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An exploration of architects' ethical boundaries: Aotearoa New Zealand perspectives of care for the built environment

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Abstract

Purpose – Built environment research frequently reveals tensions around issues such as intensification, environmental degradation, climate adaption, community engagement, heritage preservation or housing affordability. However, such discussions often overlook another crucial aspect of city-making processes: design ethics. This paper aims to focus on the ethical practices of architects as key actors in this process. More specifically, the authors ask whether, or to what extent, architects consider their ethical responsibilities to wider ecologies of "stakeholders" beyond the nominal client, and how these are affected by the outcomes of their design work – that is: who are architects designing for?

Design/methodology/approach – Using thematic analysis from literature and prior research, the authors examined qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 25 architects practicing in Aotearoa New Zealand. This paper critically explores architects' design values by situating these themes from practice alongside theory.

Findings – The authors find that architects often view their design responsibility as extending beyond the particular and immediate needs of their client and site. Architects operate within social, temporal and spatial boundaries of care (BoC).

Research limitations/implications – While attempts were made to include whakapapa Māori architects, the authors note the lack of representatives from this group in the study.

Originality/value – Challenging the prevailing narrative of competing urban interests, the authors advocate for a paradigm shift from competition to care in architectural practice and ethics. This paper introduces the concept of architects' boundaries of care to inform research into the ethical dilemmas inherent in urban discourse.

Keywords Design ethics, Ethics of care, Urbanisation, Urban design, Architectural ethics, Architectural design

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

As humans increasingly live and work in cities (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2019), these necessary spaces for

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human inhabitation are arguably a *public good* (Hazelkorn and Gibson, 2019). A public good should be non-excludable and non-rivalrous (Hazelkorn and Gibson, 2019), yet spaces within cities are often exclusionary with the creation and maintenance of those spaces mediated by competitive market economies (Legacy and Leshinsky, 2013; Spector, 2010). The dominance of growth-dependant planning in Western cities has shifted power from public to private interest (Rydin, 2013). With economic growth as a central prerequisite, matters of social equity and environmental sustainability are often more rhetoric than reality in urban development (Rydin, 2013; Legacy and Leshinsky, 2013). The neo-liberal system underpinning growth-dependency reframes the spatial, social and environmental relationships within the city as competing rights (Erdem and Kavanoz, 2023). This framing of rights as inherently rivalrous can lead to the delivery of some rights detracting from others, whether they be rights of people or non-human life (Ruming *et al.*, 2024; Komac, 2017).

Whether urban, suburban or rural, human inhabitation is always relational and interconnected (Krasny, 2023). Understanding this interconnectedness and the role architecture plays with respect to both social and environmental well-being leads us to an ethic of care (Fitz and Krasny, 2019). In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, these concepts of relationality and interconnectedness (*whakapapa*), health and well-being *(mauri ora*) and care for the natural world (*kaitiakitanga)* are also core values of the indigenous Māori culture (Lipsham, 2023; Yates, 2016). We propose that understanding the role of the architect as a relational one within an interconnected world can restore architecture's moral core as a caring practice.

Using Fraser *et al.*'s foci of relation for ethics (Fraser *et al.*, 2023) and practice (Fraser *et al.*, TBC) as a springboard for the analysis of interviews, this paper identifies boundaries of care (BoC) in architects' design practice. These permeable boundaries draw attention to the extent of architects' care in design, from their immediate client to the wider urban and natural environments. This paper further situates these BoC alongside Tronto's four elements of care (Tronto, 1994, pp. 127–136), demonstrating how these proposed boundaries reflect the process of caring practice.

This study thus addresses a gap in the research looking at how architects make complex decisions in their design practice, and how they position those decisions in relation to their professional ethics. Formal professional ethics are typically focused on contracts, finance and communication, and are often removed from the practice of design. In providing an understanding of how architects apply their ethical values in their design practice, this paper informs subsequent stages of the lead author's doctoral research aimed at developing a framework or toolkit to support architects in practice.

2. Literature review

2.1 Public good versus private interest

The deleterious impact of competing user rights leads to "the public good [becoming] congested [such that] it is not able to perform all or some of its functions" (Komac, 2017, p. 137). White and Tronto (2004, p. 426) contend that to move from competition to care, "we need to conceive of care in a public way that permits both rights and needs to be understood as applicable to all". A key aspect of this, especially for urbanism, is that we do not live alone; we are always living with and alongside others, human and non-human (Krasny, 2023). In Te o Māori (the Māori worldview), *whakapapa* is fundamental to *kaitiakitanga* (Lipsham, 2023; Yates, 2016). That is, both the drive to care and the ability to provide adequate care come from and are dependent upon understanding our world as interconnected and interdependent. Lipsham (2023) and Brannelly *et al.* (2013) have previously noted the

commonalities between this key aspect of Māori traditional values and care ethics. Bellacasa (2017, p. 70), affirms that "interdependency is not a contract, nor a moral ideal–it is a *condition*".

