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ASSEMBLING BODY, MIND, AND SPIRIT IN DIGITAL HUMANITIES TEACHING PRAXIS

Diana Alvarez and Rebecca Rouse

> The authors of this book call for a science that can bring together the best wisdom of past indigenous spiritual traditions with current techno-digital knowledges, with the purpose of exploring and affirming the multi-dimensional places where body, mind, and spirit assemble, where spiritual work is seen as political work, where political work is seen as spiritual work, and where the erotics of love invest both. Becoming one such spiritual activist rewires one's brain body, and erotics, in a process that opens the apertures between worlds. Peoples meet there, and transit to new perceptions.
>
> —*Chela Sandoval, foreword from This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*[1]

Introduction

This chapter is a collaborative meeting point for two educators at the intersection of performing arts and technology, who share a focus on topics often considered too subjective or taboo within teaching and learning, such as empathy, compassion, and interconnectivity. Even our focus on teaching and learning, because we are outside the pedagogy field, can seem transgressive, in technologically inflected disciplines where "hard" science research may be privileged. In contrast, we characterize teaching as a spiritual, activist endeavor centered in intuition and decolonizing practices and highlight the collaborative and embodied nature of our inquiry through autoethnographic duet as method. For us, teaching is personal, given the complexities of our identities. We both experience power and oppression in different contexts, including the classroom.

From this intersectional feminist grounding, we reflect on our own formative student experiences and what has been modeled for us by teachers and mentors inside and outside of institutional settings. Through this critical, collaborative reflection we draw out a set of practices that come together to make transformative, cocreated learning possible across courses relevant to the Digital Humanities, such as multimedia performance, game design, storytelling, and music. We discuss ideas for how these practices seek to assemble not only mind but also body and spirit in the act of teaching and learning and can be utilized to remake and refashion more traditional curricula such that transformation, as opposed to information, becomes the goal.

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Our ethos for knowledge-sharing spaces calls for the cultivation of care, cocreation, embodied practices, and being rooted in empathy and wellness. This ethos descends from family knowledge, Black, Indigenous, brown, people of color, queer, trans, gender expansive, disabled, feminist art, activism, and thought.[2] Our work responds to the call from many DH scholars[3] for the field to open access to computational media as a tool for creative expression and cultural critique. In our efforts to encourage further transformation beyond our own duet, we conclude the chapter by offering a prompt for liberatory play or performance that is broadly applicable across many types of knowledge-sharing spaces both within and beyond traditional academic institutions, on farms, at community centers, in public libraries, in transit, and more. In our collaborative sharing, we locate the "multidimensional places where body, mind, and spirit assemble" and invite other activist educators to employ artistic and humanistic modes to transform their teaching and scholarship within the Digital Humanities and beyond.[4]

We have embarked on this chapter at a time when global tragedy, oppression, and grief pervade our lives. As of October 2023, 6,961,014 people have died during the Coronavirus pandemic worldwide.[5] In Israel and Palestine, escalating terrorist and state violence resulting in overwhelming civilian deaths has captured global attention. In the United States, the rise of white supremacist terrorism infiltrates classrooms and homes. Scholar Heidi Beirich warns of white supremacy as a worldwide movement:

Recent research has found that hate crimes in multiple countries have risen along with the rise of Identitarianism. Racist attacks on refugees, immigrants, Muslims, and Jews are increasing worldwide at an alarming rate. Scholars studying the internationalization of hate crimes call this phenomenon "violent transnationalism" (Jipson and Becker 2019a, 2019b).[6]

Researchers such as Kristine Hennings examine the overwhelming overcriminalization of Black youth in the United States, and independent researchers map police violence in the country, noting that Black people are three times more likely to be killed by police than their white counterparts.[7] Meanwhile, national entities repress activist thought. The United States Department of Education recently eliminated mention of Black activism, Black feminism, queer theory, and intersectionality in the proposed AP African American Studies curriculum.[8] Critical race theory and cultural studies disciplines are under attack at schools and universities, with an impetus to privatize education.

We find ourselves as educators working in the United States and Europe within a context that on some level seems absolutely opposed to education, as has been discussed by researcher Cris Mayo (2019). Mayo suggests:

> Concentrating on pedagogy in times of anti-academic sentiment--from students and from colleagues and from those who occupy the "highest" offices in the US--requires that we return explicitly to academic values of dialogue and critical inquiry and name those as academic values.
>
> *(Mayo 2019, 228–229)*

The stories we tell in this chapter transgress with purpose to respond to this urgency, inviting readers to join us in a sacred pedagogical praxis of freedom. We believe, as bell hooks urges, that "our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students."[9] We invite fellow artists, teachers, and scholars to join us with a praxis of "hope [as] a discipline," a principle which we learn from abolitionist Mariame Kaba.[10]

In the atmosphere of increasing scarcity in Higher Education, institutions often begin to lose the will to foreground the concerns of humanity. These are concerns that are not only value-based or altruistic, but also bodily, emotionally, and spiritually focused concerns. As a fundamentally humanistic discipline, albeit in transdisciplinary entanglement with the technologic, Digital Humanities has a possibility to counter the dominance of Capitalism and offer more liberatory opportunities for teaching and learning. DH scholars such as James Smithies have underscored the importance of dissent to the discipline, claiming that a focus on "people ahead of politics, culture, ideology, or technology" is necessary for the "development and survival of the discipline" Smithies (2022). Dissent, dissonance, and "mess" are part and parcel of activist struggle, and we lean into these catalysts of uncertainty and transformation in our work to bridge pedagogy and DH. This chapter follows in the footsteps of educational traditions that foreground the aim to liberate both the students and teachers from oppressive power structures. One of these is the Montessori approach, commonly focused on early childhood education but with principles that can be applied at any level. As discussed by Erin Mergil and Jessica Pelizari in *Messiness and Feminism in Early Childhood Education* (2022), a Montessori approach can be characterized as follows: "…it is our work not to insert ourselves into the development of our students, but rather to provide them with the means to unfold into their most authentic selves" (Mergil and Pelizari 2022, 31). As opposed to the banking model of education, as later also critiqued by Paulo Freire (1996), the earlier Montessori approach similarly shifts away from steering the student to instead characterize the teacher as a guide to help facilitate the student's own agency in their learning process.

