Micro-liminal Spaces of (Mis)Gendering: The Critical Potential of Trans-Pedagogy in Post-Secondary Institutions

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Abstract

In fast-paced and continuously demanding neoliberalizing academic environments, this article proposes 'pedagogical pause' as an important trans-pedagogical tool to disrupt cis-heteronormativity in/of post-secondary institutions. This article discusses three micro-spaces of learning outside of classrooms (communication on listservs, work on picket lines, and navigation of hallways) to argue that as virtual, temporal-political, and multi-functional spaces, respectively, these micro-spaces of learning are critical liminal spaces that hold the unexplored potential for trans-pedagogy and yet, are constant sites of misgendering. In addressing such micro-liminal spaces of learning (and misgendering), a trans perspective can challenge both the spatial limits of pedagogy and the pedagogic capacities of universities. The article deploys a critical trans-disciplinary approach to reflect on un/heard and in/visible dimensions of everyday trans discrimination and trans expression in post-secondary institutes.

Keywords

Trans-pedagogy, misgendering, liminality, post-secondary institutions, trans expression, trans-disciplinarity

Introduction

What can a trans[1] pedagogy offer geography, and vice versa? In situating this article within the emerging trans geographies literature, I seek to challenge the spatial limits of pedagogy as well as the pedagogic capacities of universities. I begin by offering the notion of a "pedagogical pause" as a trans spatiotemporal interruption—a threshold—to the familiar and visible pathway, that facilitates reorienting to invisible and often unfamiliar openings—the voids—as alternative pathways to "transformational learning" [emphasis added] (Meyer, Land, and Baillie 2010).

As a trans person of colour and an international doctoral student at a Canadian research university, I draw on my experiences from navigating various liminal spaces inbetween and across gendered, geographic, and disciplinary boundaries that variously inform my trans perspective. I discuss three micro-spaces of learning outside of classrooms: communication on listservs, work on picket lines, and navigation of hallways. I argue that as virtual, temporal-political, and multi-functional spaces, respectively, these micro-spaces of learning are critical liminal spaces that hold the unexplored potential for trans-pedagogy and yet are constant sites of misgendering.[2] On liminality, Gennep "introduces the notion of a three-part structure for a rite of passage: separation, liminal period, and reassimilation" (1909 as cited in Land, Meyer, and Flanagan 2014, 326). This article offers a parallel three-part structure: disorientation, trans-pedagogical pause, and reorientation. In extending the emerging scholarly work to bridge the gap between queer and trans theory and the spatial theory of liminality (March 2020; Arun-Pina 2021), this article deploys a critical trans-disciplinary approach to reflect on un/heard and in/visible dimensions of everyday trans discrimination and trans expression in post-secondary institutions.

Geographies of Trans Pedagogy: Inadequacies of a Gender-Inclusive Approach

The emerging trans geographies scholarship in the global North has predominantly focused on the spatial scale of home (Andrucki and Kaplan 2018; Doan 2010), neighbourhood (Nash 2010, 2011; Bain and Nash 2007), the urban (Doan 2007; Gorman-Murray et al. 2018), as well as corrective institutions (Rosenberg and Oswin 2015). To a much lesser extent, post-secondary institutions have featured in the discussion of urban spaces of "gender tyranny" (Doan 2010) as places of work in a continuum with the home-life, and more critically in the discussion of re-gendering of gender-neutral bathrooms in University of Waikato (Johnston 2019). For Doan (2007), a more gender inclusive urban is achievable if "[p]rogressive citizens and urban activists of all types…make extra efforts to understand this poorly understood segment of the population [transgender individuals]" (70).

More recently, Mearns, Bonner-Thompson, and Hopkins (2020) foreground trans experiences of micro-aggression and misrecognition among trans-identifying students and staff members on university campus in the UK. In their study, they focus on three on-campus spaces: "bathrooms, residential accommodation, and spaces of learning and conviviality" and offer insightful "[c]hanges in and to taught content, improved name-change processes, and the tracking of gender transitions for both students and staff, as well as diversified recruitment…[as]…strategies that could support universities in

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[1] Trans is an umbrella term commonly used to refer to a wide range of persons who identify as transgender, non-binary, transsexual, genderqueer, drag, trans masc, male-to-female (MtF), trans femme, female-to-male (FtM), and gender variant.

[2] To misgender is to refer to a person intentionally or unintentionally, relate to a person, or use language to describe a person that does not align with their affirmed gender and choice of gender expression.

building spaces welcoming of all genders" (493). The existing power geometries also deeply segregate everyday trans experiences of transgender students from those of transgender staff. Lavery (2018) argues that unlike gender non-conforming (GNC) professors, "[t]rans and non-binary students do not have either the privileges…nor necessarily the power to assert the privileges to which they are entitled" where they get "misnamed [or deadnamed] and misgendered by those charged to teach them" (para. 3).

Scholarly focus within trans geographies literature has been to move towards a more gender inclusive environment. However important, a few trans scholars and activists caution that the ways in which "conventional approaches to trans inclusion" may be inadequate, if not yet differently violent (Malatino 2015, 395). In "Pedagogies of Becoming", Malatino is wary of token inclusions and a "special guest" approach to event-based "bringing in trans, intersex, and gender-nonconforming folk to represent and authenticate trans experiences, perspectives, and political engagements." Instead, they offer "alternative strategies" "to produce an alternative understanding of gender as process, craft, and becoming" (395).

Similarly, a few trans scholars have also taken an alternative approach through "Trans* Disruptions" (Wentling 2015) and intersectionality to disrupt and decolonize "violent cistems" (Patel 2017). Wentling (2015) asserts how language can "affirm or deny" one's gender personhood, particularly of university students in their (mis)recognition by teachers. He calls for teachers to "resist taken-for-granted gender attribution processes" and "binary gender categories" (469). In his research, he highlights how campuses, in responding to trans-gender "recognition", often fail to enter "class-room interactions between teachers and trans* students" (470). Such an absence of conversation within classrooms not only sets the tone of learning, but also mistakenly conveys that gender identities and expressions are unimportant considerations. Thus, Wentling recognizes one of the forms of trans* disruption as a disruption of "linguistic gender hegemony". Elsewhere, in discussing the multiple vulnerable experiences of trans people of colour (TPOC), Patel (2017) calls for "a queer decolonisation of the toilet space, which has intersectionality at its core" for they argue that "the problems transgender people face within bathroom spaces are indeed significantly about gender, but [not] gender alone" (51), rather about the ways in which gender intersects with race and class. In extending the above scholarly efforts, I offer the notion of "trans pedagogical pause" in this paper as one such "alternative strategy" formulated from my own encounters with everyday misgendering in post-secondary institutions otherwise committed in their journeys towards a gender-inclusive environment.