Although care is pervasive and central to human life, contemporary attitudes stemming from market-based neo-liberalism laud competition and sideline care as a way of operating publicly (White and Tronto, 2004). Gore (2018, p. 120) contends that neo-liberalism has "[eroded] the power of the professions" to serve – to care for – the public good. Architectural practice within a competition-oriented worldview operates, to some degree, under the maxim (attributed to Stanford White) that the "first rule of the architect […] is to get the job" (Benedikt, 2009, p. 105). This focus is both a result of and a contributor to the decline of architecture's moral core (Benedikt, 2009; Spector, 2001). As observed by Spector (2001), despite mid-century ideals, architecture has failed to address human and environmental needs in relation to the built environment. This "left [architecture's] core design values in shambles" (Spector, 2001, p. X). Schindler's (2019) analysis identifies a post-1970s shift away from architectural practice as a moral project, marked by the abandonment of its engagement with predominantly social and economic concerns.

If neglecting the public good in service of private interests has undermined architects' ethical status, then reengaging with the public good (social and environmental) and reimagining architecture as a caring practice can rebuild that ethical status. In the introduction to *Critical Care–Architecture and Urbanism for a Broken Planet*, Fitz and Krasny (2019, p. 12) call for a "long-term commitment to planetary care", and for an ethics of care to be central to architectural practice in "[these] times of catastrophic ruination". A caring practice starts with understanding the interconnectedness of humans, non-human life and the planet itself (Krasny, 2023; Yates, 2016). Caring for each other, the planet and the city can be achieved by considering these as "things held in common" or as common concerns (Gutiérrez-Mozo *et al.*, 2021). To "[conceive] of planetary existence as living with others foregrounds interdependency", thereby emphasising that our collective needs and rights are interdependent rather than contradictory (Krasny, 2023, p. 167).

2.2 Feminist ethics of care

Tronto sets out four elements for an ethic of care: attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness (Tronto, 1994, pp. 127–136). Architecture is an anthropocenic actor with wide environmental and climate impacts (Yates, 2016); therefore, attentiveness to the need created by both the action and inaction of architects in design and taking responsibility for that need is a moral imperative (Yates, 2016; Tronto, 1994). Understanding the built and natural environments as a common concern leads the architect to both be attentive to the needs of these spaces and to take responsibility for those needs and for addressing them (Krasny, 2023; Tronto, 1994, pp. 127–133). Situating the practice of architecture within an interconnected and relational world enables repositioning away from competition and towards caring relations (Yates, 2016; Benedikt, 2009; Spector, 2006). Relationality and common concern are fundamental to Mauri; therefore, "connectivity [should be] a key condition of [architectural] thinking-practice" (Yates, 2016, p. 263).

Following Gilligan's seminal 1982 work *A Different Voice*, various ethics theorists explored the ethics of the previously feminised and disregarded domestic and caring sphere of human experience (Held, 2006). Noddings (2013, pp. 80–81) argues that each person has an inner circle whom they care for and that care for that inner circle must be prioritised. Intentionally or not, by attempting to rationalise this prioritisation, Noddings situates care as

conflicting needs rather than common concern (White and Tronto, 2004). This leads to the potential abandonment of care for those outside the inner circle on the premise that care would, or could, detract from care for the inner circle (Noddings, 2013, p. 80). Citing a lack of reciprocity, Noddings (2013, pp. 138–150) further argues against any ethical obligation to care for plants or animals, describing this as aesthetic and sentimental rather than genuine care. This position is antithetical to the Te Ao Māori understanding of kaitiakitanga as it stems from whakapapa (Lipsham, 2023; Yates, 2016). Lipsham (2023, p. 189) states that "kaitiakitanga must be understood through connection to taiao [environment] and that a shift away from whakapapa and metaphysical connection to a human-centric one will undermine the integrity of kaitiakitanga". Speaking to the issue of reciprocity, Tronto (2019, p. 29) notes that "care receiving is also a vital part of care".

2.3 Care in architectural practice

Architectural care is both practice and ethics, that is caring *about* requires caring *for*, and vice versa (Held, 2006, p. 42). Just as attentiveness to the existence of need is inadequate without responsibility for addressing the need (within one's abilities and available resources), taking responsibility for the need without being attentive and responsive to the care-receiver is also inadequate (Tronto, 1994, pp. 127–133). Incompetent care is inadequate in the same manner (Tronto, 1994, pp. 127–133). Though not typically situated within relationality, competency or skill is a key tenant of professional ethics for architects (Fraser *et al.*, 2023; Duffy and Rabeneck, 2013). Situating practice within wider relations, Yates (2016) describes design practice and design thinking as inseparable and immanent (all-pervasive and inherent). This positioning advances an ethical understanding of a relational world embedded within human practices of mauri ora (Yates, 2016).

Lagueux (2004) identifies the ethical problems architects face as internal to the practice of architecture. Architects themselves must address the question rather than defer to society to determine the ethical approach (Lagueux, 2004). The exercise of judgement is another central concept in architects' professional practice and ethics (Fraser *et al.*, 2023). This requires the architect to empathically imagine the possible short- and long-term effects of their decisions on others (Fisher, 2010). Architects' training provides skills that make them particularly adept at utilising *moral imagination* (Collier, 2006). Moral imagination involves mutual respect, empathy and dialogue (Collier, 2006). As judgement is founded in knowledge, moral imagination requires ethical knowledge. Ethical knowledge is relational and layered. Bellacasa (2017) calls this "thinking-with".

