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EDITORIAL
SITES OF INTERVENTION: GETTING DOWN AND DIRTY

What is a conference for? We asked that question more than once when, as the Local Organizing Committee, we came together to plan for the 20th EASST conference that took place in July at Lancaster University. We met in a space away from the University campus where we imagined EASST 2018 as crafting, discussing and troubling ‘meetings’. This became our conference theme – a deliberately ambiguous and broad one. The theme captured our sense that often we see meetings as tedious, as encounters we would rather avoid than engage in. We wanted our European STS community to reimagine meetings, and to curate meetings of different kinds – between people, between things and people, between things and things, between those who identify as STS and those who don’t, and between different kinds of STS. We wanted EASST2018 to reclaim meetings as stimulating, productive interventions, which also take place in particular situations. We were acutely aware of the possibilities that meetings afford, given the long association of Lancaster with the Quaker movement, and given the tumultuous political times in which we find ourselves in Europe.

Reflecting on those four sunny July days in Lancaster, we think that we mostly succeeded in what we set out to do: around 950 delegates gathered in the sunshine and also in lecture theatres, seminar rooms, a grand Victorian hall, and a huge tent, for varied encounters. And, although it was the largest EASST conference to date, there was a relaxed and friendly atmosphere as delegates involved themselves in the academic, cultural and social programmes.

Two years ago, at the joint 4S/EASST conference in Barcelona, we heard about Politics by other Means. At Lancaster we found ourselves discussing the business of ‘getting down and dirty’. Throughout the conference we were to return, again and again, to questions of how we do research and politics in technoscientific imaginaries and materialisations of making and taking life. First, through reflection on 200 years since the publication of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, then with soil itself, then with the efforts to actively resist fracking, and finally in relation to STS itself: who are STS researchers prepared to meet? How comfortable are we with moving from critique to normativity? How far are we prepared to go?

Working to make a conference of this kind was sometimes hard, sometimes fun and threw up all sorts of unexpected issues. The Local Organizing Committee often employed concepts from STS to describe what we were doing: we were involved in a sociotechnical assemblage of people and things, or perhaps we were performing a sociotechnical imaginary, and we engaged in our own sociology of expectations as we wrote scripts for our future delegates, and sought to bring into being our desired future. At the same time, we anticipated futures full of risk and ruin and wondered how we could build resilience or take pre-emptive action to avoid the worst happening. In the end, we came to appreciate that what we were doing first and foremost was a form of taking care: this was about making something for, and together with, our STS communities.

Alongside the academic programme, we were fortunate to partner with our colleagues at the University to arrange lunchtime activities, visiting the EcoHub, the wind turbine, and the IsoLab in the Department of Physics. Each morning also started with Tai Chi in the Square outside the LICA Building where conference registration took place. The Friday night social event featured the indomitable Paddy Steer, the Groovecutters and a wonderful display of European STS dancing.
And, as is often the case now, the life of the conference is not only found in the face-to-face interactions and encounters, but also online. More than 800 people followed the official Twitter handle for the conference and contributed an impressive array of duck photos and commentary on papers and events throughout the conference. As STS scholars, perhaps we should have anticipated the important role the ducks would play in the life of the conference, but we hadn’t, and we here formally appreciate that their participation enhanced the relaxed and inclusive atmosphere.

Richard Tutton is Co-director of the Science and Technology Studies Unit (SATSU) in the Department of Sociology at the University of York. He works on the making and contesting of sociotechnical futures, with a particular interest in future visions of multi/planetary lives.

Vicky Singleton is Director of The Centre for Science Studies, Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, UK. She carries out ethnographic case studies, informed by a feminist material-semiotic approach, on care and the interdependency of policy and practices. She is currently researching the production of normativities-in-practices through the materiality and politics of care.
MEETING AFTERTHOUGHTS:
LANCASTER’S EASST CONFERENCE 2018
Cosmopolitical sensitivities in STS practice: How to continue a panel session after it is over?

Michaela Spencer

This piece reflects on the panel ‘Of Other Landscapes’ held at EASST Lancaster in 2018. Recognising the particularly warm, playful and yet serious atmosphere of academic exchange which emerged in this session, I raise the question of how do STS sensitivities travel? Are there ways that the particular spirit of this panel might be extended after it is over?

‘Where do worlds meet, and how? What count as good or bad meetings of worlds? And what are the implications of such meetings for analysis and politics?’ These were the questions that we posed in a panel jointly convened at EASST Lancaster by Endre Dányi and myself. The panel was called ‘Of Other Landscapes’ and we addressed these questions by focusing on ‘landscapes’ as both the objects of and the conditions for the meeting of worlds.

This panel topic was sparked by questions arising in our own research project called ‘Landscapes of Democracy’. Through this project (funded partly by the DAAD and Charles Darwin University), we’ve been able to travel between our current home places in Germany and northern Australia, learning about the places and material practices of democratic politics. Tracking back and forth, we have done ethnographic fieldwork in various parliamentary settings – such as the German Bundestag and the Northern Territory parliament in Darwin – and of situations where different ways of doing politics abut and abrade, for example, moments where government policy practices encounter Yolngu Aboriginal Australian practices of governance and law in northern Australia.

Within the panel session at EASST, there were many other experiences of ‘worlds meeting’ that researchers brought with them and elaborated in their presentations. Research ranged from issues arising in conflicts over land and resources in the Taranaki valley New Zealand to the lived past and present cityscapes of the AIDS crisis in New York, and the challenges of orchestrating experimental ethnographies of encounter on the island of Madeira in Portugal. However, what caught us pleasantly by surprise was the particular spirit of warmth, curiosity and generosity that seemed to pervade the room for the duration of the panel. This spirit seemed to emanate as much from the audience and their keen interest to listen and participate, as it was prompted by the presenters and their careful scholarship. It is of course very hard to capture elusive atmospheres like this on the page, but there are a few moments that stand out.

