Transcript of Richard Gluckman's address to the Syracuse University Class of 2015 at Hendricks Chapel on May 9, 2015.

"Thank you. I wonder if you have as much anxiety about your future as I have about giving this speech!

What kind of 'knowledge' can a 67 year-old architect impart that a 20-something would consider, much less take? One thing I've learned as I've gotten older is how much I don't know. Fortunately, your age insulates you from this paralyzing condition. The second thing that I know is that there's a difference between knowledge and experience. I am happy to be here today to share a small part of my *experience* with you . . . but knowledge? The third thing I know is that I am the world's greatest expert on only one thing . . . myself.

You've acquired some knowledge and some experience these past few years. Perhaps aspects of my experience may have some resonance with you. Perhaps not. In that case, "Google" David Foster Wallace's commencement speech at Kenyon College. It's really, really good.

Back to me.

A few years ago while discussing my work with the critic Hal Foster, he encouraged me to "exploit the myth." My "myth" began in Buffalo. As a boy, I loved being driven around the grain elevators and the lake freighter shipping docks by my father. Foster wrote, "That for me, this post-industrial landscape was neither exotic nor futuristic as it was for the early moderns of the 20th century, but part of my everyday cityscape," which it was. I continued to experience these structures and Reyner Banham's "daylight factories" well in to my time as an arch student here. This has become my foundation myth. The clarity, integrity, and materiality of those cartesian structures continue to inform my design thinking today.

My grandfather taught me to draw. My parents gave me a great gift. While I was a second-year student, they allowed me to design and then build their home in the Glenwood Hills, south of Buffalo. This led to two other design build projects that I finished shortly after graduation which led to my conviction that I wanted to open my own office. When I see construction experience on a resume, I'm very likely to interview that person.

When I was 9 years old, my father defined the word "architect" as the person who plans, designs and builds buildings. Fortunately, for me, my course was set. We now know that the study and practice of architecture is a far more nuanced process.

At some point we all hear Goethe's description of architecture as "frozen music." When a student, we were enchanted by Corbusier's poetic "the masterly correct and magnificent

play of masses brought together in light" and Kahn's more introspective "the thoughtful making of space."

I was incredibly fortunate to have Bill Scarbrough as my first-year design instructor. He exhorted us to be "anticipatory comprehensivists." Bill passed away recently and I regret not seeing more of him these past 20 years. I always meant to ask him what that meant.

Happily, Google exists, so I looked it up.

Buckminster Fuller called himself an anticipatory design scientist, a comprehensivist, one that refused to treat diverse subjects as specialized areas of investigation, because it inhibited his ability to think intuitively, independently, and comprehensively.

I have come to describe our practice of architecture as the subjective resolution of objective parameters.

The subjective resolution of objective parameters.

Objective parameters . . . the *context* and the *content* of the project.

The *context* includes latitude and longitude of the site, its climatic conditions, local constructability issues, the scale and texture of the surrounding buildings or landscape.

The *content* includes the program, the history and culture of the client institution, the aspirations of the client as well as our own sense of responsibility to all of the constituents.

The *subjective resolution*. The synthesis of these sets of parameters yields the *concept* for the design. The *subjective resolution* – "That which belongs to the thinking subject."

You are the *thinking subject*.

You will bring to the table your beliefs formed by your unique personal history, one that is tempered by a shared cultural experience, *your* myth. You will use your ability to analyze and to synthesize and generate an idea, an idea that is rigorous and consistent and defined by clarity, an idea that transcends the basic obligation of solving the problem.

When I attended this school 50 years ago the curriculum was fairly simple and the mission fairly well defined. We studied design, a bit of engineering, not nearly enough history, no theory, and enough of office practice to convince us we wanted no part of the business of architecture. We were taught the categories necessary to pass the Exam. SU graduates had the reputation of being able to step in to an office environment and contribute immediately.

They still do, but in a vastly more complex and diverse environment.

Design studio is still the core of the curriculum. You now know a great deal about integrated building systems, multi-disciplinary strategies, sustainability, and critical theory. The skills you have acquired here— your ability to think hierarchically, to make decisions, to manage multiple software programs, to exploit social media, to practice digital fabrication—are all valued assets for young interns entering the profession.

You have been exposed to real estate investment strategies, urban planning, emerging technologies and new materials. You have access to a field that didn't have a name 50 years ago—"landscape urbanism" which can include all of the above. Landscape architects like James Corner, Julia Czerniak and Richard Roark of Olin Studio have appropriated this new discipline, and architects have been late to the table.

Comprehensive thinkers like Roark see this moment of an aging infrastructure, strained resources and the growing public awareness of climate change as an opportunity to exploit a new cultural phenomenon, that infrastructure is the thread that stitches together the urban fabric. It needs to be sustainable, cross-disciplinary and responsible for a lively urban condition.

Our future depends on it.

I am amazed at your portfolios, and incredibly impressed with your ability to present and defend your work in juries. This is testament to your great faculty—far more diverse, better educated, but no less committed than I had. I'm not sure I could get *into* this school today, let alone get through it. So, what can I share with you that you haven't already been exposed to here?

A bit.

Increased complexity of building has led to increased specialization in disciplines. This puts a demand on the importance of grappling with the aforementioned "objective parameters" early in the design process. Unlike Mr. Fuller, we are not all polymaths. But we *can* be informed, creative collaborators. This requires early and constant collaboration.