Spatializing Misgendering: Situating Trans Pedagogical Pause

In the first year of my Ph.D. program, and like other trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming graduate students I know, I too encountered "violent cistems" despite a few gender-inclusive interventions. I was still in India when I filled out the name change form to move to my new home department at York University without the baggage of my deadname. I distinctly remember navigating, the first of the many times to follow, the unfamiliarity of the administration with the term "trans" despite the option to enroll with a preferred name. From there on, I constantly encountered misgendering by my colleagues as well as my teachers in classrooms, meetings and my office shared with other graduate students. I soon realized that although in part relieving, written provisions for preferred name and pronouns in student personal information did not necessarily mean trans-awareness or gender sensitivity.

More recently, we received a standard email from the university declaring that "[P]ronouns are an important part of identity" and that we should consider sharing gender pronouns. I laughed at the irony of the email for it was addressed to my deadname. This is what the success side of a gender-inclusive approach looks like – not only is it uneven and inadequate, but it is also illustrative of how "an

institutional declaration of trans inclusivity" is often complicit "with a neoliberal politics of inclusion that fails to move students to deal with their own deep complicities in upholding understandings of sex and gender that are fundamentally transphobic" (Malatino 2015, 395).

What we need, then, is not a disengaged stand-alone email from the university broadcasting the importance of pronouns, but also more sustained trans-pedagogies to engage with unheard and invisible dimensions of everyday transphobia and cisnormativity in micro-spaces of learning in post-secondary institutions.

Numerous instances of everyday misgendering inside, but also outside of classroom interactions sharply suspended me. In Figure 1, I share the architectural rendering of my department to walk you through these experiences. While on the one hand, everyday misgendering in interactions beyond the classroom interrupted my contribution to and presence within conversations, academic as well as semi-social, as pro-forma, pronouns were always seemingly inconsequential to the content-value of conversations which, on the other hand, proceeded uninterrupted. Yet, as words of reference they mis/convey deep information about identity and personhood almost in passing. Below, I spatialize in/visible dimensions of misgendering through a poem and an axonometric drawing of my department which may be read independently or alongside one another.

Sinkholes
Source: Author, 2020

In the middle of a conversation
headed to meaningful familiarizing and learning,
connecting with and contributing to one another,
I find the ground beneath me has collapsed—

I am now sinking in this void, that gets deeper and darker.
No one seems to notice the fall.

Conversations sound blurrier
I don't hear them anymore from this void.
Somehow, a part of me returns while
the other remains suspended.

In part surfaced, I find myself forever suspicious of the ground 'neath me
that may collapse any moment.
I now move, always, two inches above the ground, and
*parallelly through the voids.*
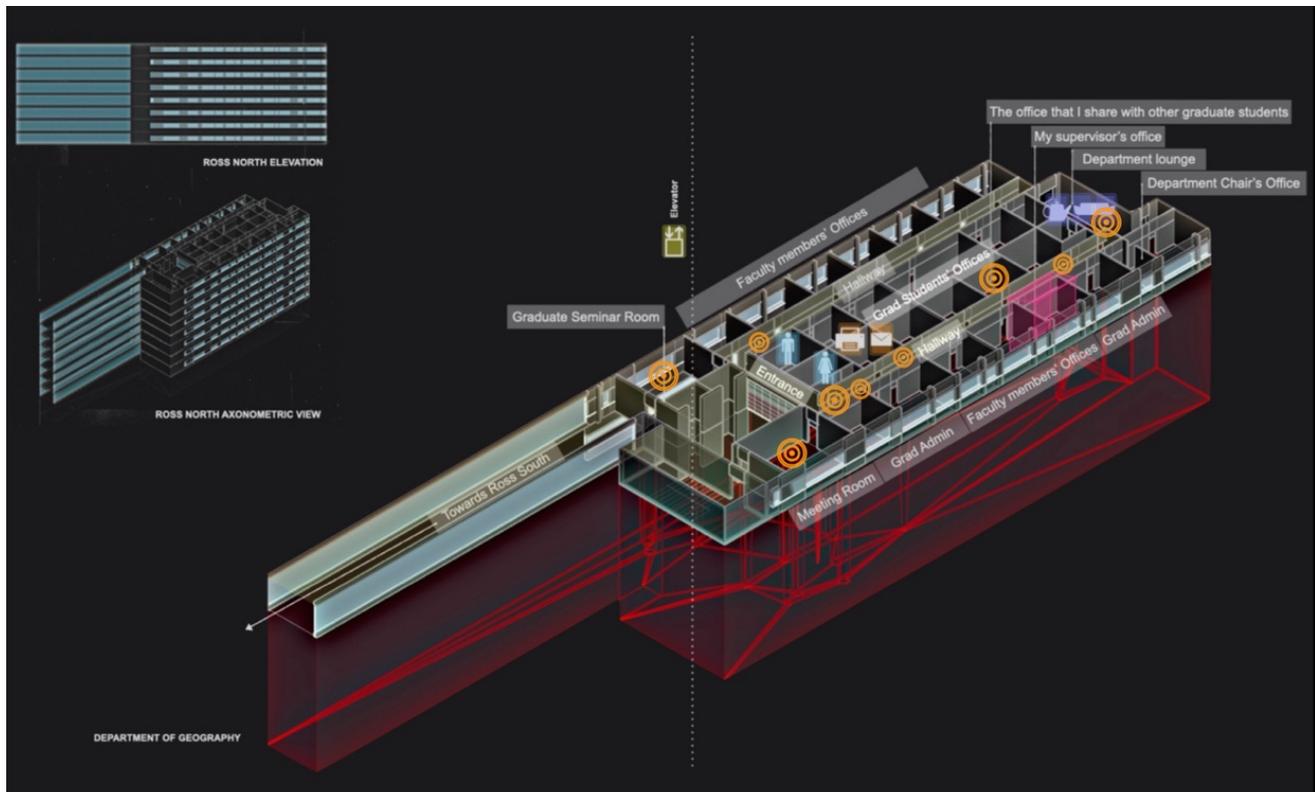
Figure 1. Spatializing misgendering: Mapping recurrent encounters of misgendering (in orange) onto the axonometric drawing of the visible built superstructure of my current home Department of Geography at York University. The figure also illustrates the manipulated subsurface topography to reveal the "unrepresentable" invisible dimensions of misgendering (in red). Source: Author.