Displaying pictures of the Tunisian coast, Amade M’charek spoke to us about meeting Mohsen, a beachcomber and artist, who picks up fragments – shoes, water bottles, pieces of clothing – washed up on the beach near where he lives. This was the first time Amade had spoken about Mohsen and this stretch of coastline in front of an academic audience, and the stories were raw in their immediacy. In the audience, we felt a strong upwelling of emotions as Amade gently wove connections between bodies on the beach, rubbish piles in the sand, and memorial art pieces supporting acts of remembrance. We could see how for those lost on this coastline, the possibility of biography had run out; and yet, here before us and with us, other stories were persisting as we listened in gentle silence.
Soon after, Laura Watts invited us into electric worlds and imagined futures on Orkney Island. Here questions of translation and storytelling arose again, with the form and the style of the presentation pointing directly towards the insufficiency of (certain) academic words and texts. As the presentation drew to a close, the question for the audience was: how to respond? Sitting with the uncertainty of finding a way, Laura suggested that responses did not have to be in words, but could also take other forms. Without hesitation, Anna Mann, Laura’s sometime collaborator, put up her hand to ask a question. When it was her turn, Anna said nothing but quickly jumped up from the audience to give Laura a hug. ‘I’ll take that as a comment’ said Endre in his position as chair.

Then, towards the end Su Hu gave a presentation in which she showed us maps from a 1886 Chinese geographic publication, pointing out the multiplicities of a landscape arising in the mapping practices of Chinese cartographers. Responding to this material, Annemarie Mol posed a question which I think went something like this: ‘So while you have pointed to the Chinese maps as presenting geographies as multiple, surely both Chinese and Western maps embed both singularity and multiplicity. How do you account for this?’ Su paused for a second, and then unashamedly responded that ‘your question is too hard’. Laughing, we accepted that as an excellent answer. As did Annemarie, who encouragingly responded, ‘that’s OK, I’ll give you ten years,’ and by doing so helped to support a particular STS figure – one who does not have to be fully formed to be brilliant.

As STS scholars, we are interested in how ordering concepts and devices travel, what spatial relations they produce. Certainly, these stories and meditations emerged during this session at EASST, provoked by the panel topic ‘Of Other Landscapes’. However, the experience of being in the room for this lively and generous event seems to spark another question, namely how do STS sensitivities travel? Might there be ways to hang onto this this warm, playful and yet serious atmosphere of academic exchange, which appeared in such a welcome fashion on the final morning of the conference?

Having returned home to our respective places and academies, this remains a lively question for Endre and I, as we seek to continue on not just the academic program gestured to in this panel session, but the spirit of generosity and inquiry that it also seemed to provoke. For example, how might such a spirit be nurtured within an emerging STS Master’s program at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, as Endre continues to be involved in its development? Likewise, how might such sensitivities be nurtured within a new TopEndSTS group in Darwin, of which I am a part? Of course, the Landscapes of Democracy project will also continue on, and traffic will flow between Germany and Australia. However, through the experience of this panel, it has become clear that there are many more allies and contributors to this effort, and that it is through these links and connections, these supportive and collaborative efforts, that this STS sensitivity may continue to breathe and grow.

Michaela is a Post-Doctoral Fellow with the Northern Institute at Charles Darwin University in Australia. She is involved in ethnographic and policy-design research which draws on STS sensitivities, and frequently involves collaborative work with Indigenous Elders and knowledge authorities, as well as government and non-government organisations.

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*Note: I’d like to extend my gratitude and thanks to Endre Dányi for his contribution to this piece, and to all the panelists and audience members who joined us for ‘Of Other Landscapes’. We hope to see you again soon.
Decolonial and Intersectional Feminist Afterthoughts

Sophie Toupin

In this brief short article, I reflect on the relevance to think in decolonial and intersectional feminist ways in order to open up new investigations in the discipline of Science and Technology Studies (STS) and within STS conferences. I do this by highlighting the critiques of indigenous and Black feminist scholars about the discipline.

I start this brief conference afterthoughts with a point made by Malcolm Ashmore and Olga Restrepo Forero’s at EASST conference during their talk entitled: “Why Bogota? The local, the global, and the interesting. Or: STS, here and there”. In their presentation they spoke about the importance of place in Science and Technology Studies (STS). Part of their argument was to highlight a bias in the ways in which researchers needed to give reason(s) why they studying in or about a location seen as the ‘periphery’, while those studying a EuroAmerican topic/location rarely needed such justification.

The issue of place begs a number of additional questions: How does place affect perspective(s)? How does it impact a discipline such as STS? To which extent place influences who is listened to, who has the authority to speak and who is invited to a panel? How does place influence the conference experience? I am located in Canada where I live and where I am doing my PhD. Its current forms of activism and societal debates influence me greatly. I am particularly animated by critical voices and actions that are making cracks in past and present forms of colonialism and capitalism. Questions of decolonization, decoloniality and indigeneity are not only part of an analytical framework I am inspired by, but more so my praxis is more and more informed by such thoughts.
In the past couple of years, indigenous resurgence has marked and influenced those who have been willing to listen and to attempt a long process of decolonizing one’s minds. Even in university settings, academic activities are now starting to include land acknowledgment as part of a decolonizing process. After all, Canada, like many other countries, is a settler colonial country. Such acknowledgment reminds us that the land that we live on, that we benefit from in terms of its rich resources (oil, water, minerals) was stolen by French and British colonialism with the doctrine of *terra nullius*. This symbolic gesture of land acknowledgment within conferences is a small act in a wider and more complex process of decolonization.

