“Safe Spaces” in Education- ghettos of marginalisation and dominance or places of equality and social justice?

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Abstract

The article critically analyses the concept of space in generality and specifically the employment of safe space as an educational concept. In addition, by employing Derrida’s notion of the arrivant the article provides an account of the author’s frustrations during his analysis of space and of his attempts to re-orientate his quantitative writings to ones that are more auto-biographical in nature. The argument emplaced in the article is that safe spaces are not safe but in reality are ‘warped spaces’ where landscapes reveal topographies of despair which mimic modern technological and capitalist development.

Keywords

safe space, Derrida, arrivant, disability

In a printed journal you may only have so many papers of a designated length. You cannot have gaps between papers; you cannot have more than your journal page limit. These are the mantras of my editorial career to date- space- striated and conformed. Limits, limits, limits – space we can do more. I do though feel a yearning to apologise to the typesetter, the copy editor, I am sorry that I am not efficient in my use of space here.

Introduction: In this paper I examine my addiction to the analysis of space as an educational concept. The fabric of the paper is woven with the examination of space and safety as concepts – this is the warp that threads my analysis together. The weft of the fabric though provides detail of my struggle both with the analysis of space and my attempts to re-orientate my quantitative writings to ones that are more auto-biographical in nature. This paper then marks a beginning, and details my becoming in a new space of qualitative writing. Within this examination academic text is interspersed with autobiographical writings (italicised) of my struggle to find new meanings both in analysis and of myself. Throughout the paper I create my own space – a pause, a stammer in the text which allows the arrivant to arrive. In the creation of this [my] space the arrivant in Derridean terms haunts the past, future and present of my text, of everything that I have

‘Smart spaces, shadow spaces, learning spaces, vision spaces, personal spaces, virtual space, creative space, hybrid spaces, social spaces, formal/informal spaces, gendered spaces, democratic space, ‘give somebody space to grow,’ collaborative space, inclusive space, disabling spaces, segregated spaces, integrative space, empty space, accessible space, their space- our space, safe space’

‘Space, bloody space‘- it haunts me- it contains, constricts and suffocates me. (can you be suffocated by too much space? - Perhaps only in outer space). Space- is ever present in my own thoughts (my mindspace) about education.
to say. It allows into the text ‘what turns up at the door’ a ‘future that cannot be anticipated’. But, it is also the ghost, the monstrous “...mis-known thought” (Royle, 2003, p.111). In this paper though I welcome the arrivant, I accord it hospitality in the ‘text boxes’ interspersed in and around my writing and try eventually to domesticate it (Derrida, 1995).

One Beginning . . .

In my reading of research articles and in discussion with colleagues about education I am drawn back to space – it has “...magnetic influence” (Peters & Kessel, 2000, p.23) - I have become moth to this flame.

‘Space’ a signifier so ubiquitous to education- it is a signifier of fashionable pathology. A carcinogen that infects and affects the space of educational thinking.

I first articulated my thoughts about space in a paper for the journal Disability and Society in 2012. Here in a paper entitled –‘Inclusion All present and correct? A critical analysis of inclusive education in England’ - I tried to employ a Derridean critique to interpret educational absences from inclusive spaces. The reviews of the paper were good I had never had such fantastic reviews. I felt clever and smug. This paper though, once finished, did not offer me the ‘fix’ I craved to cure my spatial obsessions. It was too abstract, too narrow- it skirted around the ideas of space and how it was employed in schools by teachers. Whilst it analysed striations and boundaries within and around classrooms, similar to the line of analysis adopted in the paper, space here like inclusion was illusionary. In 2012

We must create a smart space’ I was once told by a head teacher — what does smart or indeed space mean in this context? Can a space- a vacuum of non-being -be smart and in antithesis can it be dumb? ‘Stop using real spaces- the real action in education is in the virtual space’ – a Head of Department told me.

What is real here? What is reality? What is space? Can we have a real presence in a virtual space or in this space do we find a virtual unreality?

