

2020

## Femagogical Strategies in the Art School: Navigating the Institution

Barbara Knezevic

*Technological University Dublin*, [barbara.knezevic@tudublin.ie](mailto:barbara.knezevic@tudublin.ie)

Amy Walsh

*Technological University Dublin*, [amy.walsh@tudublin.ie](mailto:amy.walsh@tudublin.ie)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/aaschadpart>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), [Art Education Commons](#), [Art Practice Commons](#), [Contemporary Art Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), and the [Gender Equity in Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Walsh, A. & Knezevic, B. (2020). Femagogical strategies in the art school: navigating the institution. *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 19:1, 86-101. doi:10.1080/14702029.2020.1726087

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Fine Arts at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact [arrow.admin@tudublin.ie](mailto:arrow.admin@tudublin.ie), [aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie](mailto:aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie), [vera.kilshaw@tudublin.ie](mailto:vera.kilshaw@tudublin.ie).

**Femagogical strategies in the art school: Navigating the institution**

**Barbara Knezevic and Amy Walsh**

**Abstract**

This writing aims to define and examine ‘femagogy’ and the transformative potential for an inclusive intersectional feminist teaching practice in Fine Art education in the context of the contemporary Irish Art school. This writing will trace the influence of linguistic power structures and the influence of broader institutional patriarchy in an educational setting and outline the inspirations and genealogies of femagogy. This writing provides situated embodied examples of femagogy in practice. It proposes the femagogical model of teaching as one that situates itself outside prevailing patriarchal models and proposes strategies to reimagine knowledge production and navigate the prevailing structural patriarchy in the academic systems of the contemporary art school.

**Keywords**

femagogy, contemporary art, embodied knowledge, feminism, decolonising, art education

## **Introduction**

This writing examines the transformative potential of intersectional feminist teaching practices in Fine Art education at third level. It proposes a femagogical model of teaching that situates itself outside prevailing patriarchal models and proposes strategies to reimagine knowledge production and navigate the prevailing structural patriarchy in the academic systems of the contemporary art school. We will define then discuss femagogy, an intersectional feminist method we use in our own teaching at Technological University Dublin. This enables and creates learning situations that encourage disruptive modes of situated knowledge making, material thinking inspired by Feminist Pedagogy, Black Feminist Thought and Feminist New Materialist discourses that promote an active dismantling of hierarchical structures by proposing non-binary ways of constructing and creating knowledge. We will trace some of the contours of power in the third level education where the contemporary art school is situated and document the prevalence of patriarchal structures in contemporary art education. This writing will examine how our femagogical method resists and complicates the prevailing patriarchal hierarchical structures of the institution on a grassroots level in undergraduate education and how femagogy fosters and allows space for empowered intersectional feminist epistemologies.

### ***Femagogy (troubling pedagogy)***

As intersectional feminist educators and practicing artists, we felt it was time to trouble the term pedagogy, to decolonise the language we use to describe the act of education. In our teaching practices we are habitually calling the language we use as educators into question, starting with the notion of pedagogy, calling this term out as being white male-centric and cis-gendered. We want to develop a term that more accurately describes our ethos of

teaching and creating knowledge in TU Dublin School of Creative Arts – a term and an ethos that is equitable, inclusive and feminist.

The etymology of pedagogy is Greek, according to the Oxford Dictionary it stems from Late Middle English via Latin from Greek paidagōgos, denoting a slave who accompanied a child to school; from pais, paid- ‘boy’ + agōgos ‘guide’. (Oxford Dictionary) Another account of the etymology of pedagogy by Popie M Mohring states that

In antiquity and early Christian times a pedagogue was not a teacher, but a man (usually a slave) having the oversight of a child, an attendant who led a boy to school and carried his satchel. Plato may well be responsible (we don't know for sure) for the metaphorical usage of pedagogue and its cognates in the sense of educator, teacher, and their like. (1990, 5)

In the same essay Mohring points to andragogy as an alternative term for the education of adults, (1990, 4) and while it is not in common usage, its etymology points specifically to the teaching of adult males.

When the etymology of the words we use to describe the act of education implies a hierarchical teaching relationship of child and guide, slavery, and conflates male-ness with studentship, leaving out female-ness, gender non-binary and transgender positions and those who do not identify as male, it is time to make a change to the way we speak our thoughts associated with our educational work. Language has such a fundamental and formative role in the ways that knowledge is produced and disseminated that we cannot underestimate the power and affect of the ways we speak and what we speak. As Donna Haraway states

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. (2016, 12)

*Speaking with 'willful tongues'* (Ahmed 2017, 4)



Figure 1. Sarah Browne, *Reports to an Academy*, 2016, HV video with sound, 28 minutes. Courtesy of the artist.

