On Generative and Generational Interlinkages and Intersections: Interdisciplinarity in Humanities, Culture, and Art

Iris van der Tuin[1] (iD) and Amy Pekal[2]

Abstract

This interview looks critically at how the humanities do not just study works of culture but work together with artists. Within the practice of a truly interdisciplinary approach, "artistic research" finds its way into the discussion as it operates at the intersection of many disciplines and as its transversal qualities continuously produce excess to maintain complexity within the given research context. These positions implicate us as researchers in culture and we work with as well as reflect on how these cultures always/already have an impact on our research, teaching, and learning.

Keywords

interdisciplinarity, artistic research, new materialism, feminist theory, fieldwork

Viv Bozalek: Iris, how does your philosophical approach influence your ways of doing inquiry?

Iris: This question centers around the very topic of my research. So, the convergence of philosophical approach and method makes it a very interesting question for me. The name of my chair is "Theory of Cultural Inquiry," and this is an important name for me because it expresses that there should be, and that there is now, room for not just philosophy of science, or theory of science, not just for epistemological reflection that is based on the natural sciences, but also for philosophies and theories of knowledge enriched by reflections on the humanities and even on how the humanities do not just study the works of culture but also work together with artists, such as Amy Pekal. Under the umbrella of "Theory of Cultural Inquiry," I work on how humanities scholarship is positioned *in* culture; I reflect on, and engage with, the fact that, as philosophers, theorists, and scholars of culture, we are researching the very processes that also, and at the same time, influence our own research. An example of how I go about accomplishing this goal can be found in the *Ethics of Coding* report that I wrote in an interdisciplinary and international group consisting of philosophers and theorists of the humanities and the arts, media and architecture, and education, including Felicity Colman, Vera Bühlmann, and Aislinn O'Donnell (see Colman et al., 2018). It is important for me to think about coding, or, as we name it, the

"algorithmic condition," that we are part of as researchers. Our students are coming of age, both academically and socially and privately, in this condition of networked media and machine learning; we are trying to catch-up as teachers (see Serres, [2012] 2015; Van Petegem et al., 2021). Together, we are positioned *in* cultures of coding and work with, as well as reflect on, how these cultures always/already have an impact on our research, teaching, and learning.

This double or enveloped approach has been with me since I was doing the research for my PhD in the 2000s. My dissertation project was, in fact, informed by a realization about the fact that my philosophical approach was influencing or guiding my way of doing inquiry. At the time, I identified academically as a feminist epistemologist and I wanted to work on "feminist new materialism" (see Van der Tuin, 2015). The available literature—especially the literature that was available for students—was, also in Europe, dominated by Sandra Harding's famous tripartition of feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theory, and feminist

[1]Utrecht University, The Netherlands
[2]Independent Artist, New York, USA

Corresponding Author:
Iris van der Tuin, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Utrecht University, Janskerkhof 13, Utrecht, 3512BL, The Netherlands.
Email: I.vanderTuin@uu.nl

postmodernism from 1986. The tripartition offers a very helpful way of teaching and learning feminist theories of knowledge, truth, and objectivity; however, it is a stumbling block for the introduction of feminist new materialism. Feminist new materialism simply cannot be added as a fourth category to Harding's list because the list is a bit of a progress narrative. And, of course, it is also more than a progress narrative. The tripartition has been very helpful for understanding what it means to know as a feminist and it is rich in offering space for dialogue and discussion. But when I was reading the feminist scholarship of the late 1990s and early 2000s, in my understanding, feminist new materialism could not be a fourth category nor could it be fitted into the category of feminist postmodernism. Scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Karen Barad, Claire Colebrook, and Vicki Kirby were, quite simply, doing something entirely different. So, I ended up asking myself, how does this literature not just *change* what is the very substance of feminist epistemology, but also how does the work of a new generation affect the ways in which we should be *talking about* feminist epistemology as nonlinear progression?

