

Friction and Failure in the Secondary Art Classroom: Cultivating Decolonial Transformative Pedagogies of Hope

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Abstract

This article explores how the colonisation of women's bodies, as perpetuated through the art trope of the female nude, has constructed a specific bodily ideal that still resonates and informs how we view women's bodies in contemporary life. I address how the same narratives that restrict our understanding of the female body, also restrict our understanding of drawing. I share part of my PhD practice research: PhEminist Skins of Resistance, a project conducted in my school, which sought to decolonise the legacy of the female nude and support the empowerment of the young women artists who populate the classrooms in which I teach. Theoretically informed by PhEmaterialism (feminist posthumanism and new materialism research methodologies in education), material agency is positioned as vital to an embodied learning experience and situates how I (re)position life drawing as a tool to re-imagined and disrupt heteronormative and raced colonial imaginings of the female body. I further explore how this project created space within the secondary art classroom for creative-activism, and the power of such learning environments to reach out beyond the constraints of neo-liberal educational structures and inspire transformative pedagogies of hope.

Keywords

creative activism, decolonisation, life drawing, phEmaterialism, transformative pedagogies

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Introduction

We see images of women's bodies on a daily basis, the glossy film of the magazine, the shiny surface of advertising screens, cinema screens, social media content, the access to imagery has never been so pervasive. What interests me when I see such imagery is understanding how the legacy of Western art, specifically the art trope of the female nude, has constructed and perpetuated specific bodily ideals that still resonate and inform how we entangle, both physically and ideologically, with women's bodies and our own bodies in contemporary life. I explore how this bodily ideal, generally perceived as white, abled bodied, heterosexual, youthful and slim (Nead 1992), perpetuates gendered, sexist and racist ideologies that feed into art and educational narratives. How do these histories not only impact on the bodies of the young women that I teach in terms of their mental health but also, intriguingly, how do these histories also resonate through contemporary secondary art educational practices and restrict our (Western) understanding of drawing? A perception that often aligns with a desire to create a photo-realistic image, one that Meskimmon & Sawdon (2016) explain is based on copying and reproduction. I argue these histories permeate through the English art education system to the detriment of its learners and its educators and through systems of post-colonial and neo-liberal structures. However, it is also by being situated in the middle of these histories that I suggest creating the necessary friction to activate the potential for decolonised pedagogies of hope (hooks 2003).

This article offers insights from my PhD project 'PhEminist Skins of Resistance Decolonising the Female Nude through practice research¹ with Young Women artists' (Stanhope 2022) and reflects on the colonial residue that constructs the educational space in which I work, as well as Western art historical narratives that inform the subject that I teach. I share creative processes from the PhEminist Skins project where (re)viewing life drawing through a decolonial lens created possibilities for transformative pedagogies of hope.

To support these explorations, I drew from phEmaterialism (Ringrose *et al.* 2015), a disruptive theory that entwines feminist post-humanism and new materialism research methodologies in education (note the conflation of the 'ph' of post-humanism with the 'f' of feminism and the capitalisation of the E to position education as the focus). This is an ethically led methodology, that destabilises colonial and humanist hierarchies and actively attends to the agency of matter and materiality as forms of meaning-making. It places creative practice as central to the research and supports alternative forms of knowledge making, deviating from the traditional 'academically' driven narratives and neo-liberal ideologies that pervades secondary English education and academia. The PhEminist Skins project was developed with a phEmaterialist ethics of care at its core, with the aim to attend to the needs of the participants through an evolving structure rather than one that was predetermined. Creative practice supports the care-ful nature of this research as it provides an outlet for 'difficult to articulate feelings' (Renold & Ringrose 2019), which can then be activated to support the empowerment of young people. This focus on 'art-ful practices to craft and communicate experience' (Renold & Ringrose 2019, 2), disrupts traditional understandings of data collection creating opportunity for da(r)ta (arts informed data) and questions what data can 'do' (Coleman & Ringrose 2013, 2). This call to activate the da(r)ta is key to this project, to re-claim the colonial history of the female nude and life drawing as a process for empowerment.

