary* fine art as some lodestar of professionalism as such, as *the* exemplar of discourse-field "autonomy." The alternative, presented above, is instead to appreciate that a profession is first and foremost an occupation which provides expert services within a structured situation, and thereby bears fiducial responsibilities both positionally and institutionally. This may not fit well with a critique of "capitalism," but it nonetheless explains professional behavior far more parsimoniously than does any effort to generalize the concept of artistic "deception."

That is, double coding, deception and outright mendacity *are* laudatory in the fine arts, *and precisely because artists do not provide expert services within structured situations*. No one in the art world *imagines* holding any artist to *any* fiducial responsibilities to anyone, whether patrons, gallery owners, collectors or fellow artists. But this is the case precisely because *contemporary* fine arts are no longer proceeding

<sup>32</sup> Of course, even the most avant-garde artist must, in order to be successful, eventually attract the attention of gallery owners, influential collectors or influential commentators – all of whom are technically laymen. A trajectory of success, however, can begin by attracting the attention of insiders, fellow artists, including those not yet established, similarly struggling for recognition [see Bourdieu 1992].

<sup>33</sup> For an earlier discussion by Larson of "self-serving dissembling by professionals," see [Larson 1984, 36, 68 note 5]. Similar discussions are found routinely in the works of other revisionists.

along a professionalism project, as did painting and sculpture (but not architecture) from mid-Seventeenth century Paris to the mid-Nineteenth century. The fine arts today are not professions, and can never become professions (even if art leaders wished to professionalize). The same is true of haute couture and haute cuisine.

It is only because Larson fails to see or to appreciate this rather bright line structural difference between fine art and any possible professionalism project, that she can persist in presupposing that *a*) architecture is self-evidently a profession and *b*) fine art is self-evidently this profession's lodestar. As a result, she can also at times portray "the duplicity" of architects in a positive light: It is what prevents the wills of lay clients from accounting entirely for the development of new concepts in architecture. It is what permits architects at the discursive core eventually to consolidate dispersed built-structures into identifiable styles, as best they can amidst the heteronomy of their expert occupation.

## 7.2. *Architecture Firms, Elite Architects and Clients*

Larson initiates her direct argument that fine art provides architecture with its lodestar of professionalism by contrasting the place and purpose of large architecture firms with that of elite architects. Large architecture firms are an American invention, pioneered during the late Nineteenth century, and are organizational expressions of occupational heteronomy. On the one hand, they offer clients guarantees of competence, efficiency, reliability and technical support while, on the other, offering architects regular employment, career advancement and opportunities to specialize. Many firms draw a division between design partners and managing partners precisely in order to insulate the former from the tedium of administrative duties and the humilities of attracting and retaining clients [*ibidem*, 12, 104].

It is, however, not corporate practitioners but rather elite designers which inject into architecture the aura of fine art, through public fame. These are the occupational practitioners renowned regionally, nationally and internationally for designing culturally significant built-structures and thereby, in Larson's view, confirming "architecture's professional claims." The aesthetics of design confers on this elite a privileged place and purpose in the field, for "elite standing is then aggrandized by the charismatic ideology of art" [*ibidem*, 12]. In turn, the majority of architects, pragmatics, derive professional legitimacy from this "very small elite of artist-architects" [*ibidem*, 7-9]. It is the occupational activities of elite designers which incarnate the "art" being articulated simultaneously at the field's discursive center. Elite designers are admired at the center precisely because they are believed to assert the profession's

autonomy against the more mundane concerns and market-mimicking behavior of clients [*ibidem*, 8-9]. With this Larson sees art and aesthetics being literally *constitutive* of architectural *professionalism*. Correlatively, she sees a service-orientation being ultimately de-professionalizing. The second part of this proposition is instructive whereas the first part is distorting at both conceptual and empirical levels.

Larson fails to see that professionalism in any field stands or falls, respectively, on whether expert services are provided within structured situations or whether they are provided at more fluid sites of contracting or diversion. As a result of Larson instead portraying professionalism in architecture otherwise, as resting on art and aesthetics, her subsequent accounts of the tensions riddling architectural practice become confusing and contradictory. This is less a reflection of Larson misreading the empirical record than, rather, a reflection of defects in her conceptual framework, in how she is conceptualizing professionalism in general and the professional status of architecture in relation to fine art in particular.

