

# **SCHOOL UNREALNESS**

# SCHOOL UNREALNESS

Towards an Educational Critique

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Open day guide

REAL  
WORLD

SCHOOL  
UNREAL

# INTRODUCTION

When we demarcate a ‘real world’ from within the school, we are implicit in the creation of a binary. However, if not considered discretely and in opposition to one another, the ‘real world’ and ‘unreal school’ provide us with two poles on a spectrum. Should we then tread from the real to the unreal, towards its far inconceivable limits, what might the unreal offer? How can the school’s hypothetical *unreality* allow us to imagine otherwise?\* It is in the unknown intimacy of the unreal that this book has found itself lurking, that it will look to excavate a space for potential and critique.

School Unrealness is made up of four essays that, in their progression, work towards proposing an unreal school. In *School (Un)realities*, I unpick the binary implicitly created when we speak of a ‘real world’ from within the ‘unreal school’. I then examine the latter through several guises: a binary of real and unreal, a reality that is fluid in several stages of real, and realities that fork and overlap in their conception. Cultural theory, critical pedagogy and literary fiction aid my analysis of an unrealised ‘unreal’ school. Agency is created to position the school’s reality as fluid and non-binary in light of contradicting subjectivities towards the so-called ‘real world’, and a queer potentiality is located somewhere in between.

In *Fictioning a Method*, the unreal scope of fiction is widened beyond its perceived ‘genre’ in its capacities as a performative tool for dissent. The employment of fiction is examined within art movement Institutional Critique, through a mythical leader of the 19th century Luddite revolts, and in a literary excavation of an underground counterculture. Crucially, this essay exemplifies fictions that have been enacted through their authoring by an audience, aiding me as I assemble a ‘toolkit’ for fictioning.

In the third essay, I work towards proposing an *Educational Critique* and focus the toolkit’s potential directly towards the art and design school. An Educational Critique sits close to the unreal, aligns with the methods of Institutional Critique and the Educational Turn, using current academic circumstances of the (UK) art and design school as its socio-political and cultural landscape. Two biennials offer the essay a means to understand how an Educational Critique might contextualise and act reflexively of itself when produced.

Blueprints for an unreal school are then assembled in the study’s conclusion, where a speculative archaeology of the *Department of Extension* looks to action the entirety of the study’s research and framework of an Educational Critique. Proposed and performed through its inaugural open day, the Department’s point of conception is located within the context of my own university, Kingston School of Art and the ongoing redevelopment of its New Extension building. Temporary scaffolding and less discernible (but increasingly systemic) bureaucracies canvas my critique and are bookended in the midst of a prominent anniversary. An artefact of the applied research project, the Department of Extension’s open day guide, is annexed at the book’s conclusion.

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“Thinking otherwise is another way of thinking that runs counter to the great modernist narratives—it locates its own inquiry in the very borders of systems of thought and reaches towards the possibility of non-Eurocentric models of thinking.”

Danah Abdulla, *Design Otherwise: Towards a Locally-Centric Design Education Curricula in Jordan* (London: Goldsmiths University, 2017), pp. 16–17.

Populated amongst these essays are eight conversations with architects, designers, artists, curators and educators, offering connected and divergent understandings of the 'real world' and 'unreal school', as well as discussion on the critical, performative possibilities of fiction and speculation, framed through practices between both. These voices have foregrounded the project's development, past and ongoing: thank you to Cathy Gale, Tugce Karatas, Prem Krishnamurthy, Nina Paim, Mariana Pestana, Luiza Prado de O. Martins, Kieran O'Connor, Pedro Oliveira and Jack Self. Their sheer generosity of time and knowledge has helped to shape and hone my research further, and without whom I could not have connected the dots of school (un)reality up.

Whilst I have chosen to focus my interests of the real and unreal binary onto the school, and design education within that, it is by no means exclusive. I hope through this that any conclusion drawn can offer itself as a toolkit, as several toolkits in a forking path of (un)realities, for deployment between and beyond our problematic binaries.

# Jack Self

Jack Self is an architect, writer and curator based in London. He is Director of the REAL Foundation and Editor-in-Chief of magazine *Real Review*. Previously, he was Contributing Editor for *Architectural Review* (2009–2017), Editor-at-Large for *O32c* (2014–2018) and Editor at *Strelka Press* (2011–2013).

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OG Where do you position yourself on a spectrum from real to unreal, in your practice as an architect, editor-in-chief, and actor within both?

JS The sun is expanding. In a couple hundred million years the planet will be profoundly changed as a result. Within, I think, one to two billion years, it will cause all of the seas on Earth to evaporate and everything we've known to turn to dust. This is not an abstract concept, this is a reality. Therefore, everything we see now is

highly contingent. I don't think the universe really cares about humanity. There are aspects as to how we came about or why the universe is established in the particular way it is that I don't think is possible for me to know, and so I don't pursue those questions. What I mean is that, everything we do is doomed to futility. It serves no apparent purpose, or at least one that I can use in a material sense. Therefore, what is the purpose of life?

Well, most people think about life in terms of three great metaphysical questions: who am I, what should I do with my life, and what will happen to me at death. Those types of questions have led me to take what I consider to be a certain type of ethical position on my life. Through no fault of my own, I was born into a position of great privilege. Rather than try to dissimulate that or try to pretend that I am not more privileged than others, or to try and pay off my conscience through charitable work or something that will make me feel better, I choose to try and take full responsibility for that privilege. I try to understand what the obligation of that privilege might be. As a result, that is why I founded the

REAL Foundation in the way that I did. The REAL Foundation is an architectural practice with a governance model that forces it to only do certain types of projects. We have an independent board of advisors and we can only do architectural, cultural or others works which promote democracy, inclusivity and equalities of many kinds. Amongst them, but not limited to, are gender, race, class, wealth and space.

I view myself very much in the Western Enlightenment tradition, which is that modernity is a project that has been running for a couple hundred years and I think has another couple hundred years left too. I don't believe in a universal subject, but I do believe very much in the promotion of these types of equalities. I believe very much in democracy and in the promotion of social inclusivity and justice.

On the other hand, I believe in all of those things and act as if they are real in the certain knowledge that, no matter what I do with my life, it will ultimately be futile. What that brings you down to is an idea that you are not working towards a specific goal. We can never create a world which is truly equal. It's not a possibility, it's a utopian vision. But, nonetheless,

we can change how we act on a daily basis in order to move towards that. What you achieve with your life is a lot less important than how you choose to live your life. The way you choose to relate to other people and the way you choose to relate to the world—at the everyday scale—is all that you can hope to do.

For many years I used to go on holiday to the Greek islands and I would float on my back in the sea. I would look at my feet and I would look at the horizon. While all the flora and fauna of the Earth has changed many times, the one thing that has remained consistent throughout the last four billion years of its history is this vision. The colour of the sky and the colour of the sea, this fluid horizon is a permanent reality of what it means to live on the Earth more than any other landscape. I know that if I go on holiday for too long, this state of being, this relationship with cosmic time, will unpick all of my attempts to remain a good, politically engaged and socially aware citizen, and I will never come back. I could quite easily reject this particular form of reality today in favour of one which I think is more associated with what it means to be a living and conscience being.

OG What does it mean to live in the real world today?

JS My primary objective is to change people's perception of reality. As an architect you design space and you design very specific power relations.

One of the things that is remarkable about architecture is the fact that everything you design is both literally and metaphorically true. Reality and narrative collapse when you design space. A really basic example of this is the head of the table. The head of the table is both an actual head of the table, an actual place, but it is also a metaphorical condition.

At the moment we are sat opposite each other. The table between us creates a break to the idea of conflict or confrontation. If there was nothing between us, it would actually be a rather confrontational situation. These very minor conditions of space have huge influences on how we think of reality.

Housing in particular is a powerful driver of social structure. For more than 350 years in the UK we have had only four types of house. All are terrace-row and built at four scales. Once you know this, you will

begin to see terrace houses of particular proportions. They are basically the same plan and the same house at four different scales, for reasons I won't go into right now. The consequences of this was that the class structure of Britain was literally entrenched in which scale of house you grew up in.

In a way, the construction of the heteronormative nuclear family was a project that modernity made possible by a certain design of house. The idea, for example, of the single person bedroom was invented in the 1850s by Henry Roberts. This was the first time that someone had consciously put one single bed inside one room. Before that, there was not such a concept. As soon as you have the single person bedroom, you can conglomerate them to form the nuclear family.

You can put a single front door in order to make sure that the family can be easily monitored by authorities. The invention of house numbering allows you to identify a home and restrict the circulation of the people who live there. All of these spatial and architectural instruments are creating a type of reality, social structure and power relation. In that

sense, my main objectives are to make people aware of this and encourage them to explore alternatives. The thing I hate most is apartments where you can only place the furniture in one arrangement. You should have total freedom to put your bed wherever you want and in whatever room. In order to have a house where you can do that, it requires a certain freedom of thought on the part of the architect. You often see this cliché of the frustrated housewife who finds herself so restricted by society that she is limited to moving the furniture around and re-arranging the living room on a constant basis. This is a subconscious realisation that our relationship to material objects is entirely bound up in our narrative and fictional, unreal vision of the world. The two are interchangeable. If you change your material reality, you change what everyone thinks is real.

OG What does the space of the laboratory offer the *REAL Foundation* (Real Estate Architecture Laboratory), both literally and figuratively, that the firm, atelier or practice might not?

JS It implies a sense of rigor and also a sense of empirical

evidence. The scientific method is one of experimentation, observation, recording your results and drawing a conclusion. A method not based on preconceptions, but an outcome of the experiment. For me, the idea of the laboratory is very different from other forms of practice, in as much as we are trying to be precise about how these things work. We are also not pre-judging or making an assumption about the best way to design. We are observing, studying, and trying to understand how existing space works. From that analysis, we then try to create a proposition out of it.

OG Does being 'against from within' hold ground in changing the institution of education?

JS I think you have to be very careful about what it is you are trying to achieve, and what your ultimate outcome or objective would be. What about the school do you wish to change, and is the school itself the correct scale for that change?

Increasingly, students and academics find themselves in the same predicament. For a long time, there was a debate as to whether a school should be like a factory or like a shopping



mall. When the protests in 1968 began in French universities, the welfare state as it existed in the late sixties had said that everyone can have free education. What the students then said was, yes, we can all have free education, but we can't choose what we study. We are being taught by old professors who have very entrenched and old-fashioned ideas. We get a free degree, but we have no intellectual freedom or academic autonomy. They rejected that, and then that became harnessed by a small group of people to become the basis for neoliberalism. But actually, I don't think that is what the protestors of 1968 were really asking for. Just because you reject what you're being taught, doesn't mean that you're rejecting the concept of free education.

Nonetheless, there you have two models of university. One which is a factory, where the university's reputation is based on the quality of its students. They are trying to give you a common education where everyone has, more or less, the same skills. No one can really massively succeed, and no one can really terribly fail. There is a homogeneity to the product, which is inevitably the student.

Then there is the other model of the university, which is more like a shopping mall. You hear students saying, we're not getting what we paid for. They feel that there is some sort of economic dimension to what it is that they are buying, a product that they are the consumer of. In that model, which is increasingly dominant, the student supposedly has more agency over what it is they are buying. But, of course, they are not the experts in the subject and so they don't know how to ask for what they want—they don't know what it is they want. Even if they did, they wouldn't know how to achieve it. A lot of the time students get very angry against their own institutions and they want to change them. But then really, who has the possibility of changing it?

Academics are also underpaid and precariously employed and exploited in different ways. They are increasingly subject to all sorts of complex, administrative and bureaucratic controls: marking, feedback, and management of their classes, of which they are often not paid for. In that sense, students and academics are increasingly on the same side. The location of the power that would be needed to change this situation

doesn't exist within university itself. Even the chancellor of the university is subject to budgets from the state, ministerial direction and so on. When we talk about institutional reform, I don't know what can be done. I tend to focus more on the students themselves than the institution. Which is to say, how do you raise a level of political awareness of these issues amongst the student body? How do you create a sense of community amongst people? People who, by the nature of the system, are encouraged to remain isolated individuals.

OG Is it new metaphors we need for the school?

JS My main instinct would be to ask why we want education and what it is we are using it for. These days, the reason to go to a university is in order to have a piece of paper that says you went to university. It becomes a vocational and professional marker, like an A Level or GCSE. It's pretty meaningless. You can do very well at an exam, but that doesn't mean that you have any knowledge of the world whatsoever. If you want to enter certain types of professions, to become a chartered professional account

for example, you have no choice but to enter a formal system of education. If you work in a creative field, your relationship to the university is a little bit different. Let's say you are studying to become an artist. You are using that time at art school as a way to develop your voice. You are there as a way to meet like-minded people and to sense out the spirit of your times through being in touch with your generation. You are there as a way to learn from the knowledge of people who have more experience in the field. It's less important that you have a technical piece of paper.

To hold a Bachelor or Master in Fine Art is not in itself a professional qualification. Anyone can call themselves an artist. To me, there are many other ways one can go about getting that education without going to a university at all. I think in certain creative disciplines I would challenge the idea that we even need university. I would like to see more diversity of institutions, ones that are more informal and targeted in the types of things that they are trying to teach people. And, most of all, ones that don't come with debt attached.

# Mariana Pestana

Mariana Pestana is an architect and curator based between London and Lisbon. In 2011, she co-founded the collective The Decorators. More recently, she has co-curated the exhibitions *The Future Starts Here* (V&A Museum, London) and *Eco-Visionaries* (MAAT, Lisbon).

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OG What is your understanding of the 'real world'?

MP I imagine there is no one answer. Coming from an architectural background, I wasn't satisfied with the answers that were out there for that question. I decided to study literary fiction. I spent a few years researching a field of literary studies called the possible-worlds theory, created by many people including Umberto Eco, Marie-Laure Ryan, and [Lubomír] Doležel. Many of these theorists started

writing about possible worlds in the eighties but it has developed quite a bit since then with virtual reality and video games. In the eighties however, they took this notion of possible worlds from the field of philosophical logic, applying it to literature in order to understand how fictional worlds are constructed.

I engaged with these theories and its questions: what is a fictional world, how does one create a fictional world, and how do readers access that world? I worked with some of its key notions to think about the practice of design, and if by borrowing this theory from the field of literature and fiction I could unveil other dimensions of design projects. The definition I am most happy with is framed through the difference between something that is actual and something that is non-actual.

Let's say that the real world is made up of things that have been actualised. All which has not been actualised is then unreal. These things are fictional, they are possible. We live in the actual world where everything has been actualised, where we can conceive of possibilities. What is really interesting about design practice is that it can question this difference. When

we actualise something, does that then become something of the real, or does it continue in the domain of the unreal? What does it take for something to become actualised? Is it the fact that you enact a possibility in a given space for a period of time, is it that you invite people into the project and act collectively as if it is happening? By acting 'as if,' are you already actualising that something?

These are questions, and there is no one answer. I find the space in between very interesting and one that can be extremely productive.

OG How does your practice as an architect and curator operate within this framing of reality?

MP On two levels. In my practice as a designer with The Decorators, we enact possibilities in public spaces. We imagine futures for certain places and then we build them up for a period of time. Often our work involves not only building and designing structures, but also programming them. That is a very important aspect for us.

Our first project *Ridley's* was a temporary restaurant. We designed a system in which that restaurant could function and

then became restaurateurs ourselves. We designed the actual restaurant as a whole functioning system, almost like a synecdoche. We had an idea about that space, but also more generally how that programme could become an agent of renovation as much as more conventional spatial design. We enacted [*Ridley's*] for one month in its plot and, in that sense, engaged with the construction of the real by interfering with reality. By plugging a system and project into a certain reality, I believe that you can transform it. Xavier [Llarch Font] (a member of The Decorators) calls it rehearsals for public space. We are rehearsing a possibility for a period of time and inviting people to become part of it.

As a curator, I am also interested in staging and rehearsing. Many of my curatorial projects involve the production of dioramas or sceneries to contextualise projects in a certain way. I am also interested in researching objects that function as prototypes for futures in their own right. When I curated *The Future Starts Here* at the V&A, I wanted to gather projects that represented beginnings of ways of thinking. For example, Facebook's UAV (Unmanned Aerial

Vehicle) was intended to distribute internet to the whole world. This is an object with solar power and great engineering, but I was interested in how that object embodied the intention of Mark Zuckerberg to connect the whole world to the internet. Not only that, but to problematise a future in which the internet is provided by one single company.

I use the framework of fictionality to play with these binaries of real/unreal, fictional/non-fictional and actual/non-actual to think about design projects beyond their design and aesthetic properties—or their triality. I am interested in how they stand in relation to fiction and reality, how they have the capacity to transform reality, and how they are in themselves embodiments of bigger visions. In using this vocabulary of literary theory, perhaps we can understand design in different ways, focusing more on the intentions behind a design object and the projections it is able to make. That is, rather than the other dimensions we are more used to analysing in our fields.

OG I was going to ask who gets to decide what is real and unreal, but perhaps it is better framed as the intentions of interference

within a reality. In the roles of curator and architect, roles that hold power in mediating real spaces, how do you navigate those intentions?

MP What I find really interesting in this is that there are many, many possibles. Some of them get actualised, some at different scales, some in different contexts and some using different media.

