

# From Student to Teacher

If I may be autobiographical, I was lucky in coming across a deschooling approach, paradoxically, at the 'public' school that I attended. Our ambitious headmaster would invite a different younger intellectual to speak to the higher forms. In my last year, it happened to be Rudolf Wittkower, who was used to teaching through seminars, which allowed the teacher a certain latitude in the relations that they would establish with their students. But from school I went to the London University and then the Architectural Association, and in both institutions the education that we received was intended to prepare us for work in architects' offices – it was *schooling* in Illich's sense. My first serious academic engagement came a decade later at the Royal College of Art, where – though I did give some more or less formal lectures – I had constant and often cordial, informal contact with students.

I had always wanted to work with an architect, however, and this opportunity arose when I became the head of a new department of Art at the still very new University of Essex. I had made it a condition of my appointment that I would be able to initiate a higher degree course in the theory and history of architecture. It was the first such course anywhere, and the questioning method of the seminar was essential to the teaching. I could choose my associates: they were the Czech historian Dalibor Vesely and the Parisian architect Antoine Grumbach, who was, incidentally a pupil of the philosopher-critic Roland Barthes. Though members of the team later changed, the seminar format of the course remained, and did so though it was, for various reasons, moved to London: first to the kitchens of the Soane Museum and then to the President's room of the Royal Academy.

In each location, the coffee preliminary was a convivial introduction, and set the tone of our sessions. When we all later moved to Cambridge, some of that atmosphere was maintained by overflowing into local cafes. When I moved on to Philadelphia, though, the right physical environment for the course – even in the Furness building, where Louis Kahn had held his famous and very different atelier – took some time to establish a different but appropriate location. Yet a measure of conviviality was maintained, and I was even able to invite Ivan Illich to hold a number of seminars on the historicity of the sense of sight and on the reading methods of certain medieval thinkers. But more ambitious than my modest coffees, Ivan introduced quite informal but crowded morning breakfast sessions and the occasional evening *spaghetтата* as an adjunct to his teaching.

I hope to have maintained a tone of conviviality in of all my different locations, circumstances and varied institutional contexts, within which the sharing of meals has also played some part. Clubby, shared meals between groups of students (with or without their teachers) have been common enough in many institutions and academic halls, but as fairly regular, time-tabled events they lack a common investment in the learning enterprise in which conviviality is so essential, and in which the transformation of student into teacher may sometimes pass almost imperceptibly.

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