Language is key to the hegemony of dualisms and binaries that prevail in education, thought over matter, language over making, culture over nature, male over female. Sara Ahmed speaks to the power of language in how it forms thought and power structures in *Living a Feminist Life* when she states, 'I began to realize what I already knew: that patriarchal

reasoning goes all the way down, to the letter, to the bone. I had to find ways not to reproduce its grammar in what I said, in what I wrote; in what I did, in who I was.’ (2017, 4)

Sarah Browne’s 2016 video work titled ‘Reports to an academy’ (Fig.1) describes the oppressive difficulty of language and knowledge production in the academy, and of navigating the politics of the neo-liberal art institution. ‘So, I began to devise a plan. I realised that speaking was not the way to find a way out in the Academy. I began a new series of practical exercises, leaving the linguistic to one side and instead focusing on the physical. Previously, I had been trying to train my tongue inside my body to perform better, which was the wrong approach: I realized that what I needed to do was train my whole body as a tongue.’ (2016) The protagonist transforms herself into an octopus, a squirting, tentacular aqueous creature; a *bodytongue* as a visceral, slithery form of embodied resistance and protest.

How we speak about and the terms we use to describe education is absolutely implicated in the form education takes. Ahmed describes the power of resistance and the embodied affective qualities that reside in language when she describes Feminism as ‘Feminism: a history of willful tongues. Feminism: that which infects a body with a desire to speak in ways other than how you have been commanded to speak.’ (Ahmed 2017, 191)

We too, want to speak with embodied willful tongues. (2017)

We are using the term Femagogy in place of the term pedagogy, but this does not mean we are replacing one hierarchical regime for another, where some are included at the expense of others. That is to say that it is not only people who identify as women who can engage in

femagogy. Femagogy is *not* a white elitist ableist cis gendered feminist outlook that excludes people of colour, queer people, trans people or ignores the urgent politics of race, sexuality, class, or neurodiversity. We refer here to Sara Ahmed's definition of Feminism via bell hooks.

I want to take here bell hooks's definition of feminism as 'the movement to end sexism, sexual exploitation and sexual oppression' (2000, 33). From this definition, we learn so much. Feminism is necessary because of what has not ended: sexism, sexual exploitation, and sexual oppression. And for hooks, 'sexism, sexual exploitation and sexual oppression' cannot be separated from racism, from how the present is shaped by colonial histories including slavery, as central to the exploitation of labor under capitalism. Intersectionality is a starting point, the point from which we must proceed if we are to offer an account of how power works. (2017, 5)

Femagogy is a form of Feminist pedagogy, and to us this means intersectional feminist education, an inclusive, expansive form of art teaching that focuses less on hierarchical models of top down teaching where knowing is possessed by the lecturer and is transmitted to the student. It is making art knowledge in an equitable feminist way, that makes space for plural and multiple positionality of students and their own knowledge creation. Instead of telling- to students it is 'making-with' (Haraway 2016, 129) students, colleagues, matter, materials, art-works, images, history and politics. It is creating space; an environment where many threads of knowledges and narratives can thrive, be shared and co-created.



In the publication 'Do the Right Thing' by Lisa Nyberg and Johanna Gustavsson of the Malmö Free University for Women (MFK) discuss their notion of 'Radical Pedagogy' stating that

Radical pedagogy is defined through a clear and transparent perspective on power and with a view on education that challenges the prevailing social order through a critical language and an active construction of alternatives...The focus of a radical pedagogy is not to confirm the prevailing power structure, but to activate critical thinking. It is not principally what we learn, but how we learn, how we understand, how we use knowledge and who defines what is worth knowing. (2011, 47)

Nyberg and Gustavsson outline the importance of criticality around language and its relationship to power. They state the necessity for creating alternatives to what already exists and they note the role of knowledge and language in constructing and maintaining hegemonic structures. Femagogy shares the ethos of Feminist Pedagogy and owes a debt to the forms of resistance and education that intersectional Feminist pedagogical practices have established. We feel that Femagogy is a useful term to rally behind. Changing the term is changing the terms of engagement with a word spoken from our 'willful tongues.' (Ahmed 2017, 191)

### ***Collaborative teaching and learning – an act of transformation and resistance***

An immediate example of our collaborative teaching ethos is this collaborative writing work, the latest in a series of academic collaborations we have engaged in together. In 'Why Call Successful Co-authoring Feminine?' Kami Day and Michele Eodice discuss the under researched area of collaborative scholarship, and fully problematise their potentially essentialist contention that co-authoring is feminine. They arrive at a statement that co-

authoring ‘is nurturing, heterarchical, noncompetitive, caring, connected, contextual, affective approach—not to mention the possible risks of challenging and subverting academia’s sacred cow of single authorship—most often locates them (the authors) in a space that is not limited to competition, autonomy, hierarchy, and rationality. Of course, we are not saying that these co-authors are never competitive or self-promoting (or that autonomy and competition are never appropriate)’. (2001, 58) These authors reflect on co-authorship as not just a feminist but a *feminine* act, an affective gesture that privileges relationships and care and acknowledges how this challenges the rubrics and the structures of the institution. This is an approach that we have adopted as a strategy in our femagogical work academic work for its potential to frustrate and deny the patriarchal impulses that inform the institutional neo-liberal desires for single authors, academic competition and singular points of view.

