

EDUCATING FOR CHANGE: A CASE FOR A PEDAGOGY OF DESIRE IN DESIGN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT:

Despite major inroads in demystifying creativity for the non-design disciplines, there has been very little movement in the design disciplines themselves beyond traditional paradigms. As argued in this paper, this is particularly noticeable in design education where traditional pedagogical approaches persist despite the emergence of new experimental pedagogies and the possibilities and opportunities they offer. In response, this paper describes what is revealed when a 'pedagogy of desire' is used as a critical lens to reflect on an experience of developing and implementing a first year interior design program involving first and second year undergraduate interior design and architecture students. Implications drawn from the review are presented and a case made for continuing experimentation and development of a pedagogy of desire for design learning and teaching.

Keywords: Design, Pedagogy, Desire

1. INTRODUCTION

"...desire is not outside the relations between teachers and students; it is a productive force that constitutes being-in-the-world and produces teachers and students as creative, imaginative agents" (Zembylas 2007, p. 340).

As inferred by the above quotation, the focus of this paper is on desire. Specifically, it is on what is revealed when a 'pedagogy of desire' is used as a critical lens to reflect on an experience of developing and implementing a first year interior design programme involving undergraduate students across the university but predominantly those studying interior design and architecture. In particular, the paper highlights how the students' desires, including the desire to learn in and/or about interior design, together with the teachers' desires, represent an overarching pedagogical 'hinge' (Ellsworth 2005) or pivot point for engagement that acknowledges learning as an active state of transition connecting body, mind, space, and time (Curriculum Collective 2007, p. 64). In this sense then, the design program can be conceived of as a disruption that invites a shift in moving "...toward previously unknown ways of thinking and being in the world" (Ellsworth 2005 in Curriculum Collective 2007, p. 64). Rather than a point of beginning, the start of first year is seen as a threshold informing a new rhythm to an already underway process of becoming.

To provide a context for critical reflection of the implemented program and the resulting implications and argument for a radical new pedagogy of design, the paper commences with an overview of traditional and current design pedagogy. The discussion then moves to a consideration of alternative pedagogies including a pedagogy of desire, illustration of which is provided through a review of the design programme mentioned previously. Implications drawn from the review are presented and a case made for continuing experimentation and development of a pedagogy of desire for design learning and teaching.

2. DESIGN PEDAGOGY

Current literature is becoming increasingly vocal about the need to review architectural design pedagogy given our highly complex and continually transforming society (Salama and Wilkinson 2007). "There is a feeling among many design educators today that the discipline has reached a crisis in its development, and that change is needed immediately in the way that design educators articulate their epistemology and their methodology (Wang 2010, p. 173). In relation to professional architectural education, Coleman (2010) argues for rethinking how architectural education is organized. Describing it as "overwhelmingly predicated on skills development" (p. 202) producing "unremarkable buildings at best" (p.201), he advocates for a more holistic approach with greater consideration of what the humanities can offer, particularly in the design studio where the influence of "capitalist production" (p. 202) is most apparent and persuasive. As described further on, the romantic model may have something to offer. An important aspect of the romantic model, and theories of the aesthetic, is the notion of 'the sublime'. Philosophers Longin, Kant and Burke all entertained distinct interpretations of the sublime, but it is Burke's contemplations that afford significance here. The Burkean sublime focuses upon physiological and emotive affects of self-aggrandisement of the viewer/soul following confrontation, blockage and transport [overcoming + emergence] through experiences of astonishment, terror, obscurity, magnificence, and reverence in the face of that which evokes the sublime (Wawzinek 2008).

It is of course one thing to argue for such change in design pedagogy and another for this to be possible in universities that remain essentially positivistic. For Wang (2010), one approach is to adopt a new paradigm based on complexity theory; one that allows creativity and rationality to exist symbiotically. From a complex systems perspective, design learning would be viewed as an open-ended process that creatively as well as rationally conceptualises design projects as systems to be explored in order to discover their relational meanings and values, in the process inviting the emergence of unique and novel properties (Wang 2010).

