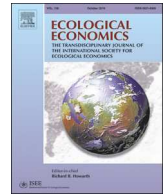




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Commentary

From academic to political rigour: Insights from the ‘Tarot’ of transgressive research

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ABSTRACT

The role of science and knowledge production is at a crossroads, as societal transformation calls for challenging dominant forms of knowledge production that have contributed to marginalizing other ways of knowing. This presents a challenge to mainstream science and invites a deeper reflection on our roles as scientists and exploration of alternative engaged, post-normal and activist approaches to research. This paper examines the diverse ways researchers are meeting this challenge. Employing the device of the Tarot deck we describe seven “characters” to illustrate the variety of roles and approaches that trans-disciplinary, transformative, transgressive and activist researchers are engaging in. These characters are used to introduce and develop the concept of political rigour as a means of expanded academic rigour in new emancipatory scientific paradigms. We demonstrate how these Tarot characters can be used as an activity for collective and personal reflexivity and propose ten principles that frequently emerge in a ‘political’ peer review process. We argue that the insights emerging from these strands of radical, critical, engaged and applied forms of scholarship, can significantly improve the understanding of what a “transformative knowledge paradigm” may look like in practice and how it can be mobilized for social change and environmental justice.

1. Introduction: the point is to change it

In the context of climate change, massive ecological destruction, and widespread social injustice, the world currently faces immense challenges (Future Earth, 2014). While terms like the ‘Anthropocene’ place responsibility for this socio-ecological disaster on humanity as a whole (Malm and Hornborg, 2014). Critical activists and academics alike increasingly call for us to turn attention to the structures and systems at the root of this crisis, recognizing that true transformation will depend on identifying and resisting the entrenched power interests that dominate our personal and professional landscapes (Temper et al., 2018) (Fig. 1).

Within this transformation, the role of science and knowledge production itself is at a crossroads, as societal transformation calls for challenging dominant forms of knowledge production and the established protocols and discourses that have contributed to marginalizing other ways of knowing (Klein, 2015). The critique and diagnosis of the current crisis in science (Saltelli and Funtowicz, 2017) has led to calls

for trans-disciplinarity, conceptions of post-normal science (Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1994) to deal with wicked problems that cannot be solved by purely scientific-rational approaches (Rittel and Webber, 1973), the rise of activist-led sciences such as degrowth (Weiss and Cattaneo, 2017) and environmental justice (Rodríguez-Labajos et al., 2019; Conde, 2014), and a discourse on the need for “transgression” of academic protocols.

Trans-disciplinary research, which integrates knowledge from various scientific and societal bodies of knowledge and includes participation of actors from outside of academia to create legitimacy and ownership, is increasingly seen as necessary for addressing and responding to sustainability challenges, and also for integrating questions of socio-political justice in research (Moser et al., 2013; Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015), and as such contributing towards a new scientific paradigm based on very different principles from those dominant today.

Other scholars are putting forward the notion of transgressive learning and science, which refers to boundary crossing and challenging oppressive normative structures, and is defined by Lotz-Sisitka et al.

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