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Brittain-Catlin, Timothy (2011) The Success of Failure. In: The Annual Colloquium of Doctoral Students of the Institute of Technology (ITA) and the History and Theory of Architecture (GTA) at ETH Zurich, 17-18 Nov 2016, Zurich. (Unpublished)

DOI

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The success of failure

The Annual Colloquium of Doctoral Students of the Institute of Technology (ITA) and the History and Theory of Architecture (GTA)

ETH Zürich, 17 November 2016

This is really a talk about architectural culture and the boundaries of it. The question for me at the moment is where those boundaries lie, and how it is that some people in some situations find themselves outside them. Some of this is specific to my own experience in the British environment, but some is not; all of it is relevant to how architects are perceived, how their work is discussed and canonised, or not, and how the managerial culture of research, or so-called 'research', in some universities is not particularly helpful to them. So what I am trying to do is to probe the link between architectural history writers and criticism, and criticism and professional culture, to see where the limitations lie and how we can get more pleasure from the buildings we see around us.

The first thing I want to say is that architectural history developed in a different way historically in Britain from how it did in other countries, especially European ones. In Britain it developed through journalism, and not through the academic study of art history. This is really the key point and has many implications for present day practitioners, especially as university monitoring and research funding systems become more and more managerialist and more and more streamlined to suit other departments. The history of it runs like this. In nineteenth-century Britain architects were very little concerned with theory and well known architects had no connections at all with academia because, quite simply, there were no architectural academies in the way that there were in Europe. The tone of the gothic revival which transformed British architecture from the 1840s-1860s was intensely pragmatic and anti-intellectual: the buildings of the period were primarily supposed to represent and express building construction directly, what we now call 'realism'; attempts at intellectualisation in the early part of the century failed to have any lasting impact. The Royal Academy schools, where John Soane was professor, were not really architecture schools in any modern sense; in 1841 University College, London, appointed its first professor of architecture, but the first real school was the Architectural Association which was founded in 1847 when articled clerks, that is, apprentice architects, banded together to invite speakers to address them, to make their life more fun and more interesting.

'More interesting' is, I think, the key here. It is obvious that journalism as a genre is a good way of making a subject more interesting simply because it can draw directly on personal experience and need not have any boundaries, either in content or in methodology. Jonathan Glancey, who wrote about architecture for the *Guardian* newspaper, also published articles on trains and aeroplanes, things that often interest architects. Architects for the most part have a short attention span. If they read for example the *Architectural Review*, they can see something different on every page, and it is much more likely to catch their attention than ten pages and then some footnotes. It can also appeal to people other

than architects, who themselves do not constitute a very large number of potential readers. And the other great strength of journalism is that it places a great deal of significance on story-telling. It is obvious that the great academic narratives that stick in our mind are good stories; but the framework of a short magazine article allows much more freedom of experimentation at this than any other medium.

Thus it came about that the most dominant voices in British architectural history over the twentieth century were to a great extent journalistic ones. John Summerson, who wrote what is still the definitive account in London building in 1947, as well as *The Classical Language of Architecture* which my carpenter has been using when building a table for me right now, and the Pelican History of Art for the neo-classical period in Britain, trained as an architect but then began as a writer for the *Architect and Building News*. J.M. Richards, at the *Architect's Journal* and then the *Architectural Review*, was most likely the single most influential person to introduce European modernism to a British professional readership. Peter Davey, in effect editor of the *Architectural Review* for about 25 years up to about 10 years ago and Jonathan Glancey's mentor, was considered to be a major influence across northern Europe in terms of the types of buildings he published; he likes to claim, for example, that he "invented" Peter Zumthor'. He saw himself as much as a Puginite as the early *Architectural Review* had been, and I remember him asking me, in relation to a building I had suggested publishing – 'but what would Pugin have said?'. Mark Girouard, who is the historian who probably influenced me more than any other, was the architectural writer and editor at *Country Life*, a magazine which otherwise is interested in rural pursuits, dogs, cooking, gardens, that sort of thing. He wrote mainly about country houses and he had to write a good story – which in his case of course would have been a case study in social history – for it to appear in print. And Clive Aslet, who is a wonderful writer, was himself first architectural editor and then overall editor of *Country Life*.

