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Learning bodies engaging with art: Staging aesthetic experiences in museum education

ABSTRACT

How can we stimulate encounters between students and artworks that are both sensuous, meaningful and transformational? How can we involve students' bodies in aesthetic experiences in art museums? Inspired by Richard Shusterman the article focuses on three dimensions of the aesthetic experience: the phenomenological, the semantic and the transformational. Together with Judith Butler's concepts of performativity and performance, these notions are used to discuss the role of 'the learning body' in three case studies carried out in art museums over a ten-year period. The study sheds light on how the concept of aesthetic experience can be used for understanding the pedagogical value of encounters between young people and contemporary art. Another aim is to show how the body as locus for aesthetic experiences can challenge traditional understandings of the learning body and to discuss how to develop performative forms of art education that actively involves students' bodies.

KEYWORDS

art education
museum education
aesthetic experience
learning body
contemporary art
performance

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, our bodies and senses are almost constantly involved in relationships with various forms of visual and material culture. Images, objects, physical environments, television and social media all compete in order to attract our attention and to engage us in different forms of interaction. The majority of these experiences are sensuously attractive, while at the same time containing many layers of complex social and cultural signs (Kress 2010). More than ever, therefore, it is vital for young people to learn how to construct meaningful relationships with contemporary visual and material phenomena, while avoiding having to sacrifice the pleasurable experience of their phenomenological immediacy. In this context, museum education has the potential to become a privileged channel for experimentation with what 'having an aesthetic experience' might be about. By offering a specialized environment, historically constructed in order to isolate aesthetic experiences from the 'chaos' of everyday life (e.g. Bennett 1995), the art museum can be converted into a laboratory for exploring new kinds of relationships between learners and artworks – and in the wider sense – between learners and the contemporary visual world.

In this article, I will discuss the role of the learning body in museum education using examples of encounters between young people and works of contemporary art. The aim is to discuss how the concept of aesthetic experience can be used as a tool for understanding the pedagogical value of such encounters in a contemporary context. Another more specific aim is to show how the body as *locus* for aesthetic experiences can challenge traditional understandings of the learning body in museums, and to discuss how to develop performative forms of museum education that can actively involve students' bodies.

The study departs from a pragmatist and post-structuralist position entailing that, in education, aesthetic experiences can and should be understood as performative. In this understanding, 'experience' is something you *do*, rather than something you *have*. Hence, aesthetic experiences can be consciously 'staged' through educational initiatives. In the analyses presented here, I will adopt a multidimensional concept of aesthetic experience, inspired by the pragmatist position of the American philosopher Richard Shusterman. In addition, I will introduce the concepts of performance and staging inspired by the American feminist scholar Judith Butler. Empirically, I will exemplify my points through three case studies that I have carried out in museums over a ten-year period from 1997 to 2007 (Illeris 2002, 2005, 2009a).

THREE DIMENSIONS OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

In the article 'Aesthetic experience: From analysis to Eros' (2006), Richard Shusterman questions current conceptions of aesthetic experience in order to discuss if and how sexual experiences, as opposed to most understandings, can be regarded as aesthetic. Shusterman's preferred notion of aesthetic experience, inspired by his earlier studies of John Dewey (see e.g. Shusterman 2000a), is 'an experience that is valuably pleasurable, vividly felt and subjectively savored but also one that is objectively meaningful in being directed at some object of perception' (Shusterman 2006: 218). According to this definition, Shusterman finds that bodily experiences, including sexual experiences, can be considered aesthetic experiences, especially if one

believes, like Dewey did, that the most important aim of these experiences is to provide essential, vital and nuanced contributions to 'the art of living' (Dewey 1934/1989: 9–41).

