

# Tentacular Classrooms: Feminist Transformative Learning for Thinking and Sensing

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## Abstract

Integrative transformative learning in a feminist perspective asks students to engage in potentially troublesome and unsettling debates, to confront their own privilege and situated knowledges, and to experiment with conventional boundaries for knowledge production. We introduce the idea of the “tentacular classroom” grounded in the work of Haraway on tentacular thinking to show the ways in which the learning encounter, figured as a tentacular organism, allows for co-production and multiplicity in knowledge production. Through two illustrative examples from gender studies classrooms, we show what is at stake when unruly tentacles become involved in disrupting the boundedness imposed on teaching and learning in the neo-liberal university context. We conclude that a tentacular classroom entails confrontations with troublesome knowledges but also with troublesome unlearning as well, leading teachers and learners to an alternative point of departure for the learning encounter.

## Keywords

transformative pedagogy, social transformation, Donna Haraway, feminist pedagogy

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Tentacles and all things tentacular have long inspired the human imagination. Represented in popular culture as devious, exploratory appendages capable of slithering their way into the most inaccessible of spaces, nothing remains safely outside their suctioning grasp. Modern biology has furthered our understanding of tentacles, particularly the cephalopod kind, by demonstrating their capacity to *think* independently from the animal's centralized brain as they engage in sensorial exploration, hunting, and even play. How might thinking and feeling with these complex, curious, and intelligent organs help us arrive at new ways of imagining and occupying classroom spaces in transformative ways?

In this article, we aim to explore the ways in which Haraway's concept of the *tentacular* might be used as a feminist point of entry into transformative learning in gender studies education. In spite of the increasing presence of feminist work on transformative learning—eco-feminist, decolonial, and others—such perspectives still remain scarce within the field, and when they are present, they have been “toned down” (English & Irving, 2012; Miles, 1996; 2002; Ntseane, 2012). As Brookfield (2003) argues in his study of African-American feminist conceptualizations of transformative learning, “the African American intellectual community has conducted a vigorous debate on the process of transformative education and the way factors of race, gender, and class need to be central to its praxis” (p. 212). Like Miles (1996, 2002), we see the need for additional feminist pathways to transformation to be made visible, particularly those that bring together self, social world and life-affirming values.

Our particular exploration of transformative learning emerges from gender studies classrooms in Scandinavia, which are grounded in critical approaches to gender as a highly complex and intersectional phenomenon. As Norway and Sweden are also taken for granted as so-called models of gender equality, teaching for student transformation involves scratching below the surface of this self-image as gender equal, happy places to live to ask how such an image is produced and at whose expense. The work of introspection and problematizing these seemingly well-functioning societies is often a struggle that requires engaging students in sustained processes of unlearning that set the self in a broader societal context.

In our teaching praxis, allowing for the movement of tentacles in and out of our classroom spaces constitutes an alternative practice of knowledge production. The opening up for tentacles means welcoming in potentially “troublesome knowledge” (Perkins, 1999), which has the potential to provoke anything from discomfort to trauma in learners (Cousins, 2006). As Hassel & Launius (2017) note, gender studies brings numerous opportunities to engage with troublesome knowledge:

Much of the material in introductory Women's and Gender Studies courses asks students to re-think “common sense” ideas and assumptions about their culture, their society and how it works, and their experiences, including the sometimes uncomfortable experiences of the situatedness of their own bodies. This process can be both alienating and affirming. (p. 31)

Our first example discusses, from a teacher's perspective, what happens when tentacles bring ideologies critical of the feminist project squarely into the gender studies classroom. In our second example, a classroom extending tentacles asks students to lean into the curricular texts by intentionally *feeling* and *sensing* them in relation to their own subject positions, before sending tentacles out of the classroom to explore the self's relation to social space. Both tentacular classrooms that we present involve students and educators in decentralized processes of knowledge production.

Allowing for the movement of tentacles in and out of classrooms is not without risk. Involving a great deal of unlearning for educators and students, it asks us to reconsider what constitutes a legitimate source of knowledge (lived, embodied experiences vs. traditional scholarly knowledge) and accept that much learning occurs outside the classroom walls. What we have set out to do might not provide easy answers or quick solutions, but our aim is to grapple with the tentacular simultaneously as a theoretical framework and a transformative pedagogical practice. Although the concept of the tentacular may be seen as abstract and as belonging more to the realm of science fiction than pedagogy, we provide two local and situated examples of how this reconceptualization of knowledge production can be put to use in practice. This foregrounding of teaching practices and learning processes in our tentacular classrooms will, hopefully, inspire the creation of more such spaces.

