11.800, Knowledge in the Public Arena: The Uses and Abuses of Research Professors Xavier de Souza, Frank Levy, and Martin Rein Session 10

Research writing for non-academic readers

- 1. Guest: Anne Spirn. The Granite Garden
 - a. Wanted to keep feet in both practice and academic worlds, book was written with that in mind.
 - i. Met editor in 1979 who changed life; convinced to write for a general audience
 - b. Background
 - i. BA at Radcliffe in Art History, closest to art as offered at Harvard
 - ii. Agonized over graduate school: anthropology, art history, art, photography
 - 1. Received four year stipend to get PhD at Penn in Art History
 - 2. Discovered Landscape Architecture
 - a. Ian McHarg: "Multiply and Subdue the Earth" film; book *Design with Nature*.
 - Offered a spot in the incoming class, delayed a year and then switched into landscape architecture
 - c. Post graduate school, worked at Wallace McHarg Roberts and Todd.
 - i. Phenomenal projects
 - 1. "Woodlands New Community: Guidelines for Site Planning."
 - a. Transferring scientific knowledge to the planners and people who would be working in the community.
 - 2. "Environmental Resources of the Toronto Waterfront."
 - a. 1974, realized that there was lots of information on the urban natural environment
 - Most projects: Ecological new communities, ecological new towns built on farmland
 - 1. Students pushing McHarg on doing more urban design
 - a. No scientific information for urban contexts.
 - d. Firms get projects based on books written by principals
 - i. Even during the recession and halt on building in early 1970s.
 - Colleagues thinking about setting up own firms;

- Decided to write a book that would create a clientele for the kind of work I wanted to do
 - Wrote grant proposals, cut back to 30 hours a week (3 days a week);
 - 2. Received fellowship from Radcliffe Institute
 - a. Spent year doing literature research
 - i. A ton of material
 - available, scattered
 - b. At end of year, Radcliffe Institute held publishers day
 - i. City in History editor started own practice as literary agent, gets cut of royalties
 - ii. What do you want to write? Who is your audience?
 - iii. Think about writing for a general audience and send a prospectus: Contents, Sequence of Ideas (Plot), Description of Organization, etc.
 - 3. Started teaching Masters in Architecture program
 - a. Discovered that architecture students don't read
 - b. Decided to target a general audience for books
 - c. Norton, Pantheon, Basic, wanted to see sample writing, sample chapters.
 - d. Writing was much more difficult than I thought
- 3. Interested in figuring out ways for practitioners to do what they do better.
 - a. Trade Publishers vs. Academic Publishers
 - i. Trade: for general audience, 40% discount to bookstore
 - ii. Academic: 10% discount to bookstore, so bookstores don't carry them
 - iii. Some tension eased through Amazon, though you still have to pay more for the book.
- c. Story of writing:
 - i. Finding a voice
 - 1. Struggled with finding a voice for "Air" and "Earth" chapters.

- 2. You must keep the reader reading; have a responsibility to your reader
- 3. How do you grab an audience that is not in your field but still be demanding of the audience and produce some surprises for them?
- ii. Structure of the book
 - 1. Original structure: consequences of ignoring the
 - information first; benefits of using information second a. Problem: wading through negative might turn
 - away audienceb. The structure will come from the material
 - i. Problems with literature: different
 - disciplines weren't speaking to each other
 - 1. New Structure: Air; Earth; Water;
 - Life; Ecosystems
 - 2. Sent to publisher, they say it needs an Introduction
 - a. Introduction: introduces the ideas
 - b. Prologue: introduces the actors
 - c. Epilogue: imagining the future
 - d. Bibliography: in original manuscript, bibliography took up 25% of the pages; Basic printed it in reduced type so it would not be overwhelming to general reader
- iii. Gestalt of the book (as opposed to article or edited volume)
 - 1. While writing book, advised to stop and write three articles
 - 2. Took six months off to try to write articles, but decided to go ahead and finish the book instead
- iv. Practice vs. Academia
- v. Aftermath of the book
 - 1. Not tenured at the point of publication
 - 2. Reviewed in New York Times Book Review the week of its publication
 - a. Boston Globe op-ed at conference where I presented the book
 - b. Phone calls come in asking about practice
 - i. If I had gone into a practice, it would have done what I wanted
 - ii. Decided to give academia ten years
 - No examples of people teaching and practicing with intact marriages
 - 3. Started getting reviews in journals
 - a. Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Planning, History, Geography; etc.
 - History, Geography; etc.
 - i. Jargon tends to prevent academics from crossing disciplines.
 - ii. Spawned new field of urban
 - environmental history
 - 4. Books have a lifetime
 - a. Longer than articles
 - b. The Granite Garden is still in print.