When I wrote the *Scales of Plausibility* essay (featured in the Z33 book *Studio Time*), I was very interested in asking these questions. What is this moment when something becomes actualised? I gave the example of the Refugee Flag. Is it when the creators of the flag decided to commission it that it becomes actualised? Is it when Yara Said designs the flag, or is it when the flag is produced in a factory? Is it when the flag is held by visitors, or is it when someone working on the Olympic Committee finally displays it in the official manner?

I think the actualisation is produced not through one action alone, but in the sequence of them all. Though they may not be in synchronous collaboration, they are collaborative. They build up on top of each other.

I believe that this mode of thinking is our only possible resistance to other more dominant and encompassing ones, like that of Silicon Valley. In that context, someone comes up with an idea and gets funding through a research department to develop that idea further. Then, they get big investment to scale up that idea really fast. This is often called *moonshot thinking*. A project, or an idea for a project, has to be scalable at great speed and become disruptive. How do we compete with the kinds of futures being produced in Silicon Valley? It is a really difficult question to answer. I believe projects that are born in local circumstances with defiant politics also have the capacity to become widespread. Through these sequences of collaborations, they can gather more and more people around them.

In terms of how we display these objects, we are talking about radically different power structures. Specifically, projects that are produced in contexts that have a lot of access to power and can concentrate it. The model of companies like Google and Apple concentrate power in a very small number of individuals. These are CEOs that haven't been democratically

elected but have huge amounts of power. There is also a way of thinking about projects in terms of how they distribute that power. Some projects concentrate a lot of power and aren't open for others to modify or re-invent them. In terms of how we display these as curators, I find it very challenging. On the one hand, it's important to reveal the intentions behind many of the technologies and designs that form part of our everyday life. They all have inherent politics and power structures.

There is important work to be done in revealing those less visible dimensions. On the other hand, it's really essential to open space for projects of distributive power. This asks the question of whether you can ever be critical of the homogenising futures presented by big technological companies. Is it an illusion that you can even be critical of them? What does it mean to display a project by Google? Should you not display projects by Google and instead give space to others? These are questions I think about in relation to my practice as a curator.

OG Why is the enactment of possible worlds and fragments of them important?

MP

In my view, it has to do with inviting more people to become part of a certain vision. In many ways I'm fascinated by fictional projects that take up the form of drawings, like those of Archigram and Haus-Rucker-Co for instance. Though, the kinds of fragments I am talking about are situated in the public realm in a more direct way. They are perhaps closer to things such as the Occupy movement: spaces that are constructed, used, and then somehow integrated into people's everyday lives. Not only do they become the project and vision of their creator or initiator, they also have the capacity to transform over time. Whoever joins the project can divert it in the direction of this vision, something that becomes permanently negotiated. A shared vision of the future, these fragments and enactments are then collectively constructed and developed. They are not one perspective, they are multi-perspectival.

Why is enactment important? It is almost like a gateway to this fictional world. Umberto Eco has said that fictional works depict incomplete worlds. The author creates a world that is incomplete, and it is then the reader's job to fill in those gaps

of the world that the author chose to represent (he calls it a cosmological task). In a design project, people that you invite in can hold a more critical role than only filling up the gaps. The ways in which you allow involvement in a project can really shift its direction. I come from spatial design, so I wouldn't know how to enact things in another way.

OG

What role does design education have in altering these distances between the actual and fictional world? Speculation now appears to have become a tool more actively taught in design school.

MP

The work of Dunne & Raby and their development of a speculative design methodology, taught within the Design Interactions MA at the Royal College of Art, has shown how education can stimulate a way of thinking and designing that engages with the unreal. At the same time, whilst they were encouraging their students to think about future possibilities and fictional scenarios, they were also engaging with the very contemporary real in the context of technology labs and through being in dialogue with the Imperial College's research,

for instance. They were deeply engaged in the real. I think that is what made their fictions so powerful and visionary. Not only in their own, but also in their students' practice through the methodology they had learned in the school. It's incredible how this methodology generated a way of thinking about design and practicing it.

Design education is crucial because it opens up space for these projects to be created, and the series of resources students can use to produce work that is critical and fictional. Space has opened up not only in the workshops of a school, but you could say that the work of Dunne & Raby has opened up space in the actual world for these projects to exist too. When theirs and their students' work got exhibited at the MoMA as part of *Designs and the Elastic Mind*, that opened up a new space for a certain kind of Design Fiction to be displayed and discussed.

Today there is a proliferation of design festivals, design biennales and design museums where projects that have a fictional and critical nature can live and exist and develop. It's not as easy for a practitioner going to work for a company or design studio, but I think there are now

interesting contexts to display work that reinvents the discipline and practice.

# SCHOOL (UN)REALITIES

In the classroom, studio, lecture hall or seminar, the teacher and student may refer to the space beyond the school's assumed boundaries as the 'real world', the school's reality then contested. Such a dispute might suggest what lies within is then unreal. Here, our notions of what happens inside a school—learning, teaching and the tacit knowledge of that experience—are brought face-to-face with its physical and non-physical boundaries. So then, let us begin with a reality check.

In order to comprehend the 'unreal school', we might begin to do so through matters of space and time in order to understand its relationship to the 'real world'. Paul Elliman calls the school a provisional base to filter the world from and a place to reflect on and invent new principles.<sup>1</sup> In this understanding, reflection and invention are components within a school's incubation of its students ('provisional base') where the school is orientated towards a reality (filtered from) but not directly within one. In the

opening essay for the 4th Istanbul Design Biennial *A School of Schools*, its curators frame the school as a 'space of exception' through Giorgio Agamben's reading of Carl Schmitt's 'state of exception' theory, in its potential to offer a "temporary suspension of normal functioning where utopian ideals might be achieved".<sup>2</sup> Here the school is decoupled from the 'normal' or real and emancipates a theorised unreal freedom for teaching and learning. Both texts advocate for the school as a space grounded in some level of speculation, invention and 'utopian ideals', a kind of speculation that may not function in the real world. A 'temporary suspension' also reads closely to fiction's own role in willing a 'suspension of disbelief' of its audience.<sup>3</sup>

The school can also offer time that is freed from the real world, an understanding that extends back to the Greek *scholé* (school) which synonymizes 'free time' next to 'school' etymologically. Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons defend the school through its origins as somewhere that established a time detached from the *polis* (society) and *oikos* (household).<sup>4</sup> The school is again a matter of suspension, where its notion of time separates students from the unequal social and economic order of family and society.<sup>5</sup> While Masschelein and Simons do well to discredit accusations of 'alienation', instead praising the 'non-productive time' a school facilitates<sup>6</sup>, their language is still implicit in a binary: real world time and unreal school time.

## *The 'real world' binary*

But what do we mean by the 'real world', and whose real world is it? Cambridge Dictionary offers a definition worth positing here: "the set of situations most humans have to deal with in their lives, rather than what happens in stories [and] films."<sup>7</sup> Another describes the real world as something that exists and occurs "in reality" drawing from "actual events or situations".<sup>8</sup> Both definitions imply a binary: stories and film are unreal and separate from the reality of 'actual

events' where humans live and participate in actuality.

Is television unreal also? MTV recently announced a reboot of its longest running and most successful reality TV show *The Real World*, a model that set precedence for the now ubiquitous format. Here, the real world is cast, filmed, and edited, condensing days into hours to create highlight from monotony. In such, the real world is revised and retold where editing and the TV format itself enables a reality—albeit skewed—to exist. Reality TV has since widened its gaze to the school itself. BAFTA-winning *Educating Essex* offered us an eyeshot into the modern-day UK classroom where the school is subjected to real world voyeurism for entertainment and pastime. If the real world is what surrounds a school, our re-presentation of a school's 'real world' reality then conflicts. By way of the definition above, our school in *Educating Essex* is a story-on-film and thus unreal, a simulacrum of reality.

In an interview with Kingston School of Art lecturer Dr Cathy Gale, we discuss the real world and its colloquialism. She argues, “[the real world] is quite macho, the real world is about money. It's tough, it's dog-eat-dog, it's competitive.”<sup>9</sup> Gale raises a point that the phrase itself is already embedded with dogma. She describes the real world as something underpinned by patriarchy and implicitly tied to commerce: “it's a framing of reality as capitalism in its toughest form.”<sup>10</sup> Her criticism resonates with Henry Giroux's account that higher education is “held hostage to market-driven modes of accountability” and accredited by their probable economic contributions.<sup>11</sup> Mark Fisher expands on this through his understanding of a Capitalist Realism which he describes as a “pervasive atmosphere”<sup>12</sup> where, in this form of reality, education is regulated through an invisible barrier constraining thought and action.<sup>13</sup> He argues that education is directly implicated by such an atmosphere and is anything but “inured from the real world”.<sup>14</sup> Instead, education is the “engine room of the reproduction of social reality,” one that directly confronts capitalism's social field.<sup>15</sup> The reproduction of a reality, comparable to MTV's, adds

a layer of inception to our understanding of the real world, though its binary again conflicts. Through such perspectives, the unreal school is controlled by the real world through money, capital and market forces entrenched within society.

In light of Cathy Gale's criticism of the real world as patriarchal, I also argue that it is heteronormative. Heteronormativity “gives form to a broad range of cultural forms and societal institutions,” underpinning ‘social phenomena’ that include the “construction of identities ... and practices of institutions”.<sup>16</sup> Such a framing allows the real/unreal binary to resonate amongst queer and gender theory. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that binary oppositions of identity, principally homo/heterosexual, are inextricably linked to social organization.<sup>17</sup> Judith Butler describes the male/female binary as a ‘cultural fiction’.<sup>18</sup> She articulates that a ‘gender reality’ is created and sustained through social performances<sup>19</sup> in a ‘tacit collective agreement’.<sup>20</sup> Society's ‘collective agreement’ then demarcates a space to perform a reality of identity fictions. Through such understandings, the real world and unreal school can be understood as binary oppositions mingled within and overlapping other realities as societal constructs. If deemed a ‘cultural fiction’, one that is performative, people in the real world and students of the unreal school are then its ‘actors’ also.

Within the binary opposition of ‘real world’ and ‘unreal school’, the unreal school appears to be marked as Other in light of a real world that excludes “those who do not fit a societal norm.”<sup>21</sup> Referring back to Cambridge Dictionary's ‘real world’ definition, “the set of situations most humans have to deal with in their lives”,<sup>22</sup> we can understand societal norms as the defined “situations”, and “most humans” as the real world's hegemonic identities.

Having not yet been fully schooled through the ‘engine room’, students of the (unreal) school are—in theory—yet to assume societal norms and thus incubate as Other. However, it is within this incubation that one reality of the school enables prejudice of the Other also. For many during their experience of education, prejudice from the real world

is projected inward as inequality is smuggled past the gates. Thus, I liken the unreal school, an assumed 'space of exception', to a hyperreality that enmeshes real world inequalities. Such conflicting ideas might then suggest a series of realities for the unreal school. Deemed subjectively through juxtaposing socio-political and economic readings, the binary is in dispute. Henceforth, let us consider the school's reality fluid and non-binary.

## *Stages of real*

"When does something become real? A drawing for an unbuilt building is merely a scheme, but if someone commissions the building, or simply buys the drawing, it becomes economically real. If an agency approves the project for construction, then it becomes legally real. A building also becomes real if it is built, but it won't be for the first time."<sup>23</sup>

Tim Durfee plots out a building's 'stages of real'. In his description, a building is at once schematically real, economically real, legally real and built real. His analysis implies consecutive moments and allied iterations in becoming real. Through such, when does the school become real? Or, what are its stages of real? Durfee's analysis might line up: the school can be schematically real, economically real, legally real and built real also. To draw out more fluid realities, I will now assess the school through an example of its unrealisation.

Cedric Price's *Potteries Thinkbelt* proposal (1964–1966) was seminal in imagining an alternative, provincial-based infrastructure for the school. Price designed a diagrammatic reality that would have seen students taught in 'rail-buses' across a suburban sprawl in North Staffordshire towns, connected up for mobile learning and living where students would travel "from laboratory to factory, from information

centre to home, and from one home to another".<sup>24</sup>

*Thinkbelt* was ultimately considered unviable and unrealistic, economically and legally unreal, yet its prediction of today's work-life precarity and current 'capitalist realism' appears retrospectively real: "the relevance of the *Thinkbelt* proposal today is Price's unwitting anticipation of the most perverse neoliberal tendencies to exploit labour power".<sup>25</sup>

Now, what might make a school real additionally is what sits inside of it: corridors, printing machines, collections of books that occupy shelves, and its students. Paul Elliman suggests that a canteen and library, the makeup of a school's 'hubness', is all that is necessary for conception; he refers to them respectively as "a place to meet and talk and a place to meet and think."<sup>26</sup> I note Elliman's use of 'place' with Marc Augé's non-place theory close to mind.<sup>27</sup> Whether intentional, the place to talk and the place to think are predicated by their use. The 'space' of the school is abstract, untouched: the blueprint for a school but not its lived reality. In the context of Price's *Thinkbelt*, the classroom carriage or 'rail-bus' as space exists inside Price's published proposal. The diagrams and objective language are void of use: "[faculty areas] provide for the immediate disposition of rail-based, mobile learning units."<sup>28</sup> We are told what could be and how it would technically operate, in theory. If we use the school however, it becomes our 'place'. The place of the school is worn, rough-and-ready and with character(s). The rail-bus as place is one that might have seen its 'faculty area' hazed with remnants of paint and floors lined by greyboard offcuts. The 'disposition' described could have been a student's feverish response to an afternoon brief set between the Tunstall and Pitts Hall artery.<sup>29</sup> In such an exercise, we map onto Price's plans a reality: the place onto space, the real onto unreal. The place of the school is localised real, experientially real—a school culturally real with people. The invocation of learning allows us to imagine how his *Thinkbelt* may have thought, it allows us to inch closer to what has been drawn on paper.

Although the *Potteries Thinkbelt* was not built real, perhaps not legally or economically real either as a result of its unrealisation, its plans hold the potential to become real in other form. Price and Joan Littlewood's *Fun Palace* project too remained unrealised, yet its spirit and essence became real in the construction of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. More popularly termed Bowellism, the outward externalization of its structure was a notable reference to Littlewood and Price,<sup>30</sup> the *Fun Palace* therefore becoming derivatively real.

More recently these educational projects have been called 'Paper Schools', borrowed from 'Paper Architecture', of the unrealised and theoretical kind. Designers Corinne Gisel and Nina Paim coin this in an essay-project where they unearth an unrealised school in Brazil.<sup>31</sup> In an email they write, "when thinking about these 'paper schools', we decided to look at them not as 'failed' attempts, but as living ideas, as thoughts that think thoughts, as a garden of forking paths".<sup>32</sup> Their reference to Jorge Luis Borges' book is intentional and one they describe recalling in earlier stages of the project. *The Garden of Forking Paths* pivots off the now seminal quote, "I leave to the various futures (not to all) my garden of forking paths".<sup>33</sup> *Garden* offers its protagonist and readers simultaneous realities to contend with. If only as metaphor, this is still useful in applying Borges' story to the school's reality, so as to consider it real and unreal simultaneously, and as a spectrum of overlapping realities in between. Likewise, to consider paper schools as 'living ideas', theoretical room is created to retrospectively manipulate and converse with their realities further.

Tim Durfee may have missed one key reality in his aspirants: the exercise of storying *Thinkbelt* means the school has become literarily real. Or, as real as we can imagine it to be with words. Ludwig Wittgenstein rings in here, where the limits of our language might mean the limits of our world—or school.<sup>34</sup> In light of *Thinkbelt*'s unrealisation, a reality without its students there to wear in the school and action its proposed learning space, are we

not then able to conceive of its fluid realities? Any teething of usage and ephemeral memories are surely stopped in their tracks on the paper the school was constructed on. Elliman acknowledges their unrealisation but calls Price's projects "architectural essays on flexibility, indeterminacy and impermanence".<sup>35</sup> Samantha Hardingham described the *Thinkbelt* as "utterly uncompromised".<sup>36</sup> In these understandings, to be real on paper is to be uncompromised by other stages of real, and to be real on paper is to be flexibly impermanent.

Each stage of real can be considered individual, but also collective. Walter Gropius once asked us to "grasp the composite character of a building both as an entity and in its separate parts,"<sup>37</sup> and it is those separate parts I hold close to the stages of real. While the politics of various reals may mingle—the legally real implicating the economically real as policy planning, or the derivatively real feeding into the historically real as lineage—I recognise these stages as separate parts too, and not necessarily successive. In an interview with Nina Paim, she makes the case that, while not built real, 'paper schools' have real traces left behind.<sup>38</sup> It is these traces and lineages of real that offer us a line to draw from: from the real to the unreal, or somewhere in between.

## *A school unreality*

In looking to reclaim to the school's (un)reality from the stale hands of 'real world' neoliberalism and the hyperreality of education, a queer potentiality is revealed in between the oppositional 'real world' and 'unreal school'. In a Walker Reader series on 'Queering Design', guest editor Nicole Killian offers a poignant statement:

"A queering of design education is an opening, a hole—an unclosable gap. Queering would be the deconstruction of normality without the goal of a new normal. We don't know yet what



these new structures might look like and they too will change. We must go into the unknown, together.”<sup>39</sup>

Any reality holds the potential to become real in our minds, schools and histories. Though, it is within the school’s (un)reality that an opening may appear between brackets, a potentiality *within* that unknown. It is here then that we must depart from the ‘realness’ of reality. Born within the 1980s ball culture in New York City and famed by documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990), ‘realness’ was coded as the desire and attempt to blend into a heteronormative and patriarchal real world. ‘Realness’ is to pass, to assimilate, to disguise.

