Title // **Art School as a Transformative Locus for Risk in an Age of Uncertainty**

Abstract // **211 words**

Risk is not a neutral term even in (Western) contexts of art and design pedagogic practice, where risk-taking is entwined into the matrices of the academy from the macro to micro: from institution to studio to tutor to student. Neither design education nor practice exist in a vacuum, so the conditions and contingencies of risk in contemporary design pedagogy are unpicked, in relation to *place, process* and *people,* as inter-connected (though often fragmented) components of study. Art school is examined as a transformative locus for risk: a conceptual-architectural site for knowledge but also a temporal space of subversion, within which the studio provides students with a relatively safe setting for risk in individual and collective practices (Schön, 1983). Neoliberal policies of standardisation and competition are as embedded in educational institutions as they are across all levels of society: the resultant loss of agency is felt individually and collectively. This article reframes risk as a fundamentally located dialogic pedagogy, an autonomous co-operative and collective action, underpinned by critical thinking and disobedient pedagogies. This is a transformative process anticipating change in an expanded mode of design in which the student members of the Alternative Art School are considered as critical agents, employing creative reflexivity as an antidote to the neoliberal stifling of risk.

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Introduction

Risk is not a neutral term even in (Western) contexts of art and design pedagogic practice. It is also fundamentally located in the idea and socio-physical framework of the art school: in the studio, the curriculum, module descriptors, project spaces, review and assessment systems. As a conceptual-architectural site for knowledge the creative campus, thus, forms a synthesis of the physical and socio-economic in a temporal mode of discovery: a *transformative locus*, which embraces the unknown and is infused with productive ambiguities. Paul Elliman argues (2011) that a school just a building with a school in it, as open to interpretative use or destruction as any other, inferring that its concrete and glass learning environments should be abandoned in preference for an emancipated university of the internet. In this context, risk-orientated design practice and education drives students to explore the edges of the knowable, to challenge norms and patterns of learning itself, and in so doing to break new ground through which new perceptions of the discipline and designer can emerge. A situated pedagogic practice, which Dennis Atkinson (2018: 2) advocates as an "adventure in which modes of learning and their outcomes may be unclear, but which need to be addressed". Innovative discovery is infused with experimentation and risk, by definition of being unfamiliar and new, so what are the constraints and conditions for this in contemporary academic institutions?

Neither design education nor practice exist in a vacuum, so the conditions and contingencies of risk in contemporary design pedagogy will be unpicked, and considered in relation to *place* (a campus; a studio/classroom; socio-economic context)*, process* (pedagogic practices; hidden curriculum) and *people* (social actors including tutors, students, managers). The inter-dependent, though often fragmented, components of study in the art school are determined by a matrix of forces including neoliberal agendas (austerity and competition), which facilitate or delimit risk. While a certain level of social responsibility is necessary, the implementation of risk in academic contexts reveals a plethora of administrative obstacles to creative expression and autonomous social experiences (dominated by health and safety concerns), including training courses for the use of a ladder or changing a lightbulb, and banning anything pinned to studio walls and corridors, such as artworks.

Transformation is essential to thinking and growing in the academy: "without the capacity to think critically about our selves and our lives, none of us would be able to move forward, to change, to grow" (hooks, 1994: 202). As a transformative process and space of learning the creative campus cultivates critical discourse to encourage a curiosity in students, to challenge common assumptions and push the boundaries of (their) practice in the pursuit of (new) knowledge. By contrast neoliberal policy-makers "want education to be strong, secure and predictable… to be risk-free at all levels" (Biesta, 2016: 1). From the tutor who proposes, frames and facilitates risk to the student who resists or embraces its benefits, each stakeholder in the educational contract perceives risk in different ways, within a shifting socio-economic landscape. In a discursive but also 'disobedient' pedagogic process (Atkinson, 2018), adaptable to the territory of each student's abilities and potential, risk is examined as a collective action through which greater critical agency can be invoked

underpinned by critical discourse. bell hooks (1994) suggests that the best way to enhance the potential for creativity and innovation is for staff to take more risks in pedagogic practices *with* students.

In an example of pedagogic risk-in-action the Alternative Art School (2013-19) will be outlined as an autonomous co-created 'school', which has set out to resist the constraints of academic conformity, and institutional hierarchies, disrupting curricula and prescriptive modes of teaching. In a mode of productive ambiguity this elective is underpinned by an embrace of autonomy, risk, and revolt in a rejection of a crisis culture that feeds on fear of failure and difference (Fisher, 2009, Sennett, 2012). As an idea open to reinvention and reconfiguration the art school is deconstructed and reconstructed in a process of critical interrogation.

