

New Babylon: Rethinking Spatial Metaphors within the Practice of Art Education

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Abstract (Summary)

We live in space, we are surrounded by space. Too little, and we might feel crowded, too much and we might feel lost. We rely on coordinates in space to help us find our way. Space just is, or is it? This dissertation has two distinct purposes. First, it is an exploration of the function of spatial metaphors as they have come to be relied upon in the coordination of knowledge. Second, it is a speculative projection of how our conception of knowledge and inquiry might be altered if we were to adopt more complex and critical understandings of space as metaphors to guide art educational practice.

The study begins with an examination of how conceptions of space as a neutral and prior presence have been used to substantiate divisions between academic disciplines as well as separate artistic inquiry from the experiences of everyday life. The paper then examines space as seen through the work of critical geographers, philosophers and social theorists. In particular, thinkers who begin to articulate a kind of space that is neither static, nor prior to experience, but rather a notion of space as produced, constantly changing and always in a state of flux. What this dissertation intends to answer is, what would art education look like if the spatial metaphors that guided its practice were derived from these more fluid and integrated conceptions?

Architectural form is a manifestation of theories of space. The paper will examine the correspondence between architectural theory and forms and the metaphors drawn from these ideas. Particular attention will be given to New Babylon, a visionary architectural project produced by the artist, Constant Nieuwenhuys. The designs and models that comprised this project coincide nicely with many contemporary theories of space as a contestable, malleable and imprecise concept.

An exploration of cyberspace as a limitlessly fluid architectural space will provide the metaphorical foundation for the presentation of an alternative pedagogical approach to art educational practice. Finally, the findings of the researcher will be reflected through an examination of student artwork.

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