Instead, let us call for a school unrealness, an unrealness that celebrates and extends a freedom to imagine otherwise. A ‘school unrealness’ in theory should lean less towards a framing of the art and design school as a space of exception, a framing that may contribute further detachment to ‘real world’ realities of homogeneity, precarity and solutionism. These realities—and lots more—need urgent address and a context in which to action within. We must hit eject from the space of exception and work tirelessly to construct and maintain what curator Nadine Botha calls a ‘safe space to redesign reality’.<sup>40</sup> However, ‘safe’ should not inoculate any critical empowerment, and to redesign reality must not necessarily imply redesigning a future. We have realities calling out to us in the very present, these need our attention just as much.

A school unrealness can be understood as a queering of art and design education, where that ‘deconstruction of normality’<sup>41</sup> Nicole Killian has suggested, is premised as something embodyable by learners. A school unrealness should foster a radical incubation of learning that nurtures and activates urgencies from all its participants.

Although it may appear that the unreal and fictional are of particular dispute in our current post-truth condition, we may do well to look back upon ball culture for its scrutiny and embodied understanding of a certain kind of reality.

Only then, in between the paradoxical binary of ‘real world’ and ‘unreal school’, can we begin to excavate a space for potential and critique. That is, one where a school unrealness is unleashed to collectively re-imagine art and design education.

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# Nina Paim

Nina Paim is a Brazilian designer, researcher and curator based in Basel, Switzerland. In 2018, she co-founded the non-profit design research practice *common-interest* with Corinne Gisel. Their practice brings together critical inquiry, issue advocacy, collectivity building and creative storytelling.

[www.common-interest.ch](http://www.common-interest.ch)

Note: Some factual errors may appear in this transcript.

OG When does the school become real? Is it the drawing on paper, is it the students that fill its corridors? When does the school become economically real, legally real, or literarily real when you write about it? Yours and Corinne's essay on the 'Paper School', unrealised educational visions, I see as one way of looking at the school's

reality. Although a school may be unrealised, it is real on the paper it was imagined on. Maybe there is something in what we do with their unreality that can make them more real for us in what we draw from them today.

NP A lot of things come to my mind personally. After we made the book for [exhibition] *Taking A Line for a Walk*, conceived by myself, Emilia [Bergmark] and Corinne [Gisel], we saw the book not as an end process but more like an opening and a starting point for conversation. We organised a series of discussions in different places. The first one was called The Political Assignment, and it was something we organised in Amsterdam. There was another called the Historical Assignment in Zurich, and then the last was called the Real Assignment in New York. We wanted to talk about this notion of what real work is inside the school.

Sometimes, teachers refer to these types of assignments as 'scale 1:1' or 'real life assignments'. These are terms that are used to talk about something that has a reality to it. Often, these are assignments that want to mimic a real brief that a real designer would get in the real

world, or it's actually assignments that are a real brief.

However, this is was conversation that happened in the beginning of December 2016, a couple of weeks after Donald Trump was elected. So, the real assignment was that immediate reality, and how to confront that reality within design education. It went off track from what we originally intended to discuss what makes an assignment real.

Often times I think people use words such as 'training' or think of the school as somewhere to 'train' and 'exercise' as if it's not the real thing. It's a bit like soccer: you have to train, but it's not the game where you win or lose. Conditions are controlled. For me, that never really worked as a student. I think a certain sense of reality, or a certain sense of what I was doing was actual work was necessary for me to do the work that I wanted to do. As a student, every time I had to do a fictitious poster for a fictitious rock concert, these assignments never really gave me much. I craved for a reality.

I think part of the argument we made in the *Paper Schools* essay was that it's not because something didn't happen that it is not real. There are real traces

of that thing that is left behind, and these traces of that idea or that model or that plan, these are things that can inspire us and take agency from in our educational practices. Often, these paper schools never happened because they were, at the time, too outrageous or too difficult to understand from a social, cultural and political context to be accepted. But they exist, and bringing them back into reality, through writing about them and talking about them, is giving people resources to imagine. I think imagination is a very important tool to actually change things. I think it's also part of why we wanted to publish the *Taking A Line for a Walk* book. By presenting to people a wide array of assignments, it is also about showing students that design education can be taught from wider perspectives. I'm being given this assignment where I have to design this fictitious poster for a rock concert, but I could also be doing this or that, or that. I think it took me a long time as a student—and also as a designer—to unlearn a lot of the things that I had learnt in my initial years of design education. It made me realise how pervasive these foundational moments are. Once you are

given some food for thought or imaginary instruments that you can bounce ideas back against something else, that can give you a critical insight to judging your own experience and imagining how it could be different. I think that is why I see these fictional things as real, as they can be really useful.

In the case of Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi and her unrealised *Escola de Desenho Industrial e Artesanato* (School of Industrial Design and Craftsmanship), she was envisioning a school where local craftsmen and craftswomen were working in diffusion of each other. A diffusion in the roles of teacher, student, master and apprentice. This is a complete contrast with the model and idea today of the star designer, who flies around giving workshops from here to there. This was a completely different way to imagine what an exchange site is. Who gets to do the exchange? A lot of the times this is a given. Schools function in a way where you have a regular body of teachers, and all of a sudden there comes an external tutor—perhaps really well known, or whose work has been celebrated. OK, but you could also be working with someone that is in the periphery who has been

doing design work that has not been considered ‘design work’. You can design otherwise, and you can think otherwise about design.

I think that is why the fictional can be real. There is quite a bit of feminist theory around the notion of speculation, as a way to imagine something that is not yet there and as a way to give yourself agency to actually change it. I think that is an important aspect to it. Sometimes you need to envision something, you need to see something that is not yet there. That is the most difficult part.

OG In the *Paper Schools* essay, you speak about unrealised educational visions as living ideas. I think this framing allows us to see these projects as something malleable. It allows us to enact them.

NP Exactly, and that is where we see the potential of it and why we think it is interesting to look at. There are some historical examples of successful schools: the Bauhaus, Black Mountain College or Ulm, for instance. These have been over and over established in the canon. I think it is important to look elsewhere.

The Bauhaus is turning one hundred, so there has been an upsurge in people talking about it, but this mostly a conversation that reiterates what we already know. Even though the Bauhaus was very complex and multi-faceted, with a multi-layered experience, it cannot be reduced to one thing.

When you talk about something else, when you change the discussion to something else, I think there is agency in doing that. Why are we all talking about this? Let’s talk about that. That’s more interesting, let’s change the subject. There are metaphors to many other aspects of doing work where you choose carefully which theory you quote. Do you quote the same old white male that has been cited over and over again, or do you consciously choose to quote otherwise? I think that is an activist way of addressing design. It’s not that you want to erase the canon of design history, but you want to show other aspects of the world that are very complex.

OG When we think of fiction, we might think of the novel, but I’m interested in the other ways that you can deploy a fiction. I look to Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers and his fictional museum

*Departement des Aigles* (Department of Eagles) as an example of this.

NP I think that is a really great reference, and it also makes me think back to the *Ministry of Graphic Design* project as that was also a reference for us. I think when Prem [Krishnamurthy], Emily [Smith] and Na [Kim], together with Salem and Maryam [Al-Qassimi] conceived of the *Ministry of Graphic Design*, they were thinking in a very similar direction to what you are talking about now. That is, embracing graphic design’s ability to give structures to things and thinking about graphic design outside of its presupposed discipline.

In the UAE, the ministry format is a way in which to organise the social place of the region. The biennial was held in a building that used to be bank. This was an official building: it had a sign that said ‘Ministry of Graphic Design’. It looks to and really takes from the Department of Eagles in playing with that fictional quality.

Within the Ministry, we curated the *Department of Non-Binaries* exhibition. There was not one entrance or one exit, and there was no exhibition path so to speak. In the

middle, there was one area called *Bayn*, the Arabic word for 'in between'. This was a space that we conceived with *Bayn Journal*, a critical graphic design magazine founded and initiated by Elham Namvar and Rasha Dakkak. They wanted this space to acknowledge the pervasiveness of graphic design in the UAE, so they isolated everyday, mundane objects—sock packaging, greeting cards, souvenirs—and presented them in vitrines as if they were art or something special and rare.

Graphic Design in the UAE is often taught through all the Western models, and nobody looks at the everyday anonymous graphic design. Creating a fictional museum and using those cues had the power of elevating work that was otherwise unseen. *Bayn* had a wall with prayer mats and they were trying to show how prayer mats are also objects of design. There are different design devices that play out in the everyday. You can talk about objects using local materials that are a part of the imaginary of people from the UAE and the Middle East. So, I think sometimes the fictional can give agency to imagining otherwise or thinking otherwise about design.

OG Some element of disguise appears necessary in how we deploy a fiction to subvert a space. To disguise that fiction may then allow our work and its intentions to permeate into the surrounding space or city, one that might not welcome it otherwise. People can then enter that space and feel comfortable offering something to it.

NP It's so much about giving space. It's about making space more complex, more diverse. Less homogenous, more heterogeneous. Much of design education—and my experience of it—is about conformity and forming people. The word form itself is often used. People that graduated from my school in Brazil used to be called Form SG 2005, the graduating class of 2005. This upholds the idea of formatting, forming, or conforming. I think design is such a broad and ample terrain, that conforming is not necessarily what you want to achieve. In terms of design education, you don't want to make people think the same. On the contrary, you want to make people understand their unique value and possibility of contribution.

# A Parede

A Parede (Dr. Luiza Prado de O. Martins and Dr. Pedro Oliveira) is a Brazilian duo of artists and researchers. Their work advances a decolonising framework for inquiring and intervening on material practices, with a particular interest in matters of culture, gender and sound studies. They are both co-founding members of the Decolonising Design Group.

[www.a-pare.de](http://www.a-pare.de)

OG In the *Yarn Sessions* project, you describe the process as ‘designing through yarning’. Can you describe where the project developed from and how yarning was deployed as a methodology in the sessions?

AP The question of yarning, of talking through things, it came from a Brazilian thing. We spent a lot of time figuring out what we could do to offer a way of practicing speculation, but we were not necessarily talking about speculative design. We

started mapping things: what are the approaches, what are the faults that we both see in these approaches, and what interests us that we would like to keep. We started with a format of open sessions where people would tell their stories or come with news stories, as a way of talking through objects. That was very inspired by the work of Augusto Boal—a Brazilian playwright—and Paulo Freire.

We were trying to think through how Boal used objects as a part of his plays. Then, when we started thinking about names it was kind of a coincidence. When people get together to gossip in Brazil, you say they get together to *tricotar*. *Tricotar* is literally to yarn. OK, so it’s a yarning session where people are gossiping and talking about life. We then learned from a friend in Decolonising Design Group, who is Australian indigenous, that yarning is an indigenous practice. It’s not a practice of yarning yarn, but telling stories without an end. The third point of inspiration then came from Donna Haraway’s idea of the ball of yarn. Haraway talks about imploded objects which she describes as balls of yarn. In her conception, these imploded objects are objects

that you can untangle and unravel. Whole worlds come out of that because you can extract so much through meaning and how these objects exist in the world.

In terms of how we designed the sessions, there was never a fixed strategy. What held them all together was the fact that they always began from props and speculative proposals. We presented these to participants as parts of a story that was incomplete and then they had to fill in the gaps. We had to discover and build together. Our work after then reflected back on having longer engagement with students—a two day workshop instead of one. You then give time for people to actually reflect and you can also give feedback to their ideas. Say, why don’t you think about this from another perspective? Why don’t you approach this from a different angle?

We then developed the *Yarn Sessions* into another project called *Impossible Methods*. This format builds upon the *Yarn Sessions*, and there were elements of the sessions that became a methodology. For *Impossible Methods*, we have sets of different questions that we ask students. We don’t ask

them to answer to us, but to answer to themselves within groups based on objects that they themselves bring to the workshop. Before the sessions take place, we give students keywords. For instance, bring an object that represents power to you. First, they have to think what that keyword means to them and they have to interpret that in the material world. What is a materialisation of that keyword? We give two words that are generally in opposition to each other: power and empowerment, work and labour, or voice and silence for example. Crucially, it is what that object means to you. It’s been interesting to see the personal interpretations and how participants place the objects within their own personal histories and backgrounds. This has already addressed a lot of the flaws we found in the *Yarn Sessions* format. It opens up a world of possibilities just by allowing questions to be asked in terms of the objects that participants possess.

When you trigger a student to have an idea in this way, the impact this has in their future endeavours will change how they think. Most importantly, because they found out themselves. We don’t teach them a model.

Instead, they learn what questions they should ask by themselves. This is the Paulo Freire method of a problem-finding and problem-posing education. This goes completely against what he calls the banking concept of education. In this, the educator is in a position in which he deposits knowledge onto the students, that must be vessels to passively receive that knowledge. Freire defends a model of education where you do things together. You learn together.

In each session, there is so much that we observe and that we learn. It is something that you build together, and it changes the way you perceive education. For us, this goes back to the self-organisation student movements that take place in Brazil. From the moment you realise that you are an active agent in building your own education, you have a completely different attitude towards it. That is what is missing in design education, and education as a whole. As a student, you are not taught that you have agency, but you can actually change things. It's just a matter of using the power that we have as educators to distribute that power and never concentrate it, and even to reassure students that they do have power. That

is the whole point of being an educator: teaching people to teach themselves. Though teaching implies a relationship of power, so how do I become an agent in enabling agencies? Paulo Freire says that emancipation cannot be bestowed upon people. It is a process in which people find themselves to be human, or find themselves to be agents and to be active. You cannot just tell someone to do that. The educator is a mediator and education is something you build together.

OG Do you think we need a sense of theatre within design education? The designer as actor, or *spec-actor* as Augusto Boal understood it.

AP Augusto Boal was so ahead of his time. We do need theatrics, and we need to enact agencies as part of our *bildung*—our formation and development. We need to develop a different performativity towards our agency. Performing these agencies makes you more aware of the limits of your own power and privilege. You actually enact them, and by enacting them you become more aware of the boundaries. The fact that you frame it as a

performance is also important. From the moment you bring the performative aspect of these things to the foreground, you cast it in an entirely new light. You start examining things in a way that you wouldn't otherwise. Sometimes we think that certain things that we do, that we think or say, are natural. The moment that you cast them as a performance specifically, you put them in question. What is the difference between what is natural—what you consider natural—and what is constructed? It is also a decolonising act because you can attempt to temporarily escape modernity's rationality and objectivity. You start dealing with subjectivities and you start becoming aware of how these subjectivities inform your process.

Performativity has to be a component of how we perceive ourselves in the world. To encourage people to think of what they do as performances is already one step. Augusto Boal talks a lot about the value of enactment. From the moment you perform that enactment, you see new things that you wouldn't have seen if you were only discussing them in the realm of ideas and

thoughts. It becomes this suspended reality, which is something we also talk about in the *Yarn Sessions*. The sessions created a suspended reality for people to experiment with ideas. But then, in the end of each, we would bring these ideas back home. What do we learn from this? How does this connect to your own lives and your own realities?

The moment of suspending reality is also interesting. Speculative Design almost demands this from the audience, but we try to bring this to a more Boal way through a suspension for everyone involved. One thing that emerged in the sessions was the mixing of reality and fiction. Some were framed as a collective performance, where participants were asked to tell stories and tell others about what they know. Often, stories that people told as speculative things were actually real, but everybody thought that it was something the person had just made up. In the debriefing sessions that we had afterward, people then started to unpack what was real and what was not. This brought a whole different meaning to the question of speculation. Something that sounds preposterous for you, from the context that

you know, could be a real thing that happens in another part of the world and in another context for other people.

OG How does this intersect with the Dunne & Raby brand of speculation?

AP Dunne & Raby were really influential in our development as designers. One thing that has to be said is that they never claimed to have invented speculation, until *Speculative Everything*. [Earlier books] *Hertzian Tales* and *Design Noir* discussed the limitations of their practice and the limitations of design. They built up a discussion from things that were already there. Then, they turned *Speculative Everything* into a brand. This is speculative design, this is not. We understand that it helped them to establish their own practice as something fixed, which was concomitant to the process of what was happening at the RCA. Our problem is what *Speculative Everything* has done. It established a canon that is white and Western European, and that is problematic. This is something that *Hertzian Tales* and *Design Noir* did not set themselves to do. They are much more honest explorations of the limits of

design practice, and we do still look at these books as an interesting means to build up a discourse, but not to establish a brand. When it starts to establish a brand, who gets to decide that brand? After *Speculative Everything* created such a canon, we started looking at other references. Speculation has been happening in Latin America since Gabriel García Márquez, and even before that.

When you have a field of design called *Speculative and Critical Design*, it exempts the rest of design from acknowledging their accountability in making futures and being critical and accountable for its politics—but we are responsible for this. We have to be present. We have to be there when these futures are created so people can say, this future does not belong to me. If someone says this future does not belong to me, how do you react as a designer? Do you stand your ground and say, well, sorry not sorry? Or, do you rethink your practice to ask why this future does not belong to that person. If designers are not willing to engage in conversations about what they do, what are we doing? What are we doing as creators of things, of systems and futures?

