



INTERVENTIONS: PROVOCATION

When Trans met Discipline: scenes from an arranged marriage

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Transdisciplinarity is all the rage!

This spirited statement, or announcement even, rings true of the contemporary intellectual landscape. The amalgamated term/concept proposes a means to breakdown traditional boundaries, encourage collaboration outside of staid academic spaces and in doing so become a key driver for innovation. Many have bought into this promise. However, amidst the fervour for the promise of fluidity of knowledge and interdisciplinary exchange lies a productive tension between the principles of transness and the inherent fixity of traditional disciplinary structures. Etymologically, they sit on opposites ends of a spectrum indicating flux and fixity. What kind of union does this term portend? What is liminal, or overlooked in the composition these opposing forces?

Our provocation aims to take on a playful troubling in what observe as a limitation of the scope of transdisciplinary work. Drawing on critical perspectives from trans and queer studies, discipline-making and un-disciplining and the energies that heralded the birth of transdisciplinarity, our provocation plays with the tacit ways in which power structures, historical legacies, and implicit biases continue to operate spaces that claim transdisciplinarity. We aim to argue for a more thorough understanding of the interplay between fixity and fluidity, highlighting how acknowledging these dynamics can lead to an expanded palette of work that can leap beyond the current practices of engaged scholarship towards the speculative and outrageous. Through a series of conversations with texts, theorists and activists, our contribution will work to make productive mischief from the periphery.

Keywords transdisciplinarity • experimental • fixity • power • queer

Key messages

- The aim with this provocation is to play on the often-overlooked tensions between the principles of transness and the inherent fixity of traditional disciplinary structures.
- In service of this, we offer an imaginative rendition of what could articulate a behind-the-scenes unpacking of issues, concerns, positions.
- Drawing on critical perspectives from trans and queer studies, discipline making and un-disciplining and the energies that heralded the birth of transdisciplinarity, our

provocation plays with the tacit ways in which power structures, historical legacies and implicit biases continue to operate in spaces that claim transdisciplinarity.

To cite this article: Sitas, R. and bhagat, H. (2024) When Trans met Discipline: scenes from an arranged marriage, *Global Social Challenges Journal*, Early View, DOI: 10.1332/27523349Y2024D000000030

Introduction/invitation

Transdisciplinarity is all the rage!

This spirited statement, or announcement even, rings true of the contemporary intellectual landscape. The amalgamated term/concept proposes a means to break down traditional boundaries, encourage collaboration outside of staid academic spaces and in doing so become a key driver for innovation. Many have bought into this promise. However, amid the fervour for the promise of fluidity of knowledge and interdisciplinary exchange lies a productive tension between the principles of transness and the inherent fixity of traditional disciplinary structures. Etymologically, they sit on opposite ends of a spectrum indicating flux and fixity. What kind of union does this term portend? What is liminal, or overlooked in the composition of these opposing forces?

This provocation leans into the assumptions proliferating about the productivities of transdisciplinarity (TD) and transdisciplinary research or work (TD/r or TD/w).¹ Structurally, this piece is divided, unequally, into three sections: The Bicker, The Riff and The Play. Our starting point, The Bicker, is an imagined facilitated session – masquerading as couples therapy. The aim of this conceit is to imagine Trans and Discipline as individual entities that have been put together, perhaps inconveniently, to attend to a growing sense of incomprehension about academically produced *knowledge*. The italicising of the term ‘know’ is deliberate. And we deal with this later on in the provocation. The session is mediated by a third character in the form of a generic and perhaps slightly clueless facilitator. This is strategic. In the second section, The Riff, we experiment with another kind of being for Trans and Discipline, speaking to each other through a speculative and imaginative medium, essentially exploring the range of what-ifs.

In the final instalment, we shift to The Play. With this, our purpose is to put some form to our provocation. In doing so, we also aim to test out the expanse of what TD/r and TD/w could propose – albeit in ways that could be challenging beyond the form of a provocation in an august publication such as this. In this respect, we ask for your indulgence, since **new** things are not *knew* things. And this could get a bit messy.² In The Play, Trans and Discipline come together, speak as one, kind of with the help of the new/knew kid on the block, in a manner of speaking, the notorious ChatGPT. Given the ferment that this AI language model (ALM) has stirred up across various knowledge-making spaces, we thought this could extend our hustle/hassle further. There is more later that fills out the rationale of this turn. So, this provocation is just that, provocative, a luxury we aim to lean into with the most.

