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**To cite this article:**

Wade Tillett (2016) Conference space, *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 13:3, 191-194, DOI: [10.1080/15505170.2016.1234985](https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2016.1234985)

Conference Space  
Wade Tillett

*Abstract*

*The following is an exploration of the spatial configurations (and their implications) within a typical panel session at an academic conference. The presenter initially takes up different roles and hyperbolically describes some possible messages that the spatial arrangement sends. Eventually, the presenter engages the audience members in atypical spatial configurations and explores their possible alternative messages. A (non)rebellious audience member heckles the unconventional implications [...].*

This presentation requests your participation in creating and experiencing different spaces <...>.

Presenter Role #1

<The presenter proceeds to stand on a chair behind the presenter's desk.>  
I am on the soapbox. I am on the altar. I am on the throne.  
I deserve to be here. I was born to be here.  
I am genius. I am god.  
I am above you. I wield my words (my research) to silence.  
These are the words from on high. Here I bring them down to you. Let me try to explain so that you can understand, in your meager ways with your meager minds.  
I am one to your many.  
I dispense. I spread my many seeds. I am prolific.  
I accept many forms of subservience.  
I need you to fill the chairs.  
Your attention is my power.  
[We do deserve attention. We earned our place here. We get what we deserve.]

Presenter Role #2

<The presenter squats and hides behind the presenter's desk.>  
You are many to my one.  
Please don't see me. My research is a shield. My jargon is a wall.  
This desk, this mic, these are barriers that I hide behind.

I am empty. I am a sham.  
I hope no one notices.  
Who among you will find me out?  
I say the names that I should say.  
My words are words to spill.  
My time is time to fill.

[This is just how everyone feels at times. It doesn't mean we are really shams.]

Audience Member Role #1

<The presenter takes the role of an audience member and sits in one of the many chairs facing the front.>

You are one of the few. I am one of the many.  
You are selected. I am not.  
You speak. I am silent.  
You are visible. I am invisible.  
You are named. I am nameless.

[That is just how it works. The system decides based on merit, and it just doesn't happen to be my turn now.]

Audience Member Role #2

<The presenter continues in the audience chair but writes notes frantically.>

I am a parasite. I cling to your words, your thoughts, your presence.  
I collect your references. I steal your thoughts.  
You use me as a prop. I use you as a tool.

[Sharing research is what makes knowledge move forward. That's why we follow proper citation practices.]

Audience Members Role #1

<The audience turns their chairs to face one another, every other row turned around.>

We are together.  
We share space.  
Our bodies face one another.  
Our spaces overlap.  
We turn from the front. We abandon the leader.  
We speak and we listen.  
There are many conversations, not just one.  
We create spaces.

[There are already spaces created within the program, that is why there are different time slots. If we are patient we will find out where each of us belongs.]

Audience Members Role #2

<The audience arranges their chairs in random order.>

We are horde.

We are many.

We are multitude.

Our order is an order that is only ours.

Our order is an order that springs new each day.

[Deep down we know each one of us is in it for ourselves. We all compete individually in this meritocracy.]

#### Audience Members Role #3

<The presenter instructs the audience members to hide their nametag (which also include their place of employment). The audience is asked to speak to someone else they do not know.>

We reject these seats as given.

We rebel against this order.

We refuse the hierarchy of places of employment.

We do not need to know which institution you are from.

We reject the cult of personality.

We will listen to you even if we don't know your name.

We see each other as capable of thoughts worth hearing.

[We need to know names and institution so that we can make informed judgments about the worth of research.]

#### Audience Members Role #4

<The presenter passes out photocopies of the barcode on his nametag. (The barcode is scanned whenever you enter a room at the conference.) The audience covers over their own barcode on their nametag with his barcode and is to use his barcode for the remainder of the conference.>

We are not one.

We are more than one.

We do not have one identity for one nameplate.

We do not have one body for one badge.

We share ideas. Ideas run through us. They don't start and stop neatly like an entry in a database, like a number from a barcode scanner.

Identities run through us.

New forms take shape through us.

New spaces form between new bodies.

We are here as before, but reborn.

[As if you really want to give up your identity. It's pretty much all you've got.]

#### Presenter Interlude

<The audience returns seats to the original configuration facing the front. The presenter stands by the entrance doors.>

Here is how we got here.

Through this door.

Through this room.  
Through this hotel.  
Through this conference.  
Through this university.  
Layers upon layers, filters upon filters, facades upon facades of meritocracy.  
What are we doing here, now?  
What are we re-enacting?  
[We aren't enacting anything. We are only attending a conference presentation.]

Presenter Role #3

<The presenter takes the normal place standing behind the podium and speaks into the microphone.>  
I am a hypocrite.  
I hold the mic.  
I gain by pretending to give.  
I facilitate new forms so that they come through me.  
I want credit.  
My name is Wade Tillett.  
[We all want credit. There is no harm in that.]

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