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## **Editorial: Transmethodology – Creating spaces for transgressive and transformative inquiry**

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In the current global crisis, where a pandemic has changed everyday life as we know it, research and scientific breakthroughs are brought to the fore and expected to help us out of the crisis. The breakthrough in the development of vaccines is the most obvious example, but educational research is also called upon to mitigate the pandemic's negative effects on children and young people. At the same time, it is apparent how research methods and results become part of political conflicts and are used to serve certain interests, highlighting how research findings can be (mis)interpreted and (ab)used to support specific agendas. In a way, the political and social aspects of research endeavors set the scene for this special issue. The special issue has been written during a global health crisis and, although none of the articles address the pandemic directly, it has had a profound impact on the special issue's conception. Editors, reviewers, and authors have all in different ways struggled to find, not only the time, but also the mental resources to work on the articles in the midst of intense workloads and concerns for the health and welfare of close relations, work communities and the global

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situation in general. The pandemic is an influential backdrop to our work and efforts, and must in a way be given due credit for intensifying our focus on the different forces that shape our methodology and research processes.

The special issue deals with entanglements, borders, and bridges between ideas, concepts, and spheres often considered separate and distinct elements in research processes that are frequently represented as well-ordered and linear. Under the heading *transmethodology*, our aim has been to make space for and bring to light the often messy, non-linear, and complex research processes that form our methodologies.

### **Why transmethodology?**

Within the sphere of humanities and social sciences, the last decade has seen a rise in theoretical perspectives highlighting entanglements of human subjects, materialities, affects, technologies, and between space, time, and place. This has drawn attention to the need for research that follows the messy, chaotic, transgressive, and sometimes conflictual movements of bodies, subjects, objects, practices, and categories. A central question in this regard is: How can research methodologies be redirected and reshaped so as to capture such movements? Furthermore, if social processes and human beings are understood as being in constant flux, the question remains: How can we encapsulate this in ways that illustrate the multiplicity and complexity of our engagement in processes of transformation and becoming? Such processes are inherently embedded in the multiple culturally and historically developed contexts where we live our lives. How can methods, theoretical approaches, and analytical frameworks enable the exploration and critical analysis of such movements and of subject-world connections and entanglements? In this special issue, it is our intention to explore and discuss such potentials in relation to what we term a **transmethodological** approach.

We propose the term transmethodology to capture the many ways in which we as researchers engage in transgressing and destabilizing boundaries or divisions between theory

and practice, ontology and epistemology, and between methods and research fields. The concept was initially developed through invigorating talks, seminars, and discussions starting in 2016 in the research program, Engage – (dis)engaging children and young people<sup>1</sup>, at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Denmark. This special issue can be seen as a result, and continuation, of these conversations on how research can work transgressively and transformatively.

### **What do we mean by transmethodology?**

In Latin, trans means ‘across’, ‘over’, ‘beyond’. The verb ‘trare’ means ‘to cross’. Dictionaries add ‘through’, ‘to go beyond’ to the complex of meanings related to trans as a concept. With methodology in research usually understood as the interconnection of epistemology, ontology, and method, transmethodology indicates going beyond this and crossing traditional boundaries. One could say that methodology in itself is an inherently transgressive term, since it deals with “general principles of the formation of knowledge” (Pryce, 2000). By adding ‘trans’, we wish to open a space for new kinds of reflections on how knowledge is produced through research, and make space for the less visible, intangible aspects of research often not reported in journal articles or official research reports.

Transmethodology can point to the kind of empirically and theoretically based approaches to knowledge production that allow research to analytically focus on phenomena through multiple theoretical perspectives and multiple interacting/connected empirical methods. This may also indicate a combination of qualitative and quantitative elements of inquiry and the creation of new onto-epistemological approaches and ethics.

Transmethodology may also imply the potentiality in transcending conventional methods of data generation to include seeing, sensing, making meaning of, and affectively engaging in the research field. From this perspective, methods are not seen as neutral sources of data, but

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dpu.au.dk/en/research/research-programmes/engage/>

as acting on and creating the research field. As Springgay and Truman (2018) state: “We need to shift from thinking about methods as processes of gathering data toward methods as a becoming entangled in relations” (p. 204). To be entangled in relations also means that the research process is dependent on and driven by complex relations between the field, the methods, and the theoretical approach. Theory is likewise not treated solely as a framework to describe, understand, explain, or predict phenomena, but rather seen as their constitutive dimension, interacting with the researcher as well as the researched.