## Situating Feminist Transformative Learning

In gender studies, transformative learning has been most influenced by feminist pedagogy<sup>1</sup>, a theory or philosophy of teaching and learning that integrates feminist values and theories with teaching and learning praxis. From its origins in second wave feminism, feminist pedagogy has drawn its momentum from four interconnected elements: the self, the curriculum, the learning community, and broader social change. As Shrewsbury (1997) notes, feminist pedagogy is:

engaged with [the] self in a continuing reflective process; engaged actively with the material being studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism and classism and homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge; engaged with the community, with traditional organizations, and with movements for social change. (p. 166)

Shrewsbury's mention of knowledge production as a collective, bottom-up endeavor rather than as emerging from a hegemonic syllabus plays an important role in feminist classrooms.

The assumption that feminist theories provide insight into such alternative classroom power structures that are more conducive to democratic education can also be seen in their oppositional stance towards neo-liberal corporatist values. Speaking from one such university, Wright (2016) sees as a widening gap between feminist and institutional values, and knowledge from women's and gender studies "constructed

often as irrelevant and/or too political and controversial, rather than a necessary philosophical foundation to critical thinking” (p. 215). In addition to the institutional challenges, teaching about gender and diversity has been under increasing scrutiny by a western political climate characterized by rising populism and so-called “post-truth” discourse that undermines “hard-won gains in relation to gender and other intersecting forms of inequality and difference” (Burke & Carolissen, 2018, p. 544).

Feminist transformative learning that emphasizes the role of self within broader social change falls under the umbrella of the integrative approach to transformative learning (Clover, 2002; Miles, 2002; O’Sullivan, 1999, 2002). Rather than focusing narrowly on how transformative learning occurs on an individual level, integrative transformative learning inquires into the broader purpose of educational transformation and how pedagogies relate to the seemingly unsurmountable ecological and social challenges facing the world today. The definition provided by O’Sullivan et al. (2002) will help us see some important resonances with feminist theory:

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our body-awareness, our vision of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (p. 22)

Such a definition also acknowledges that a multiplicity of knowledges and standpoints—all situated in unique ways—are required for such a shift to take place. Haraway’s work, in particular, which we see as important for a transformative feminist pedagogy in higher education, calls our attention to the ways in which we know and experience the world, not as detached, objective observers but as partial and located ones. *Situated knowledges* is the name Haraway (1988) gives to the practice of creating: “[...] a more adequate, richer, better account of a world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others’ practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions” (p. 579).

In Haraway’s work, tentacular thinking is a form of critical reflection that involves reimagining better ways to inhabit the planet. This particular way of thinking involves “staying with the trouble” as Haraway (2016) calls it, or learning to engage in “generative joy, terror, and collective thinking” to learn to live better and more relationally on a damaged planet (p. 31). Seeing the tentacular as embodying sometimes contradictory elements, Haraway wants us to see that opening up for this type of critical reflection renders us vulnerable; it is unsafe and potentially terrifying because it requires us to reckon with the current state of affairs—a dying planet, along with inequality perpetually amplified by colonialism and capitalism. Yet “staying with the trouble” also has the capacity to produce joy as we seek to deepen our connectedness and responsibility to all others. Haraway (2016) cautions that this shift in the direction

of heightened relationality is far from being safe or harmonious but it is necessary for the transformation toward living better on our planet (p. 98).

## Tentacular Thinking in Practice: Risks and Possibilities

As feminist thinkers invested in transformative learning and student-active investment in the co-construction of knowledges, one strategy is to explore tentacular thinking as a useful thinking tool for negotiating power, participation and rethinking classroom knowledge regimes. In the work of Haraway (2016), tentacular thinking and tentacularity in general engage in the same generative dynamics as the storytelling method and child's game of making string figures. Her attention to the tentacular and the entanglements created by games of string figures—where tied together pieces of string are used and reused to make different shapes, representations and figures—brings together knowledges and embodiments as co-constitutive. For us, this highlights how learning is situated, but also how it transforms and challenges norms and established life practices. Haraway (2016) writes: “The tentacular [...] make attachments and detachments; they take cuts and knots; they make a difference; they weave paths and consequences but not determinisms; they are both open and knotted in some ways and not others” (p. 31).

