

**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY: PRESIDENT'S AD HOC COMMITTEE
FREEDOM
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Why do we come together today to discuss the emerging University?

Why are we not out there doing our own thing?

Are we here to learn, to share, to sympathise, to create, to show commitment?

In my first chapter of my first book, (well) *Connected Architecture* (Academy 1994), I wrote: In western society there is a sense that the private life of the individual is now far more important than the public responsibility, which is a reversal of attitudes held only a few decades ago.

This was an observation on our society as a whole, and this same trait was identified and remains today too dominant in the approach to, and the activities surrounding architecture.

Reflecting now upon the wider question of freedom, it is even more evident that the pendulum has swung even further toward the individual, his freedoms at the expense of both our sense of community and perhaps our planet.

We have fought against other nations and other religions to promote and defend our sense of freedom. This historic idea of freedom has served us well, but for the past three decades it has tended towards the extreme limits of social acceptance and tolerance. It is now a handicap to progress.

Not only has technological progress been part responsible for fractured families and communities, but in part, it has also been our hunger for individual freedom - to act alone. We are now paying the price for allowing it to advance so far. We can see this in the distribution of wealth, and the fragility of ecological and economic systems. This personal freedom is evidently at the expense of others.

Freedom is synonymous with independence, which has ultimately manifested itself in the idea that I can do what I want if I can physically or financially do it. It is the dominant ideology that has produced rogue traders, obscene levels of bonuses and the collapse of the banking system, and outrageous salaries for European premiership footballers. Perhaps the UK premiership is heading for financial implosion too.

How can we measure the harm that the freedom of one person does upon another?

We know that one thought or one action can affect the lives of thousands, if not millions. It may be harm to one, or love to another. But if that thought or action is self-centred, it will inevitably harm more than it will nurture.

Self and unself, freedom and incarceration, independence and interdependence - this is the dialectic of our age.

Freedom(s) need a framework, and that framework is order.

I was involved in the rewriting of the Royal Academy of Arts Laws. These were first drafted in 1768 by a few wise men, including Samuel Johnson. In a changed society, we had two fundamental issues with these beautiful crafted laws. The first was that an individual artist could be held responsible for a claim made upon the Academy by a non-member (member of the public) rather than the community of the Academicians.

The second was that Charity Law prescribed a level of accountability that required a gentle twist to the laws. Although a private institution free of government interference or subsidy, the Academy has an obligation to its public and its membership of 90,000 RA Friends, and a degree of 'unself' and 'transparent' regulation was essential.

I also wrote a short essay explaining why individual academicians should have obligations to their fellow academicians, and the Academy as a whole.

The idea of order, and of rules, gives us continuity with the past and an understanding of how our society evolves. As an architect and artist, I know that I am part of an historic intellectual and creative continuum. This gives me a moral perspective which in turn provides social habits which then allows trust to act as a central bonding agent.

As a result life is made easier than in Bladerunner or any one of Hollywood's films of a post-apocalyptic world. This stability, while allowing discreet and incremental change establishes a social psycho-reality which is both comprehensible and essential.

The *quality of order* is measured by achieving a balance between individual freedom and community, between independence and interdependence. It needs resetting.

It is also the case that the 'individual' behaviour of one company, or one nation towards another, needs to be redefined in the context of our connected world.

Connexity, an old English word, embodies this notion of a worldwide society so deeply interconnected and interrelated between man and man, machine and machine, and man and machine.

We need to redefine the meaning and extent of individual freedom in an interdependent society, and reframe our 'orders' to embrace them.

END