CHAPTER 13

Walking With(in) Transdisciplinary-Scapes

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Setting Off

Transdisciplinarity asks us to do, be and think differently, transgressing and transcending disciplinary boundaries, requiring a different ‘way of being’ with(in) the world. But how do we make such a shift in being? How can we learn to pay attention differently? How can we learn to transcend the habits and assumptions we have of research? This chapter is an offer to remake narratives of transdisciplinarity, research and writing as we walk with(in) entangled scapes of north-east Scotland and my PhD project which explored teaching as an improvisatory act. In bringing together the sensorial, the bodily, the natural and research, we expose different languages, sensations, images and experiences with which we can think and do in a transdisciplinary-scape.¹

This chapter is an offer² to go for a walk, an offer to travel together in company (with each other but also with materials, images, words). It is an offer to ‘play out together’³ in a transdisciplinary-scape to see what

¹ All photographs are my own with relevant permissions gained from those in the workshops as required by the ethics procedures of Aberdeen University.
² In theatre improvisation ‘an offer’ relates to the opening up of a situation through an activity or a verbal interjection which enables others to join in. Accepting the offer, and making with it, allows the improvisation to move forward (Johnstone, 1979).
³ Transdisciplinarity, as a practice that transgresses and transcends disciplinary boundaries, has potential to respond to new demands and imperatives (Russell et al., 2008, pp. 460–461). De-coupling the specific language and practices of a discipline from their original contexts opens up new possibilities for viewing and experiencing the same phenomenon in many ways. This requires a different ‘way of being’, which Perry (2021) refers to as ‘pluriversality’, referring to the ‘surplus’ of meanings and ways of learning which may be generated to enable the complexity of a changing world to come into the realms of our experience. ‘Playing out’ in the transdisciplinary-scape, experiencing transdisciplinarity with all our bodymind, is to allow ourselves to rebel against static, habitual, expected ways of being writer/researcher/educationalist.
happens, bringing with us our experiences, and paying attention to how we think and make with them as we walk.

This isn’t a walk to reach a particular destination, it isn’t about where we end, but it is about what happens along the way, where paying attention and noticing what is occurring makes us re-see, re-make and re-tell our relationships with each other. As we walk, our encounters mobilise material-body-environment performances, revealing new narratives, new experiences of transdisciplinary doing, being, becoming. Our walk begins from my front door, into the fields of Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

As I sit here looking out over the fields of north-east Scotland, I can see the very beginnings of spring arriving. The broom bushes that line the fields have started to turn yellow, reminding me of the Scots song about gypsy-travellers with the line ‘I’ll tak ye on the road again when yellow’s on the broom’. On the trees, I can see the little pockets where the leaves will burst out in a few weeks’ time. And yet, at this distance, through a window, the landscape looks very still, as if yet

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4 ‘The yellow’s on the broom’ is a Scots language song (MacNaughtan, 2001), based on a book by Betsy Whyte about the experiences of Gypsy-Travellers in Scotland. The song is threaded with issues of social justice and being with(in) the landscape.
to be woken up fully. To see what is alive, what is moving, we need to venture out and go for a walk. We need to be in and with it, and pay attention with all our senses, not just viewing it from afar. We need to ‘take the road’ and go travelling with the landscape and all that it offers.

As we take our first steps, out of the front door, across the road and onto the earthy fields beyond, the cold wind pulls at us, the sound of the trees rustling draws us in, the smell of the flora wakes us. We think with the word landscape, playing with it as we go ... 

Landscape       scape-lands
sca-land-scape   space-spaces
discipline-spaces: space-scapes   discipline-scapes ...

Transdisciplinary-scapes ...

The words, as rhythms, as patterns, as sounds, entangle themselves with my recently completed PhD project, raising questions. What ‘scapes’ had I walk with(in)? What sort of movements had I made? What had pulled at and awakened me? What had I moved across, between, through to make the project transdisciplinary?

Despite completing my PhD four months ago, I am still in a state of ‘play’, where the materials and ideas are still with me, making all the time. Memories, jogged by photos or objects from the workshops, take me back to the music education suite at the university where I, a group of music student teachers and their course leader, explored the idea of teaching as an improvisatory act. We played, we made, we explored, and in doing so we troubled5 disciplinary notions of improvising with transdisciplinary encounters (with theatre improv, improvisation in nature, contact improv dance, and improvisatory pedagogies in early years education). We entangled ourselves with playdough and pipe cleaners, images and quotations, videos of improvisations and improv games, and of course musical instruments.