For Haraway, the notion of tentacular thinking implies acknowledging thinking—and therefore also learning—as a collective entanglement, something multi-faceted that moves and shifts in potentially unpredictable ways but in which is embedded the potential for startling changes. We understand tentacular thinking in line with Haraway's (1988) long-standing claim that knowledge production is not linear, disembodied or static, but rather situated in historical, social, bodily and normative ways. The tentacular also highlights how knowledge production is implicated in ideology and power structures, and that the second decade of the 21st century inevitably brings different conditions of possibility for transformative and participatory learning than previous decades. With the notion of tentacular thinking, itself situated in what Haraway (2016) calls the *Chthulucene*, a timespace past, present, and to come, she attempts to go beyond human-centered ways of thinking about knowledge and learning. As such, the tentacular embodies the processes of knowledge production, not according to the figure of the human brain but rather in a more-than-human multiorgan operating in the manner of the string figure described above: “giving and receiving patterns, dropping threads and failing but sometimes finding something that works, something consequential and maybe even beautiful, that wasn't there before, of relaying connections that matter, of telling stories in hand upon hand” (Haraway, 2016, p. 10).

In the popular imagination, tentacles are traditionally associated with the octopus or with slimy, slithering, penetrating alien monsters, and are, in that sense, an incarnation of the troublesome. However, Haraway makes the point that tentacles, in all their materializations, are also fleshy, sensory tools for understanding and exploring one's environment. Although the octopus' brain cells are confined to the brain-organ, the central nerve system that feeds the brain is extremely well developed. For Haraway, this

is an example of a breakdown of the conventional mind/body split, and of the human/non-human divide, allowing multiple knowledges to be taken into account as part of knowledge production rather than just hierarchical and canonized knowledge regimes, such as the hegemonic syllabus, for example. Further, the materiality of the tentacular opens up for encouraging a multitude of lived experiences and embodied knowledges to take part of/in the classroom knowledge productions.

Following Haraway (2016), we recognize that the notion of tentacular thinking is part of an epistemology of *thinking-with* where the basis for transformation is a multitude of perspectives and lived experiences, human and non-human, that contribute to the production of embodied knowledges. Such knowledges, intentionally written in the plural form, are referred to as *situated* to signal that all knowledge is shaped by the social location and positionality of the knower. In both a transformative learning and feminist perspective, not only does the thinking-with different perspectives make knowledge richer but it also contributes to a collective transformation, that of creating better ways to live together inclusive of the broad range of human diversity. Haraway's feminist epistemology of thinking-with pays tribute to Spivak's (1988) *subaltern*, Smith's (1990) *particular perspective*, Harding's (1991) *strong objectivity*—all of which are attentive to a feminist politics of location or positionality. This way of knowing resonates deeply with the vision of integrative transformative learning as maintaining the “totality of life's context always at the forefront” (O'Sullivan, 2002, p. 31) and in this sense, tentacular thinking is a necessarily diverse and collective rather than individual undertaking. As Haraway (2016) states, “Tentacularity is about life lived along lines—and such a wealth of lines—not at points, not in spheres” (p. 32).

In terms of classroom practices, tentacular thinking resonates with Hassel & Launius's (2017) findings that women and gender studies courses tend to encourage students to challenge their horizons of understanding by examining lived experiences in the light of disciplinary concepts and others' experiences, and to challenge established knowledge regimes and revisit normative social codes. This encouragement is also something that we recognize from our own teaching practices, where we also recommend that students read beyond the prescribed curriculum, and reach outside of academia for debates, discussions and other things to think with.

