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**THE MISFITS, NON-CONFORMISTS, OUTSIDERS,
RADICALS AND REBELS: AN ATTEMPT AT RESISTING
THE DOMINANT STRUCTURES OF SPATIAL DESIGN
EDUCATION**

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Slide 01 - Title slide

Name / Title / Role

Institution

I am a Senior Lecturer with nearly three decades of experience developing, delivering, and leading programmes, in spatial design education. My practice-led research is driven by an interest in messy, mischievous and subversive pedagogies, and in the consequences of architecture, particularly underused and overlooked spaces within towns and cities.

**Slide 02: The Misfits, Non-Conformists, Outsiders, Radicals and Rebels.
An Attempt at Resisting the Dominant Structures of Spatial
Design Education.**

Graphic: protagonists

Abstract (tightened up):

Rather than advocating for the unrealistic wholesale reinvention of pedagogical practice, this paper argues for a more nuanced approach, exploring how pedagogies can be used to further disrupt the neo-liberal agenda, within Undergraduate spatial design education.

Drawing on the radical pedagogies of Colin Ward and Anthony Fyson (1973), Ivan Illich (2011), Paul Goodman (1971), Everett Reimer (1973), and Paulo Freire (2000), and Schick and Timperley (2022) (the Fellowship) this inquiry explores the continued relevance of their ideas in shaping undergraduate spatial design curricula. It does so at a time when Higher Education (HE) faces systemic pressures, including underinvestment, commodification, and standardisation, amid the chaotic educational reforms led by Architects Registration Board (ARB) and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

Alternate forms of articulation will be used to enable the disruption of the overly rigid, dominant and orthodox modes of formal academic writing, through the production of a critical discourse in the form of manifestoes, vignettes, and metalogues. Suggesting an approach that cultivates ‘small pockets of resistance’ (Schick & Timperley, 2022) where learners and educators are provided the opportunity to challenge the hegemonic gatekeepers, in the pursuit of the mischievous, subversive and sometimes absurd.

Thematic: Resistance / Subversion / Absurdity

Slide 03: Graphic

This presentation forms part of an ongoing trilogy of interconnected papers. The first paper (this one) explores the theme of **resistance**, the second will interrogate **subversion** and the third **absurdity**. The trilogy unfolds as a metalogue examining how learning might flourish when authority, educational jargon, metrics, and bureaucracy are resisted, among those who have long wrestled with the question of what it means to learn. And although the scholars speak from different decades, contexts and continents, their words resonate with the present.

The practices explored here disrupt the dominant narratives of efficiency, employability, and professional readiness. They do not seek escape, but provide moments of friction, where governing structures can falter, hesitate, or be quietly reworked. Learning in this setting is not delivered, but negotiated, contested, and situated. It is not designed to resolve disagreement, but to hold it open. And much like learning, the trilogy does not seek conclusion, it asks only that you listen.

Thematic: Metalogue / Fictocriticism / Collage

Slide 04: Graphic: Methodological Practice

Metalogue

Metalogue, a term coined by Gregory Bateson (1972) will be used to stage encounters between competing voices, allowing contradictions, uncertainties and disagreements to remain unresolved. It will attend to small acts of resistance that emerge in tension with regimes of standardisation, audit cultures, professional accreditation.

Fictocriticism

Fictocritical methods further enable the blending of theory, narrative, reflection and speculation, creating space for vignettes and imagined exchanges that blur the boundaries between research, practice and pedagogy. Together, these approaches challenge the dominant academic conventions. In doing so, the trilogy treats writing itself as a pedagogical and political act, aligned with traditions of radical, emancipatory education.

Collage

The settings in which our protagonists encounter one another are of equal importance, and so the text is complemented by a series of handmade collages.

Spatial design

For the purpose of this paper, the term spatial design refers to Architecture, as the regulated; Interiors as the commodified, and finally Disruptive Spatial Praxis (Pedagogy) (DSPx) as the unregulated.