Although Tronto's, 1994 book *Moral Boundaries* excluded creative activity, production and the creation of art from care, we argue that architecture – in all its aspects – *is* care. Indeed, Tronto's (1994, p. 102) definition of care from that work, as including "everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible", must surely include architecture? Spector (2010) identifies the programmatic and practical aspects of architectural practice as satisfying that definition but notes that the aesthetic aspects of architectural practice may be excluded. Yet aesthetics, like ethics, is intrinsic to the practice of architecture – form is entangled with function (Lagueux, 2004). Both Spector (2010) and Held (2006, p. 32) assert that creativity can be a part of care. Critiquing the limitation of care as reproductive labour (in the Marxist sense) and not productive labour, Held (2006) makes the case for care as creative and transformative. Further, "only a biased and damaging misconception holds that caring merely reproduces our material and biological realities while what is new and creative and distinctively human must occur elsewhere" (Held, 2006, p. 32).

More recently, Tronto (2019) has explored the necessary elements of a caring architecture and urbanism practice. Architects must first recognise "architecture [is] a reflection of power" as buildings require resources and therefore are subject to the needs and desires of those who control access to those resources (Tronto, 2019, p. 26). Architects (Tronto claims) are focused on *things*, not relations – that is, buildings in service of capital, status and aesthetic sensibility, rather than the ongoing relations between people, and between people and place (Tronto, 2019). Tronto (2019) advises that an architecture of care will involve going beyond the client brief, or the beautiful object. Caring architecture shares responsibility for caring for the world, including repair and preservation (Tronto, 2019). Tronto (2019, p. 30) further declares that "caring to repair our broken world provides the political stakes of a caring architecture".

3. Methodology

3.1 Study design

To better understand how architects engage with these issues in practice, we undertook one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 25 New Zealand Registered Architects. These were conducted face-to-face and via Microsoft Teams, dependent on participant location and availability. The interviews were recorded and were transcribed using transcription software. Interview questions centred on decision-making, relationships, the role of architects and the impacts of building design. Refer Appendix.

The lead author's experience as a practicing architect informs this grounded theory research, alongside a critical feminist lens. Following the interviews (carried out on different days), the principal researcher recorded their reflections, identifying common themes in the architect participants' responses. Initial review of the interview transcripts supported these initial impressions and further identified similarities between the reported concerns and experiences of the architect participants. Using NVivo software, participant responses were manually coded using *a priori* themes drawn from literature and previous research. A cyclic and reflexive process worked through overlaps and relationships between these initial codes, leading to the expansion, splitting, collapsing and refinement of emergent codes. These codes were further categorised, from which broader themes were identified.

3.2 Participants

Inclusion criteria: An invitation was sent out to all current New Zealand Registered Architects with contact details listed on the public register, to participate in a study looking at architects' ethics in practice. The invitation was also published in industry newsletters. We initially received 32 positive responses, with 25 participants confirmed after some withdrew due to the timing of the study. This paper uses data from the introductory interviews with participants in that study.

Demographics: The gender balance of participants, 9 women and 16 men, reflects the national gender balance of registered architects in Aotearoa New Zealand. This is shifting over time with close to 50% of recently registered architects being women [New Zealand Registered Architects Board (NZRAB), 2022]. Of the 17 participants registered since 2000, there are 8 women and 9 men.

The earliest registered participant was registered in 1977, and the most recent in 2023. As architects may register at different stages of their careers, their date of registration is only an approximation of their total industry experience. For example, one participant has been practising in the industry since the late 1970s, yet registered in the 1990s. Participants include directors, team leaders and staff architects, and one architect is the client-side architect for a large infrastructure entity. Practice sizes range from sole practice to 50+

workers. Participants are primarily urban-based, with 16 in Auckland, 1 in Whanganui, 1 in Palmerston North, 3 in Wellington, 3 in Christchurch and 1 in Raglan (see Figure 1). There is a wide range of work represented in the study participants from public and community work to commercial and development housing, and private residential, as well as expert witness, remediation and heritage architecture (see Figure 2).

Limitations: There is inevitably an element of self-selection to the study, as participants responded based upon their interest in the subject and their availability. It is perhaps worthy of note, that while making it clear that they did not wish to participate in the study, several architects expressed concerns over the use of a feminist ethics of care lens, and about references to the importance of Te Ao Māori, and the attempt to prioritise enrolment of Māori architects to the study.