In contrast to analytical aesthetics, whose ideal of clarity relies on precise and univocal definitions, Shusterman's pragmatist notion of aesthetic experience is deliberately pluralist and multidimensional. In another paper, published as part of the book *Performing Live* (2000b), he distinguishes four dimensions of aesthetic experience: the evaluative, the phenomenological, the semantic and the demarcational-definitional. He further places these dimensions into three 'axes of contrast' where, for example, the demarcational function of defining the aesthetic status quo is contrasted with the transformational function aiming to enlarge the aesthetic field, e.g. by exploring its bodily potentials (Shusterman 2000b: 15–24). In the following, I will adopt a similar multidimensional notion of aesthetic experience focusing on three dimensions, which partly overlap Shusterman's. I define these as the *phenomenological*, the *semantic* and the *transformational* dimensions.

The *phenomenological dimension* is based on subjective experiences of immediate presence. In contrast with Immanuel Kant's (1799/2008) analytical definition of aesthetic experience as the free interplay of cognitive faculties, the phenomenological aspect of the experience connects to bodily anchored feelings of intense awareness. These feelings can be experienced as overwhelming and unexpected and are therefore often difficult to communicate in words. Experiences of immediate bodily presence might occur during the encounter with a work of art that is particularly involving, but also, for example, when moving the body to an intense piece of music, or – like in Shusterman's example – when abandoning oneself to sexual experience.¹

Shusterman (2000b: 17) describes the *semantic dimension* of aesthetic experience as a hermeneutic process of interpretation and reflection that makes the experience meaningful in a historical, social and cultural context. Quoting Hans-Georg Gadamer (1982: 86–87), Shusterman (2000b: 19) writes that 'the appeal to immediacy, to the genius of the moment, to the significance of the "experience", cannot withstand the claim of human existence to continuity and unity of self-understanding'. Consequently, exploring the semantic dimension in the encounter with an artwork entails a focus that goes beyond the phenomenological immediacy of the aesthetic experience, including reflections on its semiotic complexity and its production of meaning in a dialogical process. As noticed by Shusterman (2000b: 17) this form of cultural mediation does not mean that an artwork cannot be experienced as immediate, but rather that it is fully possible to have an aesthetic experience that is *both* vividly felt *and* reflexively meaningful.

The *transformational dimension* of aesthetic experience is connected to active processes of agency and change. It thereby also connects more directly to the concept of *learning* and in particular to Dewey's famous educational credo 'learning by doing' (see e.g. Dewey 1938/1997). According to Shusterman (2000b: 21–22), the transformational dimension has been increasingly overlooked by Anglo-American theories of aesthetic experience, as these have been more interested in defining, delimiting and explaining the concept than assessing its possibilities of agency. In contrast,

Dewey's prime use of aesthetic experience is aimed not at distinguishing art from the rest of life, but rather at "recovering the continuity of its

1. Many contemporary scholars of aesthetics, including Richard Shusterman and the American philosopher Susan Buck-Morss, discuss whether it is really possible to have an aesthetic experience that is ontologically immediate, i.e. not mediated by some kind of a sociocultural filter, pre-understanding, or *Vorverständnis*, to use the term coined by Gadamer (1982). Although both Shusterman and Buck-Morss say they are sceptical about 'the immediate', because they are aware that it might easily be understood as just one more cultural construction, Buck-Morss admits that she cannot resist exploring the immediate as a personal experience in the encounter with art: 'I know it is absolutely improper to say so, but this bodily experience [of the artwork] is not always mediated. To say so flies in the face of all received wisdom in the academy today, but I cannot deny my own experience' (quoted in Jørgensen 2007: 65).

aesthetic experience with the normal processes of living", so that both art and life will be improved by their greater integration.

(Shusterman 2000b: 22)

Uniting the sensuous experiences of immediacy of the phenomenological dimension and the reflexive experiences of meaning making of the semantic dimension, the transformational dimension of the aesthetic experience is performative in the sense that it entails a dynamic and developing experiential activity, a progressive interplay between sensuous and reflexive experiences *in the making*. The learning stimulated by these processes is directed not at accumulating knowledge about the artwork, but rather at the capability itself of 'having an experience' – of knowing how to construct, undergo and reflect on sensuously based relationships to artworks and other aesthetically oriented phenomena.