In a ground-breaking speech at the Second Sex Conference in New York, September 29, 1979 Audre Lorde stated famously “For the masters tools will never dismantle the masters house” (2007, chap. 10, para. 9). With this statement, Lorde was criticising the conference for being exclusionary and failing to include women of color, lesbians and poor women in the conference program, declaring that if one uses the exclusionary tools of racist patriarchy to examine the produce of that same patriarchal system than only the smallest social change is possible. As co-authors of this academic paper, we recognise the inherent irony and our use of the ‘masters tools’ in disseminating this knowledge in an academic journal, a crucial part of the structural academic patriarchy, that will only be available to those with the means to access it. This, however, is only one form of our knowledge dissemination. This strategy of femagogy is disseminated through our artistic research, our art practices, our writing, our teaching as lecturers in TU Dublin. It is a form of resistance that is more than thought, it is an active way of being.

On our staff team the spirit and ethos of pedagogy is embraced by educators of all genders and takes its form in the ways that we teach Fine Art and also in the ways we engage with one another as colleagues. Collaborative research, team teaching and co-teaching is a core feature of the department in which we teach. This is an educational strategy, a deliberate act that disrupts the notion of single authors, geniuses, singular (art) histories and hierarchies. In the act of co-teaching modules, students are presented with a selection of positionalities, a variety of sensibilities, and a range of experiences that may variously agree or disagree with one another, but ultimately describe and allow for an epistemological situation for students that is plural and open.

To illustrate a concrete example of how these teaching methods are employed, we will describe the structure of the BA in Fine Art on which we teach and describe in detail one important teaching method that we apply as a staff team. During the final five semesters of their education, students are encouraged to establish their own independent studio practice and each semester undertake a 20-credit interdisciplinary studio module as well as obtaining a further 10-credits in art history, theory and complementary studies. Contrary to other forms of art education, we do not employ the personal tutor system whereby individual students are assigned a personal tutor in a specific Fine Art discipline. Instead, we operate a tutorial system where several staff members with different research interests and expertise are available to work with students. Individuals can select to sign up for consultations with different lecturers depending on the direction that their work is taking them. An assigned year co-ordinator monitors the effective implementation of this from the staff team. At other times staff pairings facilitate studio critiques and peer discussion of student work in progress. This structure creates spaces for students to develop a studio practice across the Fine Art disciplines, not just in one area while also exposing students to a variety of positionalities

throughout their education. It encourages students to develop a studio practice that is specific and unique to them as individual artists while breaking the hierarchy of personal tutor and student relationship.

### *Structural patriarchy in the institution*

To accurately situate structural patriarchy in the in the context in which we teach we felt it important to situate the position of women historically in Ireland. As such the Irish state has oppressed women's access to the full recourses of society including education. Conroy points to the number of 'anti-woman'(2015, 34) laws that were passed between the years 1926-37 to control the position of the women within the state. Notable laws include The Marriage Bar in 1932, which eventually extended to the entire civil service that required women teachers to retire on marriage. Finally, in 1937, the subaltern position of women within Irish society was copper fastened in the Irish Constitution in Art. 41.2.1° and Art 41.2.2° which state that,

‘the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved’ and ‘The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.

Women’s position here is clearly defined and controlled by the Irish state. Her body, thoughts, experiences and worth all placed within the home outside the walls of third level education, academia and the art school.



Figure 2. Amy Walsh, *Article 41.2 A Woman's Place*, 2019, Photograph, Courtesy of the artist.

These historical legacies are still felt within education today as it denied women access along with the opportunities for promotion to higher managerial positions across the entire civil service. While women today account for more than half of university lecturing staff within Irish Universities, only a quarter of them progress to professor grade. This problem was evidenced in November 2014 when Dr Micheline Sheehy Skeffington a lecturer the National University of Galway (NUIG) won the case that she brought to the Equality Tribunal following her lack of promotion to senior lecturer in the 2008/2009 round of promotions at the university. As Sheehy Skeffington notes

This was the fourth time I had applied for promotion and the second time I was deemed eligible, but I was not ranked high enough to get one of the limited places. By then I was 19 years as a college lecturer and had many achievements,

so I knew I deserved better. I asked how many women *had* been promoted in that round and was told that, of the 17 people promoted, there was but one woman.