A first step in this approach is the preparation of the learning environment. As Montessori observed, "the child makes himself out of the elements in his environment, and this self-making is not accomplished by some vague formula, but following a precise and definite guidance" (Montessori 1936, 54). While in the Montessori early childhood classroom, this is characterized by low shelves and accessible materials appropriate for the young children, in the upper school and higher education context, we might think on a level that is less materially focused, querying our learning environment to ask: How do we listen? How do we speak? How do we write? What do we bring into the classroom as worthy of consideration? Here we can think beyond the important task of diversifying the syllabus to also open up the classroom to the spiritual, physical, and emotional. In other words, teaching becomes deeply personal and embodied. This personal approach is natural for us, as our positionality has made our experiences of teaching personal.

In recognition of the power of the personal in relation to teaching, our method in this chapter is an autoethnographic duet. This means our inquiry into our own critical, multisensory teaching practices has been achieved through shared storytelling, with the reciprocity of a musical duet. Throughout the chapter we share excerpts of this collaboration as three "duets," marked by shifts into first person storytelling. Each duet reflects on a turning point in our own development as learners and teachers. These three duets are titled: **Pedagogy is Personal**, **Activating an Embodied Arts Practice**, and **Transgressive Praxis in Digital Humanities Classrooms**.

In our first duet, **Pedagogy is Personal**, we situate ourselves historically and culturally as learners. Dr. Diana Alvarez describes the resonance of their genderqueer Xicane origins, familial relationships, and artistic influences which have shaped their classroom philosophy. Dr. Rebecca Rouse reflects on the privilege of access she had growing up to the academic environment, early experiences of interdisciplinary inquiry in all its complexity, as well as the tensions she perceives as a female professor in a male-dominated field. Our second duet,

Activating an Embodied Arts Practice, shares reflections on our own student experiences which activated an embodied awareness within our studies and opened us up to the radical possibilities of the classroom. Finally, in the third duet, **Transformative Praxis in Digital Humanities Classrooms**, we synthesize our learning in relationship to key mentors who have led us to seek connective, transformative, antioppressive methods in our own classrooms today. The chapter then concludes with a prompt for the reader to continue liberatory practices in their own classroom.

Background

The works of intersectional feminist scholars, contemporary educators, activist artists, and our collective lived experience of several decades as educators and higher education administrators ground us in building liberatory classrooms. For us, a liberatory classroom is an active work-in-progress environment that will grow and adapt to local and global concerns and the needs of our communities. The liberatory classrooms we imagine and work toward are consent-driven, neurodiverse, interdependent, antioppressive, and accessible spaces that cultivate joy, active community care, empathy, creativity, reflection, opportunities to express and resolve challenges, and transformation for all participants. Our classrooms center global Indigenous knowledge and planetary wellness in both its ethos and curriculum. Transformations are possible in these learning spaces that are not documented in quantitative evaluations implemented by many institutions, and this informs the autoethnographic duet methods in which we deliver our insights in this chapter.

Chela Sandoval's call for a science that "explore[s] and affirm[s] the multi-dimensional places where body, mind, and spirit assemble" in the 2002 anthology *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* was an effort to "loose[n] the grip of outmoded methods and ideas in order to allow new ways of being and acting to emerge."[11] *This Bridge* (2002) was published two decades after, and as a response to and continuation of, the foundational cultural studies text, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*. Both anthologies brought together a polyphony of voices rich in their differences: language, experience, identity, genres, and writing styles are prismatic, with a shared hope for "personal chronicles [to] present a political analysis in everyday terms."[12] Audre Lorde wrote in 1977 that poetry "forms the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action."[13] The concept that art provides a blueprint for concrete sociopolitical change was set into motion by Black feminist activist imagination in collaboration with women of color feminist writers, and reverberates through generations of activists.

The anthology-making *practices* of the *Bridge* anthologies emerged as responses to exclusion by academia as well as the injustices of racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and global struggles. We as authors of this chapter live and create within the exclusionary and dense hierarchies of structural oppression.[14] We put forth these DIY, community-building anthology-making practices as guides for pedagogical practice to expand beyond the rigid structures of capitalist education.

Bridge anthologies emphasized polyphony and dissonance of voices, languages, politics, and bodies as expressed through written language. Gloría Anzaldúa, coeditor of the initial *Bridge* anthology, propelled language beyond euro-centric confines and described her ethnic identity as "twin skin" to her linguistic identity.[15] Anzaldúa's spiritual connection to multilinguality (and multigenre writing) created pathways to witness identity from a nonbinary,

unbound perspective. Perceiving identity beyond an either/or binary allows for multiple truths to exist simultaneously—that is, multiple voices, languages, politics, and bodies to exist simultaneously, shaping action. Anzaldúa's position on writing as a "gesture of the body" echoes Audre Lorde's belief that "our dreams point the way to freedom"[16]:

> For me, writing is a gesture of the body, a gesture of creativity, a working from the inside out. My feminism is grounded not on incorporeal abstraction but on corporeal realities. The material body is center, and central. The body is the ground of thought. The body is a text. Writing is not about being in your head; it's about being in your body. The body responds physically, emotionally, and intellectually to external and internal stimuli, and writing records, orders, and theorizes about these responses. For me, writing begins with the impulse to push boundaries and to shape ideas, images, and words that travel through the body and echo in the mind into something that has never existed. The writing process is the same mysterious process that we use to make the world.[17]

When expanded beyond the confines of the written document, and into a corporeal learning environment, *transformative ideas require tangible actions*—bodies require places to rest and sit, minds require accessible modes of learning, souls require nourishment, and so on. Tangible actions shift meaning, understanding, and further actions. Who will share and create when given an alive and free space for learning and growing? Whose stories will we give our attention to?