Māori architects make up less than 4% of New Zealand Registered Architects [New Zealand Registered Architects Board (NZRAB), 2022]. Despite our attempt to prioritise their enrolment, we note the lack of whakapapa Māori practising architects participating in the study. Māori architectural practitioners with a kaupapa Māori (Māori customary and philosophical approach) practice may have different priorities or concerns from traditional Western architectural

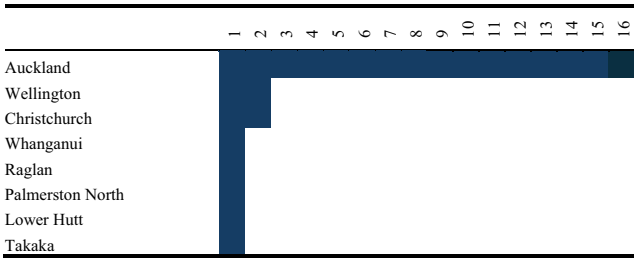

Figure 1. Architect participants by location
Source: Authors' own work

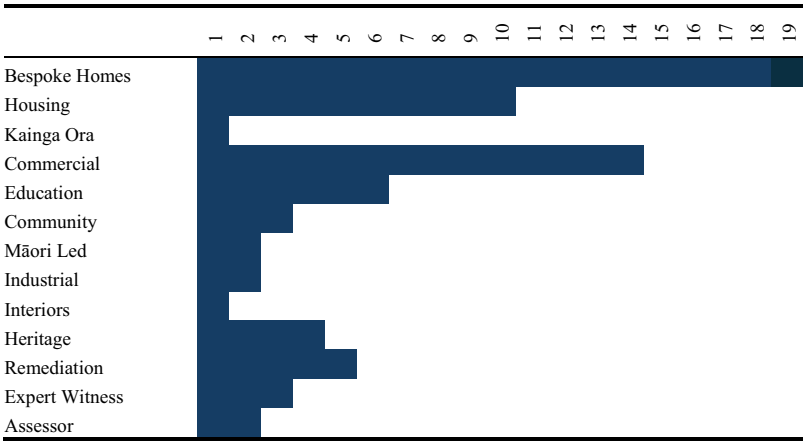

Figure 2. Architect participants by type of work
Source: Authors' own work

practice. A reform approach to architectural practice and ethics in Aotearoa New Zealand should be decolonial and recognise kaupapa Māori practices in architecture. This is a gap in the overall study that we aim to close in the second stage.

While the focus of this paper is localised in Aotearoa New Zealand, situating this research in a wider global context is an important consideration for future study.

4. Results

4.1 A priori themes

Earlier research identified five "foci of relation" for professional ethics: autonomy, collegiality, service, public and ecosphere (Fraser *et al.*, 2023); and three "foci of relation" for practice: form, communication and dynamic (Fraser *et al.*, TBC). *Autonomy* encompasses architects' professional integrity, judgment, competence and impartiality. *Collegiality* embodies architects' professional relationships, the sharing of knowledge and skills, mutual support and collaboration. *Service* comprises the architect–client relationship. *Public* reflects the relationship between architects and wider society and the social and cultural impacts of architectural practice. *Ecosphere* acknowledges the integral relations between the built and natural environments and the role architectural practice plays. *Form* is that aspect of practice involved with the interplay of aesthetics, structural design, durability, thermal efficiency and material properties. *Communication* includes not only formal written, drawn and verbal communication of design and intention, but also informal and indirect communication with/from communities and non-human life. These foci of relation were used as *a priori* themes in the initial analysis of the interviews to explore the scope and range of participants' thinking with regard to ethical architectural practice.

4.2 Emergent themes

Sub-themes to these foci of relation emerged during the analysis, along with thematic relationships. We identified a set of sub-themes that related to participants' perception of architects' responsibility in the design process. The particular focus of this paper – who are architects designing for? – was prompted by that observation. Partially in response to interview questions about short- and long-term responsibilities and impacts, participants spoke about the permanence of buildings and the importance of considering both the ongoing performance, or durability, of the building and the spreading impacts, or "ripples", of the built environment. Participant G-24-2 noted that "[architects] are putting something built fairly permanent out there that other people have to interact with" (see Figure 3).

Through the architects' responses, it became clear that there are two overlapping ideas of durability: technical and socio-cultural. Similarly, the impacts, or ripples, of the built environment are both environmental/climate and socio-cultural. Both concepts can be situated in relation to the boundaries of the client and project site, either within or beyond. These BoC are: beyond the client, beyond the site, thinking long-term and ripples with the sub-themes of socio-cultural and technical durability, and environmental-climate and community well-being ripples.

Beyond the client: The importance of considering people other than the immediate client was highlighted by 17 architect participants. There may be multiple layers to a client and further known stakeholders or stakeholder groups. For example, for architects designing schools, their client includes both the ministry and the school board, as well as further stakeholders such as teachers, students and community groups. Sometimes, however, the stakeholders are unknown and may be unacknowledged by the client. In the case of a developer client, consideration of the potential needs of an unknown occupier was cited as a factor for design thinking by participants. Similarly, architects reported considering how an

