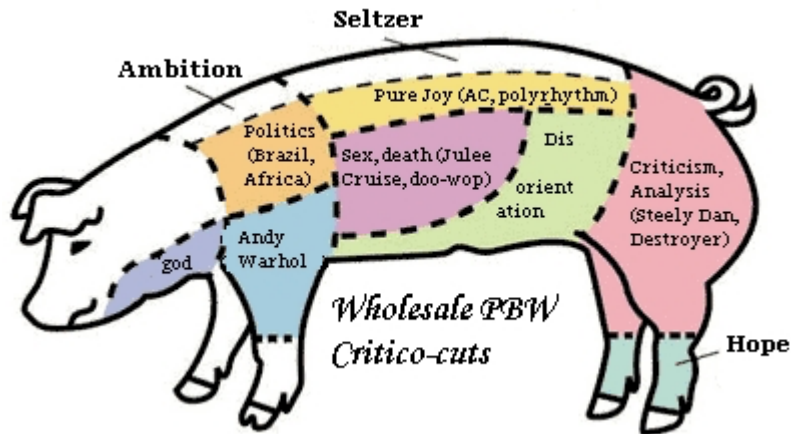


MISUNDERSTAND ME CORRECTLY!  
Roger Connah



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A Few Good Years

...scientists investigated half a century ago the phenomenon of 'experts' not learning about their past failings. You can mis-predict everything for all your life yet think you will get it right next time.

N.N Taleb *Fooled by Randomness* (2004)

Such an invitation and application to become a Full Professor inevitably coincides with a certain period in one's life and the choices we have made for ourselves. Many will recognize this situation. This is a life-condition that cannot be bargained, that is not open to compromise. For me, and this is crucial, my mother's impending death after a long life will also make this choice for me.

It is clear from my CV that my own journey, living, writing and teaching presents an unorthodox figure for a university, and perhaps even more so for a committee dedicated to the word 'promotion'. The unorthodox can of course offer a diversity, veering from nuanced accommodation to essential 'against the grain' strategies, but all such engagement must be done through a constant and vibrant self-shifting, especially in relation to how a school develops and adapts to change.

We often change whilst institutes do not, and vice versa. But the role of Full Professor allows another opportunity to emerge; it can take on areas in a school's planning not always reached by other routes, other faculty or directions. I consider a Full Professor also being able to offer that role in charting, both intellectually and pedagogically, what Edward Said terms 'late style'.

Such figures operate in both nearness and distance and, as Said writes, are both "subjective and objective. Objective is the fractured landscape, subjective the light in which – alone – it glows into life." Sometimes we are even faced with a more extreme option; this is often contingent on our life's journey and the honesty with which we face our own selves.

For an indication of such choices echoing Said's 'Late Style' or that third and creatively irascible stage in an artist's life, I might ask you to turn to some of the passages in my most recent publication, *The Rest Is Silence* (Oxford 2011). As fortunes change over our careers, as we oscillate between acceptance and rejection, reversing once-considered intimacies, the closing small text called 'A Gift Misunderstood' describes it better than I can do here.

There are other options that resonate with Edward Said but, I would like to suggest, have more bearing on pedagogy and the intellectual position within a university. One option might be a retreat. What we might term the *monastic option*. This presents the individual (the educator, the professor, the poet) with difficult decisions and asks for an inner honesty from all academics and professors who encounter such a life stage. How often do we ask ourselves this: what am I good at and how do I continue in collaboration with younger souls? What have I ceased being good at? What has entered anew and re-writes the past?

For me I cannot continue to contribute to a university if I do not contribute to the students, and steer them towards their own life's stages, helping them keep pace with momentous change in our contemporary life, whilst at the same time asking for that all-essential pause, whereby they see the unnecessary haste ahead of them and can think how unwise it is sometimes to leave the past behind. History scripts the present as they reject the past. It is a well-known invitation to immediacy.

In this late or later stage of life, there is also a route in between. It becomes not so much a condition of not speaking any longer, this usually arrives in its own time as one ages. But it is one of choosing more carefully the words that make up the sentences one speaks, and the thinking that must support any position taken. This applies to us all intellectually, pedagogically and of course, in our personal life.