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha proposes that we imagine a world with disability justice at the forefront: "How does it change everything, to imagine and plan for a future where we are the majority—and not a terrible thing, but a source of possibility and power?"[18] Herein lies a map toward tangible shifts (or perhaps, realizations) of power—we must work with imagination as a primary guide.

The trajectory from imagination to tangible actions may sound good in theory, but educators may wonder, how do we get there? There is an extensive history of interweaving art and social justice in classrooms, which we encourage readers to explore.[19] Specifically, artists who enact multisensory performance practice *in tandem* with liberatory teaching practices such as poet and playwright Magdalena Gómez, composer Pauline Oliveros, and theatrical jazz artist Sharon Bridgforth are a part of the learning lineage of this chapter. Magdalena Gómez teaches writers and artists how to craft honest personal narratives in multiple mediums and developed a collection of writings that "seeks to act as a method of healing for those impacted by bullying through the cathartic power of writing." Composer Pauline Oliveros developed attention strategies as "ways of listening and responding in consideration of oneself, others, and the environment."[20] Theatrical jazz artist Sharon Bridgforth channels her ancestral wisdom into multimedia performances with a steadfast dedication to the precise language, rhythm, and artistry of Black culture.[21] These artists are especially unique in their abilities to bridge multisensory arts practice, teaching, embodiment, activism, and cultural histories. Their work inspires speaking, listening, and remembering with honesty and empathy—key ingredients necessary for building liberatory learning spaces.

DUET 1: Pedagogy Is Personal

Diana:

The commonly used term, "first generation to college" does not capture the distance or dissonance between worlds that I have traversed as a learner. The tongue in which I currently write, in a scholarly chapter, is a compromise between these worlds. Autoethnography,

storytelling, songwriting, poetry, and all forms of Creative Writing allow for these worlds to meet. That is, the world of my heart–my grandmother–somehow coexists with my embodied knowledge and practice as a scholar within these lines.

My grandmother María Vera Barnett (1928–2015) had an eighth grade education. She spoke wistfully of attending school in Benavides, Texas, and often said that if she had not been married off so early (at age 16) she would have adored continuing her schooling. Mi abuela was not physically safe on her journey to school as a girl. She would tell the story of almost being assaulted on a school bus. María never told me if she was allowed to speak Spanish at school in the early 1940s. It was common during this time for Mexican students in Texas to have been punished for speaking their native language, and to have been segregated from their white peers in the classroom.[22] I wonder if my grandmother was ever punished for the way she spoke, and if that influenced when she felt comfortable doing so.

My grandmother's language was una mezcla de Tex-Mex Spanish, Spanglish, and some English. In English, my grandmother spoke with a lilt—a confluence of Spanish, Texas Twang, and old Hollywood formality. I grew up immersed in a symphony of mixed languages. What might have been considered "noisy," "dissonant," "asymmetrical," or "broken," by some is the polyphonic soundscape that was the backdrop where I learned to read, and where I wrote my first poems and songs. This South Texas home was my first educational site.

During my graduate work, I drew inspiration from the anthology-making practices of women of color feminists Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, and Gloría Anzaldúa. Through their work, I learned that multilingualism, multigenre works, and multi- and transdisciplinarity activates social transformation and connectivity. The unabashed creativity of artist-scholars led me to feel at home in my education. If Lorde, Moraga, and Anzaldúa could navigate, critique, and revolutionize teaching, so could I. As I worked to complete my PhD, I grew ever more concerned with studying power and oppression within the classroom.

It is a very personal endeavor, thanks to my grandparents and family history, to create and facilitate liberatory spaces of learning. Individuals who, like me, are the first in their families to attend college are less likely to complete their degrees, more likely to lag behind in wealth.[23] As a mentor to students who are predominantly first-generation-to-college, I am often confronted with patterns that reflect my own educational journey. I often ask myself, "How do I keep this student in school?"

In my course, We Will Thrive: Activist Art, Community, and Resistance, we analyze global oppression through autoethnography. Most of my students are personally invested in propelling positive social change. They are brilliant, multifaceted scholars, artists, parents, and caretakers who have experienced addiction, incarceration, trauma, abuse, and poverty. I name these life experiences to underscore the capacious empathy that we nourish through dialogue and storytelling in our classrooms. Many of my students have been criminalized and/or forced through the school to prison pipeline. School has been dangerous and traumatic for many of my students, who recognize with facility when language is insincere, condescending, or irrelevant to their educational growth. So, if we are going to get anywhere in our classroom, it is my responsibility as educator to dissolve expectations of what a "traditional" classroom should be, and to build a community of trust. Collective trust can only be cultivated with intentional and habitual demonstrations of empathy.

In my classes, I explicitly encourage writing without attention to "proper" grammar and punctuation in daily writing assignments and first drafts of essays. This practice is based on a pedagogical philosophy shared with antiracist educators, such as Felicia Rose Chavez, who advocate for students to "demonstrate confidence first and technical proficiency second."[24]

My students and I agree that the ways in which we speak at home, and amongst family and friends, are legitimate and welcome modes of communication. I emphasize legitimacy because it can so often feel to a first-gen-to-college student that code-switching in academic spaces delegitimizes our natural way of speaking. Here I am reminded of Gloria Anzaldúa's potent reclamation of her multilinguality:

Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate.

I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue—my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence.[25]

When showing my students the "code" of academic writing through repeated revisions, I make it a point to underscore that academic writing is not "proper" or "better" than the language they speak at home. Through my own lived experience as a person who learned these codes through self-study and with the support of mentors, I empathize with my students as they grapple with multiple languages that are constantly shifting, borrowing, riffing, and expanding. I put my empathy into action in the format of my writing and creative assignments, and the ways in which I evaluate student progress. In order to engage my students in a joyful and affirming learning experience, I constantly learn to break apart traditional aspects of what a classroom experience is "supposed" to be. I believe that this way of teaching offers respect to my students' and my ancestral lineages. In this way, I work to compose the liberatory and affirming learning environments that my grandmother, María would have found pleasure and joy being a part of.