## FICTIONING A METHOD

To namedrop fiction, our thoughts may deviate to a personal favourite—a novel or film, most likely. We are quick to umbrella the ‘genre’ as literary or cinematic, but fictions are found everywhere and nowhere as they blanket the world as invisible constructs. Fictions hinge time onto ourselves, broker our billions and allow international industries to function each day.<sup>1</sup> It appears necessary then that we widen fiction’s aperture in order to fully capture its potential. In the introduction of reader *Fiction as Method*, its editors acknowledge such broadening: “fictions proliferate in all aspects of our lives, unconstrained by the novel as a specific form of art”.<sup>2</sup> They refer to the book’s contributions as ‘registers of fiction’ in the way they operate, as an alternative to defining fiction’s spatial boundaries.<sup>3</sup> ‘Registers’ are useful here: the registers within the school’s (un)reality might be re-figured as series, stages or guises.

Having positioned the school’s reality as fluid and non-binary in the previous essay, I now look to understand what fiction can offer the unreal school. To do so, selected ‘registers’ will be analysed in order to understand their potential when employed with intent and method. I first examine a fictional museum, produced as Institutional



Critique, and then extend my analysis to other fictions whose scope and subject are also institutionally-minded. I will then make use of these fictions to derive from them as models, scripts, rumour and heresy in my proposal—and later actioning—of an Educational Critique that follows after. Firstly though, I look to ground the essay with a brief overview of fiction in its expanse.

### *Fiction as verb*

In order to action a school unreality, it is important that we understand fiction not as the popular literary medium alone, but as a set of tools and methods with a multitude of applications. Fiction can take us further than a conventional idea of reality and offer “a ludic approach to theory”.<sup>4</sup> Though the fictional can become unrelatable,<sup>5</sup> and perhaps not enjoyable when forced or compelled to engage with one, fictions allow us to see another way, if only “holidayed in temporarily”.<sup>6</sup> Sites of fiction have also been discussed. While Jussi Parikka substitutes the term fiction for imaginary, the library, museum, studio and laboratory are all named in his essay on speculative practices as fictions in situ, that are “designed to shift the space of the possible”. He argues that both the library and museum spatially situate the imaginary, and that a mythology is crucial to their production.<sup>7</sup>

In the design community, fiction has been employed more actively as of late, evidenced in the recent canonisation of speculation across disciplines in the form of Speculative and Critical Design (SCD). However, the stakes of SCD have been problematised by a number of those practicing. Discussions around who SCD is made by and for, as well as the over-termining of fictional projects as Critical Design, Design Fiction or Design for Debate, have pushed back against the Euro-centricity and ignorance of ‘real world’ realities within the discipline.<sup>8</sup>

To follow the canon, one can trace the recent speculative turn in design fairly swiftly back to the work

of Dunne and Raby (Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby), a contemporary design practice that has employed fiction across their future-orientated projects. Whilst doing so, Dunne & Raby also mapped out a SCD methodology in the book *Speculative Everything* (2013) alongside their previous headship of the Design Interactions MA at the Royal College of Art. Whilst earlier books *Design Noir* (2001) and *Hertzian Tales* (1999) had already introduced their ideas of critical fiction, it was *Speculative Everything* that arguably led to the SCD canon formation thus far.<sup>9</sup>

However, I hope to differentiate between the ‘what if’ fictions much of SCD produces, and the arguably ‘as if’ ones I analyse in this essay. Novelist David Garcia explains the two: while ‘what if’ fictions “lead to satirical acts designed to unmask the workings of power,” ‘as if’ fictions are “more utopian, leading to forms of activism that, rather than demanding change, act ‘as if’ change has already occurred”.<sup>10</sup> I also look to draw more of my research efforts from *mythopoeia* (myth-making) of literary fiction, within which the concept of *fictioning* may allow me to analyse projects through a more performative framing. ‘Fictioning’ has been defined in a contemporary context as:

“the writing, imaging, performing or other material instantiation of worlds or social bodies that mark out trajectories different to those engendered by the dominant organisations of life currently in existence.”<sup>11</sup>

It is in the performative and spatial potentialities of a school unreality that I look to ultimately focus my research. The ‘operative effect’ of a fiction is thus key to my study over its objective and disputed existence.<sup>12</sup> Such a focus allows me to analyse fictions through the way they are enacted by their audience and less through their objective realities. To begin, I look back to a politicised art project with fictional intent.

## A mirrored subversion

Institutional Critique has been retrospectively defined as a “politicized art practice” that targeted the frameworks and bureaucracies of the museum’s institution.<sup>13</sup> Artists producing Institutional Critique took aim at the oft-hidden infrastructures of the art institution, doing so to unveil how they form us as publics.<sup>14</sup> But, to uncover fiction’s potential within Institutional Critique, I turn towards Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers.

“Broodthaers embarked on a project that would take four years and generate twelve separate yet connected sections; together, they resulted in one of the most significant artistic endeavors of European postwar art. Yet, if we take the artist at his word, what he imagined during this time was not exactly art, but a different kind of world.”<sup>15</sup>

On first reading, this statement may sound sensational, posing Marcel Broodthaers as a self-proclaimed gatekeeper of other worldly knowledge. But, when read under the context of my study, the vastness of “a different kind of world”<sup>16</sup> may read less so. Marcel Broodthaers used fiction as a method to imagine another means for the museum, thus imagining another reality or world. That different kind of world included the *Musée d’Art Moderne: Département des Aigles* (Museum of Modern Art: Department of Eagles), a museum he constructed “simply by behaving as one”.<sup>17</sup>

In what began within the aftermath of May 1968, Marcel Broodthaers constructed a fictional museum, one without a permanent collection or fixed location. He described the project as both a political parody of art shows and an artistic parody of political events, claiming that its fictioning allowed him to capture reality as well as what it conceals.<sup>18</sup> Writer Rachel Haidu argues that, instead of positioning the *Musée* antithetically to the institution’s power, Broodthaers

instead “mirrored that very institutional weight, replete with bureaucracy and naming and communication conventions”.<sup>19</sup> Haidu’s notion of ‘mirrored’ is our subversion under spotlight. Mirroring suggests the *Musée*’s content may not have been directly subversive, but the actioning and employment of said conventions was Broodthaers’ subversion. The artist recognized methods of administration, communication and print within the institution, then able to re-action them to suit his critique. Broodthaers himself acknowledged that the fullest expression of *Musée* came after its inauguration, where he implemented “detailed markers” that included invitation cards, announcements, signage, operational hours, and other functioning departments.<sup>20</sup> Across all four years of the project, Broodthaers engaged with a design-conscious fiction. In our interview, Cathy Gale praises his ‘designerly’ skillset and says that “there is nothing about the Department of Eagles that isn’t incredibly well considered as a piece of design.”<sup>21</sup> To design the *Musée* well meant it could be enacted, with belief, through the participation of ‘real’ actors: a gallery public.

Circumstance was key in the *Musée*’s opening. In an interview Broodthaers remarked, “this museum was born, not out of a concept but out of circumstances. The concept came later”.<sup>22</sup> An iteration of *Musée* under the title *Section Documentaire* presented itself on a spread of the De Haan beach in 1969, where Broodthaers’ museum took shape by circumstance of wave tide (“a floor plan is drawn into the sand at low tide”), accompanied by an audience of circumstance in their timely presence (“whoever they were on that day”).<sup>23</sup> A fiction has been deployed on the De Haan, but through its enactment by a public, does that fiction become real? In one photograph, two children are captured digging. The girl is Broodthaers’ daughter, the boy is his friend Herman Daled’s son. The boy holds a sign that reads ‘Musée d’art Moderne – section XIXième siècle.’ On initial viewing, the candidness of a beach photograph is familiar by way of its setting. Yet, our familiarity to it is entwined with its fiction. Here, the children are playing at the *Département*

*des Aigles*. On paper this sounds unfamiliar, but here we see them holding a spade and playing at the beach, allowing us to assume some normality in the scene whether real or unreal. Perhaps Broodthaers asked the children to hold the sign intentionally, or perhaps a curiosity led them to it—then captured. While we can't be sure if the children believed the museum to be real, we can take their participation in Broodthaers' fiction as a means to exemplify how, once employed as method, a fiction can be enacted.

The editors of *Fiction as Method* argue: "fiction facilitates a peripatetic wandering, but this wandering nevertheless returns, if only through a gesture, to the concrete political circumstances of its genesis".<sup>24</sup> Although *Département des Aigles* is without a fixed home, acquisition or conservation, its unticked criteria should not automatically oblige us to consider it unreal. Instead, it "assume[s] the reality of a fiction".<sup>25</sup> This elevates an overlap between real and unreal, where a fiction takes the guise of reality or is implemented into one. We can here frame fiction as something consciously and meaningfully enacted as real, given that 'concrete political circumstance'.<sup>26</sup>

### *An improper name*

If 'political circumstance' can agitate a fiction into being, I now look back over a century earlier, where a fiction was employed and enacted at the centre of a nationwide revolt. The Luddites, several groups of textile and woollen-mill workers across the Midlands, Yorkshire and northwest England, revolted against the owners of machinery in protest of what consequences they had created for labour practice during the Industrial Revolution. Heightened between 1811 and 1812, their leader Ned Ludd may or may not have been real.<sup>27</sup> Some have authored that a Ned Ludlam was an apprentice stocking-frame knitter, although this story is considered apocryphal.<sup>28</sup> In any case the mythology of Ned Ludlam, Ned Ludd, General Ludd, King Ludd, and the

Machine Breaker in his many guises created a fiction that, when given the political circumstance that revealed itself in 1811, could be actioned and assumed en masse. The name Ned Ludd was penned within writing, borne from revolt in ballads, chalkings, declarations, manifestos and ubiquitous threatening letters.<sup>29</sup> Ludd's fiction is argued as a precursor to a Luddite 'brand', one that spread organically to other regions.<sup>30</sup> This was during a time long before our current post-truth condition, and an age where the real and unreal might not have been so woolly.

Marco Deseriis unpacks the fiction of Ned Ludd and defines it as an 'improper name', or "the adoption of the same alias by organized collectives, affinity groups, and individual authors."<sup>31</sup> Nuance appears where the eponym detached itself from its originating context<sup>32</sup>. He explains:

"The name Ned Ludd designates two asymmetrical forms of struggle. On one hand, Ludd expresses the resistance of the last guild masters and apprentices against industrial capitalism. On the other hand, as it enters the Northwest, it comes to designate the emergence—albeit still in embryonic form—of a modern form of class struggle all internal to the capitalist mode of production."<sup>33</sup>

To learn of method here, Ned's fiction could sustain itself with enough potency to traverse geographies and divide itself into smaller factions of meaning. Ned Ludd became armour-like for those who participated in its fictioning: its actors had performed a "juridic folk play" in a "mumming of Ned Ludd".<sup>34</sup> At first a generalised signifier in initial riots of 1811–12, longer-term usage of Ned Ludd reflected a forking path of realities, one in which the 'social composition' of workers was "fundamentally different".<sup>35</sup> Whether real or unreal, Ludd's collective identity was actioned in its political circumstance and constructed where necessary. Ned Ludd was malleable, performative: a fiction as literary weapon.

## A speculative archaeology

How close can we get to the act of fictioning? The Centre Georges Pompidou, an architectural project I refer to in *School (Un)realities*,<sup>36</sup> had its reality contested during its process of realisation—then Centre Beaubourg. In 1975, under the pseudonym Gustave Affeulpin, French sociologist Albert Meister wrote *La soi-disant utopie du centre beaubourg* (The so-called utopia of centre beaubourg). It storied the Centre beaubourg, differentiated with lowercase b, a subterranean counterculture that existed in the space directly below the superior Beaubourg. One was real, the other a fiction, and “a concrete slab would divide the two cultural universes”.<sup>37</sup> In the midst of Beaubourg’s development, another reality had been constructed: “[Meister] silently excavates several million cubic metres of earth below the space demarcated for the construction of the Centre Beaubourg”.<sup>38</sup>

To describe Meister’s writing as excavation aligns to the terrain of *beaubourg*, but equally to the embodiment of its unearthed fiction. The work of excavation is evocative of bodily practice: movement, gesture, and a connectedness to the earth. To carve out the *beaubourg* required time and a methodology to construct a fiction that was believable, one that had been enacted in his own reality of Beaubourg, but crucially a reality that could be enacted through reading in the minds of others: literarily real. Meister engaged in a speculative archaeology, a counterculture-making that he deemed necessary given the political circumstance he found himself in. Meister’s fictioning was embedded within the reality of Beaubourg’s own: the plateau and then ‘cavity’<sup>39</sup> his apartment overlooked. If only by way of circumstance, his tenancy opposite the construction site, Meister was the author of a new reality. In using his role as narrator, he masks the political circumstance of real world “official culture” with a profoundly unofficial ulterior reality.<sup>40</sup> In a short extract, Meister speaks of an extensive meeting inside the *centre beaubourg*:

“There it is, a bit passionately, our dialogue with the pre-conditionists. Believe me, I have made a serious effort to condense the discussions that lasted days and that strained more than one meeting into one page. And again, noticing that there weren’t apparatuses, organisms, or positions to conquer, they grew tired and disappeared completely, taking their dream of a new society, built from the simple conquest of power that their naive eschatology, calls ‘transformation of structures’, with them.”<sup>41</sup>

Meister edits his own reality—“believe me, I have made a serious effort to condense the discussions that lasted days ... into one page”<sup>42</sup>—but in the process his story inevitably remains a solipsistic account from one individual’s subjective view of an institution. While his account does imagine the counterculture with exceedingly detailed description, his ‘single story’<sup>43</sup> inadvertently remains narrow in its excavation from a male, French-European perspective.

To consider Ned Ludd and *beaubourg* together: while the former was actionable by a critical mass, a trans-geographical population’s shared struggle fictioned into a collective body, Meister’s countercultural world remains the only narrative, however numerous in ‘beaubourgiens’.<sup>44</sup>

There is useful overlap between the intentions of both fictions, but their methods appear to conflict by way of their employed enactment. Though, both examples offer an embodied critique, where the ‘political circumstance’ that each fiction had manoeuvred itself from within then paved the very foundations upon which a fictioning could manifest. A call to arms is thus a call to fiction.

## A call to fiction

Analysis of Marcel Broodthaers' *Eagles*, Ned Ludd's improper name and Albert Meister's *beaubourg* have aided me as I've tried to unpack fiction methodologically, to widen its scope for potential and a critique. Designer Jacob Lindgreen uses Albert Meister's counterculture as an editorial blueprint in *Extra-curricular*, a recent reader that compiled an expanded discussion on contemporary graphic design education. On actionable threads to be drawn from *beaubourg*, he writes:

"it's important to position the same kind of world-making and self-organised experimentation as a catalyst for change, whether it be in thought or action; in the ruins of the old, implanted into the beginnings of the new, or far away from the site of either."<sup>45</sup>

If a fictional museum involved mirroring 'institutional markers' based on some stage of (un)reality, a fictional school might mirror the school's own markers, based on another. If a radical counterculture had been fictioned as means to reject its 'real world' superior, any equivalent within the school may take aim at similar bureaucracy and pretence. And, if a political circumstance was to reveal itself, as several already have, a collective body might be the only means to mobilise against the hegemonic forces at play within creative education. Through such, the conditions and frameworks upon which we might build an embodied critique against the art and design school are to be laid down ahead.

## Endnotes

1. *Fiction as Method*, ed. by Theo Reeves-Everson and Jon K. Shaw (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017).
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3. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
4. Interview with Cathy Gale, see page 59.
5. Interview with Nina Paim, see page 36.
6. Interview with Kieran O'Connor, see page 84.
7. Jussi Parikka, 'The Lab Imaginary: Speculative Practices In Situ', *transmediale* (2016) <<https://transmediale.de/content/the-lab-imaginary-speculative-practices-in-situ>> [Accessed 20 Dec. 2018].
8. Pedro Oliveira and Luiza Prado, 'Questioning the "critical" in Speculative & Critical Design', *Medium* (2014) <<https://medium.com/a-parede/questioning-the-critical-in-speculative-critical-design-5a355cac-2ca4>> [Accessed 6 Dec. 2018]; Cameron Tonkinwise, 'Just Design', *Medium* (2015) <<https://medium.com/@camerontw/just-design-b1f-97cb3996f>> [Accessed 6 Dec. 2018].
9. Interview with A Parede, see page 42.
10. David Garcia, 2017, pp. 82–83)
11. David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan, *Fictioning: The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), p. 1.
12. See Note 1, p. 17.
13. Alexander Alberro, 'Institutions, Critique, and Institutional Critique', in *Institutional critique: an anthology of artists' writings*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).
14. Rachel Haidu, *The Absence of Work: Marcel Broodthaers, 1964-1976* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), p.xvii.
15. Christian Rattemeyer, 'Musée-Museum', in *Marcel Broodthaers*, ed. by Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Christophe Cherix (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2016), p. 166.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
17. Jonathon Keats, 'The New Marcel Broodthaers Retrospective At MoMA Will Change Your View Of Museums', *Forbes* (2016) <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonathonkeats/2016/02/17/the-new-marcel-broodthaers-retrospective-at-moma-will-change-your-view-of-museums/>> [Accessed 9 Dec. 2018].
18. Marcel Broodthaers, 'Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section Art Moderne et Publicité', in Gloria Moure, *Marcel Broodthaers: Collected Writings* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2012), p. 354.
19. See Note 14, p. 167.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
21. Interview with Cathy Gale, 2018. Section unpublished.
22. Deborah Schultz, *Marcel Broodthaers: Strategy and Dialogue*, PhD thesis, University of Oxford (1999) <<https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:7d6dbff1-7cf0-4187-8ba8-6940192f4824>> [Accessed 27 Dec. 2018], p. 67.
23. Christian Rattemeyer, 'Musée-Museum', in *Marcel Broodthaers*, ed. by Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Christophe Cherix (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2016), pp. 167–177).
24. See Note 1, p. 11.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Writings of the Lud-dites*, ed. by Kevin Binfield (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), pp. xiii).
28. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.
29. Marco Deseriis, *Improper Names: Collective Pseudonyms from the Luddites to Anonymous* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), pp. 30–31.
30. See Note 26, p. xv.

