Abstract
Drama and Design both have outcomes that cannot be predicted by their authors. This paper investigates a field of design in which this unpredictability is particularly apparent: that of Architectural alteration.

The theory of Architectural alteration has been based hitherto on wider Architectural theory. This has led it into all sorts of blind alleys, in which its own ends cannot be met. This paper seeks to unblock some of these blind alleys, and to model a theory of Architectural alteration on Drama.

Thus conceived, it can offer lessons back to Architecture and Design. The designer can become not just a narrator as author, but also narrator as performer.

Introduction

A story was direct and simple, allowing nothing to come between herself and her reader—no intermediaries with their private ambitions or incompetence, no pressures of time, no limits on resources. In a story you only had to wish, you only had to write it down and you could have the world; in a play you had to make do with what was available: no horses, no village streets, no seaside. (McEwan 2001: 37)

Ian McEwan’s novel Atonement concerns a little girl, Briony, whose world is fatally affected by her desire to exercise authorial control over it. Briony’s story begins with her naïve decision to stage a play. The problems she encounters—described above—are the problems faced by designers every day. As Donald Schon points out:

There are more variables-kinds of moves, norms and interrelationships of these-than can be represented in a finite model. Because of this complexity, the designer’s moves tend, happily or unhappily, to produce consequences other than those intended. (Schon 1983: 79)

Drama and Design both have outcomes that cannot be predicted by their authors. This paper investigates a field of design in which this unpredictability is particularly apparent: that of Architectural alteration. We are used to altering buildings, but only those to which we do not attach Architectural value (fig.1). Stewart Brand’s How Buildings Learn identifies what he calls ‘low road’ buildings as uniquely flexible.

Such buildings leave fond memories of improvisation and sensuous delight...Low Road buildings are peculiarly empowering. (Brand 1994: 33)
Their very lack of ‘designedness’ lends them to easy and constant cannibalisation as new users chop them about to suit new needs.

Low Road buildings are low-visibility, low-rent, no-style, high turnover. Most of the world’s work is done in low road buildings… (Brand 1994: 24)

While this is a useful account of the vernacular, it does not address the terms of reference set by the theory of Architecture—it is not about Architecture, but about buildings. This paper will address what happens when a ‘design’ architect encounters the work of another ‘design’ architect, when he/she encounters another work of Architecture? (fig.2)

The theory of Architectural alteration has been based hitherto on wider Architectural theory. This has led it into all sorts of blind alleys, in which its own ends cannot be met. This paper seeks to unblock some of these blind alleys, and to model a theory of Architectural alteration on Drama, in which the performance is itself the unpredictable outcome of the script. The alterer of Architecture is conceived as the teller of an old tale: a narrator.

The site the architect encounters in the practice of alteration is another building—it is Architecture itself. Since this building already exists, and the task at hand is to restore, conserve, repair, reconstruct, or alter it, the existing building is the prime generator of the project—the subject matter of the project is Architecture itself. The project is Architecture about Architecture: it is reflective.

Schon argues that it is the unpredictable nature of the outcomes of Design that makes it reflection-in-action:

When this happens, the designer may take account of the unintended changes he has made in the situation by forming new appreciations and understandings, and making new moves. He shapes the situation, in accordance with his initial appreciation of it, the situation “talks back”, and he responds to the situation’s back-talk. (Schon 1983: 79)

If Design is itself reflective practice, Architecture about Architecture is doubly reflective. It approaches the state of the ‘finite model’ (ibid.) to which all theory tends. Thus, conceived as Drama, it can offer lessons back to Architecture and Design, whence its own body of theory is derived. The designer can become a narrator, not as author, but as performer.