Rebecca:

Growing up in a family that had access to higher education, I had privileged access to university culture. My father is a professor, and included me in the research process itself from a young age. As an undergraduate theater student, he asked me to develop a study of teamwork in the performing arts and publish it with him (Rouse and Rouse 2004). This was a complicated experience. While extremely valuable in introducing me to research practice at a young age, I can also remember my inner conflict at encountering this analytic and proceduralized approach to interacting with and seeing the world. As a theater student focused on playwriting and directing, I remember feeling that I "just wanted to make my art!" That frustration did give way, through the process of collaborating on the study, to fascination at viewing my passion from a different angle. I had somehow worried that scientific examination would spoil my delight in theater practice. Thankfully it did not. I also remember I had chafed at my father's engineering approach, which I had felt was incommensurable with my artistic focus, even on a linguistic level.

While I could not articulate it at the time, I later realized that I was picking up on the power differences between the cultural and economic weight given to scientific language versus artistic. Working across arts and engineering, both the messiness and generative qualities of this translation were in play. In the end, our perspectives were put in conversation with

interesting results, and on a meta-level also worked to demystify my understanding of what collaborative interdisciplinary research can look like. In hindsight, I can see how influential this experience was in my trajectory towards an interdisciplinary field (Digital Media and Games) which bridges STEM, the arts, and the humanities. Digital Humanities collaborations are often not as clear-cut as mine was with my father (i.e., the artist and the engineer) with many researchers holding interdisciplinary backgrounds themselves today. But nevertheless, the entanglement of these different disciplinary languages and their access to power in different contexts continues to bubble below the surface in my experience of interdisciplinary work.

Given my family background and experience growing up, I always felt at home in academic contexts as a young person. This changed once I became a young faculty member teaching in Game Design. As one of the few female instructors, often teaching groups of students that included few or no female students, my gender and its visible lack of "fit" in the male-dominated discipline became quickly apparent. This showed up in subtle ways in many courses but most notably in my first attempt to re-design a course on the History and Culture of Games. While the version of the course I inherited focused on teaching the students the basics of the dominant work culture within the games industry, to help them fit in, I had a vision for the course as showcasing the fascinating and complex ways in which games are an integral part of our wider culture and society today, with both good and bad impacts. To present this wider view of games and cultural engagement, I revised the syllabus to include examples of games made by women, queer people, and people of color, and included scholarship on game design from people with these backgrounds as well.

The reaction was swift and clear: students were displeased. I received terrible scores on the course evaluations, and angry comments about how the course had nothing to do with Game Design, was a waste of their tuition money, and that they did not come to a Game Design program to be forced to read "feminist theory." Interestingly, in this first version, the course included no feminist theory! Just the explicit presence of women making and writing about games. But this experience sparked my desire to push further. Now I wanted to include feminist theory—and do it in a way that could enable students to actually engage the material, not simply reject it in anger. I reached out to a colleague, Amy Corron Youmans, and asked if she would join me in a collaboration to reshape the course, bringing in her expertise in intergroup dialogue as a pedagogy method. She agreed, and we began a multiyear pedagogical research project together (Rouse and Corron 2020; Corron and Rouse 2022; Rouse and Corron Youmans 2022). Through the experience of not "fitting" in my own classroom, and by recognizing the gift in my students' anger, an interest in pedagogy began to grow.

Notes on Duet 1: Disassembling to Assemble Liberatory Learning

To persist as a student and/or teacher while confronting and disentangling oneself from oppression is to disassemble and transform the underpinnings of educational institutions, and therefore, the politics in which they are immersed. This disassembling is an uncompensated labor borne by students and educators who are women, neurodiverse, Black, Indigenous, people of color, disabled, trans, gender nonconforming, and queer in euro-centric institutions of learning. Our very existence in elitist educational spaces is considered political, because such institutions so often exclude our bodies, languages, souls, and cultures. Poet

Wyslawa Szymborska calls our attention to the political resonance of what is included or excluded, even to the level of what we do say, or don't say:

> Whether you want it or not, your genes have a political past, your skin a political tone, your eyes a political color, What you say resounds, what you don't say is also politically significant.[26]

How then, do Digital Humanities scholars contribute to an inclusive, connective, decolonial educational praxis? While there are many DH projects[27] that work toward these values, with artists, scholars, and educators actively bridging digital history research with cultural studies and activism, we see less emphasis in the field on how to enact these practices within the classroom itself. Further collaborations between DH scholars, artists, and scholars of critical pedagogy and cultural studies could activate the cosmic, "in-between" spaces between our disciplines, where so many who are excluded from education are to be found. We thus call for renewed attention to the exciting potentials of the classroom. As bell hooks has written, "The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (1994, 12). hooks was writing from the vantage point of an earlier wave of the ongoing "culture wars" in the 1990s, and her words resonate yet again today as we ride through yet another crest of similar tensions. The classroom persists as an underexplored space of radical potentiality, perhaps in part due to how highly regulated a space it is (think of the institutional rules around teaching time slots, contact hours, syllabi, grading systems, learning outcomes, assessment measures, and more). Indeed, this level of regulation may evidence a recognition of the radical potentials of the classroom space, with regulation acting as a reactive method to work to keep such potentials "under wraps." We suggest that the same progressive energy, skill, and focus that develop the liberatory and critical DH *projects* referenced above can also be brought to bear within the classroom—and the classroom can also be brought outside of the confines of the university! We are not the first to make such calls and indeed are inspired by teachers who have created such spaces in their own classrooms and beyond, in which we were students. In our next duet, we share reflections on these formative experiences from our own time as students, and how they continue to shape our work in praxis as teachers today.

