

ARTICLES

Toward a Performative Trans-Pedagogy: Critical Approaches for Learning and Teaching in Art and Performance

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The two authors of this paper met through a research seminar entitled “Trashing Performance” at Goldsmiths, University London, part of the UK-based research project Performance Matters; the seminar examined the value of marginalized, queer performance practices and feminist and queer theory. Vikki Chalklin is a performer and lecturer working at the intersections of performance studies and body studies, and Marianne Mulvey, whose research interest is in the pedagogic potential of performance, is Curator of Public Programmes, Tate London. Our ongoing discussions around performance, art, and culture led to a collaboration examining the radical potential of queering the institutional structures of the art museum. This paper looks at three evening courses for adults that emerged from these discussions, devised and delivered at Tate Britain and Modern by the authors. We identify and analyze key pedagogic encounters, theorizing our shared approach and its potential as what we are calling a performative trans-pedagogy. First, we describe our case studies and locate our pedagogical approach within the literature around critical and transformative pedagogies. We pay particular attention to how work on affect and emotion has been employed in this field, the crossovers between theories of situated learning and feminist epistemologies, and what queer theory can contribute to the locations and dislocations that are necessitated by radical forms of learning and teaching. This sets out the three nodes through which we build our concept of a performative trans-pedagogy: the trans-cultural, performative affect, and disorientations.

We propose that a trans-cultural approach, in which crossing the boundaries of academia and practice, art and popular culture, and the aesthetic and political, allowed us to teach art appreciation and criticism while at the same time providing a queer critique of its structures. Combining bell hooks’ (1994) argument for the pedagogical purpose of pleasure, laughter, and enjoyment with recent queer and feminist work on the cultural value of “negative” affects, we suggest that the intentionally ambiguous affective register of the courses—where discomfort, embarrassment, enjoyment, and pleasure often combined—enabled difficult, complex, and confrontational issues to be considered and discussed. Finally, the notion of disorientation, key to the queer approach to phenomenological theory developed by Sara Ahmed (2006), is used to highlight the modes of location and dislocation staged in these courses, and in particular to propose that these disorientations were pedagogically effective in enacting the modes of questioning we wished to inspire in the students.

Context: Tate London’s Course Program

Tate London’s approach to course programming is theme-led and responsive to current exhibitions, collections displays and current cultural debate, rather than offering classic art historical courses covering periods or “-isms.” The program suggests new ways of looking at, making, and talking and

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thinking about art through different theoretical approaches and practical methods. Painting, printmaking, poetry, and critical writing are offered alongside discursive courses covering philosophical and theoretical approaches to art. During a typical session of a discursive course, the tutor gives a mini-lecture outlining some critical theoretical tools that participants take into the galleries and use to discuss the artwork, or the building itself and the experience of being in it. Participants are a mix of art professionals, students, enthusiasts, and self-improvers, many of whom are Tate members and repeat course bookers. Many have no formal art education or background but see Tate courses as intellectual stimuli outside of their day job, or opportunities to keep learning after retirement.

The three courses that we analyze in order to elaborate our trans-pedagogy fall into the discursive category and took place over four to six weekly two-hour sessions at both Tate Britain and Modern in 2014–15. “Body Talks: Thinking Art Through the Body” and “Animal Magnetism: Art Beyond the Species Divide” were jointly devised and taught by Vikki Chalklin. “How Speech Acts: Art and Life” was taught by Marianne Mulvey with five guest artists. As well as learning through a diverse range of materials and concepts delivered by the course tutor, it was important that the theme of each course be broad enough for diverse adult audiences to both relate to them through their own experience and find elements of what was learned and discussed useful in their day-to-day lives.

Our first collaboration, “Body Talks,” was programmed using Tate Britain’s collection displays and temporary exhibitions to explore themes of the body and embodiment in art and culture. The aim was for people from different knowledge bases to encounter art in the gallery from a range of perspectives and feel confident to discuss it in a supportive and exploratory setting. The theme was deliberately open and pluralistic: we all have a body, senses, affects and emotions, the experiences of which were made an integral part of the gallery-based sessions. The discursive format also framed learning as a shared experience and endeavour. An example of such experience-based peer learning happened in the fifth “Body Talks” session, which centred on the hierarchy of the senses and included a wide-ranging discussion where participants’ various cultural backgrounds were mined by the group as sources of knowledge. An excerpt screening of Derek Jarman’s *Blue* (1993) brought out personal and cultural associations with the colour. The discussion then roamed around the linguistic associations between seeing and knowing in English and ended with one participant recounting her experiences of an Eastern European wedding ritual where a blindfolded bride must guess her husband from a line up of men by feeling their ears, a tradition that, counter to the Western visual hierarchy, proposes touch as true knowing. The session continued with a touch tour exercise in the gallery, discussed in detail below.