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCES THROUGH PERFORMANCE AND STAGING

In order to concretize how the three dimensions of aesthetic experience mentioned above can be activated in museum education, I employ the concepts of *performance* and *staging*. Inspired by the American feminist scholar Judith Butler (1993), and her theory of performance as behaviour that is deliberately constructed in order to challenge socially recognizable identity matrices, I connect the concept of *performance* to bodily behaviour where social norms – for example about how one 'normally' relates to artworks – are explored, challenged and modified (see also Illeris 2009b). Following this line of thought, when visitors choose to actively perform a relationship to an artwork – for example by engaging in some kind of role play – it is possible to consciously intensify one or more dimensions of the aesthetic experience. When the body acts in new ways through performance, the experience changes and one might perceive different aspects both of the artwork and of oneself relating to it.

As we shall see in the following sections of this text, in museum education performance is closely related to *staging*. This means that in order to allow for a certain bodily performance, a certain situation has to be made available to the visitors, either staged by the artwork itself, by the museum display or by the museum guide or educator. While museum displays have traditionally staged visitors' bodies in ways that favoured contemplation and cognitive forms of learning, the aim of this study is to discuss how such stagings are now being challenged, both by contemporary art forms such as installation art, and by new, performative approaches to museum education.

Before introducing my case studies, I will briefly discuss how traditional stagings of the learning body have been enacted in museum education. Departing from a previous study (Illeris 2009a), I have outlined three ways of staging the learning body, which, depending on the situation, are traditionally offered to visitors during a museum visit: *the contemplative body*, *the educational body* and *the pseudo-productive body*.

TRADITIONAL STAGINGS OF THE LEARNING BODY IN ART MUSEUMS

The first traditional staging of the learning body in the museum could be defined as *the contemplative body*. The staging of this body has been associated with religious contemplation and the new role this has taken on in modern times. As shown by the art historian Carol Duncan (1995), the 'aesthetic

museum', that first appeared in the beginning of the twentieth century reproduces forms of bodiliness that can be recognized from Christian rites when the public moves silently from one work to another, stopping in front of each one in sign of veneration. Like the body of the faithful Christian, the contemplative body must appear controlled but not stiff, with an open and receptive glance, and an air of being deeply absorbed by the wonders of art. According to the modern western tradition of art appreciation, the disciplined behaviour of the contemplative body is highly desirable, because it is more successful in showing love of art, adhering to what Pierre Bourdieu (e.g. 1992) would call the 'doxa' of the field of art. Likewise, having themselves been educated within this tradition, many educators feel particularly gratified when their students (or some of them) show contemplative veneration towards the beauty and aesthetic qualities of the works.

The second traditional staging is *the educational body*. This body mainly reproduces the classical behavioural patterns of the body at school – a body that acts as a receiver and reproducer of knowledge transmitted by the teacher. The educational body is not a body in a receptive aesthetic state, as in the case of the contemplative body. It is, rather, an alert and attentive body that listens, observes and absorbs knowledge that can be 'banked', to quote the well-known Brazilian educator Paul Freire (1968/1993). The enactment of this body occurs when the ritual of the silent progression from one work to another is integrated with the format of a guided tour with the teacher or educator explaining the history and particular significance of each work. Moreover, in recent decades the traditional guided tour has evolved into more dialogical encounters, where the guide's presentation before each work is supplemented by a brief discussion with the students to involve them at a personal level. Following this trend, the learning body is not necessarily a silent body, but one that knows when it may speak and when it may not.