Art School as a Transformative Locus for Ambiguity

The moniker 'art school' will be used in this paper, despite an inherent bias towards the discipline and its mythical cultural status, as an over-arching term for the creative campus (Patterson and Sharman, 2014), due in part to the recent reclaiming of 'art school' nomenclature by universities originally formed on principles of industrial competition. The mythical heritage and symbolic cultural value of the art school allows a certain amount of cognitive and critical play with its physical framework and pedagogic practices. This study is limited to the UK to enable closer interrogation and understanding of how contemporary neoliberal policy has infiltrated the academy affecting all participants, creating a messy landscape of paradoxes and pressures. From cuts in funding, to risk-averse behaviour as a means of guaranteeing success, this is a topical but unavoidably partial analysis.

In his essay 'A School is a Building with a School in it' Paul Elliman (2011: 148) suggests that notions of art school are underpinned by connectivity to diverse resources and contexts of meaning, forming "a provisional base from which to filter the world we live in, a place to reflect on basic principles or to invent new ones". He questions the need for learning in conventional classrooms and architectural sites of learning, proposing instead a 'University of Nowhere', 'Wild School' or 'Other School' (Poynor, 1997). The digitally mobile space is envisioned on the basis that new technologies offer opportunities for a broader demographic of students. Here students can study more freely than physically located institutional hierarchies permit, echoing the optimism of Ivan Illich's (2002) fluid processes facilitated by educational (digital) webs, expanding the opportunities for each student to transform their learning in social contexts, for instance.

For Elliman (2011: 144) "the very notion of school has become, in neoliberal terms, a concept for just another commercial product, forced to compete along with everything and everyone else for a place in the market". As Giroux (2014: 51) puts it, "Not only does neoliberalism undermine both civic education and public values and confuse education with training, it also treats knowledge as a product, promoting a neoliberal logic that views schools as malls, students as consumers, and faculty as entrepreneurs". By embedding the brand value of the art school within its newly designed studios, cafes and lecture theatres the academy has shifted attention away from what occurs in the learning environment to the signifying status (commodity value) of the building itself. Once relegated as an annexe to the main academic campus building, the art school has gone through a transformation from adapted (but not very heated) Victorian school to glossy show-home. Several university campuses appear

to have been designed for future use as shopping malls with a central atrium and glass-fronted studios resembling retail units ready for adaptation by the market when the incumbent franchise (education) is forced to move on or close. The 'openness' of the contemporary design school's glass studios forms an illusion of transparency and accessibility, however. The introduction of card swipe machines has increased 'security' while simultaneously tracking students (and staff) measuring their attendance and, in the process, restricting movement between courses and communities of practice by blocking entry without significance bureaucratic intervention. As recent events in the power structures of social media and surveillance have demonstrated, the same technologies that once offered a techno-utopian emancipation (Illich, 2002; Poynor, 1997) have now become tools for control (Berardi 2013).

Risk and the Neoliberal University

Risk, in the form of new methods, untested techniques, and challenging opinions/questions, may incur fewer financial penalties on the creative campus than in the corporate sector, but other pressures, such as targets, league tables and increased student numbers represent similar punitive threats/constraints for the tutor and institution. Impelled to raise 'standards', increasing League Table status and student satisfaction while producing world leading research, academics/managers have resorted to grade inflation and more prescribed learning. Quality assurance and curricular planning now more concerned with the "effective production of pre-defined 'learning outcomes' (Biesta, 2016:2) than changing the world through (risky) design strategies. As Mark Fisher (2009: 26) argues, "Far from being in some ivory tower safely inured from the 'real world', [education] is the engine room of the production of social reality, directly confronting the inconsistencies of the capitalist social field".