Our next collaboration, “Animal Magnetism: Art Beyond the Species Divide,” followed a related line of enquiry and approach. Drawing on traditions of animal symbolism in art, literature, and myth, as well as concepts emerging from philosophy, feminist, and queer theory, the course looked at the wild, domestic, and mythical creatures portrayed in Tate Britain’s collection, from the classical to contemporary. The intention was to reconsider what these representations of animals and animal-human relationships tell us about dominant cultural practices of their time, and how they speak to us now about what it is to be human. The variety of artistic and cultural practices covered raised questions around anthropocentrism, posthumanism, deviant sexuality including fetish and kink, and sentience and agency in animal and nonhuman species. With transgression of the boundaries between humans, animals and other nonhuman beings running as a theme throughout, the course aim was for participants to relate these questions to their views on, for example, what is considered normal or deviant and to expand their understanding of the limits of the human body. Following the

structure of mini-lecture and discussion in the galleries, the first session began with an ice-breaker question where the class was asked: “If you were an animal what would you be?” This offered up some interesting responses about individual participants’ perception of, and possible identifications with, animals.

The course “How Speech Acts” brought together critical theories of performativity with contemporary artists’ practice, popular culture, and current affairs. In the first session, students were introduced to J. L. Austin’s *How to Do Things With Words* (1976) and the concept of performative speech—words that enact something in their very saying. The class then learned about subsequent re-readings of this text by Jacques Derrida (1982) and Judith Butler (1993) that develop the implications of theorizing performative speech: problematizing authenticity and destabilizing normative constructions of gender, identity, and sexuality, but also everyday behavioural practices. Over subsequent sessions, the class met five different artists whose work dealt with performativity, including Harold Offeh, whose session we return to later. Each workshop session began with a discussion of the homework reading or activity, followed by a presentation and discussion from the artists on their work. After a break, artists led a performative activity, ranging from a confessional writing exercise with Scottee to devising a gallery tour based on overheard conversations with Patrick Coyle.

We believe that these courses enacted an innovative approach to learning and teaching that has implications beyond the specific context of adult learning in the gallery within which they were located. In particular, we wish to argue that these courses were performative in their pedagogy—rather than simply relaying or transmitting information, they performatively produced the modes of enquiry they were introducing, bringing into being new ways of thinking, questioning, and being for all the participants, including those teaching the courses. We found that these courses enacted a form of enquiry that was specifically aligned with the prefix “trans,” examined below as posing a particular intervention into ongoing debates around performative and critical pedagogy.

Beyond Critical Pedagogy

The concept of a performative trans-pedagogy developed in this paper is based on a drawing together of thinking around critical pedagogies, feminist epistemology, and the potential of “trans” as a prefix. Our interest in what are often variously termed radical, transformative, or critical pedagogies is rooted in the broad literature on non-traditional pedagogical models emerging primarily in relation and response to the concerns of Paulo Freire (2005). Challenging the tradition of “rote” learning he termed “the banking principle,” one he deemed both a pedagogical and political failure, Freire argued that prevailing models of education inhibit, rather than foster, students’ critical consciousness and ultimately work to further alienate marginalized students. His rousing treatise for a more liberatory model therefore proposed a pedagogy that could encourage students to gain a complex understanding of the social world and the workings of power and oppression by positioning them as active agents and producers of knowledge within the learning encounter.

As feminist scholar and activist bell hooks notes, education in the arts and humanities should by definition be “education as the practice of freedom” (1994, 4), an education that resists and disrupts rather than reinforces hegemonic oppressive power structures. hooks’ pedagogical polemic draws on and develops Freire’s work to argue for the necessity of a radical, liberatory, transformative *engaged* pedagogy, stressing the importance of the holistic spiritual well-being of students and teachers.

hooks argues that an engaged pedagogy must not only open the minds of learners and teachers but erase the Cartesian mind/body dualism (Henriques et al. 1998), which even in critical pedagogic frameworks such as Freire's locates knowledge within a disembodied and rational mind. hooks argues that to do this we must:

open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. (1994, 12)

In order to enable learning beyond the established boundaries of what is knowable and acceptable, we must engage our hearts as well as our minds, allowing emotions and feelings so often sidelined in pedagogic practice to work alongside rational debate. This therefore prompts a reconsideration of the role and value of affect in the classroom, which played a key role in all three courses.

