

Strange Encounters: Creativity as a state of alterity in the early stages of design learning

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ABSTRACT

In the early years of architectural education, social and cultural, material and immaterial, ethical and aesthetic design considerations are introduced to novice learners. These design knowledges are often perceived by students as insufficiently defined and unfamiliar. As a result, students experience their initiation to creative thinking as an othering process, a state of alterity. The paper theorises the relationship of creativity and alterity in early years of design learning and discusses its pedagogical value by reflecting on the learning process of a design unit that brought together two inclusive drama groups and first- and second-year students of architecture.

KEYWORDS

architectural education, alterity, creativity, inclusion, accessibility



Figure 1:
Year 1 design studio, week 1 2021-
22, Bute Building, Welsh School of
Architecture (Welsh School
of Architecture 2022).

I n t r o d u c t i o n

In the early years of architectural education, social and cultural, environmental and technological, material and immaterial, ethical and aesthetic considerations of design are introduced to novice learners. These are also the years when common design principles and methods are established and architectural communication and representation skills are taught. Introduced to first-year cohorts primarily through *learning by doing pedagogies*, these design initiations are orchestrated as ice-breaking activities and are primarily hosted in architectural design studios (Fig.1). First-year students tend to perceive them as open-ended, insufficiently prescribed, and unfamiliar; and their introduction to architectural studies as the risky exploration of unfamiliar territories, a state of *alterity*.

The concepts of alterity and creativity are brought together in philosophical and sociological discourses of the 20th century. Gaining distance from Platonic and Kantian definitions of creativity, as divine inspiration or a gift, scholars of late modernity define it as a situated, cultural and occasionally a shared practice that transcends conventional knowledge.¹ Conversely, philosophers of alterity like Emmanuel Levinas and Cornelius Castoriadis, and sociologists like Jean Baudrillard and Marc Guillaume, define alterity not as the distorted projection of the self on the other but as an innovative way of being.² For Castoriadis, in particular, alterity is essentially a creative process that generates 'infinite qualities and quantities of lifeforms'.³ In all these definitions, creativity and alterity are discussed as transgressive and unpredictable processes, not as cultural products or categories.⁴ Metaphors of transgression support the two notions' conceptualisation and bring them closer in the relevant literature. From such a theoretical standpoint, this paper discusses

the pedagogical value that defining and orchestrating creativity as alterity holds for the early years of architectural education. It does so by looking at the learning process and impact of a vertical and live design unit organised by the Welsh School of Architecture for its first- and second-year students and the Hijinx Inclusive Theatre Company.

The live design unit titled Access and Inclusion: Barrier or Creative Tool for Performance Space Design was designed and led by Amalia Banteli, a lecturer at Welsh School of Architecture and performing member of the Hijinx Odyssey drama group, and Jon Dafydd-Kidd, the outreach coordinator of Hijinx Inclusive Theatre Company (Hijinx). The two unit leaders developed a theatrical stage-set design brief, which aimed to bring together first- and second-year students of architecture with members of two inclusive drama groups, Hijinx Odyssey and Hijinx Telemachus.⁵ Hijinx Odyssey is an inclusive drama group with performing adults with and without learning disabilities, while Telemachus consists primarily of 16- to 24-year old performers with and without learning disabilities. The Access and Inclusion unit invited first- and second-year students to:

- a) study the needs of another creative community (the Hijinx drama performers) by using literature reviews, performance games, theatrical improvisations, and ethnographic means;
- b) conceptually develop and present a number of design ideas for three theatrical stage-sets of Hijinx's upcoming performance; and
- c) reflect on their learning process and experience.

This paper discusses the pedagogical values and process of the Access and Inclusion unit in light of philosophical and sociological discourses of the 20th century on creativity as alterity. It argues that re-defining and orchestrating creativity as alterity while employing performing pedagogies in the early years of design learning can help educators appreciate the challenges and needs of their sensitive first-year cohorts. It can promote empathetic learning not only between tutors and students, but also between students and the diverse and volatile bodies that architecture cares for. Orchestrating creativity as alterity invites the employment of unconventional learning approaches and methods, and encourages the establishment of connections with other creative practices and communities. Finally, it provides a strong introduction for students of architecture to ethical and aesthetic design principles as essential conditions for creative and playful experimentation.