I cannot talk about place without talking about situatedness or what Donna Haraway calls situated knowledges. According to Haraway (1988), all knowledge production is situated in social relations, all knowledges arise from a partial perspective, and all perspectives taken from subjugated positions provide the most “objective” accounts of the social worlds from which they emerge. In Canada, one of the most important situated knowledges is that of indigenous peoples. Without taking seriously their claims to sovereignty and for nation to nation relations genuine process decolonization will remain a metaphor (Tuck and Yang 2012).

Discussing the relationship between place and situatedness is relevant when one travels to a conference in a country with a different political heritage, decolonization process, activism, and current burning debates. I consider place and situatedness less as categories and more as relations embedded in larger geopolitical and economic processes to only name two. Notwithstanding, burning debate(s) in a discipline are often informed by place and situatedness and in turn influence ones thinking: the theoretical approaches that one is animated by and the types of voices one wants to listen to, among others.

In an attempt to initiate a process of decolonizing STS, the metis scholar Zoe Todd (2016) who teaches at Carleton University in Ottawa talks about the erasure of indigenous knowledges in STS. Her critique has wide ramification since she argues that knowledge production in STS still perpetuates colonialism today. In her article entitled “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take On The Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word For Colonialism” she pushes us to rethink how knowledge production functions and how this process is still connected to colonialism. She asks two interrelated questions. First, how can a decolonial approach ensure the acknowledgment of indigenous thinking in Euro-Western scholarship, activism, and socio-political discourse? The discourse on STS she argues has to be decolonized and ought to acknowledge the work of indigenous peoples in the turn to new materialism (in other words the human-non human relation) otherwise colonial relationships are replicated. The second question she asks is how can marginalize voices be heard in academia, including within conferences? Making room for such voices is essential for making STS a discipline that continues to evolve, change and be relevant.

Feminist Science and Technology Studies (FSTS) too is a framework that is called to change in exciting directions. New engagements of FSTS with intersectional analysis of gender and race, for instance, open up areas of investigation that have at times been overlooked. This framework for deepening an analysis of power and oppression across multiple axes and rooted in black and African feminist thoughts allow us to highlight the relationality or co-construction of the world we live in. In “Feminist Science and Technology Studies: A Patchwork of Moving Subjectivities” (Bauchspies and Puig de la Bellacasa 2009) Banu Subramaniam identified intersectionality as an understanding of gender which FSTS should engage with more deeply. Such engagement had already started with the writings of Patricia Hill Collins (1999) in her article “Moving Beyond Gender: Intersectionality and Scientific Knowledge”. In this article, she examined how feminist analysis of gender and scientific knowledge might benefit from closer ties with intersectionality. She identified two types of relationship that came to define this understanding of gender. First, the interconnectedness of ideas and social structures in which they occur, and second, the intersecting hierarchies of gender, race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity (1999). Collins argues that feminist criticism of scientific
knowledge gives little attention to the issue of race rather favoring the category of gender. She uses the term parallelism rather than intersecting to refer to the assumption whereby social categories such as gender and race are too often disconnected. Emphasising only the male/female dichotomy while forgetting all others weakens scholarly feminist analysis.

In her intersectional feminist technological work, Safia Noble (2018) shifts discourses away from liberatory possibilities of the internet toward more critical engagements with how the internet is a site of power and control over Black life. Her use of intersectionality allows to interconnecting ideas of power and control and the social structures in which they occur. Her work is important for feminist engagements in STS as it highlights the failure of the social construction of technology theorists to identify how these practices are co-constituted in racialized and gendered ways that involve power and often maintain systemic discrimination and oppression.

I close this reflection by stressing for continued engagements with critical and feminist science and technology studies among which are decolonial, postcolonial, anticolonial, intersectional feminist and indigenous perspectives. This engagement can also be reflected in the plenary panels and talks where an even greater place to diversity is made. Feminist science and technology were very well represented at EASST (such as meeting soil and meeting Frankenstein) it would be fantastic to make room for a greater diversity of voices and non-white speakers in the next EASST.

REFERENCES


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I write of the political urgency of connecting with political kin. My thoughts concern the necessary doing and undoing of social relations in order to perform more lively planetary politics, as everyday sociabilities in material worlds. I have escaped from the traditional academic institution, which I regard as unfit for this purpose. And yet, as I undo my relations with ‘proper’ scholarship, I must learn how to forge new relations with improper, political kin.

EASST was, conceivably, my last ever ‘proper’ academic gig (Panagia 2009), performed shortly before handing in a PhD thesis which takes the form of a suicide note to the neoliberal academy. Submitting the troubling thesis was the final act of killing off the remaining vestiges of a proper academic self. I had hacked the funding opportunities. I had demolished the brief: ‘innovation in the digital economy’ became ‘mending as a more than human, noncapitalist politics of matter’. I had stolen research time to plot my escape. I had exited the neoliberal force field and ended up in a fragile, unmarked dwelling in Cuba, where the critters and the weather can kill. I now live an improper, unscholarly afterlife, as the excess. An outside politics (Papadopoulos et al 2008) of matter is what my material labour aims to perform. My disciplined commitment is towards escapology from the dried-in habits and insensible assumptions of the deathly dominant regime. To do this, I experiment in making alternative modes of existence materialise through my everyday experience, through a process I term ‘ontoexperiment’ (Middleton 2018).