I delivered a paper at the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry - Colonisation, disability and the intranet: the ethnic cleansing of space? - This subsequently became a paper in 2013 in the International Journal of Qualitative Inquiry. This seemed better, at last I had actually begun to analyse a space in a distinct and concrete way. This analysis though was cloaked in the abstract methodology of colonialism and of historical archaeology. Satisfaction of a job well done soon became conflated by school reports of time passed -
‘Satisfactory- but must do better.’ As with the new Oftsed framework in England, satisfactory was no longer thus – I needed to re-focus- adopt an action plan- move forward. I began to take notes-hundreds of pages of notes about space and place.

Finally, I had found it- or perhaps it had found me – it was ‘safe space’, this was the fix I needed. This is what had been gnawing away at me for years – I did not understand it- I could not comprehend what safe space meant. I had though finally found a place for my analysis of space. I could begin to write . . . however, before I could analyse safe space I found myself drawn firstly to analyse space itself - safe and safety would have to wait.

Trying to write, TRYING to write, the history of space it’s just too damned complex. I cannot do this- I’m not a physicist- put it off- go deliver that lecture complete that marking...

What is space- what is its history?

Two months pass, I have successfully avoided writing. I have immersed myself in a technical rationale place, of essay marking – of grading – form filling. Time to move forward – but I cannot write – this auto-biographical thing, it’s not me. I re-read Stronach’s autobiographical of alternatives. I find a calm place, a space to write. This space thing is difficult, it is complex but that is why it is held my fascination for so long. This is it then, I must start to think through boundaries across frontiers. This is the crux of the paper. I must create a different space, one in which pedagogy may be revealed- “ . . . complexity is the key” rather than the enemy (Edwards & Usher, 2000, p. 11).

Physical space- cultural space. I wrestle with these ideas. Just as I start to find a way through my mind is pulled to another space. Its Friday, its 5.00pm I want to be at home with my children, to embrace them to feel the warmth and love of that space. Suddenly I snap out of this thinking- I leave a note on my desk . . .
I arrive at work on Monday I had forgotten the note- it reminds me- it reawakens the ‘thought space’ I was in on Friday. I begin to write . . .

Space, large or small, is complex. It is grounded in duality; externally through a complex history and from within it is shrouded by a complexity of analysis. In illuminating the ‘nooks and crannies’ of such space One is drawn into its origins through enculturation [enpsacing], Cosmology (Jammer, 1954), Theology, (Casey, 1998), theoretical and experimental physics (Borgman, 2010) as well as a myriad of interpretations, reinterpretations, representations and misrepresentations. Space, though, in all of its ever present forms may be observed as a “. . . locus of beginnings”, the formulation of boundaries between the “. . .self and world” (Rickert, 2007, p. 231). Historically viewed, theories of space in westernised “. . .maximal terms” (Casey, 1998, p.77) owe their ends - but not yet it seems their beginnings - to geodetic mapping (Jammer, 1954) and the “. . . common efforts” (Casey, 1998, p. 77) of theologians, philosophers and physicists “. . . relentless quests to discover the geometry of physical space” (Borgman, 2010, p. 1). Space, then, in one etymological register is absolute, relative and maximal where the limiting surface of geometry contains empty space but also contains a physical body (Jammer, 1954). To such thinking, ‘In the beginning was the Word’, on this they can agree, however whether that word be God or chora is where initial divisions, tensions and boundaries become emplaced in nascent theories of space.

**Space as theory**

It is not my intention here to provide a detailed or comprehensive account of the development of the theories of space. Many authors, better than myself, have produced such works (See Jammer, 1954). What I do want to do however is to provide some summative snapshots of the periods of inertia and rapid development of spatial theories. Through an account of the ebb and flows of spatial analysis I will provide a flavour of the discourse that provided the starting place for more recent theories of space. Here, in these newer theories, human involvement and interactions are key. For now though let us start at one beginning.

According to Jammer (1954) theories of space in antiquity fall into three distinct phases. Firstly, there are those which defined the physical characteristics of space – what might be termed the atomistic view. Second, are those with a Platonic emphasis upon mathematics and third are theories based upon the ontological viewpoint of Aristotle.
Here in this space, squeezed around this arrivant, I want in Derridean terms to introduce space as a hole in the autobiographical text, through which I wish to bring into being other ways of knowing. We need a reconfiguration of thought and I need to move beyond the irritation emplaced in this arrivant. This arrivant reveals nothing but ignorance - a dementia of the Grecian spatial term, or perhaps disappearance and death of such language from modern discourse.