### **First Example: Tentacularity and Troublesome Knowledge**

The following text is an example that comes from notes on Author #3's classroom: *at the beginning of the semester, I asked the students about their motivations for taking the course, and if they had any particular topics, debates or dilemmas they would like to discuss. They had many good ideas, but one suggestion made my heart sink a little: Jordan Peterson. As you all know, Peterson is a controversial figure in a landscape of increasingly anti-feminist rhetoric and often cited as an inspirator for the Incel movement—involuntary celibacy for predominantly white young men. I will be honest: my first impulse was that personally, I do not want him in my classroom. Nevertheless, given the students' suggestions, I realized he is already there, culturally, politically,*

*and, by being brought forth tentacularly as a topic relevant for the current state of affairs in gender studies and in ongoing debates about gender and feminism in the world more broadly. So, then, how to include Peterson without entering into, or reproducing, debates about feminism as the enemy for example? How to facilitate constructive learning about controversial, and in part, disputed, topics?*

*In the end, I decided to address the topic of Peterson, both as an example of a contemporary influencer being critical of the feminist project, and as an example of how the notion of gender equality continues to be a contested term—and how it is bound to raise questions of equality and for whom. Now, this felt risky. On the one hand, a risk of lessening or whitewashing the very problematic rhetoric from Peterson in order to prevent this from becoming a “yes or no to feminism” debate in the classroom. On the other, the risk of bringing in a troublesome topic can also cause silence and uneasiness among the student group by way of being a potentially divisive and problematic subject, particularly if systemic inequalities are not acknowledged (Gressgård & Harlap, 2014). Of course, not bringing it in would also be to risk undermining the project of tentacular learning.*

Overall, we had a constructive debate in the classroom that day, where the students had been asked to present Peterson’s project in smaller groups, followed by a plenary discussion on gendered roles, norms and expectations. My pedagogical plan, as moderator, was twofold. Firstly, to situate Peterson’s ideology in historical and contemporary feminist debates. Secondly, to facilitate dialogue between the various student presentations with a specific attention to how moments of unease and potential conflict are not just about different opinions, but about intersectional power structures. In spite of a lively discussion, parts of the class fell a bit quieter than usual because of unease or, potentially, in acknowledgement of the sensitive and potentially risky topic. Interestingly, some students used this session as a foundation for their exam paper on performativity and how Peterson deploys speech acts as a way of doing or (retro)fitting a specific kind of masculinity. Here, Butler’s (1990) theories of gender performativity became a key analytical tool for understanding Peterson’s project, and an entry point for critical engagement.

In many ways, this case shows how potentially troublesome knowledge can be used to give ownership of said knowledge, where both students and teacher are invited to reflect and (re)examine their thinking and practices. That said, it also sparks silences. We nevertheless take from this example that tentacular thinking is a useful strategy for making an opening—a crack—for learning and knowledge through student-generated concerns: bringing in ideas or debates that are familiar or engaging potentially incites learning. This is not new: using recognizable examples and engaging with student concerns is a pedagogical trick of the trade. For our purposes, however, tentacular thinking in the classroom is a way of operationalizing Haraway’s thinking-with as participation: To invite critical self-reflection on troublesome topics by way of addressing one’s own as well as others’ complicity in powers structures and knowledge regimes. As Haraway (1988, 2016) indicates, this is a risky, participatory endeavor that demands critical reflection<sup>2</sup> from all involved. In this example, the tentacular approach

opened up a collective exchange of viewpoints, as well as silences, that it was possible to build on, both in terms of collective knowledge production in the classroom, and knowledges about the situated, tentacular legacies and effects of the case in point.

Drawing on feminist pedagogy about power structures, empowerment and vulnerability in the classroom (hooks, 2010), we therefore suggest that inviting students to tentacular thinking can ensure knowledge exchange and ownership and can contribute to building just pedagogies and cooperation. Deploying tentacular thinking as a strategy promotes participation and commitment—and often ownership—among students, and as the example shows, it also prompts reflection for the teacher on how to address potentially troublesome knowledges, and to acknowledge systemic inequalities as foundational for the conditions of possibility for participation. As such, it moves into what Rogowska-Stangret (2017) has called the “unruly edges” of knowledge landscapes (p. 13). As a participatory and reflexive approach, the tentacular also destabilizes an authoritarian teaching role, where traditional classroom hierarchies are challenged, much in line with recent trends for a more student-active learning in higher education. However, in feminist pedagogy, power relations in the classroom are not *undone* by momentary shifts and facilitation of ownership. Rather, the question of power relations in the classroom involves a focus on vulnerability and the conditions of possibility for participation, and as such, the Peterson example may serve to illustrate these systemic inequalities and mechanisms.