Somewhere in the course of my PhD research, I was reading Barad's work and I was introduced to the concept and practice of "posthumanist performativity," designed in a reading through one another (a "diffractive" reading) of the French historical epistemology of Michel Foucault, the feminist poststructuralism of Judith Butler, and insights from quantum mechanics and "Science and Technology Studies" (see Barad, 1996, 2003). I was also reading Ahmed, and focusing on her way of working through and beyond psychoanalysis, phenomenology, poststructuralism, queer theory, and Black second-wave feminist theory (see Ahmed, 1998, 2006). The feminist scholarship of Barad and Ahmed, and that of Colebrook and Kirby, could not be fitted into, or added to, a list-like approach to feminist epistemology, because it was transversal, and it invited a transversal response. At that moment, I first began working with the notion of "generation" as my key concept, because this concept expresses *both* stable and stabilizing generational classes, and also generativity, or processes that do justice to the novel, the unexpected, and the indeterminate. I ended up reading and writing quite a lot about how generative processes *produce* generational and other classes—such as sexual, gendered, racialized classes—and how we should do justice to the fact that these classes are then getting "projected back onto a reality" (see Grosz, 2005), whereas generativity as a force is, in fact, unstoppable, both discursively and materially. I argued that the combinatory work of Barad and Ahmed, and also of Colebrook and Kirby, was processual and generative, and that it *also* produced a feminist new materialism, as both an updated version of feminist standpoint epistemology and as being unfit to be reduced to that category. Generation as a duplex concept was my way to both

expressing differentiation and to keeping an eye on the novel, unexpected, or indeterminate. Looking back, I think about it as a mini-theory of change.[1]

I am still, in a way, working on the kind of generative philosophizing about generational knowledge production that I started with my PhD research. I have an ongoing research project that works on female and other philosophers who have ended up being forgotten today because their thinking (and) methodologies did not fit any of the existing philosophical categories upon the publication dates of their texts. For example, the work of the American philosopher of art and life, Susanne K. Langer (1895–1985), is part of that project and, in one of my favorite sentences of hers, she reflects on her writing process and says that "[q]uotations could be multiplied almost indefinitely" (Langer, [1942] 1957, p. 27; see also Van der Tuin, 2016, 2022). I think that is very much what we experience while writing today; the processes of connecting can hardly be stopped in the algorithmic condition. At the same time, it is the publishing format that *makes* you stop because there is a fixed number of words or pages to a text or a time limit to the finishing of a digital publication. I am also thinking about a French historian of science, Hélène Metzger (1886–1944), who thought about how our thinking process, and our produced thought, is always "expansive," as it moves in so many different directions at once (Metzger, [1936] 1987; see also Van der Tuin, 2013).

In another project, I am writing about concepts as mini-theories and about the common practice of collecting these concepts in glossaries or dictionaries, thus reflecting on the question why work on concepts pops up everywhere at the moment (see Van der Tuin & Nocek, 2019; Van der Tuin & Verhoeff, 2022). Together with colleagues, I both reflect on, and actively participate in, the production of glossaries both in the humanities and in the cultural sector more broadly, thus thinking about why we need these modular, procedural, and even *integrative* publications that are filled with both good old terms and neologisms that need to be put to work in thinking, doing, and making processes. Nanna Verhoeff and I argue that we use concepts and develop glossaries to "code" the overwhelming processes of material-discursive connecting in the algorithmic condition (Van der Tuin & Verhoeff, forthcoming). We argue that concepts have an inherent "methodologicity," and that the work that one can do with concepts must be invented anew in every single research project and/or artistic and curatorial gesture (Van der Tuin & Verhoeff, 2022).

Feminist new materialist research, diffractive reading, and the conceptual and creative humanities all want to avoid reduction. These are movements in thought and practice that are trying to be affirmative, silently battling against projecting thoughts or classification systems onto reality and reducing realities to such an extent that, for example—in relation to Amy's work—"naturecultures" (Haraway,

2003; Latour, [1991] 1993) cannot be engaged with any longer as result of the fact that the entanglement of what we think of as "nature" and as "culture" is cut off from the naturecultural processes that even drive our own research. Indigenous scholarship has been arguing and working against reduction from the word go (see, for example, Hokowhitu, 2021). So, there are intricate links with (entanglements of) the new humanities and cultural inquiry, and the push toward decolonizing reductive curricula by mobilizing indigenous theories, methods, and scholarship. It depends on one's location to what extent the latter work is a starting point or not and it has to be noted that most starting points make it impossible for a scholar to truly embrace to "irreduction" (Latour, [1984] 1988).

Viv: Iris, what does this philosophical approach that you have been using make thinkable or possible for inquiry? I am particularly interested in your work on glossaries, how that makes some things possible and others not possible, and how you see it as transversal, as well?