The Bicker

- Therapist: Good morning and welcome. Can you help me to understand how we find ourselves in this moment?
- Trans: I think people may have become a little bored ...
- Discipline: [interjecting] ... I don't think they were bored. It's been coming a while. We've been put together loosely over the last couple of decades, but now it's becoming *a thing*. And there's a need for this union to produce ... to make something that is there to respond to a whole bunch of insecurities in academia ... And I am not always convinced.
- Therapist: Where did the arrangement start?
- Discipline: To start, my origins are very deep. If we want to measure it in terms of documentary evidence, I come from as far back as the first century. I'm the means by which the world knows things. I have been operating with this understanding of being, a home of knowledge. I come from what it is to know something; to comprehend something... Around the late 1800s, a Swiss psychologist called Jean Piaget,³ recognised that knowledge comes with a very specific set of understandings. And they were developed as the world was getting more complex ...
- Trans: [interjecting] Complex for who and wasn't it always complex ...?
- Discipline: Can I finish? Anyway, so, Piaget points out that there's an interconnection between complex phenomena. But where I really come into being was thanks to Nicholas Poole in 1942 who came up with the manifesto of transdisciplinarity. This union of form has inched along since then and most people didn't pay too much attention. But there's an increased sense of crisis in the knowledge-making system.
- Therapist: Trans, you had wanted to say something. Discipline has spoken about this really long and expansive rich deep history, and you are new to the scene.
- Trans: I think just because my name wasn't written down doesn't mean I haven't been around for a long time. I think there is a long-recorded history of this union as a particular kind of discipline, but it doesn't mean I wasn't always there. The success of colonial Enlightenment thinking made sure I was excluded for a very long time, but I was always there.
- Discipline: [interjecting] But you are just a prefix!
- Trans: When I'm written down, I'm a prefix, but I have always existed just beyond and alongside. But it's in that moment of recording that fixes this idea of a prefix in the *English* language. This is perhaps a convenience as there was an increasing crumbling of the assurance or the confidence of disciplinarity. And perhaps as a prefix here, I may seem new, but that doesn't mean that as a movement and as a set of ways of being I wasn't always just over there.

The desire to fix and that urge to *know* in a particular way is relatively new. And giving me this name is also a fixing and a forming which I'm inherently interested in resisting. I'm able to shapeshift a little bit more, perhaps, which makes it difficult because our matchmakers want me written down next to discipline sometimes. But I have many other companions.⁴

Therapist: Discipline, what feelings does this marriage stir up?

Discipline: Well, I can try to help us understand it. OK, so certainly there's a rigidity that comes with what I am. But it's necessary. I mean, I'm the means by which we have learned about this world. And don't forget your parents who bring you into being, who bring you a kind of platforming. Butler, Halberstam, Edelman, Christeva⁵ ... It sits, obviously, within a particular canon. And that canon is an interesting one, but it's a canon in itself.

Therapist: Are you able to give us perhaps an illustrative case of your early, early presence that can help Discipline, that can help me to recognise how you moved in the world and what it was that you were seeking to do?

Trans: Linear chronological time assumes that there is a moment where an idea of beyond and across didn't exist and then suddenly existed as soon as (mostly thinkers from the Global North) wrote it so. The word 'trans' may have an etymological beginning but the idea of being between and beyond does not have a start and end. Why be bound to linear time and Anglophone canons? Don't get me wrong though, I don't mind being bound, I love a bit of BDSM.

Discipline: You joke, but we do need some consensual boundaries. We are quite clear on the fact that, to start to really build understanding in the world, we need to specialise. This focus allows us to problem solve. And those problem-solving mechanisms develop methods that are linked to specific kinds of understanding. With our marriage, of inconvenience perhaps, what we're being asked to do is to integrate across different systems of knowing and a lot of complexity comes up.

Trans: What if, in this process of integrating you learn you are wrong? One of the things that our union has meant recognising is that there are many things wrong with disciplining, which goes counter to the formation of the idea of knowledge being right.

Discipline: [pause] The word wrong doesn't feel fair, but you've chosen it. Wrongness assumes these singular focuses on particular ways of understanding the world are irrelevant and that's a problem.

Trans: I wouldn't say irrelevant, I would say inadequate.

Therapist: [nervously] Let's take a moment's pause. Would you like a glass of water?

