

THE PLURIVERSE SCHOOL (transcript)

The following presentation will take the form of a dialogue between two protagonists:

P1: A composite character constructed from interviews, recollection of informal conversations, thinkers, writers as well as theories I have engaged with.

P2: Language and texts I have collected whilst navigating LCC's physical and digital spaces. These will be contextualised by my voice (in *italic*), the narrator in order to be explicit about my interpretive influence

The dialogue will question the relationship between educational spaces and the act of education. With an autoethnographic methodology and a feminist approach to research, I want to channel design education's world-building capacity and explore ways in which we can collectively occupy and adapt the school we find ourselves in to build more inclusive, socially just, and innovative worlds of learning. During this dialogue then, will appear three such worlds that have been described to me during conversations I have had with interviewees. I am sharing them in the hope that through storytelling, we can give them visibility. These worlds take different shapes: bubbles, rivers, nooks. Endless spaces to be inhabited, transformed, or worn as camouflage; a pluriverse school grounding us deeper inside the institution, but only as a means to take action, transgress and bring people together. What if we collected these emergent stories, celebrated them, amplified them, shared them, and connected them? Would it be possible that through narration, imagination, and association we could create new worlds where we can take action and transgress? Worlds where we can follow our ideas, interests, and purpose?

We find ourselves on the edge of a roundabout anchored at the centre of a vast building site in which the promise of the future is materialising, but the remnants of the past are still discernible. A 20-minute walk south of the river, the building we are facing is part of that past. From the outside, only a sign tells us what we are about to enter: London College of communication, part of University of the Arts London. Made of an assemblage of buildings, it is impossible to discern its boundaries. One college amongst many, it aptly mirrors the patchworked nature of the University itself. Across the road, the building faces its demise: A half-erected core is growing by the day.

P2: A cutting-edge new building that will help us experiment further with new ways of working. *You heard well. Not learning, working.*

P1: Hot-desk working.

P2: As the world around us continues to change, so too do we.

P1: We haven't been considered

P2: Oak handrails with LED illumination on the underside shed beautiful washed of coloured light on the steps

You had an uneasy feeling that it might just be

P1: adding to the gentrification of the area.

P2: The stairs will be fabricated in sections and brought by road to site for placement and fixing in a carefully choreographed sequence to ensure the stairs grow as the building adds levels.

Wrapped in an open-plan package complete with

P2: exhibition space, retail opportunities, common areas, neighbourhoods and the opportunity to go from one place to the next.

A promise of a space that can do and see everything, blurring the lines between work and leisure, entertainment and studying.

P1: We're not going to be able to teach in that place.

You went to one of the staff meetings, to you it felt like they were describing

P1: just another building

P2: With stunning views

The sound of the pile driver jolts us from our daydream. Soundtrack to our existence here, reminding us

P1: we are in the belly of the machine which is itself pouring out.

For now, we exist within a building-site then. A loud, chaotic, vast and metamorphosing infrastructure which has grown out of its original purpose.

P2: Floods, power outages and lift issues

P2: We continue to invest heavily in our current building

Bulging at the seams, and run down, the building bears witness to a past that no longer exists. As privileged individuals who have been given access to it, we also embody the intangible manifestation of this infrastructure.

P1: We are the institution.

P1: The admin,

P2: assessment matrix,

P2: credit system,

P1: box ticking.

P1: There's people making decision up there. Who are these people? What is happening up there?

Bound to its ideological and physical interior we are often overwhelmed by its scale.

P1: It's a huge thing. Ambiguous. Fluid. Nonsensical. It doesn't often feel like there's any way to catch it.

P1: It's quite radical in its thinking, you observe,

P1: but you know, obviously very bureaucratic.

You're thinking:

P1: I may not stick around

Fatigued and sometimes distrusting of its intentions, imagining a brighter future for ourselves becomes difficult without the fantasy of an escape. In corridors and staffrooms, after lectures and workshops or during lunch breaks, we talk and dream of existing beyond its boundaries. But through these conversations also emerge stories of resistance that exist firmly within it.

WORLD 1 THE RIVER OF LIFE

Let's enter this building then, say hi to reception as we take out our lanyards to access the gates, the threshold separating the outside from the inside, us from them. Up the large staircase we go, a left turn to enter the corridors of the workshop block. No,

P2: this doorway has been closed due to refurbishment.

P2: Sorry for the noise.

They also apologies for any inconvenience caused. The place is changing, remember. Back down the stairs and round to the ground floor, up two flights and down the corridor.

P1: You're assigned basically two rooms

P2: Our facilities enable us to learn, research, make and innovate.

You have tried to play around with the rooms

P1: 'Do we set them up in a circle?'

P1: 'Do we have the chairs in an arrangement?'

Ultimately it always ends up being the same set up.

P1: It's always just a big screen with a bunch of tables and chairs

P1: It's quite clinical
Suddenly though, you disappear from the room and the four walls transform into a
P1: A river of life.
A project you've been developing
P1: A safe space
P1: An authentic space
given entirely to them. Alumni & student. Peer to peer. You give them the opportunity to share their
experience with each other. To take ownership in defining:
P1: What is a masters?
P2: Learning at the level will be about intellectual engagement, discovery, interaction and change
They talk about their
P1: moments of doubt,
P1: the confidence they gained without fear of judgement.
P1: No hierarchy.
P1: It's a conversation starter to make sense of their journey
P1: And they really appreciate that
P1: It makes them into a community, you observe

WORLD 2 THE BUBBLE

You head up the stairs, through the set of double doors. Heavier than they look. Navigation is not
easy. Online. Offline.
P1: Infrastructure becomes visible when it stops working.
This infrastructure is so visible its blinding.
P1: Practically for technical spaces, it's been sh*t show
But still, you've managed to create
P1: a bubble
A bubble that's resisting the chopping block
P1: last year our workshop physical space was cut in half
P2: Our specialist workshop and studios are equipped to industry standards
P1: The reality is, we're being squeezed and squeezed and squeezed
P2: Our outstanding facilities are central to student life at LCC
P1: We don't feel considered at all
P2: One of LCC's greatest assets is its outstanding range of old and new technologies
In a building filled with fluorescent lit rooms with grey flooring, you've managed to transform your
little corner into a rare inviting space
P1: Students end up coming here just to hang out
And through the connections you make with the students you are able to
P1: really get involved in the student work
P1: We also try and work on initiatives to make a wider appreciation for the discipline
P1: displays
P1: book fairs
Despite the college's effort to squeeze, your impact is expanding
P1: We have students who graduate and start a small publishers
P1: We see them doing really well as their own people
Ultimately perhaps that's the purpose of education
P1: That's really worthwhile

WORLD 3 THE NOOK

P1: It's Friday afternoon
and in this world of matrix, structures and attainment goals, a
P1: nook
emerges.

P1: It's optional, so no grades are involved,
suddenly,

P1: we can do whatever we want.
Freedom then, inside the walls.

P1: Mindfulness exercises
and

P1: music
in the background. This room becomes

P1: a testing ground for what could happen.

P1: Sometimes the lights are switched off.

Close your eyes, take a breath you could be anywhere, opportunities are endless. Suddenly you don't feel so blinded.

P1: This is where you can do your worst drawing, or not pay attention, or decide what you want to do.
This freedom, that exists outside of the university parameters, this feels like

P1: transgressive learning.