For instance, having earlier emphasized client “control” of architects or, at minimum, client “abuse” of architects, she later notes some hazards clients face. Some of these hazards indicate that clients do indeed enter embedded exchanges, if not structured situation as entrenched dependents.

Larson notes that clients endeavor to minimize risks, and particularly today when stylistic disunity (namely post-modernism) accompanies escalating construction costs.<sup>34</sup> To this end, they seek architects with track records, and thereby recapitulate the field’s market niches. They seek architectural services already established in different market niches (whether commercial, retail, residential or other). With this, the total market of clients can be resourceful and powerful in *dictating* the kinds of services each kind of architect is permitted to provide.

As dispersed clients, insecure in their taste, work with architects who accommodate eclecticism, both sides tend by default to conform to accepted styles. For both sides, beauty is lodged “more than ever in the eye of the beholder” such that it becomes difficult for anyone to tell who really is in charge. This is particularly true

<sup>34</sup> Larson sees two “discursive shifts” altering architectural instruction and practice during the Twentieth century, and the body of her book revolves around tracing each shift and its consequences. The first shift culminated in Modernism in Europe, which originated during the 1920s and then became, after World War II, “the architectural style of international capitalism.” In the United States the center of Modernist discourse was the Department of Architecture and Design in the New York Museum of Modern Art, founded and directed by Philip Johnson [Larson 1993, 263, note 5]. The second discursive shift began in the mid-1960s and culminated by the 1980s in an American post-modernism. The latter not only rejects the universalistic claims of Modernism but also abandons any quest for formal and ideological unity [*ibidem*, 5-6]. Post-modern architecture instead seeks formal inspiration in both pre-modern, classicist sources and in vernacular, kitsch trends of the middle class, which trickle down to the working class [*ibidem*, 260, note 6, 25-26].

when a client is represented by a committee: An architect's "traditional function of 'arbiter of taste' for the ruling class becomes difficult, if not impossible to perform" [*ibidem*, 117-122, 219].

The best an elite architect can hope to achieve in this sort of socio-cultural situation is to attract commissions *which span niches*, and thereby permit him to develop a range of designs such that his talents escape routinization. Larson argues that striving for range is "an ideological strategy" by which architects assert and pursue aesthetic autonomy. Range allows them to create new knowledge in response to new problems. Even elite architects, therefore, see open competitions in this light: as strategic opportunities to demonstrate range [*ibidem*, 123]. But we might consider: Is this true in either fine art or professions proper? Do we expect installation artists today or physicians, lawyers, engineers or scientific researchers to resist specialization and instead to pursue range?

The only other argument regarding professionalism which Larson adds to this basic proposition about art legitimating architecture as lodestar is her even more basic proposition about professional autonomy resting generally on exclusivity of core field discourse. Her argument here is that by virtue of the expertise required to enter the core, *all* professions and *all* scholarly disciplines gain autonomy. They claim successfully an exclusionary right to set their own standards of acceptable and exemplary practice. Professions and disciplines may well respect "outside boundaries" of their occupational fields established and patrolled by political officials or other non-expert authorities. But within these boundaries they "brook no interference" from these officials and authorities [*ibidem*, 12].

The problem here is not that Larson's argument is mistaken, but rather that this quality of expertise is simply not constitutive of professions. It instead spans all expert occupations as opposed to distinguishing professions within this larger set.

Larson's thesis, again, is that the authority of architectural elites is undermined even within core discourse by elites' ongoing dependence heteronomy in securing built-structure commissions and then actually building them. That is, architectural elites are dependent not only on clients but also on other technical experts of all sorts, including multiple types of engineers. This is why architects lack "the ideological autonomy" accorded to other professionals and, Larson again insists, to artists even more so. The discourse of architecture is autonomous only on paper [*ibidem*, 12-13].