The PhEminist Skins project was undertaken at my place of work, an all-girls' secondary school in Southeast London, England, where I hold the post of Head of Art. I worked with 6 years 9 students (13–14 years old): Bethany, Christie, Lienne, Lily, Nadia and Tabitha (Figure 1), who collectively called themselves Young Women artists (YWAs).² The project took place over the course of a term from September to December and consisted of various creative sessions, or what I termed explorations. Each exploration was developed in response to the YWAs, their needs, concerns and desires. The explorations included an initial thought mapping session which brought the YWAs together to share their experiences around body image. This evolved into the media collaging exploration which supported a discussion about the influence of contemporary media imagery, a recurring point of interest in the mapping session. This then fed into the next exploration which discussed the historical underpinning of media imagery through exploring the history of the female nude, which scaffolded the final session which was a life drawing class. The culmination of the project was then left open for the YWAs to activate their experiences from these explorations (if they so wished), which evolved into the 'Perfect' exhibition. For the purposes of this article, I will concentrate on two aspects of the research, the life class and an element of the Perfect exhibition called 'Skin Canvas'.³ These two elements provide an interesting insight into how



Figure 1
The YWAs Outside the Perfect Exhibition Held at 310 Gallery, Goldsmiths, University of London. Stanhope, C. (2013).

creative practice can be activated to support the empowerment of young people, and therefore activate transformative pedagogies of hope.

To support such pedagogical transformations, there is a need to position myself, as the practice researcher, within the colonial histories that have shaped my life both personally and professionally. Transformative pedagogies of hope are not something we can facilitate if we position ourselves as outside of the problem. For example, how do I pay attention to the complex colonial histories that I am still unlearning? How do I support students from diverse backgrounds, including students from white heritage as well as former British colonies, to feel empowered to question these histories when they are in an educational system that actively shuts down such conversations? And in terms of art education, taking into account my own position of (re)learning much of my presumed knowledge from my own education, how can I ensure I am not perpetuating entrenched colonial narratives through my curriculums? Such questions collapse a linear concept of time bringing past, present and future histories into collision, and so it is here where I start.

Friction and failure: Colonial context of the English education system

Although I have a long history of working within a neoliberal educational context, it was with the change of British Government in 2010 that the educational landscape shifted dramatically. An emphasis on reconfiguring the education system to create one in which students are positioned as 'productive economic entrepreneurs' became the focus for the then education secretary Michael Gove. Gove's vision of a 'world class education system' which would 'equip [young people] to win the global race' (Gove quoted in Adams 2013) emphasised academic competition and monetary success on a global scale. The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) was thus introduced with an emphasis on 'rigour' in the curriculum (Gove 2014). The EBacc consists of English, maths, science, a language and a humanities subject, which Nicholas Addison and Lesley Burgess (Addison & Burgess 2013) have argued is a replica of the 1866 Victorian curriculum, which 'regresses to a set of subjects designed to fortify the British Empire' (1). Such practices were heightened when Gove restricted subject matter to what he deemed "celebrate[ed] the distinguished role of these islands in the history of the world" and portray Britain as "a beacon of liberty for others to emulate" (Gove, cited in Higgins 2011). This meant texts that dealt with empire or shared diverse heritage became optional units in the curriculum and that black and Asian British history was side-lined in mainstream education (Leach *et al.* 2020).