I hold Ramo’s (2004, p. 309) view that such terminology should be “. . . omnipresent” acting as compliment to everyday understanding and discussion of time, of place and moreover of society. As my thoughts flow out from the constriction of the space and arrivant above, the space below provides another beginning.

There are those (see Winter, 2009, p. 61) for whom chora is term that is difficult to define, it is a “. . . non-thing”. Entomologically, this concept reveals no logical purity but rather has evolved as a distribution of terms (Ranciere, 2004). In itself it is a term that has been subject to translation, reworking, changing, localisation and one that has been “. . . corrupted though intermediaries” (Ramo, 2004, p.764). Platonic thought, as example, details chora as a space of giving, of creation and of becoming. A space which as entity pre-existed heaven (Timaeas 52a-d – See Ramo, 2004). We must though take care here. Despite Plato being commonly attributed with the initial analysis of space, chora has a long history. Albeit one that is synonymously located with other terms such as peras, topos and kenon (Rickert, 2007). Here, though I am minded of Homer’s Iliad which promulgates a particularly lurid account of chora as ground that was cleared of the dead or deadly (Ramo, 2004). This account stages chora as a double relation (Ranciere, 2004), inculcated, perhaps infiltrated, by the Grecian peras where space had ‘double efficacy’. Space then clears out as well as closes in. It is a “. . . locator to, as well as of” (Casey, 1998, p.137).

These accounts then provide a more definite space, than space as just a ‘non-thing’. Plato continued the refinement of chora moving it away from an infinite space to one as a site of partial occupation (Ramo, 2007). For example, Plato in Timaeus evolves chora as a receptacle, a site of occupancy “. . . which provides room more than, of more of, a particular body which it contains” (Algra, 1994, p.273). Chora, in this form, becomes more of an “. . . abstract geometric of cartographic extension” (Ramo, 2004, p.764). Aristotle too observed chora to be a limitation for human bodiesvi. Space, then, even from its earliest incarnations became enmeshed in a dialectic tension. Chora became emplaced within the pincer of the
illogical bind providing an inverse reality of two opposing ways (Ranciere 2004). Here potential, limitless and limitation, a place of being but also of becoming concurrently formed and malformed space. Further thought upon these spatial relations refined chora to a space of a sum of its places (topos) (Algra, 1994) – it became located as a container of containments. In such formulations and articulations topos became "... concrete, contextualised" and localised (Ramo, 2004, p.764) within abstract space (chora) that itself was part of an infinite void (kenon).

Despite these early detailed analyses, Plato’s chora lay outside the description and language of the universe (Morgan, Nd). Chora was unrepresentable, it did not look like anything and importantly it did not resemble anything (Morgan, Nd). Despite such inherent difficulties, space defined within this triarchic hierarchy was subject to little change until the fourteenth century (Jammer, 1954). Indeed, even in Medieval times spatial theories were dominated by Platonism (Jammer, 1954). A notable later change in this analysis of confinements was that of Kant. In the 1780’s although defining physical space as devoid of orientation, Kant established that the human subject could impose orientation through reason and moral law (Borgman, 2010). It was not though until the heyday of logical positivism that western philosophy and science began to “... place pockets in the vast fabric of what Newton called absolute space” (Casey, 1998, p.134).

In modern philosophy, space as subject became emplaced within an extensive metaphysical and epistemological literature (Jammer, 1954). It appears that most philosophers have developed a theory of space. Einstein, it seems, in his detailing of relativity increased the focus on the importance of space as an analytic concept (Jammer, 1954). It is from this point forward that space, to me, becomes more interesting as a concept of analysis. For as the notion of space, as being something, “... neutral, fixed and immobile” (Casey, 1998, p.4) became diminished it became overlaid with new and exciting ways of thinking.