I have embraced indeterminacy, vulnerability, and risk as the new normal, but one of the less anticipated challenges, as I distance myself from proper sociabilities, is to connect with fellow improper kin. By this, I mean those who are also working on the messy construction sites where ‘alterontologies’ (Papadopoulos 2018) are finding form, those who conduct a politics of matter in material worlds, those who also refuse to perform the dominant logic through everyday experience, those who experiment with their lives. I am certain that my kin are many, but too often we keep quiet, we blend in. Our impropriety is so diverse, and so lacking in infrastructure (Berlant 2016) that it is notoriously hard for us to find each other (Halberstam 2013). How can those insistent on doing political work before and beyond research find and nurture each other, given that we may speak different academic idioms, and that the pressures to survive inside/outside the academic institution may hide or compromise our political intent?
The EASST gig went great. I abridged the suicide note in 14 minutes, 58 seconds flat. I was fresh in from Cuba and had short shrift for anyone and anything that stopped short of a concrete material response to the planetary emergency. My performance was deeply troubling (to) habits and assumptions, and yet, my audience made me feel welcome. They were ready to be discomforted, it seemed. Their affect embraced me. The parting slide was 'where are my kin?'; and the Q&A stuck firmly within the practicalities of the ‘what next?’ Thanks to comments by Laura Watts and Andy Yuille, I realise that in Cuba my kin are the extended web of ‘amistades’ (friendships); the neighbours who I have ‘nothing’ in common with, those who let my family sleep on their floor during a hurricane, those who give me their last egg to make a birthday cake when none are available for sale, those who come asking for a few leaves from my garden to cure an ailment. These kinship networks do the work that Google and Amazon do in the ‘broken sociality’ (Berlant 2016) of the Global North. These fleshy kin, who are not of my choosing, are the people in physical proximity who help, threaten, take advantage, share, teach, gossip, deceive, sacrifice and protect in the compromised and dis/comforting social ties of everyday life.

Then, quite separately, there are the kin that I can choose, the political kin I interpell in this piece, those I can perhaps tease into online entanglements, those with whom I crave energising, practical-focused conversations. But in the everyday struggles of material existence, these kin are likely to be too busy to sustain a conversation, too distant to populate a community, or too overwhelmed by the discomforts of enduring the risky sociabilities which that would entail. The sociabilities I really seek to join, to create and to nurture, then, are constituted through
fleshy-political kinships, among the political kin who, like me, dwell on the vulnerable plane of everyday alternative materialities, kin who dare to depend increasingly on one another, kin whose mutual dependencies can kill off the deathly sociabilities of neoliberal capital. Material politics can really kick off when physical and political kin become a material community, when political kin turn from reading Haraway and Barad, and get un/comfortable, intimate, risky, and dirty nailed.

Back in the unmarked house in the unmarked street, mine is as yet an insensible solo performance in an insensible world. It’s my political imperative to turn this into a collective endeavour, and besides, I’m desperate to find human kin to dance, to laugh, and drink tea. Coping alone was never an aim, but it’s a habit, and I am still undoing the givenness of self and self-sufficiency (Yusoff 2013). We need to become nonself-sufficient, however we might come to understand the term. My ‘affective infrastructure’ (Berlant 2016, 414) is negligible and my desire to ‘conven[e] a world conjointly (ibid, 395), remains in unresolved tension. To live in risk and vulnerability, breaking old ties as I go, requires building networks of new ties to fill the affective and infrastructural gap between the existing worlds we abandon and the alternative worlds we perform into existence. ‘The social relations we create every day prefigure the world to come, not just in a metaphorical sense, but also quite literally: they truly are the emergence of that other world embodied in the constant motion and interaction of bodies’ says Shukaitis (2009, 143).

PhD study has a toxic effect on everyday sociabilities, it polices the ability to sustain any form of healthy human relations, and to find time for anything other than itself. I’m emerging from the process with my kinship networks in tatters, and with the potential for activist scholarship collapsed. I have taken my doctoral commitment seriously because the thesis is for a politics of matter, not for a potential academic career. As a result, I have produced something approaching a proper thesis at risk to myself and loved ones, and in cruel isolation from the political kin it needs to translate to, learn from, and share with, in the hope that publishing my experience can help to generate political movement in material worlds. What happens next is a collective question. So I ask again, who, and where are my kin?

References


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Meeting Afterthoughts

TALKING ABOUT THEM WITH THEM? REPRESENTING OBJECTS-SUBJECTS IN STS CONFERENCES

Nadav Even Chorev

Attending EASST conferences in Torun, Barcelona and now Lancaster, I have gained a certain perspective on how subjects, matters and issues of discussion have evolved. The issues with which STS is engaged have become more varied, complex and numerous. This echoes the complexity and indeterminacy of challenges that figure in public life and discourse, on the backdrop of a changing political context. Changes in climate, environment, health and medicine, data, gender, governance, and regulation. All these, to name just a few, preoccupy STS scholars. As reality is in flux, this is brought forward to be discussed in EASST conferences. The Lancaster conference explored the conjoining of these various changes, as its lead theme of “Meetings” indicates. Yet, as reality multiplies (Mol, 2002), I could not escape the growing impression that discourse multiplies as well and that the gulf between the two, reality and discourse about it, widens.

Following some examples for the EASST Lancaster “Meetings” conference, I use this short paper to reflect on a few of my concerns regarding representation in STS conferences. I review here briefly examples regarding socio-material complexes implicated in the fields of health, medicine and environment as discussed in Lancaster. I suggest that as far as STS conference talks are concerned, a cue can be taken from STS’ own concern with different aspects of materiality, to transform the ways in which objects-subjects of research are represented verbally.