Most but not all of these writers are talking primarily about British buildings, and about British private houses in particular. But there are other places where architectural history in England emerges, most especially the national amenity societies, who produce an extraordinary treasury of new research, new interpretations and new stories. The writer who is still today, 40 years later, the authoritative source on the architecture of the 'long Edwardian' period, from the 1880s to the First World War, is the late Alastair Service. In the mid-1970s he wrote the two books on this which haven't been bettered since: one of these, in fact, was mostly a compilation of articles that had appeared in the *Architectural Review* during the course of the century. Alastair was, essentially, a gentleman by profession. He had inherited the family publishing business and the income from this supported his work. As it happens, the thing he was best known for during the period in which his books appeared was being chairman of the Family Planning Association, an organisation which gave advice on contraception and was thus a kind of amenity society itself. But the way in which he drew attention to his 'research', as it would be called now, was through the Victorian Society.

The Victorian Society today is a recognised amenity society, which means that public planning authorities have a duty to consult it when someone wants to demolish or alter a historic building. For the purpose of dealing with these cases it receives a government grant but for everything else it is funded by its members. But in the 1960s and '70s when it was

still a recent organisation it was already a club for slightly eccentric people who were interested in Victorian architecture and wanted to go to lectures about it, or join in trips to Victorian buildings, and that is still true today. Mark Girouard was a key active early member; so was the historian and polemicist Gavin Stamp. Andrew Saint, who taught me, and who is unusual in having a European and American readership, emerged through the Victorian Society and is still one of the senior members of its building committee (where those development applications are discussed) and its various publication enterprises. But most of the people who get involved in its church-crawl or pub-crawl or town-hall crawl trips and talks have no professional interest in Victorian architecture at all. You can see here very clearly the fact that in Britain art history today (it wasn't always) as a formal academic discipline has no relationship to architectural history and to architecture culture generally, and indeed the worst thing that can happen to a mainstream architectural historian is to have their work peer-reviewed by an art historian.

I'm now a trustee of the Twentieth Century Society, which does the same thing as the Victorian Society but for buildings designed from 1914 onwards. From this position I have a good overview of what goes on. We also have trips and tours, and we have a journal – more about that in a moment – but we also have a magazine which includes short illustrated articles about things that interest members, for example by people who live in modernist houses. Many members have strong ideas about the styles they like, but there is a large range of them. It's worth saying that the very high graphic and reproduction standards that we use for our magazine, our website and our journal – which are derived from the glossy lifestyle press as much as from anywhere else – are also those which set the standards for academic architectural history publications. But from the point of view of what I want to say today, the most important role these societies play is in the rediscovery and reinterpretation of subjects that do not appear on the academic radar.

I went last month for example on a trip around some churches designed by N.F. Cachemaille-Day, an architect who only ever appears in footnotes at most. Cachemaille-Day designed some extraordinary expressionist churches before the Second World War, and then after it built some cheaper but often very original and interesting new churches to replace Victorian buildings damaged by bombing. The person who led the trip would never describe himself as an architectural historian and whose professional background is something else entirely, but he is I would say the greatest expert in England on inter-war churches. And freed from any kind of academic methodology and 'research' managerialism he is free to present them and interpret them in any way he likes; we will publish it and our members will enjoy it. This seems to me to be the expression of the experience of architectural history, as it is and as it should be for most people who are interested by it.

Now, this situation is starting to pose something of a problem as universities and their research funding is increasingly professionalised. There has not so far been much of a problem but I doubt that it will continue like this. Traditionally, universities have recognised the journalistic sources of architectural history, so, for example, Mark Girouard, with his background in *Country Life* magazine, became Slade professor of fine art at the University of Oxford in 1975, not an academic 'job' but a prestigious platform, what we would nowadays call a visiting professorship. Essentially, this way of doing things was self-regulated: there were no rules about peer review, and in Britain there has never until recently been any

dogmatic approach to methodology. So Mark's work was appreciated because anyone who took any interest in his subjects, whether they were an academic or not, could see that he was researching it thoroughly as well as writing about it attractively. It's a kind of elitist situation I suppose in which a small group of people at Oxford appreciated his work, rather than insisting on some 'fair' process.

