Warm-up Essay: "The Future of the Testing Role" Lecture by James Bach

In his 2017 lecture, James Bach argues for the importance of dedicated software testing specialists in an age where agile development methodologies have made companies question the need for testers. Due to early agile philosophy, companies made quality assurance a shared task in development teams. Bach insists that testing specialists are important and that we should take pride in our craft. Some agile teams without testers cannot look forward and mostly use JUnit testing and mock-up data. Testing is thus seen as a short-term activity.

In most companies, measurability is valued. The testing practice must be legible, while the reality of testing work can be very abstract. Testers should be better at advocating for the value they create in organizations, as testing is often parallelized with detecting bugs, testing creates new knowledge and information about processes and the product.

The team perspective is on success, but according to Bach, testers must focus on failure and risk management. An independent tester is important, as the tester is free to see things from a more critical perspective, as they are not burdened by fixing the detected bugs and issues. He had some interesting points on role fluidity, inviting more than testers to do testing but still having designated testers manage and take responsibility for the testing process.

Testing is not easy, according to Bach. Often, testing is seen as an easy task, as just shallow testing is done in small contexts. I appreciated the "We do not break software; we break the dreams of it" quote. It takes practice and expertise in both software development and domain knowledge to look beyond the obvious.

The testing effort should be displayed in a way that does not dumb down the work testers do and showcase it beyond generated test cases. Bach is critical of the cookie-cutter mentality and argues that certifications like the ISTQB have dumbed testing down. While this sort of systematic testing that the ISTQB stands for is probably needed in many contexts, Bach's opinions are interesting, though they might be viewed as provocative.

Bach is also skeptical of test automation in addition to certifications. I can understand his viewpoint and would not be surprised if, still today, there is a belief that test automation can cover all testing aspects and replace testing specialists. Having dedicated testers can be seen as insurance, but sometimes it is hard for leadership to look beyond the return on investment perspective.

For me, who is interested in testing and quality assurance as a first career choice in IT, it is saddening to hear that testing is often seen as just a stepping stone to other areas of software development. Meanwhile, Bach's enthusiasm for testing is inspiring as well. This lecture was an interesting take on advocating for the importance of one's work, and the real-world difficulties that testing deals with.