

FOREWORD II

This is a book built around case studies designed to show that the comparison of art and science is no simple task, because “art” and “science” are cultural resources, employed not to describe the boundary between them but to constitute it, and then to keep it constituted—or change it, or destroy it. “Art” and “science” are categories continually being reconstructed by “artists,” “scientists,” and others with interests in keeping their fields visible and well positioned. As a curator and exhibitor of art works with a leaning toward critical works and living female artists, Hannah Star Rogers has focused on the positioning of contemporary art; and her book has made me aware both of how little I know of it, and how much she knows of science, the main focus of my own work.

The book has also made me aware of Rogers’s ongoing effort to coax the “emerging field” of art-STS into existence, and I wish it well, mindful particularly of the relevant context. We currently live in interesting times, with the environment unstable, geopolitics unstable, and outbreaks of internal violence in several developed countries. In the United States and United Kingdom, a move to a Nationalism redolent of Fascism has occurred, and the right is intent on extending and consolidating its power. Its leaders recognize that constituting power is more important than agreeing what (else) to do with it. They deploy power as a generalized capacity to respond to events, but they constitute it by interacting

strongly in ever more organized and extended social networks, even as they preach individualism to others. Those minded to oppose them need to imitate them, in order to act collectively as they do. ASTS may be a move in the right direction.

My knowledge of the sciences allows me to make a more confident and better informed response to Rogers's general account of how art and science are collectively constructed. And lest it be thought that my own admiration for what gets done in science is bound to clash with Rogers's discussion of its similarity to the "non-rational" activities of art, I'll immediately make clear that this isn't the case at all. I am a critic of rationalism and admire natural scientists for their patience, not their "rationality." Rogers's case studies are replete with examples that both clarify the meaning of what she is saying and serve as evidence for it. Ignoring minor quibbles, in my judgment her general account is right, and her book should help a range of readers to accept it.

Rogers begins by pointing to Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* as a source of insight into science, and to Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* as an aid to an understanding of art. Both authors are well chosen for her purposes, but her citation of Becker is particularly apposite. He is widely recognized as a sociologist with an enduring interest in how people do things together, and unlike Kuhn has extended his work into many different contexts and encouraged its wider application. Famous for his studies of deviance, addiction, and music making, as well as art, Becker has also served as a resource and inspiration for studies of medicine, the sciences, and war, all fields wherein artists currently find employment.

Rogers is highly sensitive to the importance of power, whether as a source of support for artists, or of disappointment when they seek genuine respect from it, or as something intrinsically objectionable for them to react against and criticize. Becker, like Rogers, always studies power in specific contexts, but in describing how people who interact with each other can coordinate their actions and thereby do more together he also points the way to a more general understanding of it. Humans may enter the world with powers incarnate in muscles and vocal chords, but they quickly amplify those powers as they interact, share tasks, and fashion tools and artifacts to make them easier to carry out. Today power is vastly amplified in these ways in ever more coordinated societies with extensive

division of labor. Musicians, who affect each other from second to second as they sing or play, illustrate what coordination makes possible with wonderfully vivid exemplars; scientific researchers, who make knowledge together and continually convert it from product to resource, provide awesome exemplars of the same thing. In both cases power is amplified by coordination, based on the shared knowledge of a group of interacting human beings. Against this background, Rogers evokes a politics of knowledge wherein artists use art works as carriers of the knowledge they share, and scientists make use of particular exemplary achievements for the same purpose, with knowledges in both contexts changing even as they are routinely used. And her case studies illustrate admirably how the amplified powers latent in these changing knowledges can both increase the provision of collective goods within groups and intensify the conflicts between them.

There is still no general agreement that knowledge is collectively constructed, and the facile rhetoric of individualism still runs rampant in our culture, at the end of my own career as at the beginning. But much has changed over that time notwithstanding, including how people think of power and their relationship with it. Rogers notes how the power that artists currently relate to is largely financial: artists struggle for resources made available as sums of money. And the form of money is itself changing rapidly, as politicians require banks to create it electronically in unprecedented quantities. It is hard not to notice today that money is fiat money, valuable not because of what it is made of but because of how it is treated. Money is whatever has that status, and that status has to be constructed collectively just as all statuses are, including science and art and other institutionalized fields of activity. Rogers may always hope to convince, or confound, any who remain skeptical of her general argument by pointing to this ubiquitous and well-known exemplar of something collectively constructed, and continually being reconstructed.

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