Sinkholes, the poem above, spatializes misgendering. It uses "the ground" as a metaphor for the dominant understanding of reality as fixed, solid, and fully comprehensible within the gender binary. Misgendering—effectively distorting and/or erasing anyone outside of this gender binary—is a key process in the maintenance of the cisnormative ground. Further, the state of partial "suspension" refers to a temporary interruption—a pause—in the prescribed pathway on the familiarized cis ground where trans-ness is registered as absent—a void—that then opens alternative pathways to learning. "Sinkholes," then, is a symbolic representation of the invisible dimensions of trans discrimination as well as trans expression. While trans scholars have more commonly explored "trans" as a spatial metaphor to signify movement, transition, and migration (Aizura 2018), in this paper, I contend that the critical potential of trans-theory also lies in, as I offer, the notion of "pedagogical pause" as a state of temporary stillness and suspension that crucially facilitates reorientation of one's relationship to and perception of (cis, i.e., the familiarized and normative facets of) reality.

Similarly, the axonometric drawing of my current home department at York University (Figure 1) maps recurrent encounters of everyday misgendering (in orange). Every encounter of misgendering further alienated me to the metaphorical subsurface (in red), severing my sense of belonging and grounding in the department. Unlike the built superstructure, the subsurface is not an accessible physical space, rather a void illustrating invisible dimensions of trans denial. It is from that place of void that I offer a reflection on the critical potential of trans-pedagogy. This is a different starting point than much of the trans pedagogies scholarship discussed above, which focus on institutional spaces across a variety

of spatial scales with conventionally enclosed boundaries, such as classrooms[3], bathrooms, student housing and other on-campus amenities. One of the primary objectives of this article, then, is to tap the unexplored potential of trans pedagogy by challenging the spatial limits of and extending the pedagogic presence to micro-liminal spaces of learning outside classrooms—and perhaps to the invisible subsurface. Subsequently, this article aims to extend the nascent scholarly work to bridge the gap between queer and trans theory and the spatial theory of liminality (March 2020; Arun-Pina 2021).

Methodologically, this paper takes on one of the many "challenges to liminality" highlighted by scholars of queer geography who have recognized "the inherent difficulties which emerge in trying to 'represent the unrepresentable'" of employing "more traditional methodological techniques" (Brown and Knopp 2008 as cited in March 2020, 6). Throughout this article, I utilize my trans-disciplinary training in architecture, visual art, and geography (ongoing) to recreate a visual-textual interface which cannot be neatly located *within* the confines of either one of the disciplinary boundaries alone; rather, it occupies the liminal space *inbetween* the three disciplinary boundaries. For instance, in Figure 1, I first drafted the floor plan in AutoCAD (a technical drafting software used by architects to design the physical built environment) from my memory of everyday lived experience of the department space. I then transferred the architectural drawing onto a vector-based photo-editing application to manipulate the image to reveal the invisible dimensions of misgendering within the built environment. Thereafter, the drawing was for a third time transferred into a layout software to overlay the visual with the textual data on navigating misgendering.

Both the poem along with the drawing work to activate a "pedagogical pause" as an important trans-pedagogical tool. By employing trans-disciplinary approach to research analysis, this section offers creative possibilities to overcoming the above-mentioned scholarly challenges to "represent the unrepresentable." This paper is designed with pedagogical pauses using "desires for belonging as threads [that lead] us into unforeseen places and connections" (Probyn 1996, 8-20), as an invitation to (read through) "an-Other form of spatial awareness" (Soja 1996, 11). As we stand at the outset of trans geographies, it is only exciting to wonder what would a trans theory, and, in so doing, a trans pedagogy entail?[4]

This paper now turns to three micro-liminal spaces of learning outside of classrooms: communication on listservs as virtual, work on picket lines as temporal-political, and navigation of hallways as multi-functional spaces. I argue that these micro-liminal spaces of learning hold unexplored potential for trans-pedagogy in part because they are constant sites of misgendering. Alongside undoing the gender binary, in discussing each of these micro-liminal spaces, this article performs a trans reading of various dichotomies such as virtual/real, radical left/normative, and real/imagined, respectively, which continue to play a hidden role in maintaining "violent cistems."

Speaking from Virtual Voids: Boundaries, Belongings, and the Cisgender Comfort of Binaries

Human geographers have recognized "how the digital is reshaping the production and experience of space, place, nature, landscape, mobility, and environment" (aka the "digital turn" (Ash, Kitchin, and Leszczynski 2018)) long before our current (at least at the time I am writing this) Covid-19 reality (or virtuality?). I draw on "the virtual" in its often held "opposition set up [to] 'the real', or 'the physical'"

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[3] Although, scholars on critical pedagogy continue to actively rework the boundaries of the classrooms (Chang 2004; Elder 1999).

[4] I sketch out some ideas towards my contributions to trans theory elsewhere (Arun-Pina, forthcoming).

(Kinsley 2014, 364). In that, "the virtual" becomes synonymous with "trans" individuals who are frequently accused of "tricking" and "faking" others in and through their trans expression (see Haimson and Hoffmann 2016; Cofield and Doan 2021). In a recent phenomenal research work, Straayer (2020, 255) argues how cisnormative "prosecutions of penile prosthetic embodiment as 'gender fraud' punitively restrict trans men's claim on reality." We are considered inauthentic, uncertain, even unreal. Many trans-narratives illustrate how such accusations are in fact incoherent, sudden, and convenient ways to reinforce cisnormativity.