From the 1960’s onwards, space dominated French academic tradition (Faubion, 2001) as it became emancipated from the straight jacket of Aristotelian thought (Jammer, 1954). The present age of analysis is one where space and place again became important (Faubion, 2001). Space became detailed as a series of places- a “... portion of geographic space occupied by a person or thing” (Yi-Fin Tuan, 1977, p.23). Space then was fashionable again. It was observed in the “... simultaneous of the juxtaposition of the near and far, of side by side of the scattered” (Faubion, 2001, p.7). This
reassertion of space as social theory (Peters & Kress, 2000, p.21), or what has been named a “ . . . spatial turn” was observed in phenomenology, geography, architecture and urban planning. Led, it is argued, by figures such as Durkheim and Mause, space became articulated more in the nature of the local and social arrangements rather than vague notions of boundless space (Casey, 1998). It is here in cultural space where we might observe how space produces and reproduces power relations. It is the triarchic relationship of the geodesics of space, place and power that my attention focuses (Thompson, 2010).

From this necessarily brief analysis of space I wish to take forward the notion of space being a container or constriction and juxtapose this analysis with the “ . . . logical intimacy” of more recent ideas of space as “ . . . enclosed with porous boundaries and open orientations” (Casey, 1998, p.232). I want to analyse the lived spaces of education where “ . . . customarily bodily actions” (Casey, 1998, p.232) lie at the heart of educational traditions. Before I can further this analysis though I need to define what safe might mean.

Safe and safety?

What is safe as theoretic and what might safe be in practice? Let’s start with simple lexical ontology and dictionary characterisation garnered from the Oxford English dictionary. Firstly, safe can operate as an adjective – ‘protected from or not exposed to danger or risk; not likely to be harmed or lost. Second, safe may operate as a noun ‘a strong fireproof cabinet with a complex lock, used for the storage of valuables’.

In practical terms as noun, people may also seek safety- of ‘being protected from - or unlikely to cause danger, risk, or injury’ to something. Or an object may be designed to ‘prevent injury or damage’. Indeed as a United States colloquium, safety is the condom. The etymological roots of such terminology are believed to derive in Middle English formulated ‘from the Old French sauvete’ and ‘medieval Latin salvs (safe) salvitas (safety). ‘Protected from’ ‘complex lock’ ‘something that is designed’ further capture my interest. Interestingly, in the
United States the army has a ‘Commander’s Safety philosophy’ which urges ‘Excellence in safety’ and that safety starts with ‘individual commitment and discipline’. Safety in the army is seemingly lost through ‘complacency, excessive motivation, overconfidence ...’. Commanders who provide safety for their troops also ‘have a concern for the well-being of their soldiers’ and have a positive attitude towards the mission. Safety is also ingrained in everything Commanders do ‘before, during and after operations’. The absurd, almost comical, duality in such statements is replete. Yes, here soldiers may ‘protect from’ but surely the military is inherently dangerous? Does it not sometimes have to be dangerous, lethal and at times a killing machine? Soldiers are employed to cause harm. Safety here then is bound in danger- perhaps as Armstrong suggests (2003, p.83) the word safe is actually only a “... rather sophisticated euphemism for dangerous”. Elsewhere the home is often ‘disneyfied’ as a place of security and safety- but this suggests that such refuges are surrounded by anxiety and unsafeness (Harden, 2000). In reality the home can be a “... womb, a bunker ...an escape but also a fortress- the home has many faces” (Antonelli, 2005, p.15). Home, like the army commander’s rhetoric above, is to safety what a children’s chicken pox party is. Safety is situation and culturally specific and is time located. Safe and safety is also risk tempered by both the “... appearance and illusion of safety” (Yelavich, 2005, p.25). Safety, around the world, as Antonelli (2005, p.13) reminds us changed after 9/11, but also that it is “... not the same all over the world. In certain circumstances in certain regions what we would consider an emergency is instead an everyday occurrence”. Safety and space then are context specific they are laden with perception, complexity and inversely perhaps even danger. I move now to explore how safe and space work in unison and analyse what is a safe space and how this concept is emplaced within the applied setting of education?

I stayed at the I hotel whilst attending the Congress of Qualitative Inquiry - this sculpture sat in the lobby – it fascinated me then as it still does now. The pattern of the words falling through the gaps in the arrivants likewise fascinates me.