DUET 2: Activating an Embodied Arts Practice

Diana:

At the end of my senior year of high school, my high school orchestra teacher, Ms. Stakes, invited me to go to the Kerrville Folk Festival (held annually in Kerrville, Texas) with her. The summer after I graduated, she drove us through the Texas Hill Country, and I set up my tent on her camp site at the festival grounds. This was my first time adventuring like this on my own. I had studied music as a violinist in middle and high school orchestra, and also sang with a hotel lounge band led by my music mentor, Linda Flores, from a young age. I was accustomed to interpreting, either instrumentally or vocally, the music of others. Though I was familiar with many classical music composers, it did not occur to me to consider the possibility of practicing composition for myself. Songwriting was not in my consciousness as something that I could participate in–I didn't even consider that there were songwriters behind the pop, rock, jazz, country, and Latine [Latin] songs that I grew up listening to and performing.

At the Kerrville Folk festival, I was introduced to songwriting as a profession, and as a way of life. I met families and troupes of friends who had attended the Kerrville Folk Festival for decades. After daytime mainstage performances, it was custom for festival attendees to roam between campsites to share and listen to music. I wandered joyously around the campgrounds from night until early morning, sitting around fires at different campsites listening to songwriters exchange music in the round. I relished in activist songs, songs that blended languages and genres, and traditional European folk ballads. There was a reverence that attendees of this festival held for the narratives and sounds composed by another human that I had never experienced before. I was introduced to artists Anaïs Mitchell, Vance Gilbert, Myshkin, and Ruthie Foster at the Kerrville Folk Festival. This was the first time I would witness people of color performing songs that they had written, and making a career out of being a performing songwriter. In turn, it felt revelatory to me to come out to myself as a songwriter.

I circumnavigated my songwriting path for at least a decade of my life, but returned to it as a PhD student, when I composed the songs and rituals for my opera, *Quiero Volver: A Xingonx Ritual Opera*. I consider my songwriting as much as an intrinsic, embodied part of me as my queerness. I cherish coming home to myself as a songwriter and am grateful to Ms. Stakes for seeing that possibility in me as a teenager. She was a classical music instructor who appreciated the vastness of folk music. Her invitation to the Kerrville Folk Festival was one of expansion, which shifted my relationship to composition, music-making, language, and performance.

Rebecca:
In an early 1980s elementary school music tradition that was often characterized by rote learning, a more creative music education experience still burns brightly in my memory. In second grade, our music teacher Shirley Campbell introduced us to the dramaturgy of music in an exciting and multisensory way. She played a recording of the Hall of the Mountain King from Grieg's Peer Gynt for us, and described the basics of the narrative. Then, she brought in craft materials and a camera and tripod, and guided us through materializing that narrative in stop-motion animation. We made the characters from walnuts, with bits of colored construction paper glued on, to turn the little brown nuts into Grieg's trolls. A few weeks later, Mrs. Campbell had the pictures developed on 35 mm slides. She had the classroom set up like a theater, with a slide projector, roll-down screen, and the stereo was ready. We watched and listened as our imagination came to life through the magic of animation, and the animating magic of music. We had worked as a big group to create this, something that transcended the level of the individual work more common in school. And to see the inanimate come to life – and see the humble materials transformed to living creatures, alongside the majesty of Grieg's music – and to know that we had made it! What a gift. Looking back, I see how this interdisciplinary approach to music education can serve as a model for DH. The use of technology,[28] art, and design to draw us into collaboration and open us to appreciation of disciplinary entanglement, even as eight year olds, was inspired.

Notes on Duet 2: Listen Up!

Here the duet has guided us through teaching moments that helped us to see a fuller scope of what we were capable of, and what technology is capable of, toward multisensory approaches. Foundational to opening to this possibility, however, is the need for attention,

or the will to listen—or rather, not only the will, but the act of listening itself. In the act of writing a chapter, we ask for your attention. For Pauline Oliveros, a mentor we both share, attention begins with the act of listening. In this case listening is understood not only as an intellectual act that leads to understanding, but also as a multisensory embodied practice, highlighting ways of knowing that are physical, spiritual, and emotional.

Oliveros' practices of embodied deep listening emerged concurrently with feminist discourse, and especially that of US-based women of color activists beginning in the late 1960s.[29] Women of color feminist artists-academics during this period called attention to flesh as a means to building consciousness and creating social change for their bodies, and for the bodies of marginalized peoples. Indeed, Oliveros practiced and theorized listening as love, writing:

> Listening involves a reciprocity of energy flow; exchange of energy; sympathetic vibration: tuning into the web of mutually supportive interconnected thoughts, feelings, dreams, vital forces comprising our lives; empathy; the basis for compassion and love. Yes, Deep Listening is the foundation for a radically transformed social matrix in which compassion and love are the core motivating principles guiding creative decision making and our actions in the world.
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> *(Oliveros 2022, 57)*

The deeply transformative potentials of listening are grounded in the biological reality of the voice and the ear. As discussed by Steven Connor, the voice is uniquely intimate in its production (it comes from within the body) and in its reception (being perceived within the ear of another). Connor points out how the intimacy and reflexivity of the voice differs from other senses:

> Undoubtedly, I learn how to see, learn how to touch, grasp, and manipulate, but I do not need to watch myself doing these things in order to learn how to do them. By contrast, I cannot speak without putting myself in the position of the one who hears my voice; without becoming, in principle at least, my own interlocutor.
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> *(Connor 2000, 5)*

Furthermore, listening is a multisensory attention experience grounded in the realities of human bodies, which hold vast and expansive possibilities for disability, ability, gender, size, neurodiversity, spirituality, ancestral connection, politicization, and cultural identification. For example, Oliveros' work on building musical instruments for Deaf and hearing-impaired communities focused on haptic approaches to resonate across similar modes of listening in relation. Thus the practice of vocalizing, broadly conceived, can be understood on a granular level as necessitating an openness to empathy for the other, for the listener.