There have been of course many people who have contributed well researched, well argued, well informed ideas to both academia and the profession simultaneously – the landscape writer Nan Fairbrother comes to mind. In 1970 she published one of the most powerful and influential books on landscape planning called *New Lives, New Landscapes*, and you can see its effects everywhere in Britain. Yet she was a person without professional or academic qualifications, a doctor's wife who had earlier been a physiotherapist, who had up to then written sentimental reminiscences about living in the country in austere conditions; she would today be patronised to death if she applied for an academic position; I remember my own dean, who came from a field of nineteenth-century German literature, saying that under no circumstances would he appoint someone to even the most junior position without a doctorate. But I can give an example of an architectural theorist who about as different from Girouard and Fairbrother as it is possible to be. Reyner Banham wrote for some 30 years opinion pieces – no research, just opinions, sometimes rather daft ones – for the magazine *New Society*, and no one thought that this was a waste of his time. And I think that the style of writing – the story-telling – has been enormously important.

The problem that is beginning to develop is that universities want rules in order to assess the 'outputs' – a horrible word that reminds me of Kinsey's 'outlets' – of their research staff. In Britain, the research outputs of academics are assessed roughly every six years. We have to register everything we publish with our university database, and I have noticed that the software it uses will automatically accept or reject a submission depending on whether it will be usable for this assessment. If I write a magazine article I get back a message that the submission has been 'flagged up' as problematic, and apparently this is unchangeable. This is not the only software problem – I tried to give as a referee for a research council application Mark Girouard, perhaps the most influential and respected architectural historian in England, and the drop-down menu in the system wouldn't let me, because he didn't currently hold an academic job.

My argument is that in an architecture school, which in Britain is primarily a vocational school and an oddity in a university, everything I write is a contribution to architecture culture. Of course I'm aware that if I write a book review in the *World of Interiors*, I'm not making much of a contribution to knowledge. But if I write many hundreds over 25 years, as I have done, to develop and present ideas, then the situation isn't quite the same, as Reyner Banham of course knew when he wrote those countless articles for *New Society*. If at the same time, I write for our Twentieth Century Society magazine, and for the Victorian Society one, and for lots of other different bits and pieces online and on paper, for professional magazines like the *Architectural Review* and *Architecture Today*, I am contributing to the broad and lively architecture culture in which we want to educate our architecture students. It seems to me that that is how I am doing my job properly, especially among students who will never read another academic article again in their lives, and that of course is most of them.

It's worth saying too that the research council responsible for funding the humanities in Britain does not really fund architectural research unless it has an art-history or a sociological element to it, which is going to leave architectural historians in an increasingly difficult situation. At one conference I went to, supported by the intensely academic Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Andrew Saint, who was the chairman, began by saying that he was hoping for interesting stories from people who really cared about what they were doing, and not box-ticking, peer-review exercises for the benefit of university databases. Of course many of the canonical academic critics and historians of architecture during the twentieth century did not use the kind of methodologies that would today stand up to modern standards or computer recognition systems. The art and architectural historian Alan Powers, who is to some extent to the Twentieth Century Society what Andrew Saint is to the Victorians, has left his position as professor of Architecture at the University of Greenwich because he has chosen to work – more effectively – outside academia – and very few people have done so much, using all the means available from books to magazine articles, walks, talks and broadcasts, to enrich the architecture culture in Britain as Alan has. To some extent the amenity societies, the Victorian Society and the Twentieth Century Society, have had to adapt themselves to the reality of the academic assessment procedure and its computers and its software. I have been involved with both the Twentieth Century Society annual journal and another one, and the only way in which we could get academics to contribute their research to it was to set up a peer-review system for it. If their work couldn't be included for the assessment exercise, they would not be able to find the time to write them. But we have been very careful that this should not deter the enthusiasts who mostly make up readership from researching, writing and submitting articles for it.