Iris: The book that I have written together with Nanna Verhoeff on critical concepts for the creative humanities is a book for humanities scholars and art and culture professionals who want to work at the intersection of the humanities, science, and design. It is inspired by, and hoping to add something to, the intersection that I talked about before, namely, that of the humanities scholar and the cultural theorist collaborating with the artist and arts and culture professional. One of the concepts that we were recently writing up is "implication," and we found ourselves very inspired when looking at the etymology of implication—we learned that the etymology leads to "entanglement." The concept of implication invites to ask the question, how one is implicated in the particular process that you are studying. This concept, then, leads to making situated analyses. In addition, the concept of implication transpires the idea that, because you are entangled, you always have to invent the process that you are studying, *anew*. We were doing research on the concept, asking, "Who has been writing about implication?" We found out that the French sociologist René Lourau, in the 1980s, wrote a book that wanted to produce a theory of implication. He writes about the inevitability of being implicated in one's own research and gives some advice to us as scholars; he says that keeping a research diary is a very good idea (Lourau, 1988). Journaling during the process of doing research actually provides the researcher with some sort of archive of the avenues opened up by the research in the entangled process of doing the research—and, sometimes, these are avenues that cannot be written about, because of (as I said earlier) time constraints, space constraints, format constraints, whatever—but it was really his advice to keep a research journal and try to expose—by studying that journal as part of the data—how

the researcher is implicated in the process under study, in the political economies and symbolic global orders that influence not only the processes studied but also, and at the same time, the processes of studying those processes. Nanna and I were very interested in Lourau's little book from 1988, and in his own research journal that was part and parcel of the book, and we basically bought the one volume that was still available online. The book is unique in, first, doing a proposal for a theory of implication; then, providing some examples of research journals that have been kept by some scholars, obviously including anthropologists; and then, the third part of the book is the research journal kept during the writing of Lourau's own book. Lourau was implicated in his own proposal toward keeping a research diary. This is not really an answer to your question as to why glossaries and dictionaries are transversal, but I do hope that my answer demonstrates that, by working on a particular concept, one is led to many different scholars—in the present, from the past, into the future—and not really respecting disciplines, disciplinary backgrounds, or other categories.

Viv: That's very helpful for what we were interested in, that answer, because we were also wondering how your philosophy influences how you would go about collecting data—which is more related to social scientific research, not so much humanities, I would imagine. But things like the research diary have been used by a lot of feminists, I think. Iris, I noticed in your papers that you spoke about self-reflexivity, which would be part of the research diary. And I was also interested in your thoughts on this—because I have written myself about diffraction versus reflection. Haraway and Barad both eschewed self-reflexivity, saying that with reflexivity, one has to take a distance from something, but we are always part of things and we cannot take that distance. In addition, Barad says that she doesn't juxtapose one thing against another, as you were saying, but rather pays attention to the fine details of what the person is arguing. So, it is the attentiveness and the doing justice to the text. I am quite interested in her later writings about "crystallization" and how she has used Walter Benjamin and says that his notion of "montage" is very similar to diffraction. You are putting a montage of things out there and then it is up to your readers to use it in the ways that they find helpful. It is also not only spatial diffraction but also temporal diffraction, and how these two things are always/already influencing each other, and that it is not about leaving the old behind and looking for the new.

Iris: I am going to start from another example. A while ago I was reading a paper together with my colleagues from the interdisciplinary bachelor's program, Liberal Arts and Sciences, at Utrecht University. And it was about serendipity in interdisciplinary research (for the paper, see Darbellay et al., 2014). My colleagues and I are interested in the