Unlike design pedagogy, pedagogy in general has been quite dynamic experiencing a number of 'reforms' over the last several decades. For architectural design pedagogy little has changed since the Beaux-Arts and the Bauhaus apart from emphases which Salama and Wilkinson (2007) label as academic (focus on formal design and aesthetics), craft and technology (emphasis on function and pragmatic application), and sociological (concern for addressing social issues). Despite these differences however the design studio remains "...as the main forum for knowledge acquisition and assimilation, and for creative exploration and interaction" (Salama and Wilkinson 2007, p. 5), both for interior design as well as architectural education. In articulating its qualities, Wang (2010) describes it as "...a vital complex of material representation, social collaboration, creativity, emotionality and tolerance for uncertainty..." (p. 176). In terms of critical examination of the design studio again this has been rather scant with the limited number of "serious" studies indicating "the urgent need for more published discussions and research and on the evolutionary aspects of design teaching as well as contemporary design studio pedagogy" (Salama and Wilkinson p. 6).

In terms of understanding the design studio and how it might more effectively respond to social change, the work of Donald Schon in the later part of the twentieth century cannot be ignored. Acknowledging the initial enduring influence of an articulated apprenticeship model adapted to an educational context by L'Ecole des Beaux Artes and the Bauhaus, Webster (2008) describes how this became to a limited extent more theoretically underpinned in the 1980's through a cognitive-based theory espoused by Donald Schon that highlighted the complexity of professional practice and the need to develop expert tacit knowledge through reflection in and on action. For Webster, such a model is inherently flawed and too narrow particularly today when there are opportunities to engage in a dialogue between more holistic and developed theories such as those of situated knowledge, and action and learning (p. 72). Of particular concern for Webster is Schon's failure to recognise other dimensions to learning such as affective and corporeal dimensions, that learning takes place in other settings outside the design studio, and that it is students' total experience that informs their development as professional designers (p.66). With respect to the latter, Webster makes reference to the work of Pierre Bourdieu and his notion of *habitus* which recognises how embodied aspects of self inform everyday action and how this is continually developed through experiences including but not limited to educational experiences (p.69).

3. PEDAGOGY OF DESIRE

Two concerns noted by Webster (2008) in relation to current pedagogical approaches in design education are those of repression and coercion. Citing the work of Dutton (1991) and Stevens (2002), she describes how the design studio presents "...a picture of tight control, coercion and molding" (p. 71). As a counterpoint for pedagogy generally, Zembylas (2007) promotes a pedagogy of desire "...as that which produces and seduces imaginations instead of being associated simply with repression and coercion (p. 332). More specifically, he advocates a pedagogy based on the Deleuzian-Guattarian notion of productive desire rather than the Lacanian understanding of desire as related to a psychoanalytic concept of lack or the Freudian association with (sexual) drive. For Deleuze and Guattari, desire is understood as continuous flow and as such is always becoming (Zembylas 2007, p. 336). Within an educational context, the aim is for individuals to overcome repressive subjectivities to become desiring 'nomads' in accordance with the 'immanent principle' of a constant state of (ontological, epistemological, and corporeal) becoming and transformation (p. 336). In this sense, the role of desire is neither revelatory nor repressive, but creative; the subject through desire producing another 'nature' (Zembylas, p. 337). Also in this sense, desire is not a state, position, or personal trait, but rather a "...pedagogy of the subject and the relation between subject, objects and artefacts"; it is an existential force constituting "a surface of learning and teaching events" (p. 338).

Drawing on the work of Pignatelli (1999), Zembylas (2007) describes how a pedagogy of desire is not tied to any set of 'best teaching practices' or 'appropriate learning skills'; it neither privileges the individual nor ignores it; rather it aims "...to explore the various social, aesthetic, material and political manifestations of one's existence and its connection to others" (p. 340). In this context, teachers are not on a mission to emancipate students; but rather to mobilise the desire to teach/learn in a pedagogic space where eros, passion and knowledge converge (hooks 1994, McWilliam 1996 in Zembylas, p. 342).