[A while later]

Trans: Hey hey, how you doing darling? You look perplexed. Did you fall out of bed this morning?

Discipline: Did I what? No, I do things in a pretty carefully considered way ...
[Pause] ... It takes a while for me to process things because I have to go through the long history of my thoughtfulness and so I take my time to think through things.

Trans: Yeah, it's tough being old, right?

Discipline: Age comes with a bit of wisdom. It must be very nice to be young, flirty. The desperate need to be so fresh all the time. You know I am here to support you with all this knowledge.

Perhaps I should come back in with a small apology? I feel like I came on a little bit strong earlier and I was thinking about it, and I need to use a metaphor. It must be really, really difficult for you, Trans. As Discipline, I have very long, deep roots. A flower, for example:

I'm rooted and I've got a long history and my flowers are really beautiful because I am so, so grounded. And I kind of forget that sometimes you don't have that. You're a bit like a bee, you know, who relies on the pollen of my flowers and my groundedness. And it must be difficult to be flitting from flower to flower. I see there's a power differential here that perhaps you need me a little bit more than I need you.

Trans: Again, I don't think of myself as young. I think that you seem to want to define me, which I think is so cute, really, very cute. You also seem to be anxious about my other companions. You spend a great deal of time with Multi and Inter, which I find very sweet. I just don't know if monogamy is the thing that we should be thinking of. We need to think about ourselves beyond this very limited notion of monogamous that requires a fidelity which to most feels superimposed and forced. We live in a much broader and much, much more interactive world where information sharing towards the purposes of knowledge making require us to understand and share ourselves in increasingly complex ways. I think it really is about communication. And it's interesting that in your feeling insecure you need to frame me within this relationship as being flirty, flighty, as being the bee to your flower. It's a really interesting analogy because without the bee the flower wouldn't exist.

Discipline: As we know now that plants can speak to each other and you've raised this question of communication. So if there are other ways for me to communicate, what makes it special to keep the pollination as the form of communication?

Trans: That's a lovely question. Maybe we can think about this as an opportunity beyond the groundedness by which you have so clearly imprisoned yourself.

Therapist: [anxiously interjecting] I would like to pose a question to the two of you and what you offer each other within this relationship.

Discipline: Well, you know I'm not usually very comfortable or used to surprises and when we were arranged to gather together there was something quite interesting in the surprises that you bring.

- They sometimes mean more to me than my other prefixes. But they are rare and tiring.
- Trans: You are very cute. That's what I love about you, Discipline – your fixity, you are so sure. It is quite beautiful to encounter these very certain collections of processes and ways in which to understand the world. And in your very particular framework ...
- Therapist: (under their breath) You say cute a lot ...
- Trans: Mmmm, where was I – in your very particular framework they have values. The challenge however is blurring those lines, roots, or rather those walls
- Discipline: [interjecting] Look, I've been pushed into a corner, let's be honest.
- Trans: You bring up the corner and the wall. You can take down the walls, there doesn't have to be a corner, and there doesn't have to be a pushing.
- Therapist: So let me interject at this point. What I heard was that there is something appealing about Discipline's certainty and predictability, yet it has the potential to become staid and that predictability lacks excitement. Trans, you frame yourself as generative and generous ...
- Discipline: [interjecting] Are you saying I'm not generous? I come with a wealth of information, of long-standing knowledge and expertise and willing to share that?
- Trans: You really are very cute. I have one word, OK? Relax.
- Discipline: I understand your request for me to relax, but this is serious business. And I do see value in this arranged marriage, but for it to work there, there need to be some conditions.

The Riff

- T Could you imagine our potential?
- D What do you mean?
- T Well, right now, institutions have us operating primarily as a means to justify a kind of [glorified] community engagement exchange. As an opening proposition, these exchanges are worthy – the combination of lived experience with academic research does offer the possibility of more wholesome bodies of information. But we know how this could result in a holding pattern of sorts. It has to be able to grow beyond these simplistic interactions.
- D Oh, you are fixing for a fight, I see. Having said that, I agree. What you're proposing is a push to experiment with the extent of us – staging the trans-ness as it were – beyond the safety of the centre. It reminds me of the days in which the various disciplines came into being. From the broad, perhaps even vague, messy terrain of information around us that then had to be sorted into initial containers, like. The work it took to coalesce the various strands, to streamline, to make discrete. The information we began to uncover. It—