The notion of “affect” has been at the centre of scholarly debate across the humanities and social sciences in recent years (for a more detailed account of what is often termed the “turn to affect” see Blackman 2008a/b; Clough 2010). One of hooks' primary arguments identifies the failure to address the value of excitement and even fun in the classroom as one of Freire's shortcomings (hooks 1994, 7). Challenging the suspicion with which academic environments tend to treat laughter emerging from a classroom, hooks wishes “not only to imagine that the classroom could be exciting but that this excitement could co-exist with and even stimulate serious intellectual and/or academic engagement” (ibid.). Her call for academics to loosen their attachment to seriousness is particularly pertinent in light of recent developments in queer theory which have positioned irreverence and frivolity as potentially fruitful modes of academic engagement (Butt 2005, 2007; Butt and Rogoff 2013), as examined in more depth below. While pleasure, excitement, and fun were central to these courses, we also found that embarrassment, discomfort, and anger were equally pertinent. Just as theorists of affect have worked to reconsider the generative value of negative affects (see Ngai 2004; Love 2007), we suggest that the need to “struggle over knowledge” (Giroux 2000, 258) positions tension, challenge, and contradiction as favourable and even necessary in the practice of radical pedagogy.

For hooks, this tension and challenge is necessary to empower minoritarian students within the bourgeois education system by disrupting the presumed “safety” of the environment for certain types of (white, middle-class, heterosexual) bodies (hooks 1994, 39). We are aware that hooks and Freire's critical pedagogies were not developed in the bourgeois, white, middle-class space of the art museum, which might seem a contradictory space to test them out. Indeed “Body Talks” confronted us with an all-female, almost all white and middle-class group of students. This lack of diversity was somewhat surprising to us, despite our awareness of the known socio-economic factors concerning access, spare time and income, level of comfort in the art museum, and interest in matters of the body, which we are unable to explore fully here. However, utilizing the framework of critical pedagogy in this environment presented a particular challenge to us as facilitators of learning. Rather than empowering marginalized students, then, our challenge was to use this model to destabilize the assumptions and expectations of the learners in order to produce new knowledge and experience. The underexplored territory of this particular setting and audience, and the difficulties it posed for teachers and groups, we felt worth exploring in the context of this special issue.

Another key foundation for the theoretical framing of our performative trans-pedagogy is to draw a link between what is often termed feminist epistemology (Stanley 1990) and work in education studies on situated learning. Feminist theory regarding the subjective nature of all knowledge emphasizes the importance of what Donna Haraway (1998) terms “partial perspectives”—the role that each individual’s multiple and shifting subject positions, experiences, and perspectives have in what and how they research. This has led academics working within this epistemological framework to take up the imperative of being attentive to their positioning as subjects:

Academic and other knowledges are always *situated*, always produced by *positioned* actors working in/between all kinds of locations, working up/on/through all kinds of research relation(ship)s. (Cook et al. 2006, 16)

Similarly, theories of situated learning have discussed how different skills and modes of communication are constantly being learned within different social environments in everyday life, not just in the classroom (Scott 2001). The movement inherent in both feminist epistemology and situated learning foregrounds the importance of location and dislocation in our trans-pedagogy. As discussed in more detail below, we draw from Sara Ahmed’s (2006) queer phenomenology to work with the productive challenges posed by location and dis-location—where the need to be rooted in our subject position also calls for the requirement to be dis-orientated from the social structures that allow that position to emerge.

Finally, we have developed our pedagogic model through employing the prefix “trans” in order to indicate a model of learning and teaching that not only challenges traditional understandings of pedagogy, but uses the radical spirit of trans to transgress and transcend the assumptions and power structures remaining in some critical pedagogic frameworks. In using “trans” throughout this paper we are mindful of its employment in relation to academic debates both around transdisciplinarity (Sandford 2015; Pulkkinen 2015) and the emerging field of transgender studies (Stryker 2006). In contemporary popular usage, trans* is most commonly associated with its use as an umbrella term for transsexual, transgender, and queer gender identities that challenge or exist outside of essentialist binary gender models. Recent work in transgender studies has argued that the disruption of binaries and assumptions posed by trans bodies, identities, and politics has far-reaching implications for “powerful critical rereading[s] of contemporary (post)modernity in all its complexity” (ibid., 15). We found that whether intentionally or not, all three courses included discussion around trans identities in relation to the themes of embodiment, essentialism, difference, and constructions of the Other.

