

B
lazon

A
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(
Cuenca)

J

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M
urtaugh



—BLAZON ANALYSIS—

Tenné a chalice gules beneath a plate of six points to chief gules

The town of Cuenca is 175 kilometres east of Madrid and 200 kilometres west of Valencia. Established in 714 by the Arabs as 'Kunka', the old fortified city rests on high ground between the Júcar and Huécar rivers, one hundred metres above the newer urban centre. Estación Fernando Zobel, the recently constructed main rail station, is a further ten kilometres south of the city.

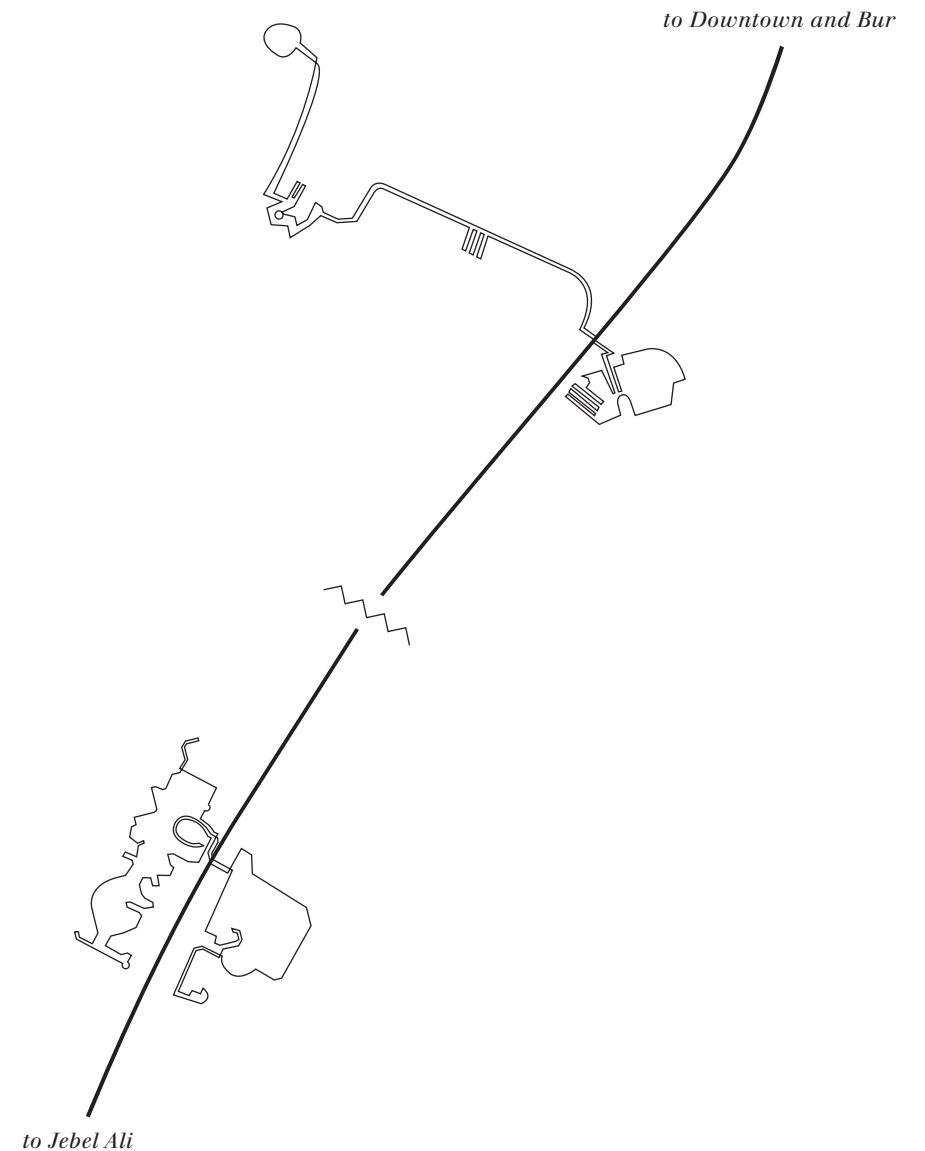
I first visited on 31 January 2013, traveling on a morning train from Madrid-Atocha, on the recommendation of a colleague who at dinner only the night before suggested that the city's historic 'hanging houses' would be of interest given my architectural background. Without a specific plan in mind or knowing the distance from the station to the old city, I walked into town—I suppose, as one did before motorised transportation.