In extending the long-held "debates of 'realness' of online lives and personae" since the advent of the World Wide Web, Haimson and Hoffmann (2016) have more recently worked to complicate the virtual/real binary. They argue that cisnormative policies discipline virtual sites to exclude gender non-conforming individuals. In their study, the authors illustrate how Facebook users are required to use their "authentic identities" and "real name" leading to "systematic deactivation of many accounts belonging to transgender and gender variant users, drag queens, Native Americans, abuse survivors, and others" (para. 2). Haimson and Hoffmann argue that "for some, a Facebook identity is more 'real' than certain off-line identities" (para. 2).

If "interactions with and through Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs)…call into being a new dimension of spatial experience" (Kinsley 2014, 364-5), below I invite you to the virtual dimension of misgendering and trans expression. This imagining is done through communication on a departmental listserv which, unlike Facebook, includes members who are relatively proximate and more likely to encounters in "real" life.

from:	████████████████er@yorku.ca>
to:	████████████faculty@yorku.ca
date:	Feb 5, 2018, 4:53 PM
subject:	Gendering
mailed-by:	yorku.ca
security:	🔒 Standard encryption (TLS) Learn more

Hi All,

I want to share, briefly, my experience since last term in the department. I was still in India when I came across the possibility to sign an official document that allowed me a preferred name in all my interactions, until I get to change my name legally (hopefully this year). With the help of the department administration, I was able to submit and make changes to most places the name would appear. While many conference registration systems still do not offer the possibility to sign oneself as trans/non-binary or use the gender-neutral prefix of Mx., I was able to use my gender as a trans-identifying person on my application to the Graduate Program in Geography at York.

To my surprise, since I moved to Toronto, on multiple occasions I have been frustrated and struggled with how people (mis)understand gender identities, what different terms and pronouns mean, and how to use them in everyday interactions. I have noted people who repeatedly misgender me (staff and colleagues), people who are entirely unaware of

what trans means, people who are apologetic while continuing to misgender, and some people who are very active in autocorrecting themselves (in immediate speech and interaction, but also internally before speaking). Some graduate student colleagues even initiated a discussion about gender on the geography-grad listserv and were able to exchange a thread of interactive e-mails. On rare occasions, people felt free to ask me questions about gender and sexuality. Yet, I continue to be misgendered repeatedly in everyday spaces, inside and outside of classroom spaces (in meetings, hallways, in my office, and in other places on and off campus). On an everyday basis, it has been extremely difficult emotionally to carve out and perpetually look for a space and time to discuss gender. It is also exhausting to have to correct *others'* gender privileges in an already absent space to be able to discuss gender as a discourse, and not as a persecution or "personal" correction directed towards *a* person. This everyday lapse intensifies when I am misgendered by faculty members, who, given the collaborative nature of educational environments, I expected to be more supportive of students.

My supervisor did help me to find gender-neutral washrooms in the library building and shared a campus map of gender-neutral washrooms. But I still end up having to "plan to pee" to reach a location on time, especially given that we do not have a gender-neutral washroom on our floor. I am trying to draw attention to these mundane, everyday infrastructures, activities, and interactions because they have a deep impact upon my experience of university life, campus space, and self-expression.

I want to take this opportunity of addressing my gender identity to foreground the need for continued efforts in collaborative educational spaces that enable everyday practices of gender understanding and exploration possible, pedagogic, and pleasurable! I am a trans-identifying person, and I use gender-neutral pronouns of "they/them". I have never belonged to "she", have grown up aspiring and relating to "he", and have further come to vehemently resist cisnormativity. I strongly feel that transgender is not a mix of, or (vaguely) somewhere between the two genders, but is a field of its own, a gender of its own – I have come to realize that I am "transculine". I do not expect people to not make mistakes — we are conditioned and constrained by language, and in language is the possibility to rework the assumptions of not just others', but more importantly one's own gender and sexual identities. I explained to my colleagues and friends, that my mother does not have the resources (social, and formal educational in terms of language and everyday socio-cultural space), yet, has attempted to auto-correct and sensitize her everyday interaction with me, in choosing gender-neutral words and pronouns, even as I doubted, she would fully comprehend what living and negotiating everyday spaces as a trans-identifying person would entail. Her self-learning (and fearlessly correcting of other relatives and friends around her) suggests that there is no excuse for those with academic privilege to *not* take on the gender project as an everyday practice, and pedagogy to critically activate discursive spaces sensitized to gender differences.

I am happy to contribute in any way possible to the departmental work of better understanding trans-identity and creating trans-encouraging spaces. In such a project, I know I have the continued support of my supervisor, my colleagues, and particularly other

trans-identifying graduate students, one who has reached out to me, initiated, and facilitated discussions on gender, and the graduate Program Director who encouraged me to publicly voice my discomfort and struggle. In response to his recommendation, I have written this letter – a letter that is personal and renders me vulnerable. It is a collective and individual call to participate in an active gender discourse upon which the department's commitment to critical human geography should be based.

Much hopeful,

Chan

In the months that followed, only one faculty member from the department privately acknowledged my electronic letter. What was most difficult for me to contend with was the continued misgendering by faculty, staff, and students that followed the emailing of the letter. Such a mix of deafening silence and continued misgendering made me feel like neither my words nor I existed. Both in information and in institution, I was invisibilized and erased (Namaste 2000; Bauer et al. 2009).

In retrospect, I find the hopeful tone of this letter disturbing. On the contrary, I routinely felt hopeless, frustrated, and invisibilized—while simultaneously being hypervisible: stared at as if I was somehow incomprehensibly different. Yet the complexity of my difference was not understood. With utter exhaustion, I remember navigating between classes where I was either the only brown, international student in a relatively queer class, or the only trans-person in an utterly cis-heteronormative class. As is common to individual as well as shared trans experiences wherein so many of us do not find the space for trans expression nor trans care (Malatino 2020), I too found myself having to "suspend" a part of myself outside the class. My gender identity converges and diverges with my racial/ethnic identity and my nationality in these institutional spaces in ways that apparently never meet.

Although institutions create and maintain an environment that facilitates fragmentation and alienation among queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, and people of color graduate students, it is precisely from an intersectional trans location—gendered (as a trans/nonbinary student of colour), geographic (as a inter/transnational student), and disciplinary (as a trans-disciplinary student)—that this article works to dismantle the binary split between the sexual/gendered other being white and the racial other being straight or cis (cf. Puar 2007; Haritaworn, Tauqir, and Erdem 2008). Of note, the disparity between my expectations from and my experiences of making this journey from "sexually regressive" India/Global South to "sexually progressive" and racially regressive Canada/Global North is beyond the scope of this article; however, these expectations and experiences continue to fuel my pedagogical reflections as well.