- T Could discover be a more interesting word? Sorry to cut your flow, dear. But could *discover* be more useful? Because this does preserve the accidental – and with it the notion of surprise. Because, also, this wonder is something we need to find a way back to. To destabilise the patriarchal push of the ‘knowledge-making’ project, well industry. Let’s face it, it has grown into itself, like an ingrown toenail.
- D Ouch!
- T Bear with me ... and this is not a return to the conversation we had earlier, it is rather an invitation to spin out of the disciplining of understanding. From where we sit, what has been emerging recently, from multiple sources, is that the ways in which *knowledge* has been built and then authorised is increasingly being observed as not universal⁶ – a term and concept it has, for a long time now, assumed without question. It speaks, to a large extent, to the colonial project and how the ways of knowing the world needed to be cohered around very particular framings.
- D Oh, OK. So, this is the matter that is working to unsettle knowledge hierarchies.
- T I think a more accurate word could be disposition. Unsettled sounds like an unruly stomach – uncomfortable but mostly insipid – remedied. Trans-ing it, pushing it off track, is what we are saying – ya?
- D Slap the other cheek, while you are there ... But, yes, I see it. There are a set of peripheral concerns that escape the lure of conventional or even institutional organisation that could offer a compelling ground for exploration. Much akin to the moments of chaos we so firmly avoid in my arena.
- T Yes, the very same ones that energise ours. Or so it would seem. We do have to admit, the lure of centrality is hard to resist. The promise of power, of a certain sense of settled-ness is attractive. Flux comes with its own set of challenges – confusion and exhaustion – those are real.
- D Shame, hey. But now you’ve got me going. There is an excitement I am finding when I think back to the origins, all my discipline-babies. Before they came into being, they were these odd little (erm) conceptual concerns. And so perhaps, this is where we find ourselves once more. The world has moved significantly since those babies were born. As adults, they have become a tad fixed, inward looking. It is no surprise though. The world they have had to make in the world they are living has had to have particular boundaries, which leaves many of them narrow in their thinking.
- T Look at you, throwing shade on your children! Mama, the library is open!
- D Which library are you speaking of?
- T Oh, never mind. The point, though, is that we’re vibing now. If there is an interesting outlet for this union to explore, if the products of our union – TD-babies that is – could find their

way into a kind of being – that would allow them to exist, for however long, as pupal, vestigial, fragmentary, raucous, outrageous, glorious—

- D Sounds like characters on the world's favourite drag show
- T Ya, doesn't it just. OK, now I've lost my train of thought!
- D That's no surprise. While you wait for your train to arrive again, let me throw a few other things out since we are riffing.
- T There you go again, D – where have you been hiding your funk?
- D One of the things I've been thinking about recently is the assumption of knowledge making that emerges out of disciplinary endeavour. I get the feeling that, especially looking at the engaged scholarship work, that there is something to trouble here, or there. What is still challenging is the provenance of the proposition and then where and how the syntheses from these multidisciplinary, rather should I say, multistakeholder interventions are produced and for who. Looking closely at these seemingly complex collectives, kind of, fuels the debates around authorship, authorising and epistemological authorisation that emanate from particular knowledge-owning set-ups.⁷
- T I hear you. Here's another train – follow me a bit. So, from where I see it, disciplinary endeavours, as you call them, have become somewhat of a machine.⁸ Take publishing. There are quite literally thousands of papers being published on a weekly or monthly basis. All of our Academia.com subscriptions are ample proof of this production. In this respect, shouldn't we be asking who *really* has the capacity to process all this information? To take it in, to let it situate itself within the frameworks that constitute your own infrastructure of knowing, and then find ample meaning to have any kind of significance or effect. Affect⁹ would be interesting too.
- D Ah ... OK. So, this process of publishing, which requires a complex process of curation – given the acceptable format – literature reviews, problem statements, citation, bibliography, references – of vast amounts of information is what is being called knowledge making, or even knowledge generation. But, truly, given the labour involved, the knowledge that emerges out of this process sits in a very small circle that revolves around the author or authors, the peer reviewers and perhaps a section of works cited. Beyond this, there may be a collection of individual scholars, too. It being assigned in classrooms may increase its knowableness-stats, but this is still within particular institutions that are driven by academic interest. And now, we have ChatGPT-like platforms – generative, super-fast harvesting AI applications which will make *knowing*, at least in relation to the publishing machine, easier, albeit marginally speaking, only. What work is really left to be done?
- T Oh, babe, shame ... the AI-panic has got to you. But moving on. This *knowing* thing you project – who exactly is invited into this project? 'Cos, from this end of the pond, it is a very,