The insatiable needs and demands of 'industry' reduce notions of employability to conformist attitudes in professional design practice in which 'fitting in' rather than a rebellious transformation of mainstream culture and working practices is the ambition of our most talented graduates[1]. Employability is increasingly framed as industry-ready. Yet, on graduating, the new designer must immediately join the 'creative industries' if they are to survive in urban centres (or move if the institutional location presents a lack of opportunities) constrained by ever-inflating studio and home rents while paying off debts accrued over a minimum of three years in HE. The type of work that young designers (feel pressured to) produce, is therefore dominated by corporate aesthetics and market-based strategies leading to what Sennett (2012: 8) describes as a "cultural homogenization… expressing a neutrality-seeking view of the world… arising from an anxiety about difference, which intersects with the economics of global consumer culture". Now risk-aversion pervades contemporary education, reflecting inflated perceptions of danger in the social sphere fuelled by a fear-mongering press (Patterson and Sharman, 2014). Since the War on Terror began, Mark Fisher (2009) argues, there has been a 'normalisation of crisis' and instability has become a constant in the 'real' world. Simultaneously, academic curricula have become more rigid, more surveilled, more measured as administrative responsibilities have multiplied. Entrenched competition between institutions, faculty staff and students delimits risk in its focus on winning at all costs. The singular correct outcome is sought rather than critically engaging with the ambiguous realities and

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[1] Derived from level 5 and 6 exit interviews with students in the highest grade banding at Kingston School of Art.

multiplicity of responses to the 'wicked problems' of everyday design in a complex world, as defined by Horst Rittel and Melvin M. Webber (1973).

Historically, the art and design academic institution has offered an environment in which to "pursue those questions that normally would not be addressed in professional practice, with its pressures and contingencies" (Bonsiepe, 2006: 27). No longer the intellectual safety zone of history, the 'real world' has come crashing in through the art school's doors. Real in this context refers to the market forces that dominate contemporary culture, politics and education policy, which is "driven by an overarching political view of how the world should work. A sense that government sees every aspect of cultural life purely in terms of its economic utility" (Tickle, 2013: *np*). Under the shadow of the 'economic Darwinism' (Giroux (2014: 1) of casino capitalism can higher education remain a space and place for risk through which education and its social structures can be exposed, challenged, and subverted as a means of seeking ways to reconstruct our civic and social spheres?

Transformative and Transitional Pedagogies

In the transition from school to HE traces of hidden strategies, such as grade coaching to sustain acceptable league table results, and reduce the stigma of failure at school, lurk as an insidious resistance to risk-orientated methods and ideas of freedom. In addition to seeking 'clarity' students entering higher education often prefer the more prescribed teaching and learning techniques which have guaranteed success at secondary school level (Vaughan *et al.,* 2008). Students learn to align themselves with staff judgments, benchmarking their own progress in relation to the individual tutor rather than risking practice that runs counter to dominant institutional or stylistic norms (Orr and Shreeve, 2018: 47). The implicit rather than explicit value of ambiguity in art school teaching and learning practices "creates vagueness and insecurity for many of our first year students who have expectations based on the concrete and the certain" (Vaughan, *et al.* 2006: 1). Learning through open-ended projects guides the development of individual students' art and design practice: a "project-centred learning approach [that] is a defining element of studio-based pedagogy" (Orr and Bloxham, 2012: 235)**.** Even within a set of limitations such as choice of typeface, format, scale, print process or digital platform, many project tasks are intentionally open-ended, anticipating the value of the not-known (Atkinson, 2018). In recent years such (creative and cognitive) uncertainty in teaching and learning methods and structures has been eradicated, the inherent uncertainty and ambiguity of the creative process is sterilized in preference for satisfying the clarity and knowability that students seek.

The competitive individualism of capitalist society is mirrored in the nation's classrooms and studios, pitting students against their peers, to attain the cult status of the singular hero in the arts. A state of isolated 'precarity' is characterised for students as 'success anxiety' (Giroux 2011; Fisher, 2009) in which the highest grades are sought as the only outcome for all activities, while reductive pressures of future debt delimit the possibilities of experimentation or risky strategies. For many students, hard work and high grades justify the investment of parents/guardians, a strategy underscored by the assumption that this will lead directly to securing employment. Therefore, risk may be perceived by the student as an unnecessary threat to achievement, while the art and design tutor frames risk-taking is an inherent, often tacit, value of pedagogic practice along with experimentation and innovation (Atkinson, 2018). It could be argued that in the social contract between student

and HE institution poorer students have more to lose from risk than those from more privileged backgrounds and so a form of self-censorship delimits the possibilities of risk increasing a disparity of achievement (Illich, 2002). "A degree is generally regarded as a costly investment that needs to provide returns more immediately in measurable – hence, quantitative – criteria of success" (Gray, 2018: *np*).