I have chosen to denominate the third staging of learning body *the pseudo-productive body*. Given that this is an active and moving body, it is usually kept separate from works of art and confined to a separate laboratory where it does not disturb the contemplation of other visitors and does not risk breaking or soiling the works or disrupting the 'sacred feeling' of the place. The pseudo-productive body was introduced in museum education during the 1970s, when art museums again began to see themselves as educational institutions (see also Hooper-Greenhill 1991, part one). In today's practice, the staging of the pseudo-productive body occurs during a workshop in the laboratory, which usually takes place an hour before or after the guided tour of the exhibition. Here the educator gives the students an assignment, which regards exploring themes, methods or materials of some of the works they have seen or will see. I describe this kind as 'pseudo-productive', because the aim of the workshop is to reproduce the productive work of the real artist in a compressed interval of time. Because in the typical art laboratory setting, there is neither the time nor the space to explore the working methods of a really productive body, the participants' bodies remain in an indeterminate state, half way between the learning body of the student and the productive body of the artist.

CHALLENGES FOR EDUCATION IN ART MUSEUMS

The traditional stagings of the learning body discussed above have become naturalized repertoires of museum education, and are therefore not easy to change. However, many arguments can be found for testing alternative

educational models that involve both the artworks and bodies of the students in more dynamic ways. Below I have listed three contemporary challenges that face traditional art and museum education, regarding the roles of art, students and aesthetic experiences:

- Like other contemporary visual and sensuous phenomena, a work of art is not necessarily an object of contemplation or passive observation. On the contrary, contemporary artworks often establish a relationship where the visitor's body becomes an active participant through aesthetic experiences of phenomenological immediacy, semantic complexity and transformational agency.
- Students of today, especially in secondary school, demand forms of teaching in relation to art where they feel they are protagonists and can ideally contribute to building a sense of self. Here the active, performative body has an important role as the ultimate *locus* of the experience itself. Young people today accept or reject experiences based on the intuitive criterion of 'whether it grabs me or not' (Illeris 2005).
- Our understanding of what aesthetic experiences might be about has become increasingly complex. The traditional analytical definition of aesthetic experience as disinterested cognitive pleasure practiced by the contemplative body has been both supplemented and challenged by, among others, pragmatist and post-structuralist understandings that involve the whole body.

I will now discuss how alternative and experimental educational encounters with artworks based on experimental bodily performances can generate aesthetic experiences that are both sensuous, reflective and pedagogical. I will use three cases in order to focus on these three dimensions of contemporary aesthetic experience: The discussion of the first case, *Witness*, will focus mainly on the phenomenological dimension; the second case, *Blind*, highlights the semantic dimension; and the third case, *Derelict Woman*, discusses the transformational dimension.

CASE I: WITNESS

Artworks, and especially works of contemporary art, often have the deliberate intention to interfere with the audience in a way that disturbs the traditional bodily performance of the viewer. Regarding museum education, this can be illustrated by an encounter between a class of Danish upper secondary students and the installation *Witness* by the American artist Susan Hiller, mounted in a deconsecrated chapel in the town of Roskilde, 30 kilometres from Copenhagen. As can be partly seen in Figure 1, the installation consisted of a large number of small loudspeakers hanging from the ceiling by long, thin cables in the dimly lit space. By taking a loudspeaker to their ear, the students could hear a voice, recorded from the Internet, recounting some kind of supernatural experience. The voices spoke in different languages, and in order to experience the installation, the students had to move around among each other and choose which loudspeakers to listen to and for how long.

The students met the artwork during a guided tour offered by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde. In spite of the museum educator's efforts to stage the students as traditional educational bodies, the immediacy of the



Figure 1: Students visit Susan Hiller's *Witness*, installation at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde, Denmark, 2000. © Helene Illeris.

experience of Hiller's installation simply swept away all traditional behaviours in favour of a spontaneous exploration of the installation guided by fascination and curiosity. To the students, both the first experience of entering the dark space and the experience of physically moving around to listen to the voices coming from the tiny speakers provided an aesthetic experience that 'grabbed them'. As one student said: 'When I entered the dark room, I could feel it right away. My imagination ran wild, it was doing 110, and my soul, which had been poor, felt rich. It was almost nothing less than a miracle' (Illeris 2005: 237–38).