Fig. 1: Gothic ornaments at Lancaster Priory Church overseeing discourse at the EASST Meeting (photo: Nadav Even Chorev)
This can be viewed as a post-modernistic disconnection between the signifier and the signified. The concept of "fact", denoting real, hard, undeniable empirical evidence, has lately fallen out of grace. Only a year before the Lancaster meeting, post-truth was debated over the pages of Social Studies of Science (2017). It is not my intention here to decide whether discussions in Lancaster represented an epistemological democratization or retreat from the world. The great majority of presentations and papers that I have had the opportunity to hear were focused on pressing problems that concern people everywhere. However, I wish to use this opportunity to make sense of my concern that the way issues are talked about, is detached from issues themselves. This concern stems in part from my own engagement with an environmental health phenomenon that is associated with long-term adverse problems. The basis for this is an approach that examines effects originating from real-world scenarios. Interestingly, this comes from medicine's own recognition that science does not exist in a void (Sherman et al., 2016). This understanding has affinity with STS reformatory, engaged, underlying aspirations (Sismondo, 2008).

I will illustrate what I mean with a few examples from talks I have listened to, or the one I gave in the panel I co-chaired (C26). This last one focused on the state of STS research into the field of precision medicine. Remarkably, in my view, the panel consisted of three full sessions with some members of the audience holding through all of them. Some of the papers clearly addressed problems in precision medicine that have direct implications for practitioners, medical technologies and the sometimes subjugating practices by which these are administered. Above all, the problems discussed impinged directly on patients, their experiences and pre-discursive suffering. Those papers that dealt with patients, but also with clinicians and scientists, including my own, brought quotes and excerpts from interviews and direct observation. Can this type of bringing the voices from the field be turned into actual participation of informants, artifacts and so on? Will such participation distort an STS theoretical approach of some kind or the explanation of knowledge production practices or make them less symmetrical? After all, some of the STS stories told (Law and Singleton, 2000) entailed practices of exclusion (for example, of ethnic groups from Nordic biobanks, or in possibilities to access population-wide genomic studies) or coercion (e.g. in the use of a new respiratory diagnostic technology in the UK). The need to explain and generalize from the idiosyncratic practices on the ground is clear, but can a more direct way of mediating be found (Geertz, 1988)?

The next two examples pose a more complex case in light of these questions. They deal with two distinct perspectives on issues of environmental contamination and how to act on it. One concerns the plenary titled "Meeting Soil", the other, a panel on toxicity (A29). In the plenary, two ecofeminists spoke about engagement with soil itself through micro-practices of permaculture. Both speakers, one activist, the other STS scholar, explored the possibilities of pushing beyond legitimate scientific knowledge on soil by recognizing its sacred and affective qualities. One departed from a binary historical narrative to describe this, the other used ‘STS dialect’. Common to both was the grounding, so to speak, and belief in small-scale, grassroots activities and their capacity to instigate environmental improvement. In contrast to the benign tone of the plenary discussion, under the same sun, on the same planet, other man-made environmental harms are taking place, as reflected by papers in panel A29. We are not only constantly exposed to a myriad of chemicals. Exposure relates to multiple social and political practices, from the most mundane to the most powerful expressions of late-modern capitalism. In a sense, toxic chemicals, as understood in this panel too, are a kind of material-semiotic complex: a matter inextricably connected with discourse. Like soil, the challenge is to make the all-encompassing presence of chemicals visible, turning our gaze so as to enable action. As some of the papers have shown, even in the field of chemical exposure, bottom-up actions are possible. Both soil-emanating permaculture and chemical-countering activities are strategies for dealing with imminent environmental threats. What is the difference between regaining the
visibility of soil and that of chemicals? Perhaps it is in the metaphorical part of the material-semiotic complex, where soil may be sacred, but health effects of chemicals represent the consequences of a disenchanted world. What kind of political action is required to act on these two different facets of the environmental whole? Grassroot action if possible in both field. Yet, action on the scale of ‘humble’ or ‘invisible minor stories’ can be regarded as a weapon of the weak, while what is necessary is concerted political action on a different scale.

What can be done to address the absence of what is talked about in STS conferences such as that in Lancaster? How to reach for a representation in which the pre-discursive quality (Butler, 1990: 7) of material phenomena can show more directly through metaphorical, ‘material-semiotic’ complexes? How can this pre-discursive quality be articulated while still recounting material agency and performativity (Marres, 2012)? Picking up on the theme of “Meetings”, a preliminary direction could be to ‘meet’ the object-subject of discourse at occasions of discourse themselves, such as conference talks. Instead of “talking about them without them”, create frameworks in which patients, activists, soils, chemical, diagnostic artifacts and abstract data, can play out their own role in presentations. Let object-subjects, be they human or non-human, speak for themselves in a kind of performance styled on citizen science, to allow for symmetry not only in the evaluation of knowledge, but also in its STS conference representation.

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For many years now, STS has focused on how different socio-technical matters and worlds are enacted and for whom. In many ways, those questions are turning back to STS scholars themselves. For whom are STS theories and objects of knowledge enacted? One of the questions opened at the plenary Meeting Machines was a question of “applied STS”; similar questions were raised in the panel on multidisciplinarity (what is interdisciplinarity in practice?) and methodography (what is co-laboration in practice?). Connecting these three questions might be useful while thinking about STS and innovations.