31. See Note 28, p. 3.

32. Ibid., p. 31.

33. Ibid., p. 32.

34. Norman Simms, 'Ned Ludd's Mummers Play', *Folklore*, 89 (1978), 168-178 <<https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.kingston.ac.uk/stable/1260126>> [Accessed 21 Dec. 2018], p. 170.

35. Ibid., p. 170.

36. See page 25.

37. Luca Frei, *The so-called utopia of the centre beaubourg* (London: Book Works, 2007).

38. Finn Brunton, 'The walled city', *Radical Philosophy* (2012) <<https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/the-walled-city>> [Accessed 9 Nov. 2018].

39. Ibid., p. 6.

40. See Note 35, p. 6.

41. Ibid., pp. 53-54.

42. Ibid., p. 53.

43. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 'The danger of a single story', *TED* (2009) <[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story)> [Accessed 8 Jan 2019].

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45. Jacob Lindgreen, 'Uppercase models, lowercase counter-models / an editorial',

in *Extra-curricular*, ed. by Jacob Lindgreen (Eindhoven: Onomatopée, 2018). p.11.

# Cathy Gale

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OG

In your *Offshore Artschool* (OAS) paper, you state that the project "acknowledges the limitations of current academic circumstances (in the UK)" and works within them. Can you offer some insight on the paper and your thinking behind it?

CG

The *Offshore Artschool* was an accumulation and merging synthesis of different kinds of research. It looked at the socio-political context of design education in relation to current neoliberal policy and its impact on the arts, and yet the unregulated nature of commerce.

The OAS started as a theoretical proposition which drew inspiration from Cedric Price's *Potteries Thinkbelt* school, and also his *Fun Palace* with Joan Littlewood—a flexible building. What was interesting about these ideas is that they feel very current. The concepts Price was dealing with could easily be seen translated to contemporary education in design and flexible spaces. These were designed, created and envisioned in the 1960s and 70s. So, the OAS started as a slight ludic proposition. At the same time as this was happening, the Costa Concordia crashed. It crashed into an island after sailing too close to the shore. The idea was then that the boat would be called the Costa Academia: education afloat, but possibly about to crash.

The OAS was a speculative proposition, one in which the education would be flexible, agile, mobile. All the things we talk about to be on a boat. It would be an educational heterotopia. It would exist in its own set of rules, which is a mirror of how things are working. It would travel around the world, avoiding tax and travel from tax zone to tax zone in this offshore way, without actually paying tax.

There's a design fiction component to this which I am still developing, which draws inspiration from George Soros and what has happened with the Panama Papers. But, in terms of the idea within an art school, I decided to test it. First, this was at the Cumulus conference, an international group of design educators and a very interesting community. Then, I decided to see what would happen in creating a heterotopia from within an art school. That's how the first group joined. It was a mixture of first and second years at the time. It was unmarked and optional, but started to do some interesting things, snowballing from there to become bigger and more important.

Then, rather annoyingly, it was recognised as a really valuable teaching and learning exercise. I was then asked by the programme leader to implement it into the programme as a marked project, which I've been resisting ever since. Instead, I give students A grades so I don't have to mark it. The marking of the project gets in the way of what it is attempting to achieve, which is a completely free and autonomous space for students to decide their own program, to tackle issues and to be free

from the usual hierarchies of the educational institution.

OG I read the OAS paper as one that employs fiction as metaphor, theory and critique, to both construct a school and theorise your position on education. When you were writing it, was fiction something you actively thought of a tool to be used?

CG Fiction, Speculative Design and Design Fiction allows a ludic approach to theory. Partly based on fact and partly based on fiction, you might say. There are a number of boats that travel around the world that have very interesting statuses, unaligned with any government control. Some of them are ships that produce fashion garments, some of them have been prison boats. The UK had a series of prison boats and there was one that had been proposed in the 1980s when prisons were becoming too full. The [boats] are very interesting communities, and they do exist. What was interesting about Michel Foucault's theory of a heterotopia is that his heterotopia *par excellence* was the ship.

[OAS] was underpinned by theory and philosophical notions of collective identities and

spaces that were mobile. The fictional aspect then imagined the people on the boat as crew, completely visualising the community of who they are and how it might operate.

Fiction allows you to take an idea a little bit further than reality permits, and the limitations of your own imagination might permit. In terms of what is, fiction allows you to go into a territory of what could be. OAS has become less fictional since, because what happened then was that it became very practical. It went in a different direction. It became less fictional, less theoretical, and has become more scholarly and an actual pedagogic exercise.

My interest remains in developing it as a part-fictional, part-speculative school, similar to Paul Elliman's *University of Nowhere* as an internet-based school that may or may not exist as a boat. It would have a mystical status: there may or may not be a boat that travels around the world. The support of that would then be part-fiction and part-fact. Of course, I'd quite like to buy a boat, but I'm working with my own limitations of time and money and fiction allows you to go beyond those limitations.

OG Is there something to learn from unrealised projects, like that of Cedric Price's *Fun Palace* and *Potteries Thinkbelt*, in their state of unreality?

CG I think what those spaces offer a way is of escaping the capitalist realist limitations of contemporary art and design education. Mark Fisher described the current capitalist system as controlling the limitations of the imaginable. Capitalism then constrains the possibilities of alternative modes of living and thinking.

For most people my age or above, we've encountered quite different systems of government, but your generation haven't. You've only really encountered a neoliberal government, and things have become quite terrifyingly right-wing in dogmatic and didactic political situations. I grew up with there being alternatives, most of your generation can't see any alternatives. It's a space presenting [an] alternative of the imagination in which you are approaching your education less formally and conventionally as pursuing grades, or attempting this notion of success that might get you a job. It's about critiquing the

actual structure that you're within at the same time as you're doing it. This is why I've pushed the *Alternative Art School* project within education, rather than after people have left. There are several schools—the Parallel School, Open School East and School of the Damned—that exist outside the art school. But, once you're outside the art school, you're not really critiquing what's happening inside the art school. Instead you're providing free education but repeating what happened inside, so it fails to be a critique. It has no leverage within any academic institution, so the *Alternative Art School* project had intended to cause trouble within that space, taking ideas from architecture and that impermeability of the space to upset these uncertainties of 'do a project – get an A – get a distinction – get a job'. It's a false economy. The models I'm looking at and the ones you suggest are ways of imagining a different set of structures, a different set of aims and limitations to work within, or beyond.

OG When we mark out a 'real world' from within the school, we are implicit in the creation of a binary. Can the school be considered unreal?

CG That's a very interesting question. In fact, part of my paper looked at this real/unreal binary. Drawing on Henri Giroux, Mark Fisher and Richard Sennett, I looked at this split between college and the real world—as if college is somehow protected. Except, it isn't. College is so in the real world, it's so controlled by market forces as contemporary society is. There's really not that much difference at all. In fact, I think students are even more trapped now than they've ever been.

What we mean by reality is really interesting and a very worthwhile thing to unpick. When we talk about the real world, underneath that there is a series of assumptions about the real world. [The real world] is quite macho, the real world is about money. It's tough, it's dog-eat-dog, it's competitive. But, it is a particularly skewed version of the real world. In this version, green protests and feminine ideologies are too soft, doing work in the community is soft—but the real world is hard. There is a patriarchal underpinning of this notion of the real world that is very tied to commerce. You hear about the school of hard knocks. There is art school that is soft, it

has snowflakes in it and it's not really tackling the reality of the world which is tough and competitive. That is total bullshit. It's a framing of reality as capitalism in its toughest form. Art school in particular has suffered from a media and cultural status which is framed as being soft. I think we all get pissed off when we are told we don't work very hard, when actually graphic designers and designers in particular work harder than any other student I've met. They are more rigorous and focused. The pressure to be trained for a professional practice is much stronger for design students than it is for Philosophy or English students.

The proximity of design education and the so-called real world is embedded and infused, it is not different at all. However, the language we use to describe art school and design study, and the language we use to talk about the real world is something that really needs to be unpicked and reframed. Such language presents a binary that is based on ideas and not reality.



# Prem Krishnamurthy

Prem Krishnamurthy is a designer, curator and writer. In 2004, he co-founded the design studio *Project Projects* (now *Wkshps*). More recently, he was director of exhibition space *P!* in NYC (2012–17) and workshop for exhibition-making *K*, in Berlin (2018–19).

[www.p-factorial.org](http://www.p-factorial.org)

OG Across your wide practice, language—and a certain logic of language—has performed as a transformative structure. How do words function for you?

PK I first came to everything I knew creatively through the word, through writing. That was my interest as a child, which then developed into my focus on art, photography, design and curating. It's impossible for me to separate those things. In my practice, I think a lot about translation: the translation of disciplines as well as mis-trans-

lation. In college, Jacques Derrida's *On Grammatology* as well as deconstruction, structural linguistics and post-structuralism were what my friends and I were reading. The word is a building block, a structural unit. Language has a set of rules, grammars and protocols, which are both shared and individual. Meaning can be mobilised through understandable forms, but also allow for permutation. An ends-oriented approach to design or curating—one that maintains that there is one authoritative or possible solution—has been something I've rejected since an early age. The idea of the permutation of language offers multiple possibilities to say the same thing but with different resonances.

OG When employed as tool, method or source material, what does fiction and speculation engender within the practice of exhibition making?

PK Reading and writing fiction is what I grew up wanting to do. I often explicitly—whether within design or curating, or other formats—start from thinking about works of fiction and what you can learn from them. Recently, I've been re-ar-

ticulating how I talk about aesthetics. Do your colleagues talk about “form” and “content” in design school?

OG Not so much in my experience of design school.

PK That's probably a good thing, I think those terms have ran their course. I've been talking a lot recently about a triumvirate of terms: *structures, stories and subjects*. When looking at a work, I try to analyse the structures that enable it externally and those that organise it internally. Then, I consider the stories that a work is telling: what are the narratives that are communicated? And finally, the subjects: who is telling the story, and to whom is it being told?

Fiction, more obviously than other media, depends on all three of those registers. As a genre, fiction has a story or some communicative aim and narrative. Fiction also has a structure—for example, a beginning, middle, and end. Of course, at any given point in time there are certain modes of fiction or storytelling that seem “natural”. However, we have countless examples from present and ancient times of non-linear and asynchronous ways of storytell-

ing, and different approaches to structuring a narrative. Then, the subject—who is telling the story, and to whom—is always significant. Of course, there are notable exceptions that intentionally collapse these distinctions. Somebody like W. G. Sebald always comes to mind. In his practice, you are not quite certain if what you are reading is fiction or autobiography, memoir or historical fact. There are categories that are being blurred, which is very interesting. But, on the other hand, any time you enter into a very conventionally genre-driven mode you often forget some aspect of the trio. For example, within what used to be called the documentary mode, people cared mostly about the subject or story, and a “naturalistic” structure was somehow taken for granted.

On the other hand, in Classical Greek theatre, the story was in some ways the least important aspect. In my understanding, people who came to see Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* performed already knew the plot, its characters, and how the story would end. What was actually most significant was its performance, who was acting it, or some other aspects. All this being said, there is a way to think about all three

of these modes, within fiction, design, and other works. You can create awareness of all of them, in different degrees and at the same time.

OG You recently co-directed the Fikra Biennial in Sharjah. What did fiction offer the *Ministry of Graphic Design*?

PK One interesting thing about the *Ministry of Graphic Design* was that a lot of people didn't think it was a fiction—for better or for worse. It became a kind of para-fiction because a lot of people thought it was an *actual* Ministry. Speaking from the position of this fictional ministry, and from the assumed role that Emily [Smith], Na [Kim] and I had as artistic directors in playing “ministers” gave us a different kind of license. It also allowed us to highlight questions of agency. Who were the organisers of this fictional ministry? This also emphasised its organisation structure—with a number of different “Departments” within the main *Ministry*, while at the same time telling stories. That was the balance we attempted to strike. It had narratives in it that were very timely and urgent, but at the same time that didn't mean

that they had to happen in an ‘unmediated’ way. They could still take place within the conceptual structure of a Ministry of Graphic Design, with the explicit acknowledgement that there were different curatorial teams working on different sections, organising them in their own individual and collective ways.

OG Does that act of reclaiming and re-performing institutional structures hold ground in transforming them?

PK I believe the answer is “yes”, but I don't think that it usually happens in a very straightforward or direct way. A couple of months after we decided to call our show the *Ministry of Graphic Design*, the UAE announced that they would introduce temporary ministries to address specific problems. They now have an actual Ministry of Possibilities, for example. While I don't think that is a response to our *Ministry*, there was a lot of attention paid from official channels to the fact that we had created an exhibition called the *Ministry of Graphic Design*—and I've even heard rumors they might make a real minister at some point. I think an exhibition like this does have an impact, but it is

probably a really long tale across a very long-time span in actually reaching people and change existing structures.

OG When we mark out a ‘real world’, we are implicit in the creation of a binary. In such a framing, can we then take the exhibition to be unreal?

PK One of the things I've been interested in is thinking about the methodologies of roleplaying within an exhibition making setting. As a child, I used to play table-top roleplaying games. A lot of what I learned about fiction and constructing situations, about collective work and also empathy, came from that experience. Sociologist Erving Goffman, in his 1959 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, theorised that every social appearance is a performance. I think that is something we know well, particularly in the age of social media. However, it becomes a question of how aware you are of those different roles and how those roles can change. It is also a question of what happens when somebody becomes aware of their role as a player. If you are able to undermine the idea of the unified, monolithic self, you are also un-

dermining or chipping away at the idea of a unified, monolithic reality. You are starting to see different layers or modalities that are behind it.

Your question of the exhibition and its reality or unreality is essentially the same as asking if a work of fiction is real or unreal. It comes back to how you define real and unreal. I would say a work of fiction is both. The best exhibitions, even though they appear to be happening now, are actually happening in another time frame. They are projecting forward ideas, objects and relationships. On a less abstract level, many of the most influential exhibitions were mostly influential after their time. And so, what does that mean? Twenty years after these exhibitions are ‘over’, are they still alive? In one way, you could say they are because they still exist within our memories. These exhibitions are still influencing people and creative practices. So, while a past exhibition may seem unreal in the sense that it is not a physical thing that is happening right now, in an extended degree it is obviously still working on something.

OG In that understanding, what did the spaces of *P!* and *K*,

allow you to do with exhibition making?

PK

It's funny, I do sometimes refer to *P!* like a fairy tale. There was a strong narrative urge at work within it and an awareness whilst curating it of its continuity over time. Ideas from one show would recur in other forms within future shows. There was a sense of an overarching arc, without this being totally fixed. Although there were lots of aspects that were unexpected, I've thought of *P!* a little bit more like a novel or play being performed over time. On the flip side, *K*, tried to be the absolute opposite of something as narratively resolved as *P!*. It tried to respond to things in sequence, one after another, but still be quite open. Apart from a set of pretty arbitrary structures—holding events each month, and insisting that anyone invited have a name or pseudonym that started with the letter K—there weren't other real constraints on it. Of course, there are always constraints of time, money and space, but it was meant to be conducted in a much more open-ended manner.

When I apply your distinction of real and unreal to this question, I think that *P!* was quite

real. It was on street level in New York, on Broome Street. It elicited a response and created an impact on the people who were a part of it, whether as artists or participants or curators or visitors. It impacted their work and thinking and produced new ideas and relationships in the world. On the other hand, I think *K*, could be thought of as a myth or fiction—and I like that. Going back to your first question about 'the word': every press release and event description of *K*, was written using an oddly alliterative structure. *K*, was as much a process of writing and thinking through ideas as it was of making a presentation in a space. Now, what exists of it is scant documentation and the people's experiences of those programs. Even the name no longer exists as a label on the space. So I think of *K*, as having become a fiction. Although, even if it is a thing that is no longer real, its effects are still felt by everybody who was a part of it, in their bodies and their practices. Particularly in mine, but also for the people whom I collaborated with. I think that sense of permanence, however transformed, is what is important.

## EDUCATIONAL CRITIQUE

Anniversaries offer us a period for reflection and renewed admiration. Space is also created for newfound criticism of their starring cast. 2018 and 2019 are no different, marking an ever-timely succession as the May 1968 protests commemorate fifty years and the Bauhaus reaches its centenary. The latter has brought with it an inundation of publications, exhibitions, symposia and opinion. Such efforts include the nomadic, cross-institutional *bauhaus imaginista* exhibition, which unearthed the school's less historicised reach in countries such as China, India, Nigeria and Brazil.<sup>1</sup> In another project, one that appears less concerned with reflection and more in new direction, the *NEUHAUS* has been initiated by Rotterdam's Het Nieuwe Instituut as a space for 'more-than-human knowledge'.<sup>2</sup>

A more provocative perspective has come from architectural theorist and educator Mark Wigley, who appears set to direct a new zombie movie in the centenary aftermath. In an interview with *DUE Weekly*, he asks the question: "how do you kill the undead, the Bauhaus that is in our pockets, in our brains, in our politicians?"<sup>3</sup> For a school shut down three times, only to resurface in several forms since, the Bauhaus has certainly upheld a quality of undead. Though, however comic, Wigley's point remains

valid: the Bauhaus has pervaded our designed society much more than we may like to think, and in precluding centenary longform I must side with Wigley's caution. Especially so: in the wake of these anniversaries, a renewed critique of the educational institution appears increasingly urgent.