Teacher Standards (DfE 2011) became imbued with the drive to teach 'British Values' and embedded Eurocentric and colonial narratives more deeply in the English curriculum. When giving one of her first speeches as Chief Inspector of Ofsted, Amanda Spielman (Spielman 2017) discussed British values as follows,

The active promotion of British values' means giving young people a real civic education. The sort of education that teaches young people not just what British values are, but how they were formed, how they have been passed down from generation to generation and how they make us a beacon of liberalism, tolerance and fairness to the rest of the world. (n.p.n)

The focus on 'not just what British values are, but how they were formed' stood out to me as a point of interest. To understand how these values were formed would surely mean attending to British colonial histories and needed a discussion around the residue of these histories that still pervades English curriculums (Phoenix 2010). This was of particular interest to me as I had grown up in a small town in the greater Manchester region, an area shaped by the industrial revolution. I grew up well-versed in this heritage, my links to the cotton mills through my paternal ancestors' labours and therefore the plight of the working poor very much a narrative of my early childhood. This education provided me with a proud ancestry and clear moral indicators of political and social ontologies. It was, however, not the material substance of these histories that later came under scrutiny but what was absent from this education. The fact that the fabric my town was so proud of producing (cotton) was tied to the trans-Atlantic slave trade was missing from the narrative of the museum and from my education which left a gaping hole in the socialist foundations of my heritage. To put this gaping hole into context,

In the first half of the nineteenth century it was possible for the slaves in the Southern states [of America] to spend most of their lives producing cotton that stoked Britain's Industrial Revolution. By the time of America's civil War in 1861 almost two million slaves laboured in the cotton fields, and New Orleans was linked to Liverpool by a ceaseless flow of slave-produced cotton. (Olusoga 2016, 26)

Liverpool directly fed the cotton mills of the Northwest, including the mills in my hometown. As historian David Olusoga explains, ignoring these facts results in 'the whitewashing of British history', which 'amounts to a cultural blind spot about these chapters from our past' (26). The words of art historian Alice Proctor (2020) particularly resonate here, when she says, 'It is hard to hear that the things you have been taught and have taken for granted about your national history are not necessarily true' (11).

Consequently, when Gove (2009), former Secretary of State for Education, argued for the right of every child to access their 'cultural inheritance', the problem was to whose cultural inheritance he was referring? As Rasheed Araeen (2013) states, 'It is common knowledge that what is being taught as art history in Britain is racially constructed in favour of the white race and at the expense of those who are not' (107). In the context of art education, one example can be seen through the repetitive narratives that oppress certain bodies within art history, the broader implications of this also include the gendered, sexist, ageist, ableist, heteronormative narratives that are sedimented and perpetuated through this complex history. Colonial legacy is, therefore, entangled with all aspects of our lives, both the colonised and the colonisers. We are all part of the same net, albeit entangled in different ways. In the white Western context, according to Olusoga (2016), colonialism has created a vacuum of knowledge, a discomfort in addressing the legacy of these bloody and shameful histories and how they resonate through our bodies and our actions to this day. In the following section, I give an example of how this inherited blind spot of the colonial endeavour scaffolded my perception within a life class back in 2011. It was only during the process of unlearning the narratives around the female nude that my original understanding of the structures at play in this life class began to unravel and highlighted the gaps in my previous article *Beauty and the Beast: Can life drawing support female students in challenging gendered media imagery?* (Stanhope 2013).

Friction and failure in the life class

Although the 2011 life class was not set up as a research project, the experiences from this class led to me undertaking the PhD. At this point, I held a yearly life class where all art students had the opportunity to participate, it was from my observations during this particular class that I was struck by the discomfort felt by some of the young women when confronted with a naked female body. After discussions with the students involved after the class, I initially read the discomfort as being agitated by the patriarchal residue imbued in the life drawing class, a space where the female body is a vessel, an object generally positioned by a male artist to be viewed by men (Nead 1992). Although this was certainly at play, what I failed to notice in the writing up of this experience (Stanhope 2013) was how the colonial legacy also entangled in this space. The history of erasure that has denied certain bodies the 'high art' status of the female nude is also entwined in the constructs of the life drawing space and the identities of the students that inhabit them. This position being infused with a white feminism, blinkered by my own generalised interpretation of the experience and failing to address the history of the various racialised identities and experiences of the students within the space (Picower 2009). As educational and social activist bell hooks (2003) argues,

We may unwittingly collude with structures of dominance because of the way learning is organised in institutions. Or we may gather material to teach that is non-biased and yet present it in a manner that is biased, thus reinforcing existing oppressive hierarchies. (45)