THEMES	PARTICIPANTS (in order of date of registration)																							
	P-24-3	G-24-4	Y24-3	B-24-2	P-24-1	P-24-2	Y-24-1	B-24-4	B-24-1	P-24-5	G-24-5	Y-24-4	B-24-5	Y-24-2	G-24-2	P-24-4	R-24-3	R-24-5	Y-24-5	G-24-1	R-24-2	R-24-4	B-24-3	G-24-3	R-24-1
Beyond the Client	3	2	2	7	6	0	0	0	0	4	1	1	4	0	4	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	4	2
Beyond the Project Site	2	1	0	3	4	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	3	2	2	3	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	3	1
Environment-Climate Ripples	0	1	0	0	0	4	0	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Community Wellbeing Ripples	1	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	2	4	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	2
Socio-Cultural Durability	0	7	2	7	3	1	0	1	1	2	1	4	6	2	4	0	0	3	1	2	0	2	1	1	3
Technical Durability	2	2	0	2	0	3	2	1	2	6	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	4
Brief Budget Timeline	4	1	2	4	1	3	4	2	0	0	0	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	9	1	2	1	0	0
Client Satisfaction	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	0	1	2	0	0	4	1	0	2	1	2	0	0	2	0	0

Figure 3. Emergent themes
Source: Authors' own work

owner-occupier client's needs may change in the future. Consequently, a recurrent sub-theme of socio-cultural durability is adaptability. In addition, the experience of others within the wider community, both using and passing by the building and whether from a purely aesthetic or a well-being point of view, was also raised as a common consideration in the design process.

Example quotes from participants are as follows:

- "Not just what you're doing now in how it's affecting the future, how something can be used in the future and how the world might change". Y-24-3
- "Who is actually going to be living in this space or occupying this space, whether it be the university, the students, the lecturers". B-24-5
- "Architecture exists because of clients, not in spite of clients, but at the same time, we've got a responsibility to the greater built environment, to the greater natural environment, to the cultural condition in which we live". P-24-1
- "Responsibility to clients ends with the project and the legal long stop. And the responsibility of an architect to the community is forever". G-24-5

Beyond the site: Exo-site relationships were discussed as relevant project considerations by 17 architect participants. These include heritage and wider built environment, and the natural environment including landform, non-human life, waterways and climate.

Example quotes from participants as as follows:

- "Architects should take care of the environment, the quality of community spaces that we deliver. These are aspects of […] our responsibility that extend far beyond the immediacy of one project". B-24-2
- "To me, a good building is a responsible building that, you know, treats the spaces between it and the other buildings very carefully". P-24-1
- "But what about ethics in terms of, say, architect to environment relationships? And those kinds of things that literally can't speak up for themselves because they're not animate". R-24-1

Ripples: An overlapping but distinct theme that emerged from the interviews is of the ripples that buildings and the built environment have in shaping society for good or ill, as well as downstream environmental and health/well-being impacts. Participant R-24-3 expressed this concern saying, "we do these structures that make ripple effects for other people's lives". Overall, 20 architects spoke generally about the impact of the built environment on people and communities as well as the natural environment. This can be further delineated into environmental and community well-being concerns.

Environmental-climate ripples: Raising concerns about downstream impacts of design and construction, 11 architect participants addressed flooding, waste and climate impacts, especially in the form of embodied carbon and operational carbon.

Example quotes from participants are as follows:

- "At the moment my bugbear is [construction] waste […] it's disgusting". B-24-1
- "If you're thinking from a really architectural point of view like excessive form making, for example, I think you could say well, is that ethical? You know, because it looks just like a waste of energy at the very most fundamental". B-24-4
- "A lot of the environmental harms that we deal with are shifted from one place to another […] So what did we achieve with that environmental outcome? We moved it from here to there and we didn't actually address the harm". P-24-2

Community well-being ripples: A recurrent theme in the interviews was that buildings, and the built environment generally, have a role in responding to and shaping society and culture. Issues relating to the mental and physical well-being of individuals, as well as societal well-being, were raised by 18 of the architects interviewed. Within this, the impact of materials on the health of building occupants and construction workers was a specific concern raised by three of those architects. The well-being of people and communities includes concerns around built form, access to sun and quiet spaces, as well as ideas around neighbourhood and social behaviour.

Example quotes from participants are as follows:

- "I'm quite a firm believer that the spaces we design, design us and [that] we've got the ability to impact and change a community based on what we build". G-24-1
- "There's a multitude of social health, physical health, mental health, environmental well-being that […] as architects […] are very relevant issues we can't not design for". R-24-2
- "A good building, I believe, creates change in people, will create positive behaviour or creates a different outlook on life for whatever it might be. I just think a good building can change people for the better". R-24-3
- "I've been waiting for the silica in our [cementitious] type products to become [today's] asbestos. There are products I won't specify because they're as bad as asbestos". P-24-2

Thinking long-term: Thinking about the lifetime of buildings showed in the responses of 22 of the 25 participant architects, as participant R-24-5 remarked, "once something's built, you know it will be there for a very long time". The responsibility of architects to future occupants and generations is expressed succinctly by participant Y-24-4, "architects should be looking at the longevity and durability of the project". Or as Y-24-3 put it, it's "not just what you're doing now and how it's affecting the future, [but] how something can be used in the future and how the world might change".