In all "a pedagogy of desire dissociates itself from instrumental purposes of education in order to embrace neglected aspects of learning and teaching such as joy, pleasure, happiness and transgression; it educates visionaries, not bureaucrats (Pignatelli, 1999 in Zembylas, 2007, p. 340). With deference to the work of McWilliam (1997), Zembylas (2007) relates how in a relational sense, desire also presumes an invitation to forbidden territories exposing those involved to risks as well as pleasures, however, as stated by Boler & Zembylas (2003): "no risk, no creativity, no good invention, thus no difference that makes difference" (Zembylas 2007, p. 344). Further to this, Dweck (1999) points out, "...that the tasks that are best for learning are those which risk confusion and error (p.16), then pedagogical work directed at improved learning outcomes would focus on creating obstacles that need to be overcome. Error would be welcomed and explanation minimised (see also Zull 2004). However, where error results in painful condemnation from external others who are marking, grading and measuring each move, then it is more likely that a student will avoid uncertainty at all costs, not embrace it for what it might conceivably offer to fresh understanding and to the strategic search for meaning. Put bluntly, ramping up performance measures around teaching and learning is not likely to grow a creative workforce – indeed, it may have a contrary effect. A risk-minimising 'student protection' environment, though laudable, is likewise hardly conducive to the sort of learning environment that is likely to optimise creative capacity" (McWilliam & Haukka 2008, pp. 19-20).

A pedagogy of desire creates risks "...based on the fact that the classroom becomes a space in which the teacher and the student 'seduce' each other and capture each other's desire" (p. 333). "The claim to seductive power is...definable as the power to achieve authority and to produce involvement...within a situation from which power is itself absent. If such a power can be called seduction, it is because seduction is, by definition, a phenomenon of persuasion: it cannot rely on force or institutional authority ('power'), for it is, precisely, a means of achieving mastery in the absence of such means of control (Chambers 1984, p. 211-212 in Mc William, 1996, p. 7). Connected to this is the potential of desire to "...subvert normalised representations and significations and find access to a radical self" (Zembylas 2007, p. 332).

Like the traditional studio approach to design education, many traditional and current pedagogical models "...repeat and reinforce the same master/servant dynamics that characterise mostly authoritarian pedagogies, because they destroy desire and passion (Bracher 1999b)" (Zembylas

2007, p. 341). Similarly, they generally aim at regularity and certainty invoking not only a binary understanding of the mind and the body; of rational intelligence and emotions but also a preference of mind over body, and rational thinking over emotional expression. In contrast: "the sort of curriculum which would foster pedagogy of desire is more likely to have the body at the centre of teaching and learning, enhancing opportunities for emotional and bodily expression, 'helping students to develop sensory intimacy with their world and counteracting the tendency to de-sensualise and commodify the human relation to reality' (O'Loughlin 1998, 293)" (Zembylas 2007, p. 342).

4. TOWARDS A PEDAGOGY OF DESIRE IN DESIGN

The holistic, critical and embodied approach adopted for this unit is exemplified in various ways. First and foremost it is conveyed in the introductory material made available to the students in the form of the unit outline. The following extract from the outline conveys two things: first, the focus on person-environment as multi-dimensional and relational; and second, a concern for specific attitudinal development as well as skills and knowledge.

The projects and exercises that you undertake as part of this unit will have a knowledge focus as well as a skills focus. Knowledge wise this will involve developing understanding of how people interact with 'interior' environment (perceptually, psychosocially, culturally and existentially), and how each influences the other. Using this knowledge as a designer demands certain skills involving imaging, representing and communicating, testing and critical inquiry. It also demands specific attitudinal attributes such as empathy, perseverance, preparedness to experiment, to work independently as well as collaboratively, to invite and undertake critique (DTB101 Interior Design Unit Outline, 2011).