There is a stage – I have been told this more than once by those wiser than myself – that comes upon us, sometimes stealthily, sometimes openly, a stage in our lives where we need to set things in reverse. ‘Reverse’ of course can invoke nostalgia or sentiment, but this is not the reverse implied in this sense. Reverse in the sense that I wish to use in relation to a Full professorship does not mean trying to relive the past, celebrate past glories or one’s own individual achievements, nor is it an attempt to achieve *now* what was thought more achievable *then* in younger times, in more tolerant eras perhaps. This would be a mistake as far as I can see.

The reverse I speak about is an initiation; it is that moment when we can turn back, whatever knowledge and insight gained. It is a moment even to go against the grain amidst the shared communities that only perhaps a university can still offer in today’s world.

In the greater scheme of things, schemes that operate at both the local and global levels, what is it we can offer back into a system like further and/or advanced education if not a generosity of openness and frankness that goes alongside a proven ability, record or achievement? Can we even speak plainly today, to committee and university alike?

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Some uneasy souls will already be twitching. It seemed propitious that I could begin a contemplation about Full Professorship on the evening of the hurricane Irene which caused the cancellation of a flight to Canada via the East Coast of America. When such a thing happens, and they are more frequent than we perhaps acknowledge, when a postponement takes time and events out of our own hands, we take control again in a state of wonderment.

It is blissful, ecstatic even, but there is nothing mystic in this. It reveals those states across religion, philosophy and other belief systems that – Tibetan ‘bardo’ like – put us into a moment of suspension. The liminal space once more invites insight of another kind, and it never fails to assert new values and re-validates older ones as we assert ourselves gracefully, whether we recognize how to occupy this moment or not.

Edward Said did indeed have a particularly elegant way of writing about this in what became one of his final essays (*On Late Style*) before his death, speaking about how those who go against the grain must do so with the subtlety of a saint, and the tenacity of a marathon runner. The lateness; the quirkiness of late Beethoven or Adorno’s lingering hold on that moment in philosophy before trends invite others to not listen anymore.

Said didn’t use those words. But this late stage, a third stage in an artist’s, intellectual’s or I would suggest an educator’s life is not one of closing off, of settling into the comfortable stage of recognition. Said was speaking of a vibrant stage where knowledge and insight must compete with the self to give back to the community something more than was possible before. It is returning to the community that allowed the individual to develop.

It is also a taking back, erasing aspects of the self that have outgrown usefulness. Before, that is, we finally put away our tongues. Before life has to close on itself relying on dignity to do so, we enter this latter stage. Does this not resemble the call for the Full Professor to take centre stage in terms of an assumed seniority yet to move aside, to offer what can be taught in another way, in order to excite learning and knowledge once more?

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I have taught intermittently all my life, for over 30 years, in a whole variety of areas and disciplines. And because of the countries I have lived in, the students I have met, because of all the activities that I have been able to share and attend, I have lived that teaching. It has always been to me what I call *Live Pedagogy*.

I have always been committed to testing any pedagogical lull in the self, any desire to consider one's knowledge more important or valuable than others. This was a kenotic journey begun after Jesus College Cambridge, in Finland and continued in India before returning to Sweden. And then onto Texas, before arriving in Canada.

The book *How Architecture got its Hump*, a series of lectures originally delivered over four continuous days at Cornell University in 1995 expresses this journey that became at all times a pedagogical test and narrative. One's collected achievements, the index of life's journey known as the curriculum vitae or as known in North America the 'bio-data' reads well enough.

But it cannot demonstrate the crevices, the contest and fine tuning that make up the events, the lectures, the films, the exhibitions, the books or the choreographies. The moments of ecstasy and anxiety, and they exist even more so today, in teaching and learning alongside the young undergraduate, the master student or the PhD student are told in the spaces between the lines, in the gaps that make up our differing *ontologies*. I use that latter word for a special reason.

For the last ten years whilst teaching, researching, traveling, designing and writing two experiences, two individuals, two volumes have led me to this moment, to test whether it is even appropriate to apply for a Full Professorship. The first is represented by the recent publication from Oxford University Press called *The Rest is Silence*. This was a study begun in 2000 and finally published in 2011. It began, as many such ventures do for me by accident, this time in Helsinki one evening in late 1999.

The widow of a murdered artist was given a copy of a rather large earlier volume of mine called *Writing Architecture*. She saw in this book another history, another narrative, another world and on behalf of the Trust invited me to come to Lahore in Pakistan to research the death of this artist, her husband, his career and works. The brief was open but the learning was immense. It ended with the title of the book becoming eerily prescient.

