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Half a century of mono-, multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinarity: A personal perspective

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It's more than 50 years since the start of my working life. Driven through undergraduate days in my chosen subject of wide-ranging but total mono-disciplinarity, which nonetheless introduced problem analysis *and* the achievement of creative solutions, applications since have been a series of experiential multi-disciplinary working. In more recent years, I have returned to my "parent mono-discipline", in part, in one particular aspect of my current trans-disciplinary work.

My focus here is on the more usual work experiences, putting aside, if I may, a brief but never to be forgotten multi-disciplinary (but *not* disciplining) experience of army Royal Engineers - and even the ultimate inter-disciplinary experience of "life-long" marriage to an art-psychotherapist.

Multi-disciplinary working with a large London architectural practice, with architects for landscape as well as for buildings, engineers for structure and utilities, and specialists for cost-measurement, was at that time an innovation. But satisfaction came from on-site experience of construction: movement and noise of activity; components coming together in series of pre-determined creative solutions to need; plethora and minutiae of significant detail; on-the-spot decision-making above, on and under the ground; and all the management issues. Then more, on a very much larger scale, in three different countries, each with different cultures, languages and values and always as part of different teams of multi-disciplinary colleagues.

Not half way through my multi-disciplinary half century, typhoon experience, whilst working with international engineers, turned me towards hazards and disasters, the turning itself a multi-disciplinary experience of officers of government, the UN and ngos. Then, in academia, mono-disciplinarity again ruled: "What has it got to do with architecture?". Mono-disciplinarity in multi-disciplinary research approached an equivalent of racial discrimination. Not until departure from my new-found work-place of universities, was the satisfaction of trans-disciplinary application in the field re-discovered and, of which, publication ensued.

How will the gap be closed between disciplines? Firstly, disciplines aren't only for learning but are ways of thinking. Inter-disciplinary working will be difficult where thinking is closed or without creative purpose. Within each chosen discipline, it's the inner disciplines of thought, as well as those of learning, communication and publication (with free access for all), that we need first to examine; only then will the mutual and shared values of inter-disciplinarity emerge, be understood and excite. Secondly, disciplines are not the prerogative of academia but of apprentices, artisans, craftspeople and professionals. True inter-disciplinarity requires easier access into, and genuine receptivity by, academia. The mono-disciplinary grounding that triggered my trans-disciplinary path, would have been impossible if universities had not at that time been free. Ultimate trans-disciplinarity is essentially a socio-political thing.

The objectivity is appealing of trans-disciplinarity as "how the different forms of knowledge...can be articulated together...to produce new knowledge and perspectives for problem solving" but, what is not, is the "implied hierarchy...with trans-disciplinarity at the pinnacle of endeavour." I would want to find a place for "trans-disciplinarity" as a *process*, for the movement of the individual between one discipline and another, from one application and from one solution to another, perhaps to disciplines and solutions not anticipated and never known to have existed. To my mind, that would be trans-disciplinarity. Perhaps only by such access and integration will governance of perceptive social concern be realised as the key to cessation of the making of vulnerability. That would be *trans*-disciplinarity, as in *trans*-national and *trans*-ocean – and yes overall, a *trans*-port of ultimate delight yet to come.