

Chapter 10

The Pluriversity for Stuck Humxns: A Queer EcoPedagogy & Decolonial School



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A poem manifesto by Lena Weber (Fig. 10.1)

*One day you wake, roll out of bed,
a groan, a shake, turn of the head.*

The sun seems changed though that cannot be

*-it's all arranged for half past three.
Another meeting, then a test
- someday, you swear, you'll need to rest.*

*Most days your soul feels far away
-your chest, crushed – the future, grey.*

*Today, you think, will be the same –
screens and walls, no hope for change.*

*So, one by one, you shuffle your feet
into the morning's unseasonable heat.*

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Fig. 10.1 The Pluriversity
for Stuck Humxns logo



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*Then upon reaching the university stairs –
you pause again to smell the air.*

*How strange,
what normally smells stale and old –
today gives whiffs of stories untold.*

*And before you can reach up to knock
the door is opened by grandfather clock:*

*“My post has changed, my ticking stopped –
no need for keys now nothing’s locked...”*

*“Come in, come in there’s much to see
your payments late? But school’s now free!”*

*You cross the threshold – hands clenched tight –
what’s going on? this cannot be right...*

*The hall: a garden – the offices: gone...
and now... what’s this? a sense that you belong?*

*You see beneath a poplar tree
gathered groups of twos and threes...*

*A waving flag above them spells
‘Welcome to the Department of Raising Hell’...*

*And there-a herd of cows “moo” in,
through the Department of the More-Than-Human.*

*Off to learn the art of dilemmic farting
In the department of Transgressive Gardening*

*And over there-by the hedge
‘the Department of Sticky Privilege’*

*Where students wash off their entitlement,
that sticky grime from colonial ‘enlightenment’.*

*What appears to be a walking gut
calls “don’t be shy, step right up!”*

*And gently moving to your side
says “welcome home, I’ll be your guide”.*

*You begin to walk as the gut gestures
“things are changing, rest assured” –*

*And just then you see,
a quite uncanny similarity*

*between a giant moss covered-rock,
and that handsy prof who always just 'wanted to talk'*

*"Over here!" the gut whispers, in your ear
"presentations have begun, we must go near" ...*

*"In the Department of Uncertainty
we both accept and critique –
the uncertainty in our work and world"
said the department's feet*

*"To recognize our inner wisdom
in the Department of Intuition
we learn to trust our instincts
to bring our desires to fruition..."*

*Here we learn from error,
in the Department of Meaningful Mistakes-
we set aside our egos
to give more than which we take.*

*World-shaping is what we do
in the Department of Careful Crafting,
with threads of old we weave the new
remembering our grandmothers' darning.*

*Together we are powerful,
our differences make us strong-
'Coalescing of the Marginalized'
is where we all belong.*

*Realizing we cannot live in a bubble
in the Department of Empathetic Echolocation
We stay with the hot stinky trouble.
Practicing "call and response" education.*

*Appropriate strategically,
but do not become their fool-
these are the tactics we discuss
in Department of the Master's Tools"*

Found in Translation: How the Pluriversity Began

It is a humid June day (2018) in the Coffee Region of Colombia. The air is vibrating with the shrill of cicadas, bird song, and almost indiscernible sound of steam sizzling off the leaves of a thatch shelter we gather under to reflect on our plans together at what we call the "Living Aulas" (living classroom) Research School. We have worked online for the past five or six months preparing for this day, through a constant stream of 'reply all emails,' many hours of weekly zoom (video conference)

gatherings, and what feels like kilometers of colourful iterated google doc pages, that have brought us to this moment. Some of us have met and worked together over the past three years in person, in different arrangements and different contexts. We are a group of early-career researchers and practitioners representing three Transformations to Sustainability (T2S) program¹s – The Transgressive Learning² (t-learning), PATHWAYS³ (to Sustainability), and ACKnowl-EJ⁴ (Academic--Activist Co-Produced Knowledge for Environmental Justice) – as well as Colombian sustainability practitioners working in grassroots initiatives from six bioregions of the country. Not all of us (the authors) were represented in this gathering in Colombia, the rest of us are involved in other ways in this collaboration. Most of us are working at the intersection of academic, social and environmental justice, grief--laden, existential and painful struggles.⁵ We are meeting and experiencing realities that our education has not fully equipped us for, and often we find our colonial education hindering us from fully meeting the realities we are tending to. As such we need a new way to learn, and a new kind of academy to do this; one that is intersectional, post-human, creative, empathetic, and courageous (i.e. brave and loving). We have been blessed with incredible mentors, who have been changing and queering the academy and systems within, and who have nurtured us in building the space for which we have been longing.

Our gathering in Colombia is a culmination of years of collaboration across our networks, and our contexts. It was a gathering set out to generate a transformative space (for learning and pedagogical development) in which to share experiences in the fields of activism, education, justice, law, ecological economics, development, policy and conflict transformation (with many in-between liminal fields as well). We are a collective interested in the socio-cultural transformations needed for meaningful sustainability or preferably *buen vivir*, which represents a turn towards a

¹The Transformations community brings together a growing network of researchers and practitioners who work towards social transformations in sustainability contexts. See <https://transformationstosustainability.org/>

²www.transgressivelearning.org

³<https://steps-centre.org/project/pathways-network/>

⁴www.acknowledgej.org

⁵The range of work by contributing authors spans: political ecologies of climate change and environmental movements (Scheidel et al. 2018; Temper et al. 2018; Temper 2019), environmental policy alternatives and justice movements (Broome et al. n.d.; Bajpai 2019), higher education and public pedagogy (Lotz-Sisitka 2019), environmental education and critical pedagogy (James 2019), environmental education and arts-based research (Van Borek and James 1964), water access policies and resistance (Pereira and Wilson 2012), Transformative ocean governance from a social justice perspective: (Morgera et al. 2019), systems research and agriculture (Metelerkamp et al. 2019), researcher reflexivity and transgressive learning (Temper et al. 2019), Action research and transformations to sustainability (Macintyre 2019; Macintyre et al. 2019), transgressive learning epistemologies (Bengtsson 2019), bringing together environmental law and the anthropocene (Vermeylen 2017), climate change and (Moser 2020), socio-ecological transformation and stewardship (Cockburn et al. 2018; Eakin et al. 2019), possibilities for peace amidst extreme violence (Kuany 2017).

more biocentric, relational and collective means of understanding and being in the world (Chaves et al. 2018).

We are a diverse group coming from Colombia, India, South Africa, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Spain, Canada, USA, Turkey, Ethiopia and Kenya. We are womxn, men, gender non-conforming, queer, straight and some of us move in the spaces between these identities. We come from very different educational disciplines ranging from the sciences to the humanities. We are dancers, singers, artists, theatre makers, zoologists, ecologists, economists, geographers, educational sociologists as well as sisters, brothers, fathers, mothers (Leah is breastfeeding her three month old daughter Saphhira as we discuss our plans for the week). We are friends. We are all activists in some form, and we are all deeply passionate about the flourishing of people and the more-than-humxn. We speak at least 12 languages (Dinka English, Spanish, Chichewa, Swahili, Hindi, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Afrikaans, Norwegian, German, Turkish, French). We are a diverse tribe, and are deeply aware of our plurality, and the rich ecology of knowledge (de Sousa Santos 2014) that we grow when we come together. Considering this, it was (and is) vital for us to work with the transformational potential of this plurality. In many ways this collaborative intelligence⁶ (Martusewicz 2009) is our greatest instrument for transgressive and transformative research and pedagogical development.

An example of this collaborative intelligence, lies in the axes of difference arising in the presence of our different languages; as well as understanding the power relations that result from the hegemony of language. In our exchange it is not only about translating some exact meaning but also understanding the multiple interpretations, knowledge(s) and ways of being that are offered across different languages. This has been for us an important counter hegemonic and queer practice, given the fact that only a few languages dominate the 'sustainability space' in terms of decision-making, policy, research and communication about particular issues.

Early on in our time together in Colombia we were guided by Injairu Kulundu and Anna James in working within the fertile potential of our languages. Injairu posed a generative question to all of us: *What kind of research is worthy of our longing?* We translated this question into the 12 different languages that we speak, and considered the different agendas and normative structures that conventionally govern and guide what research happens, about what, and how its implemented. We felt we needed to ask the question of what we were longing for, and what might emerge when we ask it in our different languages? What wisdoms are hidden in our translations?