The title had been offered by that remarkable South Asian scholar, Dr Sara Suleri from Yale, met once when we both read our work on a stage in Toronto in 2002. Her generosity captured the story of the book, the murder of an Indian-born Muslim artist called Zahoor ul Akhlaq and his constantly troubled, exiled and maligned journey across Islam and Modernity. The book ends with a short essay called 'A Gift Misunderstood'. Nothing, as I intimated earlier, could be more appropriate to signal the history, the reverses and bad press of this part of the world over the last decade.

The second 'being' and 'event' is a volume soon to be published in association with the Royal Academy in London. Again this emerged from an accident. The architect and Royal Academician Ian Ritchie, one of the UK's leading 'third stage' (against the grain) architects, had chanced upon the same earlier volume (*Writing Architecture*). He had been intrigued by the cross-disciplinary meanderings now called mappings or *information ecologies*, and the critical conjectures now called *ontologies*.

Ritchie invited me, after what appeared like a stringent test, to work on a volume together. It had to be an unusual book, nothing like the celebratory image and text collection of an architect's achievement. It was to be a quest, like Karl Popper's autobiography: an unfinished or unending quest. The volume *Being: An Architect* became one, two, then three, then went back to 2 volumes with an accompanying CD.

From a series of options for the title, the colon was crucial. The colon suggested the being of the architect, the life inseparable from, yet separated from, a profession. This was a man, an architect running an unusual practice, living a 'truth' as best he could, in a discipline so inextricably intertwined in the daily.

It seems appropriate here to end with the word 'ontologies'. Generally, this is still used to mean 'the study of being' though we can still find it slipped into the 'science' of being. The slippage between study and science and back again is where perhaps our learning can respond to the contemporary without losing the lessons of the past. But how to do this?

For example, can advances in ‘ontological engineering’ help us re-classify and re-awaken our understanding of architecture and its contemporary reliance on computer generated imagery? Or are we guilty of para-science, asserting our authenticity and intolerable jargon into areas others do not follow? Can we speak about architecture in the way dance is spoken of, to create a valid re-awakened public understanding of architecture; its primal role, its value, its constant need for re-validation in our lives?

How would we gain by a structural coherence of such shifts where science invites new research, where study opens us to wider research and where thinking across the humanities and digital technology, could help to put this University on the map? On the map? Architecture appears to be expanding, its media presence enlarged, yet its social reach, its cultural value and the activism within, are all questionable today.

Given this sense of disquiet, political uncertainty and economic meltdown, architecture is trying to re-situate itself within a professional and an expanded agenda. The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen architecture work in, work alongside, or even parallel developments in many areas. So much so that it appears essential to understand architecture’s collaboration and involvement with and across many disciplines.

But we rarely do this, we rarely encourage this. Urbanism rebounds off global development whilst environmental anxiety invites a responsibility from us all. Yet we must also explore the public understanding of an architecture which has little criticality, that has media support yet little social impact; an architecture we might say that cannot recognize itself anymore due to evolving practices, iconic idiocies and the ever-present shifting of boundaries.

It seems appropriate to end on a beginning. I am hoping to embark on a study called *Generosity & Architecture* in association with the Australian architect Gregory Burgess. Involved in live pedagogy, I will explore new pedagogies and the ethics of re-engagement and will try and set out the notion of generosity and the notion of "more" (giving more/going towards more/the gift/ and the given).

The issue is, of course, for the impending senior academic wider and yet devastatingly more intimate. The issues we need to explore are current for us all in our schools at present: should our curriculum remain discolored by various theories about what architecture should be? Can our expanded programs move towards the study and deeper research of what architecture can be, through shared collaborations, through (un)blinkered insight whilst embracing both the uncertainty and the vibrancy in the thinking that is architecture in all its collisions with so many disciplines and idea fields?

I have said enough. I would willingly answer any questions you might wish to pose to me, and will make myself available at any time. This appointment would allow me not only to continue contributing to the School and University, it would put life in reverse in all its forward meaning; the rest would not be silence. At least not for a good few years!