Here Larson goes over the deep end, by treating artists as super-professionals rather than as (charismatic or deceiving) members of expert occupations which have voluntarily de-professionalized for two central reasons. First, artists do not wish to be held to fiducial responsibilities of any kind, whether to gallery owners and collectors or, certainly, to the larger community and society. In addition, they increasingly

prefer not to be confined by the epistemological and didactic occupational orientations which professionalism also demands structurally [Haden-Guest 1996]. To the extent that leading architects see the fine arts as their lodestar of professionalism, they already have little choice except to emphasize the importance of genius – and sheer luck – rather than that of architectural historiography and theory.<sup>35</sup>

### 7.3. *Architecture Adrift, Due to its Lodestar*

Larson acknowledges (citing Peter Eisenman) that precisely because “there is no theory of architecture,” this expert occupation lacks “cultural power,” is unable to impose on the public or clients either its syllogism or its way of distinguishing architecture from building-construction. Lacking any obdurate theoretical foundations, even elite architects are left simply with negotiable client programs and commission competitions. Inclined systemically by postmodern architecture to be tolerant of eclecticism and vernacular meaning, architects operate with a sense of malaise, a sense that they lost something important with the demise of modernism and the International Style [*ibidem*, 168].

Once post-modernism disconnected aesthetics and symbolism from construction and function, it simultaneously dissolved any common standards of judgment which had spanned the entire profession during the heyday of the International Style. The field became inundated with a “plurality of design codes,” and architects increasingly evaluate work in terms of being “good, of its kind” or as differentiated by built-structure and program type [*ibidem*, 219-220]. While architects at first considered the new diversity of design liberating, today they are decidedly unenthusiastic. They are “look[ing] with reluctance at the formal and stylistic freedom they have acquired” with post-modernism [*ibidem*, 181].

Our point is that what architects sense is being lost is the project of professionalism itself. To take fine art unreflexively as their lodestar of “autonomy” is *simultaneously* to abandon professionalism. Indeed, Larson notes that most architects appreciate that the fame and glamour of a few cannot possibly compensate for the occupation’s weakness as a profession more generally. “The lionization of celebrity architects by the ‘star system’ and the use of their signatures to valorize both real

<sup>35</sup> Larson notes that elite architects “take their formal cues directly from evolution of types or from architectural history, not from what is current.” But then she adds that as design is being brought to a program and construction, “the active part of designing involves politics [with the client and the central engineer] more than drawing or even imagination” [Larson 1993, 163-164]. Worse, with the rise of trained construction managers during the 1970s and 1980s, architects have lost even this political function of coordinating the views and activities of multiple building specialists [*ibidem*, 229].



estate and luxury objects parallel, ironically, architecture's loss of power as a specialty of construction" [*ibidem*, 219].

Design in architecture has been reduced to image-making, just as aesthetics in the fine arts has been reduced to showmanship or self-promotion [see Haden-Guest 1996 for how and why this happened]. Architectural design is no longer linked symbiotically to structure and form, as it had been within the International Style. Commercial clients in particular hire architects not to receive some putatively independent cultural authority but rather simply to receive "surface imagery, rhetorical persuasions, and status appeal." All professions – including law and medicine, engineering and science – experience internal segmentation and stratification, but architecture, not the other professions just noted, is simultaneously experiencing a decline in the socio-cultural authority of its core discourse [*ibidem*, 319, 231, 241].

With this line of analysis and commentary, Larson is unwittingly demonstrating that, indeed, there are critical distinctions between fine art, architecture and professions proper, including engineering. Fine art, which revolves centrally around a star system, has long ago abandoned a professionalism project, and yet remains an expert occupation. In turn, the lure of a similar star system for elite architectural designers indicates why architecture remains fundamentally ambivalent about continuing a professionalism project. Finally, this also reveals why engineering qualifies more unambiguously as a profession: a star system is hardly a threat, and engineering instead upholds epistemological and didactic standards of instruction and practice widely recognized across the field. All of this follows because engineers offer expert services within structured situations (they can do real harm) whereas architects do not.

Rather than seeing this structural relationship between these three occupations, Larson sees only the following issue: "Calling attention to the transformation of art and artists into commodities highlights only one of the contradictions that plague architectural work" [*ibidem*, 181, 219]. In light of our conceptual framework we can now see more generally why Larson cannot avoid contradicting herself as she continues to repeat the self-understanding of elite architects, that fine art provides their lodestar of *autonomous professionalism*. Citing Susan Sontag on pop art, Larson argues [*ibidem*, 95] that post-modern architecture, like pop art, stimulates and shapes a new sensibility, a new attitude of taking pleasure in art rather than associating art with edification.

With this, however, she undermines her case for fine art providing a lodestar for much of anything, least of all professionalism. She notes, for instance, that American artists and architects simply join the ranks of a professional-managerial class, as opposed to affiliating with any politicized art avant-garde as in Weimar Germany.