We reflected on the Spanish word 'investigación' as the direct translation of 'research' which felt to some a too technical word for how we understood our

⁶Rebecca Martusewicz (2009: 254) refers to the concept of 'collaborative intelligence', which she borrows from Susan Griffin (1996): "...intelligence, even knowledge, is not born of the human capacity to think or make sense of the world alone, but rather it is the result of a collaborative endeavor among human and the more-than-human world. In this sense, as human communities are nested within a larger ecological system, we participate in and are affected by a complex exchange of information and sense-making that contributes to the well-being of that system."

research practice. The co-researchers and the researchers in the Colombian T-learning network (we grouped ourselves around language and context) also agreed that ‘investigación’ was often done for an institution or a grade and was not meaningful for oneself. Some of us felt envious of the English word ‘research’ which implies something like “you look... and then you look again (re-look).” That is, research is reflexive. We were looking for a word that fit better with the final part of the phrase “worthy of our longing” and put forward the word ‘escarbando’; which holds the meaning of digging with one’s hands in the earth and can be used in the sense of searching within the soul. It immediately invokes the sense of connecting people with the earth, which is the idea that connects members of the Colombian T-learning research network. Exploring the concept of ‘worthy’ brought up questions of ‘worth’ and in particular, a tension between measurable worth and other forms of value. For example, we visited the idea of ‘valer la pena’ or ‘Merecedor’ which spoke to the ways our work involves pain and sacrifice. This could have been discussed further however, they might resonate with notions of being, deserving and merit.

In Dinka, a language of South Sudan, the translation of ‘longing’ is ‘Takda’. ‘Takda’ has a collective connotation to it, reminding us of the tensions and resonances between individual and collective. The concept of longing brought up questions such as: Are we longing for something that was or for something that has not yet been realised? In addition, is longing ever achieved? Or are we working towards something that we will always be working towards? Perhaps it is the enactment of working towards longing rather than the fact of reaching the desirable point: home, hope, land? Instead it is about a desirable mode in which to be, to research, to dig.

While this flurry of new words loaded with meaning were emerging, Injairu drew a symbol on a piece of paper taped to a rickety bamboo wall – it looked somewhat like a pretzel with its ends joined – a circle folding into a circle within itself (See Fig. 10.2). This symbol, unconsciously sketched by Injairu, resonated deeply with Tania, a Colombian activist and researcher who works closely with Indigenous people in her region. Soon our conversation took us to interpretations and experiences

Fig. 10.2 Yumartan: an Indigenous concept from Colombia, carried the meaning of being and working inside and outside the system simultaneously



Fig. 10.3 Sankofa bird reaching behind itself for a seed on its back, Sketched by Dylan McGarry during the Living Aulas in Colombia. Sankofa is a concept from Ghana that carries the meaning of something like ‘it is not taboo to go back and fetch what has been left behind’



beyond the direct translation of the original phrase (research worthy of our longing). ‘Yumartan,’ an Indigenous concept from Colombia, carried the meaning of being and working inside and outside the system simultaneously.

Tanya, learning about this concept from the elders, drew it as an inner and outer loop (Fig. 10.2:), to be inside and outside at the same time constantly reflexive, in one’s body and in the social eco-body together. This notion was a powerful one as, throughout Living Aulas, we continued to discuss the tension between alternatives and the structures that lock us into unsustainable ways of being. Flowing from discussion came a small and powerful sentence “The past is alive in our territory. Relation in time is not linear.” This reminded us of the concept ‘Sankofa’, (Fig. 10.3) a concept from Ghana that carries the meaning of something like ‘it is not taboo to go back and fetch what has been left behind’ and echoes something Martha Chaves had heard from Indigenous people she spends time with: that should walk into the future looking backwards, communing with our ancestors, with our history, with histories that could have been, or histories that were ignored/silenced.

This symbol and this uncanny moment, was for us an awakening that we expand drawing on the generative notions offered in the terms ‘queer ecopedagogy’ (in the section below). It was a resonance, a collective empathy, a sense of being inside the work we are doing, but also outside of it at the same time. A communal reflexivity that emerged in this moment and that emerged from our many identities and socio-cultural histories. It also emerged from a longing to break out of the closet of normative sustainability science. It became clear that we were forming our own ‘queer’ university, a different kind of university for ‘transgressive learning’ (Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2015, 2016), but one that did not recognise universalism, but rather affirmed a plurality of knowledge(s), and knowing(s) and being(s) and seeing(s). The Sankofa bird, the Jumartan and Injairu’s drawing were for us artifacts of (relational) agency (Gell 1998) that we were developing together.

We renamed ourselves, which itself was a generative queer act of finding language and metaphor to hold our emerging identity. We felt we were a Pluriversity as opposed to a University, and that we needed a learning community that could work on helping humxn to unstick themselves from normative socio-cultural-economic-political structures. The Pluriversity for stuck humxns became a generative image (Freire 1970) that helped us see what kind of pedagogy we needed and who we were creating these pedagogies for. The Pluriversity, in part, has been inspired by Laura Ellingson (2009) who responded to the shortcomings of grounded theory, arts-based enquiry and auto-ethnography in researchers' abilities to accommodate and meaningfully represent multiple ways of knowing. We use her multifaceted approach to tracking an evolving phenomenon (in our case an evolving reflexive and embodied practice and iterative journey through collaborative theory making). This chapter is what Ellingson (2009) would describe as a multiple-genre text, within which a shifting tone emerges in different vignettes authored by different voices, in order to capture various nuances in the specific learning experiences that have emerged in the Pluriversity.

In this chapter we begin to sculpt an image of what the Pluriversity currently is, and what it could be. For now, the Pluriversity exists in occasional gatherings of individuals from three different Transformation Knowledge Networks funded by the International Social Science Council (ISSC), now known as the International Science Council. It also exists in online exchanges, and a variety of smaller projects and initiatives – all of which are dedicated towards democratizing knowledge exchange, learning, and creative co-production that can help support movements around the world dedicated towards just, decolonial forms of sustainable transformation. Lena's poem is a manifesto and a fog horn – warning us of the dangers inherent in our current norms and lock-ins, and dreams of tangible alternatives, but also a praise-poem of what could be and what should be. Using the power of metaphor, satire, imaginal thinking, and prose, we have invited a diverse group of our community to share their perspectives of what the Pluriversity is to them, what shape it forms, how it operates, and what it daydreams about.

We first situate the Pluriversity in the exciting liminal undergrowth that is the coming together of queer-eco pedagogical landscape, with a short exploration into the conceptual expansion of 'pluriverse' in socio-environmental justice movements in the global south. We examine how these movements are a significant contribution to the expansion of devices needed for queer-eco pedagogical expansion. We spend the majority of the chapter exploring the different 'departments' of the Pluriversity. Here we satirically use the descriptor of 'departments' to make strange the existing conceptions of departmental fracturing of universities. For example, we do not just have 'heads of departments' in the Pluriversity but also the feet, guts and genitals of departments. As a transdisciplinary collaborative we are aware of the hazards of pillarising or 'making silos,' that separate knowledge into departments. We see these 'departments' rather as organs of a larger thriving, growing, transforming body organism – that is familiar yet strange, uncanny. We end the chapter with a call to enroll in this free, international queer Pluriversity.

Defining Pluriversity

In our network we have worked closely with Ashish Kothari et al. (2018) and Arturo Escobar (2011), who have developed and expanded the concept of the pluriverse which acknowledges the multiple ways of knowing, being and doing in the world. The Pluriversity for Stuck humxns is directly inspired by the Post-Development Dictionary “Pluriverse” created by Kothari et al. (2018) and indeed is a direct action towards decolonising the university (Boidin et al. 2012). Kothari and Escobar’s dictionary deconstructs development and sustainability through a generative opening of new and old notions and worldviews that resonate with the decolonial movement within sustainability (Chaves et al. 2017; Demaria and Kothari 2017). The dictionary and the plural expansion of knowing and doing diffuses development away from the unilateral trajectory of goal driven sustainability, and top down western constructs of development to creative re-imagining, decolonial re-existing as resistance and queer transformation of identity and place. The dictionary for us was a Freirean (1970) generative code that queered the language and the descriptors beyond sustainability – *to buen vivir* (South America); *Ubuntu* (South Africa) *Swaraj* (India); and many others (Shiva 1988). The Pluriversity for stuck humxns has become a community that nurtures and incubates the transformation of beliefs, values, and points of reference within and between individuals. As a collective it accommodates ‘multiple ways of knowing’ (Ellingson 2009), or what Boaventura De Sousa Santos (2007, 2009) refers to as ‘ecologies of knowledge’ within complex learning environments. These learning environments exist within the ‘hot-mess’ we currently find ourselves in, that being the global (climate exacerbating) ecological crisis, a transforming global political landscape, massive social inequalities and profound disconnection or perhaps ‘ecological apartheid’ (Cullinan 2011; McGarry 2013) between humxn and more than humxn in the rapidly globalizing socio-economic world.

