

Matt Wisnioski and Sonja Schmid

Intro to STS *Social Text* editorial board and situated reviewer exercise

Dear editorial board:

We are writing to follow up on the “Transgressing the Boundaries” manuscript to share with you the external reviews and our judgment for how to proceed. As you recall, we believed that this manuscript had unique potential, but we also shared the same concerns that you raised about the lack of clarity in its philosophical arguments and the inaccessibility of its physics principles for a wider audience. For this reason we asked three prominent scholars with differing approaches to theories of social construction. Remarkably, all three agreed to provide reviews. As you will see, they recognized some of your hesitations but offered encouragement toward publication.

We have shared these reviews with you in the content management system. A brief summary is as follows. Steve Shapin is for publication, stating that it is indeed transgressive, “burst[ing] the bubble of who can claim the right to comment on / criticize science and how science should be done.” Fuller “highly recommends” publishing it, writing that it is “a legitimate foray in post-truth publishing, in that it seeks to rewrite the rules of the game in physics expertise; ... The radical nature of his claims—even their implausibility—is, I think, a reasonable price to pay for the greater epistemic democracy.” Finally, while Bruno Latour critiques the lack of “anthropological methods and broad sociological analysis,” he acknowledges that “the words of a physicist in a sociology journal will be weighed heavily.” He thus suggests that the author clarify his prior, quite critical, stance toward social constructionism and the Strong Programme.

Given these external reviews we are bullish on publication and plan to **accept with significant revisions**. The gulf of inaccessibility between humanists and scientific specialists you describe is exactly the promise of this manuscript, and the editors will work with the author to resolve the issues of jargon, specialized debates (e.g. the relative stability of meaning of “quantum gravity”), and disciplinary differences. We hope that these can be overcome because the paper has the potential to spark an important and necessary dialogue among STS scholars and practicing scientists. As Fuller suggests, “even if Sokal’s claims turn out to be wrong, even dramatically wrong, the appearance of egg on your face is the preferable price to pay over potentially saving face by not publishing it, all voices need to be given their fair chance to be heard. Such a broadened dialogue can begin to reduce the misunderstanding and hostility in recent debates about the nature of knowledge and how to study it.” With our assistance, a published example like this manuscript will be just such a productive start.

Thank you again for your dedicated service to a journal that seeks to publish the cutting-edge of interdisciplinary inquiry.

Sincerely,

Sonja and Matt