(2014)

Similarly, O'Brien noted that there has never been a female university president in the past four hundred years of higher education in Ireland (2018). Sheehy Skeffington's case and these facts not only reveal that Irish Universities are still predominately run by white cis heterosexual men but also reveal that they are still recruiting at senior levels in their own image, and one may conclude that the contributions of female staff are not being valued within the institutions in the same way. While the participation of thirteen Higher Education Institutions including Technological University Dublin where we both work in the Athena Swan Charter and conferral of a Bronze award to each of the participants, highlights a recognition across third-level institutions in Ireland of this inequality (Higher Education Authority 2016) and recognizes that each institution has built a 'solid foundation for eliminating gender bias and developing an inclusive culture' (Swan, 2018)

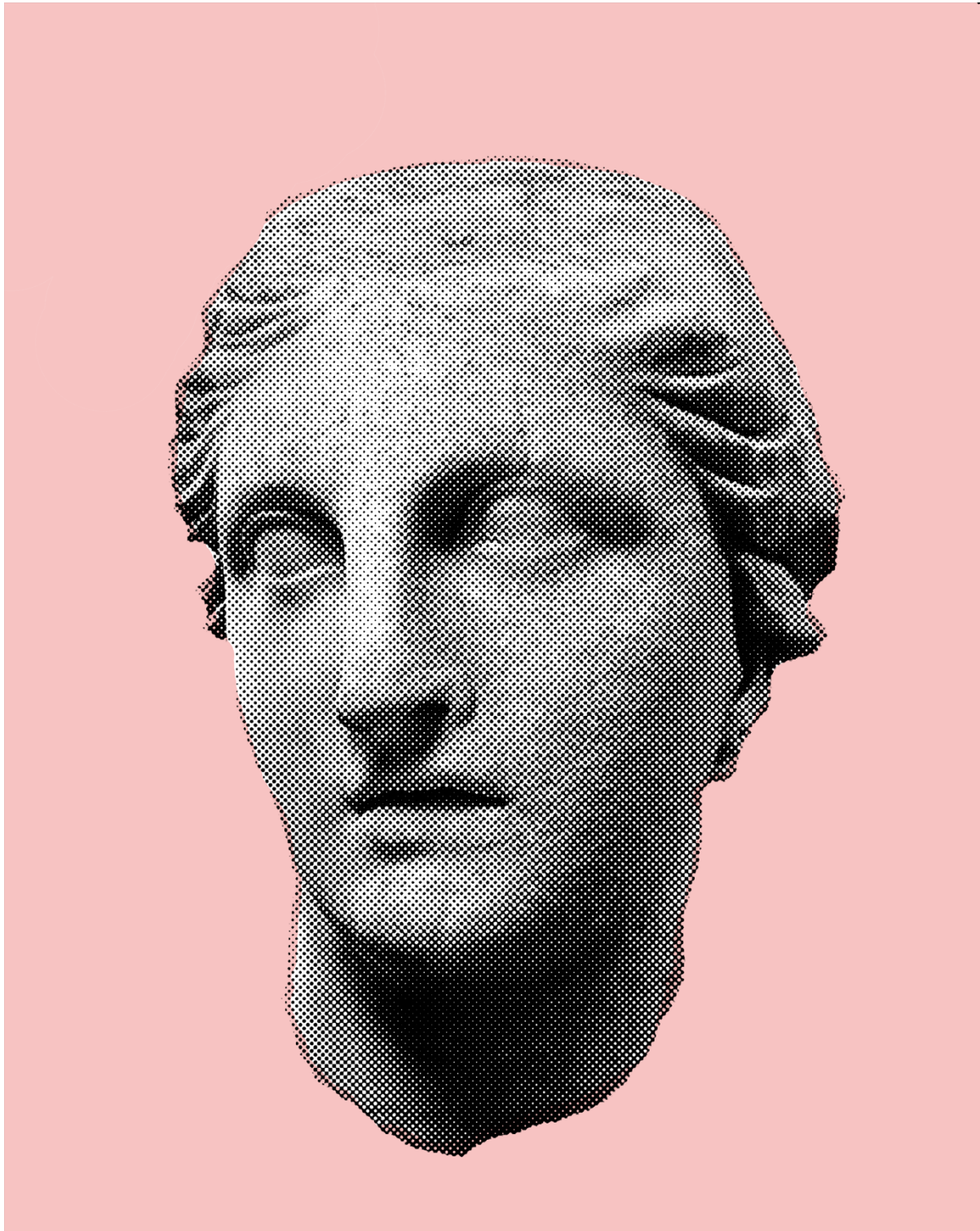


Figure 3. Barbara Knezevic, *Head of Athena*, 2019, research image. Courtesy the artist.

We wait to see structural change across the Irish academic landscape and call for a culture that is inclusive of race, class, sexuality and other positionalities. Ahmed articulates how

spaces of education and academia have become white male spaces and liken this to a form of social and institutional cloning. By continually recruiting in their own image Ahmed describes how this is a form of ‘wall building’ (2017, 154) and points to the power relations that have significantly impacted not only women but those whose race, class and gender are not part of the social or institutional norm. Hill Collins calls this the ‘The Structural domain of power’ (2000, 277) Who gets let into these spaces of education? And who can pass through them? Who decides what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge is validated?