Thinking with my project while walking and playing with the language of landscapes makes generative action. I want to play. I want to entangle. I want to allow the experience of walking with(in) the landscape outside

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5 Haraway (2016) draws on the term trouble, meaning to ‘stir up, to make cloudy, to disturb’ (p. 1). Haraway argues that living in troubled times requires us to ‘stay with the trouble ... requiring learning to be truly present’ (p. 1).
my front door to lead the way. To make me write-think-feel-do in different ways, as if it is almost like a diffractive grate, creating wave patterns that amplify, interfere or make change as they come into contact with other waves or materials.\(^6\)

The movement of the horizon as the trees bend violently in the wind.
Spaces and places as leading me in to explore their unending pluralities.
The felt and explored surfaces of different fields, of different features in the terrain.
The scape not as one view, but of many, asking for different ways of gazing.
The sensing of the travelling, as between, across, through and around.
The fields and disciplines not as bounded, abstracted, separated spaces, but as woven together.
The names of features, the sounds we can hear, the lines we can follow, as understandings of our experiences.

**Surfaces**

*Down the concrete steps onto the moss-filled grass of the sloping front lawn, down we go, crossing the worn-out road, the loose stones move under and around our feet, sending up tiny fragments in dusty*

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\(^6\) Diffraction, as both a physical phenomenon, and a metaphor (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016; Murris, 2016) enables a more fluid exploration of the multiplicities in thinking, creating diffractive patterns of interference which allow us to engage in practices of thinking and doing differently.
clouds until we reach the field track, full of heavy clay mud in heavy worn divots made by the tread of the tractor wheels. As we walk over the crispy mucky frozen ground it feels solid, hard, compacted beneath our feet. Contorting ankles in response, keeping upright and moving. It hurts. It makes us look down, using what we can see to help predict how best to move. We walk in this slightly contorted, uncomfortable manner, until reaching the gate – reaching, touching, its cold metal surface, before quickly recoiling our hands as we feel the ‘bite’ on our fingers and palms. As we climb it carefully, our shoes, full of mud and stones, hit the gate and it resonates with us. Beyond, we gaze across the fields, noting the patchiness of the new crops emerging from between the soil, their tiny green shoots almost invisible to the eye unless looking across to see the green haze of their collaborative effect.

I think with the experiences of these different surfaces. The moss, the slope, the stones, the mud, the hard, unforgiving ground, the gate, and looking across the surface of the field. Noticing, paying attention, to what we are experiencing. We are not merely travelling across these surfaces; these surfaces as making with[^7] us …

**Surfaces in Motion Together**

*Changing the patterns of lose stones on the road.*
*Transferring materials as we walk, picking up grass, mud and stones in our shoe treads.*
*Tiny fragments of skin stuck to the metal as we peal our hands away as quickly as we can.*
*The gate resonates.*

[^7]: In defining sympoiesis Haraway states, ‘Sympoiesis is a simple word; it means “making-with.” Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing’ (Haraway, 2016, p. 58), but instead we become entangled with material-body-environments.
A djembe drum’s surface struck not with the hand or a drumstick but with a pen, unexpectedly resonant in multiple directions. The skins, both drum and human, resonate with the vibrations set in motion, the ‘buzz’ moving up and down and through the bodies (both drum and human). The surfaces in motion, troubling boundaries of what is considered separated, fixed, controllable and what is allowed to resonate, to be alive and to entangle itself.

**Surfaces as Entangled as Felt**

*Feeling the slope as we descend as our feet crunch forwards in our boots.*
*Feeling the looseness of the stones between us and the solid road below.*
*Feeling the shape of the heavy divots in our contorted bodies.*
*Feeling the cold of the metal.*

Research notes, March 2019: Tentative. Playdough kept at the very end of the fingers. Playdough doesn’t stick to the body, remaining in touch, but is containable and separable.

Research notes, March 2019: All reaching in and forward – hands together. Hands in proximity with materials, each other, table.
Porous Surfaces of Emergence

Moss, resiliently becoming, sheltering in place. Tiny strong shoots emerging between the soil. From somewhere beyond gaze. From somewhere with nourishment. From somewhere, into here, emerging and connecting above and below, here and there.