The Pluriversity as Queer Ecopedagogy

In an attempt to be ambiguous, appropriate to the multiplicity of contributions in this paper, we come together with an interest in the intersection between environmental justice concerns and processes of teaching and learning. As far as it is possible to describe the Pluriversity in its totality we might resonate with the idea of ecopedagogy. ‘Ecopedagogy’ came to name the thinking and practice emerging in grassroots and social movements in South America serving to resist certain kinds of environmentalism emerging from and maintaining institutional practices of Western Modern Science. It is a site in which radical liberatory pedagogical praxis came into contact with explicit critiques of the environmental crisis. It has been noted to be one of the most comprehensive branches of environmental education theory (and practice) that has engaged with the idea of justice from a pedagogical perspective (Haluza-Delay 2013). Richard Kahn elaborates on ecopedagogy as both a

development and critique of critical pedagogy arguing for the intersection of multiple literacies and a movement towards political analysis and radical hope for a future that will most certainly be dangerous for much life on this earth. Importantly, it relates to political understanding or literacies of environmental crisis often captured within the confines of a science that is dressed up in burdensome robes – “mainstream institutional science” aka, “Western Modern Science” (Kahn 2010, p. 104).

Because of the way in which all structures and events of human injustice are in some way related to the planet, we know that ‘ecopedagogy’ names something that has been in existence long before the “ecopedagogy movement” was named at the Rio Earth Summit 1992 (Kahn 2010, p. 18). For example, the people’s education movement resisting apartheid education founded on the exploitation of minerals and black human labour in South Africa, might constitute an attempt to realise justice in and through education – against the oppressive colonial and apartheid regime. In Europe, North America, and South America, the Rio Earth Summit and the introduction of the concept of sustainable development had partially been critically received as an attempt to undermine more radically oriented approaches to education and environmental education (González-Gaudiano 2005; Jickling 1992). Nevertheless, given its global dissemination, it has since been taken up by various scholars including those resisting the disconnection between environmental destruction and the multiplicity of oppressions that contribute towards its manifestation (Kahn 2010; Kellner and Kneller 2010; Russell 2013).

We locate this chapter as an eco-pedagogical act that draws on imagination to understand and play with alternative knowledge nurturing institutions might be possible, and in fact are possible through our own collaborative experience in the Pluriversity for stuck humxns. In the preface to Kahn’s (2010) book, Antonia Darder (contemporary and student of Freire) explains ecopedagogy in a wonderfully succinct and direct way:

an educational process of estrangement functions to alienate and isolate students from the natural world around them, from themselves, and one another. In contrast, an eco-pedagogy that sustains life and creativity is firmly grounded in a material and social understanding of our interconnected organic existence, is a starting place for classroom practice and political strategies for reinventing the world. (p. xv)

Yet, we take Darder’s words with a *twist* (a word that is etymologically connected to queer (Michelson 2015)). For us, queer(ing) eco-pedagogy embraces alienation as a mode of experience companionship with that which is strange and weird. To be precise, to exist is to be strange and weird. To exist is to be caught up in a paradox of being one’s self and not being oneself at the same time. To be a self and to exist as such a self is somewhat displaced from one’s future essence. To exist is to be queer in the sense that I have an intuition (emotionally not rationally) that my essence is not reducible to a binary state and that what I am is still to come. In the encounter with one’s queerness, one is experiencing a form of alienation that shows me, both, that I was something else and that I am only in relation to something else. Hence, for us alienation and the experience of one’s queerness highlights in an uncanny way the interdependence of selves. I need at least another self in order

to be myself. In this way of queering pedagogy, we also break with the foundational logics of science that are upheld by the law of non-contradiction. We instead embrace and dive deeper into the paradox of our existence, abandoning the law of non-contradiction and the associate white, male, monotheistic hierarchies of constituting being. Congratulations, you are now free and encouraged to be weirdly queer! We thank Joshua Russell (2013) for pointing out that perhaps acknowledging our queerness is how one enrolls into the Pluriversity.

While the Pluriversity is certainly an eco-pedagogical project, it is in its plural and intersectional personality that it is inherently queer. We also feel that the Pluriveristy is queer because it is a boundary crossing, re-imagining place, and provides a transgressive approach to learning (Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2015, 2016). It is dedicated to challenging and reframing norms and dogma: as queer theorists might put it, to shake up the boundaries that give life to categories and “undermine the notion of category all together” (Michelson 2015 referencing Garber). It actively queers the status quo of the academy, and also of sustainability. We speak often of our community aiming to decolonise sustainability (Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2016), which is a careful and disruptive process of working with the unknown as a methodology (Kulundu 2018). The unknown and uncertainty of what might happen as we move into what could be, or call for what is not yet there is perhaps where the heart of our queerness expresses itself.

The Pluriversity is perhaps a physical/social embodiment of Joshua Russell’s (2013) framing of queer ecopedagogy as a radical invitation for change through “queer feeling and being” accompanied by “personal and political commitments” resisting domination and silencing of a wide range of beings – and as Michelson would expand, those who fall outside of the inside category/the norm. Russell notes queer ecopedagogy “invites all of us to experience and imagine ways of being and acting that challenge our notion of what constitutes a “better” life, including those that seek a more radical change in the world” (p. 13). We also see the Pluriversity as an expansion or at least inspired by Noel and Annette Gough’s (2003) “Camp Wilde:” a fictional place that allowed for fulmination of the heteronormative constructedness of environmental education. As they explain, the stories within Cape Wilde allow for “alternative ways of (re)presenting and (re)producing both the subjects/objects of our inquiries and our identities as researchers” (p. 44). Through the Pluriversity, we feel the loosening of our academic and sociological corsets, and are able to (re)represent and (re)produce in a similar way.

The Organs (Departments)

... what's this? a sense that you belong?

When coming together to write about the Pluriversity for stuck humxns we found that articulating and describing the alternative ‘departments’ that can and do exist in this free university became incredibly generative and liberating. In many ways some of us felt as if we were emerging from a closeted life within academia, and could

write quickly and effortlessly about what it is we were longing for, and what form it should take. These departments, which act more like organs of a body, recognise the multiple ways of knowing, being, feeling and doing (De Sousa Santos 2009; Ellingson 2009). These Pluriversity organs can be seen as generative wedges for new thinking of what is required for developing, understanding and practicing transgressive and transformative queer eco-pedagogies across our networks and in our more intimate contexts.

The Pluriversity has become a space for creative reflexivity and has offered us a way of being less invisible to each other and to the world. Being less invisible is a distinctive feature of queering, and queerness. The Department of Silences written by Tshego Khutsoane illustrates the need for an active space to empathise with, and intuit that which is not seen, hard to express, or normatively silenced. The Department of Lovers and Broken Hearts by Lena Weber surfaces our very raw and beating heart, the lover that each of us are, not just doing work, but making love visible – ‘work is love made visible’ (Gibran 2016).

The Pluriversity is founded on the concept of staying with, and responding to, the trouble (Haraway 2016) that we find in our places and how we are able to respond to these. This means staying with all of it, finding ways to be in the multifaceted landscapes of our activism and work, but also the multidimensional aspects of ourselves as we are transformed by these activities. Each department is therefore a framing of these multifaceted contexts and the multiple approaches that we as transgressive researchers, practitioners, and change makers have had to adopt in order to be able to meaningfully stay with the ever changing and complex labour of transformations to sustainability, environmental justice, solidarity building, cognitive justice and environmental education.

In what follows we dive into a description of the departments. We invite the reader to browse these department descriptions and enter into dialogue with any departments that grab your attention. Each department has a slightly different content focus and pedagogical approach. Feel free to flick through them at your leisure, dwelling on some and skipping others. You will see that across the organs/departments we are queering learning, assessments, objectives and even the departments themselves. You are required to select... as we queer the silos of conventional universities know that as you are attracted to one department, your interaction with that department might gesture towards another department that can engage with your stuckness.

A Welcoming as You Pass Through the Department of Courage, by Susi Moser (USA)

As you – dear stuck humxn – will quickly find out, there are many doors through which you can enter the campus of the Pluriversity. Being annoyed with being stuck is our only prerequisite. Welcome, you have already succeeded!

Beware, however, that whichever door you choose (every Department has many forms entrances and exits), there is not one that will not take you down into unfamiliar spaces, out onto dizzying balconies of unimagined vistas, or through the messiest offices of discomfort, chaos, confusion, and loss. When you find yourself sick with panic and un-knowing, you have arrived in the very heart of the Department of Courage. Welcome, again.

You might have noticed, if your adrenaline levels were not raging wild within you, that you could just walk in. Yes! Isn't that unbelievable?! We pride ourselves for not having security guards at our doors. There is no safety inside (nor was there really ever any outside, but you will learn this only in an upper-level course in *Discovery of Foolish Lies* that we reserve for advanced students in the second or third year...). So, beware, anything here might blow your mind. If we detect any boredom or acquiescence in you, we might require you to spontaneously switch classes, go somewhere else where you can be challenged more deeply.

But do not worry, you will get all the "credits" you think you need (ha! Have we got a surprise for you...) as most of our courses are cross-listed with courses in other departments (e.g., our course in the *History of Radical Deviants* is cross-listed with a number of classes in the Department of the Ancestors; our course in *Breaking with Conventional Wisdom* is cross-listed with courses in the Department of Pluriversal AKA-epi-demic Freedoms, and so on).