### *Personal experiences of Femagogy*

Gillian Rose argues that ‘the sort of knowledge made depends on who the makers are’ (1997, 306) as feminist intersectional educators we recognize that knowledge creation is shaped by the circumstances in which it is produced and shared. Bearing this in mind, we take account of our own positionalities as white, western, cis-gendered, heterosexual females along with the diverse positionalities of our students and the curriculum that we teach. Rose also states that ‘No feminist should produce knowledge that claims to be universal applicability to all’ (307) and as such we recognize the intersections of power that are at play within all academic knowledge production and dissemination. What is counted as knowledge? Whose knowledge and what subjects are legitimized are questions we have troubled in our feminist teaching strategies.

As such we look to Hill Collins (2008, 3) who argues that the suppression of Black Feminist Thought from academia not only maintains social inequalities but effectively makes black women and their ideas invisible and argues that if someone or something is invisible, it does not exist. In a similar vein, Smith (2015, XI) states that the exclusion of a subject from



academia serves to paraphrase it out of conceptual thought. While Smith refers explicitly to the topic of Abortion in Ireland, she points to a similar suppression of legitimate knowledge as Hill Collins.

To counter these challenges Hill Collins urges scholars to search for knowledge found in alternative settings and among those not always perceived as intellectuals and argues for a validation of experience as knowledge within the academy and sites a speech given by Black Feminist Activist Sojourner Truth in 1851 to support this assertion. As Truth could not read or write she would not be considered an academic and yet she uses her lived experience as an African American Women to expose the ‘concept of women as being culturally constructed’ (2008, 15)

For this paper we decided to use a mix of reflection on personal experience and testimony from both ourselves and our students, interwoven with research and theory to resist the suppression of knowledge formation and ideas that pertain to both women and those whose race, class, gender, sexual orientation may fall outside the hegemonic canon of western art school. We choose this strategy to follow a form of feminist knowledge formation as evidenced in the texts of many of the feminist writers (Ahmed, bell hooks, Haraway, Hill Collins, Rich) who we reference throughout this paper and others who we admire.

Amy Walsh: When considering how knowledges are validated, suppressed or made invisible within an academic setting. I want to turn personal experience that I had in art college in Dublin in 2002. I was a second-year student, studying Fine Art and as such we attended weekly art history and theory lectures. At the end of our art history class one week, our lecturer announced, in the form of a public apology that our next two sessions were going to

cover Feminist Art. They apologized and said that ‘as it was part of the curriculum, they did not have a choice, they had to cover it.’ I had been looking forward to the next two classes, as I had been reading about Anna Mendieta and making video work about the female body. However, I remember sitting in the class feeling quite alienated and a bit confused as to the level of antagonism expressed by some of my peers who angrily shouted ‘Oh no, not feminism!’ and ‘why do we have to learn about feminism, haven’t we achieved equality?’. By way of explanation, our lecturer told us ‘if it was up to them, we would not have to cover it at all because it was not really relevant anymore’ No one realized or mentioned that when we were talking about women having achieved equality with men, what we were really talking about was white, cis-gendered, heterosexual middle class, able-bodied, college educated women having achieved equality with white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, middle class, abled-bodied college educated men in an Irish context.

As a compromise, our lecturer told us that we would not need to attend both sessions. If we attended one, we would fulfill the requirement of having covered feminist art and proceeded to ask us, which lecture we planned on attending. The one that covered second wave feminist art practices in the US or the other one that covered second wave feminist art practices in the UK and Ireland. At no other time during my education, was I given the option of not attending something because it was on the curriculum but not deemed relevant by the lecturer.

This leads me to recall a conversation that one of our graduating students had with one of our external assessors in May 2019 ‘As I am a women in my early 20’s, in a class with mainly women, It is really important for me to see my female lecturers do well, they are my role models’ the student went on to describe, how ‘it was her female lecturers who mainly taught

courses to which she could most identify with, referencing both female artists and at times feminist theory'. The importance of teaching materials that students can relate to their own experiences, the power of modelling to and reflecting the student's identities and positionalities across the curriculum.

Barbara Knezevic:

To operationalise this vital materialist position, I rely on the cartographic method. A cartography is a theoretically based and politically informed account of the present that aims at tracking the power relations operational in and immanent to the production and circulation of both knowledge and subjectivity (Braidotti 1994; 2011a; 2011b). The point is to expose these processes of power/knowledge as both entrapment (potestas) and as empowerment (potentia), while avoiding any polarisation of the two terms. (Braidotti 2018, xv)

In this passage Rosi Braidotti describes her feminist cartographic method as a process of tracking and drawing a map of knowledge; its power structures, its origins, and its means of circulation. It is an unearthing, an archeological examination of how knowledge is produced and how it enables both entrapment and empowerment so that we might be able to chart a course that deviates from paths of patriarchy. Braidotti also highlights the need to describe our own spatio-temporal locations in epistemic practices when she says 'This method accounts for one's position in terms both of space (geo-political or ecological dimension) and time (historical memory or genealogical dimension), thereby grounding politically and epistemically the production of alternative knowledges.' (2018) In terms of myself and Amy Walsh's femagogical practice of teaching in TU Dublin, our examination and critique of the term Pedagogy is a good example of a cartographic approach. Unearthing and mapping the

origins of a term in wide use to describe our teaching work reveals our complicity in linguistic entrapment, while also illuminating alternative routes.

