

Pattern and Process: A Score for Movement-Based Teaching

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ANTICIPATION

Our performative pedagogic strategy disrupts monological forms of teaching and champions a constellating practice designed to stimulate a visceral relationship to atmosphere, aura and physicality. We aim to reconnect the sentient body to the teaching space, to keep a given subject matter in flux, and to facilitate collaborative enquiry. We do this by keeping participants, materials and space in conversation with one another, and we organise it through a live process of cutting, handling, arranging and rearranging, a multi-channel mode of delivery, and a series of haptic interventions intended to alter and extend the perception of the teaching space.

We believe that when educators recognise a discourse as a dynamic system—as an organism with its own patterns of motion and rest, its own itinerant musicality—then we make possible its movement through the students' body. As it moves, an association of ideas, images, uncertainties etc. snag, accumulate, fall away and emerge in a new arrangement, and as the rearrangement lands in the hands of the student, there occurs an inverse motion: the student moves the material. Each of us becomes a conduit for the other, initiating a sequence of live encounters that unleash a destabilizing force strong enough to threaten the fixity of a discourse.

These workshops have been crafted to equip art and design students with strategies for composition. Initiated by a tactile handling of matter, and involving a process of generating, harvesting and editing material, the aim is to help students

find form for their raw ideas. Over the course of three days students are invited to (1) generate and embody thematic as well as tangible matter, (2) collaborate in small groups and (3) share their work. At the heart of this process lies the question: how might we invent a materiality for our subject such that it may be handled? We hope to prepare art and design students for experiencing as sensation whatever discourse they might be expected to tackle—for drawing it out of theory and tradition, and rendering it as something we can touch, pick up and turn over in our hands—and, in working with the unknown, to create an element of risk for both teacher and student. Students will learn how to practice listening as a holistic, intuitive and physical (rather than purely aural) activity, how to be flexible and critical in their learning, and how to disrupt images and texts for the purpose of reconnection.

The first day involves a workshop structured around nine disruptive actions: dissolving, dispersing, floating, stretching, spilling, edging, handling, articulating and interrupting. These actions are intended to bring into being the state (of movement, matter, body) by which they have been named, thereby rendering a given subject or idea susceptible to the force by which the act is governed. Each action includes instructions for a practical exercise and a suggestion for how its materiality may inform a conceptual idea. Independently of one another, students are asked to document one detail per action, either visually or with text; these brief snapshots will inform the collaborative work. The second day is devoted to harvesting ideas from this documentation. Working collaboratively (groups of three to five), students are asked to observe connections and disparities between their documents. In this liminal space, they will be asked to look for patterns that can be disrupted, rearranged and edited into new material (both subject and form will depend on the course for which this project is being adapted). On the third day students present their collaborative work, followed by group feedback and discussion.

ACTION

Materials: wet and dry clay, bottles and bowls of water, sponges, exercise band, paint, plaster, theatre flat or other provisional surface, chalk, sticks, paper, assortment of everyday objects.

Apparatus: projector, P.A system and loop station.

On day one explain what the workshop entails. Ask students to document (independently) one detail per action; they may do this visually or with text and there are no rules concerning content (you could offer a couple of examples—a photo of the space, say, or a one-line description of an object or sensation—but emphasise that there are no rights or wrongs, and reassure them that they need not labour over the task).

Action One: Dissolve. Direction: Prepare the hands for work. Provide bowls of water and clay. Ask students to apply a coating of wet clay to their hands then find a spot to sit on the floor. Invite them to close their eyes. Wait for the clay to dry and draw attention to the sensation of drying. When dry, ask students to pair up and sponge the clay from their partners' hands. Dwell on the process of dissolving and sense of touch.

Application: Dissolve the hierarchy. Use the experiment to illustrate how we might release a subject matter from categorical imperatives in order to democratise the detail and widen the aperture.

Apparatus: P.A system for augmentation of water sound and creation of immersive, hyperreal environment.

Action Two: Disperse. Direction: Alter and extend the perception of space. Ask students to gather mirrors, bottles of water and handheld lights (mobile phone torches sufficient). Introduce a large lump of dry clay and darken the space. Ask students to direct light at the clay and have one of them drop it forcibly to the floor. When the dust has settled, comment on the disruptive choreography at work in the break and dispersal of matter.

Application: Unsettle the subject matter. Use the spectacle to suggest how an intangible concept may also be made particulate and available to a process of dispersal.

Apparatus: Projector and slides to demonstrate how an image may be rendered metamorphic.