Scholarship of Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning (SoITL) because that is a field of research that has the potential to inform our Liberal Arts program.[2] The students in this program are trained to become interdisciplinary scholars. They start with a set of general education courses, then at some point they decide what their major is going to be, and then they finish the program with not only a thesis that reflects their major, but also with an interdisciplinary research project done in a team of peers with different majors. So, we were reading this paper about serendipity. And of course, the literature on serendipity is very close to new materialist work on "diffractive reading" (Barad, 2003, 2007; Haraway, 1997; Minh-ha [1988] 1997, 1996), because diffractive readings often start with a serendipitous finding, a link between Text A and Text B. We learned as colleagues from the literature about serendipity that, to recognize something as a serendipitous finding, you actually have to have a lot of disciplinary knowledge about, and insight in, the context of a particular text, artwork, or process. This lesson makes explicit that there exists some sort of oscillation between the generated or known concepts that we may have been teaching students in traditional BA programs, on one hand, and *generativity* or leaps into the unknown, innovations, and concepts that have not even been researched very much, on the other hand. So, reading diffractive reading as something that requires avoiding something (reflection), is not necessarily something that I would use to explain the method. A diffractive reading can be started pretty much anywhere and at any time, of course, but the question is "Why are you acting on the text, artwork, or interlinkage stumbled upon? Why is it important to radically or gradually shift a certain known concept into a direction that is as yet unknown?" I think there should be some sort of starting point, be it theoretical or practical, an observation or a question that gets you interested in a sudden serendipitous connection that shifts the parameters of the starting point. I am not saying "leave self-reflection behind," because I think such parameters teach a lot about how you are implicated in certain age-old, exclusionary, and oppressive processes. The point of diffractive reading is to set situatedness into motion, to *become* with research, teaching, and learning.

What I find interesting about both diffraction and serendipity is that when you stumble upon either a text or an image that immediately reminds you of something else, you become a researcher at that very moment and the finding becomes a research object that needs a lot of attention and a lot of care. This moment is a thick moment of finding yourself conversing with a piece of scholarship, a philosophical idea, or a piece of art that needs unpacking and will lead to yet other texts or visual materials. Moments like these happen suddenly, and seldomly (Van der Tuin, 2017). I called it a form of "post-human interpellation" in one of my research

articles—you are being interpellated by a nonhuman other and immediately become a scholar, with the other (Van der Tuin, 2014).

Such a fascinating moment can also involve a colleague. For example, I wrote an article with Aurora Hoel that produced a diffractive reading of the philosophies of technology of Gilbert Simondon and Ernst Cassirer (Hoel & Van der Tuin, 2013). I remember talking to Aurora for the first time. We were both visiting scholars in the Department of the History of Science at Harvard University and we were talking about our research interests. Aurora expressed not only being interested in Cassirer's essay on technology, but also her frustration about the essay not really saying what she wanted it to say. So, I asked, "What do you want it to say?" And she went on explaining something that sounded Simondonian to me. The next day, we read each other's bibliographies and started writing about "originary technicity" from the intersected perspective of Simondon and Cassirer, thus enriching a notion that has a history in the work of Jacques Derrida. This was a serendipitous encounter. The connections between Aurora and me, and between Simondon and Cassirer, were forged with the speed of light, and they generated a really fascinating half year of unplanned-for collaboration that enabled us to be affirmative about Cassirer while pushing his thinking to the extreme. We were not reading him to say, "This is where Cassirer went wrong," but we were bringing in some Simondonian elements to look at Cassirer anew and to move toward a new concept. That is diffractive reading to me.

Viv: Iris, I know you are particularly interested in methodologies and methods, and I wonder if you can talk a little about your interest there?

Iris: We already talked about diffractive reading as something I am interested in. I am getting more and more interested in diffractive reading now that I am focusing on how students—and researchers, both junior and senior—are getting more and more affected by, and entangled with, the "algorithmic condition." Our research starts with an open and functioning internet connection most of the times, which means that we are always/already influenced by a lot of things that are not on our physical desks: snippets of information, images, and academic scholarship. Don't forget that, in performing a literature review, for example, you are part of this algorithmic system that is not outside the Web of Science or, more obviously, Google Scholar, and that writing it is a matter of acting on what "glows" in a messy pile of e-literature, to say it with Maggie MacLure (2010). I am interested in exploring these very complexly intertwined processes that happen between me and the computational processes on my computer and behind my desk. Methods that are dogmatically "displac[ing] the same elsewhere" (Haraway, 1997, p. 16) are also, as Beatrice Fazi

(2018; see also Verhoeff & Van der Tuin, 2020) says, always/already shifting under the influence of "contingent computation."

