

Feminist Theory Theater: Acts of Reading as Embodied Pedagogy

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Abstract

To be added.

Keywords

theater; feminist STS; pedagogy; reading; embodiment

Introduction

I feel honored and grateful for the invitation from the editors of ESTS to comment upon Sharon Traweek's speech on receiving the Bernal award of 4S. I believe this award was a timely recognition of an important scholarly effort that has helped us in understanding how scientific cultures are intersected by transnational political economies as well as local articulations of gender, class and ethnicity, and of an impressive amount of academic service work to the benefit of the broader STS community. Sharon's article, based on her speech when receiving the Bernal award, is rich and stimulating. It offers important challenges to widespread scholarly approaches to the understanding of science and technology, drawing on her longstanding intellectual concerns. One of these is the regime of academic disciplines, which she sees not only as a conservative force that limits inquiry, but also as a machinery of power that bestows epistemic authority in ways that limits the making and exchange of knowledge.

This comment pursues these ideas by addressing some aspects of the epistemic politics of the dominant discipline-based regime of production of knowledge and the growing set of interdisciplinary practices. My concern is to understand these practices when the norm is membership in a discipline, which increasingly is challenged, and relating this to features of STS. How has STS navigated the issues of disciplines and interdisciplinarity and the related epistemic politics? As I will discuss below, there are

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paradoxical aspects of STS that may illuminate the doing of disciplines and interdisciplinarity but also serve as a resource to reflect upon STS as a knowledge formation and community.

Mainly, I share Sharon's critical views of disciplines and the making of epistemic authority and believe that STS scholars should reflect more frequently about how the regime of disciplines shapes the field's own practices: how it orders the making of, assessment of, and traffic in knowledge. What faultlines have provided spaces for STS to grow? Are academic disciplines policed to the same degree and how does academic policing influence STS? Arguably, STS scholars have tended to study science with an empirical focus on the particular; the problem area or the site that is researched, often focusing on a single laboratory. Consequently, disciplines have mainly appeared as backstage phenomena. Their role has often been conceptualized using cartographic metaphors concerned with boundaries and the traffic of knowledge taking place across them, analyzing how the mobility of knowledge is affected by the boundaries and asking about barriers, transformations, and related boundary practices.

This has resulted in a host of concepts widely employed in STS, such as boundary work, boundary objects, trading zones, boundary walking, boundary crossing, borderlands, etc. They provide an understanding of how disciplines are upheld but also about how they may be transgressed in pursuit of interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary making and flowing of knowledge. However, I see a need to discuss the performativity of such cartographic metaphors and their usefulness when we study how disciplines and interdisciplinary communities make knowledge and shape the flows of knowledge.

Are Academic Disciplines 'Silos'?

STS scholars do not unambiguously share a critical understanding of the disciplinary regime of knowledge making, which contrasts to the distinctly negative descriptions often articulated by research policy communities. They tend to see disciplines as unable to effectively address the complex problems that are facing today's societies; academic disciplines are even seen as barriers to such problem-solving. A recent OECD report argues the need for more what they call transdisciplinary research that integrates academics from several scientific fields with non-academic participants to co-create new knowledge (OECD 2020, p. 15). It invokes the metaphor of 'silos' to emphasize the problems with the specialized, fragmented and self-contained features of disciplines, which is seen to hinder much-needed combinations of knowledge across and beyond disciplinary boundaries (p. 29). The report claims that this inability to contribute to the integration of knowledges is due to currently dominant research practices, with their standards for collecting and managing data and their narrow evaluation criteria. Furthermore, it outlines a series of policy interventions to push for more integrative research, such as economic incentives and dedicated research programs.

Acknowledgements

Authors are listed alphabetically by last name, and all authors' contributions are equal.

Author Biography

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Calvert, J., & Rip, A. 2018 'Things can be done here that cannot so easily be done elsewhere': Jane Calvert talks with Arie Rip. *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*, 4, 183–201.

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