While the concerns of some trans scholars are not misplaced in that trans subjects can be reduced to "an imaginary, fictional and merely metaphorical presence in the service of a larger intellectual project" (Nash 2010, 583), this section considers ways in which "the virtual" offers "another optic, another way of viewing the social" and "encourages [us] to write from another angle" (Probyn 1996, 35). For this article, a *trans*formative reality can be understood as "continuous, multiple, simultaneous, complex, abundant and partly invisible" (Winterson 1996 151). Trans-pedagogy relocates and shifts academic teaching to surfaces, dimensions and perspectives that are normatively considered absent. In that, virtual sites of learning and connecting outside of and in extension to classrooms confront contested "notions of digital dualism—that online and in-person experiences are not distinct but imbricated and co-constitutive" (Gieseking 2014, para. 13), and, in so doing, hold the underexplored potential of trans pedagogical dimensions of learning. However, "the virtual" is often flattened of its trans dimensions and

is disciplined to fit the cisnormative reality. My email to the department above then, was to activate a trans "pedagogical pause" in anticipation of carving out sustained pedagogic presences to disrupt cisnormativity.

In Speech and Silence: A Soundscape of Discrimination and Familiarity

What does trans discrimination sound like in post-secondary institutions? Drawing parallels with Alison Martin's (2018) work on mapping the "sonic dimensions" of gentrification deliberating "white sonic expectations" under the hashtag #dontmuteDC, this section unpacks trans discrimination as different sonic registers in academic spaces deliberating cis-heteronormative sonic expectations. If "utterances of speakers open up spaces for different ways of being through dialogue, through their anticipation of a response" (Bakhtin 1986 as cited in Kanngieser 2012, 337), in this section, I attend to which voices get amplified (familiarized), which get buried (isolated), and which are suspended (diffused). Kanngieser (2012, 337) asserts that "the voice" is "more than a conduit for the transfer of information", and "in its expression of affective and ethico-political forces, [it] creates worlds."

In what follows, I recount my experiences of working on the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) 3903 picket line at York University for five months. I reflect on the disjuncture between repeated misgendering on the one hand, and celebrations of heteronormative life stages on the other, in temporary spaces of "solidarity" located literally on the borderlands[5] of the university/city (Figure 2). Responding to the collective voices of cis heteronormative familiarizing with "silence"—a sonic pedagogical pause—meant for me:

> "a refusal to participate and perform – it functioned as a conscious provocation against what is expected and demanded, a refusal to be possessed, by enacting a sovereign re-singularization. But it was also indicative of an incapacity to find words capable of expressing internal turbulence." (Kanngieser 2012, 344)

Such a reflection allows me to illustrate how even the most politically charged transitory of spaces can be familiarized to become "deaf"[6] to trans expression. In that, the illustration below extends the work of scholars invested in "identifying the 'deaf spots' of the subfield" (Paiva 2018) of sonic geographies.

In my first year of graduate school at York University, having completed barely six months at the university when I was still getting to know people, colleagues, and non/teaching staff within the department and beyond, I entered a five-month-long, paid union strike. Despite the tense politico-economic crisis, many found excitement in meeting new people and connecting with others, and comfort in solidarity. We walked together for four to eight hours straight in tremendously harsh weather

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[5] Here, I activate the trans-potential of the theoretical concept of "the borderlands" as invoked by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987[2012]). For Anzaldúa, the concept of "the borderlands", is at once actual physical location, as well as psychological, sexual, and spiritual location to understand the
"contingent nature of social arrangements" through experiences of dwelling *on* rather than
within defined borders. It produces, she argues, a particular knowledge that is both from
"being within a system while also retaining the knowledge of an outsider who comes
outside the system" that further lends a "layered complexity to one's sense of self" as an "outsider within" (2012, 7).

[6] Use of the term "deaf" is not to assert an ableist language.

conditions, brought tea/coffee and snacks, and survived together. Within such an environment of solidarity, I struggled every single day and sometimes was repelled by going to the picket line. As an international student on a limited budget, it was not possible for me to miss a day or even an hour of pay. I remember dragging myself to work in cold and sickness, and with swollen and aching muscles; but neither weather nor my physical health were my biggest concerns. I truly dreaded new social interactions. Every day I met new people at the picket-line who freshly misgendered me and presumed my identity.