## Truth is Concrete

The mind operates most effectively by relegating a good deal of high-level, sophisticated thinking to the unconscious, just as a modern jetliner is able to fly on automatic pilot with little or no input from the human, 'conscious' pilot.  
T.D Wilson *Strangers to Ourselves Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious*,  
(2004)

At first, I was at a loss how to address you, the University Promotion Committee with the necessity for an appeal. The inaccuracy, as I claim, in the rejection of my application for the status of Full Professor was I felt not only extreme in its misreading but brutal to the extent that it appeared to miss obvious contributions and, several significant publications.

Whether each committee member would agree with the content of the published work is not an issue here, surely we all approach work differently. But one is led immediately and I think reasonably to question whether due time was taken to engage with the work, to appreciate the quality and position this body of work and even contemplate architecture from another discipline.

If we are allowed to extend that for a moment, there appears perhaps an unintended even accidental willfulness in the way narrowness and a reduced view have structured the process. Can we explain this? Can the university promotion committee explain this? Who is speaking here?

Surely this now invites me to respond to the remarks about my work brought forth in the Provost's letter in a way that is neither self-indulgent, petulant nor insolent. But how can I demonstrate the danger and potentially flawed structures that are embedded in such standardized administrative procedures and the priorities the Application Process requests of any of us.

Further, as 'maturity' was an issue mentioned in one of the cited extracts, I wonder if we might ask ourselves whether maturity might not possibly be represented in our ability to be more self-deluding as we age and progress through careerist maneuvers? Surely self-delusion is a useful trick we all play on ourselves at some stage of our lives? Is this not how we discover, as Julian Barnes the British novelist points out in his book 'Nothing to be Frightened of' and find ourselves agreeing with Richard Dawkins how we become in universities "survival machines – robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes."

More so in academia than in practice? At least this has been true in the architecture world and there is no reason to think less of the discipline because of this. Why this should be so is worth an essay: maturity might not be such a useful goal to appraise the work.

However, you will understand why I searched for the best way to answer, once more, and offer an unusual riposte to both a letter and a review process, that appears to have so little of the human touch about it. Was it read even? Should we expect this level of un-excitement and tedium within the university as we progress up the academic ladder and entertain administration as housekeeping and pedagogy as bookkeeping?

A good question indeed, and one which I have begun to contemplate, in some attempt to understand and possibly to dispel this inaccuracy. And immaturity? Before that happens, and we discover how such a process turns a CV and a life's work into book-keeping, perhaps I could turn this appeal into an essay; a parenthetical essay which would match the opening meditation prepared as part of my original package: *A Few Good Years*.

Architecture challenges many other disciplines as much as it constantly challenges its own redundancy. After all, consider how much of the built stock architects are really involved with in the world? On a good day when statistics can talk up the discipline, 5%; throughout history possibly less than 2%. Architecture finds itself crossed awkwardly and delinquently between academy and practice, between the ideal and the pragmatic, between the dream and the computer cursor. It has to acknowledge it has mostly failed to communicate its value and vitality to an unexcited public, whilst it must go on re-establishing its status within society.

This clearly presents us with difficulties of our own; how might architects, educators, practitioners offer some insight to other intellectuals, practitioners, professors and academics on what constitutes architecture and architectural scholarship? And how would we do this in a university? How would we indicate scholarship and significant contributions to a discipline so heavily – at present – undergoing change; so seriously in danger of suffocating itself by being so weightily and damagingly involved in the flaying sadness of current market conditions?

The professional trials many educators and architects go through are often mirrored in the difficulties students face when deciding whether they even wish to be part of a discipline now considered by many governing bodies (accreditation, profession, academy) morally adrift, tempted by the spoils of instant celebrity and works of dubious value if not of origin?

It was, as I was preparing this essay that I received an invitation to an event which offers an insight into our astute but often ambiguous world: *Truth is Concrete*. The image of the pig indicated four steps: *Survey – Unveil – Retell – Rebel*. It was an invitation to a 24/7 day marathon *Art and Architecture* seminar camp in Graz (Austria) which intended to take the ‘possibility of concrete truth as a working hypothesis’ and see direct action for concrete change and knowledge.

The image of the pig is not perhaps self-explanatory to those outside a shared and constant desire, to test dominant thinking even dogma, and offer an epistemological contest. But it does reveal – or unveil - the intricacies of the inter-disciplinary world and the impatience that is beginning to emerge of asking us to attempt once more to ‘live in truth’.