Approaching the city limit, my attention was drawn to the frequent use of the municipal arms—a deep red escutcheon decorated with unequivocally Catholic iconography. The heraldic symbol was not only on the customary civic propaganda but more often found in unusual public and private contexts. Imprinted in the pavements or painted on restaurant marquees, I even began to see it in the graffiti down side alleys. Furthermore, each version of the insignia was slightly different.

Later research revealed that the city's blazon (the heraldic word-picture on which the iconography is based) is not universally agreed upon. Discovering this, I gathered my materials from that first visit to assemble a design analysis of the emblem, identifying the varied ways in which it is rendered. Secondly, I produced my own version of the heraldic icon with the intention that it become standardised.

When the process reaches completion, the new municipal arms will be emblazoned on a functional combat shield and returned to the city of Cuenca.

20 MAY 2011



— FRIDAY 26 AUGUST 2011, 14:05 —

How is it?

After taking a deep pull from the straw, he leans back. Yeah. Not bad.

The four of them arrived separately over a period of about ten minutes. The group have met each week, more or less, for the last two years. Satisfied with his review of the comically large iced coffee, Deena began. So who goes first?

They composed an unlikely clique. Deena, an Omani-American architect, was born in Kuwait. Next was Evan, a business consultant from Melbourne. Across the table from them is Philipp, a branding specialist from Duisburg via Madrid—and finally ██████████. Each relocated here after employment in America. Each did so, unapologetically, for the money. This fact did not distinguish them at all in Khalifa City A.

When they first met, their conversations had a special tone, as if they might be relatives. It all seemed like a long time ago.

— MONDAY 7 JUNE 2011 —

Returning home was a constant adjustment. Six flights in three days wears heavily on the body.

Entering his apartment, he detected a large brown envelope amongst the rest of the scattered post. Closer examination revealed a handwritten address with no note of its origin. He sits down, then opens it.

Inside is a handwritten prospectus, a few pages long. There is a peculiar underlined statement midway down the first page.

This enterprise is the quintessence of our next economic century.

— THE ANTICHRIST HYPOTHESIS —

*This is the story of a person who does not claim to be a fighter for patriotic causes, a political leader or diplomat, it is merely a story of an ordinary citizen, who found himself thrust into the midst of events he had no choice but to be a part of—events he could neither evade or distance himself from as they unfolded.*₁

I

A ancient city awakens. Dormant and forgotten for thousands of years, it rises to conquer. Centuries in occidental shadows gave this once quasi-necropolis far more than a thirst for light. Accordingly, it raises an army of mercenaries.

Hordes of highly-trained foreign soldiers stream in from across the globe. Speaking every language that humankind possesses, they have led legions in both their homelands and distant locales while learning in the most revered temples of knowledge. These warriors are not at liberty from their mother countries for any lack of ability but because they are surplus to requirements. Their skills no longer fit the narrative of their home societies. Paradoxically, they are outcasts.

The battle is to usurp a distant, overseas dominion. The city transubstantiates under the guidance of its leading families, modernising itself for a new kind of combat. Introducing these mercenaries fertilises this refurbishment and promotes its leaders' just, homogenised concept of progress. This war will be bloodless, its gains will lack physical territory. Victory will not result in subjugation. The prize in this campaign is respect.

His eyes glaze over and further comprehension was impossible. The document is set on a side table. Weeks pass before it again comes to mind.

— WEDNESDAY 6 JULY 2011 —

He had writing due for The National's late summer business supplement.

While he was meant to provide some warmed-over insight on how urban growth had been affected by the worldwide financial belt-tightening, his head was elsewhere.

He would write about that document—that decision was made before he was conscious of the option. It was impossible to stop wondering whom might be attracted to such a business. A veil of compulsion draped over him and he set to work.

— FRIDAY 26 AUGUST 2011, 14:25 —

All four had read the article. None were typically paranoid but in this instance, the threat was clear. Evan saw it first. A steward placed a newspaper on the table following his breakfast meeting at the Rose Rayhaan last Sunday. He read through it three times before absorbing the trouble it posed. He called Deena first and reached the rest by lunchtime.