I understood that everyone was just trying to survive the strike, fighting administrative atrocities and financial precarity. I repeatedly politely pointed out in one-on-one conversations and smaller groups of two or three: "just so you know, I'm trans" and "I use the pronouns they/them." Yet somehow my voice always seemed to fall outside of the audible range. And my racial/ethnic identity further ascertained feeling unheard and unseen. No matter how much I raised my voice, I had to always repeat myself, and explain, "I don't use the pronouns she/he, I use they." At times, some queer/trans allies even corrected me of how I could more effectively "correct" others around me. I soon realized, if I began correcting everyone on the shift, I would reduce myself to a gender-subject/subject-gender followed by awkward silences and weariness. Eventually, I stopped correcting because I was too exhausted from picketing in sub-zero temperatures and 90km/hr winds.
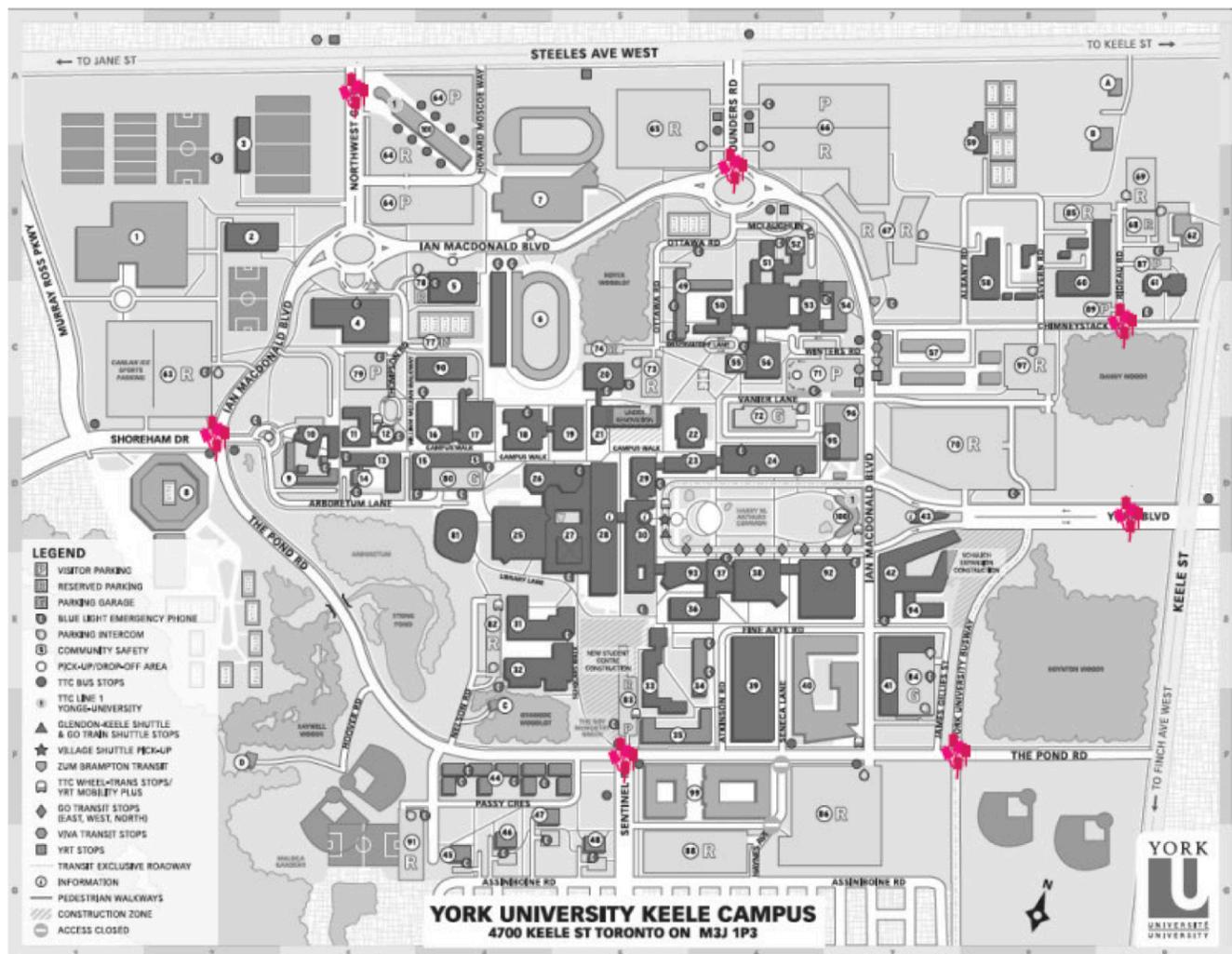
Figure 2. Location of picket lines on the borderland of university/city (Source: Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) 3903 Strike Info overlaid with York University Keele Campus Map).

Still, I felt perpetually misplaced and severely alienated in a transitory space of collective action. I felt invisibilized among diverse groups of people who connected over ethnicity, work, personal lives and interests, newly discovered crushes, and of course, presumed *common* political struggles. I was perplexed as to how people could belong (to each other, or the symbolic or material entity such as the union or nation) so easily, when I could not even feel a sense of belonging in and to my own body as perceived by them. As a trans person, for far too long, I have been familiar with the discourses of dis-belonging and alienation. While these discourses have negative overtones, they also permit important conversations to be had about systemic absences and erasures.

Many of us, trans folk, have grown increasingly critical of the solidarity culture that is both devoid and scared of internal discord and difference(s). It continues to retreat to the familiar, the comfortable, and to what is known instead of engaging with differences. Even in the most transitory spaces of a union strike on the borderlands of the university campus and the city, a familiar environment was reproduced out of patterns of interaction and hegemonic ways of understanding gender and sexual identities.

Amidst the environment of collective political struggle, we looked forward to the smallest of gestures of kindness, such as food brought to us by supportive faculty and students, and interactions with the people who waited in their cars to cross the picket line. Some students played music, others danced on the road, while the rest of us walked in circles, in between various occasional announcements. Yet, it was never clear who could have access to the microphone and what was appropriate to publicly announce. I remember being surprised by an announcement of an upcoming honeymoon vacation. Everyone on the picket line suddenly broke into claps and cheers. In a tense and divisive political time, I completely understand the need for celebration. But what do we choose to collectively celebrate? No student-leader or representative ever picked up the microphone to announce being sensitive to diverse gender identities and gender pronouns that could have shifted the onus of correcting cis privileges away from me. Instead, the public place of ritualistic protest collectively reinforced cis-heteronormative socio-spatial practices.

The authors of the article "Listening and Learning: Giving Voice to Trans Experiences of Disasters" (Gorman-Murray et al. 2017) underscore the value of single narrative voice particularly in the context of crisis management, for it allows "close attention to personal experiences that, in turn, highlight broader patterns of vulnerability" (173). Further, the authors find that "trans people face heightened harassment and fears vis-à-vis even lesbian, gay and bisexual populations, with their specific needs as yet *unheard*" [emphasis added] (168). They argue that voicing "specific vulnerabilities" is especially critical in "crisis" contexts. Their study interrogates and unlearns deeply internalized understanding of emergency and priority, and basically *who* matters in the context of temporal site of risk/crisis that deeply impacts relatively many lives.

The CUPE 3903 strike illustrates a similar temporal site of crisis. It shows who/what gets prioritized symbolically, in everyday interactions and celebrations, as well as materially, in the allocation of the hardship fund that recognizes needs of students-with-children. However, these priorities also fail to *listen* to the "specific vulnerabilities" of trans/queer international students who, as we know, may not subscribe to normative family life (if it were even accessible) and therefore, may never have "recognizable" crisis within cis-heteronormative sites of resistance and solidarity.