In addition, the unit was characterized by its recognition of the student as an embodied being with 'situated' knowledge and of the role of designing as an integral aspect of their embodiment and vice versa. In the unit outline and subsequently through the experiences offered by the unit, students were invited to consider the question: *How does who I am influence my designing? How do I design for/with others?* Right from the start then students were introduced to a pedagogical environment that focused on the subject and the relation between subjects, objects and artefacts and their various manifestations.

4.1. THE KNOWN SELF-NESS UNFOLDING

When developing the design unit then a conscious decision was made to turn the focus at the outset to the students and notion of self; to invite self-exploration and hopefully greater awareness of personal ontology and epistemology and their potential influence design understanding and process. The opportunity to explore 'self' while also developing an appreciation of the multidimensional and ephemeral nature of human experience and existence was presented through the first project that involved designing their own sukkah as in the annual competition in New York commemorating the structures built by the Israelites during their exodus. While essentially for their 'self', the temporary dwelling also had to accommodate social interaction with others and the outcome described orally as well presented two and three dimensionally. In support of the project, students also undertook weekly readings and exercises that built on lecture material. Development and critical reflection on process and content were encouraged through the requirement for students to keep a workbook or process log. The lecture was hour-long followed by a three-hour studio class in which readings were discussed, exercises presented and projects developed. In the first part of the semester, the lecture content, readings and exercises dealt with perception, design elements and principles, space/place, inside/outside, movement/transition/transgression as examples.

In applying a Burkean model of the sublime we can now describe the beginning of the semester in the unit as a situation where the novice designer was confronted by a provocation, which, as with the sublime experience, elicited a disruption and brought the design students to a temporary standstill due to the foreignness of the activities. As subsequent focus groups with students revealed this produced feelings of astonishment, difficulty, obscurity and as noted by some

students reverence and awe, as students were drawn along by a force, a productive desire to overcome and answer the call through their own creative responses. In all they tended to experience an empowering of self and a sense of confidence and growing ability through their creative acts, producing new understandings of self and views of the world. For some students, it was too overwhelming and they either withdrew from the unit or submitted by expelling the sublime and engaging with the normative.

4.2. ENGAGEMENT AND RELATION WITH THE OTHER – EXPLORATION OF THE PLEASURES (AND PAIN) OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

In the latter part of the semester students worked individually and in groups on a selection of hybridized spaces that focused on the body and its relationship with both intimate and public realms. Embedded in the project was the exploration of the body in relation to the 'layers' which surround it whether proximate or detached and distant. In Layer 5 for example dealing with body and chamber, students were asked to design a small spa for the elderly demonstrating explicit attention to reflective or transparent material and concepts of gender/sexuality, eroticism and atmosphere. Overall, the project represented what Yaeger (1989) might describe as the horizontal sublime which expands towards others, spreading itself out towards others, spreading itself out into multiplicity, sharing, transposing and appropriating. This second project shifted students' attention to an intersubjective view promoting the crossing of boundaries and bodies, and through iteration and mergence with others a movement to the potential space of hybridity in being as well as design outcome. Upon reflection, it was a project and program of learning that permitted the desires of the self to unfold and enfold with others.

In summary, our first year design unit was an interruption to the current modes of pedagogical relations that ignored the role of body and emotion in teaching and learning design establishing the foundation for us to experiment further with what a pedagogy of desire might offer. As we are beginning to discover and as highlighted by Zembylas (2007), there are personal, professional and organisational implications and individual and collective resistances to negotiate. As Zembylas reminds us, the issue is not about deconstruction and replacement of traditional assumptions but rather how much risk and pleasure one can take in allowing one's teaching and learning to modify and be modified by the world (p. 345). "Through reclaiming desire as a legitimate *affective* and *relational practice* in the classroom it may become possible to affirm the duplicity of pedagogical desire – in other words, while desire puts the teacher and student into risk (e.g. through experiencing uncertainties and anxieties), it also brings important pleasures (e.g. through assuming subversive position of knowing)" (Zembylas 2007, p. 334).

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