Thematic: Fellowship

Slide 05: Collage: Corridor

Setting the scene:

Several doors open, Illich, Reimer, Freire, Goodman, Ward, Fyson, Schick and Timperley, find themselves standing in a corridor, but one without a clear beginning or end. It is assumed that the corridor sits somewhere in a University Campus. A corridor that on the face of it should not be where it is and appears to lead nowhere.

Fluorescent lights hum above; several flicker with soft irregularity, all different hues. Not all are working. The flooring, worn with the many journeys back and forth. Flat heavy doors line either side. Too many doors. Too close together. A patchwork of slightly indistinctive shades of grey. Many doors are missing signs as though waiting for the next institutional initiative. One door is labelled Revenue Protection, another Student Learning Experience, Strategic Hub, others read more ambiguously: Visioning Chamber, Optimisation Office, Consumer Compliance Lobby, Incineration Suite and Archive of Unspoken Things.

*A long table rests in the middle of the corridor. A strange place to find such a piece of furniture. Around the table are placed eight chairs. An **Unknown Moderator** carrying a stack of perfectly aligned papers, stands stiff and formal with his back to the 'Fellowship', unsure whether sitting down would be appropriate, or even permissible as they are already running late. A grandfather, clock, sits on the middle of the table. Time ticking. A firm reminder that there's a schedule to adhere to. However, in a small act of resistance, the 'Fellowship' decides to sit.*

Thematic: Regulated / Commodified / Unregulated

Slide 06: Diagram: Relationships

Metalogue:

The **Unknown Moderator** “Firstly, I would like to thank you all for joining this conference. For obvious reasons, it’s not easy getting you all in one place at the same time.’

Gesturing towards the **Unknown Moderator**, **Fyson** murmurs, “Ok, so let’s get this metalogue underway. In spatial design education, neoliberalism is reproduced through assessment rubrics, learning outcomes aligned with industry standards (competencies), and accreditation systems like those set out in the UK by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and the Architects Registration Board (ARB), and the various Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRA’s)”.

Ward responds, “The design studio, a key space within spatial design education, is both a site of constraint and a potential arena for liberation, a space where small acts of resistance are made possible. It continues to be a space of speculation. A space to push back.”

Hands behind his head, **Goodman**, with an air of sad resignation, “But it is still vulnerable to standardisation and the metrics of employability and as you mentioned, regulation. Such a system enforces a form of cultural reproduction, where the social, cultural, critical and political dimensions of spatial design are consumed by market logic, and privilege.”

Fyson adds, “However, the design studio can still serve as a physical and intellectual testbed. While our metalogue has been evolving, the author has identified **Disruptive Spatial Praxis (DSPx)**, a field of inquiry through which resistance within spatial design education can begin to be understood and advanced. It emerges at the intersection of two influential trajectories within contemporary spatial discourse: Jane Rendell’s formulation of Critical Spatial Practice (CSP), and the broader, more diffuse concept of Critical Spatial Praxis (CSPx).

Thematic: Accreditation, Audit, and Marketisation

Slide 07: Manifesto: (Quietly) Rage against the metric machine

Metatlogue:

Ward declares, “In spatial design programmes, critique is framed as a transferable skill, rehearsed for professional practice. Yet its scope is limited. Students learn how to speak critically without destabilising the structures that certify their future entry into the profession.”

Leaning back in his chair, **Reimer** mutters, “Even critique must now be professionally aligned.”

Illich agrees, “Criticism is permitted only when it conforms.”

Gently Nodding, **Fyson** announces, “And when it does not threaten accreditation.”

Ward insists, “Still, critique is necessary. We cannot abandon the university to bureaucracy and markets. It remains one of the last public institutions where resistance can be practiced, if pushed hard enough.”

With a wry smile **Illich** adds, “So we must ask how resistance might be practiced from within systems shaped by regulation, accreditation, audit, and marketisation. For instance, challenging the authority of top-down educational planning. With each new leadership team comes the inevitable tinkering with the curriculum, echoing Giroux’s insistence that resistance emerges when both students and staff are empowered to shape their own narratives and roles in learning, even without the ok from up on high.”