Taking the analysis a little closer, we could say that through its unquestionable effect of bodily immediacy, the installation primarily encounters the students by offering an aesthetic experience that could be described as phenomenological. The installation interacts directly with the observer, involving him or her in a dense shared space of sensory exchanges, thus leading to a primarily bodily reaction. In addition, when the visitor, after having experienced the first immediacy of the bodily encounter, slowly begins to move around in the room and take the loudspeakers to their ear, she might experience that, together with the other visitors, she becomes a part of the physical space of the installation in its totality. *Witness* thus resembles other contemporary installation works in the way it encourages the visitors to have a prolonged and explorative relation to the work through bodily movement.

Without going further into this discussion, the immediacy effect, often produced by the phenomenological experience of contemporary works of art like *Witness*, can be of primary importance in museum education insofar as it enables students to experience the extraordinary bodily and sensuous effects that encounters with artworks might provoke. The phenomenological dimension of aesthetic experience can thus function as an important point of entry that opens up for other dimensions of the learning body than those traditionally staged within art museums – for example the semantic and/or the transformative dimensions.

CASE II: BLIND

Witness offers an example of how a work of art invites the students to alternative bodily forms of interaction. In Case II, I will focus on a more complex, but also a more typical, educational situation. In fact, speaking of young people, who, at least in the cases I have followed, often adopt a rather sceptical attitude towards the whole idea of 'art', few artworks offer such strong and immediate aesthetic experiences as *Witness*. The majority of works, even of contemporary art, require a more specific educational setting in order to be able to 'grab' the students. From a pedagogical point of view, the question arises as to whether an immediate, sensuously based aesthetic experience should be the goal of an encounter with art. In fact, as I have discussed in other studies (e.g. Illeris 2005), the experience of immediacy is generally not sufficient as the only learning objective, both because the cases where such immediacy can be achieved are rare, but above all because aesthetic experiences, in order to turn into learning processes, require a reflective approach that goes beyond the immediate. This reflection need not necessarily take the form of interpretation or analysis in the traditional sense. Rather, it requires some form of differentiation between the experienced moment and the possible meaning of that moment from a personal, cultural, social or other perspective.

In Figure 2 we see a boy who is posing in front of a camera together with an artwork of his own choice, in this case, a jar filled with preserved pig-eyes from the installation work *Blind* by Danish artist Christian Lemmerz. This picture is one of the results of a very simple task that I gave to a group of 15-year-old students during a museum visit in 1997 (see also Illeris 2002). I asked each of the students to individually choose an artwork from the exhibition with which they would pose in front of a camera. When I took the pictures, I asked the students to perform a somehow bodily relationship to the work. The reasons for the individual student's choice of artwork and pose did not have to be specified – all they needed to do was choose and pose, however they wished together with the work.

For example, the student in the photograph later stated that he chose this artwork basically because he, like many of his classmates, felt provoked by the idea of actually preserving 'disgusting pig-eyes' in a jar, usually used for



Figure 2: Staged photography with jar from the installation *Blind* by Christian Lemmerz (1992–1993). Educational project with upper secondary students at the Vestsjælland Art Museum in Sorø, Denmark, 1997. © Helene Illeris.

marmalade and other preservatives. In other words, his choice was based on a combination of a visceral reaction (disgust) and an initial semiotic interpretation (a provocative combination of social signs). Also, the photo recalled the performative act of standing next to the work having his photo taken in front of the classmates. The boy could project a certain individualist persona by choosing a 'daring' and 'disgusting' artwork.

However, once the photos had been printed and distributed, the students were increasingly curious about exploring 'their' artwork from other perspectives, for example by reading about the artist or through a deeper exploration of the work as social sign and their personal reasons for choosing it. Inspired by Butler, one could say that the embodiment of the relationship changed the student's approach from the distanced staging of the traditional educational body to the playful enactment of alternative forms of performance that are usually not staged inside art museums. In addition, the photos of the students' performances established further exchanges with the artworks in the form of curiosity towards the relationship between themselves as viewers, the artist and the artwork and, in addition, towards the representational function of the photograph itself as a new object of viewing and the viewers of this object.