I want here to write about my childhood and my safe space hiding in the hole behind the wardrobe – to avoid the physical abuse. Thirty five years later I am transported back to this enclosed space- where the safety of my home was the cruel paradox of a dark opposite (Harden, 2000). Here anxiety and fear surrounded my space – its ‘restrictions and properties’ set by those ‘interested in reform of my morals’ (Hardon, 2000). I note how easily I have slipped back into academic citation as my protection, as my lock to close off this childhood space. The arrivant disappears I cannot write about this. In this writing my becoming is still nascent and striated, my thoughts still disrupted- my pain and confusion still raw.
If we type the term and its equivalents, internet search find some results as to its examining these found myself do we actually space and what indeed safe from from whom?

‘We are not going to enter Srebrenica, we just want to pacify Srebrenica.’

‘The American mission in Afghanistan…is to prevent terrorists from using its territory as a safe haven.’
David Cameron (2006)

‘Mr. Blair did not believe Cabinet was a “safe space” in which to debate issues involved in going to war.’Sir Gus O’Donnell – 26th January 2011 – Iraq Inquiry.

In immersing myself in my writing I have lost track of time, I am late - I should be at a lecture - I charge from my desk annoyed with myself at my forgetfulness. I run… charge headlong to the lecture theatre on the other side of the campus. I arrive, fall into a seat, sweating out of breath, the world crashes in as an asthma attack threatens- I clutch at the inhaler and draw deep its medicated breath. In the dizziness and confusion that follow, in my desperate attempts to gain control of my body, to gain control of my breathing- the relentless in and out and the rise and fall of my chest – in this medicated high my mind focuses and then blurs again. The words safe, danger and arrivants blur and then focus again mixing into a heady fog of thought dominated by the above quotes. Safety as danger - dangerous safety - dominate my thoughts. I need to exemplify these thoughts to open up my inner world to external scrutiny – this I find disturbing, worrying but ultimately for my new becoming, necessary.

Example One: Srebrenica was deemed a safe haven by the United Nations for the Bosnian Muslims. This safe space was enforced and protected by United Nations’ Protection Force with the purity of their white tanks. Tanks and resolutions provided the safety here. Safety for these peoples then was formed around these tanks as the symbolic representation of a United Nations that cared for their personal safety and so would protect them from harm. This was the complex lock designed to protect these people. Safe space here was Aristotle’s chora –it provided a limitation for the human body but also in a Platonic sense provided the room for the body to move. In dictionary characterisation it was a space designed to protect people from harm. This then was a designed space locked into concepts of safety. Like my home safe though everything of value was gathered together in one space. This made it
easy for the paramilitaries led by Mladic. These ‘troops’ ripped through the supposed complex lock and scattered the lives and bodies of some 8,000 men and boys into flooded fields and dark subterranean pits. This is a perfect example of how in this safe area the notion of humanitarian obligation was upended to become framed as a “. . . political object of containment” (Yamashita, 2004, p.4). The United Nations Protection Force through their activities here reformed safety as danger. Safe and safety became inverted. As in the castle, after the invention of gunpowder – defence/ protection/ safety/ power/ control became replaced by a corralling of risk and danger. As with “. . . every objects designed with safety in mind, there is a corresponding fear” (Antonelli, 2005, p.10). The soldiers who were supposed to lock in safety actually enabled the massacre to be more easily completed. These soldiers therefore became guards to a ghetto as safe haven translated into killing zone. Here, then, in Heidegger’s terms the ontological difference between dasein and das seiende was ruthlessly revealed and where the “. . . moat . . . dug in order to protect humanity’s airy castle from the beast” (Krell, 1992, p.6) served to provide little more than an illusion of safety. This safe haven was in fact a leyden jar – inside was outside – outside was inside, passage of the force between outside and inside was frictionless. There was no complex lock operating here.

In this ‘pocket in the fabric of space,’ an inverse of Kant’s moral law and reason operated to malform and orientate this place. Space here had the double efficiency, it became Homer’s chora - a space where the dead, or soon to be so, were cleared out by the deadly. How then can any space be safe? My argument therefore is that in reality what a safe space actually locates is not safety itself but perceptions, or indeed hopes, of safety. It is not the space that is safe but rather the efficacy of the complex lock and locking mechanisms where the veracity of safety exists. Castles, safes and safe spaces lock in as well as lock out. They provide both protection and risk – cure and poison. The pharmakon is revealed!