When presenting knowledge to students I construct for them the cartography of my own knowledge, where and how it is situated within and influenced by my positionality. In introductory lessons, I am careful to highlight to students that I am a source, entangled in and mediated by my subjecthood like any other. I am clear that what I present is not an objective view. I tell them that I am a white western English speaking cis woman, born in Australia to post World War II immigrant Polish and Yugoslav families, and I am now living in Ireland. I tell them that I was educated in Australia in the western canon of art history, an art history inflected with the particular post-colonial Australian context, and that the knowledge I have gathered is totally influenced by my own educational and biographical experiences. I encourage students to be suspicious of what I am presenting to them, to consult sources and positions other than my own. To pursue a plurality of knowledge around the discipline of fine art and to follow their own paths and routes to knowledge.

I'd like to trace the cartography of my artistic and educational practice and to celebrate an experience of femagogy. My first experience of what we are describing as femagogy was in High School in Western Sydney, Australia. I took a class in what was then called Visual Arts in my HSC (Higher School Certificate) led by two female Visual Arts teachers Lauren Broos and Lisa Slade. These two educators exposed our class to the movements of European, American and Australian Modernism and Post-modernism but not without criticality of the canon. We were shown work by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, we focused on artists who identified as female and on artists who spoke to the Post-modern intersection of identity politics, class politics and Post-colonialism in Australia and beyond. This happened

at a stage of our education where perhaps it may have been easier to focus on skill acquisition and to leave the canon unchallenged. But these Feminist educators (and they did identify themselves to us as Feminists) taught us that art was about ideas and politics and ethics as well as aesthetics, and they demonstrated to us how closely art tracked to and spoke to the most important issues of our time.

Reflecting on this now, it feels really radical, that two female educators in a Western Sydney High School in the 1990's were teaching a Feminist form of Visual Arts to a diverse group of students from various ethnic cultural and social backgrounds. They exposed us to a vast spectrum of visual arts practice and theory and as a result I went to Sydney College of the Arts at Sydney University with a solid grounding in Art History and theories of Post-modernism.

The year I graduated from High School these two educators were co-authoring a book called 'In the Picture' (Chee, Broos, Slade 1995). Seeing these two educators writing a book on teaching Visual Arts provided an example, charting the pathways that were possible for me and encouraging a level of ambition that was embodied by these two educators themselves. Lauren Broos and Lisa Slade helped me understand that I could become an artist, an academic, a writer, not just by transmitting knowledge to me, but by demonstrating to me that those paths existed and were possible for me because I saw that they were possible for them.

***Feminist New Materialism strategies in teaching fine art studio practice: What are the methods and approaches?***

It is useful now to summarise our understanding of Feminist New Materialism and how it relates to and informs our femagogical approach to art education. In this context we are defining it as movement of contemporary makingthinking and interspecies co-making that spreads across a number of disciplines and embraces interdisciplinarity, but is most evident in philosophy, feminist theory, gender studies with crossovers into the visual arts. In our work we draw inspiration from practitioners such as Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, Jane Bennett and Rosi Braidotti.

A key aspect of Feminist New Materialism that feeds our femagogical approach, is its tendency to break down notions of the binary, distinctions such as nature/culture, male/female and particularly its resistance to the idea of hierarchical human relations to the world where humans are considered to have mastery over matter or to be the only entities with agency. Importantly, particularly to object-based art practices and how they manifest in the studio, New Materialism considers that along with humans, animals and other matter have agency and vibrancy and that the interrelations between these entities are primary.

The connections between Feminist New Materialism and the potential for these strategies in art education are indicated by the haptic and material acts that many forms of art making take, particularly evident in the material relations that arise in the studio environment. Vivienne Bozalek, Abdullah Bayat, Daniela Gachago, Siddique Motala and Veronica Mitchell describe the a New Materialist approach to education when they note that ‘a responsible pedagogy showcases how we are actively learning-with, doing-with, making-with, and becoming-with each other tied together in sympoiesis as teachers and students, and matter.’ (2018, 106) This passage describes a productive and ethical entanglement of humans

and matter in the educational setting that opens up new possibilities and feels synonymous with education in art school that focuses on studio practices.

An example of where we reflected a learning-with, making-with Feminist New Materialist position in our educational work, is in a first year Fine Art module that we co-wrote titled 'Research as Practice'. The module encouraged independent primary and secondary research and making as a form of thinking. This module honoured Feminist New Materialist strategies of situated and embodied forms of knowledge production, entanglements between humans and matter, and aimed to break down traditional binary positions in academia around haptic making and linguistic knowledge.