The prefix “trans” is also formative of our pedagogy in a broader sense. Denoting either “across” or “beyond” its suffix (Lund 2012, 8), trans is an animating prefix—it implies movement either from one place to another (as in transcontinental) or going beyond an existing boundary (as in transgressive). This dynamic crossing is closely linked to our aforementioned interest in critical pedagogies, situated knowledges, and dis-orientation—if all knowledge is located, anchored somewhere in space, it has the potential to move into a different position, or to be dis-located and cross from one place to another. Critical pedagogy also poses the necessity to challenge the assumptions and power structures of teaching encounters, pushing beyond the accepted dynamics and striving for a pedagogy that transcends what seems possible. If trans can thus be used as a *verb* (as with the more radical applications of the term “queer,” see Hayward 2014, 256), then to “trans” pedagogy could be to productively employ this constant crossing and going beyond. Our project, therefore, is to build a pedagogy that is about always shifting perspective (for learners and teachers),

always moving between spaces, disciplines, and modes of thinking, speaking and writing, always going beyond where one was before.

Our performative trans-pedagogy thus combines the concerns of critical pedagogies with an investment and active interest in the role of affect in learning environments, debates around situated knowledges, and the transgressive and transcendent potential posed by the dynamic prefix “trans.” From the outset, we intended to enact Freire’s (2005) model of learning as empowerment by foregrounding independent thought, challenge, and the value of embodied knowledge. However, even the most radical theories around transformative and engaged pedagogy still tend to frame their approaches in relation to the rather formalized and privileged institutionalized space of the school and/or university. By focusing instead on adult learning that takes place outside of the structures of formal education, we wish to extend the lens of critical pedagogies to consider the importance of learning occurring in informal contexts, as a leisure activity, and/or in later life.

This “leisure” learning problematizes but also intensifies some of the questions raised in critical pedagogies around the power dynamics of the learning encounter, the “real-life” applications or relevance of the knowledge and skills gained, and the purpose and value of art, critical theory, and education. Adult learners present a challenge through the different kinds of minds coming into the classroom (or indeed the non-classroom learning space). Our students covered a large age span and varied in their backgrounds, intentions, and their approaches to the course material and art in general. Without the requirement to gain appropriate qualifications and/or knowledge for a chosen career path, adult learners may already come to the encounter more “empowered” than Freire’s (2005) model suggests, while on the other hand an absence or only distant memory of formal education may incite intellectual and academic insecurities. Our performative trans-pedagogy therefore enacts its challenge to academic power structures by giving academic attention to a mode of learning often ignored in the education studies canon, as mentioned above. We suggest that this type of teaching and learning should be subject to similar questions and consideration around pedagogic practice, and that it can enact models that have potential impact in more formalized academic contexts such as higher education. It also further challenges the assumption questioned by hooks (1994) that education is a “serious” business—as a leisure activity, these evening courses needed to deliver enjoyment and reward beyond the acquisition of knowledge itself.

Taking into account the possibilities and challenges posed by what we were doing and how we have theorized our model, performative trans-pedagogy allows us to treat teaching as a practice of inviting different ways of thinking. Provoking innovative and difficult questions, we argue, is a performative process. These questions not only bring into being new ways of thinking and understanding the world, but they also become the catalyst to bring into being further questions in the future. This aligns our pedagogy with how José Muñoz views queerness, as “not simply a *being* but a *doing* for and toward the future . . . a rejection of the here and now and an insistence on the potentiality or concrete possibility of another world” (Muñoz 2009, 1, emphasis added).