Contingent computation, I find, is a very beautiful phrase. It leads you to the almost-machinic diffractions that you may or may not notice, and that are a matter of posthuman performativity. I like reflecting deeply and extensively on some of these contingently produced findings that pop up on our screens, and that make us think. What went into this search result? What do we learn from unraveling it? Any search result on our computer screens (and) in our offices is both mine and others'—it is library systems, it is databases, it is tagging, it is the Google algorithm, it is so many different things that go into a search result. I am interested in thinking about ways in which our research is not being reduced by known concepts, known methods, and known publication formats. And, at the same time, we are using concepts, methods, and formats that are age-old, and having intellectual fun with them! So, again, there is the generated and there is generativity, and the oscillation between the two is the interface that I want to research. I think that interface is methodological. It forces you to think in methodological key.

Question from audience: Do you ever feel that serendipity is at the mercy of the algorithm?

Iris: Of course. I mean, when I am reading a newspaper on my mobile phone, I may diffractively stumble onto something that becomes my new research object, but the way in which a philosophical insight or an artwork arrived in a journalistic product is driven by algorithmic processes. I think it is our *responsibility* to think about the extent to which computation and algorithmic processes are present and participating in this world. Because it is not just us inhabiting this world; it is very much our *students* inhabiting this world (see, again, Serres [2012] 2015; Van Petegem et al., 2021). We all need the tools to be academically and politically productive in this world, we need to act ethically, and we must try to be happy together. I have already argued that contingency and serendipity *both* require solid backgrounds, and that our engagement with these processes needs to be driven by the desire to move away from reductive research and action. Both are academic, political, ethical, and personal necessities and, therefore, we must teach students both sides of the coin of, in my work, the concept of generation.

For a long time now, I have been fascinated by the blog *BrainPickings*.[3] I am very fascinated by its blogger, Maria Popova, because she produces really wonderful readings and reflections in her posts on philosophy, science, and art; on knowledge and wisdom. Significantly, every blog begins and ends with a diffractive piece of writing along

the lines of something like "X wrote about this, Y wrote that, Z wrote something else, and still they are working on one and the same project A. Project A is connected to project B by insight P." A couple of students of mine who were majoring in Computer Science have tried to map what Popova is doing on her blog and connect it to *Wikipedia*. They proposed to interpret *Wikipedia* as a representation of the known, and understood what Popova produces in the freely styled opening and closing sentences of her blog posts as the novel, unexpected, or indeterminate interlinkages. How can we bring these two seeming opposites together in a meaningful way and figure out what Popova's methodology is? Of course, this is not the type of question a student can answer in a couple of weeks, but it was a beautiful attempt. I thought for a long time that perhaps this is the closest we can get to reading and writing about the algorithmic condition—because *BrainPickings* is all archived—and Popova explicitly says not only on her blog, but also in interviews, that it is not just what she is reading but also what she hears on the radio, what she sees while biking to her office, and what is mentioned in random conversations with friends and others, that influences her thoughts—and to me, the latter processes are very much what diffractive reading and writing in the algorithmic condition is about.[4]

Question from audience: There is a lot of conversation about the need to move beyond the traditional humanist subject associated with the Enlightenment project of knowledge, but, more recently, posthuman scholars seem to be revisiting this question and reaffirming the necessity of having a theory of the subject. Can you say more about how you see the Self functioning within posthumanist analysis when its boundaries are under erasure or in a process of becoming? So, more concretely, what do you think it looks like to write from within that?

Iris: Working from a posthumanist perspective, or with posthumanist research methods, does not mean that human tendencies are left behind or something like that. This is why I find the oscillation between the "generated" and the "generative" so very productive. In a certain period of time, feminist and other critical scholars were very enthusiastic about moving away from humanism, moving away from something that has gendered, racialized, colonial connotations, and *implications*. Yet you cannot leave these things behind very easily. So, we better come up with a "double-edged vision," as Rosi Braidotti (2012, p. 22) calls it after Joan Kelly.

Viv: I'm not quite sure whether you do, at your university, have any difficulties in supervising in the post philosophies. I know at our university, you have to pass through stringent and sometimes narrow-minded committees and get students'

work through those committees. I was just wondering whether you have any advice for people and whether you have ever experienced any difficulties with this?