American artists and architects have become aesthetic specialists, stripped not only of political voice but also didactic sensibility. Such a development only became possible, moreover, when interest in the arts became more democratized, and thereby subjected to fads and whims of middling taste, to kitsch.

Given this context of ongoing leveling, Larson is not confident American artists and architects can bring to fruition the “latent possibility” of transcending the crass utilitarianism, injustice and alienation of industrial capitalism. She acknowledges that the educated bourgeois “has learned to suspend moral and political judgment in front of works of art.” Some might consider this an example “of the congenital moral idiocy of experts.” But Larson accepts uncritically the self-understanding of artists, namely that artists somehow have remain insulated from this charge.

[T]he lingering ideological notion of an art avant-garde still associates art with progress and with a critical “antibourgeois” position [*ibidem*, 95-96, 129].

As a result of the connection of architecture to fine art, at least in principle, Larson sees merit in architectural practice that she would never countenance in any description of, say, top management in publicly traded corporations, even as the latter, unlike artists, *are* held at law to fiducial duties. She is confident, for instance, that architects do not claim to be artists or aesthetic specialists simply in order to exploit an available opportunity. Moreover, she does not consider it necessarily a callous manifestation of conspicuous consumption to prefer ordered and pleasurable urban environments and to appreciate both beautiful objects and delectable cuisine. Finally, she is confident that “neither beauty nor pleasure nor fun are morally objectionable” in principle, but the social context in which these needs are affirmed can entangle these pursuits hopelessly in “other morally obscene effects” [*ibidem*, 93-96].

Larson says all of this even as she acknowledges that the post-modern erosion of the barrier between high culture and mass culture allows architects “to present purely commercial buildings as potential works of art.” As artists, architects are always comforted by knowing that if someone less talented was hired to design the built-structures just noted, the latter would turn out worse, more socially harmful [*ibidem*, 129-30]. What is remarkable here is not simply the unalloyed apologetics (given Larson’s strident bromides elsewhere). What is equally remarkable is that Larson is implying that she – somehow, by some standard – knows definitively, really knows, when a built-structure is commercial, or aesthetic, or some combination, and then, further, whether it is either socially harmful or socially beneficial.

Likewise, in discussing the *Progressive Architecture* competition of 1971 Larson asserts confidently that juror discourse took “an antiarchitectural and antiprofession-

al tone.” She says this because “the professional assumption of competing and authority was no longer intact” [*ibidem*, 225]. The problems with any such observations on her part are threefold and related.

First, given Larson’s conceptual framework, how can she identify when *any* activity within the field of architecture becomes “antiarchitectural and antiprofessional?” Second, if fine art is indeed the lodestar of architectural professionalism, what does professional competence and authority mean? What can it possibly mean, independently of the putatively ineffable aura of the artist role? Third, if instead Larson appeals to the “discursive center” of any profession as being constitutive of professional autonomy, then on what grounds can she consider *any* message emanating from the discursive center of architecture to be “antiarchitectural and antiprofessional?” We are not saying that this cannot happen; we are instead asking how Larson can recognize it when it does happen, within the confines of her conceptual framework?

Here as elsewhere Larson regresses to the worst sorts of leftist, politically correct editorializing, utterly devoid of sociological analysis. Whereas she is quick to condemn everyone else associated with urban renewal and then deindustrialization and gentrification, she offhandedly lets architects off the hook. Being artists (and liberals), she casts them strictly as reluctant members of the professional-managerial class, otherwise having clean hands. “Contemporary architects in the United States cannot be held directly responsible for their own disengagement from social architecture” [*ibidem*, 128-129].

Even those architects who establish ongoing relationships with “speculative builders” are given a pass. They do this, says Larson, not because they lack social responsibility but rather because, well, they lack alternatives. She adds that architects themselves draw an important distinction here, between mere speculators (presumably those who do not commission them) and a “better kind” of developer (presumably those who do commission them) [*ibidem*, 128-131]. If Talcott Parsons had written these lines about any set of professional practitioners during the 1960s he would have been roundly criticized, by Larson and other revisionists, for mouthing blithely the strictly ideological claims and rationales of profession leaders.