Innovation is not necessarily about producing something new, but it also can be about re-thinking and re-making something already existing. According to Craig Calhoun, innovation is mostly “not only coming up with a new idea but continuously improving existing ideas” (Calhoun 2009). To improve existing ideas, it is necessary to co-laborate with those we study, i.e. to mutually involve ourselves with the object of study (e.g. Niewöhner 2016). Co-laborations are nothing new but often rather hidden or silenced. I suggest to keep re-thinking innovations and co-laborations; not only to give voice to those we study, but also focus on our (academic) role in the processes of innovations. Re-thinking the mode of engaging with the object of study can make us be part of, or influence, the socio-technical innovations being studied. Thus, one of the crucial questions of innovations within (social) sciences should be how to co-laborate and engage with our “subjects of study” more and better.

One might wonder why should we co-laborate even better? As one of the scholars noted during a discussion on the question of innovation, we failed in something. Maybe in explaining. What we do is discussing together how the world works and what who performs, but we fail in communication with people outside academia.” – „So what should we do?” asked someone else. Should we engage differently? Or innovate more?

I suggest, we should innovate on our engagements and co-laborations with the world outside academia. For example, Science is entangled with many other worldings: politics, but also values, cultures, and non-human agencies. At least within the STS epistemic mode, we agree on that. Yet, do we share this, quite innovative, quite revolutionary thought with either specific communities, or even the general public? Is it even possible? How should we innovate our relations with non-academics?
Meeting Afterthoughts

There are no magic answers (certainly not in this short piece of a text). However, if we understood engagement, innovation and knowledge not as final products but as processes, it will make us reflect above asked questions every time, not once but repeatedly, continuously. As much as our co-laborators whose world we study are shaping our research and our findings, we as social researchers are shaping their worlds and their understandings. As social science researchers, we already are part of our „fields“. We do engage in some, more or less explicit, more or less reflected and analyzed, ways. We co-create worlds (or world-ings) we study and shape them back. There are certainly many forms of engagement: sharing and support, teaching and public education, social critique, co-laboration, collaboration, advocacy, activism, to name some of them. Some scholars notice that while doing research, we (at least as ethnographers) tend not to co-laborate with those we do not like. That must have consequences on the disciplines, on the fields of study, and on the relations with others: politicians, economists, broader public. This makes the first point in innovation of the relations between academics and non-academics: to open ourselves to those worlds we marginalize for our lack of sympathy.

The second point should be to think through our communication strategy with non-academics. It took decades after Claude Lorius raised what is now considered to be the first scientific concern about climate change, for the general public, politics, economists, and others to somewhat incorporate it into their ontologies and epistemologies. We should try to learn from this and push the right buttons faster this time. If we want to be part of innovations, not only do we need to accept other reflexivities, but we also need to care about relationships, and to the use of knowledge depending on those relationships – not only before and during the process of research, but especially after the research is done.

We need to find out what is important, how the knowledge is used in practice and whether those we are aiming for and relate to, pick up on what we are saying. To do so, it is not only important to have a thought-through communication strategy (Calhoun 2009). We also need to keep analyzing our own world, our own processes we are living in, and co-laborate with others, including non-academics, on it. Even without magic answers, if we want to innovate, we need to reflect on how to do it, how it has been done by now and what are the limits.

I call for more openness. Let´s open the tower of academia. Let´s take the time and energy to write to the daily newspaper, comment on what is happening – credit academics and junior researchers for their writings, and public events outside academia. Let’s collectively, and openly, talk about changes needed both within and outside academia. Let’s co-laborate with those we do not like (Niewöhner 2016). Let’s institutionalize applied STS. Let’s be creative in methods. And let’s collectively reflect on what we are doing, not only as academics but as part of the broad public. At the end, we will not be alone, in the thinking and doing.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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I approached this year’s EASST conference with a heightened sense of anticipation and excitement. After all, it is my favourite scholarly encounter, akin to a colourful STS pride parade, and it never fails to provide a strong sense of community and belonging amidst fruitful academic exchanges. That was certainly my experience in the previous EASST conference, and even more so because it took place in my home country, Catalonia, and in a city that is very close to my heart, Barcelona. This year was not so different, as the UK has been my adoptive home country for the past fourteen years and the legacy of the Lancaster Centre for Science Studies looms large in my way of doing and thinking with STS. The conference was also my last stop in the UK, I was about to leave behind my PhD years in Edinburgh and start my new life in Sweden, ready to join my next STS academic home at Linköping university as a postdoc.

At Lancaster’s bus station I was greeted by a group of bus drivers that kindly indicated how to make it to the conference venue; transport has been arranged, nothing to worry about. Yet, and due to a particular tendency to publicly display my practical incompetence, I still managed to head to the wrong bus. The group of drivers called out my attention and teasingly pointed out ‘you should know, you are supposed to be clever going to conferences and talking about books!’. Their observation made me laugh and got me thinking on how something so taken for granted in our academic lives such as attending conferences can be perceived by non-academic others. Are we all just a bunch of intellectuals spending public money on book club retreats? What’s the point of conferences after all? What do we get out of these choreographed gatherings? In what follows I will provide my personal answer in three parts: perplexing, experimental and affective meetings.