In recent feminist pedagogy, vulnerability is emphasized as a possible starting point for allowing more democratic classrooms (hooks, 2010). According to hooks (2010), being vulnerable is necessary in order to stimulate at all creative and critical reflections on one’s own learning. She writes

by making ourselves vulnerable we show our students that they can take risks, that they can be vulnerable, that they can have confidence that their thoughts, their ideas will be given appropriate consideration and respect. (p. 57)

That said, gender studies is (still) full of potentially controversial subjects: abortion, surrogacy, sexual minorities—and Peterson—and so it is a political and ethical decision to open for tentacles. The obvious risk is, of course, an unsafe classroom resulting from the particular challenge of balancing authority—or perhaps it is governmentality—and tentacularity. In order for risky and potentially harmful topics to be put forward in the classroom space, attention to the power dynamics at stake in each case is required. The Peterson example is particularly risky in the sense that it foregrounds a critique of gender studies as a field, and as such makes both teachers and students vulnerable to attacks and criticism, as both Wright (2016) and Burke & Carolissen (2018) have pointed out.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of staying with the trouble, it might be necessary to open up for the troublesome, in this case Peterson’s ideology, in spite of its anti-feminist stance. For our experiment here, it did offer an opportunity to situate troublesome knowledge within a global, Chthulucene context, and well as in a localized,



Scandinavian gender studies learning environment. As we know from feminist epistemology, learning is also about unlearning, and about challenging established knowledge regimes, inviting in what has been silenced, marginalized, and about remembering what has been lost. With respect to these forms of troublesome knowledges, inviting to tentacular thinking is also unruly, and in a sense encourages the unexpected, the unpredictable, the uncontrollable of knowledge production. However, by bringing these risky and unruly tentacles into the classroom, we potentially compromise the very epistemologies of our field that advocate participation and responsibility. As a case in point, the Peterson example risks making room for anti-feminist sentiments in order to grapple with issues of systemic and ideological inequalities. That said, when anti-feminist ideology becomes a tentacle in this manner, our approach is to transform it into something that can be thought with feminism rather than against it. With our concept of the tentacular classroom, we suggest a pedagogy that encourages both marginalized, hidden, controversial or unconventional knowledges and experiences in order to facilitate more relational dialogues about what constitutes knowledge and knowledge production.

Deliberately negotiating questions of authority and participation in the classroom is, as we have argued, a key insight in feminist pedagogy. Opening up for tentacular knowledge and vulnerable positionalities, also risks making it easy to debunk our knowledge base, precisely because it is not fixed and static, but constantly under construction. Considering the precarity of the situation for gender studies in several places in Europe, as illustrated by the ban on gender studies study programs in Hungary, the threats against gender studies scholars and departments in Poland and Sweden, as well as ongoing debates in Denmark and Norway concerning the so-called deficient scientific credentials for the field, gender studies and our traditions for co-constructed knowledges and inclusive pedagogies are also rendered vulnerable. This means that, in a time when calls for authority—be it scientific or political—seem to be resurfacing, we need articulate strategies for continuing our feminist pedagogies without letting go of the importance of situated, embodied knowledge practices.

We argue that tentacular thinking is one of those strategies, in spite of the risks. Can we make it risk-free though, and should we even aim for it? Scholar and feminist hooks advocates for risk-taking. Haraway encourages us to stay with the trouble. Tentacular thinking in the classroom is acknowledging that there are many different types of knowledges, and is, in that respect, an attempt to facilitate the different types of meetings between said knowledges and experiences. At the end of the day, we believe it is more fruitful, albeit risky, to move into this uncontrollable terrain, these unruly edges, these fields of troublesome knowledge. However, as this example shows, this strategy also requires an awareness of the very risks and possibilities involved in putting it to use.

## Second Example: Tentacularity and Multi-Sensory Experiences Outside the Classroom

Feminist pedagogy's current turn toward new materialism suggests that as feminist educators we revisit not only our teaching and researching practices, but also our theoretical toolbox and terminology (Hinton et al., 2015). When we ask ourselves what kind of thinking we want to incite in our gender studies classrooms, we might take inspiration from Demster (2007) and Haraway (2016), who advocate for *unbounded* ways of thinking—beyond categories and dichotomies—which do justice to the complexity and interdependency of living systems, allowing us to think in terms of interaction and interdependency.