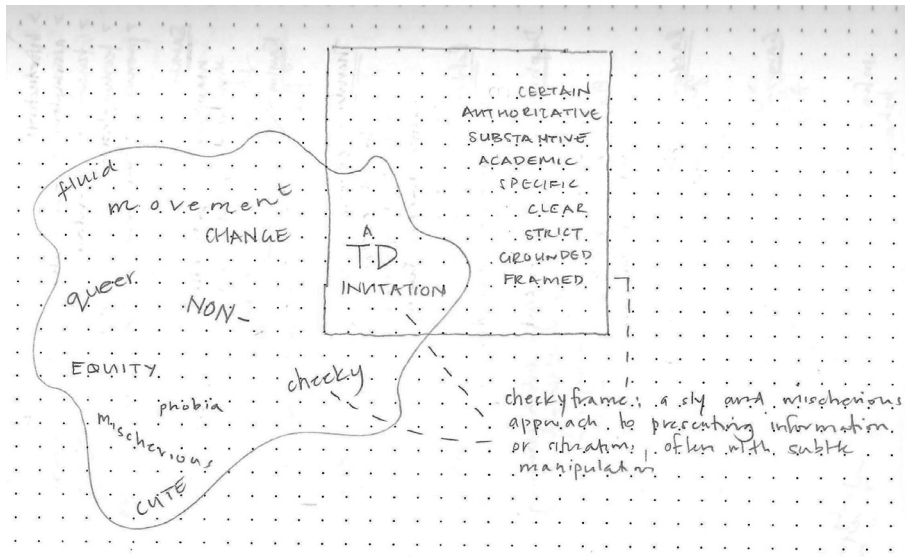
- very exclusive group – you are aware of this, yes? Much like we discussed earlier, the idea of universal knowledge needs as much a forensic exploration as does the assumption that information being produced from your discipline-centric spaces is knowledge.
- D Is the knowledge-declaration project prone to scale?
- T Huh?
- D Is knowing dependent on how *many*? Or could it be configured around another kind of metric?
- T Ah, that's a great question. And perhaps a useful grounds for us to make available, ya?
- D What do you mean?
- T In what sorts of interesting, curious and peripheral ways could we question the means by which something gets to be *known*? And, in tandem – is where your disciplinary project has gone past itself, assuming authorities in spaces that it has primarily lost connection to? Is the potential in the union a way to revive a visceral curiosity that could consider stepping out of its institutional big-boots to consider, with aplomb, engaging with the messy and the discombobulating that has little tactile engagement beyond theorising?
- D I feel like I just got hit by something
- T You call it impact, if I am correct. Sit with it ... I'm going to keep going. Who is allowed into this unhallowed arena? This seeming den of undisciplined-iniquity? What *could* emerge from these entanglements could be a bunch of new frameworks to think about the growing inequities, the polycrises, the abyss that feels so present and ominous.
- D New frameworks? You mean new disciplines? More specialities? Am I about to have grandchildren?
- T Oi vey – hold on to yourself. Perhaps not as fast as you imagine. Throw yourself back to the super-early days, when trial and error were vital. Your current children have enough hold on the world, in a manner of speaking, for this, for us, to play some. To really stretch into what it is we could be, dare I say it, useful for. Before we have to be shaped into yet another of your babies – as you call them. As who we are, recognising the innate contradiction at our core, trans and discipline – we could take this space to experiment, to rely less on conditioned logics, to understand what we could be like on the edges.
- D Because the centre is covered, I see. There are enough players holding this space. Should we play?
- T I thought you'd never ask. Let's.

The Play

Keywords

Trans: fluid, movement, queer, change, non-, phobia, equity, cheeky, cute, mischievous

Figure 1: A cheeky TD invitation



Discipline: certain, authoritative, strict, framed, specific, clear, grounded, academic, substantive

The first game we attempt, here, is to make a fuss. To design a process that could both fuse and separate. In the instance of the former, we wanted to imagine Trans and Discipline as intertwined. Put simply, what could this Transdisciplinarity look like, in ways that, certainly, in the academic landscape are generally assumed? However, when we looked closer, what we see is perhaps more tenuous. What is supposed to look like a union resembles a haphazard tacking, rather. In recognition of the form that frames this contribution – a provocation – we put forward two (of the many) attempts we undertook to evidence our imaginings. These two quotes were facilitated by ChatGPT as a form of transdisciplinary conversation between Rogoff and Wittgenstein and AI’s imagination of their contributions. As mentioned in the Introduction, our decision was driven by the attention this ALM has garnered. Balanced against its processing speed is a recognition of its limited capacity towards nuance. This felt, in many ways a palimpsest of the conceit of *Transdisciplinarity*TM. The result, we feel, speaks for itself. Saying anymore, we felt, would be akin to explaining our punchline. Again, in a manner of speaking.