**Drama Theory: the problem of Script and Performance.**

The ‘ground zero’ of modern drama theory is the late nineteenth century practice of mimetic theatre, the ‘realistic’ translation of the script into performance. Sets that were facsimiles of the scenes described in the script, period costume; and faithfulness to the words of the script attempted to penetrate the gulf between the mind of the author and his audience. For example, Wagner’s Bayreuth stagings of his own operas—*gesamtkunstwerken* over which he had complete control- can be seen as an attempt to immerse the audience in his own imaginings, to conceive of the production itself as a definitive and transparent conduit from one to the other. (Milling and Ley 2001: 28)

Stanislavski was one of the first to question this notion of transparency. He viewed the production not as some window into the author’s mind, but as the arena to which actor and director bring their own contribution. He describes the text of the play as ‘not valuable in and of itself’ (Stanislavski *Building a Character* Milling and Ley 2001: 22) until performers ‘breathe the life of their own sentiment into the subtext’ (ibid.). He encouraged actors to introduce themselves to the play, and to bring their own experiences of analogous emotions and situations to bear upon those within the text.
However, this was not to be achieved at the expense of the unity of the production. Stanislavski always insisted upon the supremacy of the director, who introduces the play to the cast, rather than merely leaving them to ‘arrange the play by themselves’ (Nemirev Danchenko My Life in Russian Theatre Milling and Ley 2001: 6).

Stanislavski’s thinking transformed the idea of the performance. It derives its authenticity and unity not from an incorruptible union between authorial intention and performed manifestation, but from the uniqueness of each performance as a phenomenon in its own right, not as not the projection of one mind, but the physically tangible meeting place between many.

These ideas were developed by Jerzy Grotowski. He placed more emphasis on the presence of the actor than had Stanislavski, insisting on the primacy of performance over script. The performance of the classic play was intended to be like looking at oneself [my italics] in a mirror, at our [my italics] ideas and traditions, and not merely the description of what men of past ages and thought and felt (Grotowski Towards a Poor Theatre Milling and Ley 2001: 131).

The logical conclusion of the idea of the script as an empty skeleton, into which performance breathes life, is that the performance has autonomy. Writing in criticism of ‘realistic’ mimetic theatre, Edward Craig writes:

Today they [actors] impersonate and interpret, tomorrow they must represent and interpret, on the third day they must create…(Craig The Actor and Ubermarionette Milling and Ley 2001: 50)

On the one hand this led, in hands of thinkers like Jacques Copeau, to an interest in improvisation, in which the actor:

...is protecting his territory, trying to win back the encroachments made upon theatre by the litterateur and the writer. (Copeau Texts on Theatre Milling and Ley 2001: 57)

On the other it led to an interest in ancient forms of popular theatre that transcended the script. The commedia dell’arte, mystery plays, and pantomime are forms of improvised performance ordered not by an author, but their own rules of artifice and theatricality. (Miller and Ley 2001: 56)

We cannot say that modern drama theory is a closed and resolved book. However, we can frame its field of reference. Drama theory is quite explicitly about resolving the relationship between two constructs. There is the play, as individually authored: a dry skeleton as yet devoid of life. On the other is the physical and collective fact of the performance, which is simultaneously about the script, and a work of art in it’s own right (fig.3). Theatre is the telling of old tales.

![Figure 3: the frame of reference of Drama Theory](image)

## Traditional Theories of Architecture About Architecture I: Authentication

The care of monuments has traditionally existed between two poles of thought: Restoration, and Conservation. The former approach is best articulated by its first great proponent in nineteenth century France, Viollet le Duc:

The term restoration and the thing itself are both modern. To restore a building is not to preserve it, to repair, or to rebuild it; it is reinstate it to a condition of completeness which may never have existed at any given time. (Viollet le Duc Dictionnaire Raisonne VIII Jokilehto 1999: 151)
Restoration supposed that the authenticity of a building lay in its stylistic and aesthetic unity. For example, Viollet le Duc worked for many years on the restoration of Notre Dame in Paris. He removed Baroque and Neo classical additions that he believed to conflict with the purity of the Gothic style of the original building. He also ’completed’ many parts that he supposed the medieval masons to have left unfinished (fig.4).

Conservationists, led by John Ruskin, saw restoration as:

a destruction accompanied by the false description of the thing destroyed (Ruskin *7 Lamps of Architecture: the Lamp of Memory* Jokilehto 1999: 175).

For conservationists completeness and authenticity lay in the fact of a building’s survival, weathered and worn, in whatever form, from one age of culture to another. However, while a building itself might survive, the people and the society who had made it could not. The Historic building stood as an epitaph to their now-obsolete ways of conceiving and making things.

If this was the case, then restoration was a double crime. One the one hand all sorts of age-old accretions would be removed in order to return the building to a spurious modern notion of ‘purity’.