Creativity as alterity in year 1 design studios

As previously mentioned, creativity and alterity are often conceptualised and defined with references to metaphors of transgression. Discussing how the two notions relate to transgressive practices will help justify the pedagogical

alliances between design and performing arts that the Access and Inclusion unit adopted. It also helps us define essential terminology.

In his article 'Corporeality and its Fates in History', the sociologist Pasi Falk suggests that the notions of *corporeality* and transgression are interrelated.⁶ The notion of corporeality initially appears in philosopher George Bataille's writings on human sexuality and erotism.⁷ By reviewing the history of the term's definitions, Falk un-defines corporeality as synonymous with the body's biology or physiology. He argues that corporeality is a form of transgression, a movement from the body to the world and vice versa. Falk's definition of corporeality presupposes a scholarly acknowledgement of the cultural *orders* that constrain and define the human body. Cultural orders are not static. They are constantly negotiated.

Transgression is itself a transition to the other (non-normal) state, the sacred or festive world. But this time, from the point of view of corporeality, transgression also points to the breaking down and crossing of the borders confining and defining the body imposed by culture as an order.⁸

In 2003, Rob Imrie looked into present and absent corporealities from UK architectural education and practice. He noticed that human bodies are predominantly visualised as stable, canonical and normative in the frame of our discipline.⁹ Imrie advocates for an open-ended and flexible design education that is sensitised to diverse corporealities and supports the transgression of cultural orders.¹⁰ Imrie's and Falk's research on corporealities allows us to look at alterity as integral to being in the world, and not as an othering cultural category. Performing pedagogies are then key to exploring alterity as a spatial practice.

Initiations of first-year students to creative thinking and design learning are often supported by visual studies of imaginary corporealities, students' experience of space, and the development of small-scale design projects. Second- and third-year design curricula then prioritise developing large-scale and programmatically complex projects that serve the needs of social groups and communities (such as residential projects and civic buildings). By focusing on the development of large in-scale and more complex projects, later years of architectural education provide fewer opportunities for the in-depth study of distinct corporealities and their constantly negotiated needs. By prioritising the study of architectural experience as embodied and situated practice, first-year design curricula provide a fertile context for the in-depth study of distinct corporealities, and for discussions on architecture as an apparatus that constrains or challenges cultural orders. In the Welsh School of Architecture, these opportunities are often seized by orchestrating:

- sensory and performative explorations of particular locations (Fig.2);
- studies of scale and proportion through bodily surveys of experienced spaces (Fig.3);



Figure 2:
Sensory explorations of river Taff
trail (Welsh School
of Architecture 2020).