More generally, Larson attributes far too much significance to heteronomy within any profession, because of the same defects at a conceptual level. She assumes as given that autonomy is somehow constitutive of professionalism as such, as opposed to whether expert services are provided within structured situations. The problem is that all professions ultimately are heteronomous, not autonomous. Physicians and surgeons, for instance, may gain access to prestigious appointments in teaching hospitals by means other than those endorsed by their field’s discursive center. This

hardly reduces the professionalism of medicine. The same is true of academicians gaining access to prestigious university appointment by extra-discursive means.

The annual awards of the journal *Progressive Architecture* allow Larson to document the increasing difficulty of jurors (mostly fellow architects) to reach agreement amidst the heteronomy – and proliferating aesthetics and design codes – of the profession. She documents that jurors rely on balancing by default: they appear content to assert their preferences and then to trade off one award in one style with another award in another. Indeed, such case-by-case decision-making has resulted in jurors increasingly neglecting the issue of design altogether, this being too divisive and thorny. They instead favor evaluating submissions on the basis of service and craftsmanship [*ibidem*, 221]. That is, instead of deliberately privileging one stylistic type over another, jurors typically agree to disagree about this, whether procedurally, by accepting divided votes, or substantively, by finding projects sufficiently diverse stylistically to offer something for everybody [*ibidem*, 229].

From our point of view we can see this default trajectory as architecture's lingering efforts to sustain a professionalism project despite the star system and rhetoric of aesthetics, both of which treat fine art as lodestar. Architects (and jurors) increasingly embrace professional service and technical competence because they see this as their last line of resistance to sheer trendiness. From Larson's point of view the same default trajectory indicates an opposite tendency, namely architecture's abandonment of aesthetics and thus of a professionalism project.

Service, indeed, ignores the architects' artistic and theoretical aspirations, while craftsmanship, in its characteristic concentration on the perfect object, rises only occasionally above the isolated building [*ibidem*, 221].

## References

- Abbott, A.  
 1988 *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.  
 2002 "Sociology of Professions." In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*. Elsevier Science Ltd.  
 Baynes, K.  
 1995 "Democracy and the *Rechtsstaat*: Habermas' *Faktizität und Geltung*." Pp. 201-232 in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, edited by Stephen K. White. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bledstein, B.J.

1978 *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America*. New York: Norton.

Borgatti, S.P., and Pacey C.F.

2003 "The Network Paradigm in Organizational Research: A Review and Typology." *Journal of Management* 29: 991-1013.

Bourdieu, P.

1996 *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

2005 *The Social Structures of the Economy*. Cambridge: Polity.

Champy, F.

2006 "Professional Discourses under the Pressure of Economic Values: The Case of French Architects, Landscape Designers and Industrial Designers." *Current Sociology* 54: 649-661.

Cohen, J.L., and Arato, A.

1992 *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Collins, R.

1979 *The Credential Society: An Historical Study of Education and Stratification*. New York: Academic Press.

1990 "Changing Conceptions in the Sociology of the Professions." Pp. 11-23 in *The Formation of Professions: Knowledge, State and Strategy*, edited by R. Torstendahl and M. Burrage. London: Sage.

Dezalay, Y., and Garth, B.G. (eds).

2002 *Global Prescriptions: The Production, Exportation and Importation of a New Legal Orthodoxy*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Freidson, E.

1989 *Medical Work in America: Essays on Health Care*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gieryn, T.F.

2000 "A Space for Place in Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 463-496.

Goode, W.J.

1957 "Community Within a Community: The Professions." *American Sociological Review* 22: 194-200.

Greenwood, E.

1957 "Attributes of a Profession." *Social Work* 11: 45-54.

Haden-Guest, A.

1996 *True Colors: The Real Life of the Art World*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Jarausch, K.H.

1990 *The Unfree Professions: German Lawyers, Teachers and Engineers, 1900-1950*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johnson, T.

1979 *Professions and Power*. London: Macmillan Press.