Locating Risk in the Art School

For Biesta (2016:1) education always involves a risk "not the risk of failure due to lack of diligence, poor planning, but because education less about filling a bucket and more about lighting a fire". A synthesis of dialogic debate and playful reflexivity enable the not-known (Atkinson, 2018) to form a concrete intellectual position from which risk and freedom can be more confidently deployed as core pedagogic practices. A disobedient pedagogy is adapted to design from observations on fine art by Atkinson (2018: 60):

> Real learning in the sense of experimentation has no prescriptive force, it is restless, disobedient and awaits subjects-yet-to-arrive. Real learning is a deterritorialisation, a disobedient force opening up potentials for new or modified ways of doing, making, seeing, thinking, feeling.

Risk operates within boundaries of creative curiosity, as a method of perceiving the world differently and finding ways of capturing that for others, "to make connections in unexpected ways and places and to see possibilities where others may not" (Orr and Shreeve, 2018: 8). The formal arrangements of the classroom setting create a stage for conformity under the authority of the teacher, a socio-spatial structure which is disrupted in the transition from school to HE. Interacting with open-ness, embracing uncertainty and experimentation, exploring new methods, materials and modes of thinking, enables designers to negotiate the complex and unpredictable demands of professional (commercial) practice.

New strategies and pedagogic practices are sought for a critical design pedagogy from within contemporary academic conditions, reconfigured through dialogic debate and critical thinking to envision an alternative 'beyond' the market forces that determine educational policy and employment. Dialogic modes of pedagogic practice emphasize mutual participation (Giroux, 2011) in the creative campus to build a community of the possible in which tutors and students co-operate as critical agents: "a dialogue, unlike a contest, is not about winning and losing" (Biesta, 2016: 3). In this exchange listening is essential to negotiating the edges of the knowable, finding points of agreement, managing disagreement or disappointment, and being open to unexpected directions (Sennett, 2012). hooks (1994) argues that the best way to enhance the potential for creativity and innovation is for staff to take more risks in the pedagogic practice *with* students. To identify, extract and apply risk requires demonstrations by staff, examples from history but more pertinently the dialogic development of a set of bespoke tools defining risk in the most pertinent terms for their own learning needs (hooks, 1994). By trying new methods, leaving the comfort zone, testing ideas that may not work, underpinned by critical pedagogy as a 'theoretical resource and a productive practice' (Giroux, 2011: 5), students are encouraged to more actively engage in their learning. For Patterson and Sharman (2014: 1):

As educators we have a responsibility to *co-generate* [my emphasis] opportunities for risk, encourage encounters with it, and inculcate unfamiliar learners to its discomforts and rewards. We have a common pedagogic duty to defend and create risk – to value it.

Donald A. Schön (1992: 11) identifies the studio as a relatively safe setting for risk in individual and collective practices (Schön, 1983). In this context, "Doing extends thinking in the tests, moves, and probes of experimental action, and reflection feeds on doing and its results. Each feeds the other, and each sets boundaries for the other" (Schön, 1983: 280). The classroom and studio are not neutral working environments, they are infused with the power of the tutor and authority of institution, and reflect larger society in reinforcing entrenched social inequalities. Giroux and Penna (1979: 21) identify this social space of learning as a hidden curriculum, challenging the inherent bias of tacit teaching in the classroom to "help uncover the ideological messages embedded in both the content of the formal curriculum and the social relations of the classroom encounter". One solution, as Elliman (2011) argues is to create more movable modes of meaning, referring to Cedric Price's *Thinkbelt School*, which was proposed in the 1960s to run on abandoned rail routes between Staffordshire pottery towns. Here meaning itself is in motion while a more accessible mode of learning is designed to cater for those with the least power and capital. But perhaps all the creative campus requires is a library and decent canteen? Describing his time studying at Goldsmiths, Michael Craig-Martin cites the value of communal spaces therein such as the library, studios, workshops, and canteen: "a powerhouse of a place where everybody was rubbing up against everybody else. And that seemed to generate a kind of companionability" (Craig-Martin, 2009: 43). A mutual support network in which risk was infused into the development of creative knowledge and practice. Student Union bars have a proud history of hosting film nights, political debates, poetry performances, and gigs: spaces in which this social mix can lead to unexpected creative alliances in a meaning-generating process where knowledge is gained through interaction and participation, yet many of these sources of socio-creative serendipity are closing.

The next section considers the *people* of the art school as significant actors in a community of practice (Wenger, 2004), who have the power to be agents of change in a bottom-up rather than top-down configuration of critical engagement and risk-orientated teaching and learning. The Alternative Art School (AAS) represents a mode of critical pedagogy that scaffolds student agency.