There are two aspects to thinking long-term: socio-cultural durability and technical durability. There is naturally some overlap in the interview responses, with respect to two sub-themes, as designing for one often goes hand in hand with designing for the other. Participant B-24 −2 pointed out that "[a] developer will sell all these and disappear tomorrow and do something else. But that building will stay there for 80 or 100 years".

Socio-cultural durability. The strongest theme in the interviews is that of socio-cultural durability, the ability for a building to remain useful, relevant and desirable into the future. Of the 25 participant architects, 20 raised concerns related to this theme. Aspects of this theme include function, aesthetic, adaptability, cultural relevancy and design intention. Not all mentions of these aspects were coded to socio-cultural durability. These sub-themes of the *a priori* theme form were only coded to socio-cultural durability if they were associated with the theme of thinking long-term.

Example quotes from participants are as follows:

- "[Architects] should be looking a long, long way forward […] Where things are, where things are going to be, how cities can grow and develop. Which is kind of poignant about now. What should we do with our city? Should it grow out? Should it grow up? How do we make it? How do we make this a better city?" B-24-5
- "The heritage buildings that we have left, are here because they could be adapted. They could remain functional, those that couldn't [are] not here anymore". R-24-1
- "I think [good architecture is] a really beautiful shelter that can actually be really flexible and be something for future generations you know to, you can look back on, I think something that could stand the test of time […] a building that's flexible, it can adapt and it's climate responsive". Y-24-2
- "What we can do in the long-term trying to see the effects of a design beyond its current intended use and whether […] a design can be adapted or modified for the next building owner". R-24-4

Technical durability: Related to socio-cultural durability, technical durability includes structure, weather-tightness, energy efficiency, material durability, the concept of healthy buildings and the ongoing maintenance of buildings. These issues were discussed by 13 participants. These are also sub-themes of the *a priori* theme form, which, unsurprisingly, showed in all 25 interviews.

Example quotes from participants are as follows:

- "An architect has a duty of care to […] ensure that the building's safe for future generations. They have to ensure that they pass on some information about how the building is to be maintained correctly and looked after". P-24-2
- "The Building Act basically says you've gotta have a durability of 50 years, which, I think, it's pathetic […] We should be looking at at least 100 years". P-24-3
- "Deconstruction and everything were all the fad when I was at architecture school, so God knows how that works you know most of that leaks. It's all been pulled down now anyway, so you're just creating a lot of cost and expending a lot of carbon and you're not getting a lot of building performance". P-24-5
- "I work with buildings that are like over 100 years old and it's interesting to think like what the architect was doing back then in their short term, which has become my long term. And then in my short term, what am I doing for whoever works on it in 100 years' time after that […]" R-24-1

5. Discussion

5.1 Results overview

As the emergent themes are entangled (being tied into the process of design and into the finished built product of the design process), there is necessarily an overlap between them. All participants addressed concerns related to at least one of these BoC. The more an architect spoke about one of these BoCs, the more likely and frequently they were to talk about one or more others, with two participants addressing all BoCs, seven addressing five and seven participants addressing four BoCs. The most recurrent theme, addressed by 20 participants with a total of 54 references to aspects contained within the theme, was socio-cultural durability. A strong focus on the functional performance of buildings as places for people lies behind this theme. The form sub-theme function was raised by 19 of the 25 architects. Function as a focus of architectural design practice is neatly expressed by R-24-1, "function is important to a good building […] because a building without people is pointless".

During the interviews, we had the impression that community well-being ripples and socio-cultural durability were emphasised more by those architects working in education and residential architecture. Likewise, our impression was that commercial architects and those who had done remediation and/or expert witness work focused on technical durability. However, we found the analysis showed no clear pattern related to the type of work. The longer participants have been registered and they were somewhat more likely to stress the wider issues, suggesting experience has a role to play. However, even those registered in 2023 addressed a range of issues relating to wider impacts and longevity.

The interviews covered a wide range of issues and topics, with several recurrent themes. This paper draws out common themes relating to the question "Who are we designing for?" As study participants ranged from succinct to expansive in their answers, comments were not weighted by length. Interviews ranged from 20 min to 1 h 30 min. There is no strong correlation between the interview length and to what extent a participant addressed these themes. Nor is there a strong correlation between interview length and participant experience. We also compared concerns regarding client satisfaction and the client's brief/budget/timeline to the themes focused on in this paper and found no clear pattern (refer Table 3). One participant placed particular stress on the client's brief/budget/timeline, but this does not appear to be part of a wider pattern. Generally, the more a participant spoke to this paper's themes, the more likely they were to also speak frequently about brief/budget/timeline and client satisfaction.

5.2 Ethics in practice

The interviews with practicing architects contained themes of care and relationality within architectural practice. These emergent themes extend design responsibility in practice beyond the particular and immediate needs of their client and project site. This demonstrates that architects are already engaging in caring architecture according to Tronto's (2019) requirement that caring architecture will respond to needs beyond the client brief. We propose that it is possible to use the concept of BoC to aid in navigating ethical dilemmas inherent in urban discourse. Tronto argues that calling attention to moral boundaries also draws attention to what those boundaries include and exclude, who determines those inclusions/exclusions, and why (Tronto, 1994, p. X). By situating architectural design practice within BoC, we aim to draw attention to those boundaries and prompt architects to consider what is included and excluded.