Now, let me tell you, darling, what was swirling in my mind was a subject just waiting to take shape. It was like a dream, honey, so big and bold, yet deeply rooted in my own desires. Oh, it felt like reaching for the stars and yet being pulled by my own heartstrings. And let me tell you, with the intellectual tools and analytical models I had, and the ways I could express myself, it felt like a dance between the impossible and the inevitable.¹⁰

Transdisciplinary exploration, like Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, ventures beyond the confines of disciplinary boundaries, mapping the interconnectedness of knowledge. In the realm where language meets action, where disciplines converge, we find not mere propositions but the lived experiences of complexity, inviting us to transcend the limits of our understanding and embrace the unity of diverse perspectives.¹¹

Under construction

test: would Vladimir and Estragon be willing to wait here?
test: would a ball kicked along the road roll backwards?
test: would a bunch of flowers stay alive all the way home?
test: would Charles Baudelaire walk these pavements?
test: how long would a goldfish survive?
test: would Frida Kahlo find enough colours?
test: would the carrots grow straight?
test: would Nawal el Saadawi be able to relax?
test: would a cellist be heard?
test: would Elvis be happy here? Would Fela?¹²

Reimagined as a set of queries for surgical inquiry.

1. Test: Would Vladimir and Estragon be willing to wait here?
 - What kinds of patience are required in surgery and beyond the scalp? In what ways could they¹³ influence endurance and perseverance in operating, waiting and practice rooms? How can surgical inquiry learn from the tragicomedy of waiting?¹⁴
2. Test: Would a ball kicked along the road roll backwards?
 - Considering momentum and inertia – what could inform surgical techniques and instrument manipulation? How can surgical inquiry defy gravity?
3. Test: Would a bunch of flowers stay alive all the way home?
 - With regards to the fragilities of lives and the debated importance of preserving vitality, how could this question of horticulture open up ways to mull through the responsibilities surgeons need to consider in their mission to sustain life and promote healing?
4. Test: Would Charles Baudelaire walk these pavements?
 - What are the roles of creativity, melancholy and empathy in efforts to enhance patient care and surgical innovation? In which ways could Baudelaire's love, sex, death and deviance inform debates that centre the diversity of human experience and the intersections between art and science?

5. *Test: How long would a goldfish survive?*

- How can thinking of surgery as a form of non-linear time-travel between states of wellness–illness and unavoidable death keep the goldfish alive a little longer? How can different perspectives on urgency and emergency shapeshift decision making?

6. *Test: Would Frida Kahlo find enough colours?*

- What attention to detail and visual acuity contribute to surgical precision and aesthetic outcomes?¹⁵ What weighting are the matters of perception, prescription and perspective in surgery? What kind of beautiful scar would Frida have drawn on her own body?¹⁶

7. *Test: Would the carrots grow straight?*

- Thinking with a queer lens, what if we never wanted them to? How can queer impulses nurture surgical environments and team dynamics? What can be learned from cheekiness, failure and intimacy in surgical accuracy?

8. *Test: Would Nawal el Saadawi be able to relax?*

- Perhaps rather, under which conditions would she be able to relax? What labour, stress management and self-care practices would nurture well-being within public health systems? Could this suggestion broaden the palette of human emotion, political standpoint and resilience in relation to surgical inquiry?

9. *Test: Would a cellist be heard?*

- Following on from the previous, could there be a new or knew role for an interlocutor? What is the soundtrack of surgery? How can composition shape the importance of communication¹⁷ and collaboration in surgery?

10. *Test: Would Elvis be happy here? Would Fela?*

- What forms of cultural diversity and inclusivity are currently evident in global surgical practice(s)? What can be learned from zombies and a little more spark? Considering patient-centred care and equitable health outcomes, how does the discipline need to expand? Who could be / needs to be called in to design these lexicons?