[FOOTNOTE MARKER TO APPEAR IN CAPTION]9

Places

There are different places we can go. Do we climb the slopes to reach the tree line? Do we climb the fence and weave our way along the

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9 ‘Yes, and’, a theatre improv game (Johnstone, 1979), permeated my PhD. It provided a generative way of ‘making with’ the materials of the project, as well as lending itself to the final few pages in the form of this poem. The poem, as a ‘porous surface’ was where the ‘new shoots’ of thinking emerged from the rich, nourishing spaces of the project.
rough land between the river and field of crops? Do we aim for the narrowing of the field where the boundaries of different fields all meet? Or are we going to meander, walking without an intended ‘place’ in mind? We decide to just set off and see what happens. Walking through the field, the edges, the boundaries come in to meet us, making our scope for changing direction feel more limited. Wondering whether we were coming to a dead end, we pause to pay attention to our options. At first, we just see barbed wire fences, more and more entangled, impenetrable spikes, keeping us ‘in place’. But as we look closer, we see a gate we could climb, we see a broken fence in the distance which has been pushed down by a fallen branch and we see a small bridge over the stream to our right. We choose the bridge, watching the very small brown trickle of water passing under our feet as we cross. And suddenly we are into a much wider space, rising up towards the hill and down towards a line of trees which blocks our view of what is beyond. We want to see. We want to know. We want to understand the scape beyond, so we climb up, deliberately changing our position, changing our place, changing what we can see. We warm up, feeling the heat pushing out between our layers of clothes and we breathe differently, in a more laboured, deliberate, more knowing way. We feel our heartbeat in our ears and hear our bodies in motion with each step.

These are places, not as destination, but as becoming.¹⁰

Unbounded Places

Kept in place – we are so often kept in place – but what keeps us there? Why do we stay? And what allows us to move differently? To travel? To go beyond, or over boundaries we may feel are impenetrable? What opportunities for moving across and between can we see if we pay close attention? Seeing the potential of the bridge on our walk reminds me of the moment one member of the research group, Anya, asked a question during a workshop. Her question, ‘Where is the teacher?’, in response to an image of three young people playing music together, is a moment full of potential to move to a different place. This is a little like the bridge in

¹⁰ Barad (2007) argues that all the world’s matter (human and non-human) is in a constant state of becoming. However, this constant becoming is not individual and bounded, but is a process in which we are all mutually entangled, always intra-acting with everything we are entangled with (Barad, 2007) where ‘companion species [both human and non-human] are relentlessly becoming-with’ (Haraway, 2016, p. 12).
the field, an opening, an offering to do somewhere differently. We paid attention to it, and in doing so created movement in thinking, doing, imagining.

**Displacing Ourselves**

Dis-place-ment: to remove, change, or be out of place (www.etymonline.com).

How do we dis-place ourselves to make something different occur in living-research-practice? How does changing what we do, what we experience and what we think with help us displace habits, intentions and assumptions? How do we allow ourselves to be displaced, which involves making ourselves vulnerable and open?

I rip, I tear, I move around, I repeatedly reposition, playfully making with the materials
Multi-dimensional, embodied and felt (Springgay, 2018), this same process of ripping and tearing applies as much to our experiences of improvising. We displace our existing relationships with materials, our habitual ways of responding and our disciplinary assumptions.

Research notes, April 2019: Key on cymbal. Disrupted expected norms about material relationships. What is instrument? Challenging sight and perceptions more than ears? Changing, repositioning our thinking, and bodies with each other.
Research notes, April 2019: Listening with whole body, as listening beings. Not just with ears, but leaning, reaching in, deliberately making across the space, connecting both in sound and body.

Friction

*Reaching the top of the slope, being able to see across, down, between the places we have travelled together, we take a moment to consider where we are and where we go next. The shortest, easiest route down is the way we have come, retracing, reflecting in mirror image, the journey we have so far taken. We know what we are likely to encounter, what we are likely to feel, as we have only just travelled that path. It feels the safest option. And yet, our attention is pulled by the potential of continuing our explorations, of taking a more tricky, unknown, unplanned route. We set off again, following the edge of the field to our right, following a robin as it flies ahead of us along the stone wall. As we reach the corner, the robin flies over the wall. We want to move with it, we want to continue to travel in its company. We want to know where it takes us. We crunch flat the frozen grasses with our feet. We scramble over the wall, which has more lose stones than we realised at first. It is uncomfortable, as the stones scratch at our legs and hands, making us adjust our position constantly. As you begin to step down the other side you realise the field on the other side is lower, creating a larger drop. There is a moment of hesitation, of concern, of friction between the wall and ourselves, between the two fields we are traversing, between where we have come from, and where we are going into. Are we allowed to climb this wall? Are we going to land safely on the other side?*

I want to understand what one member of the group had meant by the collage picture he had made, but he refused to tell me (‘Ah, I think I’ll
leave that up to you’), capturing in a single moment the tension between trying to understand to represent and research as performative.\textsuperscript{11}

Research notes, February 2019: The picture – full of movement, sound reaching outwards, it can’t be kept in place. And therefore, full of friction between improvisatory ways of being with materials, and more common relationships in music education of accuracy and interpretation.