In the example below we find an invitation for considering tentacularity from the perspective of intentionally teaching outside the classroom space, moving and extending the boundaries of the classroom to encompass alternative learning spaces in which multi-sensory experiences can occur. With this in mind, the text below presents an instance from Author #2's classroom that will be discussed in subsequent sections:

*The Bachelor's degree in gender studies at my department was formerly structured to teach the most canonical texts in the discipline as well as the most established methodologies used among scholars at the institution. When I began as lecturer, I was invited to introduce intersectionality in an introductory course on gender. During the second term, students could then revisit intersectionality for a deeper exploration of the concept. After a few meetings, it became clear to me that students perceived a clear separation between themselves as subjects and the axes of difference involved in intersectional analysis, marginalizations that they located elsewhere, happening in the "real world." This phenomenon was reinforced in their essays for which students distanced themselves, using almost entirely secondary sources and aiming to illuminate the theoretical aspects of ongoing debates in society. To disrupt this boundary situation, students were assigned to work as teams in a field course whose objective was to explore their own subjects within the space of the city or the town in which they were living during the duration of the course.*

The first step towards developing a critical tentacular thinking was to enable students to read themselves in the lecture material and required readings. Reading in advance and in such a manner opened for the possibility of disrupting the hegemonic canon at the institution, injecting the various theoretical positions in the text with their own life experiences. Through this approach, students occupied a position from which to respond to the lecturers with their own alternative interpretations. During the seminars that were held after the lectures, the class also made further interpretations as to how different situated knowledges related to everyday situations. Students were encouraged to outline how they experienced the sociological effects of knowledge by shaping complex ideas, contexts, situations and visions in different ways. Instead of just reading and writing texts, the students were given further opportunities to take center stage and talk to the class, drawing from their different backgrounds and knowledge positions, extending their tentacles beyond the walls of the classroom.

A second critical step toward developing tentacularity was to allow for the growth and extension of various sensory and emotional relationships both to each other and to the outside world by awakening among them their *sentipensante*, or the *thinking-feeling academic* (Fals-Borda, 1987). For this purpose, it was natural to organize teaching in smaller-sized base groups—or tentacles—so that students could experiment with verbalizing and writing with new knowledge. During the seminars, with their focus on creating conditions for dialogue between students and the lecturer, group thinking was fed by its tentacles that had been extended in different directions thanks to various situated knowledges. Students could provide their own interpretations of texts that had been previously situated by their authors, provoking an intentional erosion of the authors' canonical authority. As a result, the texts became more tangible, felt and therefore able to be sensed, rather than simply known. During the semester, we pursued an intersectional approach to identify oppressive situations as well as to affirm alternative situated positions. Only when students understood each other's starting points, and the teacher relinquished hierarchal control, did situations arise where the group together developed new interpretations. New knowledge grew organically from allowing the students' own experiences to be displayed, transforming the classroom space into a tentacular body capable of mapping certain societal dynamics through its various extensions.

The third step for developing a critical tentacular thinking and action consisted in paving the way for students to make an impact in society with their newly acquired knowledge. The sameness to which we are accustomed in our gender studies classes is constructed by the students reflecting each other's backgrounds. As metaphor and as practice, this sameness is an obstacle to increase the diversity of underrepresented and particularly underprivileged social groups. What actually happens with such social composition is that reflection as an approach ends up looking for homologies, analogies and uniformity at the expense of obscuring and disregarding differences. Putting this in a tentacular frame means that the class emerges as a body without tentacles, unable to reach other social constellations beyond the dominant white, middle class constellations ruling in society.

The fourth step involved in building a tentacular classroom was to develop students' sensorial skills during the courses and to push students to realize the ontological value of such skills. To this end, students acquired further training in identifying a particular research field with existing knowledge gaps into which their own contribution could be placed. Students further planned how this initiative would be materialized through field work that involved exploring difference (identities other than their own). In the first level course, students worked to use the literature as referential; rather than stressing its canonical status, the literature functioned to make an entry into a fieldwork situation. Students were trained to go out to society to make manifest the ways in which intersectionality could be used to disrupt normalities along lines of ages, body abilities, racialities, economic classes, sexualities, and speciesisms. Each and every one of these fields was mapped by the students in their tentacular base-groups over a period of 5 weeks. They worked tentacularly to create new knowledge situations in which class

workshops filled up with discoveries and sensational interpretations by using all the senses. Students could then perform and disseminate their knowledge in non-writing based forms such as sketches representing different social positions interviewed by the group, which is very important for the development of empathy and emotional attachments to groups not represented in the class. Other group prepared musicalizations of the findings based on their musical and poetry skills. The same could be said by those interested in photography to document different observations and trips around the cities spaces that are habitually blamed in the corporate press or concealed for not been attractive enough for gentrification.