Deena stood to drop the most financially but ████████'s very existence was at stake. After twenty minutes, today's crisis talk was going nowhere. Tensions were broiling even before this incident and all appeared on-edge. None of this mattered to Deena. She had already decided what to do.

***Evan, want a cigarette?** The other two didn't smoke.*

Yeah, right behind you.

II

The history of speculative capital is now older than those steering it. The effect of being raised, educated and employed within an environment where actual value has little to do with commodity is total—our minds are wired for a lifestyle completely indecipherable to our grandfathers. There are at least two unique professions of the interregnum between capital and whatever comes next, products of their time that are more symbiotic than they initially appear.

The first profession is that of the independent business consultant. Such persons are well-educated and English-speaking, with executive experience but often lacking any specialist training. They are products of North American or European universities, factories for producing MBAs set loose to a world which does not demand them. With education debt and families to begin, a percentage of these consultants float to distant countries where there is enough of an economic development lag for a competently trained executive to take advantage and forge a career. These people tend not produce new ideas or knowledge, they replicate tested methods to engineer predictable growth on an ever-decreasing scale.

The second profession shares almost exactly the same traits, despite appearing nearly the opposite to conventional eyes. Similarly educated and nonspecialist in focus, they also redistribute themselves across the globe to areas with a perceived progress deficiency. They are not required in their states of origin, but pass for distinctive creatures while abroad, replicating historical methodologies to cultivate interest. This is the role of the professional contemporary artist.

If we strip away our preconceptions of career purity, the professions are one and the same—liberally educated nonspecialists, operating in unfamiliar lands with the expectation that they generate 'something' from 'nothing'.

From a neutral standpoint, this activity would constitute a miracle. I suggest that these professions mutually occupy a position in our globalised society as secular Christ figures.



—— NINETY SECONDS LATER ——

■■■■■ returns from the toilet to find Philipp alone, checking his Blackberry.

« ■■■■■ asks Philipp if his friend Lucas had spoken to him »

We had some drinks last night—you were a topic of conversation. How are things going between you two?

« ■■■■■ assures Philipp everything is fine but worries an email she sent may have upset him »

No, he didn't say anything. What was it?

« She had a particularly haunting dream last weekend and needed to tell someone »

Hesitating at first, she recounts the vision.

—— THE DREAM ——

It was late. ■■■■■ found herself in the back of an automobile.

A recent model Rolls, maybe a Phantom. The city looked like New York. She immediately recognised the driver as a well-known comedian, while in the front passenger seat was a fairly prominent artist. (No one any of her friends knew, however.) The men were British, yet the car was left-hand drive. It felt like Manhattan. Her hand held a business card which she faintly recalled receiving from the front passenger.

Extremely thin, gold card stock—light brown, actually—and printed in a colour tone very slightly off that of the paper. The design consisted of an amorphous grid. Across the bottom was a name that did not belong to anyone in the car.

III

This is not a theological argument, merely a hypothesis like the imaginary number in mathematics—a prerequisite for equations that didn't exist before its invention.

The professional consultant-artist character, controlled and inert, manufactures nothing but the replication of that role—sediment of the natural limits of speculative capital. That these persons fall into economic cracks in Qatar, China, or elsewhere isn't really the problem; rather the alien position they hold is highly restricted and only exists on the whims of a disconnected class of natives. The consultant-artist character regards themselves as a high status progressive, while the reality is far different—they are merely agents for socioeconomic stability.

However, these mercenaries can be galvanised for greater effect within their theoretical combined profession. Richard Sennett's *The Uses of Disorder* suggests an alternative idea of equilibrium, where higher measures of uncertainty can fortify otherwise healthy environments:

She is made conscious of a kind of equilibrium of disorder in the lives of adults around her ... their contacts are more explanations of a constantly shifting environment than an acting out of unchanging routines.²

A related professionalized art perspective comes from John Latham, who notably coined the term 'incidental person' to hypothesise similar unasked questions:

In the course of conducting a professional role an [incidental person] has to approach all contexts without any declared personal bias. The work will demonstrate or indicate the strongest lines of difference in interpretation if it is known that the position is approached without temporary enthusiasms, publicly declared causes supported, political formulations already circulated. The strength of a well-stated viewpoint can be the greater for this adopted independence, the political impact included.³

STUDIO [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] CORPORATION
217 BOWERY

The time cuts quickly to the afternoon of the next day. [REDACTED] finds herself at the address on the card and seated on a Gehry couch, uncomfortable and shifty.