Trans-Cultural Pedagogy

The foci of the courses were distinctly trans-cultural in their holistic approach to the body, theory, and art appreciation. They disrupted multiple disciplinary boundaries by drawing vocabularies and approaches from across art history and criticism, performance studies, cultural studies, anthropology, critical theory and philosophy, as well as the already interdisciplinary fields of body studies, human-animal studies, and queer, feminist, and postcolonial theory. Moreover, our

collaboration across different institutional and academic positions allowed us to address shared concerns through our differing approaches vis-à-vis the gallery and the classroom, curation, academia and art and performance practice. As well as crossing academic and institutional boundaries, we took care to present source material that drew connections between academia and varied, diverse forms of popular culture that would otherwise be unlikely to be framed in relation to one another. Tapping into ongoing debates within cultural studies and visual cultures around seriousness, taste, and the contested yet persistent distinctions between the “high” arts and “lowbrow” entertainment and mass media (Gans 1999; Butt and Rogoff 2013), we employed a frame of reference that we are calling trans-cultural—crossing boundaries between different academic, artistic, and cultural forms and mediums. Discussing, for example, Damien Hirst’s use of animal carcasses alongside feminist theory regarding animal rights (Adams 1990) and the enactment of animal alter-egos in “Furry” fan subcultures allowed for new connections and insights to be made regarding the significance and varied roles animals play in art and culture. For adult learners wanting to expand their engagement with and ability to interpret visual art, this trans-cultural combination of references, materials, and approaches allowed for a different set of questions to emerge than those that dictate traditional approaches to art history and criticism. This was particularly significant in the context of the highly institutionalized gallery space of Tate, which is closely associated with the hierarchical structures of cultural, artistic, and academic knowledge production and the regulation of value in relation to art and criticism.

In week three of “How Speech Acts: Art and Life” Harold Offeh presented his performance practice that deals with queering gender and cultural identity and the ethics of appropriating language and performative practices from minority ethnic and other marginalized groups. Offeh’s recent work includes *Covers* (2009–ongoing), where the artist attempts to transform three iconic music album covers posed by black female artists and models into durational performances, including Grace Jones’ *Island Life* (1985). Offeh’s session coincided with the breaking of the Rachel Dolezal story—a white American civil rights activist and Africana Studies lecturer “outed” by her parents as lying about her racial identity, who subsequently said she “identifies as black.” Given the themes of Offeh’s work, as preparation we set a discussion of the story on the *Huffington Post*’s website (July 2015) between Black Voices presenters Marc Lamont Hill and Lilly Workneh, alongside a short extract of sociologist Erving Goffman’s (1956) analysis of everyday face-to-face interactions in terms of theatrical performance.

Alongside the Goffman reading, the Dolezal story and its media representation brought up anxieties in the class over a white woman “passing” as black, as a potentially offensive inversion of the expression that has been used in 18th-, 19th- and 20th-century America to describe mixed-race people passing as white—usually to gain access to social acceptance and/or privileges. There were also concerns about Dolezal claiming a history of trauma that is not her own and fighting for black civil rights from a false position. Interestingly, Dolezal’s description of herself as “trans-racial” and *Huffington Post*’s representation of the evolving #AskRachel discourse on Twitter, which included questions about her knowledge of black culture (“ask Rachel to name two seasonings. Salt n pepper don’t count”; or “ask Rachel if church starts at 9 a.m. on Sunday, when will it end? 11 a.m., 1 p.m. or tomorrow?”), were equally troubling to the class. Offeh suggested that what seemed particularly uncomfortable was the presenters reducing black identity to a set of essentializing signifiers or characteristics and attributing Dolezal’s “trans-racial” identification to mental illness or post-traumatic stress because, in these ways, they dangerously echoed transphobic discourse. Drawing on both the Goffman and *Huffington Post* preparatory sources brought about an engaging class discussion around the performance of self and cultural identity that raised uncomfortable concerns.

These were later echoed in the performative “Snap Diva” workshop that concluded Offeh’s session, where we found the affective responses particularly strong.

Performative Affect

As discussed above, hooks (1994, 2003) argues that affect can play a significant role in the development of a critical pedagogy. Beyond the practical considerations of navigating expectations associated with learning as a leisure activity, we found employing a combination of enjoyment, embarrassment, pleasure, and discomfort highly pedagogically effective in enabling critical thinking. Work emerging from queer and feminist theory in recent years has highlighted the critical and cultural significance of “negative” affect (Love 2007; Ngai 2004). In particular, the discourse of what is often termed queer negativity (Halberstam 2011) has examined the specific importance of pain, shame, loss, and disgust to queer subjects and cultural production. Lisa Blackman (2011) argues that some queer performance operates on a platform of negative affects which are employed in an ambivalent, ambiguous way to enable new modes of belonging and formation of subject positions for the queer subjects to which they attach themselves. Following Jennifer Doyle (2013), we consider affects to be inherently too diffuse to be understood through neat categories of this or that emotion and thus strive to position ourselves, and our pedagogy, in the complexity of the ambiguity between different feelings that may resonate in more positive or negative ways. We believe negative affects have as much to offer the pedagogic encounter as the “positive” feelings hooks (1994) calls for. Since feelings are always multiple and dynamic, we consider the affective register of our courses through a pairing of the two extremes of affect that often function closely together—pleasure/discomfort, and enjoyment/embarrassment.