PERPLEXING, EXPERIMENTAL AND AFFECTIVE MEETINGS AT LANCASTER CONFERENCE

Sara Bea

Fig. 1: More than book clubbing?
**Perplexing meetings**

The ‘meeting soil’ plenary that brought together Starhawk with Maria Puig de la Bellacasa provided a privileged glimpse into an ongoing conversation between two seemingly disparate authors. It was a generous and unconventional move to open up a conference with a non-STS, non-academic figure in dialogue with a well-known feminist STS scholar. A testimony of STS’ capacity to embrace the other without appropriating it neither adapting it and translating it to its own academic language. Meeting in the difference and celebrating the interference. The point of departure was Maria’s transformational encounter with soils whilst taking part in Starhawk’s Earth Activist Training, thus, the meeting rendered the scholar as apprentice and the activist as intellectual. The dialogue run smooth albeit in an asymmetrical manner, it ploughed through the abundant common ground between feminist STS and activism for ecological justice but it did so by privileging Starhawk’s notion of ‘the sacred’. My curiosity was sparked and my attention tuned in as I struggled with the discomfort brought about by the language of spirituality and feminist essentialism. Such feelings of perplexity are rare and greatly generative, a sense of disquiet always invites to rephrase the questions at stake and to dig into one’s entrenched dualisms to test their obduracy. For in Starhawk’s ecofeminism the spiritual and the political are thoroughly entangled and underpin her ‘Goddess religion’ that in turn also embraces science as part of the solution. Even though my initial reaction was to question what the notion of the sacred could be adding to soil activism, I decided to ‘stay with the trouble’ and embrace the odd as I went along their joint articulation of Earth remediating practices. It was indeed inspiring to see how their assemblage of small stories on bioremediation methods and transformative human-soil relations promoted alternative, affective and ethical ways of being in the world. I was struck by the message that we are all creatures of the soil - humans, animals, worms and bacteria alike - living in and off the soil whilst also being the soil. The ethical and political consequences that follow from this assertion are manifold and have become intrinsic to permaculture initiatives part of a growing culture of regeneration, remediation and repair that seems to be imbued with a stubborn and brazen sense of hope. Maria’s and Starhawk dialogue resonated with Haraway’s, Stengers’ and Tsing’s artful contestations to apocalyptic visions of Earth’s demise. It is their collaborative thinking and doing that generously provides a novel sense of hope and places the work of activism both outside and within academia in a uniquely interdisciplinary and political manner. The conversation also helped to confer a heightened sense of political responsibility to our knowledge-and-world-making practices; it defined STS’ intervention as mediators that work at the intersection of disparate domains and bring them into conversation. STS scholars were called upon as (re)mediators by intervening and interfering in environmental practices and politics. It was certainly worth staying open to an unexpected conversation that acutely brought into high relief STS’s capacity to claim that ‘it could be otherwise’. I personally left the plenary room with a strong sense that after all we might already be living in hopeful times.

**Experimental meetings**

EASST has been for me a forum in which I feel allowed to be experimental, to try out new ideas and tentative approaches and offer them for collective discussion. Whilst preparing my paper for Lancaster I felt the usual frustration of struggling to capture with a succinct presentation a whole article, let alone my entire doctoral project. The ethos of Lancaster encouraged me to change gears and instead I opted for providing a thought-provoking and entertaining performance. After a few years conferring in different sites and formats I have acquired a strong allergic reaction to conferences that feature a painful succession of soliloquies directed to a distant audience that merely comes back to life to clap. I am thankful that this was not the case at EASST and that the hard work of the organising team at Lancaster transpired in the many panels that successfully delivered (more) meaningful academic encounters. It was a matter
of turning up the experimental and transforming monologues into fruitful dialogues. These experimental meetings offered excellent academic value whilst retaining a sense of fun and consideration to each other because ultimately, we are each other’s audience.

AFFECTIVE MEETINGS

The social event at Lancaster conference provided the felicitous conditions for building STS community by night: drinks, food and music. I relish these fleeting festive moments at EASST conferences, where else can you catch up with so many friends, colleagues and turn familiar names into lovely people to meet and chat? Before, during and after dinner we shared a disposition to engage with each other and to nurture our affective meetings that are also essential in our academic relations and productions. STS might not be a well-defined discipline and it might remain a heterogenous field that barely hangs together. However, when we were partying at Lancaster we enacted a sense of collective that hangs (out) together pretty neatly.

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1 I am grateful to Joan Haran for providing a clarifying conversation after the plenary and later sharing her working paper ‘Bound in the spiral dance: Haraway, Starhawk and writing lives in feminist community’.
Meeting Afterthoughts

WHAT DOES INFRASTRUCTURING LOOK LIKE IN STS?
WHEN? WORKSHOP REPORT

Karen S. Baker, Andrea Botero, Hanne Cecilie Geirbo, Helena Karasti, Sanna Marttila, Elena Parmiggiani, Joanna Saad-Sulonen

The workshop was organized at the EASST 2018 Conference to take stock of empirical insights and conceptual developments around the notion of infrastructuring in STS. We report on the collective process that aimed to critically map and disentangle assumptions, identify blind spots, and chart the varied uses of the notion in STS. By using a hands-on approach inspired by Participatory Design, the workshop contributes to the quest for new ways of thinking and inventing, in addition to proposing formats where collective conceptual experimentation could take place in cross-disciplinary settings.

During the EASST 2018 conference, we organized an experimental workshop with the title Infrastructuring in STS: What does infrastructuring look like? When does it look like that? The aim of the workshop was to stir discussion and reflection on the notion of infrastructuring in STS. The first instances of the use of the term infrastructure as a verb is found in Star and Bowker’s work (Star and Bowker 2002). Since then, it has gained traction in the STS field as can be testified by the close to 100 references we collected as part of the preparations for the workshop. The use of the gerund ‘infrastructuring’ is an analytical measure that shifts attention from structure to process, which has proven to be also appealing to many different research communities, including many design fields (Karasti 2014, Karasti & Blomberg 2018). Widely travelling concepts can be enriched by being influenced by different traditions in the research communities that adopt them. However, as acknowledged in the workshop, enthusiastic use and widespread adoption may also dilute the analytic purchase of this concept if connections between the different understandings of the concept are not maintained. In the workshop, some participants suggested the notion has become inflated, whereas others continued to see its value as the first wave of enthusiasm (with expected easy profits) passes.