So now what I want to do is to talk about this broader audience of unregulated, undefined, unmethodological amateurs in Britain and the role they play – how in a sense they are portrayed as nostalgic or whimsical losers desperately hanging on to comforting feelings in old buildings, whose own personal voices fails to register within the system and yet ultimately they come to be heard. What we want is good stories to build an architecture culture. Robert Drake, that expert on interwar churches I mentioned, told me the other day during our Cachemaille-Day trip that he was publishing his first article, on the little-known interwar church architect J. Harold Gibbons, in a journal called *Ecclesiology Today*, so presumably they are going through the process I've just mentioned with our own journal. There are many architects – like Cachemaille-Day, or Edward Maufe, the architect of the unfashionable 1930s gothic Guildford cathedral and much else – which are very unlikely to emerge through the regular art history channels who have mostly ignored them up to now or considered them as freaks or dusty joke figures when evidently they play a large part in the consciousness of architectural enthusiasts. These architects offer strange stories, or unhappy or irregular experiences, rather than critically sustainable ideas.

I've talked a bit so far about boundaries – in academia, in criticism, in architectural education; who is inside, and who is not; who is acceptable for what purpose, why, and how. You can see now how this general framework and this background establishes the way in which practising architects are *also* set up to succeed or fail. Many distinguished people have looked at this well before me. One of the most interesting, I think, was the

Dutch teacher Niels L. Prak, who published a book in 1984 called *Architects: the Noted and the Ignored*. In the early part of this book he looked at how architects get directed into one form of practice or another, whether they will be noted by critics or ignored by them. Essentially, what he said was that one kind of job will lead into another; that architects can be fenced in to the category of producers because of their relationship with speculative developers or contractors. Architects who make it into the pages of the magazines likewise become fenced in to the creative side, because of the people they meet, the invitations they get or indeed look for. It's obvious that having talent plays a big role but it is only part of the story. Prolific architects such as Maufe, Cachemaille-Day and many more, for example the twentieth-century traditional gothic church builder Stephen Dykes Bower, or Raymond Erith, were successful and recognised professionally, but they have hardly made it into the historians' critical canon at all, as if that was a different world altogether. In particular the canon sought to exclude designers whose work appeared nostalgic or sentimental – this seemed to be the worst crime of all, for some reason. So Raymond Erith, the architect of Downing Street as rebuilt in the 1960s and of other houses with strange and dreamy neo-Georgian detailing, is never mentioned in any canon of anything. Our Twentieth Century Society book on Stephen Dykes Bower was written by an architectural historian whose day job is a Jesuit priest, and is the third best-selling on the list, only one place below the book on the well-known modernists who designed the Barbican estate – and I'm prepared to bet that none of you have ever heard of him. There is a kind of coalition of losers which consists of the unfashionable and uncanonical architects and their supporters amongst the members of the amenity societies. Sentimentality, like that of Stephen Dykes Bower, is key attribute of loserdom.

So the point I am moving towards is that the enthusiasts very often can have a broader sense of how to explain phenomena in architectural history which has so far received inadequate attention. What originally attracted me to the subject of exclusion from the canon was the discovery that many reasonable architects in early-mid nineteenth-century Britain found their reputations trashed altogether by the protagonists of the gothic revival. The careers of some of them simply ended – they were bullied to professional death. Once I started to look beyond the canon and also at the type of architects who interested the amenity society members I began to identify people who had, I think, been let down by academic architectural historians. A good example for me as a historian of the early gothic revival was the architect R.D. Chantrell, who has been admirably studied now by Christopher Webster, whose amenity society background is in the Ecclesiological Society which looks at Victorian churches. The most obvious candidate for me personally was Horace Field, an architect from Hampstead whose best work was carried out during the Edwardian period. This was a time when expectations in architecture, and the sheer workmanship of it, was extraordinarily high, and so there are many good architects of the period who could have escaped the radar – in fact even Alastair Service, who wrote a lot about Edwardian Hampstead, had little to say about him. But Field interested me for two reasons. The first was that he who came up with the model for the typical high street bank branch in England: his invention, a modernised version of the seventeenth-century house, was so successful and so appealing that all the other banks copied it very soon afterwards, and then in turn the post offices and many others. So the English high street looks the way it does today to a large extent because of Field. In fact it is the very ordinariness of these

buildings, the fact that there were soon so many like them, that makes them hard to protect legally.