Notes

¹ Piaget (1972), Banathy and Jenlink (2005), Nicolescu (2006), Barad (2015), Escobar (2018), Miszczak and Patel (2018), Stengers (2018), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021), Shrivastava et al (2022), Shackelton et al (2023), among many others.

² Amin (2017), Simone (2010), Halberstam (2011), Haraway (2016).

³ Nicolescu's (2006) reference to Jean Piaget.

- ⁴ Trans-formation, trans-ition, trans-mission, trans-action, trans-cend, for example.
- ⁵ The discipline of trans studies is varied and critical of its disciplining. See [Trinh \(1989\)](#), [Prosser \(1998\)](#), [Edelman \(2004\)](#), [Stryker \(2004\)](#), [Valentine \(2007\)](#), [Namaste \(2009\)](#), [Dutta and Roy \(2014\)](#), [Barad \(2015\)](#), [Puar \(2015\)](#), [Bey \(2017\)](#), [Green and Bey \(2017\)](#), [Chu and Drager \(2019\)](#), [Sharma \(2023\)](#), [Ultra Omni \(2023\)](#) among many, many others both validating and tossing the idea that trans can be disciplined.
- ⁶ The notion of the universality of knowledge, which posits that there are certain truths or principles that are universally applicable across all cultures and contexts, has been subject to scrutiny and debate for some time. However, there are still some who argue for the existence of such universal truths, the counter to this argues that knowledge is inherently contextual and shaped by cultural, historical and social factors. Prime to these debates are thinkers and authors like Paolo [Freire \(1970\)](#), [Butler \(1993; 1999\)](#), bell [hooks \(1994\)](#), Maria [Lugones \(2016\)](#), Arturo [Escobar \(2018\)](#) and Vandana [Shiva \(2020\)](#).
- ⁷ These debates play out over several terrains and thinkers that parallel the authors mentioned in the previous note. Kimberley [Crenshaw \(1991\)](#), Linda Tuhiwai [Smith \(1999\)](#), Sandra [Harding \(2009\)](#), Walter [Mignolo \(2009\)](#), Sabelo [Ndlovu-Gatsheni \(2021\)](#) and Marquis [Bey \(2022\)](#) are contributors and framers.
- ⁸ We talk about the journal industrial complex, but there are other very disciplined outputs like endless unusable policy notes that are the checkboxes of TD success. Each of these are disciplines and disciplining forms of knowledge and methods drawn into traditional notions of transdisciplinary research.
- ⁹ See Eve Kosofsky [Sedgwick \(1990\)](#), Sarah [Ahmed \(2004; 2017\)](#), William [Connolly \(2006\)](#), Nigel [Thrift \(2007\)](#), Lauren [Berlant \(2011\)](#), Brian [Massumi \(2015\)](#), Ahmed [Ansari \(2019\)](#) and many others thinking through notions of affective knowing and knowledge making.
- ¹⁰ A rewording of [Rogoff's \(2000: 1\)](#) quote: 'What I had in mind was a subject-information, on the one hand far too ambitious and on the other far too personally motivated, and these seemed respectively unachievable and unavoidable, given the intellectual tools and models of analysis and the modes of writing I had at my disposal'. Produced by ChatGPT, an AI language model developed by OpenAI, prompted to rewrite the quote as Eartha Kitt.
- ¹¹ ChatGPT was asked to design a quote that fuses Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logica* with the sensibilities of transdisciplinarity.
- ¹² Karen Press's reflections on urban design in *The African Cities Reader* (Press, 2016: 62).
- ¹³ Is the 'they' the interplay between surgical actors? The surgeon, nurses, anaesthetist, patient, hospital administration?
- ¹⁴ Interrogations of waithood and waiting usually cast the wait-er as agency-less. How can the absurdity of Vlad and Gogo inscribe power in public health systems?
- ¹⁵ Surgery is often about making cuts as invisible and minimal as possible. What if the cut were an artwork beyond neatness? What if those under the knife chose surgeons for their imaginative flair with scars, and not their efficiency at making things disappear?
- ¹⁶ Frida Kahlo had awful experiences with surgery and was in pain for years. Her art was part of her rage and healing. What if Frida was in medical school curriculum?
- ¹⁷ Surgeons are notoriously and stereotypically bad communicators – from inane banter about pool noodles in birthing spaces and barely bothering with bedside manner. How can riffing, vibing and composing offer inroads to connection beyond clipboards and gowns?

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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