This empathy is certainly not always present in day-to-day interaction, but the potential is there. Building on Oliveros' work and others, there are many further examples of embodied practice and attention-building. Artists Favianna Rodriguez, Sonya Renee Taylor, and Alok Vaid-Menon create works in multiple mediums that proclaim the right of bodies of the global majority to express, resist, exist, migrate, love, transition, imagine, and experience pleasure.[30] Through multisensory expression, these artists shift our attention and awareness of trans rights, expanding beyond the gender binary, antiracist resistance, radical self-love, and migrant rights.

As our work is so deeply informed by mentor artists and scholars who practice embodiment as a method of personal, social, and global transformation, our classroom practices offer our students the possibility of understanding themselves holistically. Artistic practices within the classroom allow for gradual shifts in perception, and therefore action in service of planetary healing. Acknowledgment of the power held by bodies often considered marginalized offers momentum for shifts in cultural and political power. We witness empathy, compassion, and (re)claiming power reverberating in our classrooms and see this as a hopeful and radical shift for DH. The exercises that we find most transformative and accessible are multisensory in nature. We also share an interest in dissonance in our classes. We both practice silence in our classes and allow for "awkward" moments to lead to new understandings. As deep listeners, we consider how our positionality influences our epistemology (Takacs, 2003). How do we listen? Whose voice or language do we use to speak in the classroom? To transition to action we share a third duet focused on discussions of our own classrooms today—in action. This action then is not constrained to the moment of practice in the classroom, but it continues to act on us, as we then act!

DUET 3: Transgressive Praxis in Digital Humanities Classrooms

Diana:
Years after coming to the understanding that I was a songwriter, another teacher expanded my conceptualization of composition. Pauline Oliveros mentored me as I began to write my opera during my doctoral studies. I ended up incorporating Deep Listening studies and practice of writing text scores for ensemble performance into my opera thanks to Pauline's guidance.

Musical study with Pauline was always embodied. She began Deep Listening meditations by first doing a series of physical exercises, which included slapping our behinds and howling "yeehaw!" Pauline's teaching approach, though unconventional, felt very natural to me. She was a scholar who was unabashed in her pursuit of sound knowledge, and being around this strength of spirit, one couldn't help but to open one's ears and senses.

Deep listening, improvisation, storytelling, performance, singing, drawing, painting, laughing and play are seeds for empathy, which in turn cultivates trust, interconnectivity and interdependence. Multisensory creativity is essential for assembling joyful and liberatory learning communities. It is common for my students to write an autoethnographic paper detailing their own relationship to consent and body sovereignty while also submitting a companion creative audio recording on the topic. When we discuss global activist perspectives of liberation and justice, I hold a songwriting workshop to introduce my students to digital song- and music-making tools to support their practice of writing a liberation song. The purpose of this art-making is pleasure, not perfection. With this, we shatter the confines of who is "allowed" to call themselves an artist.

As a former adjunct Humanities professor, the arts courses that I taught were often designated as writing-intensive courses in which I brought forward an arts-based approach. During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, I learned (as many of my colleagues did) to find ways to connect with students with empathy and humanity in online spaces. When I structured time for my students to share multimedia performances online through Zoom, the resulting performances felt more like roadmaps or blueprints than what would be considered "finished" performances. This happened in part because students struggled with academic

preparation during the emergencies of the pandemic, and because we were scrambling with the various technological tools we had available to make our performances possible. There was a lot of learning on the fly that happened during this time.

One positive outcome that emerged from sharing these roadmaps or blueprints for multimedia performances was the opportunity for students to see art as a process-driven practice, where their maps could receive more detailed feedback from their peers through a chatroom or comment box, which is more telling than applause at the end of a seemingly "finished" work.

The necessity of teaching online also led me to work very hard to "reach across the screen" in online collaborative musical environments, both with my teaching and with my own techniques as a performer. I led improvisational text scores with groups of students, an online songwriting workshop where students wrote lyrics within the chat for a song that I played live during our Zoom call, and began to interweave scholarly lectures with musical performance for talks with various colleges and universities. In the future, I am very interested in finding ways to have students build digital archives and galleries of their multidisciplinary art works and scholarship.

At the end of each class, in-person and online, my students practice speaking words of love, empathy, and compassion to one another. This exercise requires patience and welcoming multiple modes of expression. Facilitating love, empathy, and compassion exercises can be challenging when anxieties run high during finals, and of course, when students have personal conflicts with one another. However, it has been my repeated experience that students crave the space where we collectively express gentleness and care freely. The vulnerable invitation to care and be cared for within a classroom setting feels like the ultimate transgression. For me, this work is a powerful reclamation of an Indigenous-centered approach to community and learning. We witness/listen SO we can care for one another, because we are interconnected, interdependent beings.

Rebecca:

Shirley Campbell's approach has stuck with me, reinforced through several decades of theater training and practice as well. Theater is an ideal platform for exploring the interdisciplinary, a quality leveraged by progressive educators such as the Bauhaus (Gropius and Wensinger 2014). In my undergraduate Interactive Performance and Games course, I take a similar approach.

This course concludes the first year in the Bachelor's Game Writing program at University of Skövde. The cohort of roughly 20 students work in one large group to design and produce a LARP (live action role play) with an open play structure, for the public to join in and play at a location off-campus. LARP is a type of role-play game that shares many aspects in common with improvisatory theater and immersive theater, in which themes and characters may be set but storylines are flexible. By using the medium of live participants, as opposed to the computer (which dominates the rest of the education) this course opens the Game Writing students to an immediacy of feedback on their work and also to the frisson and spontaneity of liveness, qualities that are more difficult to achieve in the digital medium alone.