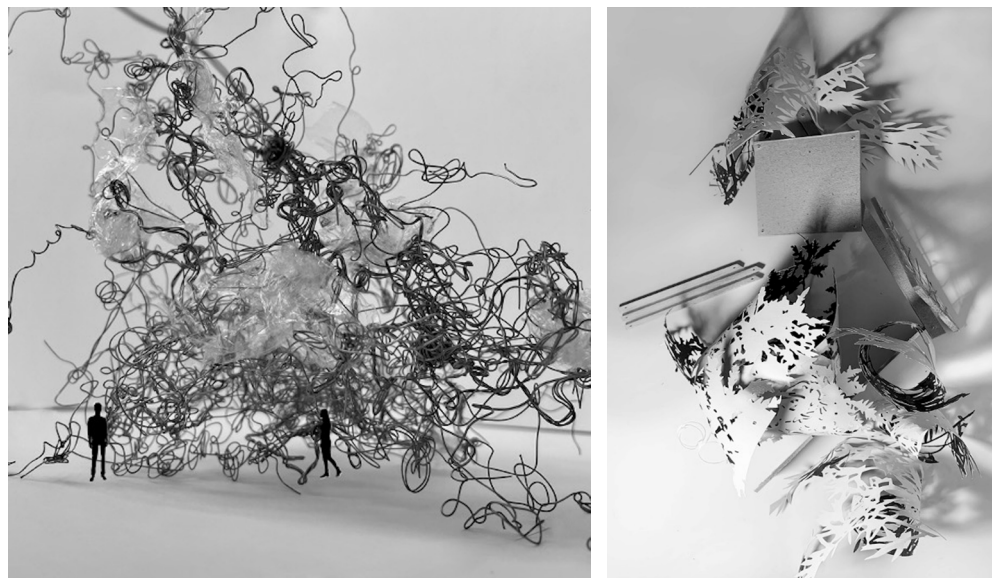


Figure 3:
Studies of scale and proportion
[left], and cabinet exercises
and right 3D memory
traces of sensory explorations
of river Taff [right] (Welsh School
of Architecture 2022).



Figure 4:
Design and construction of tools,
toys and furniture (Welsh School
of Architecture 2020).

- the design and construction of ephemeral tools, costumes and furniture (Fig.4); and
- visual studies of imaginary users' routines in the frame of simple and small-in-scale design projects.

In these ice-breaking activities that usually take place during the first semester and year, the educational focus falls on how imaginary dwellers of design projects or students' corporealities experience architecture.¹¹ In this pedagogical framework, architecture is mainly studied as a cultural condition, not as an apparatus that imposes cultural orders. Moreover, the primary medium that students employ to study these other corporealities is their own bodies. These self-referential approaches to the study of design dwellers encourage understanding others as distorted versions of the designer's self. Hence, two opportunities are lost: a) an opportunity to adopt a hetero-referential way of studying the design dweller, and b) an opportunity to acknowledge that first-year students are another transgressive corporeality and potentially an empathetic one.

In particular, first-year students transgress new social/cultural/educational environments and orders as they enter higher education and creatively occupy design studios and lecture theatres. As they leave their countries, neighbourhoods, and schools to embark on a new educational journey, they are both stressed and enthused by design activities, stretched when they apply old skills to new problems, intimidated when asked to adopt new skills swiftly, challenged when invited to critique their peers' work or to reflect on their own. As they transgress the new orders of design education, students may become defensive and less receptive to tutors' advice, reluctant to abandon old views or methods, demand explicit guidelines for the creative tasks they are given, feel guilty or disappointed when they compare their work to the work of more experienced others, become fearful of mistakes and failure. However, initiations to design learning and creative thinking are meant to be open-ended, insufficiently prescribed, and unfamiliar. This is why they are described by scholars as *threshold learning experiences*, experiences that transform the students through the learning process.¹² Architects Anthony Williams, Michael Ostwald and Haugen H. Askland suggest that risk-taking, through unconventional and unpredictable experimentation with old and new tools, is inherent to creativity.¹³ These uncomfortable experiences are not exclusively present in design learning. Psychologist and educator Lars Lindström argues that creativity comes with a strong sense of uncertainty and risk-taking.¹⁴ Philosopher Siegfried J. Schmidt sees in creativity, an effort to oppose the habitual and the mundane, and considers alterity as integral to creativity.¹⁵ Queer and disability theorist Robert McRuer looks into similar experiences when he explores creative writing and composition. McRuer suggests that the first encounter of a writer with a blank page is a meeting between two bodies: a familiar body and one in the making. This 'other' in-the-making body is one that we do not recognise when we first engage in the

creative process.¹⁶ In order to surpass this uncomfortable state of alterity, novice design learners have to temporarily abandon the gaze towards the self (self-referential, introverted) and focus on new creative possibilities that their transgression offers. These include possibilities offered by the design studio's space and tools, their learning peers and tutors, and the imaginary dwellers that give life to their design briefs (hetero-referential, extroverted). Hence, learning from real others pedagogies, i.e. *learning by doing* and *learning by watching others do* are both the critical cause and also the remedy for the othering experience of design learning.