My failure to notice my collusion with colonial histories surfaced in that 2011 life class brought into sharp focus the need for troubling throughout my practice, paying attention to unconscious bias (Picower 2009), white fragility (DiAngelo 2018), and white privilege (McIntosh 1997). As Martha Mahoney (1997) explains '[p]art of white privilege ... is not seeing all we have and all we do, and not seeing how what we do appears to those defined as "other"' (331). Or as Rosi Braidotti (2011) states, what we are surrounded by daily 'escapes self-scrutiny in that it is so familiar, so close, that one does not even see it' (16). Whilst these histories and experiences of 'not seeing' bring with them uncomfortable feelings of guilt and perhaps shame, and there's no doubt that is an integral part of any evolution that we should sit with these feelings and acknowledged them, but then there is the need to activate them. Emotions such as guilt and shame promote self-absorbed introspective responses that do little to change anything. As art historian Proctor (2020) powerfully argues, such emotions can be paralysing but they are not 'inherited ... responsibility is' (11). To make oneself accountable is a call to action from within these complex histories. A destabilising of humanist history is, importantly, not a turn away from colonial histories, but a place from within which to resist; a pedagogical positioning that harnesses the friction into an active process of unlearning and importantly, re-imagining.

To create space for decolonising and unlearning in the context of Western neoliberal education, I seek support from hooks (2003) and her important work *A Pedagogy of Hope*. The focus around 'hope' as a tool for making an 'anti-racist choice' orients this practice research towards accepting that this evolving project is not a conclusive answer to a set of problems. As hooks (2003) explains, this commitment to anti-racist practice does not mean that 'mistakes' won't be made, but it is the ambition to create an open practice that when mistakes are made, we can

'face it and make needed repair' (hooks 2003, 61). Hope, for hooks, is therefore an orientation towards the future. It moves within colonial and patriarchal discourse but actively makes an anti-racist choice, facing problems as they arise and finding ways through. As she states, 'no-one is born a racist. Everyone makes a choice' (hooks 2003, 53). This critically engaged teaching is embedded in working *with* people and communities to cut across 'Imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchal values' (hooks 2003, 1). As Camilla Stanger (2018) extrapolates,

Under this hooksian framework, the future is not the precarious and risky place it is within a neoliberal discourse of education, in need of pinning down and securing through a string of qualifications; it is instead a space for possibility and (social and political) change. (53)

In this space of possibility, hooks (2003) aims to create a practice of freedom where all collaborators in the classroom space are supported through empowered becomings. She instils ideas of a 'classroom without boundaries' free from the white capitalist patriarchy (hooks 2003, 13), arguing that radical possibilities can emerge in the move from disembodied, sterile learning environments that perpetuate white middle-class values, to emotionally charged settings. The PhEminist Skins project sought to create space for 'possibility' by attending to the failures outlined above and activate them through collaborative creative practice. It is important to note that I view failure in the process of this project as vital. Accepting failure as part of the process means there is a continuous effort to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway 2016), acknowledging that when mistakes are made, I seek to make repair (hooks 2003). The failings in my practice therefore open-up opportunity for transformation.

Friction and failure: The raced skin in art history

Before I explore the potential of life drawing as a transformative pedagogy of hope, I need to directly attend to the history of the female nude and its racialised legacy which prompted these investigations. Although I cannot do justice to the complex and often paradoxical histories of the racialisation of the black skin in European contexts, and there are a vast number of texts that more eloquently provides such overviews (see Connor 2004; Nelson 2005; Olusoga 2016; Adi 2019), I want to highlight the emergence of the racialised black skin as a way of understanding the contemporary ramifications of such histories on the perception of the female body through the construct of the female nude. The skin in art history becomes a malleable political tool, used to subjugate 'other' people of non-white complexions. Charmaine Nelson (2005) discusses this as a device to embed idealisations of female beauty as whiteness,

The black female subject has a strained relationship to the history of Western visual art: frequently represented, yet often as an abject sexual and racial body, the polar opposite of the idealised white female subject. (45)

With this aspect of colonialism, the black body, specifically the black woman's body is subject to a particular form of pathologisation, 'Conceived within the terms of racial denigration, black women's bodies were reduced to signs of sexual abnormality' (Nead 1992, 74). Black women's skin became defined as ugly, overtly sexualised, erotised and positioned as the 'moral opposites of pure white women' (Leeds

Craig 2006, 163). This manifested in scientific experiments on colonised subjects, trying to solidify the ‘difference and superiority of the ‘white race’” (Ahmed 2002, 49).