In the second half of Offeh’s session for “How Speech Acts” he led a “Snap Diva” workshop where we—the course participants and tutor—learned “snapping,” a communicative body language allied to voguing, from 80s/90s Afro-American Gay subculture. Using the YouTube video *How to Snap like a Diva* by Marlon Riggs to teach essential snap moves, Offeh took us through a series of activities to rehearse, develop, and perform our own Snap Diva sequence. Music and movement were essential to turning the classroom learning environment into a performative workshop, and collective laughter helped ease our self-conscious, tentative attempts at snapping. As a finale Offeh encouraged us to use the length of the room as a catwalk, which we sashayed down from opposite ends, performing our Snap Diva routine as we met our partner in the middle. In the post-workshop discussion one of the participants, a heterosexual white Swedish woman, likened the experience to her inability to master the vernacular nuances of Italian in a part of the country where she’d lived for some time. She found her attempts to learn and use an intimate language of a marginalized community—queer, African American men—felt similarly false and raised an uncomfortable affective response. Echoing the group’s previous concerns around pretending, masquerading, and deceiving others through our self-presentations and interpersonal relations in the Goffman/Dolezal discussion, this particular participant found the snapping exercise offensive to the community whose language she was trying and failing to mimic. It was clear that the embodied experience of learning and performing this new language was an uneasy pleasure for the group; it had clarified *and* complicated some of the Dolezal/Goffman discussion and brought aspects of Offeh’s own practice of appropriating and performing multiple cultural, gender, and sexual identities into sharp relief. The session ended with Offeh explaining that his work seeks to promote and proliferate the appropriation of these identities, which he sees as potentially accessible to a number of different subject positions.



“Snap Diva” workshop with Harold Offeh at Tate Modern, 2015. Photography by Jane Wells © Tate 2016.

Ambiguous affect also played a significant role throughout “Animal Magnetism.” In the opening session, an explorative gallery tour asked students to consider the different ways in which animals appear in the works of Tate Britain’s pre-20th-century galleries. It became clear that there were striking parallels between the representation of the bodies of naked women and horses. This alignment with a similar objectifying and potentially sexualizing gaze raised a discomfort around inappropriate sexuality but simultaneously also presented the pleasure of being able to discuss a taboo subject in a fairly safe way. This issue was raised again in the final session through the theme of “blurring the species divide.” A course participant who worked at London Zoo shared incidents of animal behaviour that trouble our normative assumptions about sexual agency and inter-species desire: she recounted a story about a male gorilla looking up female visitors’ skirts and his attempts to grab female zoo-keepers’ breasts. In this setting, these anecdotes were at once shocking, amusing, and troubling, and enacted the powerful ambiguity of questions that have no straightforward or immediate answers.

In the same session, enjoyment and embarrassment also worked closely together through the semi-involuntary embodied reaction of laughter. Earlier in the course participants had been asked to describe what animal species they most closely identified with, and in the final session, drawing from exercises commonly used in the teaching of acting techniques, we asked them to consider the physical form and movement of their chosen animal. This was met with reluctance and embarrassed laughter as participants anticipated the inevitable next stage to act out this animal character through

their own bodies. Wishing to avoid a didactic teaching encounter, we gave them the option to carry out the exercise or not, and they collectively declined. This “failed” exercise is interesting with regard to the questions it poses around the limits of laughter and embarrassment when they lead to a shutting down of the pedagogic encounter. However, while the exercise itself was not realized, its intentions manifested spontaneously later in response to Nicholas Pope’s *Liar Liar* (2008), a sculpture composed of fifteen tubular ceramic shapes resembling organic life forms. The discussion centred on the possibility of understanding these shapes as nonhuman or possibly extra-terrestrial life forms, particularly focusing on how these tubular beings would move, feed, and communicate. During the conversation, a few members of the group spontaneously performed how they imagined these forms might move in an animal or human-like way. Outside of the structured exercise, the pedagogic effect of encouraging the participants to embody a nonhuman form and thus learn through their bodies was able to emerge in an unforced and organic way. This was significant in enacting the blurring of the boundary between human and non-human bodies that was being proposed through the intellectual material of the course, but it also opened up the possibility of thinking *through*, *beyond*, and *into* another body. As discussed above, the course drew connections between diverse cultural objects and phenomena, theory, and art objects to encourage an open questioning and consideration of naturalized cultural norms, particularly around marginalized or Othered bodies. This attempt of (impossible) identification with an unrecognizable form (that only abstractly resembles an animal or human) thus acts as an extension of the challenge to normative assumptions around bodies and identities. If we suspend the clear-cut boundaries between human and nonhuman species, what boundaries may it become possible for human bodies to transgress?