The second thing that interested me was what happened to his career. His early working life was spent in Hampstead which then was a pretty village that attracted not only artists but also politicians and businessmen. In fact his work for Lloyds Bank began only because they were looking for a local architect to carry out some alterations at a building they had already bought. He made strong connections with prominent Hampstead residents and by 1910 was building houses and large office premises for clients he had met through them. But after the First World War his career seemed to collapse, and by the end he was living in the shadow – literally, in fact – of his more successful contemporaries, and doing small alteration jobs for neighbours. Someone so talented ought to have been in a stronger position. What happened to him? And are there any lessons today, if we don't want students, for example, to forget good designers in the same way?

Field is interesting because he clearly was, or at any rate had been, a first-class designer. Of course we don't know who actually did the designing – he often worked in partnership. In fact we don't know anything about him at all, which is a good thing as it means we can only concentrate on the buildings. And yet maybe that in itself is not all we need to do. I've earlier today mentioned the British practice of Seely & Paget, which produced a large number of institutional buildings, houses and churches from the 1920s up to the 1960s. The interesting thing about them is that they were terrible designers – they just seem to have had no talent at all, and if one or two decent buildings emerged from their office, it must surely have been from one of the junior architects they employed. They were socially very well connected, and like Cachemaille-Day they benefitted from the rebuilding of London churches after the Second World War. One of their funny little churches is located at the end of the street where I lived as a child and I sometimes wonder if that's why they interest me. In fact, astonishingly, they were diocesan surveyors to the Diocese of London and Paget, who neither studied nor personally practised architecture was even Surveyor to the Fabric of St Paul's Cathedral, presumably on the basis of their social connections. One of the things that I learned from seeing the Cachemaille-Day churches close up was that Seely & Paget had the same ideas about the form of modern churches but not the talent to bring them through to a successful composition. This for example is Seely & Paget's church of St Michael and St George in Hammersmith, and it really doesn't work at all – it could be the back of a post office – but when Cachemaille-Day took the same approach about six years later, at the church of St Michael in Hackney, it somehow looks more convincing. It is very sad in a way, to have the idea first but not the talent to see it through.

Now, the point for me about Seely and Paget was that they produced a huge number of buildings and yet they were completely unplaceable in any architectural narrative, they had nothing much to contribute to any art-historical argument about style. Yet it surely must be the case that there is something to say about so large a corpus of buildings. They are there, and we experience them. In Seely and Paget's case, I was struck by the discovery of a photograph of their twin bathroom, something that architectural historians had long known about but never actually seen before. I had imaged something glamorous but here we are – it is small and austere. And somehow from this I realised that the story about Seely and Paget is about how two people who were committed to each other and wanted to make

things together. It is nonsense to say that it is anything to do with a grand narrative about – I don't know, Le Corbusier or something. That's simply the wrong way of talking about it. The giggling and the gossiping of the amenity society members who knew about the twin bathroom was actually a far more accurate way of discussing and defining the value of what the architects actually did. In fact, in complement to what Peggy Deamer has written about workers who think they are artists; I'm hoping to be able to claim that these enthusiasts think they're workers, but actually what they make is art: they throw up new stories all the time.

In Field's case what triggered it for me was this garage he designed towards the end of his career. He designed it for the new Rolls Royce of one of his neighbours. What is interesting is this gigantic corbel. When Field's clients had vision and money, he designed rich, neo-baroque buildings with fine carvings and he evidently took great pride in designing details such as corbels. As his work declined in budgets and scale, he started to exaggerate these details, especially the corbels, so that they were almost all he had left. They seem to me to suggest an attitude of defiance – against what was happening to him, against what was happening to architects like him. Defiance as an attitude has a great sense of coming out unscathed from an unwinnable battle. I am reminded of this when I see a genteel little building like this one in Margate opposite David Chipperfield's Turner Contemporary, peeping out from some ugly earlier buildings – it's a look of defiance, a sense of 'everyone makes fun of me and I don't care'. It doesn't matter in a way that we don't know whether it is true or not. What matters is that it gives us a story by which to appreciate the buildings. Architects are defined by other people, and it depends a great deal on how those other people see them – this can be their tragedy as much as the reason for their success.