Iris: I think that what helps a lot is that in Europe we have a network that was funded by the European Commission and which focused exclusively on the new materialisms. The funding, in a way, demonstrated, or performed, institutional support for what you, in the context of this webinar, call "post philosophies." And it has helped a lot. I believe, when it comes to these kinds of issues, in the good old double-track feminist strategy. You work with the scholars in your institution, while you also try to carve out a space for your own approaches. In this double-track strategy, very much in line with Kelly's and Braidotti's double-edged vision, you try to also use the institution affirmatively, that is, critically and creatively, because there is no way that research projects, and especially projects with students, will materialize without institutional support. I always think back, and I think—OK, two years before I was born, in 1976, a report was produced at the University of Amsterdam, and it was the very first report on women's studies in the Netherlands. It basically said that, as feminists, we need to follow a double-track strategy; we must work within the institution as well as we must work against the institution (see Van der Tuin & Waaldijk, 2016). And that's my motto.

Viv: Yes, that's very interesting, and working with the institution helps to get things through. How do you respond to this, Amy, as both a recent graduate and as an artist?

Amy: As an artist, I position myself alongside institutions in short-term increments by participating in artist residencies hosted by institutions of culture. My research activities physically occur outside of the institutional walls, and I am aware of my position as a sovereign agent whose temporary residence results in a specific kind of impact. Because of the situatedness of my ongoing research, I find myself continuously implicated by both institutions and the natureculture processes alongside them. Operating under this notion of "artistic research" I can work at the intersection of many disciplines because art, like the feminist new materialist approaches, is transversal and continuously produces excess to maintain complexity within the given research context.

The program of Master of Arts and Society at Utrecht University is a catchall for interdisciplinary thinking. In my research with Iris, we looked at how methods in the humanities could make a comeback and be activated by a background in curating or in digital design, philosophy, and climate science. On one hand, the knowledge produced generative discussions surrounding method. But, on the other hand, it was difficult to enact methodological experiments, when academia still tried to box us into certain methodological approaches. It was not until I left the academic setting that I could understand the depth of interdisciplinary

work situated in the concept of naturecultures. Iris used the term "glossaries" earlier and in building these glossaries of knowledge and working on different concepts and unpacking them and explaining them is one approach to bridge the old and the new, the respected and the experimental. Therefore, this notion of working with glossaries and archives as a personal accumulation of data and then putting them out there into ways that are translatable is something we spoke a lot about in my cohort of peers in the master's program.

My research, specifically within the master's, focused on how institutions of culture collided with the phenomenon of naturecultures. At the time, I conducted fieldwork at Utrecht Oude Hortus, which historically was Utrecht University's first botanic garden but is no longer classified as one. During my fieldwork, I was confronted with the spontaneity of living matter and the labor required to care for such a space of living culture. Therefore, I proposed a different way of looking at a botanical garden, not only as a place of colonial and extractivist histories, but also as a place to locate the multiple temporalities that support the garden as one practiced living as naturecultures. Moreover, artistic research informed by methodologies of social sciences, such as fieldwork, and feminist new materialist approaches produced tacit knowledge, visual knowledge, and propositional knowledges for thinking-*with* the future of the Oude Hortus.

Beyond the Hortus, I began to investigate the naturecultural dualism that existed not only in botanic gardens but also in the context of the urban and rural landscapes of the Netherlands. In the summer of 2020, I partook in a residency at Cultureland. During the residency, I spent half of my time in the city of Amsterdam and the other half in the Polder Region of the Netherlands; this gave me the time to challenge the dichotomous nature of both spaces. Through drawing, I tried to embody what it felt like to create a taxonomy of species by making images that searched for the limitations of botanical drawing. In this method of drawing, you isolate the plant from all that lives and therefore the relational knowledge between species is lost. I then turned to painting as a place where I could imagine what it would be like to see the species together in one space. These works were done through a process of painting from nature and creating abstracted gestures on the canvas in the studio.[5] The process revealed how knowledge derived from representational drawing and painting is only one part of the research narrative. Therefore, the strength of artistic research's methodological abundance is that you can choose from multiple methods and test out which combinations communicate your research effectively.