The Alternative Art School (AAS) // a Community of the Possible

As a nomadic 'school' within a (Design) School within Kingston School of Art, the AAS represents a fluid notion of art school, a temporal learning environment, a floating signifier, in which to exploit the pedagogic and symbolic opportunities of the academic community "as an exchange in which the participants benefit from the encounter" (Sennett, 2012: 5). This level 5 elective is situated within an assessable module which explicitly states: "projects in this module encourage students to experiment, embrace risk and develop innovative approaches and solutions". Members (a core group of 15-20 extending to 50, including participants from other courses and institutions) are prompted to embrace the ambiguity of art school praxis, challenge assumptions and boundaries, embrace uncertainty and formulate alternative discourses. Dialogic discourse emerged as the core process of the AAS and has become a valued product for the students, representing a "shared belief in a spirit of

intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent, and rejoices in collective dedication to truth" (hooks, 1994: 40). Permission to risk is contingent on safety and *trust* as a means of recognising and embracing its ambiguous values (Patterson and Sharman, 2014). One AAS member (student, 2017) describes the emergent dialogic process thus:

> Initial discussion asked several what-ifs and began to gauge what could be of the Alternative Art School. The name was questioned but to little success, it soon became clear any title was irrelevant. Our intentions, questions, strategy, and assimilation was much more valuable.

Inadequate space and social inequalities can become entrenched as a hidden curriculum in traditional classroom/studio structures, therefore external learning environments were sought for the AAS from the outset as liminal locations for study, to disrupt risk-averse patterns of behaviour and establish more equanimity between staff and students. As a deliberate disruption of the curriculum (Orr and Shreeve, 2018: 2), the Alternative Art School (AAS) is outlined here as an interstitial educational space (Gale, 2017). It is framed and located on the edges of conventional curriculum and learning spaces. In the context of an assessable elective within a core studio-based module the AAS is one of six options that include more superficially skills-based electives in film, photography, publication design and advertising. Exploiting the methodology and location the art school as an embodied otherness from everyday society, a counterpoint to mainstream culture, the AAS members enact a disobedient pedagogy (Atkinson, 2018). Each new formulation of the group, which opens to new participants at the beginning of each academic year (but never closes off membership) determines its shape, collective identity, content, ambitions, pace of production and outcomes. As Wenger (2004: 13) argues, a community of practice can be viewed as a social learning system, in which a theory of *"social practice* address[es] the production and reproduction of specific ways of engaging with the world." This is an important component of design education because, in looking forward, students are encouraged to embrace/anticipate the uncertain societal contexts of design and propose new strategies and (survival) mechanisms. In this way students are encouraged to articulate their ideas and ambitions from a more autonomous critical position, to inspire change and transformation in themselves and each other.

In one radical pedagogic strategy to prevent 'gaming' the electives to gain the best grades all students were awarded an 'A' grade at the beginning of the year, a mark that would be confirmed later in the year at summative assessment if they could show evidence of attendance and participation. Described as a "total headfuck" by one participant, she explained that, as the only member of her family to reject medicine to study art/design, she was under tremendous pressure to do well, gain the highest grades and prove the value of her choice. By removing the need to work for the purpose of high grades, she was forced to think about what she really wanted to do with her time in the elective. The risk of 'getting it wrong' is, thus, diminished as more agency is afforded in this "space to work in rather than a space to work for" as another student put it. Workshops on power and freedom facilitated navigation of this unchartered educational landscape enabling members to take collective responsibility for the group's defining principles and the direction it could take. All aspects of design pedagogy were presented as fluid strategies and resources, available to the students to interrogate or alter in this programme. Each session opened with a dialogic investigation of the most valuable

agenda, group needs and areas of research, then identification of methods and resources to support this. Participants are encouraged to reframe or relocate the colonial spaces of review/assessment if the sterile white cubes of the institution are deemed to reinforce a biased critique. The AAS members embraced risk as a responsible freedom to generate their own meaning and cultivate their practice.