The friction is ‘sounded’ in the movement of the stones as we scramble over them and in our voices as we discuss what is happening. Sounding frictions, as generative moments, where expectations or assumptions are challenged\textsuperscript{12} and we are forced to make with in the moment.

Research notes, April 2019: The slowing of time, the hesitant, awkward pauses in bringing together their bodies, cymbals and then the sounds. A highly charged sensorial moment of attention, drawing in all who were in the room to be part of it.

\textsuperscript{11} As MacLure (2013) states, representation is an important part of research, and performative views of research should not aim to completely remove ‘representationalism’. Instead, she describes a ‘pervasive representationalism that has rendered material realities inaccessible behind the linguistic or discourse systems that purportedly construct or “represent” them’ (Maclure, 2013, p. 659). It is this reliance on, and embodiment of, representative forms of ‘being researcher’ which this encounter with the collage picture disrupted.

\textsuperscript{12} ‘Just as an analysis of landscapes can provide important information about the contours, contexts, and histories of a particular environment, collecting and analysing sound can similarly enhance our understandings of a given terrain and the contexts that inform that environment’ (Gershon, 2011, p. 69).
The friction is ‘felt’ in our scratched skin, our caught clothing, our nervous excitement at how to tackle the descent.

‘Yes, [improvising is] making it up but only once you’ve got a full understanding [hands by head – knowing in the head] of what you have rather than just go and play … you have to have an understanding in the first place … Jazz improv, 12-bar blues, you couldn’t just go and play whatever without having a complete understanding.’

The friction is ‘materially negotiated’, making different understandings and relationships with the wall, with the stones, with the field behind and in front of us.

‘Can it be a guitar?’ His question threw me. It made me uncomfortable. The question has continued to play, making with the idea of legitimation to touch, and play with materials.

These frictions leave their mark as we reach the field on the other side. The wall has left its mark on us, on our skins, on our bodies, on our clothing, but we have also left a mark on it. Where we moved stones, their undersides once protected from the elements are now exposed. The shape of the wall, changed by our presence, our movements. The flora around the wall, temporarily squashed from our landing.
These frictions constantly ‘tugged’ at us; they are more than a ‘moment’; they are part of our stories now. As one member of the research group commented in the final conversations, ‘thinking with improvising, like we’ve done here, has really made me so much more aware of what is actually going on in class’. We have ‘co-composed frictionally’ (Springgay, 2018, p. 67), not stopping where there was friction, but ‘staying with the trouble’ (Haraway, 2016, p. 1) that it created in the in-between.

(Re)Turning/(Re)Tuning

(Re)turning to the landscape, now imbued with more-than disciplines, where we (re)tune ourselves to the inseparable entanglements of nature, culture, education, becoming, research, practice, instruments, materials, bodies.

(Re)tuning to the sensorial, the movement, the experience as powerful awakening forces to what was always there.

(Re)turning to re-see, re-make, re-experience, re-materialise.

As I sit here looking out over the fields of north-east Scotland, I can see the very beginnings of summer arriving. Now there is so much to
capture our attention, feeling the rhythms of our walking across time and space. Noticing difference.

Now the movement of the scape isn’t just of the trees on the horizon being buffeted by the wind. **Now everything moves.** The clouds, the shadows, the trees, the lengthening crops, the swallows, the pheasants, the deer in the far distance. Movement becomes more visible and visceral.

Now the spaces and places are more obviously in flux, in sequences of change, moving with the rhythms of the seasons, the growing and decaying of the flora and fauna, the changes of the weather. They are ‘practiced places’, where ‘myriad stories’ (Massey, 2013) are happening with us as we walk, bringing together histories and futures in generative entanglements.

Now the surfaces are more varied, no longer contorting ourselves to deep divots of frozen ground, or stinging ourselves on frozen metal, finding ways to adapt ourselves to the challenges presented by such unforgiving touching encounters. But now, having more generous ‘bounce’ in our step from the slightly soft, flora-covered surfaces. Having a little ‘give’, a little ‘play’ in how and when we move. Where we can make with, explore and allow different ways of being to emerge through, beneath, within, between our movements.

Now the boundaries of the fields, once stark against the topology of the landscape, have become blurred by the life of the flora that has risen up, and in some cases grown over. While we can still make out the shapes of the fields, their distinctive characteristics, they are more entangled, creating an impression of ‘flowing spaces’, where, while there may still be tensions in travelling across and between, there is less definition of where our travelling could go, or could extend itself.

This is a scape which is alive. It is one which we haven’t just visited but one we have made with as we walked, as a scape full of transdisciplinary potentials for difference making, future making, and re-making ourselves.

From our walk, we have (re)turned and (re)tuned ourselves to paying attention to different movements, different positionings, different methodologies and different writings.

**References**