Collaborate with each other, with the consultants, and with the multi-headed clients.

Collaboration has different protocols: working with brilliant engineers like Arup or Buro Happold is not just about solving problems or fulfilling performance criteria.

It's about the architecture.

It's about pushing the limits, not just for formal expression but for a more efficient and elegant structure. This can be extremely satisfying.

Working among architects can be fraught. Ego is involved. If it's mentor / mentee—such as one of you working for me—I would ask that my idea be tested.

Then, your idea be explored. Then, I'd tell you to do my idea.

We have a new model, a model that evolved out of the figurative ashes of a spectacular project. One year ago we were invited to participate in a limited competition with three other architects. The project was a major addition to one of the most important cultural institutions in the world.

We weren't selected but we won something in other ways.

It changed the way we work. My team of architects engaged in an intense five-month process that began by discussing and analyzing the objective parameters and our own goals. We built consensus in frequent internal workshops, reconciled the ideas and came to our collective subjective resolution.

It was our finest work.

Kermit Lee, another wonderful professor of mine, said the main difference between an intern and a professional was not innate design *skill*, but the speed the professional makes in working through design strategies.

There is always more than one design solution to a project. Be ferocious in searching for it but be responsive and nimble when the direction needs to shift or the strategy appears flawed.

You will have to get used to the idea that seemed incomprehensible to me years ago. Many of your projects will not get built. You will not get every job you try for. Not everyone will think your project is the best thing since the Pantheon.

BUT, you will continue to approach each project with commitment and confidence.

It's a great profession and a tough business. However, it's a *good* time to be an architect. The business world has learned that good design is good business. Architects have become a brand. It's not just about corporate gain. The public has become aware of the benefits of good architecture and the bar has been raised across the board.

Tomas Rossant, the new president of the New York AIA discusses re-positioning of the profession. This repositioning includes the continued elevation of the role of design in public life, the interdisciplinary opportunities with non-architects, finding ways to use new data sources to assist in resilience design and planning, conducting research, creating new modes of practice, and expanded public advocacy . . . moving from the general to the particular.

A word about drawing. (I believe it's still part of the curriculum in this school.) It's an important way to document your thinking process. A visual narrative can be a useful tool for presentation, especially for those of us who are verbally challenged. Drawing a building in situ teaches you how to look. A camera does not do that.

You've had the incredible luxury of living in Florence and London and New York, even Syracuse. You've been taught how to experience architecture. You've placed yourself in the building, or in the interstitial space, or in front of it to understand how it works and how to evaluate it. Figure out why it feels good, or bad. Take it's dimension, consider it's spatial manipulation, feel it's texture and be critical of its light. Does it orient you and make a clear circulation diagram? Do its architectural devices mediate the scale of the building, great or small to your own body?

I was fortunate to be exposed to the work of site specific minimalist artists in the late 70's and 80's—Walter De Maria, Dan Flavin, James Turrell, and Richard Serra. This saved me from the trap of post-modernism. Their work could be defined by architectural criteria: surface and materiality, shadow and light, scale and proportion, frame and space. Serra took Euclidean forms and manipulated them with simple strategies that gave us a new formal language. The computer was not used to invent this formal language, but it enabled its documentation and construction. The idea came from his head and went to his hand and then to a one-inch-scale cardboard model, and then, finally, into the machine. That machine is a valuable tool, not the generator of the idea.

Experience contemporary art, especially Serra. His work is informed by historic architectural environments; the Martello Towers in Great Britain, and spaces like Borromini's San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane in Rome.

Keep drawing. More importantly, keep looking.

Keep fabricating, whether a model, a bench or a house.

Learn to collaborate. Collaborate with you friends here! One of them may be your partner one day. Stay in touch with your teachers. Meet Syracuse alumni. They are *all* part of an expanded, supportive family that you are joining.

Look for a variety of professional experiences. You're well equipped for it. Horizontal movement over the next five years is okay.

I learned just the other day that a five-year architectural degree is one of the best degrees a person can get because it gives you so many professional options (Parents, it was worth it). The world values your ability to do research, to analyze and synthesize, to make decisions, work hard, and work collectively.

Consider a large office or a small office.
In a small office you'll be thrown in to the deep end and learn about all phases of project in a fairly short time and you'll get a sense of the business of the profession.

In a large office you learn professional protocol. You learn the complex nature of large scale projects and the benefit of collaboration. Big offices are more hierarchical and you have to fight against the risk of compartmentalization.

If you choose a large office, then send me your resume in three years.

Do design build. Consider development. Be your own client. SHoP, Cary Tamarkin, and Jared Della Valle are all firms doing good work, making money, having more fun.

You may not be in New York. Go where the *work* is. Look for offices working in China, India, and South America.

Get an advanced degree in urban design, business or landscape design.

Maintain your social contract, your obligation to all constituents. Improve the public realm. Be responsible with our resources.

I'm not worried about you. You're extremely well-trained and you're smart. You must be. You made the decision to come here and you're graduating from the Syracuse University School of Architecture.

Continue to make the right decisions. Exploit your history, expand your experience, and create your own myth.

One last thing. It's not architecture until it's built."

(To learn more about Richard Gluckman, FAIA '71, please visit soa.syr.edu)

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