Responding to these opportunities and challenges in February 2020, Banteli and Dafydd-Kidd designed and led the Access and Inclusion unit. The idea of the Access and Inclusion unit emerged in the frame of the Vertical Studio project, a two-week intensive and unassessed design course, which consisted of a number of experimental design units, organised and sponsored by the Welsh School of Architecture at Cardiff University. The Vertical Studio project was held right after the winter examination period and before the start of the second academic semester. It established creative synergies across the school's first- and second-year cohorts with a network of national and international creative collaborators that designed and led the design units, including architects, artists, curators, scientists, craftswomen/men, business consultants, activists, local trusts and communities. Using a voting system, student participants chose between a plethora of design units that were selected by the Vertical Studio's academic leadership because they explored and experimented with the boundaries of the discipline. Due to these learning objectives and its short duration (two weeks), the Vertical Studio project placed emphasis on the creative process, not its products. Moreover, it did not employ external motives for students' engagement, such as summative assessments, credits or monetary awards. Instead, it came to a close with an all-inclusive exhibition that allowed all units to present the learning process and outputs and reflect on their experience.¹⁷

In the Vertical Studio project, Banteli and Dafydd-Kidd found a unique opportunity to move from studies of experiencing alterity to studies of expressing it. Hence the two Hijinx drama groups became important allies in studying how alterity is expressed, how architecture can support cultural orders and their creative transgressions. Merging two distinct creative communities of novice learners, a designing and a performing one, allowed all participants to discuss different kinds of alterity, study them as creative transgressions, and cultivate empathetic bonds. The two creative groups shared the unfamiliarity that initiations to creativity trigger, exchanged creative skills, and explored how diverse and unstable corporealities navigate normative environments via performing games. The inclusivity that characterised the Hijinx drama groups encouraged empirical discussions on the importance of challenging the cultural orders that define normative and heteronormative corporealities through design. Hence, the two Hijinx drama groups became promising allies in this ambitious journey.

The Access and Inclusion unit: orchestrating creativity as alterity

The Access and Inclusion unit invited architecture students to explore the potential that access and inclusion principles held for the design of three theatrical stage-sets with the help of Hijinx performers. To do so, the unit was grounded in the live performance needs of the two drama groups, which were at the time working on the theatrical production of *Pinocchio and the Northern Lights*. The theatrical script was an adaptation of the children's novel *The Adventures of Pinocchio* written in 1883 by Carlo Collodi.¹⁸ The Hijinx scriptwriter worked with performers across a long period of time to understand how the text was interpreted and enacted by them and produced a play script that supported their needs and ambitions. These participatory co-creative cultures are integral to Hijinx's approach to inclusive performing arts. While they pollinated the design process of the unit, the unit's two-week structure could not support a rigorous participatory design process.¹⁹ In the limited time given, students were able to participate in theatrical improvisations, experience and observe the needs of the Hijinx performers, discuss the barriers and limitations that theatrical stages and stage-set designs often create for them, and co-invent strategies to address them in the stage-design of three separate scenes of the Pinocchio play: *Inside of the Whale*, *Geppetto Workshop*, and *Fairground*. Aiming to produce a portfolio of ideas and not a final design resolution, the Access and Inclusion unit presented reflective videos and audio accounts of the learning process and conceptual boards and models of the students' design ideas.

In particular, Week 1 started with an introduction to the unit's brief, with meetings between the students and performers and a literary and visual exploration of access and inclusion as design principles. Students and performers were divided into two working groups (Group A which engaged with the Hijinx Odyssey drama group, and Group B which engaged with Hijinx Telemachus) and were asked to conduct group research on precedents of inclusive stage sets and theatrical spaces. This split facilitated better engagement of architecture students in performing games and theatrical improvisations by creating two working groups of 11-12 participants, a typical number of students in design units at the Welsh School of Architecture. The two groups met regularly in design studios, shared their performing experiences and co-developed their design ideas. With their unconventional and occasionally naïve questions on diverse corporealities and the design process, first-year students opened fundamental discussions on normative perceptions of users, their distinct needs and architecture's ability to care for them. First-year students occasionally seemed equally uncomfortable with drawing and performing tools, acting as a bridge between the two novice creative communities. Second-year students shared their knowledge of representation tools, design analysis and synthesis with first-year students, and offered their advice on sourcing and selecting relevant precedents and literature. Hijinx performers took the lead in performing games and theatrical improvisations, and shared their critique of theatrical spaces and their