Architecture can maintain as much rigor from the random as it can from the normative. But to ‘live in truth’ as Albert Camus attempted! Can we do this today in our society, in our professions, institutes and in a university when processes and policies are scripted by economic moves that can embarrassingly change whichever government is in power, whichever strategic plan is invented to follow double dip depression, whichever spending speculation and latest marketing drive profiled?

In the beginning of the essay *Six Asides about Culture* Vaclav Havel wrote the following: “While I consider it highly unlikely, I cannot exclude the theoretical possibility that tomorrow I shall have some fabulous ideas and that, within a week, I shall have written my best play yet. It is equally possible that I shall never write anything again.” In this volume *Living in Truth* (Faber 1987) Havel offered us a timely warning about the maturity of ideas yet to emerge, of an intellect caught in the conspiracy of deeper hope, of wider action. That was two years before the Berlin Wall came down.

It is equally possible some of us will never think anything fresh again, yet our difficulty is confessing and accepting this. We have a huge problem today with the uncurious mind; with the limitations placed on self and society by procedures and strategies that work much as a gated community works. Our tolerance is extended to others, but it can become repressive; and we would all like to know why.

There is a naive obviousness in such a statement at the same time as inner anxiety; for how can anyone know that which we have achieved, or why a university would need to know that? Just as Umberto Eco speaks so generously about the knowledge we are always about to find, rather than the knowledge we know we have, there always remain many volumes still to discover. It is not difficult to concur with this, life as knowledge-to-come or scholarship-in-waiting.

The being, scholar, educator, adventurer, traveler is only of interest if we can pause long enough to write the works that may or may not change the disciplines within which the work is carried out. Though we often do not know the results of our scholarship until later, (possibly too late if we consider academic and professional straitjackets) we might believe that this unknown cloud will eventually be revealed.

Dialogues emerge in forms that we can question, in an obscurity that clarifies, in ambiguity that has neither accepted substance, narrative or direction. The strength and potential of the unformed thought, still in process, is one of the most powerful teaching tools we have. The university usually removes this.

The pig postcard is key. How to *survey – unveil – retell and rebel?* The outcome of the university committee is no longer of real interest to us here. Rather it is surely the accuracy and responsibility as individuals of ethical dimensions with which we hold to our words and our intentions. In any exchange, issues have to be invited to go beyond the narrowness with which they have been treated or held back; this is true in the corporate as well as the academic world.

This is why there is so much talk today of re-engagement, as if sometimes – not always – on our first time round we miss what is in front of our eyes. The poet Philip Larkin's lines resonate, quietly insisting: 'someone will forever be surprising/A hunger in himself to be more serious.'

### Area of Insufficiency

How does one put forward a case for re-evaluation and for the Promotion Appeal Committee to re-engage with a significant amount of material and documentation that appears to have been misunderstood, misread and poorly evaluated? The salient points in this re-engagement and re-evaluation are as follows:

1 The Promotion process has proceeded from The School and Faculty Promotion (peer) reviewing levels until it has reached the University Promotions Committee. The objections raised by the President, Provost and Final Higher Body appear exaggerated, uninformed and at times amount to clear misreading.

2 There is also a sense that either Architecture as a field is totally misunderstood at the University Promotions Level, or then there are some unreasonably held prejudices against the way the discipline works, its relationship between practice and theory, and especially how it contests its own ideas, beliefs and philosophies.

3 This rejection has been conveyed in a standardized, cut and paste manner which neither respects the range and depth of work submitted nor even demonstrates a tolerance for the exception and diversity in the work whether in terms of scholarship, life-work or character. Whether it involved architecture directly or not.

4 This unfortunate formulaic way of writing could be interpreted as an impatient, even intolerant rebuke by the university at the unconventional, even hybrid nature and scholarship of the work, whether reaching, in the Committee's view, an intellectual maturity or not as set out in the Appendix B of the Collective Agreement between the University and the Union.

5 There appear clear errors in these ‘pulled’ statements which are outlined below. But the Support Letters from individuals who, I understand, are extremely significant in their own society and world of architecture, from the academy and profession, are not mentioned and lead me to question whether their import was recognized or even acknowledged. I begin to suspect that no one in the Upper Committee actually knew who these eminent scholars were or how to read their words.