The AAS programme is tested through limited scheduled number of focal points, a critical reflexivity based on internally-agreed reviews, externally-facing curated events, peer review and making public in a *performative* mode of Problem-Based Learning (Biggs, 1996). Work-in-progress events, rather than perfect finished outcomes formed a disobedient learning utilising reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983). Public exhibitions and symposia are arranged (by me, but designed and delivered by the students) as a mode of 'making public' the group's intentions, acting as invitations to students and tutors to debate, on a level playing field, issues of studio space, diversity and inter-disciplinarity. One benefit of starting a project in this way is that learning is fun and informal, but also 'trapped' or controlled (Biggs, 2003). The first symposium "event offered a springboard for conversation between curious individuals in a space *free from critique or judgement"* (my emphasis). Questions serve the purpose of illuminating a field of possibilities in a problem-based mode of learning, defined by Biggs (2003: 1) as a constructive alignment, an idea that:

> students *construct meaning* through relevant learning activities. That is, meaning is not something imparted or transmitted from teacher to learner, but is something learners have to create for themselves. Teaching is simply a catalyst for learning.

The group met regularly in a local day centre for children, bars, cafes and a disused shop run by a local community group[2]. Beyond the physical campus, the processes and spaces of learning are framed as political experiments in and of themselves (Ivison and Vandeputte, 2013: 25). In addition to cognitive, conceptual and critical skills, some pragmatic mechanisms have substantiated risk-based practice in this elective, including:

1. Neutral or outward-facing teaching and learning spaces unblock individual fears and patterns of institutional resistance encouraging risk.
2. The ungraded or pre-graded status of the elective significantly reduces success anxiety and increases innovative outcomes and critical engagement.
3. The tools and (negotiated) rules of play help frame learning as a productive, sometimes fun, activity.
4. Sharing food helps cement the community of practice.
5. Accessible affordable production tools to test ideas, to research-in-action.

Through consultation, then a gradual transference of power and leadership, staff and student roles are reversed or reconfigured in a co-operative or collaborative partnership. By framing teaching as a research process in collaboration *with* students, I have sought to invoke a mode of rigorous curiosity through playful reflexivity, critical interrogation, student ownership and collective autonomy based on *trust*. Mutual participation builds trust as a foundation for more proactive disruptive teaching that questions and reconfigures the continuum of

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[2] The Community Brain.

conformity from school to art school. In a more open-ended than didactic curriculum, this is a transitional space of and for transformation through autonomy and critical engagement. Through creative risk and intellectual freedom radical pedagogies offer our discipline and students a sense of beyond, what if, what's next, why not?

Conclusions

In an increasingly complex world students need to seize the attributes of the unexpected through agile thinking, critical design practice, and dialogic discourse. However, as tutors who were trained in an incomparable socio-economic landscape, we must acknowledge that the contemporary dominance of neoliberal policy has ramifications for today's students. Policies of standardisation and competition are as embedded in educational institutions as they are across all levels of society. The resultant loss of agency is felt individually and collectively embedded in the physical frameworks of the campus buildings but also in the students' perceptions of education and its value. In a society defined by precarity, neither the locus of art school nor the social space of the studio represent safe spaces for risk and subversion, as Schön (1983) proposed.

Rather than abandon the school, as Elliman (2011) suggests, this paper has posited a reconfiguration of learning. By reimagining the art school as a transformative locus (a floating signifier) a sense of community is built on agency and trust with students to invoke risk. Autonomy is important to avert what Fisher (2009) calls resigned inaction of British students a self-fulfilling 'reflexive impotence'. It is our responsibility as tutors to identify gaps in our pedagogic practice for expanded modes of design that require new tools (cognitive and creative) appropriate to this generation of learners. Notions of risk in contemporary education must, thus, be reframed for both educator and student. New discursive spaces (physical, intellectual and creative), critical approaches and conceptual tools appropriate to the complex territory of contemporary design education are proposed as alternatives to the risk-averse status quo. Underpinned by critical pedagogy, students are invited to more actively engage in their learning, defining risk in the most pertinent terms for their own learning needs.

In the process of unpicking and disrupting common assumptions about risk in the context of the neoliberal university tutors must help students engage in self and social agency and autonomy, not only in the library or bar but within assessable components of the curriculum. In a reconfiguration of conventional pedagogic spaces, the AAS represents an intellectually agile community, grounded by a collective identity and a critical connection with the 'real world'. Here, school is a reflective space to critically interrogate the contemporary socio-political landscape and our place in it. Improved autonomy and responsibility for staff to demonstrate the value of risk would help validate alternative pedagogies and draw them in from the edges. A new collective position such as that invoked through AAS gives students another perspective, challenges them to fight conformity and embrace alternatives to crisis culture and competition within an academic marketplace.

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