Figure 5:
In the performer's shoes,
improvisations and collective
enacting of a whale (Welsh School
of Architecture 2020).

ambitions for the stage-set design. The two instructors facilitated access to resources and ensured that discussions were comfortable and respectful for everyone. They also unravelled the complexity of the two design principles - access and inclusion - by enquiring about the reasons that they often seem contentious. Their discussions were enriched by the sharing of first-hand experiences and difficulties that neurodivergent and disabled performers face in performing arts spaces, as well as their creative aspirations and needs. Week 1 came to a close with an informal charrette, which supported knowledge sharing before design action by collectively reviewing a repository of relevant precedents and literature. The completion of Week 1 signified a passage from scholarly explorations to design ones and triggered meaningful comparisons between the two.

During Week 2, while engaging with the script of the three scenes, students joined the two drama groups again and brainstormed on the design of the three stage-sets. Each session lasted two hours and required a shift in participants' roles. At the beginning of the meetings, architecture students joined the performers in their warming-up exercises and improvisation routines (Fig.5), and by their end, performers engaged in brain-storming via



sketching activities led by architecture students (Fig.6). These slip-into-my shoes activities helped all creative participants to get to know each other, exchange knowledge, and share the awkwardness and risk-taking of creative thinking. With both students and performers engaged in unfamiliar activities, an empathetic bond was built that reminded all participants how strange and uncomfortable creative encounters feel, how negotiated all corporealities are, but also how intuitive heteronormative corporealities need to be to navigate our normative environments.

Figure 6:
In the architect's shoes,
participatory design (Welsh School
of Architecture 2020).

In the frame of the Week 2 improvisations, students and performers not only performed human roles but, due to the nature of the script, they also transgressed them, while enacting puppets, artefacts and animal protagonists (Fig.7). For instance, Pinocchio is a puppet and a child, an animated timber artefact abused by people and animals, and by extension, a heteronormative corporeality transgressing multiple cultural orders. They also engaged in architectural pantomime where they collectively enacted a workshop space, a kitchen space, a boat, a forest and a fun fayre (Fig.7). In these games, the Hijinx tutor took the lead and orchestrated action. Additionally, Hijinx members voiced their performing needs, stage-set difficulties and theatrical aspirations, while taking part in drawing and sketching activities that resembled design tutorials (Fig.8). In this second and design-led part of each session, the Welsh School of Architecture tutor helped participants co-develop



Figure 7:
Architectural pantomime
(Welsh School
of Architecture 2020).