The picket line I describe, then, is a soundscape of enabling cis heteronormative familiarizing and trans alienation in temporal-political spaces on the borderland of university/city. As a micro-liminal space, it challenges the relationship between protest and pedagogy, i.e., between activism and teaching/learning. A wide array of radical pedagogies scholarships (including feminist rhetoric studies,

critical race, and ethnic studies) explores ways to resist and unlearn "safe" and "sanitized" knowledge production in and beyond the classroom through "self-conscious listening" (Bessette 2016), "disquieting process" (Dowler 2002), as well as considering "discomfort as pedagogy" (Leibowitz et al. 2010) and a "pedagogy of fear" (Leonardo and Porter 2010). Although not trans specific, in calling for a "pedagogy of discomfort" (Leibowitz et al. 2010), critical race pedagogy has a deeper resonance with trans-pedagogy which may be probed to "disrupt" the cis comfort especially "for those who benefit from that power" (Leonardo and Porter 2010, 140). In that, the potential of a trans pedagogical pause may be in recognizing and reorienting the pedagogical presence to literally on the borderlands of the university/city to sensitize even radicalized collectives to transphobia and racism to listen to the voices *and* the silences of TPOC.

Contesting Conversations: Signs and Activism in Hallways

        Hallways play multiple roles alongside their primary function as circulation spaces that connect one place to another such as: 1) spillover spaces to primary enclosed spaces such as classrooms, offices, and meeting rooms, 2) instructional spaces with changing notice boards, and 3) as exhibition spaces for displaying student and departmental achievements. As such, hallways may be understood as threshold spaces or micro-liminal spaces. Although predominantly serving as "mundane organizational spaces" (Middleton, Irving, and Wright 2020) and "'fill-in' or 'add-on' spaces that fall outside of the geographic grid of identifiable social and organizational events, conducts and functions" (Iedema, Long, and Carroll 2010, 41), hallways are micro-liminal spaces which critically "convey institutional power by dominating and disciplining micro-level actions" (Middleton, Irving, and Wright 2020, 49). As some scholars have argued, the "brief journey through corridors…involving human and non-human inter/action…is part of an ongoing process of intertextuality which produces an embodied, relational, and political space of liminality …[and] new, continually evolving, dialogic space-texts" (Lucas and Wright 2015, 1-2). In what follows, I describe the departmental hallway through which I walk to reach my office and highlight a range of visuals in my sightline which can simultaneously signal both orientation and "disorientation."

        In recent research on experiences of disorientation of mobile workers in familiar environments, Bissell and Gorman-Murray (2020) "reimagine disorientation as a more everyday embodied experience and a more common quality of intimate socio-spatial formations in familiar places" where they argue "how oscillatory mobility to and from" the familiar "can give rise to multiple experiences of disorientation that signal a loss of bodily capacity to know others; to know how to proceed; and to know how to hold a situation together" (708). This article concurs "that disorientation is a productive geographical concept" (707) which often gets erased or buried with inclusion-based approach to transness (which do little to unsettle cisness) at the expense of its critical trans potential. Disorientation then, is a crucial pretext to *reorientating to invisible and often unfamiliar openings* which can be tapped by activating a "pedagogical pause" to engage with and disrupt cis privileges. I now turn to the case narrative.

        The Graduate Program in Geography at York University is housed on the fourth floor of the north-south wings of the Ross Building (see Figure 1) – a linear, exposed concrete building of brutalist architecture. The department has two parallel hallways, with offices on either side, ending in a department lounge at the far end. Upon exiting the elevators and walking through the main doors, immediately placed back-to-back are two washrooms that anchor each of the two parallel hallways – "women" on the right and "men" on the left.

Down the right-hand hallway past the women's washroom there is a display board showcasing the publications of graduate students alongside other notice boards. One such notice board is dedicated to health and safety handbooks, including one about workplace harassment. Another notice board profiles the undergraduate program. Over the years the space outside of graduate student and faculty offices has become cluttered with posters, stickers, newspaper articles, and photographs that showcase research works, identities, and ideologies of department members. From my perspective, the hallway sent a constant message of a gender binary. I became increasingly mistrusting of my departmental environment, questioning whether I was even visible or relevant.

On multiple occasions, I approached my supervisor to navigate the various incidents of misgendering that were utterly intolerable. I include three images (Figures 3, 4, and 5) as examples of micro-interventions that my supervisor and I have done in a cross-section of the hallway where our offices face each other to change the conversations (highlighted in pink in Figure 1). Elsewhere, I contend that our experiences of the built environment are layered: built, lived, and felt space. These layers are not neatly separable, rather crucially overlay one another. I argue there for a "layered engagement" with embodied spaces that "unlearn[s] and re-draw[s] certain architectural solidities to reveal its often-implicit conformities, and, in so doing, come closer to comprehending the emotional experiences of spaces" (Arun-Pina 2021, 1).

Similarly, the article now activates a "pedagogical pause" and transitions into an exhibition space to look at the "photo-objects" (Buse 2010) of Figures 3-5, which represent a layered experience of the departmental hallway with the dominant, the contesting and the imagined signs in the hallway. Reading these alongside one another importantly renders porous the cisnormative solidities to begin to comprehend "the spatiality of disorientation" (Bissell and Gorman-Murray 2020, 708).

Figure 3. Dominant signs: Hallway to my office in the department with details of the first turn: In my letter to the graduate department faculty above, I recollect having no immediate choice of gender-neutral washroom, while