I want now to explore an occurrence of safe space in education. Through such exemplification I wish to reveal how all spaces, no matter how they are named have inherent dangers folded within and without their existence. Following this I will provide the nucleus of my argument against safe spaces in education through five provocations. Here, I will contend that many safe spaces are neither safe nor are they emplaced with safety but in reality reflect something altogether more sinister.

I am also minded here of Agamben and Homo Sacer – bare live – where safety from the control of state legislative power meant that you could be killed with impunity.

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Example 2

Space means greater well-being for our children and adventure, an outlet for all the things we thought there wasn’t any outlet for.
Margret Mead (1960)

During a visit to a school a few years ago a teacher commented that they liked the school’s internet as it provided a ‘safe space’; it was an outlet in which pupils could learn. My pilgrimage into this digital educational world was marked by the virtual absence of an image of disability. I only found an ableist essence in texts and pictures discovered within the school’s intranet sites. Indeed my wanderings in this digital topography highlighted a pedagogical space where the most prevalent image encountered was that of the white, non-disabled adult male. Here then safe space materialised an agenda of ableism and normalcy. Disability was a limited, controlled and conformed indigene. The limited construct of disability observed here pulled focus on the cultural dominance of non-disabled people within this society. It promulgated a knowledge, void of concepts, revealing an understanding of “...priori conditions of knowledge, independent of what empirically [existed]” (Gasche, 1986, p.26). Potentially, though, this knowledge had very real effects by defining societal conceptions of impairment. It was an intercourse between “...imaginary beings and imaginary natural science” and with the aid of the signs it became imagined teleology revealing only “...nervus sympatheticus” not a topography of safety (Nietzsche, 1895, p.15).

Others though have written of ‘safe spaces’ in educational environments as an accepted part of the professional vernacular (Boostrum, 1998). For example, Lempert et. al. (2012, p.45) relates that safe spaces are “...central to meaningful expression of missing discourses “and to “...reclaiming lost narrative”. First, it appears that in safe spaces in education, as elsewhere, that “...being in a place where [people] are accepted for who they were without question” is important (Bryant et al. 2011, p.618). Second, we are told that safe spaces “...provide safety from danger” which “...allows people to manage their own risk” (Hunter, 2008, p.19). However, like Barrett (2010) I question the notion of these spaces as places of safety. I am not minded to accept such claims. Some researchers question the lack of empirical evidence that safe spaces facilitate student involvement and increased academic...
argument (Barrett, 2010). My focus though- is why is there need for such spaces and does their existence reveal only danger by providing a container for ethereal perceptions of safety rather than actual safety itself?

The kernel of my argument is contained, but not constrained, within five provocations below. These contentions are not mutually exclusive but have porous and flexible boundaries.

**Provocation One** – Space is “. . . potentially powerful in transforming the way we understand exclusion and inclusion... space reveals geographies of power” (Armstrong, 2010, p.95)

**Provocation Two** – Educators have always cultivated spaces (Kovacs & Frost, 2012). Schools have always represented an array of characteristic arrangement of ‘spaces, techniques and occasions for the transformation of populations’. These spaces are not emancipatory but maintain “. . . discipline through the machinery of cultural regulation” which “. . . is entwined with a regime of care”. School, then, have always been ‘instruments of power’ (Peim, 2001. P.179/185). Power here, despite the rhetoric, is wielded by the teachers not the pupils.

**Provocation Three** – It is educators who divide space in which the children are contained. This is the straight jacketed space that contains and constrains children’s capacity for ‘self motivation, self direction, self instruction and general self management’ (Peim, 2001, p.184). There is nothing new in safe spaces as there is no real safety in terms of emancipatory possibilities.

**Provocation Four** – Safe spaces are in reality ‘warped space’. Here landscapes of fear and “. . . topographies of despair” have been created which mimic “. . . modern technological and capitalist development” (Vidler (2001, p.ii). These spaces are not utopias but only heterotopias. They are spaces for the containment of degrees of deviances from the norm. In these spaces “. . . the rules of the game”, ‘negotiations and performances of power and influence in relationships’ are the complex mechanism to keep pupils locked in (Temple, 2007, p.872). Specific analysis of safe reveals, in Foucauldian terms, how spatial techniques enforce power. Safe spaces are enclosures which allow for flexible and detailed control. In these
spaces freedom is foreclosed by the Big Other (Zizek, 2009). Spaces that seem like an entrance reveal only an exclusion and obstruction. (Linville, 2009) They are the pharmakon; the remedy that provides the destruction (Casey, 1998) and perhaps are nothing more than a Harpoldian detour.