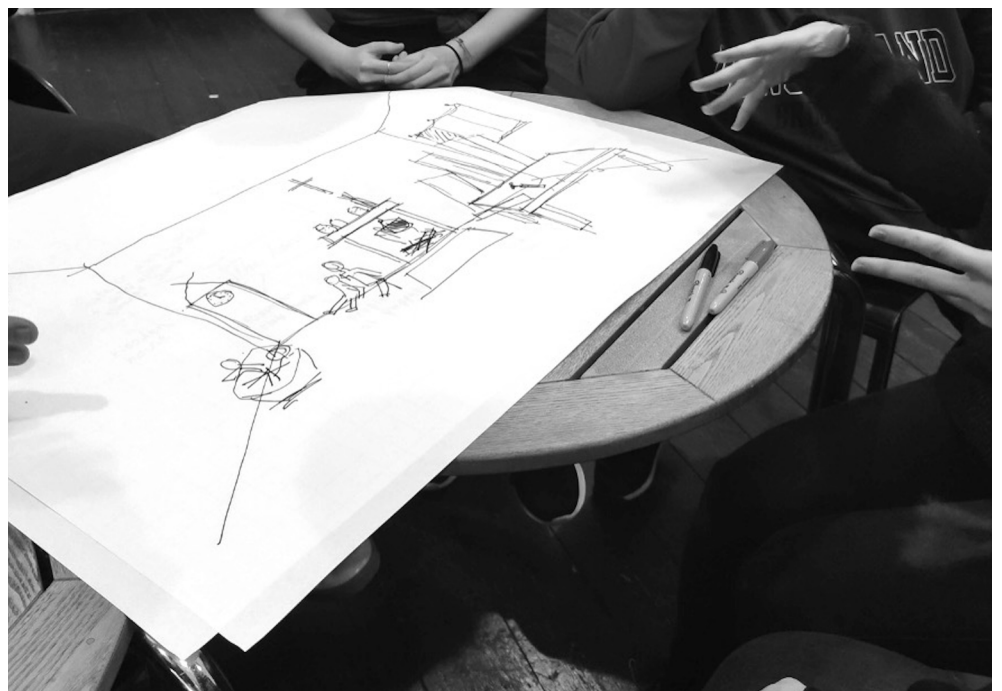


Figure 8:
Participatory design and conceptual
sketches (Welsh School
of Architecture 2020).



Figure 9:
Visit to the Welsh Millenium Centre
(Welsh School
of Architecture 2020).

ideas via sketching and dialogue. During these sessions, performers and first-year students relied more on discursive expressions of their thoughts, while second-year students acted as extended hands of a collective, design-thinking body.

Held in Hijinx rehearsal locations and outside of the comfort zone of the Welsh School of Architecture studios (at the time Hijinx was using the Norwegian Church at Cardiff Bay and the Tabernacle Church as rehearsal venues), Week 2 meetings differed significantly from the previous week. Week 1 meetings acted as icebreakers for both parties and were often dominated by the awkwardness and unfamiliarity that characterises encounters with new creative practices, while Week 2 sessions stretched creative boundaries and tested the potential of learning processes and relationships.

Access and Inclusion unit activities came to an end with a student-led discussion with the Hijinx art director at the Welsh Millennium Centre, where the final performance was to be hosted. In this last meeting, the theatrical stage was revisited and debated as a space designed to prioritise the comfort and pleasure of the audience (Fig.9). However, it was reviewed as an often difficult-to-navigate space for disabled and neurodivergent performers. The swift passage from back to front stage, threshold of theatrical illusion, emerged as particularly challenging for heteronormative corporealities. Discussions evolved around the ways that stage-set designers can negotiate that boundary, or stretch it and turn it into a welcoming space. They also touched upon anthropological thresholds and liminal spaces of everyday life, and the difficulties of transgressing them.²⁰ Finally, architecture students realised that performing corporealities essentially operate in two spaces: the permanent physical space of the theatre and the temporary narrative space of the script. Stage-set designers are then asked to facilitate this transgression by negotiating material and immaterial boundaries between the two spaces. The design of the three stage-sets was never meant to be fully resolved or



Figure 10:
Access and Inclusion
exhibition display
(Welsh School
of Architecture 2020).



Figure 11:
Design outputs exhibiting
conceptual maquettes
(Welsh School
of Architecture 2020).

final. After all, the stage design of any theatrical performance could not come to a complete and successful development in two weeks, especially while engaging novice designers. The Vertical Studio project and its design units placed emphasis on experimenting and reflecting on the design process. Traces of the learning process, like sketches, conceptual models and reflective videos with students' views were exhibited in a closing, public exhibition, which was hosted in Shift Cardiff, a multidisciplinary artist-led and collaborative space (Fig.10,11 & 12). In this closing event, the unit's participants opened a dialogue on access and inclusion as essential design principles for all kinds of creative productions.



Figure 12: Design process exhibition, Boards 1 & 2 (Welsh School of Architecture 2020).