A third man stood in front of her, at a distance of roughly 5 metres. He was reading aloud from a book. Losing focus, [REDACTED] began to stare off toward the empty street. She found herself reconstructing the man's vocalisations into another abstract drama. The man's reading ceases abruptly.

***What are you doing?** he demands.*

Thinking.

*Exasperated, the man shouts. **Fuck! We're done here!***

—FRIDAY 26 AUGUST 2011, 14:28—

Contracts were rolling in for Deena despite the supposed downturn. They might be smaller but there was still money flowing. She resolved to ensure this continued.

Philipp and Evan were quickly losing confidence and decisive action was needed to bring them back into focus. The safest course was also the simplest.

—FRIDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2011—

He had no lasting impression of the events a fortnight earlier, The reports produced nary a ripple outside the Gulf.

Instead, his thoughts wandered to a recent evening when, procrastinating, he came across a 60s era film set in Chicago. This film made him realise a significant trait in the manner people reconstruct historical characters.

It's crucial to understand the Christ archetype as the lynchpin of ecclesiastical politics. Religion requires one or more charismatic figures with the ability to captivate an exponentially larger number through historicised words and actions. Such figures appear autonomous but are symbiotic with bureaucracy, icons for societal control. Christs cannot account for themselves.

Slavoj Žižek undertook an examination of man's relationship with God through Christ where he distinguishes between the human and divine:

Once God became man, there was no longer a God one could return to or become... the point of Incarnation is that one cannot become God, not because God dwells in a transcendent beyond, but because [approaching it] is irrelevant. The only identification is the identification with Christ.₄

From Žižek's standpoint, God took a major risk by inhabiting the medium of Christ to disturb *status quo*. He also points to aspects of Christian theology that underpin a desire for revolution, citing G.K. Chesterton, a British Catholic: "That a good man may have his back to the wall is no more than we knew already; but that God could have His back to the wall is a boast for all insurgents for ever. Christianity is the only religion that has felt that omnipotence made God incomplete—a rebel as much as a king."₅ Extracting the structure of Christ from its religious context may preserve its dignity without dogma and reinvigorate an insurgent quality made inert by politics.

Vito Acconci, known primarily as a conceptual artist, has operated as an architect for more than twenty years despite not possessing any architectural education or a license. While his art output is easily codified and archived by museums and the professional art world, they have trouble with his architectural legacy. His 'second career' is only connected to his first through the historicisation of Acconci as an antihero. To the contrary, Acconci remarks that his only expectation of art was to become subsumed as a strategy for going about life.

I hope [art] is heading toward its own dissolution. I don't think there is any reason anymore for it to exist as a separate field. Art is rather a kind of methodology, a kind of mode of operation, a kind of way of doing things that really is part of any field. ... I just

Contemporary accounts illustrate wartime heroes as people of that time. When these heroes are removed from their milieu, they are portrayed as lost but possessed with a 'truer' quality, an oral tradition cliché. 'Past times were morally simpler.' Fascism never died, it became microscopically balkanised. The new world was comprised of miniature dictators.

Maybe he'd just eaten too much leftover pizza.

— FRIDAY 26 AUGUST 2011, 14:29 —

I know what we can do to end this today.

Deena had waited until their second cigarette to bring it up— he puffed before asking what she had in mind.

We all know ████████ is the risk. I think we can move ahead without her.

I'm not sure she'll go away easily, Evan says.

Well, I wasn't thinking of asking her to leave...

Her words hung with the smoke.

*wonder, if art is a very convenient way for people to develop self-satisfaction, because they think they are doing something that not everybody is doing.*⁶

While an admirable idea (perhaps one I agree with) the art-as-everything-and-everything-as-art model carries substantial baggage. Merging art activity into all things succeeds in lessening its commodity value but risks absorption by power structures resulting in a higher degree of manipulation.