Of the four proposed BoCs, one is social, one is spatial, one relates to downstream effects and the last is temporal. These boundaries are overlapping and entangled, such that

considering a project, site, or issue in relation to one of these BoC acts as a prompt to engage critically with the others (refer Figure 4). Yates emphasises that viewing both self and project as part of an all-encompassing cosmology of life can support the development of a design practice focused on mauri-ora and living well for all (Yates, 2016).

These boundaries are not meant to limit or contain the scope of obligation in the manner of Noddings' notion of an inner circle of care (Noddings, 2013; White and Tronto, 2004). We propose these BoC to allow a conscious situating of practice in relation to an interconnected world. This facilitates an expanded understanding of mutual interrelated care and justice as opposed to a reductive idea of competing needs and rights. The architects in the study already imagine what might be the needs of unknown future users, or how spaces may be adaptable. Stretching that imagination to consider wider and deeper ethical questions is well within their capability (Fisher, 2010; Collier; 2006).

There are, of course, practical limitations on time, resources and ability to act, and some limits may be required to prevent exploitation (White and Tronto, 2004). Both concerns about the ability to act and the exploitation of architects' care were raised by study participants. White and Tronto (2004) make the point, however, that prejudice and parochialism are not justifiable boundaries. In a local context, that suggests that antipathy towards or disinterest in efforts to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi – the foundational agreement in Aotearoa New Zealand between the Crown and Māori), or address diversity and equity issues, are not justifiable ethical boundaries in a caring

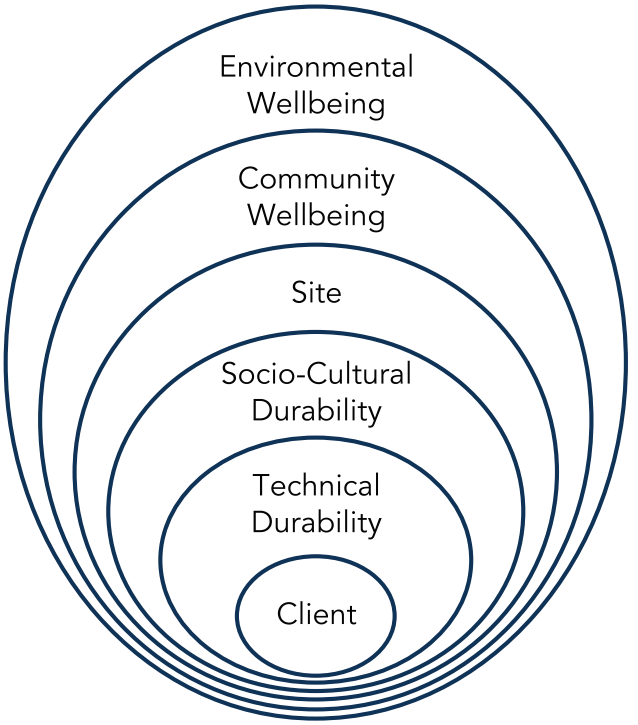

Figure 4. Architectural boundaries of care
Source: Authors' own work

architecture. Notwithstanding this, not all buildings can do all things, and sometimes care is necessarily localised and focused (White and Tronto, 2004). Nonetheless, the care underpinning ethical design stretches as far past the boundaries of the site and the brief as the potential socio-cultural and environmental impacts of the building.

We can consider these BoC alongside Tronto's four elements for an ethic of care to see the way they prompt and reinforce each other (Tronto, 1994, pp. 127–136) (Refer Figure 5). Stretching design practice beyond the client and the site is to understand projects as relational to the interconnected world. In this way, architects become *attentive to the needs* of that interconnected world. This attentiveness then makes it obvious that architectural projects have wide unplanned effects on people and the planet. Attention to these ripples prompts architects to *take responsibility* for designing out or mitigating negative effects and designing in positive effects. Designing for positive outcomes requires and is a requirement of *competency.* These ripples, both social and environmental, have temporal aspects as well, requiring thinking long-term. Thinking long-term further requires *competence* (for durability, both technical and socio-cultural) and *responsiveness* to how the interconnected (built and natural, human and non-human) world responds to the design/building.

6. Practical and research implications

Existing frameworks for professional ethics are rule-based for disciplinary purposes, and focus primarily on contractual and financial aspects of practice (Fraser *et al.*, 2023). This is true of the current Aotearoa New Zealand architects' Code of Minimum Standards of Ethical Conduct, not least in part due to the need to comply with the Architects Act 2005 (Bell, 2024). We propose an approach to architectural design ethics that is based on intention and relation rather than rules of conduct.