Speaking of credits, we do not grade here in any conventional sense. Without you even knowing it – nor ever removing a single piece of clothing – we will strip-search you for any stuckness (the Department of Sticky Privilege's entry level class on self-reflexivity is a great place to start), and your peer-advisors will co-design your course of study to address each one. What you will eventually major in, say, Public Truth Telling, Working in the Halls of Power, Speaking from Your Mythopoetic Self or whatever it may be is entirely up to you. Every so often, we will assess your progress by using two assessment approaches: loving self-reflexivity of your own courageous acts and a 360-degree peer assessment of your audacity. The Department of Attunement and the Department of Radical Love frequently send their students to help with these activities.

We do require capstone projects; and as to when they will need to be accomplished, that is entirely a function of your own progress in getting unstuck. We call these "projects" Initiation Rites or Rites of Passage and they take place at a time and in a place that the Elders deem right. You will be notified, prepared, and supported. However, you will have to go out and meet your biggest fears by yourself. If you successfully emerge from this rite of passage (i.e., at the conclusion of your engagement with our department), the work of building up or embodying your courage is far from over, but we believe you have gained the necessary skills to then live audaciously into your calling out in the world.

Lastly, a word on our own history. The Department of Courage was – until recently – one with the Department of Raising Hell. However, some of our faculty (and our sister departments) felt that anger and noise, while clearly having their righteous place and necessity, do not adequately reflect the full range of forms of

courage needed to build a life-sustaining society on Planet Earth (e.g., Macy and Young 1998; Waddell 2016). To be more responsive to the broader range of stuckness needs of our students, we therefore took the courageous step to form our own department, but co-list many of our courses with the Department of Raising Hell. If you may harbor any shade of shyness, shame, fear, and yes, despair, numbness, or hopes for salvation we invite you to come check us out. We are, as this candid embrace of the pluriverse of stuckness suggests, an incredibly diverse, open, and inclusive department. We hope this short description has been enticing to you. And if it has, we believe there is indeed hope for you ... and for our Earth! Come join us!

Department of Attunement, by Heila Lotz-Sisitka (South Africa)

In the Department of Attunement, we tune our ears to the beauty of song. We sense the rhythms of each other's visions. We attune ourselves to the darkness of narrations that require healing as well as pain, suffering and the ragged edges of contradiction and power. We attune to fringe theories, marginal voices and lost creatures that have not made it into the mainstream, listening out for what they might offer.

We attune to the stories blaring in our heads about the worlds' wounds.

The most complex assignment in this Department is attuning to the squeals and clicks of the 21 endemic species of the almost invisible golden mole during the mating season. The golden mole is one of Africa's oldest underground creatures. We find ourselves stuck. Stuck in not being able to hear that 11 out of 21 endemic species of golden moles are endangered. Dying out. The squeals and clicks of their mating periods disappearing forever.

We find ourselves stuck listening to the pain of Somalian poet Sadia Hassan (2018) who encourages a "willingness to make noise however terrifying, and attune one's ear to the beauty of it." Terrifying noise and sensitive attunement for the world's wounds. Like Sadia expressing refugee pain, we hear the shape, texture and sound of survival, "the stretch and dip and immense weight or weightlessness of it." Sadia and the golden mole teach us to use hypertrophied middle ear ossicles to adapt to seismic vibrations of immanent pain and extinction in the middle of the hot mess we are in.

With this, become singer and listener in the Department of Attunement.

Be the singing "wild creature" storied being of Ben Okri (1997) – one who holds on to wildness in order to hear and give joy. Make terrifying noises. Attune sensitively. Sharpen acoustic reflexes. Seek out better frequency resolution. Hear seismic vibrations of immanent pain and extinction. Hear each other's clicks, squeals, pain and rhythms above the blaring of the stories in our heads. Above institutional impact measures.

Department of Lovers and Broken Hearts, by Lena Weber (Spain)

In the Department of Lovers and Broken Hearts we remember how absurd it is to sit together in straight-backed chairs with our these-are-professional-right clothes and discuss in serious voices how certain we are, how sure and whole, while underneath layers of bone and flesh the pieces of our hearts are rubbing raw against layers of tape and staples.

We study queer poet Andrea Gibson's words from *Royal Heart* (2015):

*...it's hard to watch
the game we make of love,
like everyone's playing checkers
with their scars,
saying checkmate
whenever they get out
without a broken heart.
...I intend to leave this life
so shattered
there's gonna have to be
a thousand separate heavens
for all of my flying parts.*

We learn that vulnerability and honesty can strengthen us, how to break, to build and be re-built, to love and be loved. As lovers we learn about consent, how to advocate for ourselves, how to weave and respect boundaries, how to attend to the needs of others. We recognize that monogamy, in work and relationships, is only one of many beautiful ways to exist. We explore our queerness and shed deeply-learned shame about love, productivity, and power. Like Vandana Shiva (1993), we reject monocultures of the mind, of society, of self. When appropriate, we (re)claim space, visibility; we will not allow the dissident parts of ourselves to be disappeared. We slip our fingers into different ways of knowing and being, while also learning that not all spaces are for us, and that is okay.

The main course in this department is Self-Autopsy for Being Seen, in which we gather those we love and cut ourselves open from sternum to pubic bone, lay our organs and nerve networks out one by one, to see and be seen, and deeply consider the interconnected nature of existence: how touching me here, there, makes me feel this, that; how touching the Earth here, there, makes it feel this, that. We grieve the blood and bruises left by fists and words and oil spills and greed; pollution in our guts. Sometimes, we seek vengeance. Others, forgiveness.

*And to end class each day we chant:
"Call in your royal heart
Tell it bravery cannot be measured by a lack of fear
It takes guts to tremble
It takes so much tremble to love
Every first date is a fucking earth quake"* (Gibson 2015)

Department of Dreams, by Shruti Ajit (India)

When one enters the Department of Dreams, you are astounded by the limitlessness of what is in front of you. The boundaries are dissolved into a myriad of individual sub-consciousnesses. You find animals, plants, earth, water and air being connected through this energy – a vision that is inviting you to join in. You also notice that the colour of your skin, your eyes, your age, who you choose to love or where you come from does not define you or put you into these set boxes, but is more of a guiding light that helps you connect to this larger vision that is floating around you.

Your dreams let you feel things – you are able to experience all of it, in its entirety without having to suppress any of it for fear of being judged. You become a silent observer, a listener and for once you are in the moment without having to worry about your mind being scattered with tiny explosive thoughts. You become aware of the fact that this department along with the other departments within this Pluriversity is the result of dreams – a collective vision that was brought together by many people who while they were awake, constantly spoke about their dreams – which let them build this utopia.

You smile and you dream of Pluriverisities cropping up in pastoral communities in the dry scrub forests in Rajasthan in India to the eco-villages in Colombia separated by boundaries in the waking world, but connected by intuition, love and collective dreams.

Department of Intentional Paranoia, by Stefan Bengtsson (Sweden)

To engage with hegemonic structures that can be seen feeding environmental, social and economic unsustainability requires a threshold level of paranoia. As hegemony refers to taken for granted global structures by which we give meaning to the world and ourselves (Gramsci 1971), we cannot rely on ourselves' assumption to have challenged them fully. To be taken for granted simply means that they are so ingrained and forming our way of thinking that they are no longer apparent to our thinking (Englund 1986). However, given that we might speak of our ontological queerness, we might break out of or transgress these hegemonic structures, once we fully emotionally engage with the queerness of the world (cf. Bengtsson 2019; Kulundu 2018; McGarry 2014). To use the words of our colleagues from the Department of Attunement, luckily we are *attuned* to the queerness of the world and its suffering. The department fills an institutional gap at the Pluriversity given that what is needed is critical openness towards one's contribution to being stuck in the system. Upon successfully completing training from the Department of Dreams, graduates will be able to successfully apply their training to dive into the queer and slippery surplus of how one's self and the world appears to them, as this queer and slippery surplus is given by intuition (for further questions please consult Prof. McGarry at the Department of Intuition).

You might ask: What is good about being an expert in the ability to suffer? We might say that the resonance of suffering is an ontological precondition for both being a self among selves (Ferreira 2002), as well as the possibility of change (Morton 2012). We might all relate to experiences of feeling (intuition) a deep personal change when becoming aware of the suffering of others that we or others might have caused. We might have acted and spoken in accordance with discourses that maintained and sustained an economy of suffering. The potential of self-justified and seeming self-produced reproduction of economies of suffering is precisely the matter of concern that defines the department. Yet, intentional paranoia might, in the moment of becoming aware of suffering, already have transgressed these economies. Though, we are not sure if we are delusional or grasping reality. We have not seen these economies for what they truly are but engaged with an opening emanating out of the surplus of queerness, an opening that allows us as selves and the world to be different.

