

Postdisciplinary Knowledge, Edited by Tomas Pernecky

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Abstract

Where does postdisciplinarity stand in relation to the other forms of non-disciplinarity? What critiques of academia does it launch? Postdisciplinary Knowledge edited by Tomas Pernecky, aims to theorise postdisciplinarity as a rebellious and subversive movement. This article reviews this work with the aim of finding out what makes postdisciplinarity unique and whether there is a need for it? It also provides an evaluative description of the individual chapters of the book. I conclude that the input of postdisciplinarity is a necessary contribution to discussions surrounding the nature of academia and the university.

Keywords: postdisciplinarity; disciplines; academia; universities; knowledge

There are an increasing number of non-disciplinarity: interdisciplinarity, cross-disciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity, transdisciplinarity etc. Therefore, an edited book that aims to theorise a movement called postdisciplinarity (I call it a movement because it is not restricted by disciplines or specific combinations of disciplines) begs the questions; is there a need for it? How is postdisciplinarity different from the other non-disciplinarity? *Postdisciplinary Knowledge* edited by Tomas Pernecky (2019) is a collection of essays that seem to do one thing: rebel against disciplinary conventions, rebel against the state of Higher Education across the globe. Because of postdisciplinarity's subversive, almost chaotic, boundary-defying approach to research, the essays come across as a bit disparate. Perhaps this is precisely the point: the collection aims to resist against academic norm. In the introduction, Pernecky introduces postdisciplinarity: it comes across as anarchic enterprise. It has no axioms, no rules, no prescriptions. It shares with transdisciplinarity, among other non-disciplinarity, a desire to break disciplinary barriers, but unlike them comes with no guidance on how research should be done. This is in contrast to Nicolescu's (2006) transdisciplinary axioms which provide a framework for understanding the world. Pernecky suggests that in postdisciplinarity there are no paradigms like disciplinary standards and conventions or transdisciplinarity's axioms. Postdisciplinarity states that research should be completely free of them. This means, for example, no barriers regarding what separates the natural sciences from the social sciences and also the arts and humanities. Research should not be driven by artificial constructs like disciplines and their 'rules'.

Overall, I think the book offers hope in the way it reconceives the academic project in light of being anti-disciplinary. It offers substantial progress in this area through theorising the art of rebelling against academic norms. The chapters, however, can come across as a bit disparate and disconnected. Maybe this is the point, the book is not meant to be prescriptive. The book is rebellious in spirit through offering multiple perspectives rather than an overarching argument. It practices what it says it does. I believe the book should still receive credit for its largely successful attempt at destabilising academic disciplines. To elaborate further, one needs an insight into the chapters in the collection.

The first chapter by Barbara Lekatsas is called 'At the periphery lies the centre: Women artists and the legacy of surrealism: the case of Ithell Colquhoun and Camille Billops.' Accordingly, the postdisciplinary researcher is seen as an artist, someone who challenges *genre*. Particularly, surrealism is chosen as a movement because of its expressive rather than representative qualities. Social justice also plays a role, as seen through the discussion of female and non-white artists. This fits with the rebellious nature of the collection.

In the second chapter 'Undisciplined Thinking: Disobedience and the Nature of Design', Welby Ings discusses his supervision of over 80 PhD and Master's candidates. He suggests that his students conducted projects that did not adhere to the discipline-based structure of the university, Ings focuses on several projects he supervised that did this. Ings also suggests that the growing importance assigned to professional training in universities has led to more ways of non-disciplinary thinking. Outside the academic bubble, disciplines might not be as useful as initially appears. Furthermore, structuring universities around faculties and subjects, the traditional way of doing so, no longer seems to fit with postdisciplinary resistance to disciplinarity.

The third chapter 'Transcape Theory for Designing the Invisible' by Chikahiro Hanamura focuses on landscape design. This looks at the subject-object interaction in creating landscapes and how we can design the world accordingly. A landscape is a space in which we participate or view, it is the connections between the different elements of human and natural geography. This initially seems the least relevant chapter in the collection to the *theory* of post disciplinarity, but its focus on the change we can bring about in landscapes still has the effect of challenging norms: a landscape is not seen as a static entity which we cannot change. Despite this, I would have liked to have seen this and potentially other relations to postdisciplinarity made more explicit, particularly I think it would have been suitable to discuss the postdisciplinary nature of the landscape in more direct terms. Yet, one could take the position that the whole point of postdisciplinarity is not to be prescriptive in terms of what one can write about.

Chapter four 'Desire as a Way of Knowing' by Ana Maria Munar and Lonni Hall aims to liberate us from a negative conception of desire: it should be seen as a good aspect of research and we should not cage it in. The chapter takes an unconventional form in terms of being a set of meditations on the thought of Esther Perel, Helen Fisher, Martha Nussbaum and Gilles Deleuze. An experimental format like this is in harmony with the discussed anti-convention motivations of postdisciplinarity. Postdisciplinarity, in my opinion, is embodied by this innovative take on the traditional academic genre. Resisting against genres, like the research article and monograph, is a core of postdisciplinarity.

The next chapter 'White Leaves in Front of My Window' by Ninette Rothmüller and Fraser Stables again takes an experimental form which challenges poetic and academic norms. In fact, it may not even be called poetry in a sense as Rothmüller suggests. It could alternatively be described as pathing a text in which one chooses which shortcuts to take. The inclusion of citations in a semi-literary work also seems experimental.

Overall, the chapter talks about cages and being outside of cages which fits with the theme of disciplines being restrictive ‘prisons’.