The *Pinocchio and the Northern Lights* theatrical production was planned to debut in December 2020. Due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the play's development and actual performance underwent significant delays and changes while constrained by governmental rules and pandemic health and safety guidelines.²¹ Changes included restrictions to the number of actors that could be simultaneously on stage and their interaction with the audience. They also forced certain members of the Hijinx drama groups (that were expected to physically participate) to take part via pre-recorded videos that were projected on screens, to which on-stage performers could interact with.²² As such, the stage-set ideas developed by the Access and Inclusion unit became less relevant to the final design resolution. Hence, an assessment of the unit's values against its design outputs and their impact on the stage-set's final resolution is then less informative in the frame of the paper.

Discussion

The Access and Inclusion unit developed its brief on the back of a pedagogical critique of design briefs that saw access and inclusion as an afterthought in the design process. It also saw learning opportunities in the first-year of architectural education for challenging old-fashioned and, occasionally, superficial approaches to the study of the body-space relationship. The Access and Inclusion unit learning process was shaped by and reviewed through ethnographic means, that is by participating in and co-orchestrating real-time design learning through reflective discussions with the students, performers and tutors involved. A constructive account of the lessons learned in the process is offered below.

The first year of architectural education and its learning routines offer admittedly more time for trial and error, experimentation and failures. This is

the year that the design process is taught and prioritised, assessment does not impact degree classification, and timetables feel less packed. As such, tutors and students can freely experiment with design tools, and explore the boundaries of the discipline, worrying less about the design outputs. Moreover, first-year small-scale briefs offer opportunities for the in-depth study of corporealities. Such exercises are more challenging to embed in second- and third-year design briefs that often prescribe the design of large scale and complex projects, and assessment impacts degree classifications. Additionally, because architectural conventions and manières are not yet established, first-year students are in a better place to approach the creative process in unconventional ways, ask uncommon questions, and bring new tools and methods in the process. Their threshold position and creative othering experience are essential conditions for adopting experimental and cross-disciplinary approaches to design thinking. Hence, transdisciplinary and performing pedagogies are better embedded in first-year design curricula. The Access and Inclusion unit offered glimpses of the benefits of introducing live projects and performing pedagogies in the early years of architectural education. While these admittedly cannot be fully developed within two weeks, and are often seen as too complex and advanced for this level of study, this dipping-toes pilot unit allows us to take note of their positive impact at this level of study.

Performing games and improvisations asked architecture students and performers to enact humans (Geppetto), puppets (Pinocchio), animals (donkeys and whales), and plants (trees and forests). During these warm up exercises, passivity and activity, presence and absence, light and darkness emerged as common metaphors for conceptualising knowledge and ignorance, life and death, reason and its absence, and community and solitude. When these metaphorical interpretations shaped theatrical improvisation, students were asked to reflect on their bodily interactions, and understand how spatial metaphors support cultural predispositions. Students appreciated how volatile and unpredictable normative corporealities can be, not only because they are culturally and historically contingent, but because they are subject to changes across their live-spans. During these discussions, students realised that alterity is not a permanent state of being, exclusively expressed by particular social or cultural categories. For example, the house wife corporeality, often discussed as culturally normative, may temporarily transgress to alterity when pregnant, menstruating or in menopause. In these follow-up discussions with members of the Hijinx drama groups, students also came to appreciate that regulatory frameworks often look at corporealities as primarily stable, not evolving or volatile. They often overlook the great range of physical and cognitive transitions that corporealities undergo and place them into particular categories, which may prevent them from connecting with each other. Discussing alterity as a ubiquitous and volatile, embodied and situated practice alerted the students to the importance of flexible and inclusive design strategies.

As previously mentioned, in the frame of performing pedagogies, architecture

students were asked to collectively enact particular spaces and places (workshops, kitchens, forests). Architectural pantomime revealed the social and cultural qualities we assign to architecture and its elements. Students performing as walls reflected on them as dividing or concealing features; students performing as windows raised concerns on privacy and exposure; students performing as beds reflected the moods of the bodies they supported; students performing as closets reflected the fear of secrets (or the enthusiasm of surprises) that storing spaces hold for us. Via bodily enactments and improvisations, students asked questions fundamental to the discipline:

- What are the constitutional differences between a shelter and a prison?
- When does a threshold operate as a passage and when as a barrier?
- How narrow does a corridor need to be to allow us to walk together?