Action Three: Float. Direction: Re-situate the body. Ask students to find a comfortable seated position on the floor (ideally away from the site of action two). Lead a figure-of-eight breathing meditation: after a long exhale, draw the breath up and into the left foot then out the top of the right brain; exhale through the top of the left-brain, down through the right foot and circle back to the left foot. Repeat. Rest. Ask students to return to their partners of action one. Ask person A to lie down. Lead an exercise in which B takes the weight of each of A's limbs: left arm, left leg, right leg, right arm, starting each limb with only the hand or foot, and taking gradually more weight until B supports shoulder or knee as well. Instruct B to extend A's limb and move it in a gentle semi-circular motion. Remind A to relax their muscles and let go of any tension. B should exert no force. The exercise finishes with B cradling A's head. Rest. A and B swap over. Ask students to visualise weightlessness.

Application: Encourage students to inhabit their most receptive states.

Apparatus: P.A system for sonic evocation of moving weight.

Action Four: Stretch. Direction: Become elastic. In homage to artist Niki de Saint Phalle, erect a temporary wall on which you have concealed small pockets of coloured paint beneath white plaster and pigment. Ask students to create a catapult with an exercise band and invite them to fire lumps of hard clay at the temporary wall. Make a mess.

Application: Pull the material into relief. Translate the event into a technique for testing the elasticity of a text or image. Suggest that thought may be treated imaginatively as a substance; that we may pull it taut and release it with a ‘ping’, and that its collision with other forms of thought may create interesting debris ready for our collection.

Apparatus: Projector and slides to visualise the disruption and rearrangement of images and text.

Action Five: Spill. **Direction:** Draw in; draw out. Ask students to make chalk drawings on (paper on) the floor, taking action four’s spillage as a starting point. Attach the chalk to long sticks to encourage movement in the whole body. Cultivate a particular kind of attention by filling the space with ‘outtake’ dialogue (pre-recorded anecdotal commentary, verbatim digressions etc.) to accompany the drawing task.

Application: Draw spillages out of accident and into design. Advocate doodles, echoes and annotations as a means of generating narrative.

Apparatus: P.A system and loop station to introduce speech disturbances, repetitions and thematic deviations.

Action Six: Edge. **Direction:** Between one thing and another. Ask students to locate a join each in the space (explain that by “join” you mean any sort of division between any sort of surface, at any scale). Give them time with their surroundings and encourage an experimental approach: a join could appear where some clay nudges a piece of paper, for example. Once located, ask students to commit the image to memory and close their eyes. Ask them to imagine a crack between the two surfaces; slowly, it widens into a gap large enough to enter. Ask them to imagine entering the gap and to make a tactile exploration of the walls, edging along with fingers, palm of the hand, back of hand, cheek, forehead etc.

Application: Invite students to dwell in the spaces between. Translate the sensory imaginings into discussion about what physical experience has to do with inner reality, and how that can be applied to their practices (Figure 9.1).

Action Seven: Handle. **Direction:** Invent a materiality. Give each student a different object to hold and ask them to record their immediate sensory responses (these objects may be anything you like—a piece of fruit, some fabric, a tool, a twig—anything). Then give each student an identical line of text—something pertaining to a state of being for which there is no material counterpart—and ask that they apply the sense of tactility inspired by the object to the ideas at work in the words.

Application: Facilitate a tactile experience of subject matter. Use the exercise to demonstrate how students may use the body to transform their conceptual narratives.

Action Eight: Articulate. **Direction:** Speak movement. Ask the students to lie on the floor and close their eyes. Working with an itinerant form of stage directions

in the present continuous tense, transpose the students' arrival, movement and participation in the created space.

Application: Evoke a sense of always arriving, never arrived.

Action Nine: Interrupt. Direction: Facilitate feedback and group discussion. On day two ask students to form groups of three to five and compare their documents from day one, noting any connections, disparities and repetitions. Ask them to pull into relief key areas of interest and apply to these ideas the states explored in the workshop. Emphasise the importance of being inquisitive and analytical. With this data harvest, ask students to edit their new material into a rough piece of work for presenting in their chosen art and design discipline. Explain that they will have a week to work on it before sharing, and that you are interested more in their raw workings than in anything polished; pattern and process will be the focus.

On day three students present their work, including summary of process, followed by feedback and group discussion.

ANALYSIS

The students were generally engaged and inquisitive. As some were unused to collaborating in this way, however, we sensed a degree of reticence when asked to share ideas. We discovered that they were either nervous about voicing their thoughts, or protective of their ideas lest they found their way into someone else's work.

Evident in the presentations was an understanding of how material may be disrupted to create flux and foster new iterations of an idea. The students' work provided fertile ground for discussion about pattern and process: students said they enjoyed harvesting the data, and seemed to grasp how movement and tactility may be applied to their own practices, thus enabling them to align their outputs with the specific learning outcomes expected of them in their respective courses.

Whereas performance students are (unsurprisingly) quick to engage with physical activities, these art and design students needed more information about the tasks before attempting them. We found it useful to explain in full what they would be invited to do, and to reassure them that any improvisation would be limited to visualisation and for themselves only. We also clarified that they would not be expected to produce any work involving performance unless they were so inclined. The students seemed to appreciate this and we noticed a palpable decompression in the general atmosphere.