Yet, there is no resting place for a truly critical, transgressive and paranoid ecopedagogy when engaging with hegemonic structures, as such an encounter of an opening renders my self different. Instead, intentionality in paranoid ecopedagogy provides an opportunity to engage with the queer essence of my self that is suffering. There is no determinable self, the position of which I should attain and or stuck to in my struggle against suffering. Instead, to engage with suffering requires of me to open up again (unsticking) and again towards something that is slippery yet that I am attuned to. Opening up requires, hence, a certain threshold level of and expertise in paranoia. Am I truly my self, or reducing myself to subject position according to a given social structure? Am I truly a self or run by an algorithm determining me and my acts? After your engagement with this department you should be able to take your paranoia to the next level and to incorporate it into an organized system of engaging with your-self and the world, sensitizing your self to the sticky and slippery surplus of being a self.

It's good to know that you will be there providing me with the possibility of suffering. From the band, The War on Drugs:

Will you be here suffering?
Will you be here suffering?
Well I hope to be – (Granofsky 2014)

Suggested reading:

Dick, Philip K. (1977). *A Scanner Darkly*. New York: Doubleday.

The Department of Raising Hell or Creative Insurrection, by Leah Temper (Canada/Spain)

The Department of Raising Hell is where we channel our anger into productive creativity and transformative insurrection. In this department we unlearn, we un-discipline, we let go and we get in touch with the liberatory aspects of being mad.

We learn that our angers are not irrational, hysterical, unjustified, sssshhhable (we will not be shut up). Anger is not hatred. It is perhaps inverted love, intense compassion and energy. Stripped of violence, it can illuminate what we truly care about and what we are willing to fight for. Anger is loaded with potentiality, it is lucid, fervent, feeding, fermenting, and capable of giving new life and restoring agency. As Audre Lorde (1981) says:

Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change. And when I speak of change, I do not mean a simple switch of positions or a temporary lessening of tensions, nor the ability to smile or feel good. I am speaking of a basic and radical alteration in those assumptions underlining our lives. (p. 8)

As Lorde and many feminists argue, anger is a way of knowing and can open pathways of being differently in the world.

This Department harnesses this potent energy to wield it to its desired ends by getting in touch with anger, and exploring how it shall be used, who it will be directed to, how it will manifest and for how long and to what end, and finally, perhaps the most important aspect of this class is releasing it through humour, love and action, aka raising hell. Usually the most used classrooms of the Department of Raising Hell are the streets outside parliament buildings, or public squares, interrupted railway lines, closed ports, roads reclaimed for raucous street parties emptied of vehicles. In these spaces we intervene in the day to day, the movement of goods, people, the flow of life and in the process transmit some of the intensity of feeling we have been manifesting. We may make you smile with joy at the carnivalesque character of occupation and resistance, our slogans and pancarts may make you laugh, or you may seethe with anger because we are *in the way* and daily life cannot go on.

With our anger in-stead we learn how to do what Gene Sharp (1973) termed political jiu-jitsu – the act of turning oppression against itself. We learn how to make beautiful trouble. As the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (visiting farterers) say in their manifesto “Nothing undermines authority like holding it up to ridicule” (2012).

Department of Intuition, by Dylan McGarry (South Africa)

The Department of Intuition is focused on the capacity to refine and become apprentice to our own intuition (McGarry 2014). I once explained intuition to be “that inner force which seems to somehow pull past experiences, memories, facts, etc., into the present while simultaneously reshaping and applying these to the current circumstances in order to make a decision, or move in a particular direction” (p. 194), which I see as a vital predictor and catalyst for agency.

In the Department of Intuition, we need to understand this strong relationship between agency and intuition that offers us freedom (McGarry 2013). Rudolf

Steiner (1964) saw intuition as the capacity to develop a moral imagination as opposed to moral imperative. Here morality and ethical engagement are not determined by laws and principles set out by societal norms and values, but rather morality is intuitively determined. Our ethics are spurred by a particular intuitive response to a given situation, which cannot be predicted and or prescribed.

Stephan Harding (2006: 30) reflects on Carl Jung's (2001) work on the nature of the psyche to describe the value of thinking, feeling, sensing and intuition. Jung saw thinking as an interpreting force, behaving in a logical, rational manner, while feeling evaluates according to good or bad. Sensing perceives direct experience through the body and intuition yields a sense of its deeper meaning through unconscious content and connections. In this way, sensation and intuition make us aware of what is happening without interpreting or evaluating; they are perceptive (Harding 2006). It is the whole experience of both perceptive intuitive and sensorial experiences, alongside an interpretative and constant evaluation that became part of the apprentice to our intuition (McGarry 2013).

One of the most useful pedagogical devices in the Department of Intuition is connective aesthetics (Gablik 1992; McGarry 2013, 2015) – i.e. the use of aesthetics as a means to make inner and outer connections with the world. Susi Gablik (1992: 4) sees the use of connective aesthetics as means to engage in a personal and related experience of the world, rather than a solely individual experience. In her words: “emerging of self that is no longer isolated and self-contained in practice, but relational and interdependent”.

A connective aesthetic enlivens and awakens our inner intuitive capacity, our unconscious content and inter-connections. Shelley Sacks (2011) refers to aesthetics as the opposite of anesthetic (indeed the two words have the same etymological origins). Here the meaning of aesthetics goes beyond questions of taste or beauty synonymous with our traditional understandings of art and aesthetics. It is rather connective practice where images, symbols, sculptures, etc. are intertwined with reflexive and relational activities and meaning-making, that enlivens or engenders inner activity within the human being (Sacks 2011).

Department of Sticky Privilege, by Taryn Pereira (South Africa)

The Department of Sticky Privilege offers mandatory courses for all students in possession of those ‘invisible knapsacks’ (McIntosh 1988), filled with unearned maps, tickets, passports and provisions that propel you to the front of most queues; and enable you to move through the world oblivious to the fact that these knapsacks, or queues, even exist.

Are you:

- White/Male/Cis-Het/Wealthy?
- English-speaking/Educated/Able Bodied/Healthy?

Then step right up; this course is for you.

We have a low attendance rate at the start of every new year, as many of our students are initially unaware that they qualify for our courses; however, through our concerted enrolment efforts, as well as the laudable reflexive curricula of the Departments of Intentional Paranoia and Empathetic Echolocation, our numbers pick up significantly as the semester progresses.

In the Department of Sticky Privilege we develop the capacity to see our shadows, our blind spots, our defensiveness, our fragility, and our entitlement. We are guided and supported by graduate tutors to acknowledge the parts of ourselves and our lives that only move easily because they are greased by the sticky oil that leaks out of the colonial capitalist modernity machine. Through pedagogies of discomfort (Boler 1999) and intersectional reflexivity (Jones 2010), we cover a range of multi-disciplinary modules, such as ‘The Geography of Space-We-Take-From-Others--Without-Even-Realising-It’, and ‘Emotional Labour Studies’. By the end of ‘Unpacking your Privilege 101’ you should see yourself and your sticky privilege with clarity, acceptance and humility. By the end of your degree you will know how to use your privilege strategically as an ally; whilst always remaining in an open, reflexive and quiet state of active listening to the previously unheard, and perceptive observation of the previously invisible.

Department of Careful Crafting, by Anna James (South Africa)

‘Mom, I want to go to a school where they make things’ said the pain of deficit model schooling,⁷ the sense that something different must be possible and the early knowledge of what it means to be alive, to create.

The Department of Careful Crafting merges the work of care and the work of craft weaving affective tapestry between us.

Lesson 1: “Knowledge for living” not *a living* (von Kotze 2009). Who are the carers and crafters? In this world they are often women but not historically so. We unpick the contradiction that this work is ‘marginal’ but also central to the possibility for living amidst death-loving trends. We find the stuckness.

Lesson 2: Beginning. Crafting is about world making, crafting something new...it’s about experimenting with the possible and flirting with the impossible. Oh, a mistake? – time to unravel! This will be good practice for the Department of Sticky Privilege. We resist the duality of ‘craft’ and ‘art’ reinventing the rusting canons that make us fearful to start (Clover 2012). Task: make something, anything.

Lesson 3: Knitting languages of anger. As we knit we think about the ticking needles of Madame Defarge in the corner of the wine shop back in 1600s France

⁷Widely practiced in South African Primary Schools in the early 1990s

(Dickens 1987). We experiment, as she did, by making our own stitch languages while crafting anger into woolly scarves. We reflect on the guillotine and those who crafted that... Honouring Madam's anger and hurt we scan for stories about other revolutions. (Please familiarise yourselves with CLR James' 'Black Jacobins' and break through Eurocentric understandings of freedom and revolutions).

Lesson 4: Complex crochet, we feel the frills of hyperbolic mathematics as we craft a coral reef. We understand the randomness – the impossibility of modelling life – behind the aesthetic of biology (Wertheim 2009). We stitch into our grief of oceans bleaching and disappearing coral. We build our own and send a message; enough is enough let us stop global warming.