The course is usually both terrifying and delightful for the students; they are not accustomed to large group collaboration, public presentation of work, or uncertainty in course outcomes. It is always possible that the LARP will flop. But, this never happens! The complexity of collaboration is navigated in a hands-on and reflective manner, challenging traditional

teaching and assessment methods. Instead of the assembly line model of education, in which we imagine every student leaves a course with the same capabilities and knowledge, this course thrives on difference. The course depends on it, in fact—the group of students must have a diversity of talents, skills, and interests in order to function. While the students receive a grade in the end, this never comes to seem very important—although many have worried about it throughout. The quality of their work is self-evident, in the playing of the LARP, just like the quality of a cake is in the eating.

In this way, by the end of the course, I have become redundant. The students have learned to organize themselves, conduct their own creative and experimental work, share it with the public, and evaluate it together. This approach to teaching opens up possibilities around valuing and celebrating diversity through meaningful inclusion that is somewhat different from the pervasive institutional approaches to diversity and inclusion work found on many college campuses.

Instead of naming and raising issues of marginalization, this course lifts the urgent necessity to embrace, celebrate, and leverage diverse perspectives, skills, and talents—because otherwise the LARP will fail. There is a recognition that a diverse team is needed, and that each team member must participate in their own way, and that all will leave the course with an individualized learning experience arrived at via collective participation—as opposed to a standardized learning experience arrived at through individual effort.

Notes on Duet 3: Joy in the Classroom

Much research has been dedicated to show that how we know is rooted in what we feel. The academic term for this is embodied cognition (Wilson 2002). While language is symbolic, music is sensual. We can debate what symbolic meanings a piece of music might have, but there is no semiotic rubric similar to that for linguistics. No matter what discipline you teach in, think about how you might employ activities that open the senses to knowing. You might think about this as experiential learning (Kolb 2014). Creating an environment in your classroom where the senses are welcomed is often a major ontological shift for students in higher education, who encounter only the symbolic, linguistic, or numerical ways of knowing in other courses. What does it mean to prepare the environment, as Maria Montessori pioneered (Montessori 1936), for adult learners in the university context? In our experience, this way of teaching also further opens the exchange of teaching, meaning we as instructors become more open to learning from our students in a reciprocal fashion. This colearning, however, does not mean we let go of the responsibility we hold in the classroom. It does, however, mean that we as teachers may need to move away from dominant practices.

As Antonia Darder describes in her discussion of the pedagogy of love,

> In the process of teaching and learning, it is impossible to express love and respect for students without our willingness to engage them in ways that allow us to know them authentically. This is a form of knowing that demands we transcend our self-absorption and authoritarian fixations, in ways that open us horizontally to know and be known.
>
> *(Darder 2017, 97)*

This means we have to be open to bringing the whole student, and therefore also our whole selves, into authentic inter-action in the classroom space. To do this, Darder acknowledges, we must also face the fact that the self is interconnected with (and not separable from) the

body. This means embodied approaches to education must take on an increased importance, if we are to achieve a pedagogy of love.

Darder elaborates: "Without the materiality of the body, our teaching and learning is reduced to a process of abstraction and fragmentation that attempts to falsely render knowledge a neutral and objective phenomenon, absent of history and ideology" (Darder 2017, 105). In other words, without the active engagement of the body, we lose touch with the situated nature of knowledge.

It is with this attention to embodiment and the goal of liberatory love in mind we offer a generative prompt in the form of a text score for you to consider for integration in your own classroom. Don't worry if students are initially confused or anxious about your approach. With kind persistence from you, they will soon join you in the joys of knowing through multisensory approaches. The difference in the sustainability of the learning. You can forget quite easily something you read or even something you wrote. But it is more difficult to forget an experience.

Conclusion: Invitation to Love, Empathy, and Compassion Score

We conclude with an invitation to you to join us in artistic, embodied, and liberatory practice. The open-endedness of our invitation is purposeful, as it is an honest recognition of the fact that the development of teaching practice is never finished and is always cocreated. Our perspective reflects Francis B. Nyamnjoh's invitation to "explore, contemplate and provide for a world of open-endedness, interconnections, fluidities, and conviviality; a world in which no one has the monopoly of power or powerlessness…."[31] The modes of collaboration and teaching that we have described in this chapter are intentionally queer, as "queer, like jazz crosses borders, borrows, samples so that the unrecognizable is seen anew, and ultimately a new something exists—that is not a binary world but a multitemporaneous one."[32] Liberatory learning spaces blur boundaries between disciplines, dissolve binary thinking, reflect interconnectedness, and are joyful. bell hooks affirms that pleasure in teaching is "an act of resistance countering the overwhelming boredom, uninterest, and apathy that so often characterize the way professors and students feel about teaching and learning, about the classroom experience."[33] We propose that this shift toward pleasurable teaching and learning occurs in part when we as teachers move toward a mode of cocreating knowledge with students. In their chapter, "Public Works: Ecological Inspiration for Equitable Knowledge Production," scholars Arbuckle and Rogers demonstrate the transformative impact of shifting roles and perspectives in knowledge production through ecological metaphors. When participants of a knowledge-sharing space are valued and hold roles that are "both necessary to the collective flourishing of a space," they write, "a collaborative, interdependent, interactive environment that is both robust (because species can adjust in response to changing variables) and precarious (because interdependence also creates risk)."[34] We are curious to explore further pedagogical perspectives on pleasure and joy within the classroom as acts of resistance to intellectual stagnancy. We offer the following text score on love, empathy, and compassion as an invitation to cocreate a complex, pleasurable, collaborative, and interactive learning environment:

Claim space for collective love, empathy, and compassion in your classroom. Should this be an hour, a day, or a few months, prepare yourself to listen and witness all participants.

What will you call this space? If you are sonically inclined, describe it in color. If you are visually inclined, describe it in sound. Dream up a name that reflects a delightful multisensory experience.

Observe your classroom environment. Now change it, moving rows of chairs into a circle, or leave it entirely, bringing your students outside or into another space.