The most notorious example of this is the exploitation of Saartjie Baartman, of the Khoikhoi people of South Africa, who was transported to London and Paris in 1810 (Gilman 1985). More famously known as the ‘Hottentot Venus’, she was exhibited for her ‘primitive genitalia’, although the focus was mainly on her large bottom (Gilman 1985, 235). Even in death, her body became a scientific specimen exhibited in L’Museum de l’Homme in Paris. As Sara Ahmed (2002) states, ‘It is not simply that the black woman’s body becomes an object of knowledge: rather she becomes seen *as body*, and as a body that is excessive, sexualised and primitive’ (53; emphasis in original). In this dichotomy, the black body is positioned in stark contrast to the white female nude, a symbol of white femininity and protected through submission to the colonial, patriarchal forms of western ‘high art’.

Friction and failure: The colonised line

Reading the life drawing space in terms of these colonial histories, and how this legacy infiltrates our perception of the drawn line, became the focus of my research. I discuss this in terms of the ‘colonised line’ which defines a drawing practice taken from the Western art historical desire for verisimilitude, a perfect copy. In terms of the educational space, the colonised line also refers to what Mick Maslen and Jack Southern call the ‘left-brain dominant’ space, ‘structured to encourage and develop rational and linear, a, b, c, sequenced sense of order, logic and reason’. In such a space, the colonial lines of regulatory practice are seen in competitive testing, end grades over process and in situations where ‘students are encouraged to collude with the system, by learning to answer teachers’ questions with the ‘right’ teachers’ answer’ (Maslen & Southern 2011, 12). Maslen & Southern (2011) argue that societal influences seep into the classroom space, and when the world is focused on ‘perfect reproduction’, then such ideals also restrict the notion of drawing and what drawing should also look like. The drawn line is a visual metaphor for the constraints of women’s bodies in Western art history as well as the neo liberal structures of the English education system.

If we look at some examples of students’ first drawings from various life drawing sessions between in 2010 and 2013 (Figure 2) these representational ideals are highlighted. Very similar lines are repeated as our eyes pass along the row of drawings. All the drawings in the images involve a heavy outline of the body, or what Meskimmon & Sawdon (2016) call a ‘closed line’. Such drawings, as seen in the life class images are waiting to be ‘filled in’ with lines and marks that can continue to draw out the learnt ‘truth’ of the object they seek to depict. Diminishing the artwork to a simple object of representation is, as Simon O’Sullivan (2006) explains, a ‘non-encounter’, and is an act of confirming what we already know about the world, or more importantly I would argue, what we have been *taught* about the world.

Having witnessed the repetition of these initial ‘colonised’ drawings created at the start of every life class, I was not surprised to see the same approach mimicked by YWAs. The following extracts are from an interview with the YWAs discussing their initial life drawings, (Figure 3),



Figure 2
Initial Life Drawings Showing the Concept of the Colonised Line. Stanhope, C. (2012).

Lienne: At the beginning I felt it was challenging as I was trying to draw everything I saw, make it very precise. Her body was very detailed, so I was kind of frustrated that I wasn't able to execute this certain area very well.

Presumably, Lienne's intention here is representation. An understanding of the purpose of the line which has been sedimented throughout art history, the containing line colonises not only the paper but the mind. As physicist and scholar Karan Barad (2003) suggests,

Representationalism is so deeply entrenched within Western culture that it has taken on a common sense appeal. It seems inescapable, if not downright natural. But representationalism (like "nature itself," not merely our representations of it!) has a history. (806)

This 'entrenched' desire for representation can be seen in the following extract when Tabitha explains how an idea of what her drawing should look like already existed in her brain.