constantly reminded of dominant signs of expected and normative gendered spaces Source: Author.
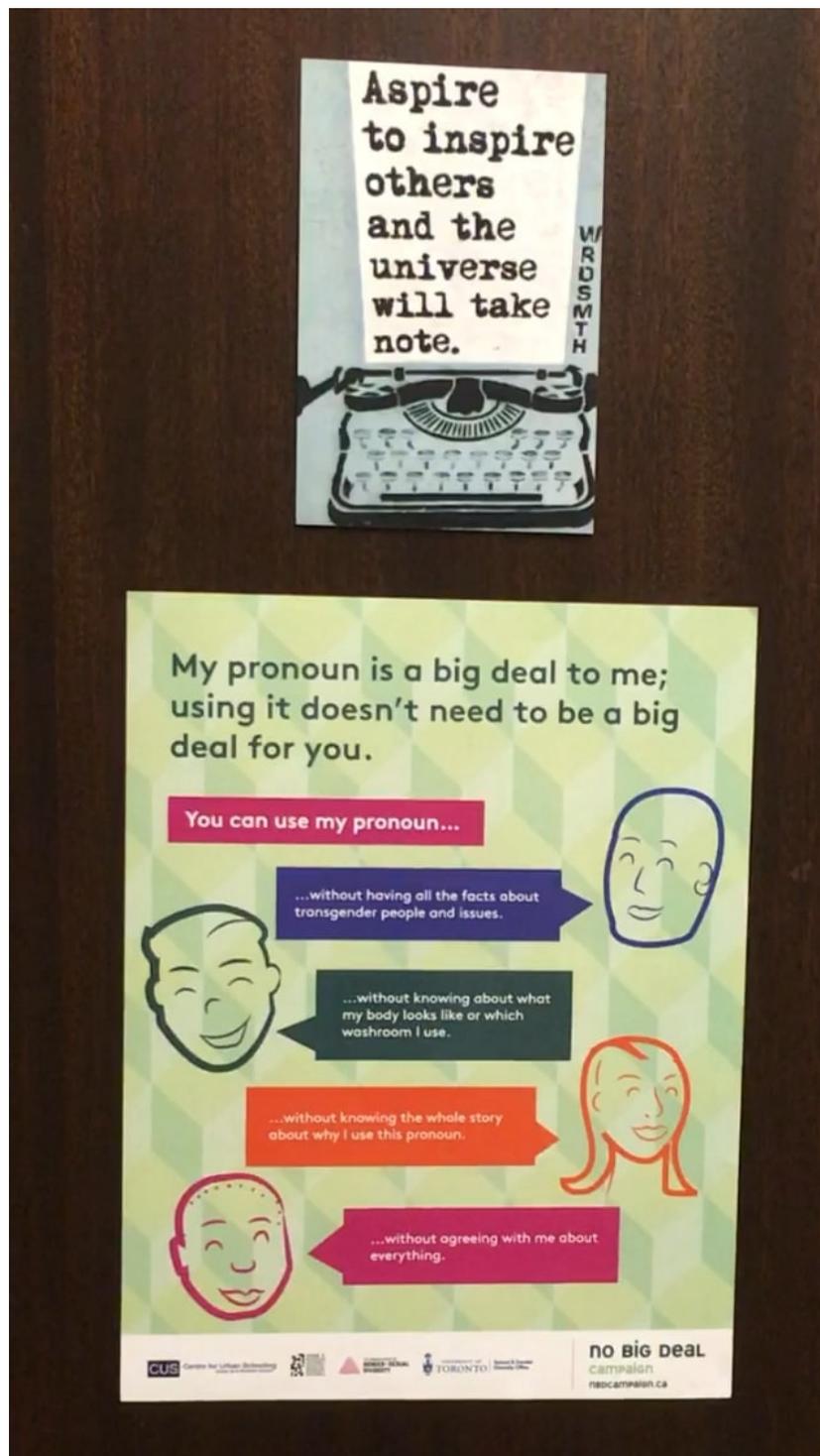
Figure 4. Contested signs: The door to my supervisor's office across from my shared office space with buttons with gender-neutral pronouns pinned on the wall (left), and a poster from the No Big Deal campaign that was started in support of transgender and/or non-binary people, by the students and faculty at the

University of Toronto. The campaign is showcased on the HealthyUofT website, reinforcing that gender pronouns and identity are important considerations for healthy workplaces. Source: Author.

Figure 5. Imagined signs: A post-card self-portrait that I wanted to give to each person who misgendered me to both symbolize my contestation of the hegemonic gender binary and to offer a pronoun reminder but did not. Source: Author.

The above micro-interventions in the hallway space intend to visually, alter optics of cis notions of a fully perceptible and comprehendible reality; spatially, create openings for trans expression and opposition to cis "gender tyranny"; and, pedagogically, carve pauses to facilitate reorienting to the invisible and the unfamiliar dimensions of transphobia.

Disrupting cis normativity of spaces might mean to disrupt the spatiality itself. In *Threshold Concepts in Practice,* Land, Meyer, and Flanagan (2014, 326) observe that the "liminal zone is a place learners want to leave and be done with it." To sustain an engaged "dialogic space-text," the inherent linear flow of the hallways needs temporary interruption and shift in the pace of movement that exhibition spaces often enable, even mandate. It is not simply a shift in the movement, however, but rather an "ontological shift in the way the learner perceives [them]selves and [their] own learning trajectory" (326). Following Gennep's three-part structure on liminality for a rite of passage—*separation, liminal period, and reassimilation*—this article thus, offers a parallel three-part structure: *disorientation, trans-pedagogical pause, and reorientation*.

Conclusion

This article extends the call for interrupting heteronormativity in higher education (Seal 2019) to disrupt cisnormativity and explore the critical potential of trans-pedagogy in post-secondary institutions. The cisnormative hold on reality as not only dichotomous, but also as solid and fully comprehensible is arguably antithetical to learning. But where does/should learning happen on campus?

In *Neoliberalization, Universities and the Public Intellectual: Species, Gender and Class and the Production of Knowledge,* authors (2016) tell us that "the production of 'safe' knowledge…reiterates the central messages of neoliberalism" (5). Trans pedagogical pause, in challenging the spatial limits of "safe" pedagogy that confines itself to dominant spaces of learning, seeks as it offers to recognize and reorient multiple pedagogic presence beyond classrooms to "many marginal spaces" (Fraser and Taylor 2016, 15). This may call for a compounded role of a teacher as an "activist-scholar" (Fraser and Taylor 2016) immersed at once in caring and activism.

Often marginalized themselves, even as they carry limited "controversy capital" (Laliberte et al. 2017), teachers put themselves at risk in going against the safe and centralized neoliberal apparatus. Elsewhere, Case et al. (2012) also advocate for enabling "student-initiated activism beyond the classroom," "student-faculty activism," "action strategies," as well as employing "innovative pedagogical practices" in challenging the gender-conforming privilege in universities. In exploring the critical potential of trans-pedagogy on campus as both physical and virtual together, this article offers a three-part practice—*disorientation, trans pedagogical pause, and reorientation*—from a place of void realized by trans learners who encounter everyday misgendering in micro-liminal spaces of learning. The pedagogical pause works to facilitate an interruption—however temporary—to cis privileges in post-secondary institutions.

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navigating gender-conforming academic spaces in the west as a TPOC doctoral student.

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