Transforming the class into a tentacular body means creating the conditions for contact and mobility into society's underrepresented or troublesome spaces, as well as to allowing students to use all the senses to learn and teach each other. Students who participated in the pilot version of the introductory course, and followed the sequence through the second level, and through the Bachelor's program continue these practices at the Master's level. At the Master's level in a course on gendering practices, the class was asked to develop an equality plan for an institution, public authority, social movement or company. Rather than turning once again to canonical texts on equality, the class naturally took up their tentacular form to dealing with the challenges of inequality in urban space. Thanks to this approach, the students developed equality plans for city archives, sport associations, political parties, festivals, city authorities and corporations forging a pathway to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016). The impact of the class as an impacting body in society confirms that tentacularity should be a natural way of becoming organically attached to society in order to feel, experience and change for the better.

## **Further Reflection: Tentacular Classrooms**

The two examples presented above represent instances of pedagogical strategies for negotiating the structures of teaching and learning in a feminist integrative transformative perspective, and to expand on the boundedness of the hegemonic syllabus, our own syllabi and the classroom itself. Our examples reflect feminist traditions concerning the co-construction of knowledges and inclusive pedagogies, epistemological and pedagogical traditions that render us increasingly vulnerable to the far right's attacks on gender studies.

One strategy tries out the tentacular within a specific set of pre-defined rules while the other attempts to tentacularly change the rules, both cases catalyzed by thinking outside the classroom. These examples are experiments—rendering those involved vulnerable and exposed—in carving out a space for relational models of knowledge production in neo-liberal university environment concerned primarily with the "management" and containing of the learning experience. Through a tentacular approach, our examples illustrate tentacular thinking, talking and reflecting (a thought-experiment) and tentacular sensing and experiencing (a social and ethical experiment). For us, it is precisely these multi-faceted possibilities that make us turn to the tentacular

as a way to open up the learning context to be more in contact with the world outside the classroom walls.

In this article, we have discussed the concept of the “tentacular” in relation to troublesome knowledges, but as our cases show, it is also about troublesome *un-learning*: “It’s into the incoming of the unforeseen, the truly monstrous, the advent of all those wholly others turning up at our doorsteps unexpectedly and demanding our hospitality” (Dunne, 2016, p. 14). Sweeping us from familiar ground, from the comfort of established categories and ways of occupying classroom space, the tentacular classroom provides us with a new point of departure from which the learning encounter can unfold. Our tentacular approach invites a participatory way of learning, yet by facilitating a tentacular approach to classroom power dynamics and knowledge production in the learning encounter, we also demand much from our students: to engage in potentially troublesome and unsettling debates, to confront their own privilege and situated knowledges, and to experiment with conventional boundaries for knowledge production. To conclude, Haraway awakens the notion of tentacularity to face the challenges of the Chthulucene, an era where we are urged to change our way of being toward all other living beings on this planet, moving beyond the anthropocentric frame of current intersectional thinking. In this way, we would be using our capacity for multisensoriality in a healing way. As feminist-critical educators we believe that it is well worth the risk.

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### Notes

1. We use *feminist pedagogy* here to signify teaching and learning that is grounded in feminist theory. In the 1990s, feminist pedagogy was criticized and dismissed by some critical pedagogues for being a “regime of truth” (Gore, 1993, p. 50). Feminist pedagogies have since gone on to flourish in numerous disciplines and continue to grow organically outward from feminist theory. In the words of McCusker (2017), “feminist pedagogy is not a monolithic and unitary concept; rather it is a movable, tractable and dynamic practice” (p. 446).

2. Haraway (1988) refers to this specific form of critical reflection as “critical reflexive relation” (p. 579).

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