

Weird Research Manifesto

By way of context

On April 12, 2022, Jane Baker, Christine Daigle, David Fancy, Ada Jaarsma, and Véronique Rousseau—folks who engage in dissonant, “weird,” research methods—gathered in zoomified space to present their thoughts on weird research as part of the event “ ‘Weird Research’ or How to Think New Thoughts”, a symposium hosted by the Humanities Research Institute at Brock University. The short presentations by each participants (recording available [here](#)) were followed by breakout rooms in which attendees and participants exchanged on the questions: “What counts as weird?” “What does weird do that non-weird does not?” and “Why be weird or why weird research?” The explicit goal was to elicit ideations, questions, provocations, irritations, suggestions, and even contestations that would further fuel our thinking and lead to this manifesto.

Preparing the ground

The event was advertised with the following rationale driving its organization:

We live in a highly complex world with multiple crises and wicked problems. In a potential attempt to resolve them, some researchers make use of non-conforming, dissonant research methods and modes of dissemination that can have the result of generating new ways of thinking. This type of research may be deemed “weird” by colleagues or grant adjudication committees with normative methodological commitments because the so-called weird approaches do not neatly fit disciplinary boundaries. “Weird research” is often but not always transdisciplinary, but it is almost always irreverent in the face of disciplinary conventions, playing with different tools, methods, applying them in different contexts, experimenting with what might happen when one shakes up disciplinary expectations. To Donna Haraway’s claim that “It matters what thoughts think thoughts.” (*Staying With the Trouble*, 35), we add “It matters what methods generate thoughts.”

Caveat

We have not discussed, let alone settled, the question of whether a “Weird Research Manifesto” must itself be weird. Would weirding the manifesto compromise its manifesting and provocative power and impact? Would it be recognized as what it is?

MANIFESTO

1. Weird research is that work that uses methods and/or produces output that is defiant of disciplinary conventions and unapologetically explores alternative methods and tools.
2. One’s work may be labelled as “weird” by gatekeepers of disciplines and research methods because it does not fit known models of knowledge-production and legitimation.

3. Weird research is often, but not always, transdisciplinary. It often also is operating in the liminal spaces of research areas, tackling difficult, interrelated and potentially subversive questions and topics.
4. Queering may entail an intentional provocation, a troubling with purpose, that weirding does not.
5. Acting as comparative alternatives to conventional research methods and tools, the weird has subversive power because, in effect, it diagnoses and interrogates the assumptions and norms embedded within disciplinary conventions.
6. Calling out the weird, naming research as “weird”, may be a means to deflate its subversive power or at least an attempt at doing so by those provoked by it.
7. It may be the case that the “weird researcher” is more at ease with the possibility that one’s experimentation may not yield conventional outcomes.
8. There is a need for recognizing weird research that explores known terrain anew or new terrain, that puts methods on their head, that dare challenge the conventional discovery model.
9. Weird research is inclusive: it embraces conventional, non-conventional, challenging topics, methods, and outcomes that dare develop new modes of thinking.
10. Weird research is pluralistic: it acknowledges and affirms the co-existence of varying modes of inquiry. In this way, there’s a provisionality (even humility, perhaps) to weirdness as an ethos for conducting research: who knows what new weird methods will and should emerge?
11. Weird research does not seek to replace conventional research. It seeks to complement it through its experimental and less rigid approach to inquiry.
12. Weird may be context dependent: what is weird to one discipline may not be so to another. Therefore, inter- and transdisciplinarians are often deemed “weird” by disciplinarians.
13. “Dirt is matter out of place” as per Mary Douglas. Likewise, “weird research is research out of place,” research that displaces itself, its topic, its questions, its discipline(s) and explores what happens then.
14. Weird research is highly reflexive about its weirdness. Such strategic self-awareness provides the opportunity for foregrounded alienation from extant norms, as well as keeps weirdness agitated, unsettled, and ever evolving.
15. Weird research is just ... weird.