

Reflection on [Hinterlands: How to do Transdisciplinarity?](#) by Patricia de Vries
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Spoken on 17th March 2022 @ International Institute for Social History, in the context of an event named '[Set Your Compass](#)' which explored doctorate in the arts possibilities in Amsterdam and celebrated the launch of the book.

The contributions from *Hinterlands* address a multitude of dynamics within transdisciplinary work in relation (though not limited) to: language, listening, risk, pedagogy, world building, expectation, care, trans-media, curation, writing, intersectionality, medicine. The list continues. The contents come in different forms; both reflective and/or poetic in style, narrated by single and multiple author(s), written out conversations, interviews and a graphic story. So as you will see in this reflection, de Vries takes a walk through this complex and exciting terrain.

If we understand the book *Hinterlands* as a hinterland, what do we experience when we visit it? A self-guided tour along and through spaces where artistic and collaborative research takes place.

Hinterlands is not a field guide or manual, it also does not tell us what transdisciplinarity is, but rather shows us the various ways it is done, what it does and how it acts.

On a walk through the book, one can eavesdrop on conversations between artists, researchers and scientists, and learn about 'sharing needs' the concept of 'harmacy'. One can find 'recipes for commoning', and plot a route on a 'rhizomatic map'. Walking around the left side of the pond, you will tread upon a treacherous road where you are warned of the dangers of getting stuck in a set of techniques or vocabulary, and of the fear of becoming a dilettante.

Hinterlands is not a space for peace and quiet. While wandering around, you hear the constant humming sound of military

drones approaching. I ventured off and the humming slowly faded but was immediately taken over by birdsongs, from a whole variety of birds, and in the background, if you listened closely, you would hear countervoices, outside voices, mixed with songs by Bjork and the voice of Gilles Deleuze.

Hinterlands is also not a place of leisure. On my walk, I've seen numerous people pushing hard against disciplinary confines.

Walking around *Hinterlands*, reminded me of a phrase attributed to Gene Youngblood: 'Radicals don't predict, they build.' So what is being built here? The short answer is spaces of possibility. A Hinterland is made, not found. Like all spaces, it is created and composed through practice. Transdisciplinarity composes and recomposes spaces. In other words, the transdisciplinary artist-researcher changes the consisting conditions of a space, thereby allowing to experience a space differently.

This (re)compositioning involves methods. On my walk, through the hinterland, I listen to a conversation between Laura Cull, Research Professor of the Academy of Theatre and Dance, and Sher Doruff, former head of the DAS THIRD programme (Amsterdam University of the Arts). I caught a snippet of their conversation about methodology. Referring to Deleuze, Laura Cull described 'method' in artistic research 'as an encounter'. And an encounter is not something a subject does to an object, but something that is reciprocally determined through embodied relations, Cull argued.

Methodology here becomes a kind of choreography. A way of moving around in space. This is to say that transdisciplinarity as a method, is not a technicality, but rather a type of relationality, structured by values, ideas, and an outlook on the spaces we inhabit and co-habit. Transdisciplinarity is not a fixed property of artistic research, but a way of crafting particular connections and

relations. And all are formed and shaped in this process.

What does transdisciplinarity as one form of artistic research encourage? What kind of behaviour does it encourage? The transdisciplinary artist-researcher makes connections that are neither necessarily utilitarian nor profitable, but explores the possibilities of a space through play, dance, exploration, supposition, reflection, digging down and standing back. They are able to share a space with difference, contradiction, and muddle, without rushing to usefulness, simplicity, or clear-cut answers.

Transdisciplinarity is a space, and a space is not a problem to be solved or fixed but can only be related to. The artists-researcher shows us possible relations and positions in space, or makes tangible and palpable what is 'not yet.' The artist-researcher is able to do so because it has greater leeway to push and transgress limits, max-out ideas and use speculation and imagination to let you feel and imagine things that do not yet exist or

seem impossible. The artist-researcher does not expect anything but aspires to make room for other values and new strategies for social and material renewal to develop more diverse and lively ecologies of ideas and values.

The transdisciplinary artists-researcher knows that no one discipline can bring about diverse and lively ecologies of ideas and values by itself, but each discipline is vital. Together they materialise and give shape and form to the shapelessness of the future.

To close, I turn to those who may think "this all sounds nice and cute, but it's not practical and it will never be taken seriously." The response is: We don't predict, we try to build spaces in common. After all, and to borrow a line from Ram Dass: we are all just walking each other home.

*Purchase a copy of *Hinterlands* [here](#), all proceeds go towards exhibition materials for graduating artists of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, through the [Berlagefonds](#).*