In fact, what these examples share is the idea of defiance. I see quite a lot of that on our Twentieth Century Society or Victorian Society trips – people go to these events because they take them out of ordinary life and provide an opportunity to place value in things like lost interwar churches, or cheap post-War ones, things that have no specific advantage or benefit to them. They aren't going to write a peer-reviewed article and get promoted. It is very striking that many of these buildings are in trouble – the Cachemaille-Day church in Eltham is in a poor physical state, and it is located in a bleak and poor area with no resources. It is also just too far away from other sites in the area for it to profit from passing tourist traffic. It is a fairly hopeless situation and no doubt that makes it attractive to some, just as there are people who like miserable seaside resorts in winter. Going to join a trip to see it could be seen as part of a sad and obsessive hobby. But on the other hand the Cachemaille-Day church in Hackney I showed you a moment ago is in a very strong situation financially, and is appreciated and well looked after, and everyone on our trip loved it, so it would be a mistake to repeat the familiar idea that everything important is to do with unhappiness of some kind, and that failure is always depressing. Finding and buying and writing and sending the postcards to your friends so you can reminisce a little about what you saw and who you met, and what the other people on the trip were like, is quite fun. And so in order to end with the claim that failure can be valuable, a kind of useful success, I conclude by going further into that theme.

One of the recent research projects I have been working on has been a very big but a lesser known house by Sir Edwin Lutyens, Great Maytham Hall in West Kent. I have been able to

look at things in the light of much that has been discovered since Alastair Service wrote his books on Edwardian architecture back in the 1970s, and there have been some interesting discoveries. Lutyens is well known among other things for his complex plans and site layouts, and one of the reasons why Great Maytham has been neglected is that it has a strangely simple, or simplistic, layout – the wind blasts straight through it from north to south. I think it is possible to make an argument for the ideas that this house was designed in the manner of hospital for a family which had lost many family members to tuberculosis – after all, both the clients had been involved with public health, and knew what recent hospitals looked like. This seems to me to be a narrative in early twentieth century domestic architecture that has been forgotten in England because of the emphasis on modern hospitals and sanatoria, and the hygiene propaganda of the modern movement which suggested that traditional-looking houses were unhealthy.

But the really interesting and revealing Edwardian story at Great Maytham is nothing to do with the architect Lutyens and yet seems to me to give some useful ideas about how to make stories about architecture that combine loss with gain. Before Lutyens remodelled Great Maytham it was a large plain house that had been cheaply rebuilt after a fire. In the 1890s it was rented by Frances Hodgson Burnett, at the time the most successful of all children's writers, whose speciality was a kind of exaggerated sentimentality. Her most famous book of all is called *The Secret Garden* of 1911, and it tells the story of how two seriously disturbed children – we would today call them sociopathic – are brought back to health through contact with nature. They are both living in an isolated house in the north of England – the girl Mary is an orphan after her family die of cholera in front of her, and the boy Colin has been made to live like an invalid all his life because of his father's depression after the death of his wife. Mary discovers a secret walled garden, which Colin's mother had made, and by clearing it and bringing it back to health, both children are eventually healed.

Unlike most of Burnett's many books this one is still selling well a century later – I think probably because the link it made between nature and health struck a chord. But Burnett's son Vivian, who wrote her biography in the 1920s, tells us something enormously important. Great Maytham itself had – has still – a walled garden, and it was well known that Burnett used to sit and write in there, and said she made friends with little birds and fairies and so on, and that it was her inspiration for the book. But he added something that is not well known. He says that Burnett was only moved to write the book when she heard that after the Lutyens remodelling, her lovely walled garden had been turned into a vegetable patch full of cabbages. It wasn't true – and no doubt she later discovered that it wasn't true – but the apparent desecration of the place was enough to move her to write the story about its rebirth. Incidentally, the description of the garden in Burnett's book doesn't actually suit the real one at all. The whole story of *The Secret Garden* is a fictional reimagining of a place which is inspired by a feeling of loss. And this led me to the conclusion that in fact it is possible to tell a story about Great Maytham by saying that Lutyens did exactly the same when he reimagined the old core of the house in its landscape as his inspiration for remodelling it. I don't think that writers and architects, even very great ones, are different from enthusiasts as people except by degree; they work on the same basis. There is a lot of talk about magic in Edwardian children's stories – in the case of the great E. Nesbit, a very unsentimental and funny kind of magic – and there must be some reason why so many were talking and writing about it so much.