Transmethodological research thus challenges the familiar and taken-for-granted notions of theory and method, and transverses dichotomies, polarities, and (a)symmetries between different methods and different theoretical conceptualizations. In relation to Gert Biesta’s concept of complexity reduction (2010), transmethodology has the opposite intention - as a dynamic framework to grasp and zoom in on the ever changing and emergent complexities of knowledge production. In this regard, it is possible to understand Biesta’s focus on emergences and complexity as methodological gateways to transmethodological thinking, as complexity invites us to understand our reality and our access to it as open, nonlinear, always in a state of becoming, and therefore emergent.

There has been a critique from many sides of renewed standardization and methodological fundamentalism resulting from an interpretation of "true science" that is modelled on an (often outdated and even misconstrued) version of the natural sciences. Furthermore, the above-mentioned different ways of critically rethinking how to work with data, methods, and theories as interlinked are not new, as seen in different fields and expressed across different theoretical vantage points. For centuries, critical research has established and renewed itself by critiquing and transgressing ideas about what research should and could be. Marxist thinking has inspired transformative methodologies concerned with transgressing conceptions of scientific knowledge while simultaneously transforming the

relation between researcher and research participants (González Rey, 2020; Valsiner 2014). Such perspectives have highlighted research as an organic process in which researcher and participants are agents of a dialogical experience, mobilized by subjective productions related to the topic studied (Goulart & Torres, 2021, p. 70).

An example of this political and transformative engagement is seen in the work of the feminist researcher Frigga Haug (1987), who, inspired by Marxist thinking, developed the method and methodology of memory work as an empirical and auto-ethnographic gateway to critically explore social structures, power relations, and inequalities. This method, which is based on collectively producing and utilizing auto-biographical memories, in itself challenges and expands established research dogmas, such as schisms between the personal and the professional, research and biography, and the individual and the collective.

We also see a focus on transversal movements and moments in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987) work, which emphasizes how research begins in "the middle". The middle signifies a rhizomatic space that neither has a designated end nor beginning. Therefore, it challenges our preconceived ideas of research as systematic, ordered, and progressing in linear movements from point A to point B. Research practice and methodology are somewhat enmeshed and must be seen as "immanent modes of thinking-making-doing (p.25). As Springgay and Truman (2018) point out: "The middle is a difficult place to be (...) That is the point. The middle can't be known in advance of research. You have to be 'in it,' situated and responsive. You are not there to report on what you find or what you seek, but to activate thought. To agitate it" (p. 206). This stance calls for research endeavors that strive to move beyond procedural approaches, in line with the transmethodological focus in this special issue and the different ways the articles engage in expanding on, exploring, and situating themselves in this "middle" of the research process.

More recently, a number of scholars have worked with and developed ways of applying transgressive and transversal methodologies and approaches that decenter the subject, the nature-culture divide, and the relation between ontology and epistemology. This work can be seen as expressing trans-approaches, where central terms include network, assemblage, affect, movement, intensity, and cuts.

The dismantling of an epistemological and ontological division is seen early on in Donna Haraway's work (1988) and later in Karen Barad's agential realist theorization (2015), which brings together concepts, metaphors, and ideas from physical science and social science, thus expanding and transgressing the traditional boundaries between their respective research fields, theories, and methods. Concepts such as agential cuts, diffraction, and intra-action offer a view of a world made up of entanglements and reconfigurations of relations of space-time-matter. This has implications for how to think about methodology and research as part of larger apparatus with its own logics and movements.

Bruno Latour's (1993) non-foundational conceptualizations of knowledge production as embedded in networks of both human and non-human actors opened up for a different way of imagining and working with methodology. It is an approach that challenges the traditional nature-culture, subject-object, and human-non-human divide by proposing a method of exploring and analyzing the world around us through the interactions of actors and complex networks consisting of objects, ideas, processes, humans etc. in a non-hierarchical manner.

Patti Lather and Elizabeth St. Pierre (2013) are also engaged in shifting focus away from traditional conceptualizations of the research process as ordered in a certain predetermined manner that moves linearly from research question, to methods, data analysis, and conclusions. As they state, "entanglement makes all the categories of humanist qualitative research problematic" (p. 630), which calls for a rethinking of research methodology in line with what they term post-qualitative approaches. This is a term that can be linked to

transmethodology with its insistence on being aware of how research aims and methods are intrinsically related to and formed throughout the research process via continuous articulation and rearticulation.