On the other hand, in order to restore formal unity, gaps in the original execution of the design would have to be filled with modern insertions. These could not be made in the same way or by the same hands as the originals. They would always be ‘a false description’ even if they did match the original fabric exactly in formal or physical terms. As William Morris who founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877 commented:

Surely it is a curious thing that we are ready to laugh at the idea of the possibility of the Greek workman turning out a Gothic building, or a Gothic workman turning out a Greek one, but we see nothing preposterous in the Victorian workman producing a Gothic one. (Morris *History and Architecture*, Miele1996 p.118)

If the Historic building is the epitaph of its makers, then nothing might be added or taken away from it without compromising its integrity. The most that might be admitted was unobtrusive repair (fig.5).

Watch an old building with an anxious care; guard it as best you may, and at any cost, from every influence of dilapidation...bind it together with iron where it loosens; stay it with timber where it declines; do not care about the unsightliness of the aid. (Ruskin *7 Lamps of Architecture: the Lamp of Memory* Jokilehto 1999: 180)

Conservation is a radical strategy, and as such is rarely actually practised, since it permits no alteration to what it finds. While this may be appropriate for the ruin or the obsolete shrine, it is an impossible strategy for the vast majority of old buildings, which remain in use. Morris said of the Historic building:

…if it has become inconvenient for its present use...raise another building rather than alter or enlarge the old one. (Morris *Manifesto of the SPAB*, Miele 1996 p.55)

A third position permits the alteration and extension of the Historic Building. The first charter regarding the Restoration of Historic monuments in Italy, for example, states:

Architectural monuments from the past are not only valuable for the study of architecture but contribute as essential documents to explain and illustrate all the facets of the history of various peoples throughout the ages, they should, therefore, be scrupulously and religiously respected as
documents in which any alteration, however slight, *if it appears to part of the original* [my italics] could be misleading…(Boito *Risoluzione del III Congresso degli ingegneri e architectti Roma 1883* Jokilehto 1999 p.201).

This approach –philological, or documentary restoration- sees the authenticity of the Historic Building not in its aesthetic unity, not in its very survival, but in the legibility of the diverse parts of which that survival is composed. For example, the ancient Theatre of Marcellus in Rome, which was converted into a castle in the middle ages, and a palace in the Renaissance, has been converted into a block of flats. At the same time the area has been excavated to expose to the ‘reader’ all the layers of this complex, hybrid building (fig. 6).

The effects of philological restoration can be felt not just in the conservation debate itself, but also in the contemporary practice of the alteration and extension of historic buildings.

The most influential thinker and practitioner in this field was the architect Carlo Scarpa, who is well known for his alterations to historic buildings in Italy between the 1950’s and 1970s.

Scarpa’s alterations to the Castelvecchio in Verona, a medieval castle, were twofold. On the one hand they involved the excavation and exposure of the layers of a structure that has existed since Roman times, and had been altered many times. On the other, they involved the addition of a new layer to the fabric which allowed it perform a new function as a museum (fig.7). The director of the new museum commented:

> Here we can see the firmly architectural quality of Scarpa’s work by a seemingly inexhaustible sequence of formal inventions articulating the skeleton, the framework partly pre-existing, partly exploded through that surgical operation...(intended to bare all the genuine survivals) and partly built anew, to bind together the scattered limbs, to fill in the gaps without concealing the wounds of time, suturing the links and revealing the joints. (Magagnato *The Castelvecchio Museum* Dal Co1986: 159)

On the one hand Scarpa’s new layer fails to fit into the order of the old building, but sits in a dialectical relationship with it instead, having its own distinctly modernist formal system. This new formal system contrasts a modernist lightness and asymmetry with the classical stereotomic mass of traditional construction. On the other hand, the new layer is apparently separated from the old by the use of shadow gaps which, as a monographer comments: ‘are the medium which both connects the two eras and points out their intrinsic differences’ (Murphy 1990: 9). Thus the old building is altered to fulfil a new function, but adheres to the precepts of *Restauro Filologico*.

