

An Interdisciplinary Conversation – From the Lighthouse

Extract from: Strang, V., Edensor, T. and Puckering, J. (eds) 2018. *From the Lighthouse: interdisciplinary reflections on light*, London: Routledge.



The curiosity that impelled this volume was not merely about the topic itself but about the dynamic effects of interdisciplinary conversations where radically different kinds of expertise meet, often for the first time... Rather than replicating the neat sequence of chapters in conventional collections, therefore, the text roams freely across disciplinary terrains. There are multiple short excursions into specialised contributions, but the overall aim is not to traverse from A to B, but to circle the lighthouse to consider the advantages of a 360° view.

A hundred years ago, scholars strolled across different areas of knowledge without a qualm, borrowing whatever seemed useful to inform their thinking. But as disciplinary specialisms emerged it became more challenging to encompass the sheer wealth of information that they generated. The academic world became a more competitive professional arena, and specialist knowledges 'divided into (putatively) distinct and mutually incomprehensible areas' (McLeish and Strang, 2014). With the emergence of well-defended disciplinary territories, such relaxed trespassing was less welcome. And while the deep knowledge afforded by disciplinary specialism has been – and remains – hugely valuable, mutual exclusivity has tended to subsume the essential unity of a shared endeavour to seek and advance knowledge.

There are some advantages to this intellectual fission. Like cultural diversity, disciplinary specificity has created particular forms of knowledge that, when compared, can radically transform each other. This is the point of an interdisciplinary conversation: that interlocutors find their own thinking altered, as well as co-producing new ideas that would not have been arrived at independently. (Strang *et al* 2018: 2)