In the same vein, Rosi Braidotti (2006) offers an innovative way of rethinking and challenging our processes of inquiry through concepts such as transpositions and nomadology that highlight the interplay of difference and movement. Transpositions occur through the ‘regulated disassociation’ of bonds that normally maintain coherence (p. 5). Transpositions are messy, non-linear, and nomadic in-between spaces and movements that require and entail a nomadic ethics that goes beyond an anthropocentric approach. In Braidotti’s work, as well as in many of the other approaches to critically rethinking research methodologies mentioned here, we see how the call for a more transformative form of research is linked to an expansive and non-procedural understanding of ethics.

Applying a decolonial approach, Gayatri Spivak (1988) seeks to challenge the hierarchical power relations and understandings of the Other, pointing towards the productive, destabilizing force of the subaltern. Her work represents a strategic resistance to essentialism, closure, and totalitarian thought, which is also found in theories on animacy by Mel Chen (2012). Chen develops the concept of animacy to transgress the divisions between the animate and the non-animate by combining perspectives from an array of different theoretical fields, such as linguistics, disability studies, queer and race theory, and critical animal studies. Animacy refers to how affective, material, subjective, and embodied lines of movement are constantly already in a state of becoming in relation to each other. We need to consider this in our attempts to understand and examine both animate and inanimate sources, thus also challenging the anthropocentric approach that dominates most social research. This focus is also evident in Springgay and Truman’s (2017) focus on transcorporeality, which “posits humans and non-humans as enmeshed with each other in a messy shifting ontology”, thereby

disturbing the taken-for-granted status of bodies and selves as preexisting. This approach furthermore requires a rethinking of method, theory, and methodology – not as preexisting resources to capture and understand a reality “out there”, but rather as interdependent forces moving the research and the researcher in different directions.

The above paragraph is not meant to be an exhaustive list and description of the many different scholars and researchers who can be identified as inspirations for a transmethodological approach. The point is rather to demonstrate that there is a broad and diverse field of ways of working transgressively. Inspired by these approaches and ideas, our use of the “trans” in transmethodology does not just signify a movement from one place to another; the movement in itself designates ever-changing processes of formulation and reformulation, configuration and reconfiguration, and materialization and rematerialization. It is important to make clear that we are not proposing transmethodology as a specific approach or a new dogma. We do not wish to delimit what transmethodology can or should be. Our aim is rather to create spaces in which to include transgressive and innovative approaches to research. Such spaces also include an acceptance of and willingness to share and show how research methodology and the related processes of inquiry most often do not follow an ordered and simple line of progression. On the contrary, they are often messy, interconnected, and demand new ways of theorizing and utilizing methods and analytical approaches. For this very reason, we have encouraged the authors contributing to this special issue to experiment with the form and style of their articles. In some of the articles, the authors break the mold in terms of what a traditional research article in a scientific journal should look like and be, and thereby also transgress the ways we are used to being informed about research endeavors and results. The complexity of and the different forces and ways in which research unfolds and can be expressed are in this way key points of focus in the articles in this special issue.



### **Common threads**

The articles differ greatly in terms of research fields explored, theoretical inspirations, methods utilized, and overall methodological focus –yet we see some common threads that weave across and through the different contributions. In various ways, the articles make visible how developing theory and concepts is a processual endeavor through different examples of how it is interwoven with many other ongoing and often parallel processes, such as research collaborations, the collective development of ideas, the particularities of and access to various research fields, accidental encounters etc. In this way, the special issue contributes with an insider view of the researcher’s “laboratory” of emergent research processes. This also includes a focus on the wilderness and messiness of research, and on how thinking in transmethodological terms can sometimes be productive in clearing a way through the wilderness. The authors offer insights into what “doing research” entails, bringing to the fore what often takes on the form of being a hidden backdrop in most journal articles and research reports - the obstacles, the collective processes of doubt and questioning, the parts of the empirical material that are usually left out - pointing towards the overall slow and sometimes resistant processes of knowledge production.

Another common focus across the articles is methodological reflections on how the different levels and processes of the research inquiry are entangled and interrelated. The authors seek to show the implications of how the theoretical framings are inspired by and related to specific methods and methodological stances, and on the other hand how specific research fields and empirical questions call for specific theories and methodological approaches. Theory and theoretical concepts are shown to be formed by the wider methodological process, which, according to Biesta (2020), also suggests the importance of a pragmatic approach in our use of theory so as to avoid over- or undertheorizing. This also

entails the need to transcend understandings of data, knowledge regimes, theory, and analysis as distinct and demarcated processes.

