This man has been around here for fifty years. That is half a century. And now, finally, they are having a day for him.

I have been his colleague probably longer now than anyone, and my role is here is pretty clear. He has been lurking in the shadows here for a long time, and I am expected to tell all of you what this shy, withdrawn, self-effacing man is really like.

Well, here he is – out in the light at last!

No one needs to tell you what he is like. If you are here, you already know him, or you have some idea of what he is like. And it is probably a pretty accurate idea. But it can be at best only partial. Whatever you think of him, it captures only part of him. It is the same with me, even though I have known him much longer than most of you.

I think of John and Dagmar as friends of mine almost from my boyhood. That isn’t quite true, but when I think of those early days in Berkeley I can’t believe how young we all once were together. I suppose it is something that happens to most of you. We would all get together almost every week and moan about how slow or resistant our senior colleagues were to doing the things we could see were obviously needed to make this a much better philosophy department. (As junior colleagues have always done everywhere, down to our own day). But we didn’t just talk about it. We were eventually able to do something about it – by convincing others, by getting new people to come and see how good things could be here, by making
some bold moves, but above all, by not giving up. John was always at the
centre of all that. He has always cared deeply about Berkeley, and about
being at Berkeley, and has always been committed to making this a better
and better place for philosophy. And it has worked. And John has never
given up. Fifty years is a pretty strong commitment.

Of course it has not been just a matter of strategies and politics
and other kinds of administrative activity. There is, above all, John’s
contribution to philosophy. Part of that is his teaching. He has taught
thousands of eager Berkeley students over the years. He has helped raise
the level of their thinking not just about philosophy but about almost
everything else. And there is that huge and still-growing body of John’s
philosophical writings. All of that, and its fame and its influence,
stands there as a distinctively Berkeley product. It is a huge part of
what has made this department and this whole university the intellectually-
important place it has become in the fifty years he has been here.

Everyone knows about that work – its importance, its
interconnectedness, and its impressive range. It is perhaps less well
known that, starting in the 1960s, John’s writings were among the first new
philosophical works in English to be translated into French and German and
other languages and eagerly read and discussed and fought over throughout
Europe. If there is now a much smaller gap, and much more two-way traffic,
than there used to be between philosophy in English-speaking countries and
philosophy in continental Europe – as there is – John Searle’s work was a
major factor in that change. It took some time before there was much of
equally high quality going from this side of the English Channel and
getting absorbed so deeply into the philosophical culture on the other
side. By now, the influence of John’s work is world wide, but he was in
the forefront of what has developed into the mutually profitable
interaction of philosophers on both sides of the Channel.

That is the John Searle most of you here probably know best: the
world-famous philosopher, the brilliant lecturer whose classes you have to
fight to get into. But even if you can’t get in you can buy a whole set of
his lectures to look at and listen to at home. But it is not as much fun!

Let me try to say a few things about what I think John Searle is
really like. Some things you might have noticed already.

There is a psychological syndrome or attitude or cast of mind that
used to be called “low tolerance of ambiguity”. I haven’t heard much of it
lately; I don’t know if it is still called that. By now it has probably
been identified with some activity in the brain. ‘Ambiguity’ isn’t exactly
the right word. It is more like “low tolerance of indecisiveness or
uncertainty or indeterminateness”. Well, whatever the condition is called,
John has got it. He can’t stand not to have a view about something. And
he is not well pleased with others who either cannot or will not make up
their minds. This is obviously true in deliberative meetings, for
instance, but also in philosophy. I myself have sometimes felt that I have
incurred this kind of feeling on John’s part. He can give the impression
that he regards uncertainty or wavering, or even wanting to think about it
a little longer, as a certain kind of weakness – like a wimp who is
hesitant to ski down the steepest mountains or drive fast cars around sharp curves. I think I have seen signs in recent years of John’s acknowledging that some ill-understood complexities perhaps lie behind some of the things we all know to be true, but the basic syndrome remains.

Another and more important characteristic of John’s, perhaps related, is what I think is best described as his loyalty or commitment. It might sound strange, but for all his individuality, I think there is a way in which John can be said to be a team player. Not that he plays on only one team, and not that he sinks into selfless anonymity on any team or any side he thinks of himself as on. But he certainly stands up for the side he is on, and without doubt or hesitation. John believes in certain things, and certain causes, and certain people, and he sticks by them and defends them. For him that is all there is to it; that is the side he is on. This is most obviously true in relation to his family. I have mentioned that it is true of his relation to the philosophy department, and to this university. I believe it is also true of John’s relation to this country. And the same is true of his relation to many individual people he has continued to think highly of over the years, and to defend and encourage. His attachment to them, and his support, is simply not in question for him.