Architectural pantomimes allowed students to appreciate that architectural elements and spaces orchestrate human interaction. The above summary of actions shows the infinite possibilities that performing pedagogies hold for design learning without pre-supposing relevant theoretical knowledge from the student participants.

Finally, in Week 2 tutorials, first-year students realised that design briefs are never static, unchallenged discourses that clients and practitioners respectfully follow. Design briefs are subject to dialogic and constantly evolving negotiations that give clients essential time to express their changing needs and allow the architect to reconcile them creatively. In these discussions, designers need to be inclusive and proactive. They must also stretch the brief to accommodate corporealities, present and future/absent ones.

The experience of the Access and Inclusion unit was described as life-changing by the participating students. Their feedback was summarised in a short video where they reflected on their learning experience in a series of student-led interviews.

[...] it was something that I felt was important but that I had no experience with. And I didn't really know what to expect. I feel like it's kind of dangerous to design for accessibility when you haven't actually met any of the people you're designing for. So that's what I was hoping to get out of it [...]

I wasn't sure what to expect at all, but I found the workshops quite surprising in like the way we could engage with people. Like, I really enjoyed that [...] So I feel like this will always be a kind of background in the architecture I'm designing now rather than something I have to focus on specifically. Hopefully, it should be implicit from now on. [...] Yeah. It's been definitely a real kind of life perspective-changing experience.²³

Students' interviews revealed that the Access and Inclusion unit offered a threshold learning experience to our year 1 & 2 students.



Figure 13:
Creative together (Welsh School
of Architecture 2020).

First-year design initiations are usually supported by references to phenomenological traditions that examine how diverse corporealities experience cultural orders and not how cultural orders are expressed. As such, in the early years of design learning, we lose a unique opportunity to adopt a hetero-referential way to engage with diverse, volatile and unpredictable corporealities and understand how design impacts or defines them. This pedagogical critique is aligned with philosophical ones to early phenomenological traditions initiated by Levinas and later by Castoriadis.²⁴ These suggest that early phenomenological approaches represent the ‘imperialism of the same’ and are self-referential, as they invite us to engage with the *other* as a distorted reflection of the creative self.²⁵ In Castoriadis’ ethical advocations alterity is introduced as an ontology of the other, in which indeterminacy and novelty are tightly connected.²⁶ In this pedagogical and sociological frame, alterity is not a stable, genetic, hereditary state of being but a creative process strongly related to indeterminacy, novelty and originality.²⁷

The Access and Inclusion design unit helped us look back at first-year students’ creative encounters and re-interpret them as a reception to unfamiliar, risky, and occasionally hostile territories. It also helped us reflect on how we can better support our students by amending, attuning and orchestrating this othering experience as a novel, intuitive, creative and unprecedented passage to design thinking. Initiations to creative thinking and design learning may temporarily or routinely undermine first-year students’ confidence. However, they can be more effectively managed when tutors divert their gaze from their novice designing selves to the transgressive selves. In this pedagogical experiment, engaging with live clients via performing pedagogies helped first-year students temporarily or permanently divert from canonical, stereotypical and normative design thinking and establish empathic bonds with their future clients (Fig.13). In this process, it became

common knowledge that creativity and alterity are both transgressive ways of being, ways of challenging cultural orders, a passage not only from our familiar self to the estranged creative one, but also from our creative selves to our co-creating others. By presenting and reflecting on the design process and outputs of the Access and Inclusion unit, this paper opened a debate on the pedagogical value that discussions on creativity as a form of alterity and alterity as a form of creativity hold for novice design thinkers. It also argued that in the early years of architectural education, performing pedagogies can help first-year students embrace the volatile nature of all the corporealities architects need to care for, embrace the risk that creative thinking entails, and successfully support an early passage to empathetic and inclusive design learning.

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