One of the aims of the module was to embed approach to art-making/thinking, which would act as a foundation for the student's Fine Art studio education at TU Dublin. To dismantle any divide between theory and studio practice, one of the first tasks we gave students was a secondary research assignment based in the library. Students were divided into groups and given a bibliography containing books, journals and online materials along with a list of artists. In their group's students were tasked with using the bibliography, the college library and specific online sources to find out about the artists that they had been asked to research. Further to that, students were asked to evaluate the source material that we had asked them to use. Each student was also asked to find a least one other artist while undertaking their research task that they had not previously known. Student groups were tasked with making a joint research wall in the studio. On their walls, students were asked to evidence their research trail, showing where and how they came across the material that they presented. Their walls were multilayered and contained drawings, photocopies of images, texts, keywords and string and grew daily. Students used thread to draw connections between

different artists and ideas presented in their research wall and the research of other students in the studio.



Figure 4. Eden Munroe, 2018, Studio research, TU Dublin Fine Art. Courtesy the artist.

Following this, we gave students an assignment titled 'ArtMakingThinking'. Students were required to make a series of drawings or photographs that were influenced by or used an adapted version of the art-making approach that they had identified in the research. Students then added these drawing to their research wall (Fig.2) and were encouraged to continue developing their making in this iterative process. We provided students with theoretical texts and tasked them to find their own. They were asked to respond to the written word with material forms, in particular with improvised and instinctive clay and string drawings, and to



use language as matter. Students were often invited to engage in communal forms of making in the studio to encourage them to embrace different approaches. We advocated what we were calling a rich, textured and layered approach to artistic research in the studio. Students began creating walls of haptic research evidencing material thinking. In this research block, no particular form of knowledge was presented as more privileged than the other. Haptic, affective, embodied approaches were encouraged alongside more institutionally accepted forms of research. The approach was one of symbiosis, one form of knowing feeding the other. Students developed tools and strategies for unearthing their own forms of knowledge and charting a course for their own artistic practice.



Figure 5. Deborah Cummins, 2018, Studio research, TU Dublin Fine Art. Courtesy the artist.

This haptic affective form of teaching and making feels agential and fluid and empowers students in their own knowledge creation. This form resists didactic models as Bozalek, Bayat, Cachago, Motala, Mitchell note when they describe a learning environment of ‘mutual

relationship in which teachers and students render each other capable. Such becomings are not about imitation, nor literal transformations (the student becoming like the teacher, for example), but rather the proliferation of multiple identities and ways of being in the world.’ (2018, 106)

In this module, we focused on decolonising the curriculum and creating spaces for students to contribute to the development of the curriculum with us. While we pointed students to the work of specific artists and texts, under our guidance, we also tasked students to research and find artists and art-making practices that we had not directed them towards. Students added this information along with the cartography of where and how they found it to their ever-expanding research walls.

We felt we not only needed to decolonize the curriculum by providing students with diverse and inclusive reading materials and references, as educators we needed to question the structures in which specific knowledges and ways of being in the world are validated and others suppressed. In 2018 one of our graduating students noted to an external examiner that ‘Some of the reading lists, for my undergraduate modules, only contained material by white male western authors.’ While this student was not referring to specific modules that we teach, as educators, we felt that we had a duty to respond to this criticism. In relation to how something comes to be known and what viewpoints are validated, Nordstrom discusses the museum archive and notes ‘not only do we need to identify how an object came to be archived and offer multiple readings of it, but we also need to look at what is not included in the archive and question why that is’ (Nordström 2019) Furthermore, we wanted to confront, challenge and dismantle the patriarchal structures in which the art school is situated, and we sought to create a space that would actively challenge knowledge hegemonies and the

patriarchal structures in which certain knowledges, subjects and viewpoints are produced and validated.

## **Conclusion**

Through the practice of femagogy our students are encouraged to recognize and use different forms of knowledge production, including but not limited to - embodied, geographical, cultural, individual, group, historical, experimental, haptic and dialogical while recognizing multiple positionalities and experiences. The aim of our femagogical work is to provide fertile environments where new artistic practices can take root and grow, and enable and create space for learning situations that allow for plurality, multiple positions, and that encourage hierarchically disruptive modes of material thinking.

While developing an approach to art-making that was unique and individual to their own positionality, students are encouraged to look at the broader social context in which we live and consider how knowledge and art-making hegemonies serve to oppress the knowledges and positions of marginalized others. Over the past ten years, the makeup of our student body has become more diverse with students coming from different ethnic and social backgrounds as well as identifying as different LGBTQ+ and male, female, cis, transgender and gender binary. Femagogy as mode of teaching practice, learning and making is a feminist ethic of 'response-ability' (Haraway 2016, 68) that fosters a way of coming together and being with each other that is based on inclusion and equality.