Iris: I would like to add to this that the ideas of "implication" and "entanglement," and the practices of reflecting on

being part of an institution and contributing to an institution and to its scholarly and philosophical processes that have certain histories and genealogies of inclusion and exclusion, immediately show that there are no easy answers. There is no way *out*. And, for me, this is where ethics comes in my teaching. In our Liberal Arts and Sciences program, we try to make students aware of our implications in, and entanglements with, systems that are geopolitical, that have long histories and genealogies of inclusion and exclusion, and we really try to work with our bachelor's students to find ways of making them aware of how institutions do what they do. How can you recognize certain reductive tendencies of disciplines? We go as far as asking students to actually write a narrowly disciplinary essay and we ask them to reflect on it by explicitly asking, "What does such an essay *do*?" This is done in a way similar to Amy's story about taxonomic drawing—we want young students to learn that writing such an essay implies that you will have to *reduce*, leave things out, and "isolate" the phenomena under discussion. I see this as a responsibility of an interdisciplinary teacher to teach students how to both navigate, critically reflect on, and be creative with the institution in all of its histories and presences of exclusion, oppression, and reduction. It is not simply about teaching the "interdisciplinary research process" or "connective thinking" (for the former, see Repko & Szostak, 2021; for the latter, see Miller & Spellmeyer, 2015), but it is also about explaining to students that most academic contexts are still not very welcoming to these interdisciplinary, connective, and "post" kinds of approaches. This, for me, is the ethics part. These are conversations that I find myself engaged in while in classrooms and, now, in the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, in Zoom and MS Teams conversations.

Viv: How does the master's program, that Amy was part of, work at Utrecht University?

Iris: The master's program that Amy finished is a program that consists of six courses, a thesis, and an internship. And the internship in Amy's case was the residency—because, of course, by doing a residency you also learn a lot about the institution that hosts you. What Amy and I developed for the thesis was this idea that her artwork was *supplementary material* and even supplementary *evidence*. So, the thesis had the theoretical framework. It had the analyses of the interviews that Amy conducted with volunteers in the botanical garden. And it had vignettes and the anthropological unpackings of these. And then, there was also this supplementary material that Amy beautifully contextualized and mobilized as evidence in the thesis. Again, we combined what is allowed by the institution and we didn't go all the way in terms of the very recent and factually unsupported tradition of artistic research. We were framing Amy's artistic research at the intersection of the humanities and the

social sciences. And, in that way, we were we were able to make it work within the institution. As Amy convincingly argued in her thesis, we are not just seeing ourselves as traditional humanists enriched by artistic research, but it is really a dialogue with artists and artistic researchers that need something from the humanities, too; they need the cultural theory, they need the concepts, they actually need the canonical texts and methodologies, all the while we are also fighting against them.

Viv: So I think you are quite well placed in your position in the interdisciplinary middle to argue for this in your institution. Do they listen to you?

Iris: Indeed, not only the School of Liberal Arts that I work in, but also the Department of Media and Culture Studies where Amy was based; these are interdisciplinary spaces at Utrecht University. In Liberal Arts and Sciences, we work with a very specific definition of interdisciplinarity; very often, scholars who are worried about, or dismissive of, interdisciplinarity think that with interdisciplinary approaches, you lose the disciplines. What we are saying is that we train "disciplined interdisciplinarians," which is a notion that was first formulated in the context of the U.S.-based Association for Interdisciplinary Studies and Project Zero at Harvard,[6] and which we at Utrecht try to institutionalize and think very deeply about, theoretically, methodologically, and pedagogically, precisely to argue that interdisciplinarity doesn't mean leaving the disciplines, their methodologies, and their knowledge and insights behind (see Repko & Szostak, 2021). Again, we find ourselves in the position of oscillation between disciplines (the known) and between something that transverses the disciplines (the novel, unexpected, and indeterminate).

We use the same strategy for research ethics, publications, and curriculum vitae (CV) building. I always advise students who write interdisciplinary PhD theses, master's theses, or even bachelor's theses, to try to present or publish their work both in disciplinary contexts and in the contexts of the SoITL, or artistic research, or new materialism. It is important to perform that you have a discipline, a recognizably disciplinary location that is also present on your CV. I strongly believe that younger colleagues teaching in Liberal Arts and Sciences and other interdisciplinary programs should continue supervising students within either their original discipline or—when they don't like that discipline anymore—they should try to move gradually into the direction of at least one new discipline, because, I think, such a dual identity makes institutional life easier. We are not setting up interdisciplinary programs or new materialist approaches or post philosophies to just become new disciplines. We also want to change academia and its disciplinary structure. Therefore, we have to keep on working within, and against, the existing

structures, trying to change them on the go. That is what I am advising young people. It is how I hope to make a difference one day.

Viv: Is there anything you want to say, Amy, about how you present or publish your work?