Acconci describes how his decision-making process evolved in a long-form interview with *Architectural Record* in 2007. In the web version of the article, the comments section features an argument about Acconci's architectural credibility while not possessing a license. One anonymous response is striking:

*Licensing is like religion...A religious person does not mean they believe in God's spirit truly, sometimes it is only a cover up for their insecurities... We all know that. A license is not a measure of one's intelligence or competence. It is a gauge of one mind to think alike with the licensing test.*⁷

I return to Žižek, who in *The Monstrosity of Christ* describes a series of notes Richard Wagner made in a supplementary text to his opera 'Jesus of Nazareth', specifically regarding the ten commandments.⁸ Wagner's notes chose to internalize the commandments' restrictions, 'making it much more severe'—*I shall not commit adultery*, for example. Žižek suggests Wagner intends to reinforce that rules do not exist without an active moral component rather than a cold list of dogmatic orders. It also indicates the internalization of principle, solopistically binding up purpose and execution in a single package. This is an important blueprint for the consultant-artist alternative.

—FRIDAY 26 AUGUST 2011, 14:33—

« ██████████'s dream account is interrupted by the others' return »

The mood did not improve in the next fifteen minutes as the meeting slid into disjointed, chaotic bickering. Philipp chose this moment to completely derail the conversation.

The real trouble is with you, Deena. You've forced our hand too quickly. It's bad now, yes. But you just want to protect your investment and ██████████'s butt.

Deena shouted something unkind, which caught the attention of the nearby table-cleaner. This was going nowhere. They all had money riding on the project, to say nothing of their pride and their futures.

Evan took a breath and suggested they call it a day. They departed as separately as they arrived. ██████████ suspected nothing.

—FRIDAY 26 AUGUST 2011, 14:47—

« ██████████ is in a taxi. She drifts off, recalling the rest of her dream »

—THE DREAM, CONTINUED—

The man had stormed off, and soon after ██████████ decides to leave. As it was a sunny afternoon she walked the thirty blocks to where she vaguely recalled staying, while absentmindedly recording the numbers of people eating in outdoor cafes on the side streets.

She was on the ground before realising it. Looking back at an upturned table, food and papers were scattered everywhere. A man stood beside his chair, saying nothing.

IV

We need antichrists.

By this, I mean persons already in the consultant-artist mercenary role but reformatted to take full advantage of their personal authority. Unbound by superiors or style, they may be able to step from the treadmill of capital history. Freelance antichrists would not exist to consume others but to provide important opposition to the static terms of post-industrial labour. I do not claim antichrists as the only way beyond the deep rut speculative capital has laid for us, nor do I advocate using the still-warm corpses of hyper-capitalist cities as a testing ground.

Personal authority does not constitute anything like the business self-empowerment stereotype: 'be-your-own-boss' or other such nonsense. What I intend by personal authority is an internalisation of principles, as Žižek proposes was Wagner's desire in the musical notations for his aborted opera. This is an authority of conviction—anarchic, perhaps—where one's responsibilities are flattened rather than beholden to ambitions of conformity. It's also necessary to consider the individual as a smaller unit than the cliques or social circles championed in professional art by the relational aestheticians of the late 90s. Liam Gillick and Phillipe Parreno's text *Le labyrinthe moral* (as of September 2013 posted on the front page of Gillick's website) illustrates the limited thinking associated with a brain constrained by speculativism.

He considers himself to be something of a subversive, independent thinker, especially within the context of traditionally liberal organizations. His job for X is to consider their overall policy, in fact he is their policy adviser. ... Labour saving devices have changed the needs of business and also have changed the way we can work as individuals. ... These changes were also aided by the X Government's changes to the tax laws in X. They made it easier to register as self-employed. This was intended to help small businesses and industry but has in fact been exploited by creative people and policy advisors. ... He was not doing anything illegal, but this change towards self-employment and apparent loss of loyalty to a company, led to pressure which forced him to clarify his position.⁹

██████ apologises. She stares at the spill as the waitress tidies up but the man remains silent. ██████ offers help. The man explains that he is taking a break from working on an important assignment. Rising and cleaning herself off, she sits down to the restored surface. ██████ doesn't recall much of the following conversation, a series of strange questions on topics like Renzo Martens or Shinto monasteries. This person was peculiar yet she felt deeply obliged.

The man completes writing, mentioning that he must send it before 5 PM. He slides it into a brown envelope, she offers to mail it. They shake hands.