## ***Bibliography***

Ahmed, Sara. 2017. *Living a feminist life*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Bozalek, Vivienne, Bayat, Abdullah, Gachago, Daniela, Motala, Siddique and Mitchell, Veronica. 2018. "A Pedagogy of Response-ability" in *Socially Just Pedagogies*. Edited by Vivienne Bozalek, Rosi Braidotti, Tamara Shefer, Michalinos Zembylas, 97 – 112. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle Edition.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2018. "Foreward" in *Socially Just Pedagogies*. Edited by Vivienne Bozalek, Rosi Braidotti, Tamara Shefer, Michalinos Zembylas, xiii - xxvi. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle Edition.
- Chee, Linda, Broos, Lauren and Slade, Lisa. 1995. *In the Picture*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Conroy, Pauline. 2015. "A Woman Told me... Punishing the Productive and the reproductive." In *The Abortion Papers Ireland*, edited by Aideen Maria Quilty, Sinéad Kennedy and Catherine Conlon, 34-46. Cork: Attic Press.
- Day, Kami and Eodice, Michele. 2001. *(First Person)2: A Study of Co-authoring in the Academy*. Utah: All USU Press Publications. 136.  
[https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/usupress\\_pubs/136](https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/usupress_pubs/136)
- Haraway, Donna Jeanne. 2016. *Staying with the trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. London; Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. 2008. *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. 2nd ed. London;New York;: Routledge.
- hooks, bell. 2015. *Feminist theory: from margin to center*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider : Essays and Speeches*. Crossing Press, 2007. EBSCOhost, [search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=739170&site=ehost-live&scope=site](https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=739170&site=ehost-live&scope=site).
- Mohring, Popie M. . 1989. *Andragogy and Pedagogy: A Comment on Their Erroneous*

*Usage*. Minnesota: Minnesota University Training and Development Research Center  
Project Number Twenty-Nine.

Nordström, Alison 2019. "Photography and the Museum a Curators Perspective."

Photography and the Museum: Contradictory Histories and Contemporary  
Perspectives, The Museum of Contemporary Photography, The Printworks Dublin  
Castle, 5 July 2019.

Nyberg, Lisa and Gustavsson, Johanna. 2011. *Do the Right Thing, A manual from MFK*.

Malmö: Malmö Free University for Women.

O'Brien, Carl. 2018. "Funds for women-only professorships aim to end gender inequality."

*The Irish Times*, 11 November 2018.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/funds-for-women-only-professorships-aim-to-end-gender-inequality-1.3693939>.

Rich, Adrienne. 1977. *Of woman born: motherhood as experience and institution*. London:  
Virago.

Rose, Gillian. 1997. "Situating knowledges: positionality, reflexivities and other tactics."

*Progress in Human Geography* 21 (3):305-320. doi: 10.1191/030913297673302122.

Sheehy Skeffington, Micheline. 2014. "Real Life Stories." Irish Human Rights and Equality

Commission. <https://www.makerightsreal.ie/equality-tribunal-hearing-found-in-my-favour-michelines-story/>.

Smith, Ailbhe. 2015. "Above and Beyond the Silence." In *The Abortion Papers*, edited by

Aideen Quilty, Catherine Conlon and Sinéad Kennedy, ix-xv. Cork: Attic Press.

Swan, Athena. 2018. "Athena Swan Award Criteria." Athena Swan, accessed 2019.

<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Athena-SWAN-criteria-for-panels-institutions.pdf>.

## Figures

Figure 1. Sarah Browne. *Reports to an Academy*, 2016, HV video with sound, 28 minutes.

Written, directed and edited by Sarah Browne. Voice: Fiona for Apple OSX 10.10.5  
Composition: Alma Kelliher. Camera: Colum O'Dwyer, Sarah Browne. Movement  
devised in collaboration with performers: Saoirse Wall & Liv O'Donoghue. Close-up  
footage of cephalopod skin courtesy Roger Hanlon at MBL, Massachusetts, USA.  
Colourist: John Beattie. Commissioned for Manual Labours: *The Complaining  
Body*, the second stage of the practice-based research project Manual Labours  
initiated by Sophie Hope and Jenny Richards that explores people's physical  
relationships to work. Manual Labours: *The Complaining Body* is developed in  
partnership with The Showroom, London; In Certain Places, Preston and Movement  
and Division of Labour, Worcester. Manual Labours: The Complaining Body is  
supported by Arts Council England's Grants for the Arts, The Elephant Trust, The  
Birkbeck/Wellcome Trust Institutional Strategic Support Fund and Birkbeck  
University Widening Access. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 2. Amy Walsh, *Article 41.2 A Woman's Place*, 2019, Photograph. Courtesy of the artist

Figure 3. Barbara Knezevic, *Head of Athena*, 2019, research image. Courtesy the artist.

Figure 4. Eden Munroe, 2018, Studio research, TU Dublin Fine Art. Courtesy the artist.

Figure 5. Deborah Cummins, 2018, Studio research, TU Dublin Fine Art. Courtesy the artist.