

BOOK REVIEW

Fairchild, N., Taylor, C. A., Benozzo, A., Carey, N., Koro, M., & Elmenhorst, C. (2022). *Knowledge production in academic spaces. Disturbing conferences and composing events. Routledge.*

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In order to fully engage with this book, I considered the movement of Dadaism which provoked ways to think differently about art and literature. Dadaism focused on a deliberate move towards irrationality and negation of traditional ways of thinking. This move resonates with the book as it underlines the importance not only the aesthetic dimensions of the conference presentations but also the debates in conference spaces that took place at certain places and times and how these can be reimagined conceptually and practically. In this book the authors push against the transitional notice of the academic conference and found a way in which they can include their critique of the neoliberal approach to academia and an examination of the self and its place in society and culture.

In this unique book the authors debate the many aspects of (post)human / more-than-human / materialist / feminist materialist aspects of the Academic Conference Machine. In their ‘co-argument’ the authors address how the *traditional* can be resisted. The specificities of conference performances introduced in this book illuminate new, creative forms of knowledge production and its presentation. The events in the book provide provocations of what audiences are not normally accustomed to being engaged with, to hear or to see in conference panels.

The authors introduce different opportunities to understand and ‘play’ with ideas that have been used to develop ‘doing’ conferences differently. In this book the authors explore the ways to disrupt the suffocating dominant normative, mainstream and bureaucratic ways of knowledge production. They introduce streams of different and, in places, thought-provoking ideas of how to use unusual creative practices in academic conference spaces. While the authors claim that the book sits within posthuman, post-qualitative, more-than-human and feminist materialist theoretical perspective, I argue that the book fits to any theoretical approach within any academic field as it has a critical approach to the many facets of a neoliberal academic life. I shall call this approach post-critical as they force the reader to think beyond the obvious, linear and traditional and encourage thinking with concepts, theory and practice.

Promoting the power of ‘co-composing’ knowledge is another strength of the book. Co-production, co-reflection and co-creation have recently been seen as a renewed way of knowledge production and have been used as an innovative framework for many academics (see for example: Rycroft-Malone et al., 2016; Mikuska & Lyndon, 2021). The development of ‘collaborativeness’ as an

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approach in research or conference presentation has been seen as a way forward, disrupting the norm and giving space and empowerment to marginalised groups within interactive research with engaged scholars. Therefore, I consider that the shared ontological perspectives (of the authors) in different approaches to knowledge is not only produced but co-produced.

The concept of earthworm reflects this co-production in which knowledge is not only (co)produced, but it is an ongoing process that is multifaceted and that is dependent on the ‘soil structure’. In this respect, the earthworm becomes data in post-qualitative methodology as well as ‘dirt’ or ‘voices’ (schizoid narrative). In fact, in the ‘Tables, Or Not’ section the authors propose that everything can be data, where data or ‘things’ emerge as phenomenon only with their ‘entanglement with other materiality in space time mattering’ (Fairchild et al., 2022, 94). Here they suggest that space time mattering helps develop different ways to think about knowledge and conference spaces, for example considering deaf attendees to experience participation on their terms. This is a powerful message of inclusion and consideration of ethics, or ethics-onto-epistemologies how they call it. Another interesting point the authors make is that the original idea of Donna Haraway’s (2016) string figuring can *mutate*. For example, they explored and played and ‘strung threads and pulled strings’ (Fairchild et al., 2022, 125) and introduce the idea of ‘stringing the I’ in relation to the process of knowledge production.

The style of the book is such that the authors challenge the readers further by ‘forcing’ them to react to the idea of ‘thinking-with-dirt’ or ‘autopsy’ with both body and mind. By doing so, the effect of Cartesian dualisms is diminishing. At the same time, they are encouraging rhizomatic thinking which promotes a new form of educational activism. I argue that this is, or could be, one of the main arguments of feminist materialist / posthuman and more-than-human approach and this book provides examples of this activism in each of the events.

Finally, how can this book help, or can this book help us to mobilise other academics to disrupt the Academic Conference Machine? My answer is ‘YES’. Taylor et al. (2020) argue that immanent and relational methodologies offer new and different potentials for knowledge production. The book is inspirational and post-critical, it challenges traditional forms of conference doings that dominate academia and offers real insight into a new discourse of academic conference spaces that has emerged as a response to the rigor-tradition-neoliberal crises of our time.

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