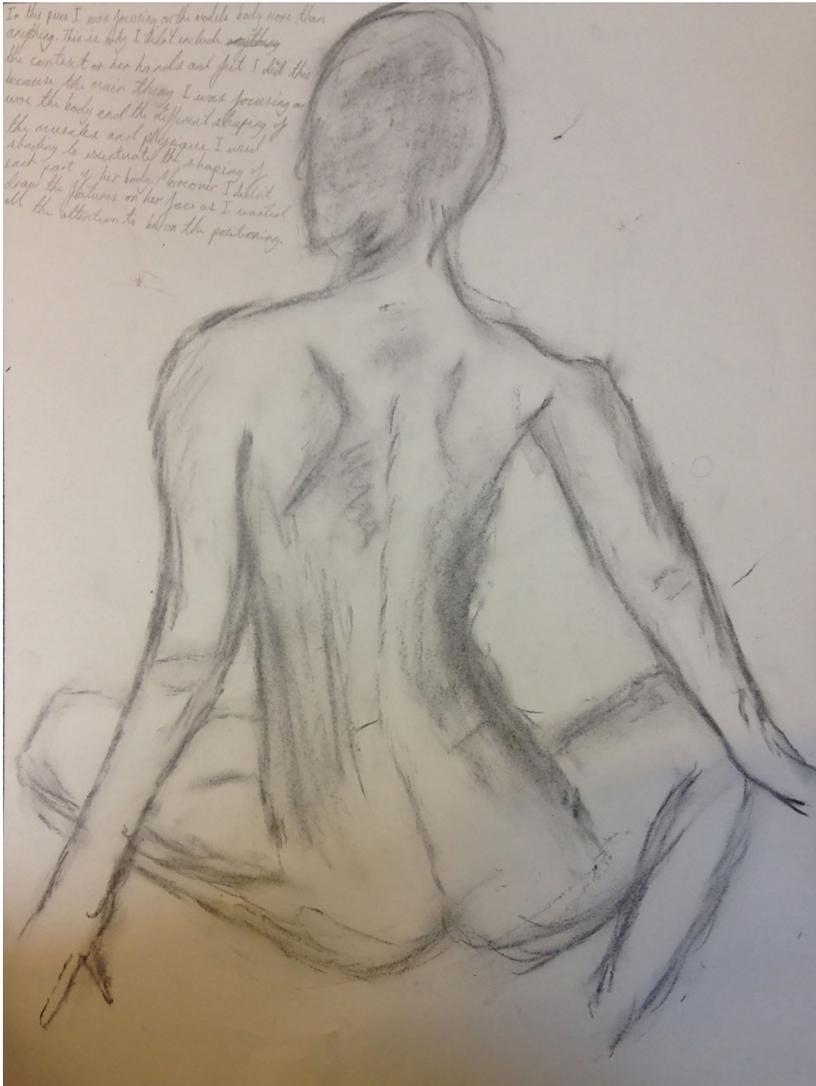


Figure 3

Example of an Initial Life Drawings from the PhEminist Life Drawing Exploration by Lily One of the YWAs. Stanhope, C. (2013).

Tabitha: I think the most challenging part is actually trying to get the right figures and make sure everything is accurate. So that it doesn't look too different from the model, or doesn't look like what you expected it to ... Initially I thought that because my brain or brains in general have a specific idea of how things are supposed to be even if we're looking at a perfect thing or the right thing. So initially I thought that's how I should draw it.

We can see in this extract an example of what Maslen & Southern (2011) refer to as colluding with an educational system where 'competitive testing is the predominant norm' and the student desires 'the right answer' (12). In terms of

understanding the purpose of drawing, this binarises the process in terms of 'good' and 'bad' drawings.