But what a person is really like is shown in what they do, and what they have been doing. And many of you here will perhaps not know what John has been doing in the last fifty years beyond the philosophical teaching and writing we are all familiar with. I can’t tell you much. But I can tell you that it has been a very busy time.
When John first came here, in the late 1950s, there was no Department of Homeland Security to keep us safe in our homeland. There was a committee of the House of Representatives called The House Unamerican Activities Committee. It was to keep us safe in our homeland by holding hearings all over the country, especially in California, to weed out activities and thoughts and attitudes that are not appropriately American and so a danger to us all. When the committee met in San Francisco in 1960 John was there with hundreds of others, protesting the presence and activities of the committee, and so being herded away by the police along with other suspiciously “unAmerican” subversives.

When Berkeley students protested the de facto ban on political activity on the campus in 1964 John was there again, protesting on the side of the students, and playing an active role in forming the faculty’s position of support. You can see some of the pictures of all this on the walls of the Free Speech Café on the campus. The protest brought down the Chancellor of this university, and the new chancellor who was appointed had known John at Michigan when John was a Visiting Professor there a year or two earlier. On arriving in Berkeley that chancellor made the very shrewd move of appointing John as his special assistant for student-university relations, and so in charge of the conditions for protests and demonstrations on the campus. He had to make John his special assistant because any more official office would have needed the approval of the Regents of the University. And the Regents were on to John, because of his activities in the Free Speech Movement, and probably from the HUAC protests.
as well. So now John was on another team. But equally committed, and equally effective.

He remained for years on the front lines in that position, through much of the turmoil of the protests against the war in Vietnam. The target of that protest was of course much wider, but the university, perhaps even the very idea of a university, was still under attack. It was unenviable work, by which John was completely absorbed. From his experiences in that job he wrote a book about student unrest called *The Campus War* and then went on the rubber-chicken circuit for several years giving speeches to interested professional institutes about what I must report he came to refer to privately as “the kid problem”.

In roughly those same years he was on television every week, on a show called World Press. Half a dozen experts would review the press of the previous week from this or that region of the world. John covered the British press for some time, but he was so good at it, so brisk and incisive, that they made him the moderator of the whole panel. He could then try to keep everyone else up to the high standard he had set, mostly by asking them sharp questions they hadn’t exactly answered in their own prepared reports. It was a very informative show. As we all know, John did not pursue a career in television.

During his apparently all-consuming job in the university administration he was of course still teaching and writing the philosophy he is famous for. After he left the administration he did many other things, including giving the famous Reith Lectures on the BBC in London and
broadcast all around the world. In this country he was appointed to the National Council of the Humanities and made periodic visits to the capital as what some of us naively thought of as “our man in Washington”. He was also for many years on the board of directors of one of California’s best wineries. He continued to give hundreds, by now probably thousands, of lectures to all kinds of audiences on all kinds of subjects. And all of this in addition to the prodigious activity we see and hear him carrying out closer to home, in that humming philosophical factory on the bottom floor of Moses Hall.

All this and more, much more, is what he has been doing for the last fifty years. It takes my breath away even to recount it. To carry on like that for ten years would be formidable. To do it for fifty years, and to still be doing it now the way he was doing it then, is unbelievable.

Does this tell us what John Searle is really like? There is no capturing it. I have touched on only a few aspects. Others will tell us more. For me, I think John is summed up best in a single sentence – a sentence he wrote himself. It is my favourite sentence in the whole Searle corpus. It comes in his book Intentionality, when he has been discussing “realism”. He declares himself a “realist”, but he says “realism” is not a hypothesis or a belief or a philosophical thesis. Here is the sentence:

My commitment to “realism” is exhibited by the fact that I live the way I do, I drive my car, I drink my beer, write my articles, give my lectures, and ski my mountains.
That is John. Well, that was *Intentionality* in 1983, so that was John then. Now he drives a much fancier car, he drinks mostly red wine rather than beer, he still writes his articles but he writes almost as many books as he does articles, he still gives his lectures which are even harder to get into, and he still skis his mountains.

That is John. But before we raise our imaginary glasses in a toast to John we must remember that this is only part of the story. There, next to John, is Dagmar. She has been there too through all these fifty years and more. She is part of the team, and part of the accomplishment. It has always been a team. It is true, perhaps, that Dagmar does not drive John’s car (at least the Porsche). She does not drink John’s red wine or even John’s beer. But she does contribute to the writing of John’s articles and John’s books, as John has always made clear. And in that way she also has a hand in John’s giving his lectures. And Dagmar too, as part of the team, still skis John’s mountains.

So to both John and Dagmar we say Congratulations! and Thank you for a wonderful fifty years!

Barry Stroud