**Provocation Five** – Safe spaces act as a mask to the bigotry replete in society. These spaces then are the blank spaces of the state where the excluded are perceived as threat to community. Here, in these ‘private’ spaces those who dwell are ‘excluded at a proper distance’ (Zizek, 2009). Equality here in the dialectical sense is formed through limitation contained within “... a mere neutral container of some content that eludes this form” (Zizek, 2009 173). Zizek (2009, p.371) analysis of power transfers easily to the concept of safe spaces. He contends, “dispositif of Power which structures and sustains the very space within which they operate? Today, the movement for gay rights, human rights, and so on, all rely on state apparatuses, which are not only the addressee of their demands, but also provide the framework of their activity”.

One can never be totally free or totally safe when the borders of the space in which you exist are maintained by the State (read also school) apparatus. The freedom here, indeed the safety here is as in Foucault’s leper, safety for the state and the ‘normal community’ from those who dare to deviate. Perhaps safe spaces are then more for teachers than they are for the pupils. As in Srebrenica, perhaps it is the locking mechanism rather than the space itself that has importance.
Within education the commonplace and uncritical acceptance of safety as a bedrock of quality education is to me both curious as it is dangerous (Boostron, 1998). Indeed, Boostroom (1998, p.405) relates “Teachers who create ‘safe spaces’ care about their students and because they do they eliminate pain from education”. Boostrom (1998, p.496) continues that the power of safe space metaphor is to censor critical thinking. Barret (2010) also believes that safe space is an overused but under theorised metaphor. In line with Yamashita (2004) I believe we should think again about such safe spaces. For myself, tracing the *modus vivendi* of this concept renders it as just another one of those educational bullshit phrases that says everything but says nothing. My argument is that in this educational form, as elsewhere, safe space’s operation becomes Latour’s black box – a well-established and unproblematic object (Latour, 2003). Here perceived virtues of shelters of equality are so simple so deeply rooted (Bachelard, 1994) but the reality is, these shelters of safety are built with walls of impalpable shadows stabilised on the bedrock of educational rhetoric. Thus, they provide nothing but “. . . illusions of protection” (Bachelard, 1994, p.5). I want educators to move beyond this uncritical acceptance of safe space. My axiom here is layered upon Foucault’s (1977) notion that space is an important category of analysis because it brings into purview vistas in which vacillations and ideological representations present space bounded by constitutions of power and knowledge (See Pavlov-West, 2009). It is through the semiosis of the social text of safe spaces that One may actually observe such vacillations. I argue therefore that rather than being emancipatory spaces such educational topographies are in reality manifestations of extant ghettos – heterotopias of deviation- controlled geometries of subservience bounded by limiting frontiers and policed by sometimes well-meaning but bigoted border guards. These are spaces of domination in which “. . . surveillance becomes the privileged form of action” (Casey, 1998, p.184) where each “. . . individual is fixed in his place” (Foucault, 1977 – see Casey 1998, p.184). They