██████ hands it to the clerk upon entering the post office, who asks if she wants to write a return address—the envelope didn't have one. Not knowing her own, ██████ nearly gives the one on the business card. She chooses to leave before answering.

—FRIDAY 26 AUGUST 2011, 15:12—

Philipp's phone rings. It's Deena.

I'm sorry. Things ended badly today.

It's okay. What I said was uncalled for. All of us are devoted to the project and we didn't need another obstacle.

Alright. Deena already knows he's going to go for it. This is why I'm calling, we must move forward. I already spoke to Evan. He's on board. It's important you are too.

Philipp felt a chill. Breathing sharply, he pressed her to continue.

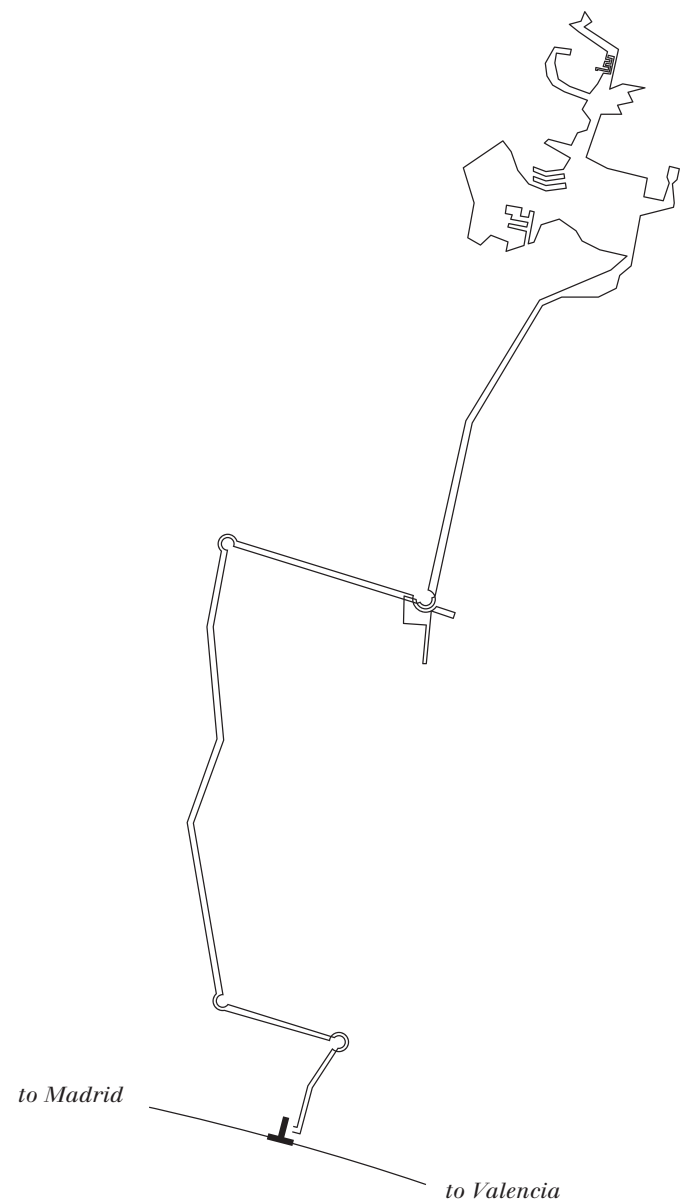


A desire for normality, even to a self-assured socially liberal mind, obfuscates much of any human's potential through lateral thinking and experimentation. One wouldn't need to be trained in art or business to fill an antichrist role, in fact professional exposure to other fields (much like Acconci's architectural career) could be more useful.

The time has come to appreciate that the limitations of accepted career pathways—an idea already rubbished with the acknowledgement that contemporary life demands competent functionality in a number of historically diverse employment fields—unnecessarily binds us to extant obsolete structures: nations, municipalities, corporations or economies.

Large numbers of independent, multi-functionary cells (freelance antichrists) can generate the friction necessary to break through speculation's limitations and discover what comes next for ourselves.

31 JANUARY 2013



*Why, at this point in history,
are such stories so popular?*

*Is it a rekindled desire for heroes or fables?
Is it a byproduct of fear and terrorism?*

Mostly, it concerns authority.

*It doesn't matter if it's seen or understood.
What matters is it's done.*