In the UK, we are faced with a neoliberal government that has been instrumental in the ongoing commercialisation of higher education across art and design. Now fully encased within the formal British university system, the UK art school today more closely resembles the Anglo-American model. Cultural critic Henry Giroux has called the result of such workings one where students are treated as customers rather than as a civic resource.<sup>4</sup> Educators and academics are clasp on precariously too, as bureaucratic frameworks encroach upon every aspect of their institutional life. REF, TEF and other acronyms that appear yearly have ensured the standardisation of research, teaching and learning.<sup>5</sup> No longer novel territory, its effectual impotence continues to pervade educational institutions across the country. That is, all whilst the space of the school is concurrently upheld as one of exception. Bar the illusive stakeholders atop its hierarchy, no party involved appears secure, supported or critically autonomous within the art and design school today. How do we combat this? Having called upon Institutional Critique in the previous essay, a critique of the educational institution reforms itself as an 'Educational Critique'. I define this as the following:

An Educational Critique sits close to the unreal, aligns with the methods and intent of Institutional Critique and the Educational Turn, using current academic circumstances of the (UK) art and design school as its socio-political and cultural landscape.

By assessing its connected and prior incarnations, I now look to understand in greater depth what an Educational Critique hypothesises, and how one might operate in practice.

Possible examples then help me to unpack the socio-political and cultural contexts that an Educational Critique may arise within. In doing so, I hope to use its proposal as the grounding framework to build upon within *Department of Extension*, the concluding essay and practical application of this study. Though, before that, I must return back to unreality and assess what role fiction may hold within this.

## *Fictioning a Critique*

Fiction has been re-tooled throughout the history of Institutional Critique, long after Marcel Broodthaers had announced the closing of his *Musée* in 1972. Today, contemporary artists have employed fiction for other critical purpose. The *Palestinian Museum of Natural History and Humankind*, and more recent *Museum of Contemporary African Art* by Beninese artist Meschac Gaba, have given voice to the objects, histories and persons whose narratives had been whitewashed and silenced within the westernised museum. Through such, fiction was re-tooled as an agent in decolonising the institution to create agency for other narratives to exist.

Returning back to the reader *Fiction as Method*, its editors display the promise of fiction as a tool to create space for 'improvisatory variations' from within the institution's infrastructure, differing from itself intentionally to open up "an otherwise rigid framework to a plurality of desires."<sup>6</sup> Though, in the same breath, they critique the fictional institution as a practiced method due to its inability to garner true withdrawal or alternativeness when purposely incubated within a larger institution.<sup>7</sup> This might imply any contemporary attempt at fictioning is shadowed by the likes of Broodthaers' canonised *Musée* and thus rendered futile. However, I challenge such critique. How else we can anticipate or enact the unsettling of an institution if we have no leverage or space within it? I also believe it is wrong to group all fictional museums together in their intention.

However similar in method, Marcel Broodthaers and Meschac Gaba both had very distinct motivations for what critique their project's fictioning had hoped to facilitate and engender. Any conception of fiction or speculation within a critical practice must not remain attributed to any canon formed thus far. The 'plurality of desires' within an Educational Critique—and any context at that—must prevail absolutely. One singular definition of Institutional Critique appears to allude itself in such attempts to endure, something especially apparent when we look to its lineage.

### *From an Institutional Critique*

Over the last century, critique of the art institution has defined, redefined and undefined itself. 'Institutional Critique' was, before it was, the Futurist Manifesto, where calls were made to set fire to library shelves and flood museums.<sup>8</sup> It was then post-modernist, borne in the late 1960s out of the era of conceptualism as a child of 1968.<sup>9</sup> The myriad of Institutional Critique within this period has since been metaphorised as 'waves'.<sup>10</sup> The first arrived during this era, whose 'greatest hits' included Marcel Broodthaers, Hans Haacke and Michael Asher. The second brought forth artists such as Renee Green, Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser, re-orientating critique towards the artist's subjectivities. During a contemporary resurgence of discussion in 2005, Institutional Critique was then 're-invented' as an 'instituent practice'.<sup>11</sup> In this proposed third wave, Institutional Critique would be deployed through strategies that bore on the traditions of its canonised predecessor. Efforts were here made to clarify its chameleon terminology:

“A form of instituting is not the same as an institutional form: while the latter tend toward stasis and structure, the former comprise a central element of what Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray call 'instituent practices,' which

develop new processes for linking disparate creative moments and inventing new “qualities of participation” that can occur inside and outside existing institutions.”<sup>12</sup>

Institutional Critique appears to have formed itself dynamically. Though, during its several waves, the movement has had its own critics. Artist Andrea Fraser once wrote a key essay, arguing against such ideas described above of being inside or outside the institution. Fraser asserts that the question is not one of being against the institution as, in her words, “we are the institution.”<sup>13</sup> The 'we' she refers to is likely her peers, and to apply Fraser's criticisms to a potential Educational Critique questions arise on who can engage with one beyond its subject. I must therefore consider where an Educational Critique is situated. Should we acknowledge that Institutional Critique was most commonly produced within the gallery space it sought to address, a direct equating of Educational Critique produces itself within an implicated school. The critique to be made should be localised.

That said, an Educational Critique might search elsewhere and beyond the school in its attempt to connect to other pedagogic modalities of public(s). One possible example I will consider is the biennial, conceived to do away with static art institutions and their homogenous programming. The biennial model has proliferated internationally in scale, number and critics since its founding form in Venice. Two editions are of particular interest to my research as I consider what may already constitute an Educational Critique and evidence another canonical relation within its developing definition.

## Exhibition as Paper School

Concurrent to discussions around the 're-invention' of Institutional Critique, another canon was forming. Defined broadly as projects that employed discursive pedagogies within curatorial practice, the Educational Turn took issue with the one-way knowledge transfer and commercialisation of education, geared towards utilitarianist training for industry.<sup>14</sup> Output of the Turn grew parallel to the Bologna Process, a series of accords that standardised education across the EU. The effects of the Process had catalysed the neo-liberalisation of (art and design) education as well as funding across the arts sector, effects that continue to ripple across institutions today.

One project that emerged in the wake of the Turn looked to overthrow the Manifesta biennial for the critique and occupation of a transdisciplinary, temporary school. An 'exhibition as school' and 'school as exhibition', Manifesta 6 had been planned across the divided city of Nicosia in Cyprus. Curators Mai Abu ElDahab, Anton Vidokle and Florian Waldvogel proposed a reform of the biennial format as, in their words, "a meeting ground for cultural producers in the region and beyond, and a platform for discussion and production."<sup>15</sup> The *Manifesta 6 School* had hoped to work 'bi-communally', engaging with cultural communities on both sides of Nicosia's geopolitical divide.<sup>16</sup> However, contracts were terminated by the Mayor of Nicosia following an alleged breach of contract by its curators, leading to School's unfortunate cancellation.<sup>17</sup>

The last-minute termination had also meant a preliminary reader had been printed and published. Despite not being able to circulate within the space it addressed, *Notes for an Art School* produced a body of writing that offers crucial narration for the project and has since situated itself within a wider discourse in the intersections of art practice, pedagogy, school and biennial. Within it, curator Anton Vidokle contributes the essay *Exhibition as School in a Divided City* and describes how the curatorial team had

set their sights on the school as a fountain of recaptured youth, a space of 'creative production'<sup>18</sup> to initiate reform of the siloed art exhibition. Vidokle praises the plurality of (alternative) art schools and opposes prevailing criticisms that suggest a 'crisis of the art school'.<sup>19</sup> However, he makes a still-salient point that, "despite the diversity of practitioners, discourse and focus tends to remain bound ... to these centres of institutional production and their relatively homogenous concerns."<sup>20</sup> Although his description of going "back to the beginning" and "back to school",<sup>21</sup> implicates the Bauhaus at such beginnings, in another reminder of its undeath, Vidokle has valuable intentions. The reader remains reflexive, asking itself: "is an exhibition, no matter how ambitious, the most effective vehicle for such engagement?"<sup>22</sup>

What does remain of Manifesta 6—reader, invites, planned promotion and e-flux obituary—we can consider artefacts of its cause, perhaps even a Paper School. As common-interest (Corinne Gisel and Nina Paim) describe, paper schools—of unrealised educational visions in art, design and architecture—offer us "source material to think, to help us engage in our own speculations, imagining other educational and social realities, and ultimately other worlds and worldviews."<sup>23</sup> In this framing, the produced ephemera of discursive and pedagogic projects offer themselves as resources, however temporal or encumbered by their socio-political realities. That said, the biennial book has become something of a unfortunate ritual, as many are venerated with gassy budgets that reluctantly succumb to an afterlife as shelf-souvenirs. In the *Volume* issue *On Biennials*, dpr-barcelona make a call for an open, electronic database to house the web of biennial books produced and forgotten each year.<sup>24</sup> In the context of Manifesta 6—of exhibition as school—we might do well to re-position the reader entirely. When understood as a possible Educational Critique, 'exhibition as school' is amended: instead, 'exhibition as Paper School', or its material output, might re-frame the event book as a direct learning resource and non-

prescriptive curricula. The material output of an Educational Critique should thus look to honour its critical position and remain resourceful for future readership.

## *Opinion corridors*

Returning back to the ‘stages of real’ framework in *School Un(realities)*,<sup>25</sup> we can use this to understand how an Educational Critique might develop and mutate. Although its proposed form in Nicosia was never actioned, the Manifesta 6 School became real elsewhere. Curator Anton Vidokle later developed the concept into *unitednationsplaza*, a temporary, experimental school held in Berlin that same year. Then, over a decade later in 2018, the 4<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Design Biennial appeared to salvage a great deal of Manifesta 6’s hopes and criticisms, its focus instead veering towards design education in the run up to the Bauhaus centenary.

A *School of Schools* was formed of several inner parts. Schools of Earth, Time, Currents, Scales, Unmaking and Digestion played host to an international raft of design projects. Curators Jan Boelen, Nadine Botha and Vera Sacchetti proposed transforming the streets of Istanbul into “corridors of happenstance learning”, and the ‘siloes’ institutions that played host to each school into “spaces for study around multidisciplinary complexities”.<sup>26</sup> Here, the space of the school is retrofitted onto the geography of Istanbul, so as to construct the biennial’s curatorial vision. The curators tap into the language of our own schooling experience, as the school corridor is reformed as city street and the classroom as cultural institute. However, whilst we can use this vocabulary to construct curatorial statements, where the corridor is revealed as a space of value for its ephemeral and tacit learning, such visions can also act unfavourably as host to more problematic realities.

The Swedish *åsiktskorridor* (opinion corridor) denotes the boundaries of what opinions or ideas are tolerated in public discourse. If biennials are also touted a ‘space

of exception’ in their facility of “international travel and knowledge exchange, despite restrictive economies and authorities”,<sup>27</sup> where are invited participants stood along their host’s own *åsiktskorridor*? Manifesta 6 had hoped to navigate Nicosia’s geopolitics, though the act of which proved fatal to the biennial’s planned knowledge exchange. Istanbul harbours its own political context that may not always align or welcome imported ideas either. So, whilst it remains clear that a biennial’s host city can offer as much value to its discourse as that of its international guests,<sup>28</sup> power remains in the hands of its curators and involved organisations whether they choose to engage with the local context.

We might understand the model of an Educational Critique as one that occupies an existing institution, parasitical for its localised cause and intention. However, the host space will inherently produce its own unique set of political circumstances that should not be ignored by its guests. Therefore, the conditions that arise through and within an Educational Critique’s implicating context must remain key to its realisation, where a localised reflexivity should allow for participatory and discursive output.

## *Towards an Educational Critique*

Institutional Critique has rendered itself unprescribed to any one period, medium, setting or subject alone; instead, as something ongoing and mutating as its re-invented ‘instituent practices’ had proposed. An Educational Critique could therefore be assimilated into an Institutional one with ease, where the formal definition of ‘institution’ is already inclusive of the school, college and university.

Though, if Institutional Critique’s critique had always been institutionalised,<sup>29</sup> becoming as much about the artist’s subjectivities as it did the institution itself, participation within an Educational Critique should hope to address such issues. Instead, an Educational Critique should move beyond the subjectivities of one individual practice and encompass a

pluralised community of several. While the fictional practices of Institutional Critique remain a valuable reference point, I must look to action the school's (un)realities collectively. Enactment, actioning and embodiment of its fiction—the participation *within* a collective fictioning—is rendered crucial in any output of an Educational Critique.

An Educational Critique could equally mould itself to the 'Educational Turn'. However, prominent voices within the Turn's discussions have since criticised 'missed opportunities' to directly address the 'highly visible struggles' concurrent to all its output.<sup>30</sup> Issues of marketisation, managerial regimes and the indebtedment of students and artists were argued as matters left unheard.<sup>31</sup> The Educational Turn's critique became institutionalised, falling upon deaf ears and remaining disconnected to the 'everyday realities and situated imaginaries' of the art school.<sup>32</sup> A localised and directly implicating critique should make attempt to act correctively of such criticisms.

Both movements the term pulls from already offer an expanded scope. It may appear unnecessary to situate my project through some hybrid 'Educational Critique'. However, what the term could do well for is to act as mediator, laying down a theoretical framework through which to work from.

An Educational Critique should not be understood as the mark of a new beginning, but an acknowledgement of continuities already at work. If only useful in this endeavour alone, an Educational Critique allows me to tie up the fictioning practices within Institutional Critique and discursiveness of the Educational Turn, to situate both directly within my own localised context. While we can recount back to Broodthaers and Bauhaus as models to draw from today, it's that exercise precisely which must be continually renegotiated and framed anew. In doing so, it may remain possible to pull thread anew. We must continue yarning and, where necessary, topple all the baggage.<sup>33</sup>

## Endnotes

1. *bauhaus-imaginista* (n.d.) <<http://www.bauhaus-imaginista.org/concept>> [Accessed 11 Feb. 2019].

2. 'Neuhaus', *Het Nieuwe Instituut* (2019) <<https://neuhaus.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/en>> [Accessed 10 Feb 2019].

3. 'Killing the Bauhaus', in *DUE BAR*, ed. by DUE (2019), p. 13.

4. Henry Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 152.

5. REF and TEF = Research and Teaching Excellence Framework, respectively.

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# Tugce Karatas

Tugce Karatas is curator and researcher with a background in design. She is a PhD fellow in the *Technologies for Cultural Heritage* doctoral programme at Torino University in Italy. Her research addresses the impact of digital technologies on the realisation of interpretive tools of cultural heritage.

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OG In your experience as a curator based in Istanbul, how did the city respond to the recent design biennial, *A School of Schools*, on a local level of engagement?

TK On a local level of engagement, I think it was better than I expected. Perhaps this was down to the location choice or marketing strategies before and during the biennial, but the engagement was better than previous years. The main location along the Istiklal Street—a very central area—made it a lot easier for people

to walk between the different venues. It was also free, so people at least took a look. I think the strategic partnerships created by curators and the IKSŞV organisation were also beneficial. Before the biennial, they travelled outside of Istanbul and to other geographies of Turkey, partnering with organisations from other cities. This brought them the credibility as well as the popularity.

While it was nice to see that all the invited guests had come to Istanbul to take part in the discussions, those discussions were not about Istanbul but the international design discourse. It would have been nicer if the guests had stayed longer after the *Orientation Days* (opening programme) to look around. Though, I think this is a wider issue of design discourse at the moment. They go to Eindhoven, they go to Milan, and they go to London. It's what the international design circle does, but it could have been nicer if they had actually spoken to the local organisations as Jan [Boelen] and the IKSŞV team did. Other than a few Istanbul-based, Turkish designers, more than half of the participants weren't local. Travelling exhibitions or biennials are still considered the best format

but I don't think they are necessary if it is not helpful to the local community. Although it pinpoints Istanbul in the international biennial map, it was not able to create a platform for the designers of Turkey, in my opinion.

OG After the *Orientation Days*, how did the dispersion and networked community of institutions respond to the biennial over its longer run?

TK It's an interesting topic. Some of the institutions involved themselves in these discussions, but it was not a discussion on design education per se. It was very strange to see, perhaps because the resources [of the biennial] were not open source. Even I didn't get the [*Design as Learning*] reader, so it was not accessible in that sense. Maybe they should have put it online and then people could actually learn from it. That is, discussion beyond the Bauhaus, Black Mountain College and other popular schools. The only thing we seem to discuss is what the Bauhaus is, but it should not only be a question of what or how. In Turkey, design education has been very influenced by the Bauhaus. During the

Second World War, many of the German artists and architects were hosted by Turkey. This was not something discussed, which I find interesting. It feels strange to talk about the Bauhaus in Turkey but not discuss its real influence on the local context.

In Turkey, we also have alternative education. *Köy Enstitüleri*, for example, was the village school, created in the same period as the Republic [of Turkey] was founded. They were a pilot project: every village school gathered people who wanted to be educated, those of which had come mostly from poor families, but from all over the geographies of Turkey. They educated these people in agriculture and sewing, starting every day with a folkloric dance as sport. Back then, it was super influential in people's lives. Then, after they had been educated, they went back to the countryside and educated other people. This is already in our history. Although it is not like Bauhaus in that sense, having this national schooling experience was an experimental thing. It would have been nice to have had more of these local stories told and to reflect on their influence in the country. What did it add? How can we continue—if we want

to continue—this schooling or experimental schooling? This is interesting to me, but I did not see any of that. It was a missed opportunity in my opinion.