We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel;  
But it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the wheel depends.  
We turn clay to make a vessel;  
But it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the vessel depends.  
We pierce doors and windows to make a house;  
And it is on these spaces where there is nothing that the usefulness of the house depends.  
Therefore just as we take advantage of what is, we should recognize the usefulness of what is not.  
( *Tao te ching* 11, tr. Waley) ◆
are spaces where “. . . fencing in and naming of go hand and hand” (Pavlov-West, 2009, p.196). This binary tension between essence and appearance of being, of nothingness – of here and of nowhere renders many of these places as neither safe, nor spaces of equality and social justice (Pavlov-West, 2009). Rather these blocs of becoming (Colebrook, 2005) conjure a topography of recreated striated Euclidean space of Foucault’s leper. Here, then, the “. . . space of identity (of entity) is a function of difference” (Pavlov-West, 2009, p.176). Exceptionalism located here is not the product principally of self-determining minority separating an infantilizing celebration of ethic self-determining. Rather, it is a product primarily of “. . . initial ignoring and rendering invisible of people's designation” (Golberg, 2000, p.74). As such safe spaces cannot be perceived as a Baroque fold (Deleuze, 2006) which asks society to consider sameness and difference as fluid relationships, upon a continuum of uniqueness (Pavlov-West, 2009). Rather they unfold a hypertext of the empty fortress (Bettelheim, 1967) a menstrual hut, a movie theatre 'balcony for people of colour' where 'decent' society is purged of deviant intent and action (See Pavlov-West, 2009). This notion of purging is important as Kristeva claims – the disgust at fluids is an adult reaction to vacillations – the gagging reaction which accompanies disgust – the movement of expulsion. (See Pavlov-West 2009). Thus safe spaces become the empty fortress – a ring of walls encircling a central absence. The self that constructs this space is folded into an act of expulsion where the self is marked from the very beginning by loss and from where the subject emerges “. . . not as an individual but as the Other” (Pavlov-West, 2009, p.223).

Safe space then is a metaphor of dominance and power. It is a symbol of societal purging where individuals of difference in their response to external danger respond with inner manoeuvres that actually debilitate them further (Zizek, 2009). We must move beyond safe spaces as a shallow paradigm of meaning and ask when creating such places - what does space mean, how do these spaces create meaning and what might specific safe spaces do? Finally, but of most importance educators must consider if such safe spaces are actually needed at all. Only by asking such questions can we provide the “. . . fertile conditions” and “. . . exquisitely dynamic intensity” situation which enables us to see what the outside “. . . folds into our identity” and “. . . how we can never control the forces of the outside” (Butler, 1995, p. 131). Only by entertaining such thought structures can we ever hope to be “. . . available to a transformation of who we are, a contestation which compels us to rethink ourselves, a reconfiguration of our ‘place’ and our `ground’ ” (Butler, 1995, p. 131).

“O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams”. Shakespeare 2.2.243-4
Post script: My beginning has ended, my transformation has begun. I have started to rethink myself and the space of my writings. My original space of safe writing is fractured, broken beyond repair. Let the arrivants flood in!

References


I want to say something in the endnotes – but the word processor does not allow the insertion of a textbox- in the footnotes - space how it limits us.
Notes

ii ‘Stuttering is perhaps the most dramatic example of a dislocation of self and world’ – I use this term here to mean an intellectual stutter, a pause something I am thinking but in previous papers would never have had the confidence to write. This is my intellectual aphasia my desire to hide my innermost thoughts less they be perceived to be stupid. See Segul Eli (1946) The Philosophy of Stuttering. http://www.aestheticrealism.org/tro1751.html

iii For Derrida the arrivant, arrives unexpectedly, it changes the conception of a threshold and questions the very border that was transgressed (Winter, 2009: 64).

iv Of course as Nicholas Royle (2003, 14-15) reminds us you cannot put ‘Jacques in a box’ – ‘Derrida is a thinker without borders, or rather a thinker of the always divisible border’. I hope the reader might forgive me for my employment of the text box in this form. However, I do intend that as my writing progresses my thoughts that once existed outside of my writing become emplaced within as barriers around my ‘academic writing’ become translucent, then invisible and finally completely break down.

v Ofsted – The Office for Standards in Education is the English inspection regime of schools. In 2011 a new Ofsted framework introduced a tougher inspection regime. From this point forward a satisfactory Inspection Report actually deemed the school as a failure and liable to be placed in special measures.

vi This notion of a container of nothingness containing something is a concept to which I will return later in the paper.

vii I will return to notion of space as confinement later in the paper as confinement and striation seem important to educational thought.

viii One is reminded here of Saddam Hussain’s subterranean bunker palace as a place of safety – in reality mobility was preferred to ‘perpetual internment literally pulling the rug over his head’ see Yelavich (2005, 23).

ix “das Sein” relates to the quality of existence whereas “das Seiende” is the object to which quality is related.


x ‘Harpold’s “place you never get to,” since in at least some cases, that place may exist only as a hypothetical alternative in the mind of the user’. It is a ‘semantic space [which] thus constitutes an inevitable limiting factor for any architectonic representation’ (Kaplin & Moulthrop, 1994: 214)

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