Now I want to conclude by explaining what this has to do with architectural history and architectural criticism, and how it is that failure, the inability to realise an ambition, a reimagining, is actually a form of success. I began by saying that architecture culture exists just as much outside the academic framework as within it – in fact probably more so – and that the managerial systems of modern universities are in my experience not that great at recognising this, with the result that young students are studying architecture in a place which doesn't represent the culture of the world they are entering. My feeling about this is that that makes it a lot harder for them to talk about what they see in convincing language, and in turn that makes for poorer buildings. And I said secondly that in the real world of architectural culture, the enthusiasts, the activists if you like, who are only rarely academics, are in fact often responsible for uncovering not only new ideas, but also for supplying a huge amount of historical information about buildings, to the extent where they are often patronised as being technicians rather than thinkers. Their motivation for doing so is a quest for a fictional imagining of their own past, of going back to buildings that were still fresh when they were young and reimagining themselves into the lives of the buildings. And then I said that the passionate world of the architectural enthusiast has a lot of different aspects to it, just as it has a number of different media in which to express itself – walks, tours, lectures, magazines and so on, and that is why it is so useful for anyone wanting to tell a story about a building. Finding interesting appealing and valuable things to say about all buildings rather than the especially original or creative ones is something that needs more talking in general. And finally I said that there is, then a huge category of people who are technically, critically, academically losers who actually have between them a very valuable and quite often intuitive sense of the meaning and importance of buildings, just as there are writers like Burnett who automatically turn loss to profit.

I wonder whether to some extent those who engage in our activities have a high degree of fantasy about what they are seeing and learning about – that there is an aspect of sentiment and nostalgia about the whole thing which can be touching and moving, and not necessarily depressing – as in the positive, feel-good sentimentality of the stories of Paul Gallico that everyone used to read in the 1970s, or for that matter the early books of Nan Fairbrother, one of which is called *The Cheerful Day*. And thus when someone like Burnett, who comes from a different area from architecture altogether, goes through a nostalgic process like this about a place, it can give some ideas to the storytellers about how to write and think about that place. It has been said that you can only be nostalgic about an experience that you shared with others – that's evidently part of the appeal of the shared enterprises of the enthusiasts and the amenity society. I think myself that communality is enormously important to architectural education if not to the practice of architecture itself. I've noticed that all the best schools I have taught in have had a high degree of it. When I started teaching at the Architectural Association in 2001 there was great deal of sharing in other people's work, and learning from the things that worked and things that didn't – this, I think, is one of the things made the school such a great place at that time. There's a great deal in Brecht's view, which Peggy referred us to, that everyone has a role to play in the overall production; the difference is that he didn't really mean it, whereas I – sort of – do.

Now, I think that architectural practice resembles the amenity society world I have described much more than it does the academic one. It obviously has in it a very wide range

of media, by which I include things like site trips and newspaper articles. Not to mention the articles and magazines about trains and planes. Personal experience plays in it a very significant role; people like an image that prolongs a moment, and architects reimagine scenes that they remember in an improved or comprised way more than they admit; and yet mainstream architectural history and criticism almost never seem to mention personal experience. It doesn't matter that the conflicting ideas of the enthusiasts and those who enjoy architectural stories are perhaps disorganised as a whole rather than coherent narratives. No narrative is big enough to tell the story of all buildings, enough so all attempts are failures; the closest one can get to is a series of layers, which might often conflict with one another, in the way that a modern kitchen will conflict with an old-fashioned dining room, even though this is a perfectly normal arrangement for many people. In fact I could end by saying this – go and look at your own home, and see how many conflicts are there, and how many people were involved in creating those conflicts. That's the true measure of diversity in architectural experience.