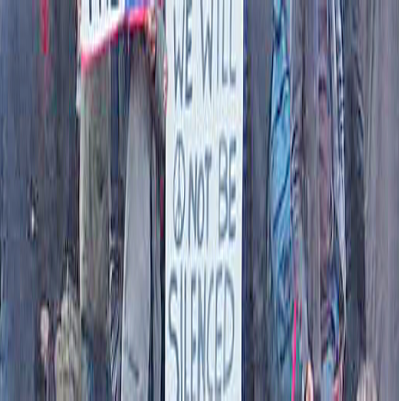




Even more radical pedagogy

Description

This week Beatriz Colomina spoke at the Andrew Carnegie Lecture Series at the University of Edinburgh on *radical pedagogy*. That prompted me to rush to Jacques Rancière's book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, which she referenced. The book is a satirical quasi-historical account of an actual nineteenth century French schoolteacher who practiced liberal teaching methods, and sought to emancipate students as empowered co-learners rather than receptacles for a teacher's unceasing teacherly explanations. The joke of the story is that the teacher was able to impart learning to students in subjects about which he knew nothing.

I missed Rancière in a survey of radical pedagogic theory we conducted in the early 1990s. Rancière's book had only just been published in English then, and came too late to be included in Shaun Gallagher's insightful book on *Hermeneutics and Education*, our primary source for educational philosophy at the time.

Misleading and misreading

In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* the teacher admits to his lack of knowledge, and leaves the students to get on with their own learning. This tactic echoes Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which is also about emancipation and non-elitist learning, I think now standard fare in educational philosophy.

In that context a truly radical pedagogy might deliberately place the learner in contradictory and untenable positions in relation to their knowledge base, as if the putative teacher is not only ignorant but wilfully misleading. I don't pick that up from Rancière, but that for Gallagher would be closer to a radical pedagogy. We explored radical approaches to education in a chapter called 'The disintegrated curriculum' in *Interpretation in Architecture*.

In identifying the character of a radical pedagogy, Gallagher drew on the work of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, who in turn owe much to Martin Heidegger, variously interpreted by educational theorists and scholars. Following Derrida, the *radical* position seized on oppositions that are assumed within intellectual inquiry, and makes play of their inversion, reversal, demolition and deconstruction.



Whereâ??s the text?

The theme of radical pedagogy was labelled as such and developed primarily in the area of literary theory. Hereâ??s a very brief survey of some of the key exponents in the 1980s-90s.

Professors of English Douglas Atkins and Michael Johnson challenged the doctrine of the time that ideas are more important than the vehicle used for their communication. They argued that rather than providing a decorative surface to reality, style may be its major constitutive element. We readers can therefore look *through* literature or we can look *at* it. The radical approach is to appropriate the play involved in this polarity between content and form, resulting in new understandings and new appreciations of the text. (This debate echoes that in architecture about form and ornament, etc.)

English Lit. scholar Gregory Ulmer suggested that this play can be realised in the lecture presentation itself, which can also be thought about as a kind of text. The result is the â??lec(ri)ture,â?• a neologism implying that laughter is inserted into lecture. The *lecriture* itself incorporates a reflection on its own genre, without necessarily destroying the genre. According to Ulmer, â??a *lecriture* â?¡ operates by means of a dramatic, rather than an epistemological, orientation to knowledge.â?• According to Ulmer the success of the *lecriture* relies on its juxtaposition with convention, and the use of irony and parody.

Ulmer identified the conventional cautions against *misreading* and *plagiarism*. The model for interplay between acceptable writing practice and the breakdown of authorship and originality is the *collage* (or *logokleptism*), working with the intellectual property of others, acknowledging the role and perplexity of mechanical reproduction. Thatâ??s a case of bringing supposedly poor student practices in scholarship to centre stage rather than simply consigning them to error.

Destruction and deconstruction

Convention suggests that you stop reading when the text stops saying what it ought to have said. But interpretation is ongoing. Barbara Johnson said that deconstruction is a reading strategy that carefully follows both the meanings and the suspensions and displacements of meaning in a text. She defended deconstruction against the charge of textual vandalism. *Deconstruction* does not equate with *destruction*. If anything is destroyed it is not meaning, but the idea of an exclusive reading: the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another.

Amongst several tactics, and more in keeping with the idea of the truly ignorant schoolmaster, Johnson suggests the teacher can deliberately introduce obscurity to promote inquiry.

According to postmodern theorists Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton a deconstructive approach to pedagogy enabled the teacher to allow the text to reveal to students something of their own situation in the power matrix.

the teacher makes it possible for the student to become aware of his position, of his own relations to power/knowledge formations. Such a teacher often has an adversarial role in relation to the student: the teacher is a deconstructor and not a mere supporter in the traditional sense of the word. She helps to reveal the student to himself by showing him how his ideas and positions are the effects of larger discourses (of class, race and gender, for example) rather than simple, natural manifestations of his consciousness or mind (10).

Initiation

On a different tack, Gregory Ulmer argued that deconstructive radical pedagogy is to the sciences what the carnival once was to the Church. In terms of curriculum, carnival disrespect means the inversion of the order of disciplines (61). According to Ulmer, initiates into a discipline normally have to wait many years before they are allowed to see its frame: the inner mystery of any discipline is not its order or coherence but is its disorder, incoherence, and arbitrariness. Thus radical pedagogy enables the student to by-pass initiation as a specialist and to confront both the grounding of a discipline, its absolutes, as well as the provisional, destructible nature of that grounding.

We've only alluded briefly to literary theory and radical pedagogy here. Of course now there's a buzz about the idea of the flipped classroom, promoting a pedagogy without lectures. Students get exposed to online course materials at home, and come to Uni for discussion. That already sounds radical and it's in mainstream discourse.

In her address this week, Beatriz Colomina gave a historical account of radical pedagogy in architecture since 1968, with scant reference to moves in other disciplines or contemporary experiments. The design studio is of course already a site for radical pedagogy, but is not the only place.

Nostalgia and activism

Colomina's message is also outlined in an [Architecture Review Article](#). It veers off the topic of radical pedagogy and elides with activism, the responsibility for which now seems to reside with students. There's a call for students to rise up and do something radical. She ends with Architectural pedagogy has become stale. Schools spin old wheels as if something is happening but

so little is going on. Students wait for a sense of activist engagement with a rapidly evolving world but graduate before it happens. The fact that they wait for instruction is already the problem. In the 1960s and 1970s remind us what can happen when pedagogy takes on risks. It's a provocation and a call to arms. That's inspiring, but leaves open the question of how then we should teach.

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