As Christie explained, she found the initial drawing difficult because she is 'not that good at drawing people', where Bethany describing it more in terms of failure,

Bethany: None of these [drawings] are perfect, they are all kinda messy and confusing and something I wouldn't usually ... be happy with them. Ermm I guess I was like when your drawing or anything, if it's not a woman if it's anything, especially painting figures you always kinda have something in your mind, how it should look, and if you don't get it perfectly, or if you, if you don't have it, if it doesn't look the same, like I feel, like I have kind of failed.

Bethany's desire to create a perfect reproduction of the model is apparent here, and the assembling of various learnt colonial narratives all come to the fore and provide visual examples of how the colonised line restricts understanding of the body into very specific forms of mark making as seen in these art works.

Decolonising the line: Reclaiming life drawing

Although I argue the line has been colonised in the life drawing context, it is also through drawing that the line can be retaken and holds within its structures the potential to create 'space for possibility' (hooks 2003). Tim Ingold (2007) provides an interesting provocation when he suggests a shift in how we view the parchment as to whether it is a surface to be explored, like a 'landscape to be travelled or a story to be told, or a space to be colonized' (39). To situate a phEmaterialist approach to life drawing as an ever-morphing assemblage that supports the multi-faceted needs of the YWAs, Barad (2003) offers particular inspiration through her theory of 'intra-action'. Intra-action dissolves the binary relationship between human and non-human entities. Shifting from *inter*-action between objects, Barad (2003) argues that human and non-human entities are affected through *intra*-acting with each other. She states,

Practices of knowing and being are not isolatable, but rather they are mutually implicated. We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because "we" are of the world. (829; emphasis in original)

This idea of shifting from a drawing approach that positions us as separate from the drawing to one where we become with and through the drawing. This was how the life class was framed, supporting the YWAs to become more emotive in their mark making enabling a diffraction of the colonised line. Bethany described this process as moving from 'trying to get [the model] just perfectly' in the initial drawing (Figure 3), to having more 'fun' in the later drawings (Figure 4). This idea of 'fun' not only alludes to Barad's notion of 'intra-action', a process that is felt viscerally, but is also at odds with the neoliberal learning process which is driven by ideals of competition. Dennis Atkinson (2018) describes this further as 'the pedagogical subject of prescribed pedagogies is conceived almost completely in terms of productivity relating to economic ambition' (198). Having 'fun' therefore, is what Atkinson (2018) would term 'disobedient', which he elaborates more clearly as follows,



Figure 4

Example of One the Later Life Drawings from the PhEminist Life Drawing Explorations by Line One of the YWAs. Stanhope, C. (2013).

Disobedient pedagogies, ... involve a continual inventive interweaving of ontology and ethics which, when confronting disobedient objects or aberrant ways of learning/practicing, may open up new possibilities for practice and new ways of understanding art. (199)

The drawings that evoke emotion, that are 'fun' in this context, pull us into the image, into the making process, so that the visceral nature of the

experience resonates for much longer after the piece has been completed. This material reverberation holds within it the potential to diffract future drawings,

Lily: I think it's [the drawing process] kind of reflective of how a person may feel about themselves, like they are trying to strive for perfection when really you should just accept you for who you are. I think it was kind of indirectly telling us throughout the process of the day to do that.

The drawing process here reframes the colonial narrative of the female nude and diffracts not only how the YWAs approached drawing, but importantly, created space for them to reflect on how they relate to their bodies.

Cultivating decolonial transformative pedagogies of hope: Re-imaging life drawing

Drawing in this context became a process with which to disrupt colonial restrictions of the female form and become a tool for future 'intra-activism' (Renold & Ringrose 2019). What was fascinating, was how the YWAs reimagined life drawing as a process of empowerment. As previously mentioned, the project was open-ended, to support the YWAs in having agency over their experiences. They decided to hold an exhibition of their work where their peers could not only see what they had experienced through the project but also engage with their findings in a more visceral way. The YWAs wanted their audience to understand the deep-rooted history that constructs a Western understanding of beauty and perfection, but they also wanted to challenge any negative emotions their audience may have had towards their own body. They did this through the Perfect exhibition and a particular workshop called 'Skin Canvas'.