Postmodernists such as Colin Rowe and Robert Venturi have taken this notion further. They borrow the notion of bricolage and fragmentation from modernist painting and early modernist architecture (fig. 8). Buildings and cities, they suggest, are incomplete assemblies of fragments, cabinets of curiosity, in the process of perpetual addition and subtraction. Rowe concludes:

> Collage is a method deriving its virtue from its irony, because it seems to be a technique for using things and simultaneously disbelieving in them…collage could even be a strategy which, by supporting the utopian illusion of changelessness and finality, might even fuel a reality of change, motion, action, and history. (Rowe 1978: 149)

No unity of meaning or intention may –without irony- be ascribed to any building. However, multiple readings may be made: the authenticity of legibility remains.
Traditional Theories of Architecture about Architecture II: Falsification

The rise of an interest in the preservation of historic buildings is all about the telling of old tales. It is associated with the rise of Historical Consciousness. History and what to do with its remains, are closely bound together, the latter being a concrete metaphor for the former. UNESCO decreed that cultural heritage:

May be defined as the entire corpus of material signs –either artistic or symbolic- handed on by the past to each culture, and therefore, to the whole of humankind...cultural heritage gives each particular place its recognisable features and is the storehouse of human experience. (Jokilehto 1999: 1)

However, if History is a continuous and multifarious process of change, then the theory of Architecture about Architecture seems to be incapable of representing it.

Restorationists destroy what is there in order to ‘reveal’ –in fact create- the intentions of the original designer, which becomes their fetish. History is frozen at the moment of the conception of the building –it is still-born.

Conservationists freeze History in the present: the building’s life is suspended in coma. This is the result of their fetishisation of the link –seen as sacred and irreproducible- between the intentions of the designer and the building.

The fetishisation of the multiple intentions of the designers of the Historic Building lead philological restorers and postmodernists to deny it any unity. Each part is separated from the other to aid legibility. History is made discontinuous and the building is eviscerated.

It is the insistence on the unity between designer and building, author and text that falsifies the very process to which the care of old buildings is wedded: that of History itself.

Restoration presupposes an ideal design implied by the imperfect reality of the Historic Building. Any such entity presupposes a designer, who, like an author has a unified intent for the building. It also presupposes that this intent can be transparently understood from age to age.

Conservation posits instead that authorial intent cannot be ascertained or reproduced from age to age, and that the building’s only true authenticity lies in the very fact of its physical existence. Therefore the original intent and process of making of the Historic Building becomes an untouchably sacred mystery, too precious to violate.

For philologists and postmodernists, alteration seems to disconnect the authentic from the author, allowing multiple authorships to read simultaneously in any structure. However, its insistence on the legibility of all of those authorships betrays its continuing fascination with the intentionality of design. Different layers are separated from one another to prevent different systems of intent from contaminating one another, preserving for the record traces of all of them.

In all of these theories the building is presupposed to be an organism that transparently reflects the intentions of a designer. Organism, intentions, and designer are considered sacrosanct.

Architectural Theory: The Author in Defiance of Time

This fetishisation of authorial integrity, and of the stopping of the hands of time, litters traditional Architectural Theory.
Architectural theory has, since the Roman theorist Vitruvius, focussed on the balance between three qualities: utilitas –function, firmitas -construction, and venustas –beauty.

Classical theorists see the building as like the human body or the processes of nature, in which balance and proportion reflect the timeless intentions of an ideal creator (fig.9). Alberti stated that Beauty is:

…the harmony and concord of all the parts achieved in such a manner that nothing could be added or taken away or altered except for the worse.’ (Alberti De re Aedificatoria Wittkower 1949: 33)

Form –beauty- is a fixed and perfectible language in its own right.

Laugier and Enlightenment theorists see the model building as the ‘primitive hut’, constructed by the ‘first man’ (fig. 10). This is an instinctively constructed icon uncontaminated by the complexity of culture and historical process. Form follows Construction transparently.

Modernist theorists see the building as the pure and organic result of the programme as conceived by the creator and frozen at the moment of creation (fig.11). Le Corbusier calls upon architects to ‘state the problem’ of the modern dwelling:

Architecture as practised provides no solution to the present day problem of the dwelling house and it has no comprehension of the structure of things. It does not fulfil the very first conditions…(Le Corbusier 1987)

And to solve it with absolute transparency:

A building is like a soap bubble. This bubble is perfect and harmonious if the breath has been evenly distributed and regulated from the inside. The exterior is the result of the interior. (Le Corbusier 1987: 181)

Frank Lloyd Wright and his master Sullivan argued for an organic, direct mapping of Form onto Function.