In the example, we see how the photographic representation of the student's relationship to *Blind* produces a complex and interwoven number of signs that enlarges the meaning of the artwork. This approach can be related to the semantic dimension of aesthetic experience, focused on reflective experiences of meaningfulness. Through new forms of appropriation, the body of the student not only undergoes an experience, but actively creates one through a conscious bodily performance. This process then reflects back and becomes a part of the sensuous experience of the artwork, so that even if the artwork by itself did not provide the student with an immediate experience, it now seems to be imbued with meaning, not only hermeneutically, but even, through a reversed process, phenomenologically. In this way, this small experiment shows how bodily anchored experiences help to overcome what Shusterman (2000b: 21) defines as the 'false interference' between phenomenological immediacy and hermeneutic meaningfulness, which could be compared to the false interference between expression and interpretation in art education (Arvedsen 2000).

CASE III: DERELICT WOMAN

It is Monday morning and a vagabond finds a woman lying dead in a narrow street. She still looks fresh, except for the bruises and the torn clothes. He finds a book in her pocket and opens it to the last page. It says:

'Lonely ... Oh, so lonely. Have just been to the hairdresser. It is a little too short, but that's the way it is. I think I'll go out tonight. But not to one of those fancy places. Too dull. People with no sense of humour. It's all a show. I hate being there. No, I think I'll go to The Blue Lagoon, but then I'll have to go through the dark alley. I really don't like it. I once heard of someone who was attacked there. But I am not afraid. I have nothing to lose anyway. Dear Diary, I am so alone. I am so lonely'.

This short and dramatic narrative is transcribed and translated from a soundtrack produced by three 15- to 16-year-old boys at Arken Museum of Modern

2. The soundtrack was transcribed and translated in 2008 as a part of the research project *Leg og blikbevidsthed/Play and consciousness of the eye*, funded by the Novo Nordisk Foundation (see also Illeris 2009a).
3. Unfortunately, the website has been closed.
4. Duane Hanson: *Derelict Woman*, 1973. Polyester resin, fibreglass and mixed materials. Photographic reproductions of the work can be found on various websites, for example <http://kultur-online.net/?q=node/2583>.
5. I find it particularly interesting that the boys chose to explore a first person narrative of a female figure, thereby seeking an exchange with an artwork representing something very different from their own life experience. In fact, while a typical set-up of a museum event is that of a male viewer watching a painting of a more or less 'defenceless' female figure without allowing this figure to speak or participate, in 'Speak Up', the artwork, an equally female and defenceless figure, is given a voice of its own and is thereby conferred the right to enter into a dialogue with the viewer, who has in turn changed bodily position from a spectator to a partaker/constructor of the event.

Art, located just south of Copenhagen.² The boys were participants in a digital workshop called 'Speak Up', arranged by the educational staff in connection with the American artist Duane Hanson's exhibition 'Sculptures of the American Dream', which took place in 2007. The basic idea, framing the educational setting, was to stimulate the visiting school classes in the construction of visual events that would allow artist Duane Hanson's lifelike sculptures to 'speak' through the specific practices of looking selected and created by the learners. The workshop was organized in six phases with a total duration of three hours. The six phases were as follows:

1. The class was given a short introduction to the exhibition, with an explicit focus on different ways of approaching the artworks using a few sculptures selected by the students according to their immediate preferences. The exemplifying approaches were based on both the performance of particular bodily relationships, for example, the relationship of a friend or a detective and on semiotic readings of the various forms of signs present in the sculptures. No other biographical, art historical, sociological or other more traditional introductions to Duane Hanson's *oeuvre* were provided.
2. In smaller groups, and equipped with small digital dictaphones, the students were asked to 'give a voice' to one or more selected sculptures by establishing performative relationships and by constructing narratives of their own choice.
3. Each group was given the chance to edit their audio files on a computer, to cut and to reorganize their sound tracks and eventually, to add new recordings and sound effects.
4. Through small bodily performances, the students presented the sculptures they had chosen to their classmates together with their edited sound productions.
5. The students discussed and evaluated the process and the learning outcomes, guided by the educators.
6. The soundtracks were uploaded on the Arken blog on the Internet.³

