

**CLEA**

Center Leo Apostel for  
transdisciplinary research  
Vrije Universiteit Brussel



CLEA Seminar x Imaginary Institute

# ***The Atlas of Social Complexity: The Unfinished Space***

by Brian Castellani & Lasse Gerrits

FRIDAY 21 MARCH 2025

16h - CLEA house

Krijgskundestraat 33,

1160 Brussels + online

More info

[clea.research.vub.be](http://clea.research.vub.be)



# *Imaginary Institute*

[clea.research.vub.be/ii](http://clea.research.vub.be/ii)



---

# unfinished space

atlas of social complexity

Brian Castellani

&

Lasse Gerrits

# social complexity, reimagined

- 1990s: complexity-turn
- mid-2000s: growth and stagnation
- 2025: social complexity imagination
- how to rekindle imagination

BRIAN CASTELLANI  
LASSE GERRITS

**EE**  
Elgar

**THE ATLAS  
OF SOCIAL  
COMPLEXITY**



U'ed, ezene se Vellin keene se dinge van EENPIS

# Imaginary Institute x Atlas of Social Complexity

- publications, arts, interviews...
- collective concern: how to get out of the stalemate
- this seminar: discussing the need and utility of unfinished spaces



# unfinished spaces

- complexity sciences thrive in unfinished spaces, where the terrain of knowledge is always shifting, demanding curiosity rather than finality
- just as the world itself is never fully mapped, the study of social complexity must resist the impulse to settle into rigid conclusions



# art of incompleteness

- theorizing complexity necessitates an acceptance of incompleteness, an understanding that knowledge is not an endpoint but an evolving dialogue
- like a rough sketch or an unfinished symphony, incompleteness is what gives science its vitality, allowing for reinterpretation, expansion
- incompleteness is not a flaw but a feature—it compels us to remain engaged, to constantly refine our questions, and to remain open to unexpected insights.



# unease and discomfort

- meaningful engagement with complexity is to resist the comfort of closure, to sit with the unease of not having final answers
- scientific communities tend toward self-referential closure, yet it is precisely in resisting this impulse that true innovation emerges.
- discomfort is a generative force





# rhizomes of knowledge

- the study of social complexity must move away from hierarchical knowledge systems and instead foster an ecology of thought where disciplines intermingle freely.
- in a rhizomatic approach, the map is never final, the path is never singular, and new connections emerge unpredictably, shifting the terrain of understanding.



# permeability and pores

- intellectual progress is not about breaking down silos but about making them porous, ensuring that ideas flow freely between domains.
- academic disciplines must remain permeable to avoid stagnation and ensure cross-pollination of ideas.



# cultivating collaboration

- just as self-organization underlies complex systems, intellectual communities must foster environments where emergence can occur through collaboration.
- creativity does not arise in isolation but in spaces where diverse perspectives intersect
- the challenge is to design conditions where novelty can emerge unpredictably, disrupting conventional wisdom.



# becoming transdisciplinary

- transdisciplinary work is not borrowing from different fields but cultivating new modes of thinking that transcends disciplinary constraints.
- it requires an active engagement with the world, an ability to navigate between theory and practice, and a willingness to let go of familiar intellectual anchors.



# transform and reimagine

- no matter how good your work is, you will have to change
  - micro patterns
  - macro outcomes
  
- you will have to inspire *others* to change