Invite students/participants to find a comfortable position in the new space. This could be sitting or standing, or laying on the floor or grass. Consider and implement a plan that offers care and accommodation for participants who are neurodiverse and disabled. This will often mean making sure that there are multiple ways to sit (in chairs with arms and without), and that there are places for students to retreat separate from the group (should they experience sensory overload).

Rest for eight minutes.

After eight minutes, guide the group through an observation and empathy exercise:

For ten minutes, listen, view, and experience your environment with attention to unusual perspectives. You may walk or stay stationary. Turn your head from side to side to shift your listening. Look at your environment sideways, and upside down. Vocalize and play uncommon musical "instruments" in your environment.

Observe your environment with curiosity until you encounter a memory, or connection to your own story that you would like to share with the group. What does this environment remind you of?

Write for ten minutes about the memory that you have encountered on your observation walk. What have you learned about this memory? Where was this memory tucked away? Describe your memory with multisensory detail. What can this memory offer you?

Pair up with members of your group. Listen, witness, and share your memories and observations with one another with gratitude. Who are you, and who do you become, when you savor the listening of another human being's story?

Now, improvise!

We invite scholars to bridge the study of multiple disciplines in their classrooms. We invite scholars to consider the body as an inherent source of knowledge. Improvisation can open us to see the possibilities beyond institutional expectations, which often are revealed in the everyday tensions we navigate in the work world of higher education. Leaning into the DH potential to expand beyond multiple disciplines, an improvisatory approach might open us to playful liberatory practices that let us sing in a register beyond the institutional power structures, like an overtone above a melody.

Following the above activity, or another of your own devising, we leave you with a set of questions to reflect on transformative moments in your classrooms:

How do you recognize what is "transformative" in your body? In your students' bodies?

When has learning been joyful for you as a student and as a teacher? What is pleasurable about learning?

Have you shared these experiences with your students? What shifts in the classroom when you open space for storytelling?

What would happen if you stopped trying to control dissonance and mess in your classroom?

What learning can be had when we move forward into dissonance?

Notes

1 See Sandoval (2002, 21).
2 Social justice scholars, artists, and activists who we reference for decolonizing education include: hooks (1994 (2014), 13), Lorde (1984), Helguera (2011), Adams et al. (2018), and Dixon et al. (2020).
3 Scholars who have made this call to the field include: Alan Liu (2012); Roopika Risam (2018); Coppélie Cocq (2021).
4 See Sandoval (2002, 21).
5 "WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard."
6 See Beirich (2022).
7 "Research on Police Violence."
8 See Goñi-Lessan (2023).
9 See hooks (1994 (2014), 13).
10 See Kaba (2021).
11 See Anzaldúa and Keating (2013).
12 Cherrie See Moraga and Anzaldúa (2015).
13 See Lorde (1984, 36).
14 For one of us, these anthologies hold a significant impact on the completion of their formal education.
15 See Anzaldúa (1987, 81).
16 See Lorde (1984, 39).
17 See Anzaldúa (2015, 5).
18 See Piepzna-Samarasinha (2022).
19 One place to start for resources on teaching cultural histories and activism alongside art is the Zinn Education Project: https://www.zinnedproject.org/.
20 See Oliveros (2005).
21 To learn more, visit www.sharonbridgforth.com.
22 See Bubenik (2022).
23 See Fry (2021).
24 See Chavez (2021, 98).
25 Anzaldúa (1987, 81).
26 See Symborzka. This is an excerpt from Symborzka's poem, "Children of Our Age."
27 Scholar Susan Michelle Merriam founded Bard College's "Mobile History Van," which operates under the umbrella of Bard's Digital History Lab (Merriam 2018). This van "uses digital technology to record and publish local history, and has worked closely with a local library and museum on digitizing archival materials and recording community history." *Torn Apart/Separados*, a project "aggregates and cross-references publicly available data to visualize the geography of Donald Trump's 'zero tolerance' immigration policy in 2018 and immigration incarceration in the USA in general." This project, created by scholars Manan Ahmed, Alex Gil, Moacir P. de Sá Pereira, Roopika Risam, Maira E. Álvarez, Sylvia A. Fernández, Linda Rodriguez, and Merisa Martinez, also brings attention to "to the landscapes, families, and communities riven by the massive web of immigrant detention in the United States" (Torn Apart/Separados). The FemTechNet *Critical Race and Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Workbook* is "an ongoing project to build resources for faculty members who are often overburdened at their home institutions, but are willing to take on the difficult task of teaching about gender and racial inequity in our information culture" (Cong-Huyen et al.). At Dartmouth College, The Black Sound Lab is "dedicated to the intersections of Black sonic life and digital work. The dual missions of the BSL are to work towards the decriminalization of Black sound and to amplify Black life through digital practice" (Dartmouth College Digital Humanities and Social Engagement Center).
28 Yes, 35 mm slides were educational technology! For fascinating discussions of the history of educational technologies, see Good (2020), Dellman and Kessler (2020), Bak (2020).
29 Gloría Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga introduced the term "theory of the flesh" in the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* in 1981.

30 More information about these artists and writers can be found at: Favianna Rodriguez: https://favianna.com/; Sonya Renee Taylor: https://www.sonyareneetaylor.com/; Alok Vaid Menon: https://www.alokvmenon.com/.
31 Nyamnjoh, Francis B. 2019. ICTs as Juju: African Inspiration for Understanding the Compositeness of Being Human through Digital Technologies. Conference Digital Humanities Conference, Utrecht University, The Netherlands, 9 th – 12 th July, 2019 by Francis B. Nyamnjoh. https://staticweb.hum.uu.nl/dh2019/dh2019.adho.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Nyamnjoh_Digital-Humanities-Keynote_2019.pdf.
32 See Jones (2015).
33 See hooks (1994 (2014), 10).
34 See Arbuckle and Rogers (2024).

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