Nicholas Pope, *Liar Liar* 2008–9 © Nicholas Pope. Photo © Tate, London 2016.

Pedagogical Disorientations

Moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground. . . . Sometimes, disorientation is an ordinary feeling. . . . I think we can learn from such ordinary moments. (Ahmed 2006, 157)

In setting out the parameters of a queer phenomenology, Sara Ahmed foregrounds the importance of experiences of orientation and disorientation as ways of understanding the social world and how it is produced. Importantly for our purposes here, she frames moments of disorientation in particular as pedagogical tools. What we can learn from these moments is closely tied to the relationship between disorientation and the discomfort discussed in the previous section. Ahmed's interest in phenomenology is rooted in the ways various "orientations"—toward certain objects and away from others—shape the social world, how we inhabit it, and how we relate to its other inhabitants (Ahmed 2006, 3). Certain objects, she argues, are positioned as "happy" or "good"—objects we "should" be oriented toward, which aligns a different orientation, toward different objects ("unhappy" or "bad" ones) as queering the straight line of the "normal" (Ahmed 2010).

As we have seen, "Animal Magnetism" provided ample opportunities for such productive discomfort—raising questions about deviant sexuality in relation to seemingly innocuous encounters and artworks, and through the challenge to our understandings of gender, sexuality, embodiment, and humanity posed by a discussion of species dysphoria. In addition to staging discomfort, we argue that each of the moments of complexity outlined across the three courses staged a productive disorientation, allowing for the opening up of new worlds of possibility that Ahmed considers a queer "source of vitality" (2006, 4). The session on monsters and hybrid creatures framed various embodiments that challenge normative assumptions around identity, bodies, and the limits of the human. Using the notion of the abject (Kristeva 1982) as that which disrupts dualistic distinctions between inside/outside, human/nonhuman, and male/female, we drew connections between mythical hybrid creatures and the ways in which "impossible" bodies (Weiss 1999)—ones that disrupt the ways we understand the world—are coded as "monstrous." Through press coverage of the 2007 furor around Thomas Beatie, a transgender man whose pregnancy was made public in the US LGBT magazine *The Advocate*, we examined experiences that transgress the structures through which we learn to understand ourselves and the social world. Framing the disorientation of a queer reproductive body alongside the question of how we are oriented toward variously "human" or "monstrous" bodies raised the possibility for the participants of queering the orientation they may take for granted. The possibility of being oriented toward or away from different cultural objects, or being oriented differently in relation to the same objects, "allow[ed] things to move" (Ahmed 2006, 154) in the way proposed by Ahmed—it opened up new worlds through the discomfort of being disorientated. This challenge to the participants to think outside of their own cultural experience laid the groundwork for the spontaneous action of thinking oneself into another body outlined above in relation to the Pope sculpture.



“Body Talks: Thinking Art Through The Body” course participants engaging in a touch tour, 2014. Detail of Henry Moore OM, CH, *Working Model for Three Piece No.3: Vertebrae*, 1968, Tate. Photography by Marianne Mulvey 2016 © The Henry Moore Foundation.

A more visceral sense of disorientation was enacted through the use of a “touch tour” in “Body Talks.” A method usually reserved for visually impaired visitors to Tate, these are sessions where a sighted member of staff guides a tactile interaction with a small selection of more robust sculptures. Wearing white conservator’s gloves, participants worked in pairs to explore Henry Moore’s large bronze works: one with their eyes open guided the other whose eyes were closed. The latter described to their “sighted” companion what they were sensing and how it made them feel. This exercise was particularly pertinent to exploring Moore’s sculptures because of the way their scale, material texture, and abstract but distinctly bodily form seems to invite a haptic exploration while also provoking a range of affective responses. In the context of a session questioning the visual paradigm of art history, criticism, and writing, as well as the dominant ocular-centrism of contemporary Western culture in general, the touch tour employed here with sighted participants orientated them differently to fairly familiar objects. Inviting the participants to touch the sculptures thus posed a pleasurable disorientation. In a group discussion that followed, several participants commented on the exhilaration of this transgression, which felt illicit and offered a unique sensual understanding of the sculptures themselves as well as a broader critical insight into modes of art appreciation. Significantly, this feeling of clandestine experience was both an infringement on the codes of acceptable gallery behaviour and a breach of the visual paradigm of culture at large. Foregrounding the sensual as a valid way of knowing or understanding in this way disoriented the Cartesian model of cognitive rationality, positioning the body as a vector of knowledge (Wacquant 2004). Touch here enabled an affective and intersubjective encounter with the sculptural bodies that