During the workshop, the three boys, whose soundtrack I quoted at the beginning of this section, chose to work with the sculpture *Derelict Woman*.⁴ They recorded 'the voice' of the sculpture using their own voices, creating a sound file to reproduce, while they experienced the sculpture together with their peers. At the end of the session, the file was published, together with those produced by the other students, on the museum's website.

The soundtrack indicates the kind of learning processes that occurred within the groups. In giving voice to Duane Hanson's sculpture, the boys chose to explore the performance of the sculpture of the 'strangled woman', whose 'diary' constitutes a vivid piece of female narrative, making the sculpture come to life on its own terms.⁵ In this way, the students actually succeeded in entering an exchange with the sculpture by creating a bodily performance based on both the immediacy of the experience and on the cultural and social signs present in the artwork.

What distinguishes Case III from the other two cases is that it exemplifies yet another dimension of the aesthetic experience: the transformational dimension. In educational settings this dimension is activated when life and art are integrated in the creation of something new, in this case, a narrative performed 'together' with the artwork. In this way, immediacy and meaning

convey into a product that is not only staged as a representation, but that it has the potential to initiate a new relationship that transcends the traditional subject–object positions in museum education. As already indicated by Dewey (1934/1989: 9–25), the transformational, and thereby pedagogical, potential of aesthetic experience lies in its productive powers of integration, which I will sum up in the following points regarding my cases:

- *Integration of sensuous and reflective aesthetic experience.* As discussed above, experimental approaches to museum education make it possible to stage aesthetic experiences where the phenomenological dimension of immediacy and the semantic dimension of creating meaning are integrated into an experience of continuous exchange and transformation.
- *Integration of reception and production.* While traditional museum education has separated reception and production in the staging of learning bodies, e.g. by confining production to a separate workshop space, in Cases II and III, reception and production are integrated via a direct reliance on the phenomenological experience of the artworks.
- *Integration of traditional and performative stagings of the learning body.* In Case III, the boys are experimenting with a bodily performance clearly different from how the learning body is traditionally staged in museum education. Nevertheless, their performance still entails a combination of recognizable cultural positions; for example, ways of 'doing gender' and ways of constructing and enacting a convincing narrative.
- *Integration of art and other contemporary forms of visual and material culture.* In none of the three cases presented are the artworks staged as 'art' in the sense of venerable aesthetic objects to be admired through silent contemplation or careful analysis. Instead, the artworks are treated like visual and material phenomena, engagement of which is through bodily and reflective interaction. Like other forms of contemporary culture, such as clothing, furniture, films or games, the artworks become tools in the construction of an experimental event, where students can learn different ways of experiencing visual and material culture – and that one way of experiencing is not necessarily more correct than another.

CONCLUSION

In contemporary society, an important qualification is to be able to understand and to challenge visual and material phenomena and to have the courage and fantasy to experience and use them in new ways. A learning body is a body that is receptive to being physically and sensuously involved in aesthetic experiences of all kinds. But the learning body, in a search for meaning and transformation, must also question immediate experiences. The learning body is a body that wishes to be engaged and to learn through interaction with contemporary culture instead of just learning about it.

In the art museum, artworks have traditionally been positioned in the role of untouchable objects of admiration and contemplation, and visitors have been positioned as contemplative, educational or pseudo-productive bodies unable to interact physically with the artworks. The cases discussed in this article show how the art museum can be used as a privileged place for experimentation, where the phenomenological, semantic and transformational dimensions of aesthetic experiences can be deliberately enacted through performance. Experimental museum education makes it possible to

create new relationships between the students learning bodies and art – and in the wider sense – between learning bodies and the contemporary world.

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