Amy: I am still figuring out the best way to publish my work to make visible the entanglements and networks that I am engaged with because the research is transversal and progresses in an ever expanding and nonlinear way. I not only try to translate scholarly research but also to expand knowing or knowledge through the method of qualitative interviews using concepts like diffraction as a point of departure. Each part for the research process informs other parts and I am constantly looking backward and sideways at the phenomena I encounter. For me, a personal archive of qualitative data helps most to hold knowledge in its excess and complexity. However, ordering and understanding the archive has been my challenge for a while now. I find myself inspired by *Feral Atlas: The More-Than-Human Anthropocene*, a digital project by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Jennifer Deger, Alder Keleman Saxena, and Feifei Zhou published by Stanford University Press.[7] The *Feral Atlas* succeeds in being and becoming the digital ecosystem that I envision for my own work. It is the diffractive practice of paying attention to the fine details that is very important to me and, to hold diffraction as part of the phenomenon of naturecultures, I made a small booklet, *Diffracting Dialogues*,[8] which follows a diffractive method in conducting interviews, where the nuances of how each person conveys their narratives and information is highlighted; from those nuances, I depart and follow the generative knowledges that emerge from the exchange.

In respect to presentation, my focus has shifted to making work that goes outside of the exhibition format. I still make art objects, but my concerns with the role of artworks have shifted to the creation of objects that support living processes such as composting and walking. Now when I think about sculpture, I think about both its use-value to those who activate it and the life it will have after it leaves my view. These "prototypes" can be replicated in multiple places, and thus they avoided fixing or being tethered to the permeant nature of an object; by exhibiting prototypes from the research process in everyday settings, I rub the boundaries between art and everyday life, and I really like that. It is in this way that the objects travel between generative and generational interlinkages.

I think that the most critical approach in evaluating one's position as a researcher is the fact that you might still continue to reproduce the very structures you try to move beyond. Then actively saying to decolonize myself, I have to be aware of, and acknowledge, that everything that I have learned in terms of nature, science, and culture has this genealogy of coloniality. So, criticality means to actively make that decision of wanting to change working in that tradition. This, I think, was a first step for me. It was followed by the step of looking at "care" which is a really critical component to decolonizing and a key ingredient to looking at the ethical implications of moving forward. I have been reading a lot of "ethics of care" with María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) as a starting point for my research. During my inquiry in the garden as an artist acting like a social scientist, I had to deal with the ethics coming out of the anthropological association of doing fieldwork. The community of study were people, but it was essential to reflect on care for the world.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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ORCID iD

Iris van der Tuin ⓘD https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1890-940X

Notes

1. For concepts as mini-theories, see the introduction of *Critical Concepts for the Creative Humanities* (Van der Tuin & Verhoeff, 2022). "Generation" has its own entry in this glossary. The book can be consulted here: https://rowman.com/webdocs/CriticalConceptsCriticalHumanitiesOA.pdf
2. The link to our research group is here: https://transmissioninmotion.sites.uu.nl/subjects-in-interdisciplinary-learning-teaching-silt/
3. The blog, archived by the Library of Congress, can be found here: https://www.brainpickings.org/ The LoC interface is here: https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0007957/
4. Popova mentioned these and other things in an episode of Krista Tippett's On Being: https://onbeing.org/programs/maria-popova-cartographer-of-meaning-in-a-digital-age-feb2019/
5. Some information on the Cultureland residency can be found here: https://cultureland.nl/amy-pekal/
6. For the Association of Interdisciplinary Studies, see: https://interdisciplinarystudies.org/ For Project Zero at Harvard University, see: http://www.pz.harvard.edu/
7. For the *Feral Atlas*, see: http://feralatlas.org/
8. For *Diffracting Dialogues* by Amy Pekal, see: https://tinyurl.com/28tphjj4

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Author Biographies

Iris van der Tuin is professor of theory of cultural inquiry in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Utrecht University, and university-wide dean of interdisciplinary education. In 2021–2022, she is Novo Nordisk Foundation guest professor in the Laboratory for Art Research, The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen and at Aarhus University.

Amy Pekal is an artist and researcher. She creates situated artistic investigations located at the intersection of nature and culture to engage with diverse communities and rebuild, across differences, environmental identities that evoke repair, care, community, and the commons. She holds a bachelor of science degree from Marymount Manhattan College, a certificate of fine arts from the New York Academy of Art, and a master's degree in arts and society from Utrecht University.