was able to suspend not only the hierarchy of the senses but also the inside/outside and self/other boundary.



“Body Talks: Thinking Art Through the Body” course participants engaging in a touch tour, 2014. Detail of Henry Moore OM, CH, *Working Model for Three Piece No.3: Vertebrae*, 1968, Tate. Photography by Marianne Mulvey 2016 © The Henry Moore Foundation.

Conclusion: The Implications of a Performative Trans-Pedagogy

An evaluative interview with an “Animal Magnetism” participant was useful in determining the impact and value of our performative trans-pedagogy. As the then Arts Programmer of the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), she had signed up in a professional capacity. Our conversation touched on a wide range of impacts, from personal empowerment to intellectual nourishment and

practical application—she had used aspects of the session on animal symbolism directly in a week-long children’s summer workshop at London Zoo and had gone on to lead tours of the National Gallery entitled “The Artist and the Animal.” She derived pleasure from analyzing works of art in relation to the range of materials presented in the lecture portion of each class, discussing these concepts with the group, and particularly in thinking differently about her job. She not only found the confidence to talk about specific works of art at Tate, but also to “use the right language” to speak about gender and sexuality—an unexpected gain. Perhaps most importantly, the course provided nourishment and validation of her critical skills and questioning: she was able to have conversations at Tate about ZSL’s ambiguous relationship to its colonial history that she had found it hard to broach, even informally, at work. Several times she expressed relief to find out she “wasn’t mad to think about these things and ask these questions.” Giving permission for such critical reflections during the sessions, our trans-pedagogic approach enabled her self-permission outside of them, and in this way chimes with artist and teacher Michael Craig-Martin’s tenet that:

the most valuable thing that I have been able to give students is permission . . . to do what they really want to do, without worrying that it won’t be acceptable, won’t be adequate, not serious enough . . . [and to] provide the support necessary to enable students to give themselves permission. (1995, 18)

In this paper, we have begun to formulate a new model for a performative trans-pedagogy to capture our insights, experiences, and methodologies in relation to teaching and learning in the art museum. With a group of participants whose opinions and subject positions came to class fairly formed, our challenge and approach was to introduce a range of materials and cultural objects around gender, race, and sexuality as a way to disorientate how they looked at art and the world. It is our shared belief that discussing these materials in relation to art and performance engendered criticality in participants, permitting them to ask new questions of the world and themselves. Drawing from, expanding, and challenging existing theory on critical and performative pedagogies, we set up three nodes through which to enact a trans-pedagogic model: the trans-cultural, performative affect, and pedagogical disorientations. We have found this mode of pedagogy to be enjoyable and rewarding and intend to continue developing and using it to inform further informal and leisure learning activities around art and performance. Furthermore, we believe that the context of adult learning in the art museum provided rich ground for a radical, transformative pedagogy, and we call for further exploration of such diverse extra-academic environments.

The defining feature of our pedagogy is a focus on the prefix “trans.” Using trans-cultural materials and objects that straddle different art forms and disciplines, concepts of trans-gender, trans-species, and trans-racial appeared in different guises in all three courses. As facilitators of learning, mining the uncomfortable, disorientating and pleasurable possibilities of “trans” as a prefix and a verb has proved both productive and exhilarating. To transition, to transgress, and to transform is to move and be moved—enacting a change of state that can be both contained inside the individual (human) body and resonate within the broader culture simultaneously. Through the mediums of our trans-cultural approach, employment of ambiguous affect, and the queer potential of dislocations and disorientations, our trans-pedagogy performatively produced a challenge to dualistic and normative modes of thinking. It is our hope that sharing these considerations here will allow other trans-pedagogical modes of learning and teaching to proliferate in diverse spaces of culture and knowledge production.

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