Classical, Enlightenment, and Modernist theory see the act of godlike authorship as the defiance of the progress of time and change. It is this defiance that lends a building its value as Architecture –designed building.

However, as our brief examination of Architecture about Architecture shows, buildings are very big, and they tend to last for a very long time. We are used to altering them, and interfering with their authored order.

They generally outlive the aesthetic and cultural preoccupations that spawned them, and are altered to suit new tastes. Divinely ordained Form is proved to be contingent convention (fig.12).

They generally last longer than the technologies with which they were constructed. However, left alone they decay, and need to repaired, using technologies which are alien to their original fabric, even if sympathetic. The purity of Constructional is violated (fig.13).

They generally last longer than the purposes for which they were designed, and so they need to be changed to suit new purposes. The mapping of Form onto Function is distorted (fig.14).

Architecture about Architecture is locked into the unpredictability of the outcomes of Design. The Theory of Architecture is based on exactly the opposite and acts as an obstacle to theorising the process of change.
Architecture about Architecture conceived as script and performance.

Drawing analogies between Architecture about Architecture and Drama can help remove this obstacle. The theatre makes regular appearances in Architectural theory. Renaissance and Baroque theorists saw architecture as the symbolic scenery of the *theatrum mundi*: the arena of moral action. Contemporary imagineers create environments as the cinematic spectacle of mass fantasy.

These analogies exist within the theoretical framework for architecture described above. When considering Architecture about Architecture, the relationships within the analogy necessarily change. Traditional architecture-theatre analogies posit people as actors and audience, and architecture as scenery. This new analogy posits the building as the script or score, and each alteration to it as a performance (fig.15).

![Figure 15: Drama Theory as metaphor for Architecture about Architecture](image)

On the one hand there is the script for a play -an organism individually authored, as architecture has traditionally been conceived. On the other there is the idea of the performance itself as a directly experienced physical and psychological phenomenon, as architecture is actually perceived.

Architecture about Architecture becomes not the authoring of new scripts, but the performing of old ones, the retelling of old tales. As such all concepts of authorship, intentionality and the integrity of the work of art are, as drama theorists have long perceived in relation to their own genre, problematic, and possibly irrelevant.

We can view the historic building not as a unified work of art in its own right, but as the ‘ground zero’ of any modern intervention: the script. It is dead in itself –obsolete in function, ‘written’ in language now scarcely comprehensible, obscure, perhaps, in intention, yet the possible soil for future growth. Unperformed, as conservationists might argue, it will remain obsolete, an infertile field, a ruin, a mere text.

We can therefore view the alteration to an historic building as the performance. It will never be, as restoration presupposes, the transparent reflection of authorial intention, but always, as Stanislavski proposes, the meeting place between many intentions. However, this performance need not be a babble as the postmodernists or the philologists might argue, but, as Stanislavski proposes, a unified experience, controlled by a director.

The products of Architecture and Design conceived as script.

If this is the case for Architecture about itself -the reflexive, theorised end of practice- then lessons may be drawn which feed into the more general practice of Architecture.

There is the notion of the building or design as script and use as performance (fig.16). The designer can be envisioned as the playwright, who provides not the finished article, but the skeleton into which use and time will breathe life.

![Figure 16: Drama Theory as metaphor for Architecture and Design](image)
All architects know, but resist the idea, that their buildings will inevitably be altered over time. The building as photographed for the magazine just before the occupants move in.

Stewart Brand makes a strong case against ‘design’ architects, who seek to preserve, their own authorial control over the workings, construction, or beauty of a building.

The race for finality undermines the whole [design and construction] process. In reality, finishing is never finished, but the building is designed and constructed with fiendish thoroughness to deny that. The occupants are supposed to march in and do exactly what was it was declared they would do two years before, during the design stage, and the building will punish them if they don’t. (Brand 1994: 64)

Drama theory shows that the anxiety of the designer is misplaced. The value of the building –even the intentions of its designer- will not be lost in its continuous re-invention by its users. The story of Cinderella, Shakespeare’s authorship of Macbeth, do not cease to be just because they are performed in different ways at different times. In the same way buildings, ‘high road’ as well as ‘low road’ can be re-told again and again without losing their uniqueness as objects, or continuity with their own pasts.