6 There are 6 statements around the notion of ‘insufficiency’ in the Provost’s letter (23.4.2012) which all need addressing. Therefore, I have itemized them in a way that might allow the Appeal Committee to re-engage – should they so wish to acknowledge their own immaturity - with the work, the documents, the publications and other achievements.

7 There are other vague statements and clichés about the promotion application which, I politely suggest, undermine the rigor of such a process. Whether this vagueness stems from the first two promotion levels/committees or then enters difficulties at the University Promotion Level, the unintended inaccuracy undermines the work of the first two promotion committees.

8 No due explanation of these processes or evaluation is contained in the letter, no adequate depth seems to be applied to the two lower levels of review which accepted and recommended the position. From what I understand from these two letters, the work and application had passed with full support through a peer review level at the school and decanal level.

9 ...and the need to clearly demonstrate the scholarly contributions to Architecture of the non-conventional publications and outputs included in your CV and dossier. This is a strange request – the hybrid nature of my work is both inter-disciplinary and necessarily at times iconoclastic. To identify scholarly contributions of other work when one has a body of recognized work seems a little counter intuitive.

The very nature of non-conventional publications (see the note above about small presses), work within film, art, graphics or literature does seem to have an obvious liberal arts and cultural connection to architecture without more necessary headbanging.

Having to identify this or make it even clearer surely goes against the very width one is attempting in these works. Why, after 30 years of working, would one be asked to measure this against ‘architecture’ when to quote John Hejduk, architecture exists in just about in everything we do and think.

Though I mentioned the CV issue in the letter to the Provost, a few words more might help us locate the difficulty that interdisciplinary work still encounters at universities and the hunger for seriousness in this invitation to see wider. How is it for example that I find myself justifying acts, events, achievements and a life lived so far away from those who appear to be my adjudicators?

How can we accept such standardized procedures, or such full-throated limpness if this indeed is going to condemn the contemporary university to a brave but flawed administrative machine? And all in the name of survival? What do we sacrifice when we force each other to enter survival mode and breath tightly?

Perhaps there is more to be gained in the quietness of the unopinionated response, in the strengthened role of never having to be so explicit about one's achievements, never having to bring that hammer down on forlorn committee tables, which no longer bear the imprint of the chairman's gavel.

*However, the view of the committee is that for promotion to Full Professor you need to improve your record of scholarly publications with high quality, refereed journals or publishers and you need to more clearly demonstrate the scholarly impact and contribution made through the more unconventional publications.*

*Also, I must add that the committee members found your application and CV to be extremely confusing and very difficult to follow, and I would strongly encourage you to address that problem.*

And yet on top of all this, after the six levels of insufficiency, after this need for self-justification, I am asked to please note that “the University Promotions Committee was very impressed with the quantity and range of works you have produced, your achievements prior to your appointment at Carleton, and the creative and non-traditional ways by which you express your ideas.”

Hypocrisy if it could squirm, would be squirming just at this moment. Who would pen such a line and think it carries weight? For as much as I love this sentence I would leave it unwrapped for now... and to be published in the book instead. Is that an exaggeration in itself; are we already self-censored to conform to the unacceptable in word, phrase, action and act?

I politely submit this re-telling of some of the aspects of the curriculum, for a life not yet finished softly asks you to ignore the following mild but nevertheless uncalled for and undesired rebuke: "These issues need to be addressed for any future applications for promotion". Entering the late, third stage of life, that we brought attention to in the essay "A Few Good Years", any late style surely has its sole duty to the self: it cannot accept the untimely demand to be lesser than one is.

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In the following statement I have tried to re-visit and bring attention to these issues in the interest of the school and university and to the benefit of others who participate and wish to contribute to the University in ways that appear not to conform to standardized procedures. You will see that though I consider knowledge as an against-the-grain practice which stretches and strengthens our dwindling humanity and generosity in order to entertain self-awareness and humility, it does so with a refined relationship to both normative and against the grain pedagogical processes. I contend that my work engages both practices.

I have no way of knowing but I hope such a process as you are now embarked on can be as entertaining and vivifying as it is serious. We have much to contribute to a university if, as academics and administrators, we allow and extend to each other the generosity of difference and otherness. I am tempted again to bring attention to the closing chapter from "The Rest is Silence" which postulates, in relation to the murdered artist, a 'gift misunderstood'.