Skin Canvas was a temporary tattoo parlour where the audience was invited to enter into a conversation about perceptions of the 'perfect' female body and what the impact of this might be on them. The audience member was asked to write an insecurity on a piece of paper, which one of the YWAs would then read and through a conversation around what had been written, would turn the negative comment into an affirmation and tattoo the affirmation onto the audience member's skin using henna. For example, someone who had said 'I don't like myself' would have this phrase reversed in the henna tattoo so that it became: 'I love myself' (Figure 5). Once the statement had been applied to the skin the audience member was invited to rip up their statement, symbolising what the YWAs described as 'turning a negative into a positive'. The act of having these conversations, of ripping up the paper and having a trace of the conversation imprinted on the skin, brought the audience directly into the action, to experience what Renold (2018) describes as the 'affective and embodied practice of creating through and with experience' (49). This act supported empowered and hopeful redefinitions of the future for both the YWAs and the audience. The tattoos also became a physical diffracture of life drawing, a visceral and embodied life drawing. Or as I came to describe them, phEminist skins of resistance, an example of a transformative pedagogy of hope.



Figure 5

'I love myself' Henna Tattoo, Part of the Perfect Exhibition. Stanhope, C. (2013).

Concluding comments

In this article, I have shared the need to sit with the friction and failure of our practice, to constantly confront colonial heritage that is infused in both personal and professional spaces. When we do then there is a possibility for a pedagogy of hope to be activated enabling empowerment and, hopefully, change. It was only by acknowledging the deficits within my initial reading of a life class in 2011, getting comfortable with the discomfort, that enabled a deeper understanding of what applying a decolonial lens to my practice meant. A shift from the usual linear process of educational narratives to being part of a collaboration, actively working *with* others (both human and non-human) to question, to trouble and ultimately decolonise our curriculums.

The journey of the YWAs during the project was one of empowerment. Shifting from their desire for a 'perfect' drawing at the start of the life class, a desire that created much anxiety, through to them embracing more expressive forms of mark making. This allowed for alternative narratives to evolve, as their drawings became more open to expression, so too did their confidence in challenging patriarchal and colonial narratives of the female nude. Life drawing became the tool through which they could resist their past experiences and reimagine an empowered and hopeful future. Their life drawings lifted off the parchment to the skin, becoming an embodied drawing, leaving a trace on their audience that lasted far beyond the walls of the exhibition. A reminder to resist past insecurities and reclaim future possibilities. Life drawing both transformed and transformative, a pedagogy of hope in action.

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Endnotes

1. The conflation of practice and research (practice research is inspired by the feminist post-humanist Donna Haraway 2003) in her conflation of 'nature-culture'. Haraway positions nature and culture as so tightly interwoven that separation is impossible which I emulate.
2. YWAs (Young Women Artists) A collective term for the group chosen by the students. The phrase was chosen with care to describe their collective identity. The term has an obvious link to the YBAs (Young British Artists) of the 1990s' London art scene, although this connection was not made by the YWAs the links were a serendipitous alignment. The YBAs stood for new ways of looking at art, this reflected the YWAs' attitudes towards the project and was an integral position of this pH-materialist practice research.
3. The usual difficulties around gaining access to a school environment were not an issue in this project as it was held in my place of work. Furthermore, safeguarding checks such as a DBS (a Disclosure and Barring Service enables employers to check prospective employees' criminal history) or knowledge of the school's safeguarding policy, were things I already had or had access to.
Parental and student consent was gained for each of the participants involved, this not only ensured they had a clear understanding of the initial aims of the project but that students also had autonomy over their contributions and could drop out at any time if they so wished.
The life drawing session required a separate parental consent form due to safeguarding concerns of students drawing from an unclothed model, and it was a requirement that the model was female.
All images shared in this article have received the consent of each YWA as have all aspects of the interviews which are shared in this article.

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