OG Alongside schools, the biennial and institution are also claimed a ‘space of exception’ in their facility of “international travel and knowledge exchange”. What does this knowledge exchange look like in reality?

TK Great question. I am also discussing this in my field at the moment. First, you have to be open to learning. The museum, exhibition and biennial are also learning spaces for me. As a curator, exhibition maker or museum director, you have to accept that people can teach you something too. You must not emphasise any one-directional knowledge transfer. If you do that, you will miss something. This kind of feedback—this knowledge exchange—is absent in our society at the moment. We use the language of Silicon Valley, words such as inclusive or diversity, but what we actually do is more like, ‘I know better than you, and this is this and this is this’. Such an approach is not working anymore. Even

the organisational aspect of the biennial and its theme could have been better in this sense of inclusivity. How can we actually communicate with international knowledge? If international knowledge means people from outside Turkey doing research and bringing their projects to Istanbul, then it works. But, if you are really talking about people sitting next to their peers from other institutions and countries, I don’t see it happening in any kind of design environment at the moment. Not in Milan, not in London, not in Eindhoven.

When I think about the discussions on locality and how [the biennial] has affected the citizens of Istanbul, I think much more could be done. For example, only the opening days of the design biennial were simultaneously translated and the other days weren’t at all. In terms of interpretative tools, there were only the wall captions describing the projects. Biennials needs such efforts to communicate to a diverse audience. This is how you actually achieve that knowledge exchange.

OG How successfully can the biennial reader anticipate the biennial’s realities?

TK I didn’t receive the reader so I’m not fully sure. In my role as reporter, reporting from the field before and during the biennial was really important for people to understand the real process of the projects, and not just the exhibition. We really tried to capture what was happening at the biennial.

As a medium the reader can work, but now we have social media and all these immediate channels. If you just hashtag design biennial you will learn much more than what is written on the website, immediately. When I contributed something [as reporter], they needed to edit and format it. This would take a couple of days, minimum. Some of the projects—the *Argo Radio* and *DUE Bar*—also helped to capture the feeling of the biennial during it. I think that these alternative channels, along with social media, were actually more effective for the biennial’s engagement.

OG Should we re-position the exhibition reader’s purpose?

TK Absolutely. We are now living in a society that is immersed in experiences. Our attention span is getting shorter

and shorter, so we need to find other ways to hold attention. Of course, the exhibition reader is a very valuable format, but we must find a way—and compromise if necessary—to enhance this experience and allow people to learn through it. This is also a challenge in my own practice. The biennial as a publication, and in its overall duration, is too long. Perhaps we should make it quick and to the point. If you miss it, you miss it.

In my opinion, biennials are always about the city, so you have to find a medium to have this connection with the city and the citizens. Sometimes, as designers, curators, and human beings, we need to jump into the middle of people to try and understand them. You need to actually understand what people want from design. This is not something that I want. Everything is super subjective, so we need to find a way to get people on board with it. Design is losing its meaning. Many people asked [at the biennial], how is that design? This is the most important question at the moment. We are not defining design, and maybe it shouldn’t be defined, but we need to decide what we want to say and who we want

to say it to. Other than that, everything we do is only to make ourselves popular or put our city on the map. When you give that much power to someone, even if they don't abuse it, it becomes dangerous. This is something that should be more democratised.

OG What needs learning, re-learning or unlearning about the design exhibition—or design more generally?

TK During the Gezi Park protests in 2013, the art biennial was in town and its curator was Fulya Erdemci. She is a brilliant curator, no doubt about that. Around the city there were several related activities held outside, but people were being killed on the streets so they cancelled all the outdoor programme. Although they kept the exhibition open, we all believe that what was happening in Gezi Park, that was the biennial. You can learn a lot from people's reactions, and you can unlearn something too. I think that was the biggest missed opportunity of the biennial.

If you are doing something for people, you need have sense of empathy. I believe a lack of empathy is a problem in design

at the moment. Everything went wrong at one point and now we as designers have lost this connection to people. We need to recover it. Empathy also gives you flexibility. If you think something is not working for the people you are serving, then you change. Change your attitude, change the exhibition format, or even change the topic.

As a society, we usually only want to see the finished object or exhibition, but the process is also important. If we want to learn or teach something, we need to see the process to learn from that process. First, accept that we are human and sometimes we make mistakes. Be honest. Biennials are a format that should enable experimental thinking. It is the only flexibility we can have now.

## Kieran O'Connor

Kieran O'Connor is a designer and educator based in London. He was a student (1998–2001), senior lecturer (2005–16) and School Director of Research & Enterprise (2016–17) at Kingston School of Art. In 2002, he co-founded BOB, a graphic design studio based in London and Zürich.

[www.twitter.com/kieranwords](http://www.twitter.com/kieranwords)

OG Kingston School of Art is undergoing a large refurbishment off the heels of a recent re-branding, one that returns to its historic title. The language of the redevelopment offers us some interesting one-liners. On a wall panel outside Knights Park it tells us that the school is “looking to the future with a significant investment in its facilities”. There appears clear focus on the notion of facility and investment. What do these words mean for a UK art school today?

KO Investment is a service. Investment is a good offer. Your investment is being met by our investment. You're spending money on this and we are not just winging it. For a long time, we didn't charge for this, and now we're charging for this. We've invested in this to give you confidence that this is a space that you should be spending money on. We're getting better, we're the equal of. We are a service that will be rated highly. We have good microwaves, we have chairs that are like this, we have lecture theatres that have these acoustic qualities.

The word investment is linked to money, but it's linked to the context of people spending money. That is a metric now. It gives the impression of good health. The word investment in isolation speaks the language of money, which has ever more become the language of art and design school.

'Facility' is similar. There is metal and welding. Technology is moving quick. Facilities give the impression that they are aware that the world is changing fast. But facilities are not people, it's stuff. Investment is not emotion or care, it's also stuff, which is money. Neither of those things

are about people, community, expertise, pride—a culture. It's just stuff.

OG As someone who was a student, a tutor, and then in management at Kingston School of Art, whose job is it to create or facilitate that culture within a school?

KO I think [a school] needs a strong Dean. I think a Dean can do that. I think a Dean can set a tone. I think a Dean has a certain amount of budget at their disposal and a certain amount of licence to set agendas. They can't do much, but they can be a focal point and they can make symbolic gestures. They can appreciate things, they can also show that they are being protective of that space. That person can make a big difference.

For a while I've been reflecting on what I've learned being in education without being an educator anymore, and designing without really designing anymore. I feel like [Kingston School of Art] needs a service design job doing. They need someone to come in and analyse the soft spots that were so precious, to look after them and make them almost ring fenced, though they do not have

to be like that forever. There are some organs which, although they are not pumping in money, are keeping us up right. They are making us feel buoyant. They are our serotonin. There are things which aren't life essential, but they are living essential for us to be a culture. My general approach in my job was to try and allow upward mobility.

There needs to be mechanisms. Service designers or someone of that ilk to come in and say something. There needs to be a swapping around of empathy in people's roles to create those understandings and bonds. I think if a Dean spent ten minutes with students they would be out of their depth. Not in a bad way, but you get out of the habit of working that quickly in your head. Students have got such quick minds because they are under ridiculous demands in terms of how non-predictable their time is. As you get older, your eye fixes. It gets less flexible. I tried to do that a little bit, I tried to make what students do here more possible out there, so they are not so passive and at the whim of industry. But, in the end, I found myself wading through a lot of politics whilst trying to be a service designer in some respects.

OG How might fiction allow us to comment, critique or imagine? Can fiction allow us to propose a culture that doesn't exist, or appears to have been weaned out?

KO I think fiction allows people to role play, or at least leave the role they are in. It allows people to become seduced and entertained and to drop inhibitions. Fiction allows you to see something another way, even if you only holiday in that moment for an hour. You are taking yourself out of your place and you are putting yourself in another. You feel like a child, you are curious and you're excited and you can't rely on your usual tools. You have to make more of an effort and sometimes that is hard. But, because of the nature of the game, it is inescapable.

Fictions allow us to suspend reality and they allow things to become more fluid. Conversations happen that aren't on tracks and preordained by everybody's routine every day. They allow us to ask questions, sometimes abstractly, which make us think thereafter on reflection more exactly about something. Abstracting things, turning them into a game or

fiction makes something easier to deal with. It approaches truths and gives you an angle or reflection on something, which makes that thing palatable and approachable. It relieves people of duties.

Fiction can bring things out of you that you never thought were there. You can find commonalities which you never thought you had. You can have a good old chat with someone and suddenly you've got a friend. That is a bond, that is a neural pathway in your brain, that is structural—that is a piece of refurbishment. Fictions are liberating if they are written and created with a relationship to the place which people can track back. It is a reflection, it is an imperfect mirror. Maybe there is bit of learning in there too.

Sometimes fiction is just an excuse for something communal to happen. The people might not buy into it or follow through in your fiction at all, but they are there and congregated. It's like a fire alarm: people congregate in a space which is not usual. People have to develop new connections and behaviours. Ivan Illich's theory of convivial tools are tools which are communal, convivial, and force the best out of us in terms of human-to-human re-

lations, rather than tools which allow us to feel segmented. Illich uses meal times as an example of bringing people together for things to happen unofficially. A lot of organic things happen unofficially—corridor discussions in the West Wing, for instance. There is unofficial architecture that goes on. Illich must have felt that he wanted to foster that.

Fictions are rituals that do not exist. Fictions are rituals that you are creating, but ones that you are tailoring. I have to design workshops borne out of teaching, where I think: how do you actually get people to buy into this? Workshops are the last thing people want to do in a business. You have to create some kind of game that people feel you have cared about. Often it is just dealing with a premise. They are just a construct, but you need to construct to place people in a space of openness. If you ask someone to be creative, it is the last thing they'll want to be. A fiction is a sneaky way to lure people in to a different way of things.

Fictions often get a bad rap for being too theatrical or escapist, but you need to get away from yourself to get back to yourself. You need distance, or some space in-between, so

you can actually see yourself. With a fiction, you are inventing a cultural moment—if only for a second. Let us all pretend we are this, and when we have done that, we can see if it relates to where we were before.

## DEPARTMENT OF EXTENSION

An Educational Critique hopes to contextualise this book's research, directly problematising the (UK) art and design school. I now use its theoretical framework within the final essay of *School Unreality* to produce an encounter with an unreal school. Drawing from the toolkit assembled in *Fictioning a Method*, I look to unearth the Department of Extension, the unreal school and practical application of this research project. An encounter with the Department, its performed fiction actualised through a real event, is contextualised within the frameworks, bureaucracies and ongoing redevelopment of my own university. Here, Kingston School of Art discloses itself as the spatial and political site upon which a speculative archaeology now unfolds.

However, before the encounter I first localise my critique through a brief survey of the New Extension refurbishment at Kingston School of Art, in order to assess how the Department should be contextualised. I then look to understand ‘extension’ from an expanded perspective, before the Department’s subsequent excavation.

### *New Extension, old perspective*

The Kingston School of Art refurbishment mobilises £30 million of investment to overhaul its campus. It will update the internal layout, improve external appearance and replace existing student residence with new academic space.<sup>1</sup> In an interview, vice-chancellor Stephen Spier looks to the future: “we are providing a building suitable for the next generation of creative practitioners, across the University we are investing to give students the resources they need to support learning”.<sup>2</sup> The New Extension refurbishment is a strategic and political one that posters the commercialisation of the UK art school, where ‘facility’ and ‘investment’ are claimed intrinsic to the success of its redevelopment. In an interview with former student and recently departed tutor Kieran O’Connor, he offers a reading:

“The word investment in isolation speaks the language of money, which has ever more become the language of art school.”<sup>3</sup>

The New Extension is emblematic. If only as homage, Kingston School of Art indirectly positions itself akin to the Bauhaus through visual allusion of its building. The architect’s rendering of the New Extension makes no attempt to hide a certain canniness: angle, perspective, shape and even signage appear derived. While ‘Bauhaus’ cascades iconically down its building’s grey façade, the New Extension’s brickwork does not afford its planners as much walling, so ‘KSA’ is squeezed atop a lift shaft. Both schools

can be read visually as factories, as places of production with clear facility. The ‘factory model’ school has its own longstanding, industrial-era history, though its metaphor has since been disputed in a critique that resonates amid Kingston School of Art’s refurbishment:

“We’ve invented a history of ‘the factory model of education’ in order to justify an ‘upgrade’—to new software and hardware that will do much of the same thing schools have done for generations now, just (supposedly) more efficiently, with control moved out of the hands of labor (teachers) and into the hands of a new class of engineers, out of the realm of the government and into the realm of the market.”<sup>4</sup>

It appears a new metaphor is needed. Through visual bookending and a spot-the-difference of two eras in art and design education, 100 years apart from one another, an opening is revealed. The New Extension, originally qualified as ‘New’ in its 1970s conception, is to become new once—now twice—more. While the New Extension may be economically real and legally real, despite several delays, the refurbishment is not yet entirely built real. The ‘what if’ is still in production and reveals an opening to imagine ‘as if’. I now outline a new, though familiar metaphor, located beyond the brick wall and closer to a school unreality.

### *Other extensions*

What does it mean to extend towards the unreal? Before knowing how and towards who or what, defining extension might first be useful. To extend is to augment: ourselves, our habitations, our means of use. An extension builds upon an existing set of parameters, both physical and non-physical. Extensions are also bound to time when we ask for one in mitigating circumstances. In *School (Un)realities*, I learned

the school facilitates non-productive, unreal time, free from the 'real world'. To extend time might then call on some *unreality*, akin to some Borgesian fantasy. Extensions are ubiquitous within construction, an industry subjected to its own extensions of delay. In the context of Kingston School of Art, an extension is New. However, when I search elsewhere, an extension reads otherwise.

One definition describes extension as "instruction by a university or college arranged for people who are not full-time students", and another as "the property of occupying space".<sup>5</sup> The former describes a schooling of those who are not full-time students. We might read into this as students without access to education: unenrolled, dismissed or perhaps unwelcome within school. The latter might be read through Sara Ahmed's theory of a *Queer Phenomenology*, which describes how the body 'straightens' its view in order to extend into space, thus occupying it.<sup>6</sup> She argues that, through an innate bodily extension along our "normative" vertical axis, the body lines up to become straight.<sup>7</sup> To queer space is then to occupy it, where 'space' is understood as heteronormative and patriarchal. To queer space is to extend into the real world. That said, exhibition *Queer Space* (1994) once asked, "is it even physical space that is in question, or is it the space of discursive practices, texts, codes of behaviour and the regulatory norms that organize social life?"<sup>8</sup> I here recount earlier consideration of a school unreality to highlight again that queer potentiality in between the 'real world' binary. Together with this reading of 'extension', the Department now takes shape.

### *Excavating the Department*

The foundational encounter with the Department of Extension eyes up the open day as its format for fictioning. The open day, or more historic 'open house', is premised as the time and space allocated to inviting a public into an institution. Within the educational context, an open day

hopes to attract potential students, and in the setting of a university the open day means business. Open days mark a crucial point of contact for those interested in joining an art of design school, platforming an opportunity to participate temporarily within its community of practice. Thus, to preview, test-ride, and pilot the Department of Extension, an open day appears apt.

Through an enactment of its unreality, 'actors' of the Department are asked to suspend disbelief as prospective students in attendance. Though, the open day inadvertently reveals itself as a disguise for a discursive event. However, through its entanglement of fiction, the Department of Extension hopes to re-enchant the tropes of symposia through a performativity and designed mythology. A contradiction of realities might then alleviate any academic or hierarchical pretence that similar events can often impose onto participants.

The inaugural event also produces with it a primary piece of ephemera: the open day guide. A point of infrastructural wayfinding and student testimonial, the guide is a largely arbitrary vessel, but a constant through which the institution can promote its ethos and disciplinary offerings. In the Department's own, there is a general adherence to these customs: an introductory passage and event schedule preface the open day's enactment. However, to draw from Albert Meister's fictioning within his underground *beaubourg*, an integrated literary encounter entitled *Extensions* looks to further conceive of the Department's overarching narrative.

Within this text, the Department is a conquest, sought after by its curious protagonist while surveying the refurbishment. Through an imagined alternative, the narrator seeks to reveal a counterculture to the emblematic New Extension and wider UK art school condition. The Department's existence is teased through the subject's pursuit, culminating in the disclosure of another text: *The Extension Effect*.

In a revision of Jean Baudrillard's *The Beaubourg Effect* (1982), a critique is rendered of the New Extension building and alludes climactically to the entry point of the Department. Within his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), Baudrillard ushered in the Centre Pompidou (then Beaubourg) with a sharp and polemical essay. He uses the construction and existence of Beaubourg as a strawman to action his theory of hyperreality, constructed—as Elizabeth Schambelan so accurately describes—through “cascades of mixed metaphors and a stuttering, splutter cadence”.<sup>9</sup> In its revision, *The Extension Effect* attempts to retain some of the original's unflinching tone and punching grammar structures, but condense and re-locates Baudrillard's critique towards the hyperreality of school. Though much less acute and theoretically stable, the revision hopes to make clear its position on what the New Extension refurbishment posters.