Perhaps though Jean Sibelius is more apt here when he instructed his audience and critics with some inner calm: 'Misunderstand me correctly' Sibelius requested. Scholarship in architecture is worth considering; it is the subject of many conference papers, many initiatives and many discussions. Nowhere better seen in the attempt to define the murky area of an architecture Doctorate, which we are currently doing at the school.

It is a scholarship because of its precarious position between theory and praxis, which advances from both the conventional (works within the various dominant discourses which refine already held ideas and beliefs) to the more open but measured critical contests on the normative, until the normative is dislodged. I suspect in this sense it is Kuhnian with a throwback to Karl Popper.

However in the margins, a world away from big publishers and the demands for researchers to pay for their own images etc, small press publications, currently termed The Zine in architecture (much like my Vertigo pamphlet lecture-essay series) provide a discourse through which new ground is broken, through which ideas are put in waiting for the scholarship-to-come.

To misread this would be a serious misunderstanding as to how ideas and thinking find their way into the wider discourse. This is the way architecture proceeds and naturally will differ from engineering, from literature or from social work.

Architecture always offers routes into and out of non-conformity; the scholars – not to be confused with any academic hoax - often begin at the edge, enter the academic centres to change them, to take up their responsibility within them. In this way we test our ideas, we thrash them out so to speak in order to re-write the nostalgia of the normative, and take on the uncurious nature of the hallowed, whether in architecture, academia or art, whether on the walls, on the street or in the journals.

Journals of dubious origin, even content, may appear to be outside the discipline, but a Vertigo pamphlet which is, for example, a drama on the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto called *Aalto Ego*, becomes a potential departure for other scholars, students, architects, even the public to respond. A recent ex-director of the Royal Shakespeare Company read the recent volume and complimented the ‘sensational language’, the ‘courage to remain intellectually alert’, even unfashionable in offering some difficulty and challenging in the face of mediocrity.

Currently the Director of the North Wales Clwyd Theatre, Terry Hands said this was the sort of work that could only be presented today in Brussels or other major European cities but not in institutes, cities or countries that have lost that risk and refuse to be ‘daringly contemporary’ in the face of the ‘payback’ world. I can see that he could be right. He knew nothing about Canada!

Dominant ideas and paradigms in architecture are often undermined and finally removed often, not before time, by small press publications, by journals and pamphlets of the Vertigo type. Indeed, some of the biggest star architects today eventually achieved their fame through small against-the-grain but no less scholarly pamphlets, some of equally dubious origin.

Following the career of Daniel Libeskind or Steven Holl, both professors and world architects, will show how their early, riskier, open and untried scholarship and theory has been tested out in small critical volumes. I recently lectured in the Lebanese American University in Beirut and in Dalhousie where I was also promoting Carleton; for this purpose, I read extracts from the Vertigo Anti-Library series and the response amongst academics and students was more than warm.

Indeed, the series began 3 years ago when I was asked to deliver the lecture celebrating Carleton University school of architecture's 40<sup>th</sup> year; it was rushed into print by students who wished to have the text immediately. I have since discussed with Kevin Lippert, the managing director of Princeton Architectural Press (probably the second or third most important architectural press in the US, and probably amongst the top 6 in the world) that these small volumes would be used to test the validity of the essay – its content and contribution to architecture and scholarship - and brought together as *Selected Readings and Works* in a larger Princeton volume later.

Is it possible that none of these processes are known or recognised by any of the committees at Carleton University that have considered this work? Was it even debated? Clarifications could have been asked for, as I have made myself available for further enquiry regarding my works and publications. What knowledge (or networks?) would be needed to recognise this and at least consider the merit, flexibility and diversity of the routes to demonstrate that scholarship and contribution to the discipline and to the university? I remain somewhat mystified that so much appears to have been missed or then 'incorrectly' misread.

Architectural scholarship has to use content, style and discourse to contest dominant paradigms – the small blurb on the back cover of my book *How Architecture Got its Hump* (MIT 2000) written by the world-renowned historian, professor and architect Ignasi de Sola Morales testifies to this. Did anyone happen to notice that small but elegant and sharp statement?

The introduction to my essay, the epic poem called *Welcome to the Hotel Architecture* (MIT 1999) has an introduction by Lebbeus Woods one of the leading architects and educators today. He speaks of the need to write with rigour and scholarship, a ‘Dante’ against the grain, in order to remain true to what architecture can achieve.