Chapter six is called ‘Knowledge as Play: Centring on Matter’ and takes the form of a dialogue between Tomas Pernecky and Lois Holzman. The aim here is conceive of research, if it should be termed as that, as play. By introducing play, the dialogue evokes the creative and serendipitous nature of research. It argues research should be ‘fun’ and ‘inventive’. Doing something because it pleases our imagination and without fear of making mistakes or being blocked by institutional structures is the way to go when it comes to scholarship. Again, it goes without saying, that viewing research as play rather than as ‘work’ is something that challenges the traditional mode of thought in academia. Much like many of the theories advocated in this book, the dialogue advocates that we should not be setting artificial barriers that prevent us from experimenting.

Chapter seven by Frith Walker is called ‘Do, learn, Do’ which suggests we should move beyond a discipline, or project-based approach, to a place-based approach in which we think about places that can be created to make a happy and healthy population. Emotions also play a role in this approach; they are to be ignored at one and the community’s peril; places shape us and we shape them. There is a relationship between humans and their places. Walker suggests that the act of doing (e.g. making) is pivotal in this place-based process, but we also need to reflect on what we have (e.g. knowledge, skills or even places themselves) so we can learn. By doing, I refer to the act of learning by experience, whether this is seen in terms of developing skills useful for place-making or alternatively building on the knowledge we have iteratively through discovery. This ‘doing’ idea could also fit with research more generally. We do research then learn from it and then do more research.

The following chapter ‘DiY (do-it-yourself) postdisciplinary knowledge’ by Emit Snake-Beings and Andrew Gibbons uses, as the title suggests, DiY analogies to describe the postdisciplinary process. DiY is the name given to creating or repairing things on your own without relying on another person’s expertise. In DiY and research the maker should have a relationship with the object (i.e. research). Furthermore, one can explore through DiY. There is not necessarily a set of instructions, it can be free-flowing. Next, the DiY-maker can transgress boundaries, the making of the product is not defined by strictly adherence to one ‘discipline’, DiY requires a diverse set of skills.

Chapter nine 'Q Methodology: William Stephenson and Postdisciplinarity' is by Claire Gauzente and James M. M. Good. As the title suggests, it relates Q Methodology to postdisciplinarity. Q Methodology respects a diverse amount of viewpoints and embraces multimedia: these can be seen as postdisciplinary characteristics. Yet, I found this chapter a bit contrary to what had been argued previously. Suggesting a methodology, regardless of its inclusivity, seems contrarian to the anarchic, rebellious, play, advocated in the previous chapters.

'On Walls and Webs: Contemplating Postdisciplinarity' by Kellee Cation and David J.Hill, the tenth chapter, argues for viewing the postdisciplinarian as weaver of webs and a generalist. They may anchor themselves upon specific points of knowledge, but instead of examining these points in-depth, they should instead try to connect them to get a better understanding of the web.

Chapter eleven, 'The University as a Maquila: Whose voices, Whose Ideas, Whose Knowledges?' is a series of dialogues that involve Marlene M. Ferreras, Duane R. Bidwell and Tomas Pernecky. Provocatively, Ferreras suggests doctoral education is like a Mexican *Maquila* or factory. This is because it prioritises low wages, high expectations, hitting standards and with no guarantee of a job at the end. This assembly-line view of doctoral education and universities is perhaps one of the most rebellious chapters in the book due to its strong use of provocative language. The university is compared to a production line in which one produces work under high pressure and with very little reward for doing so. Academia, according to this view, is like a factory churning out goods.

Chapter twelve is 'After the Love has Gone: Generalists, Specialists and Post-Professional Healthcare' by David A. Nicholls. It imagines a future, due to growing trends in healthcare, where the system of care might become post-professional, which means there are no traditional orthodox professionals controlling and deploying care. Overall, this can be placed in the context of generality, which as discussed in the previous chapters is a hallmark of postdisciplinarity.

The final chapter is called 'Postdisciplinarity: Imagine the Future, Think the Unthinkable' and it is by Frédéric Darbellay. This chapter ties together some of the knots of the previous chapters and offers a more explicit, perhaps to-the-point, explanation of postdisciplinarity. Despite this, it does not disregard the previous chapters. It rather effectively summarises the ideas behind postdisciplinarity as explored throughout the collection.

With the summary of the chapters in mind, does *Postdisciplinary Knowledge* aim to do what it conventionally ought to do, which is to articulate postdisciplinarity as a movement? While the chapters of the

book vary in topic, there is indeed a current of disobedience and an expression of rebelliousness, perhaps even revolution. Yet, if it were to articulate a single point or have a central argument then it would not be embracing the anarchic play of postdisciplinarity. In other words, the theme of not having a theme is what makes the book postdisciplinarity in spirit and essence.

To end this review, I want to go back to the questions I asked at the beginning. Is there a need for this work and does it differentiate postdisciplinarity from the other non-disciplinarity? In terms of the second question, postdisciplinarity seems to be the choice of the rebel who still has not surrendered. Inter, trans, cross-disciplinarity, etc. have all been institutionalised to an extent. Postdisciplinarity instead resists institutionalisation, it keeps its rebellious spirit. This leads to the first question, is there a need for this book? There is nothing wrong with a rebellious spirit and this book certainly entertains this. Its unique perspective can be used as a way to start a dialogue on the structure of academia and universities, which seem all too slow-moving at the minute.

Liam Greenacre is a transdisciplinary researcher and PhD student at the University of Leeds, United Kingdom. He is interested in transgressing disciplinary conventions and looks at the nature of the social world through a lens that does not adhere rigidly to disciplines. His research interests are across the natural sciences, social sciences and the arts and humanities. He has presented at several international conferences, including the *WFSF XXV World Conference* and the *Eighteenth International Conference on Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*.



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