There is an emphasis across the different articles on critical self-reflection and awareness in relation to the researchers' positioning, choices, and ways of presenting and producing the research output. This entails a focus on the researchers' awareness of the kinds of reductions and simplifications that they might contribute to in their analytical work and an attempt to transcend these simplifications by insisting on showing the variations, complexities, contradictions, and entanglements in their empirical material, theoretical frameworks, and final analysis.

The latter is another main point across the different articles – a focus on showing the complexities and non-determinacy of social life, and on developing methods and approaches that are able to capture this. The authors all work from the premise that social life and human subjectivity cannot be understood or explored through linear cause-and-effect models, which therefore calls for transmethodological and non-procedural approaches.

As will be evident in the different articles, there is not one singular, well-defined approach to transmethodology. Each study, each research context, each theoretical framework, and each aim shape the transmethodological endeavor in different directions, reflecting the broad and diverse array of research questions and fields covered in this special issue.

In their article, "*A Place to Be Together: Cultivating Spaces of Discomfort and Not Knowing in Visual Analysis*", Victoria Restler, Wendy Luttrell and David Chapin expand, experiment with, and destabilize our taken-for-granted notions of what an article for a social scientific journal should look and be like. The article is based on the work of a research collective encompassing many different fields of study, including urban education, sociology, architecture, psychology, photography, and linguistics. The collective has grown and

developed over time, becoming a safe space for the exploration of the gray zones between knowing and not knowing. The collaboration is focused on the science and art of seeing, taking into account and utilizing the many ways of seeing, and the power of these different perspectives. These perspectives also include every aspect of who the collective's members are as researchers, foregrounding a focus on gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, race/ethnicity, and class, which also entails an interplay and crossing of traditional boundaries between the personal and the professional in the research process. In their analysis of the different ways it is possible to cultivate and grow the practice of not knowing, it becomes clear that academia is also a contested space, where, the authors argue, researchers taking a transmethodological approach need “spaces to both hold each other in the vulnerability of the work and also learn and strategize on how to work within existing and sometimes unfriendly structures”. This is an important point as many researchers working with experimental and transgressive approaches risk being met with resistance.

Sangeeta Bagga-Gupta and Giulia Messina Dahlberg's article *“On Studying Peoples' Participation across Contemporary Timespaces. Disentangling Analytical Engagement”* contributes to critical reflections regarding the entangled relationships between access, communication, and inclusion based on the authors' ethnographic fieldwork with individuals and groups that are understood as in need of support (with deaf people and individuals diagnosed with ADHD as the specific cases). The authors draw attention to both the mobile and situated nature of contemporary existence (across/online/physical/private/institutional spaces) and, concurrently, the ways knowledge is produced. The authors' point of departure is how new technologies and practices shape the researcher's imagination, methods, and metaphors for illuminating social practices and how this plays out in the “wilderness of everyday life”. The article introduces a SWaSP framework, a “second wave of southern perspectives” and Ubuntu philosophy, which highlights the entanglement of persons, social

practice, and cultural tools and technologies. This framework supports analyses of the identity-positionings of the researcher as well as the people they follow in terms of the (non-)affordances of different settings and human beings' possibilities for engaging in social practices.

In “*Researching Young People’s Sexualized Digital Practices Involving Imagery: A Transmethodological Approach*”, Penille Rasmussen points toward the need to develop a transmethodological approach when doing research on complex and fluid phenomena like digitalized youth culture and related sexualized practices, such as sexting and sharing sexualized images with or without consent. Based on an analysis of the existing literature and a recent case from Denmark regarding a group of young people’s sexualized digital image-sharing practices, Rasmussen makes visible how this field is contentious and complex in terms of its research questions, approaches, terminology, and methodologies. Inspired by Karen Barad, Rasmussen suggests a transmethodological approach that takes the entanglement and instability of the digitalized practices into account. This entails a processual understanding of the field, which includes subjective, social, and technological phenomena, an openness towards ambiguous terminologies and conceptualizations, and the use of multiple explorative online and offline methods that draw on different disciplines and theoretical approaches. In the article, we see how transmethodology is linked to an actual need to develop transgressive and innovative approaches to a research field characterized by a volatility and complexity that is difficult to grasp within the boundaries of traditional monolithic research methods and theories.