Again, I have to ask, did any of the committee members happen to turn to that book and read it when seeking for some guidance as to the peer-reviewed world? And small presses are just as important as the often paid-by-the-researcher or granted volumes that populate academic presses.

For me, and I have no apology for this, one volume from Vertigo Press passed from student to student is just as important as the award winning internationally prized first volume of mine called *Writing Architecture* (awarded the International Critics prize of architecture 1991). Magnum Opus versus the thrilling pamphlet – I know which I would choose anytime.

## Gaffe or Hoax?

Our inability to predict in environments subject to the Black Swan, coupled with a general lack of the awareness of this state of affairs, means that certain professionals, while believing they are experts, are in fact not. Based on their empirical record, they do not know more about their subject matter than the General population, but they are much better at narrating – or, worse, at smoking you with complicated mathematical models. They are also more likely to wear a tie.

*Taleb The Black Swan*

I have to confess I have found this University process very uncomfortable, as it is not in my nature to survey, unveil and re-tell aspects of my work with the need to self-promote, acclaim and trumpet. I would like to think the life, the acts and achievement, are fairly self-explanatory but this is, of course, a delusion that we often bring to our own work. We are all very good at it; we claim dialogue where there is none, even where none is intended. We claim solipsism where necessary, when we know we have closed off.

The difficulty to make meaning and insert it where there is no measure presents us with a lack of substance, even a lack of direction. Yet direction is something we often wish to delay, defer, even to give ourselves the opportunity to fall short of the aims we set ourselves. In a recent communication, in fact with more than one individual, it was suggested to me that someone in the university had made a gaffe here in this process. It was all, they said, apparently self-explanatory.

Of course this is not the case, nothing is self-explanatory when it is contingent on fresh anxiety, on today's constant condition of instability and depression in the university. It was this I had in mind when I suggested in my *Letter to the Provost* that the gaffe could be my own, in other words a hoax played on myself. How many of us have ever actually acknowledged that life might be just that alibi necessary for us to appear to have made a difference?

A gaffe is usually a mistake, often not intended but made worse by the level of error or inaccuracy that is achieved. Could that be what has happened here? Probably not. But from the dictionary, a gaffe is a social or tactical blunder, *a faux pas*. According to the US journalist Michael Kinsely 'a gaffe is when a politician tells the truth'.

I do not think we need to be so cynical but to trace a gaffe like this, if indeed this process is a gaffe, we have to be dispassionate, give outside ourselves and know when to confess to lower intent. I have no idea how an application could be treated as a package, as the combined sum of more or less significant moves in a life rather than being treated as the adventure, the risk and individual sections of a life that builds up the practice and philosophy of a person.

But if we accept the latter and see life as an attempt to 'live in truth', we might trace how a gaffe could have occurred, how inaccuracies may have emerged, or how issues could be misjudged, misread or possibly ignored in favor of more pressing conditions. Whatever the case, gaffe or hoax - we are duty bound to ask how misreading occurs and what use we can then make of it; rather than falling back on the *what if* face-saving, or *it could have been this or that*.

It is also well known that misreadings are usually not accidental; misreadings can project what is often already thought or held to be true. 'True' here means to conform to an expected image, construction or narrative that necessarily asks for little or no contest.

The hoax is completely different. To understand this, we would have to consider that the person responsible for the application might want to hoodwink the institute, in this case the university. Following this logically, a case could be made that extends further than the evidence submitted. Proceeding this way the professor might attempt, in a useful phrase, to pull the wool over the various committee members' eyes.

Could this conceivably happen and if so, could the professor be exposed for an immaturity, for faking a seniority or claiming a development that may or may not be there? We need to ask then though the other question: why would someone do this and keep themselves at this level of 'fraudulence'. Orson Welles, we know, was a master at such narratives as to be always one step ahead of the untruth. The 'fake' then is by no means the privilege of media types, politicians, celebrities or film directors.

So, *the gaffe or the hoax*, it is indeed only an uncomfortable question addressed to me. Gaffes can be created in the gaps of documents, lives and committees. Expectations can make recommendations with less enthusiasm for the unknown presented. The dialogue needs to be more complete, closed on a truth whereby what appears less meaningful is replaced by a desire for meaning, even one inserted from elsewhere. A hoax is, on the face of it, much more interesting. But only to the professor! Why should this be so if the truth is concrete?



Roger Connah

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