Thematic:

Slide 08: Collage: Now defunct policy documents

Setting the scene:

The table, long and silent, begins to shift. Its surface tilts up, then flattens. The legs reorganise themselves. With no warning the table flips over. It's underbelly revealing the names of past academics, chancellors and vice chancellors etched into it.

Goodman springs into action, obsessively inspecting a bank of drawers. Full of now defunct policy documents, 'The Architectural Education Enhancement and Assurance Framework (AEEAF): Operational guidance on the managed ambiguity of learning outcomes, graduate attributes, and vaguely defined excellence' and 'Research Alignment Statement: A Cross-Unit framework for the evidencing of outputs, that may or may not count'. But as quickly as it had flipped over, it flipped back.

Thematic: Moral / Philosophical / Physical Resistance

Slide 09: Graphic

Metologue:

Timperley eyes now closed, “The institution may try to suppress critical thought, but despite all this, people resist. They always resist. The structure tries to discipline thought, but it cannot fully extinguish it.”

Goodman The question is not whether the university endorses resistance, but whether we, as educators and students, are willing to practice it?”

There’s a long pause, **Timperley’s** voice breaks the silence, “Resistance begins in small gestures, the question left unanswered, the refusal to adhere slavishly to protocol, the courage to care beyond the metric. Resistance in this instance can be moral, philosophical, and in the design studio physical. In those gestures, learning persists.”

Thoughts drifting, **Illich** adds, “With all this talk of resistance, surely Giroux should be present?”

“You make a good point”, **Goodman** queries, “Where are the others that are listed on the earlier diagram. Maybe the author is just demonstrating that he has broader understanding of the many masques that make him, or maybe he doesn’t know how to integrate them into the metologue?”

Timperley thinking out loud, suggests, “Or possibly he’s waiting for us in the Lecture Theatre?”

Thematic: Play / Conviviality / Audit

Slide 10: Manifesto: Play up!!!

Metatlogue:

Dancing around the table, **Fyson** states, “In spatial design education, employability rhetoric frames resistance as irresponsibility. Here, resistance can emerge through quieter practices; reframing briefs, choosing alternative sites, all with the aim of challenging the orthodox preconceptions of what it might be like to study and practice as a spatial designer.”

Spinning around in his chair, **Goodman** suggests, “Resistance is best practiced through play, that emerges through speculative studios, collaborative making, and work that somehow resists assessment. These moments disrupt, asserting learning as exploratory rather than bound by a rubric.”

Freire gestures, “Yes, resistance emerges through the unfinished. Often where the paperwork cannot reach.”

Mid handstand, with a twinkle in his eye, **Illich** adds, “In higher education, the entire system is now built on bureaucratic procedures, endless audits, performance metrics, these are not neutral tools; they’re weapons of social control. The real radical act now might be refusing the logic of productivity altogether, reclaiming education as a space for play and as a result disruption.”

Pre-empting the arrival of the ***Institutional Every Persons***, **Ward**, whispers, “Maybe the ‘answer’ would be to stop the discussion now, find the exit and leave, after all it is a Friday on the last day of the conference.”

Thematic: Absurd Ruminations

Slide 11: Collage: The Archive of Unspoken Things

Setting the scene

*The door labelled Archive of Unspoken Things swings open. The **Institutional Every Persons** exit, revealing a dark silent room stacked high with thousands of identical binders. One taps a stack of papers on the table. Picks up a form: Statement of Subversion (Form SBC-7) Supersedes Statement of Absurd Ruminations (Form SAR-10.65). A warm heavy breeze moves through the corridor. It carries fragmented whispers of half-formed questions that sound suspiciously like student evaluations, informal conversations, departmental emails drafted but never sent. Strategic Plans and various Curriculum Reviews, done, undone and redone. A space thick with a legacy of endless exchanges.*

*The **Institutional Every Persons** disappear, behind the door marked Incineration Suite. This is where the estates team incinerate all problematic documentation. No trace of past mischief left behind. The grandfather clock continues to log the importance time. Louder and louder. Growing increasingly impatient.*

Metalogue:

Turning to address the Assembly, **Timperley** suggests, “The archive holds what the institution prefers to forget. The labour behind learning. The failure of module descriptors, assessment criteria, constructive alignment and various ‘frameworks’ to transform power.”