Course portfolio: A warm woolly jumper among other bits of feels, facts, concepts and stitches.

To carefully craft is to resist warped relations of producing in the world today. It is to remember the wisdom of making things for the sake of making, playing, healing, expressing. It is to – along with the Department of Lovers and Broken Hearts – hold our grief and discomfort for what is lost and, aligned with the department of attunement, to queer(y) the world in order to understand the (invisible) norms that shape it (Ahmed 2015, pp. 155–159). Now we have a school like that.

Department of Empathetic Echolocation, by Dylan McGarry (South Africa)

Whales and dolphins see the world through sound. An organ in their forehead known as the 'melon organ' contains dense lipids that focus and receive sound (Deecke 2018). These sounds are translated in the brain into complex layered holographic images, allowing cetaceans the capacity to see not just the surface of things (as we see with light), but see into the multiple layers of physical matter. What is significant is that this image only lasts as long as the echo and so, the whales need to keep sending out sound, for it to bounce back off matter, and enter their foreheads.

Taking inspiration from the whales and dolphins, we know that this constant call and response (Kulundu 2018) is critical for staying with, and empathising with the difficult realities of sustainable development and justice in our contexts, to not just see the surface (i.e. the symptoms) but to see deeper, into the flesh of the issues (i.e. the systemic complications). As researcher activists involved in complex sustainability struggles we are working with constantly changing moving targets, and a pedagogy of echolocation is critical.

In my work in education for sustainable development, environmental justice and activism (McGarry 2013, 2014, 2015), ongoing empathetic connection to the realities on the ground are key. The learning is constant, and I have had to develop a kind of empathetic echolocation in order to keep meaningfully connected to these struggles. While we may not have a melon organ, as humxns we are gifted with another

organ of perception, our imagination. As Mary Oliver (1994) writes: “Imagination is better than a sharp instrument. To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work” (p. 8).

In the Department of Empathetic Echolocation classes consist of listening to the ways in which your song is mirrored back to you. Your echo is your constant tutor, and your conversations (both inner and outer) are encyclopedias. Courses in the Department of Echolocation are shared with apprentices taking classes in the Department of Attunement, for to actively listen, we become attuned to the “intersectional resonance” of each other’s “multiplicities of being” (Kulundu 2018, p. 91). Empathetic Echolocation is vital for developing ongoing ethical engagement in our actions, i.e. to be reflexive with our ethics and our capacities for care and support as we refine further in the Department of Pluriversal aka, epi-demic Freedoms. At the Plutiversity, we are currently developing devices for this kind of ongoing ethical rigour, and by developing I really mean imagining. The echo-locative devices we imagine collaboratively and individually in our constant relating and listening to each other. One such device we imagined together (one could call it a kind of occult ethical and politically rigorous reflexive calculator) is the Tarot of Transgressive Research (Temper et al. 2019). A tarot card deck (see Fig. 10.4) that we use to enter into echolocation with, through listening to the different roles we play as researcher/activists, as well as noticing the sticky situations we find ourselves in, ethically and politically in our scholarly activism. Using the cards, we are able to preemptively locate ourselves into situations and develop this reflexive echo-locative muscle. It is for us a powerful device for political rigour (Temper et al. 2019).

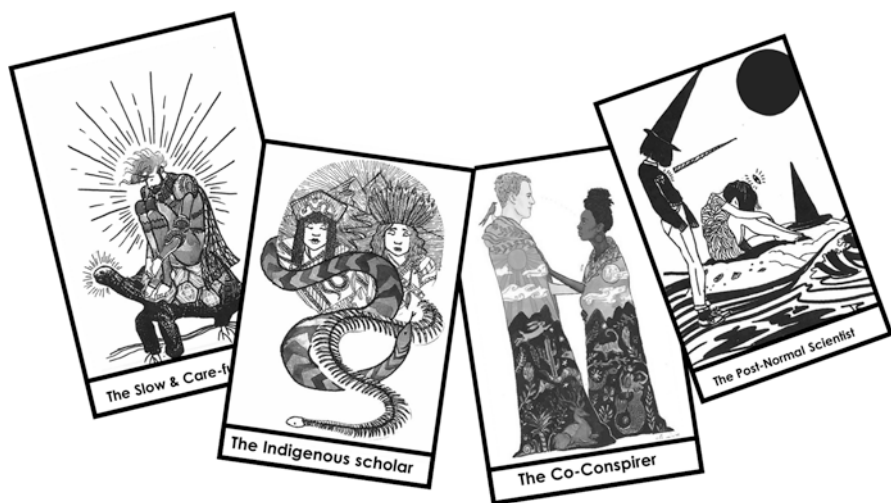


Fig. 10.4 The Tarot Deck of Transgressive Research (Temper et al. 2019: 2). A device developed in the Department of Empathetic Echolocation within the Pluriveristy for Stuck Humans

Department of Transgressive Gardening, by Thomas Macintyre (Colombia)

Bare feet on the ground. Earthy hands in the soil. Curious minds in the present. Weightless souls afloat in the Pluriverse. Welcome to the classroom of the Department of Transgressive Gardening, which sets out to transgress – move beyond and through – our learned disconnection to nature. How do we set about *un*learning that nature is something apart from us, learning towards an understanding of connection? Part of the answer is gardening. Gardening is a conscious action of entering the cycles of nature, observing, changing things around on the small-scale, reflecting on what happens, then doing it all again. It is about cultivating, nurturing, and caring for life around us, while at the same time daring to make a change – an intervention.

Although farming is intrinsically linked to the unfolding of our civilization, a significant amount of modern farming is destroying the natural world. The Department of Transgressive Gardening poses the question of whether the gardener might just have a bigger role than we think in transgressing the quagmire of civilizational stagnation! Although the distinction between farmer and gardener is subtle (and debatable), for me the essence is that while the farmer is entrenched in a repressive system of forever increasing production and consumption, the gardener takes a more introspective look at themselves, their potential for transformation (Macintyre 2019). Gardening is also good for the health, leading to less stress (Van Den Berg and Custers 2011) and can lower risks of dementia (Simons et al. 2006).

So as we move away from the straight lines and norms of monoculture, towards immersing ourselves in the messy, interconnected abundance that is nature at its core, this department of gardeners sets out to explore how to develop long-term, permanent systems of a regenerative culture (Wahl 2016). Such a culture puts garden food on the table, seats people around it, and revels in the strange and the queer, the in between and beyond, before the bell rings for the next class.

The Department of Phil(Loo)sophy, by Shrishtee Bajpai (India)

This department explores human condition by starting to look at sh#. ‘Sh#t’ that effectively serves as a reminder that humanity’s giant aspirations are usually full of sh#, the department metaphorically will look at aspects of life that are seemingly ‘regular’ and ‘small’ yet account for most essential things in life. Sh#t for example is used as a weapon to induce disgust yet treating one’s bodily secretions as abject matter is the result of narrow-minded capitalist propriety. This department rejuvenates and reconnects with the circle of life i.e. the relationship with soil that nurtures the deep buried seed through water, manure (like human sh#t), air, and sunlight and gives us food that in turn nurtures humxn and eventually is excreted to go back to

the soil. This department looks at what we consume, how we consume, and bring back the lost connection to the soil, food, water and waste. It examines the assumption that by merely flushing the toilets one can get rid of the waste or if we dump our trash and it ceases to be. This pluriversal approach demands transition of everyday actions for greater transformations. Moreover, inspired by Heila Lotz-Sisitka's (2019) "Stinking Ontology of Sh#t in the Water," the Department of Phil(Loo)sophy encourages learning and pedagogies that sees human existence as not a passive experience, but one where we must take a stance, 'Existance,' a stance against the complex and painful reality of our impact on the world and fight for human dignity and environmental sustainability. The department's classrooms are our public and private toilets, the open pit latrines in informal settlements, and the drains and sidewalks where our poorest brethren relieve themselves. Meditations over our Extistance, what becomes of our sh#, how it impacts others (human and more than human) and how we might take a stance, are explored while we poo. This department teaches us to stay with the hot stinking mess of our actions. The Dept of Phil(lo)sophy, acknowledges what an incredible intuitive and imaginal classroom the toilet is, and just how many profound ideas emerge while we are relieving and realising ourselves of waste.

The Department of Uncertainty by Kuany Kuany, (South Sudan/India)

Welcome to the department of 'none knows everything', 'each knows a piece – maybe', 'together we know a bigger piece but still, not a full pie'. Wait, let me say that again: welcome to the department where 'absolute' 'knowledge' or 'knowing' is not possible – the department of being sceptical about any form of certainty and tranquil about all that is uncertain. Here, collaboratively, we will try to join our heads and hearts together and strive with humility towards knowing and understanding of ourselves, our world, and most importantly, how to use that knowledge and understanding to transform ourselves and our world.