Not all the disciplines of design share Architecture’s rootedness in place, or its longevity in time. Products are moveable, and often short lived. Graphics and digital design seem to dispense with place and time to an even greater degree.

However, all designed products will be misused and re-appropriated; and many will be customised by those who use them (fig. 17,18). If we accept that each performance (i.e. use) will be a new and different interpretation of the script (i.e. the product), then we can abolish the idea of the product as perfect machine that answers every need. We can abolish, as performance theorists have done, the idea that the intentions of the designer could be perfectly communicated to the user. Performance theory shows that that this abolition can be achieved without sacrificing the integrity of the design, the product itself, or the act of use.

The Processes of Architecture and Design conceived as Performance.

The very processes of design and production are more like performance than literary authorship, focussed as it is on the single omnipotent author. Design takes place in teams.

In Architecture, the building itself is only the skeleton upon which the flesh of many other systems is hung by other members of the design team. Servicing systems, with their close relationship to fast-developing technologies, compromise functional authorship. The process of construction itself, compromises constructional authorship. Schemes for interior design and decoration compromise aesthetic authorship. The theory of the stage shows that the ‘fleshing out of the skeleton’ by many, rather than one, need not compromise the integrity of the building itself (fig.19).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script</th>
<th>Drama</th>
<th>Stage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historic Building</td>
<td>Architecture about Architecture</td>
<td>Modern Alteration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building or Product</td>
<td>Architecture and Design</td>
<td>Use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building Structure</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>Building fitout</td>
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Figure 19: Drama Theory as metaphor for Architectural Design Process
Furthermore, if Architecture (about Architecture) is the re-telling of a story, not the original authoring of it, then design in general might be viewed as the performance of its own context, which can include both brief and site, cultural or material (fig.20).

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<tr>
<th>Brief/site/context</th>
<th>Script</th>
<th>Drama</th>
<th>Stage</th>
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<td>Historic Building</td>
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<td><strong>Architecture and Design</strong></td>
<td><strong>Design Process</strong></td>
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Figure 20: Drama Theory as metaphor for Architecture and Design Process

No building or product arises without a brief, in the absence of site to build on or an envisioned market, or outside a time, with its own aesthetic and cultural preoccupations. Indeed the context of any design is the generator of its existence.

Design is the performance and exigesis of this context, not the defiance of it. As Drama theory points out, this performance can have its own integrity without needing to be the perfectly functional, constructed, and beautiful object parachuted onto the *tabula rasa*.

Like performance, the act of design (and its physical product) can be both contingent upon something else, and experientially unified: rooted in context and self-sufficient at the same time.

**Conclusion**

The Theatre is not the design studio, and Architecture about Architecture is a marginal practice. However, possibilities emerge from this study.

The relationship between script and stage, as understood by drama theorists, abolishes the idea of the perfect and indestructible union between author, authored, and audience, that characterises and hobbles much of Design theory. This abolition is achieved without sacrificing the central experience of the theatre itself: its simultaneously physical and narrative nature.

In addition, Architecture about Architecture, a reflexive and reflective practice abolishes, to some extent, the gulf between the abstraction of theory and the contextuality of practice that characterises and hobbles much of Design Theory. This abolition can be achieved without sacrificing the essential distinction between the two.

The little girl in Ian McEwan's novel suffered for her inability to reconcile her own desire for authorial control and the intransigent fact of the world beyond her. She should have listened to Bertold Brecht:

Anyone can be creative, it's rewriting other people that's a challenge (Miller and Ley 2001: p.57)
References

Author's Biography
Edward Hollis is a lecturer in Interior Architecture in the School of Design and Media Arts at Napier University, Edinburgh. He is an architect whose experience in practice has involved the alteration and conservation of Historic buildings, large and small, ancient and recent, throughout Scotland. This was obtained working for the architects Richard Murphy and Nicholas Groves Raines.
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