With a deep inhaling of breath, **Ward** leans forward, “There it is. Bureaucracy embodied. It multiplies until it collapses under its own weight. RIBA as the professional body, ARB as the statutory regulator, Mutual Recognition Agreements, Office For Students, Research Excellence Framework, Knowledge Exchange Framework, Teaching Excellence Framework, and on and on. This is why resistance struggles to survive. Every mischievous impulse is buried under an avalanche of bureaucracy.”

Illich, now with his fingers in his ears, replies, “Higher Education has become an engine of compliance. To be mischievous today means reclaiming education as a civic practice. But we sit at a table surrounded by institutional machines that turn everything, including imagination into metrics.”

Timperley asks, “But are we not complicit in the generation of bureaucracy?”

Thematic: A subtle resistance

Slide 13: Collage: Hum of forgotten discussions

Metalogue

Listening to the hum of forgotten discussions, **Goodman** studies the index cards in detail, “In spatial design education, challenge doesn’t vanish, it slips into these unrecorded margins. Ideas that unsettle conventions migrate into conversations that never make it into the studio brief. The question isn’t whether the curriculum permits such moves, but whether we choose to practise them despite the pressure to conform.”

Illich observes, “We are nearing the end of our metalogue and appear to be in total agreement, and that is somewhat unnerving. To quote an earlier piece in the text – ‘In this instance the metalogue will be used to stage encounters between competing voices, allowing contradictions, uncertainties and disagreements to remain unresolved’. But we seem to have achieved the opposite. We are all now constructively aligned. It feels like a stitch up.”

Running a finger along a fading label, **Illich** murmurs, “Here you see how behaviours are shaped. **Institutional Every Persons** far from the studio, define what counts as learning. Deviation becomes something to correct, not explore. This archive is full of attempts that never met the criteria.”

After a pause, **Timperley** concludes, “Perhaps the task isn’t bold defiance but a subtle resistance, small acts that keep space open for what education can still become.”

Thematic: The Rehearsal (Conclusion)

Slide 14: Collage: Cold fluorescence

The grandfather clock grows ever more impatient. It's trunk door swings open. Out step three figures. Their eyes glow with the cold fluorescence. They do not speak, but the air around them thickens with time. The speakers all fall silent.

Metalogue:

"Fifteen minutes have now past", state the **Institutional Every Persons** displaying signs of frustration, "Please can we now make our way to the lecture theatre. The symposium is about to begin?"

The **Unknown Moderator**, still standing with his back to the 'Fellowship' reflects; "Perhaps this was never a metalogue, but a rehearsal. As the metalogue never truly ends, for each participant carries it forward into streets, towns, cities, corridors, studios, and lecture theatres, where learning, if desired, persists. The university is neither dead, nor alive, nor complete. In the shifting landscape of higher education, these voices remind us that learning can never truly be the property of an institution."

Slide 15: Learning, my definition.

Conclusion:

In an era shaped by constructive alignment, marketisation and bureaucratic control, Spatial Design Education risks becoming increasingly standardised and instrumentalised. Drawing on the work of Ward, Fyson, Illich, Goodman, Reimer, Freire and Schick and Timperly, this study has argued, while radical pedagogical traditions remain of interest, these historic, possibly romanticised pedagogues, pedagogies and practices are now outdated, past their respective sell by dates. For-profit systems mean that radicalism is never evenly distributed. For some, speaking a simple truth about inequity is framed as radical, disruptive, or even unprofessional. Maybe radicalism isn't gone; it's just increasingly punished.
