

**STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY  
AUTUMN 2014**

At the core of my pedagogical approach is the fervent belief that to live in this world is to live fully entangled with others who are invariably different from ourselves, and that to *live well* in this world of difference requires that we strive to see our world from the perspective of such differences. Sharing this world—and it must indeed be shared—requires striving to see from innumerable points of view, and from such views, working together to create a world that is more livable for more forms of life. I believe that in the university—through our research, in our classrooms, within our distinct disciplines, and between and beyond our disciplinary boundaries—we have the responsibility to inspire and guide our students towards such ethical engagements with a world that emerges from our differences. In whatever courses I teach, I emphasize the importance of engaging and examining perspectives other than our own through the study of critical theories and artistic productions in various media, and through privileging discussion as a practice of listening, distributing authority, and co-creating knowledge. My hope, to quote Judith Butler, is that through these processes of engaging with others we might all “become dislocated from our own cultural and historical perspectives only to return to them enriched by an understanding of other lives.”<sup>1</sup> Through such departures and returns, we make the familiar strange, practice seeing from other points of view from which we might recognize even ourselves as more and other than that for which we could previously account. In doing so, we expand the possibilities for who and how we might become, for how we can understand or imagine this world we share, and thus for how we might take action in order to care for our world and the multitude of others with whom we share it.

These core values influence classroom practices in ways that are consistent across all of my teaching. During my time at The Ohio State University, I have taught a range of courses and topics, including dance history, writing about dance, movement analysis, critical theories of the body, and physical practices such as yoga, modern dance, and ballet. In whatever courses I teach, I strive to select materials, lead discussions, and interact with students in ways that recognize and honor the diversity in our world and within each individual, in regards to specificities such as sex, race, sexuality, ability, and class. Such differences cannot be treated as incidental; it is from these spectrums of diversity that the richness of our cultures emerges, and as such, they must be essential to our studies. No matter the subject, I emphasize the diversity of classroom communities and the multiplicity of perspectives that they contribute as necessary to our learning, integral to what and how we they learn.

Class discussions are fundamental to the practical implementation of my teaching philosophies. “Making the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute is a central goal of transformative pedagogy,” according to bell hooks, and discussion can be a primary strategy for cultivating that kind of shared responsibility.<sup>2</sup> In facilitating discussions, I solicit student contributions by posing questions about the course readings or viewing materials, and allow space for both a range of responses and for dialogue to develop between students. Speaking and listening to one another allows students to practice using, hearing, and valuing their own voices, and to hear and recognize the voices and perspectives of others who are invariably different from themselves. Centralizing discussions within my classes also emphasizes that learning is a collaborative endeavor; knowledge about any topic is not something for which I alone as the instructor am responsible. Rather, responsible knowledge is developed together from the critical

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<sup>1</sup> McGill University, “Judith Butler, DLitt – McGill 2013 Honorary Doctorate Address,” May 31, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFIGS56iOAg>.

<sup>2</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 39.

contributions of multiple points of view, the wealth of personal experiences that we each bring to our perspectives, and productive dialogue between this spectrum of differing positions.

I also prioritize multi-modal approaches to class material, incorporating readings, video viewings, writing exercises, physical activities, online materials/activities, and peer feedback with lectures and discussions to approach topics from multiple frameworks and perspectives and to encourage critical thinking across and between different media. Doing so accounts for different learning styles, cultivates spaces in which multiple intelligences can find expression and appreciation, and strives to show that knowledge and thinking take many different forms, including but not limited to the written and spoken word.

My experiences teaching physical practice courses—such as yoga, modern dance, ballet, and Butoh—have given me opportunities to develop additional strategies for facilitating encounters with difference as central to learning. First, in whatever technique I am teaching, I emphasize that each and every body is unique. We all come to study these techniques with different strengths and weaknesses, different backgrounds in training and injury, different proportions, shapes, and sizes. In my teaching, I honor these fundamental differences, emphasizing the kinesthetic and aesthetic principles of each technique and helping students discover how such principles work for their individual bodies rather than imposing singular ideals to which all students must conform.

At another scale, when teaching studio courses, I am introducing students to physical practices that originated in other parts of the world, other historical periods, other ways of thinking, and other systems of value. These techniques have disseminated from body to body—teacher to student, teacher to student—up until the present when students are learning these practices from me. Through these genealogies, these techniques have accumulated rich and complicated histories of aesthetic tendencies, social and cultural conventions, political circumstances, and personal kinesthetic knowledge. In learning any of these techniques, students are encountering this collective of others with whom these practices originated and through which they have been developed, preserved, and passed along. Importantly, this learning takes place in and through their own bodies, which is one of the profound opportunities that studying dance provides: students engage with a collective history of other times, places, and bodies *in their own bodies*, coming to know this world of others *in themselves*, and in turn coming to know and develop themselves—their own bodies—through this world of others.

It is not only the origins and histories of these techniques through which difference becomes appreciable: as these techniques become familiar to students, they begin to experience themselves as unfamiliar. Literally, physically, at the levels of muscle development, flexibility, coordination, and cognition, students actualize their own potential, embodying different versions of themselves. As they grow in their abilities, I encourage them to recognize that *there is never only one body or self that they always are or will be*. I often say in my yoga classes: we are all always already so much more than that for which we can consciously account. Rather than a fixed, static perspective of oneself—or, in turn, of others—these practices offer physical experiences of the mutability and conditionality of who we are. Students can come to appreciate that difference is not only an experience of others but also an experience of who we once were, who we are now, and who we might become. I believe that as students learn to embrace and cultivate such differences within themselves through these physical practices, they are learning to value and appreciate the diversity of others as well and to affirm and contribute to practices in which difference might flourish.