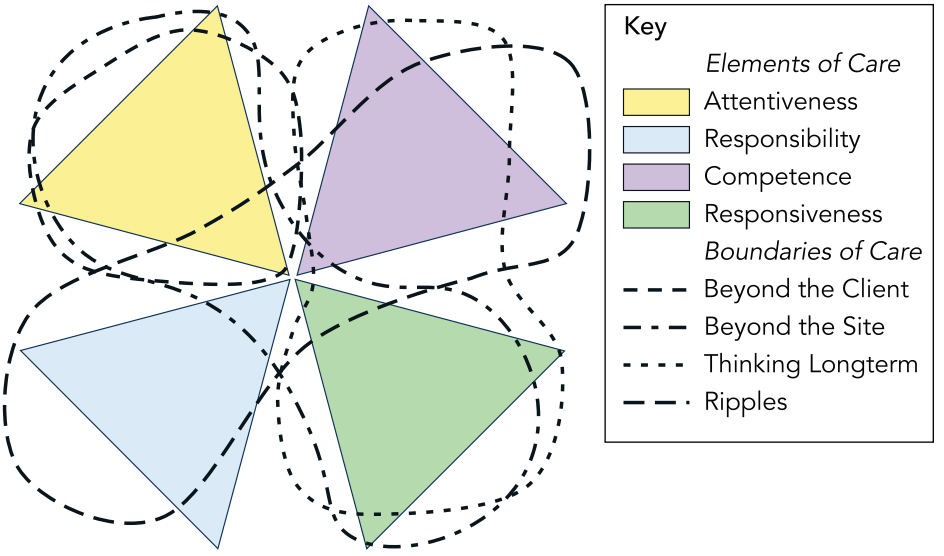

Figure 5. Architects' boundaries of care in relation to Tronto's elements of care
Source: Authors' own work

The diagrams produced in this study provide the basis for potential strategies to navigate the ethical dilemmas inherent in urban discourse. Faced with a specific project, site, client or dilemma, we propose that an architect can – using the moral imagination they are naturally adept at (Collier, 2006; Fisher, 2010) – situate that question within the BoC to explore the extent and inter-relationality of the ripples of proposed approaches to the problem. The BoC articulates the layers of meaning and knowledge embedded in an interconnected and relational world, supporting architects to engage in Bellacasa's (2017) *thinking-with* when making judgements about various possible outcomes. By actively taking a wider view and understanding how things are interrelational and intersectional, other options or approaches to the question may become possible.

This paper is part of a larger doctoral study and informs the next stage of ongoing research. In the second stage of research, we will test these concepts and frameworks and compare against other local and international ethical and regulatory design standards.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, we pose the question: Who are architects designing for? Interviews with 25 practicing New Zealand registered architects reveal that architects often view their design responsibility as extending beyond the particular and immediate needs of their client. Architects in the study consider building occupants and users as well as unknown future users/occupants with unforeseen needs. Further, study participants highlighted the fact that a building is a significant and reasonably permanent intervention in a neighbourhood. Consideration of how a building may positively or negatively affect neighbours and the wider public is therefore important to architects even with owner-occupier bespoke housing. Alongside the impacts on people and the built environment, architects spoke to the need to consider impacts on the natural environment from toxic materials, waste, flooding and embodied and operational carbon.

Analysis identified the BoC that architects operate within. These boundaries help to situate design practice and draw attention to the needs of the interconnected world. Understanding both self and practice as interconnected and relational draws the attention of the architect beyond site and client, seeking to at least do minimal harm and at best improve the condition. Recognising this moral imperative to be attentive, responsible, competent and responsive to the needs of people and non-human life within built and natural environments enables a perceptual shift from competing rights and needs to mutual care.

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Further reading

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Appendix. Interview questions

1. To start with, could you tell me a bit about your role and the types of projects that you work on?
2. What particulars do you consider architects are responsible for over the short and longterm?
3. Following on from that, what should architects be responsible for?
4. Who do you believe architects are and should be accountable to?
5. What do you think the point/purpose of a code of professional ethics is?
6. How familiar with the NZ architects' code of minimum standards would you say you are?
7. Do you have any personal conflicts with the existing architects' code of ethics? What might these be?
8. Do you feel that the current code is adequate? Or do you feel it is lacking in any areas? What are they?
9. Are there other values that you believe architects should adhere to that you think should not be in the code?
10. Do you discuss professional ethics with colleagues? Is this in the abstract or in relation to specific situations?
11. Do you believe architects should be working to make change within the industry and its wider impacts? In what way, and why, if so?
12. Where do you see architects' work intersecting considerations of rights and/or justice?
13. Can you tell me about a situation that you were uncertain about how to approach/resolve?
14. How do you assess the short and long-term impacts of your work? On whom/what?
15. What do you take into consideration and how do you justify design decisions?
16. What, to you, makes a good building or piece of architecture?
17. Regarding team relationships and power dynamics, in general, who makes decisions, who holds knowledge, and who is accountable?
18. Can you tell me about something that you didn't want to do, that a employer, client, or other authority, asked/pressured you to do? Why did you not want to do this, and how did you resolve the situation?
19. What do you believe is the most important aspect to the success of a project?
20. Can you tell me about a situation that you would approach/resolve differently in hindsight?
21. Aesthetics or ethics? How do you determine priorities and impacts?
22. Can you tell me something about your work that makes you feel hopeful?

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