The exercises of collective praxis (Freire 1970) are structured in a way that you ought to know, to a great level of certainty, what you do not know, what is unknown. Collaborators are applauded for not knowing, for identifying and naming the unknown. All are warmly welcomed to wonder collectively. That is why most of the classes are by the stream. This way, the mighty river will be able to bring with it the greetings of the lake, its rich nomadic wisdom resulting from its resolute journeys across deserts, through the swamps and over hills and mountains, and most importantly, it's longing for the mighty sea. It will also bring with it the knowledge of friends who drink, swim and live in its deep shelter.

By the stream, the ancestor of the trees and all plants will be able to join us too. It will bring with it greetings from the journeying of its roots and its understanding of various birds that live on its numerous branches. It is by the stream, my fellow

stuck brother and sister, that the ancestors play tok-ku-row.⁸ Oh, they are wise. They know what was, what is coming; who was and who is coming. They are wise. In short, my dear co-conspirator, by the stream, our chances of inviting our other friends – animals and plants – are high. And yes, the contributions from the birds, especially their knowledge of the boundary less universe up above is something that you do not want to miss. Let us go. Run!

See! Look up, down, around, behind, I told you. You might be wondering what are those ‘neoliberal’ capitalists, ‘privatized’ scientists, misogynistic war-mongering kleptocrats, ‘animal eaters’ and CEOs of ‘Earth-piercing’ and ‘forever-farting’ pollutants doing here. Is this not a gathering of the concerned and fringed common folk? Do not worry, they are stuck too – differently, but stuck for sure – and they do know something that we do not know; something that might help in solving this puzzle for a just, equal, peaceful and sustainable home for us and others. You never know. Again, you might want to ask why is that spot empty when everyone seems to be around – including those who should not be? Oh, yes, that spot is reserved for those who will come.

“Come? When?”, you might ask.

We do not know, but they will come. In the meantime, let us start the concomitance.

Department of Reciprocity, by Rebecca Shelton (USA)

In a recent interview, Robin Wall Kimmerer (2016) said:

The language of sustainability is pretty limited...at its heart, sustainability, the way we think about it, is embedded in this worldview that we, as human beings, have some ownership over these, what we call, resources, and...that human beings can keep taking and keep consuming... The notion of reciprocity is really different from that. It’s an expansion from that, because what it says is that our role as human people is not just to take from the earth, and the role of the earth is not just to provide for our single species... not only does the earth sustain us, but that we have the capacity and the responsibility to sustain her in return.⁹

Instead of sustaining oneself, sustaining community, sustaining earth, Kimmerer calls on us to imagine giving of oneself, giving to community, and giving to the earth. This is what we learn in the Department of Reciprocity.

See oneself as a system of reciprocity. Love goes in and love goes out. We must learn to care for ourselves so that we can be generative and able to give to others and to earth. But there is a balance to be learned – notice the difference between self-care and self-ish.

See the community as a system of reciprocity. We often weigh the love or care we give to another against the love or care we receive from them, but we are a part

⁸ (Among the Dinka) A clay made pebble game played under the Lang or Thau trees by the elders to pass time and philosophize.

⁹ <https://onbeing.org/programs/robin-wall-kimmerer-the-intelligence-in-all-kinds-of-life/>

of a system, a network of relationships. Reciprocity should not be treated as something sought in each and every connection, but as something that will come, in time, from the network. You may be called to give love to someone who does not have enough in their cup to reciprocate that care, but someone else may be giving to you.

See the connection with the earth as a system of reciprocity. Instead of thinking about the minimum amount of energy and work one needs to put into a garden such that it keeps producing the same amount over time, think more clearly about what the earth needs. What do these soil microorganisms need to thrive? What can I give them? What do these insects need? Then bounty emerges from care.

In the Department of Reciprocity, we learn to give and receive.

Department of the Stuff-In-Between, by Jessica Cockburn (South Africa)

In the Department of the Stuff-In-Between we pay attention to and nurture relationships, connections, linkages, tensions-in-between, and interdependence. Too often in this mechanistic world we focus on the ‘stuff’ of life: the objectives, the issues, the people, the places, the moon, stars... what about the things between them?

...he lay on her back along the deck and looked up at the stars. The sky was turning black and the stars burned out there, unchanging. All those stars, and those dark millions of light years... Dacey wondered if the space between was to push the stars apart or hold them together. (Voigt 1982, p. 23)

Dacey is a teenaged hero in one of my favourite books, Cynthia Voigt’s *Dacey’s Song*. She struggles but also thrives in the web of relations that is her family, the spaces between them fascinate her. This ‘space between’ is like the philosopher Bhaskar’s notion of the dialectic. He calls this ‘the pulse of freedom’ since the relational spaces and tensions are sources of change and emergence (Bhaskar 2008), growth and un-stuckness.

To teach, learn and research in the spaces in-between we foreground relational wisdoms, wisdom that emerges from relational spaces, relating better and more deeply to ourselves, to others, to nature and the world around us (Scharmer and Kaufer 2013). The pedagogical devices which we work with are relational linkages within our ecosystem of departments and lesson plans from nature and our fellow beings: we *shine our lights and turn out hearts towards* these linkages, inter-spaces, connections *and see what we can see, feel what we can feel*. We are reminded by the nature poet William Wordsworth to “come forth unto the light of things and let nature be your teacher.” After your engagement with this department you should be able to re-embodiment yourself as a member of deeply interconnected webs of life, to re-embed yourself in the universe, and appreciate that the space between the stars pushes us together and pulls us apart simultaneously. You will feel and see processes more than outcomes, linkages more than components, and connectedness rather than distinctness. With the Department of Ancestors, we re-remember our past and

our ancestors and that we are because they are; and with the Department of Intuition we un-learn the strictures of science and our performance-society and re-relate to ourselves and one another.

The Department of the Ancestors, by Saskia Vermeylen (Scotland)

In order for us – humxns – to get unstuck we have to listen to the stories of our ancestors. This is what we do in the Department of the Ancestors. The moment you walk in your grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents greet you, and an infinite wisdom of the elders awaits you. Your grandmother takes you by the hand and you walk to the forest, caringly and lovingly she feeds you the berries that have nurtured her grandparents. She gives you the medicine that cured your mother when she was ill. As the custodian and guardian of the landscape, she passes on enchanted knowledges residing in the forest. You feel enlightened because you walk with your ancestors, they protect you with their wisdom; they prepare you for the tribulations that await you. As you fight against the tyranny of the Age of Reason, hegemonic and positivist discourses of modernity with its twin brothers of science and law are being mythologised (Fitzpatrick 1992).

You are sitting in the circle of life listening to the folktales, myths and stories told by your grandfather. Their eyes twinkle, the fire warms you, you feel the passion of the stories in your belly, and slowly you understand that in the Department of the Ancestors you are being initiated to become the trickster, the warrior fighting back. Listen carefully and follow the path of your ancestors, and feel connected with your humxn and more than humxn ancestors, brothers and sisters.

Listening to the story of the hare and the moon (Bleek and Lloyd 2000), you build up confidence and find your own trail and voice, adding a new storyline for the next generation.

The Department of Learning, Remembering and Resisting through Music, by Kuany Kuany (South Sudan/India)

In this department, our books and pens are the Balafon, the Mbira, the Djembe, the Talking Drum, the acoustic guitar, the Erhu, the Tabla, the Ekta, the Igil, the dosh-puluur and my goodness the Kora – yes, the Kora. The problems of planet Earth – the scorched and torn Earth still waiting for the rains to stitch it back together; the oppressive and abstracted-monolithic power structures; the cry of the fringed animals and humxns – are our subjects. The classes are outside, under the Iroko tree, on a footpath along a hill, anywhere but four-walled concrete building!

Meet our distinguished, nature published yet grounded faculty: the robin, the majestic yellow-tailed cockatoo, the rose-breasted grosbeak, the house sparrow, the song thrush and the nightingale, and few once stuck-now-awakened humxns who have excelled in brooding with precious Earth in its entirety.

This department is taught by our more-than-humxn teachers. If you are still stuck to the idea of needing human teachers, trust me; the free-roaming wild, serious and stubborn parrot will be the wisest mentor yet. The silent stream, the whirling leaves dancing majestically to the tempo of the humming wind will also be a guide to you. You just have to listen!

To let you know upfront, please do not expect those glossy, disembodied papers called-certificates! If anything, they are a testimony to the laughable system of regurgitation.

In your learning and memory or remembrance class, you will be introduced to the throat singers of Tuva and Mongolia.¹⁰ We will try to attune to their voices and oral meditations on their ways of life, their ancestors and lovely horses. We will relate to their ways of knowing – terrestrial and celestial.

The distilled poetic meditations of the Sufis of the Himalayas – on how to lead a good life – will radiate via the strings of the Ektara and Tumbi.