In their article, “*From the Abstract to the Concrete and Beyond: The Winding Road of Constructing a Conceptual Framework*”, Liubov Vetoshkina and Sami Paavola engage the reader in the complex, long-term processes of constructing a conceptual framework. Using the method of ascending from the abstract to the concrete (AAC), they trace out how an

intermediate concept – in this case the intermediary object – is taken up and reconstructed in two different research projects: 1. The use of building information modelling (BIM) in collaborations between designers, architects, and engineers in construction projects; and 2. The craft of historical wooden boatbuilding in Russia and Finland. The authors introduce the concept of 'manuscript archaeology' to designate the analyses of a collection of relevant texts and documents that help illuminate how theoretical concepts are developed and linked to various elements in the research process. The article unfolds a transmethodological approach as both transgressive and as building bridges (integrating different theoretical frameworks). Furthermore, the article can be seen as an illustration of theoretical and methodological operationalizations, exploring research processes as multiple cycles of moving between different meanings of the abstract and the concrete over a long period of time. Thereby, the article demonstrates that methodological processes are more complex than just following a single cycle of concepts, data, analyses, and results.

Writing within the field of wellbeing studies in schools, Venka Simovska and Catriona O'Toole take on the task of transmethodologically analyzing the making and unmaking of a wellbeing survey by utilizing Foucauldian, Latourian and Deleuzian principles of analysis. In their article titled "*The Making of Wellbeing Measurement: A (Kind of) Study Protocol*" they suggest a move away from a (post-)positivist and objectivist framing of wellbeing as a static object of measurement that can be operationalized, towards a dynamic understanding of wellbeing, as well as the methodological approaches to study it by layering, rather than reducing complexity. The aim is to explore what a survey for measuring wellbeing *does*, rather than solely what it *is*, and hereby offer insight into how different human and non-human actors are involved in its making. The survey itself is explored as an actor capable of influencing the domain it seeks to measure in different and nuanced ways. Concepts such as apparatus, assemblage and actor-networks are utilized to understand and explore research on

wellbeing as dense, interconnected, and interdependent on the researcher's perspectives and understandings. In this endeavor, Simovska and O'Toole are especially inspired by Patti Lather and her insistence on working with the proliferation of paradigms, which reflects the authors' reading and understanding of what it means to work transmethodologically. Thus, the methodological approach the authors suggest, transgresses traditional barriers between epistemology and ontology and calls for onto-epistemological uncertainty.

In the article, "*What can we learn from a peer review?*" by Jesper Olesen, the black box of peer review processes is opened and examined with the aim of identifying interrelational connections between the manuscript, author, and other actors such as scientific standards. The article is based on an autobiographical study of a specific manuscript and the different review processes it undergoes. Olesen utilizes an actor-network theoretical framework to analyze how the process of becoming a peer reviewed article can be seen as a performative act between a multitude of actors. In this way, he offers a transmethodological take on processes of knowledge production that can expand our ways of conceptualizing authorship, knowledge and standards of scientific quality. Review processes cannot be understood as a single standardized and fixed practice. Rather the review process has to be seen as an interaction between author, manuscript and peer reviewer, which constitutes a socio-material network that gives the manuscript certain opportunities to become or not become an (accepted) article.

Monica Carlsson explores the "*Transformative expectations in research on environmental and sustainability education*" in her article and shows how transformative expectations are formative for this research field. Existing literature within environmental and sustainability education is analyzed in regard to three different categories: transformative teaching in higher education, systemic transformative change in higher education institutions, and the formation of transformative change agency in community settings. The different but

interlocking fields are defined by terms that highlight expectations of transformative movements in theory, research and practice, such as ‘rethinking’, ‘revitalizing’, ‘disrupting’, ‘reframing’ and ‘transgressing’. Within the field of environmental and sustainability research, methodology should thus not be seen as fixed and bound by established boundaries of research traditions and methodological frameworks. This points to a transmethodological approach that enables the exploration of the plurality of justifications for research and how these justifications are both linked to and transcend existing boundaries and definitions of research.

With this special issue, it is our aim to initiate discussions of transmethodology as a dynamic and diverse concept that helps make sense of and grasp the messy and non-procedural aspects of social research. As the title suggests, we intend transmethodology to be about creating spaces for transgressive and transformative inquiry. In this way, the special issue can in itself be viewed as a creative space for experimenting with and exchanging new thoughts and inventive ideas. We hope it can inspire an openness reflecting the messiness and idiosyncrasies of our research processes, and at the same time develop understandings, insights, and conceptualizations that contribute to research as a collective and common endeavor.

The special issue is planned as a running publication, and new articles will be added as they become ready for publication. That is why we have left some blank space in the end of this editorial, as we will add more text describing the new articles when they are published in the special issue. As such, the special issue can be seen as emergent and in the constant process of becoming.









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