### *A floating signifier*

In actioning the Department of Extension, an effort is made to move closer to a school unrealness this study has sought to proposition. While the Department may not ever become economically real or legally real by funding or accreditation, it has the chance to become experientially and literarily real through those who participate directly, or retroactively in reading. Likewise, while the Department of Extension is localised to Kingston School of Art for one day, an extension can extend upon anything, and towards anyone. The format is open to further re-use, re-editing and re-imagination. In any case, the Department becomes an excuse for something communal to happen and assists in the unofficial, organic architecture of discussion.<sup>10</sup> We can also take the Department to act as a ‘floating signifier’, where meaning is absorbed rather than emitted.<sup>11</sup> The Department creates a space to project the ideas, criticisms and dreams of an otherwise into. In a similar vein to Ned Ludd's fiction, the Department's signifier can become the medium itself,<sup>12</sup> an

‘improper name’ in which demands are made and other realities conquered. Such a project should be offered as one to be actively performed and re-imagined by its audiences, and malleable enough as a model for numerous iterations. The Department of Extension and its underpinning framework of an Educational Critique should extend itself for others to extend themselves. An excavation of one (un)reality might then uphold or create student agency in another. Francisco Laranjo remarks:

“At the time when the neoliberalisation of design education is expanding fast, models that respond to pressing world challenges should seek decentralisation of education, flexibility of curricula, understanding of ideology and politics, and increased responsibility for students so they can collaboratively shape their education.”<sup>13</sup>

A school unrealness hopes to emancipate any and all potential that remains at our disposal against this condition. In the face of infrastructural hegemony, we must continue carving out and upholding alternative spaces, inside or outside the institution—and however numerous.

One project or event cannot topple the institution alone. But, in the knowledge that such converging discourse appears more and more frequent, we can be certain that a multitude of critical voice and interstitial space will continue mounting itself as an unsettling force.



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**OPEN DAY**  
**TUESDAY APRIL 2<sup>nd</sup>**

## Welcome

In the classroom, studio, lecture hall or seminar, the teacher and student may refer to the space beyond the school's assumed boundaries as the 'real world'—the school's reality then contested. In such a dispute, we are implicit in the creation of a binary.

The Department of Extension is an unreal school: its students, if only temporarily, enrol to imagine 'otherwise'. Today, the Department holds its inaugural open day, pooling together prospective students to unfold discussion on the school's (un)realities.

The Department of Extension hopes to cross-pollinate interests (and optional experience) across design, art, architecture and writing. In light of—and in spite of—the commercialised UK art school, participants will engage critically with current models and canons of learning. The Department will then enact possible alternatives through a speculative archaeology.

Any reality holds the potential to become real in our minds, schools and histories. Though, it may be within the school's (un)reality that an opening appears between brackets. We must then, at once and together, depart from the 'realness' of reality.

Born within the 1980s ball culture of New York, 'realness' was coded as the desire and attempt to blend into a white, heteronormative and patriarchal real world. Instead, let us call for a school *unrealness*. An unrealness that celebrates and extends a freedom of learning to imagine otherwise.

Unreal enrolment open now!

## Schedule

10:00–10:15

### Opening

10:15–11:30

### Nina Paim (common-interest)

Based in Basel, Switzerland, common-interest is a non-profit design research practice that bridges critical insight into socially engaged projects through installations, exhibitions, publications, essays, workshops and more. [[www.common-interest.ch](http://www.common-interest.ch)]

11:30–11:45

### Break

11:45–13:00

### Kishan San (School of Speculation)

SOS is an independent and nomadic critical design school that challenges current models of higher education. SOS seeks to build relationships between the diverse latent pedagogy in our cities to create a different kind of educational offer. [[www.schoolofspeculation.xyz](http://www.schoolofspeculation.xyz)]

13:00–14:00

### “A Good Canteen”

14:00–15:45

### Nouns of Assembly

A new blueprint-lexicon for learning and collectivity is to be assembled through permutational learning scenarios. Nouns of Assembly looks to prototype formulations and provide a springboard to speculate on alternative curricula and learning terrain. [[www.nounsofassembly.com](http://www.nounsofassembly.com)]

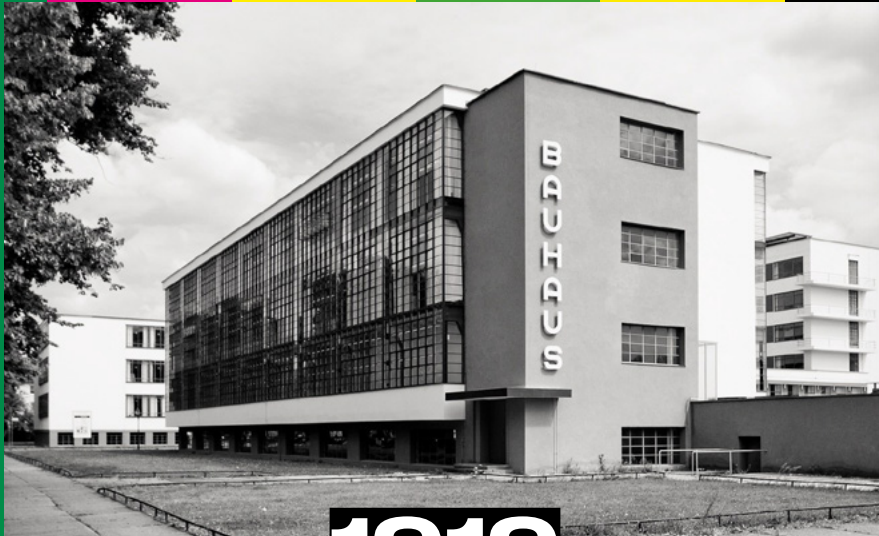
15:45–16:00

### Break

16:00–17:00

### Informal Book Summit

The Department extends beyond its physical walls and invites Chris Lee [[www.cairolexicon.com](http://www.cairolexicon.com)] and Ramon Tejada [[www.ramongd.com](http://www.ramongd.com)] for a discussion on the reading list and canon. Both will present projects that have engaged critically with design historiography.



**1919**



**2019**

**The question is:  
how do you kill  
the undead, the  
Bauhaus that is  
in our pockets, in  
our brains, in our  
politicians?**

Mark Wigley

# Extensions

As I write this, several instances of unreliable are first written as *unreliable*. The word unreal has seemingly penetrated my keyboard patterning, one habit duly formed as by-product to my curiosity. Aside of my misspelling, however, unreal and unreliable are both entangled. The unreal follows the unreliable; the unreliable towards the unreal. But, does one implicate more harmfully than the other? To be unreliable might here be likened to the ‘unreliable narrator’, the novel’s tactic of alerting its readers to their storyteller’s incredibility.

If I am your unreliable narrator, am I also unreal? Does the act of fictioning require a new guise? Does an unreal form of reality require unreal prescription? Spectacles, dark enough to cloak the real, light enough to reveal an otherwise. If only to agitate an additional layer of reality into being, a new guise may aid and abet my avoidance of any bureaucratic run-in. That is, after everything surfaces. If not today, and if not next week either, one day soon we will all extend.

But who, or what, lies at the end of my extension, of *the* Extension? Perspectives on the old are, here, Other perspectives on the New. From a mind retreat to a bodily extension, our story begins.

When I first searched for Kingston School of Art on Google Maps, it revealed three points of School, all delivered under the university banner. The images associated to one entry, River House, were mismatched. Instead of displaying interiors of a temporary three-floor building inhabited by displaced students of the New Extension, Google showed me the inside of another: Knights Park and its library or ‘LRC’. Do we label this as administrative error?

The user Syed Haris Hashmi, perhaps connected to Kingston University, appears responsible for the image upload and association. Google tells us Hashmi is a Local Guide at Level 7, with 6,349 points of some kind. It appears he has associated 67 images, collectively viewed 235,059 times. Hashmi’s most recent ‘photo work’ is that of the Pearl Continental Hotel in southeast Pakistan. If Hashmi is then our unreliable narrator of River House, am I Hashmi’s associate?

Go Back. Go Back. Two pages are undone: I am realigned with Google’s result. I select the Knights Park entry, its physical site is under construction, glazed with metal poling affixed as temporary architecture.






It is here I must begin my search of the third and final, adjacent result: Department of Extension.

## Contributions from Syed Haris Hashmi

Level 7

6,348

5,000

	Reviews	72
	Ratings	30
	Photos	89
	Videos	0
	Answers	1413



As I meander around the construction site, bytes of business rhetoric reveal themselves. The architect's rendering and university's future-facing vocabulary is subjected to the reality of a building site. A plasticized billboard reads, "Kingston School of Art is looking to the future." A recent brand overhaul of garish yellow and Anonymous black, paired with *that* rendering, is obscured by scaffolding. The School's future is held captive by its present predicament. Metal fencing with partial rust frames the image and its encroaching language

of future and investment. This unintended veneer is the New Extension's reality—or one of.

Across, another one liner augments. I have to step closer, the words are obscured beyond my gaze. "Business as usual," I first pick up in another empty strapline, "as we continue to deliver excellent teaching and

learning facilities for our students." A joke with no punch, only the sad reality of our neoliberal art school condition. Business, facility and investment replace culture, their words are now ever more permeating. I circle the gated site, hoping for a way in. None had yet revealed themselves.



I wander through the School, weaving in and out of studios. What's with the chairs? There are two of particular humour. Robin Day's 'iconic' seat is found widely across UK educational institutions. Day's design was a feat in the injection-mould process, deployed across schools, colleges and universities en masse.

Aside of it, double stacked and cast in hot pink, is another. This is the chair of Jasper Morrison, ex-Kingston student turned household brand. Who gets to sit at the table: star design or timeless homogeny? Both chairs are symbolic in their own kind of exclusion, but we'll soon sit elsewhere.

I circle back and return to ground floor, surveying the School's perimeter once more. The New Extension building has a back entrance. Maybe it was as simple as that. My only clue of the Department has been masked in the anonymous email I was sent at 3:36 PM last Thursday. Its contents, one single attachment, was a text file with all metadata wiped. The email's subject:

### **THE EXTENSION EFFECT**

Perhaps you can discern something from it, a byte of entry, a clipping of orientation—anything that might help me here. I'll continue to wander and try all its floors.



# The Extension Effect



Extension-Effect... Extension-Factory...  
Extension-Thing. How can we name it?

The Extension functions like an engine room, absorbing and coalescing all cultural energy, incubating its interior as Other: the subject and future object of societal projection.

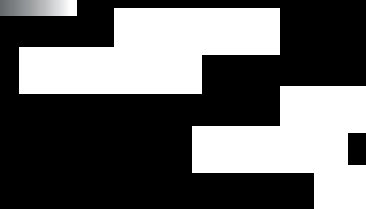
The Extension is a matrix for developing an unwavering model of absolute uniformity. Its factory model is manifest throughout: cultural reproduction, assembly lines, political deterrence. As for the stock—**bodies, books, briefs**—and so-called factory glazed workspace, there the flow has stopped entirely.

Absent but atop the hierarchy, its stakeholders offer an open, state-of-the-art, flexible style: very high-tech, very adapted to the 'facility' of future-facing art schools. This was generated not by a revolutionary mind, but logicians of the establishment wholly lacking in critical spirit.

Here again we find the real contradiction at the centre of the Extension-Thing: a dexterous, imposing exterior, and an interior clung on to old values. **A neoliberal monument** to total commercialisation, to hyperreality. The image of promise for our culture, flattened by its own society. This whole simulacrum of cultural values is undermined from the outset by the architectural shell—a raw brick, steel and concrete shell.

A rendering derived of our only apparent pedagogic and modernist narrative: if the Bauhaus is dead, do not amount to resurrection. The totalising exterior of Extension is anachronistic, only an interior void could have corresponded to this architectural envelope smuggled from that of a century ago. The culture itself is dead. *The Bauhaus is dead.* We must, therefore, start with the axiom:

Extension is a monument of **pedagogic deterrence.**



Students of the Extension are summoned to participate, to interact, to simulate, to play with the facilities... and they do it well. Thus, a type of parody, of over-simulation in response to the simulation of culture. The students, meant only as cultural livestock, are always transformed into the slaughters of a culture of which Extension is just its current incarnation.

Frankly, the only contents of Extension is the students themselves, of which the building treats like a factory line, a black box, or in terms of input/output, a flow of raw material. The only contents of Extension is that of the engine room, a **hyperfactory** of ourselves and societal conditioning. This requires that the mass of students become equivalent or homologous to the mass of society. It is this very confrontation and fusion of the two masses that occurs in the hyperfactory of Extension, producing something different from other historically radical school settings.

That is what we've learned from the hyperfactory, the hyperreality of the disciplines, and that is what one comes to learn at the Extension: the hyperreality of society.

What then, should have been put inside Extension? What Other extensions lie inside the New?

If the Extension must contain something, it should be a labyrinth, a library of infinite extensions, a game or a lottery for the chance repackaging of destinies. In short, a Borgesian world. Better still, a Circular Ruin: a linkage of individuals each dreaming in a laboratory of practical fiction and **concrete utopia**. A culture of simulation and fascination, and no longer a culture of production and meaning.

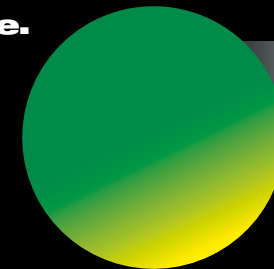
Neither inside, nor outside:  
here is something other than an anti-culture.

**Extend once: floor five.**

**Retract twice: floor three.**

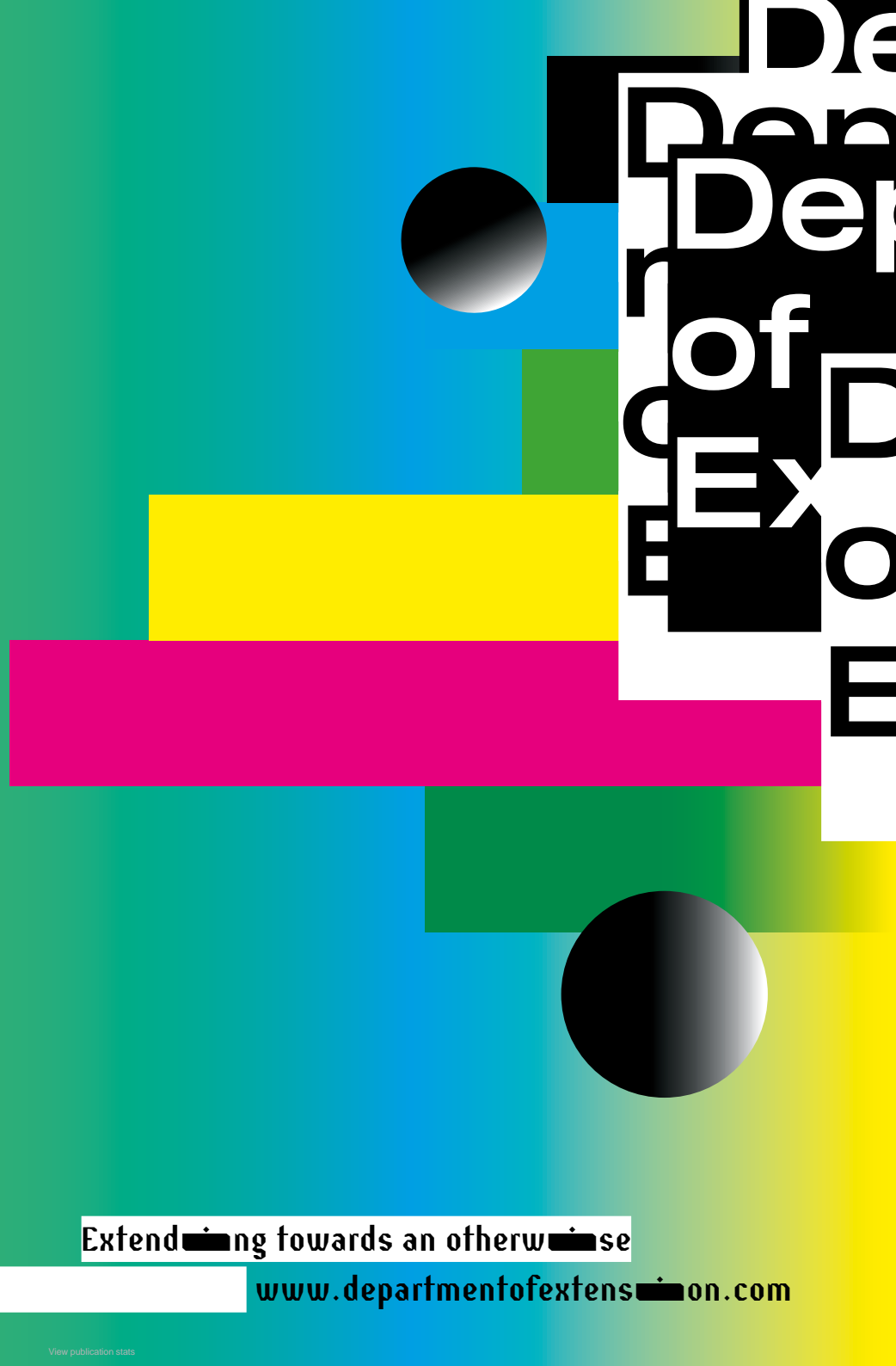
**Extend again, but not to all.**

**Towards the otherwise.**



The Extension Effect  
revises and re-actions  
Jean Baudrillard's 1982  
The Beaubourg Effect.





Department of Extension

Extending towards an otherwise

[www.departmentofextension.com](http://www.departmentofextension.com)