- King, R.  
2006 *The Judgment of Paris: The Revolutionary Decade that Gave the World Impressionism*. New York: Walker & Co.
- Kreutzer, F.  
2003 "Models and Myths of Professionalism." Pp. 35-41 in *Conceptual and Comparative Studies of Continental and Anglo-American Professions*, edited by L.G. Svensson and J. Evetts. Goteborg: Department of Sociology, Goteborg University.
- Kritzer, H.M.  
1999 "Research Note: The Professions are Dead, Long Live the Professions: Legal Practice in a Postprofessional World." *Law & Society Review* 33: 713-749.
- Larson, M.S.  
1977 *The Rise of Professionalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.  
1984 "The Production of Expertise and the Constitution of Expert Power." Pp. 28-80 in *The Authority of Experts: Studies in History and Theory*, edited by T.L. Haskell. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.  
1989 "The Changing Functions of Lawyers in the Liberal State: Reflections for Comparative Analysis." Pp. 427-447 in *Lawyers in Society, vol. 3: Comparative Theories*, edited by R.L. Abel and P.S.C. Lewis. Berkeley: University of California Press.  
1990 "In the Matter of Experts and Professionals, or How Impossible it is to Leave Nothing Unsaid." Pp. 24-50 in *The Formation of Professions: Knowledge, State and Strategy*, edited by R. Torstendahl and M. Burrage. London: Sage.  
1993 *Behind the Postmodern Façade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth-Century America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- McClelland, C.E.  
1990 "Escape from Freedom? Reflections on German Professionalization, 1870-1933." Pp. 97-113 in *The Formation of Professions: Knowledge, State and Strategy*, edited by R. Torstendahl and M. Burrage. London: Sage.
- Millerson, G.  
1964 *The Qualifying Associations: A Study in Professionalization*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul
- Parsons, T., and Platt, G.M.  
1973 *The American University*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Polanyi, K.  
1963 *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston: Beacon.
- Ringer, F.K.  
1990 *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, Wesleyan University Press.
- Sciulli, D.  
2001 *Corporate Power in Civil Society: An Application of Societal Constitutionalism*. New York: New York University Press.  
2005 "Continental Sociology of Professions Today: Conceptual Contributions." *Current Sociology* 53: 915-942, with comments by R. Torstendahl and M. Malatesta and rejoinder by Sciulli, to page 958.

- 2007a "Paris Visual *Academie* as First Prototype Profession: Rethinking the Sociology of Professions." *Theory, Culture and Society* 24: 35-59.
- 2007b "Professions before Professionalism." *Archives européennes de sociologie* 48: 121-147.
- 2008a "Painting, Law and Professions, I: Paris Visual *Academie* and English Law." *Comparative Sociology* 7: 68-108.
- 2008b "Painting, Law and Professions, II: Paris Visual *Academie* and French Law." *Comparative Sociology* 7: 108-137.
- forth. *Professions in Civil Society and the State: Structural and Institutional Invariance*.
- Sciulli, D., and Halley, J.A.
- 2008 "Professions and *Burgertum*: Etymological Ships Passing, Night into Day." Manuscript under review.
- Sousa Santos, B. de
- 1995 *Toward a New Common Sense: Law, Science and Politics in the Paradigmatic Transition*. New York: Routledge.
- Sousa Santos, B. de (ed)
- 2005 *Democratizing Democracy: Beyond the Liberal Democratic Canon*. London: Verso.
- Teubner, G.
- 2003 "Expertise as Social Institution: Internalizing Third Parties into the Contract." Pp. 333-363 in *Implicit Dimensions of Contract: Discrete, Relational and Network Contracts* edited by D. Campbell, H. Collins, and J. Wightman. Oxford: Hart.
- Wilensky, H.
- 1964 "The Professionalization of Everyone." *American Journal of Sociology* 70: 137-158.

## Revisionism in Sociology of Professions Today

### Conceptual Approaches by Larson

---

**Abstract:** More than anyone else, Magali Sarfatti Larson in 1977 established today's received wisdom in the sociology of professions, in reaction against Talcott Parsons' earlier functionalist approach. However, she acknowledges that she had failed to provide a theoretical alternative to Parsons' functionalism. Today, Larson has substantially reevaluated her approach to professions, and indeed now accepts one of Parsons' central arguments, namely that professions introduce important consequences into the larger social order. But from 1977 to today, she has still not developed consistently any identifiable theoretical approach to professions. One result of lacking any mooring at a conceptual level is that her descriptions and explanations of professionalism across her entire career suffer as a result, being at once ad hoc, unreliable and ultimately contradictory.

---

**Keywords:** *professions, fine arts, law, architecture, expert occupations, functionalism, conflict sociology, labor markets.*

---

**David Sciulli** is professor of Sociology at Texas A&M University. His areas of interest are culture (painting academies), the professions, law and political theory. He is the author of *Corporate Power in Civil Society: An Application of Societal Constitutionalism* (2001), and the editor in chief of *Comparative Sociology*.