Through their pristine voices, we will be able to relate to the Dinka: their love for long-horned cattle, their ways of learning and relating to the Nile and the Sudd. Their musical clues to greener pastures and water for one's cattle during the dry seasons and ingenious ways of catching and enjoying the trout and the mudfish gifted by the Nile as an apology for perennial deluges.

We will do the same with the Tamikrest and the Tinariwen and their love for their drought-wrecked yet lovely Sahara village of Kida¹¹ and Ali Farka Toure's ululations for his rusty-by-the-river Niger village of Niafunke¹² epitomized in the song 'Howkouna'. We will relate to his free-flowing feelings translated from deep down his belly and voice to the melodious strings of his guitar mediated by his farm-hardened fingers. It is the class where you will also be introduced to the nostalgic music that kept the refugees of barbaric warfare going in camps around the world.

In the Resistance class, we will strive to understand why the Civil Rights Movement activists opted for 'We Shall Overcome,' instead of the gun; the Anti-Apartheid resistance through the music of Stevie Wonder, Miriam Makeba, Brenda Fassie, Johnny Clegg; the Palestinian Resistance through the harps, the violins and the pianos of the Palestinian Youth Orchestra.¹³ How the sombre and meditative vocalist, Agok Malual, just cleared her throat, double press record-and-play on an old Casio Cassette player and forced the Dinka to rethink the place of the girl child,

¹⁰Huun Huur Tur, <https://huunhuurtu.wordpress.com/>

¹¹Tamikrest, Kidal, <http://www.tamikrest.net/>

¹²Ali Farka Toures, Niafunke, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCoSiT57c0E>

¹³Palestinian orchestra uses 'music as resistance'. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/09/palestinian-orchestra-music-resistance-170904120451727.html>

and lastly why the Tinariwen put down their Ak-47s for acoustic guitars to make their case for water, political inclusion and unity?¹⁴

By the end of our concomitance, you should be able to say ‘thank you’ using the talking drum; feel and express through the transcendental strings of the Kora and the Balafon, and use the finger- strings combination of the acoustic guitar to fight injustices of all kinds – from the rights of all stuck humxns to the non-verbalized grievances of the endangered golden moles who are whispering for their place in the world of man.

We promise you will be able to attune to the sound in the tears of the Nile and the Ganges (on behalf of all the rivers, the seas and the oceans) and use your tabla to fight for their unobstructed and unsullied flow.

Together, we will develop a pedagogy for learning, remembering and resisting through music.

Excited? Now run towards the stream, the rose-breasted grosbeak is taking the introductory class! He gets mad at latecomers. Have fun!

The Department of Spacious Approaches, by Luke Metelerkamp (South Africa)

The Department of Spacious Approaches is tasked with fostering a sensation of existence that is open. Not open in the tolerant or curious sense. Open in an expansive, encompassing sense. Comparable to the feeling of the vast Namib sky nestled gently on a translucent porcelain saucer.

A sensation necessarily accompanied by a spaciousness of time (particularly useful for those needing extra room to develop ways of raising hell). The practice of thick, sumptuous hours that wax and wain, not like a passing academic regiment but instead like the sands of understanding that gather in drifts and furrows in accordance with the winds that blow in a particular season of the soul. Time to wake up gently, opening cool, shadowy spaces throughout the day where the veil is, perhaps, just a little thinner.

The classroom: Solid wooden doors, 15 ft. high, painted midnight blue fixed with a gargoyle knocker, beyond which lies an open wild space (as Bayo Akomolafe puts it) ‘to claim sanctuary’ from the madness (Akomolafe 2017, p. 1).

Space to dance into the sacred rhythms of the body. Ancient groves and valleys in which to wander aimlessly for undefined periods with unknown companions. Engrossed in a distinct lack of urgency, moving slowly, less gets broken during the voyage. So much gets done with so little effort.

An ecological sensibility that rises to the surface as naturally as a balloon whose tether has been cut. When space is crafted for the west wind to blow through us,

¹⁴Rebel Music: The Tuareg Uprising in 12 Songs by Tinariwen. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/rebel-music-the-tuareg-uprising-in-12-songs-by-tinariwen>

eroding our own sense of confinement. Expanding outwards and inwards, raging winds capable of shaking the foundations cannot gather themselves in small boxes tucked away in dusty attics. Vast plains and hilltops are needed onto which thunderstorms can shed their watery weight, bringing with them the forces capable of widening the channels of the rivers beneath the winds, and the rivers beneath those rivers too. Traditional indoor classrooms are no space for such forces.

As the rivers below the rivers begin to rise, more gets noticed. Felt. Intuited (something we refine in the department of Intuition). Drawing comes into balance with writing, song with speech, the defined with the indefinable, the known with the unknowable, the possible with the impossible.

The Spacious Lungs of this department weave together with all the other organs, bringing hot winds and cold gusts into nerves, veins and arteries as well as newly found organs. A rhythmic contraction and expansion, a call-and-response, helping to echolocate ourselves, each other, the more-than-humxn and the ancestors.

Department of Pluriversal aka-Epi-demic Freedoms, by Ethemcan Turhan (Turkey)

Born out of the womb of a dying neoliberal academia that has long lost its use for the planet and its inhabitants, the Department of Pluriversal aka-Epi-demic Freedoms (DPAF in short) is our commitment of freedom of thought, of conscience, of research, of speech and silence. Our department is A.K.A. (also known as) Epi-demic Freedoms, not least because true freedoms are contagious in nature. DPAF strives to open spaces for creative destruction and promote the construction of *pluri-*versities (instead of *uni-*versities) valuing the critical traditions way beyond the western academia (Boidin et al. 2012). In DPAF, we foster and cherish “incalculable dimension of thought, the future of thought that eludes prediction and control” (Butler 2017). In a time of global lapse of reason and uprooting of researchers, DPAF is the natural home of all researchers at risk, here, there and everywhere. We stand in solidarity with those whose lives as researchers were sacrificed to the god of austerity, those who lost a place called home, and those who are fighting back the abyss that is the make-shift ivory towers filled with obedient caps and gowns.

DPAF rejects project-based, precarious academic slave-trade arrangements as much as it fervently opposes the preposterous publication/impact-factor frenzy. Our department works to overcome academic fake-selves in a journey through failures and re-trials on our way to open, honest, emancipatory discussions and explorations. In this, we follow David Berliner’s five principles for AKA-epi-demic freedoms: *principle of care* through substituting competition by an ethics of care, *principle of incompleteness* through an honest recognition that there are limits to what ‘one’ can do, *principle of honesty* through being sincere about our normative positions and vulnerabilities, *principle of irony* through making the neoliberal performance indicators a laughing stock, and finally, *principle of self-preservation*

through not overworking ourselves to death and caring for each other: Life itself cannot be squeezed into a list of grants, publications, awards, honors and titles.

Conclusion: The Cockroach is Our Coach

...

*And now we draw to a close
at least for today,
why yes, it is quite early,
but we all need time to play –*

*And to live other parts of life,
spend time with our loved-ones,
but worry not, my dearest peers,
the Pluriversity has just begun!”*

*If you find yourself lost in the struggle,
With all those things you carefully juggle,
Embody the tenaciously gifted cockroach,
Who is our ultimate queer survival coach...*

To end – as we get back to our loved ones and the other aspects of our lives, we invoke the Cockroach – for she is our school mascot, and possibly (and perhaps surprisingly to you) the most important professor at the Pluriversity. The cockroach embodies so much of what we need to learn as Pluriversity apprentices.

Firstly, the cockroach is not afraid of the hot stinky messes, in fact she raises hell in the steam pile, and then turns it into nourishing soil to grow permaculture classrooms for the Department of Transgressive Gardening. Her and her kin climb into uncomfortable shitty spaces, you might see her in the Department of Phi(loo)sphy, transforming these spaces from within. She does so, silently without pomp and ceremony. The cockroach has a sharpened tenacious imagination that is hardy, collaborative, fast, nimble and intuitive, it takes a lot to stop her, her great²⁰ grandmother practically founded the Department of Courage! Her and her friends always find a crack with their long filamental attentiveness, which we covet in our work in the Department of Intuition and in Empathetic Echolocation. She is never just surviving, always thriving, carefully crafting spacious approaches with all that stuff in between.

As we come to terms with and try to respond to the reality that we have ‘out welcomed’ our stay on this planet, we hold our broken hearts and humbly seek new teachers, like the cockroach. In the heteronormative responses to sustainability, we watch stuck humxns flail about in their megalomaniacal search of sanitized fixable solutions to complex, messy, shit-laden problems. Blindly forgetting the valuable lesson of the cockroach: to stay with the hot mess with attentive imagination and empathy – and a realist resolve sprinkled and glittered with sense of humour.

Knowing in your soul, that in order to unstick yourself, you must be willing to get your hands, tentacles, claws, and paws grubby.

...And now, kind reader, we end these rhymes-
with an invitation during these hard times-
full of yearning, for you, yes you, to join us in our quest
to shape the future of learning, no less!

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