We were interested in exploring and opening up the concept in a convivial way, with the daring idea of doing so using a hands-on approach. The possibility offered by EASST 2018 Conference to organise workshops triggered us to take inspiration from Participatory Design (Simonsen and Robertson 2013) with its focus on building together and using material artefacts as a way of thinking and drawing together through actual doing together (Latour 2008). As Noortje Marres elegantly put it in her closing keynote at the 2018 Participatory Design Conference, participatory design allows for “curating deliberate artifactual occasions as ways to reach to issues of entanglements” (Marres 2018). In the workshop, our understanding of entanglement was a conceptual one: what and when is infrastructuring?

We asked the workshop participants to bring an artefact to the workshop: an object, image, or drawing that would help them talk about “What does infrastructuring look like? When does it look like that?” The artefact would relate to the infrastructuring theme they would want to open up during the workshop. Participants assembled into groups of 5-6, each at a table accompanied by one of the organisers. The first session started with participants presenting their object
(Fig. 1) and placing it on the table, then introducing the themes and questions they wanted to address. In the second part of the workshop, the participants formed new groups and continued with the previous objects already on the tables, starting to draw connections between them or reflecting on themes they had previously brought up by using a range of materials provided, such as post-it notes, toothpicks, straws, stickers and tape (Fig. 2). At the end of this session, each group presented their work to all the participants.

The feedback we received from this workshop was generally positive but also provided some constructive criticism. Participants appreciated the opportunity to have a facilitated critical discussion with peers interested in the same topic. However, some participants found it difficult to engage, think and communicate with the provided workshop materials. In addition, several participants expressed a wish to continue working with the same group throughout the workshop. In retrospect, rearranging the groups did not necessarily work well for the participants. Our idea had been that the afternoon groups would be able to build on reflections that were developed in the morning groups, but it seems we had not sufficiently taken into consideration the extent to which these reflections would be rooted in the dynamics of the specific groups.

To be able to revisit the discussions that occurred at the workshop after the event, we decided to ask for permission from participants to record the discussions at each table. Some participants questioned this choice. They argued that a workshop is something that takes place here and now and is not meant to endure outside the room and the moment. This critique addresses the intent of the workshop. Should the workshop aim to produce an outcome that could travel out of the room, or should the outcome rather be understood as residing within the participants? If the former is the case, are there other ways of preserving the discussions for later contemplation rather than by recording them? Can the material outcomes of the workshop serve this purpose, and in that case how? These are among the issues we will consider when arranging future workshops.
In working with the artefacts that participants had brought and materials provided by the organisers, many different understandings and uses of the notion ‘infrastructuring’ were compared and questioned. One of the participants noted in the feedback form that: “I was surprised that the notion of ‘infrastructuring’ has different meanings in different disciplines and practices”. Some participants were primarily attracted to the notion because of what it can add to the analysis of the empirical, such as a heightened sensitivity to process, practice, and relations. Others emphasised how ‘infrastructuring’ is situated in an ontological discussion so they were primarily interested in whether and how it constitutes a productive contribution to driving this discussion further. The process of understanding how the other participants at the table understood and used ‘infrastructuring’ analytically thus not only contributed to reflection about the concept as such, but also to broader reflections about interdisciplinary differences, similarities and entanglements between STS and disciplines that overlap or share a border with STS, such as Design, Anthropology and Information Systems.

With this workshop we brought to an STS context some practices from Participatory Design where materials, people and ideas are mobilized in collaboration. In the first session, this entailed using participants’ artefacts to talk about the notion of infrastructuring. In the second session, this entailed using different materials, such as modeling clay, straws and thread to explore connections between the objects and themes and to engage in mutual and constructive reflection about infrastructuring. Several participants expressed that talking through artefacts they had brought with them was helpful for the discussion because the objects or drawings concretized the themes that were addressed. The second session, which invited simultaneous reflecting and making, was viewed more challenging. For those who are not used to working with materials for reflection and reasoning, simultaneous thinking and making can initially be experienced as multitasking or sidetracking and thus divert one’s full attention from either.
Entering a stage where making is seamlessly integrated with the thinking, may, however, serve to advance reflection. More guidance could perhaps support the transition from talking about artefacts to working with materials. This might take the form of explicit instructions to help overcome hesitancy in the encounter with an unfamiliar process. It could also include the gradual introduction of materials, so that the participants become familiarized with one material before having to deal with another. At the workshop in EASST2018 Conference we did, however, find that the different groups eventually warmed up to the task of thinking and communicating through making (Picture 3).

Using collaborative making and building to support abstract reflection seems like a promising direction for joint work on conceptual development. In a few cases we saw how the use of the materials reinforced “performative” aspects of the argument that a participant wanted to make. One example that occurred in several groups is how certain points were stressed by building a connection between concepts or infrastructure elements using bits of modelling clay or toothpicks and pieces of tread, and then smashing them up or cutting the connections while talking. While making is not the only strategy to achieve these types of connections, it is certainly one that could be used more. At a time when social sciences are starting to express interest in building new collaborative relationships with Participatory Design (Marres 2018), we support the quest for new ways of thinking, inventing and sensing collectively, hoping to further develop formats where such experimentation can take place, particularly in cross-disciplinary settings. Using a hands-on approach by working with artefacts appears to be a promising avenue to explore.

Fig. 3: Detail from one group’s board featuring a person - modelled in clay - standing in relation to infrastructures as living and lived - labelled by post-it notes. (Photo: Sanna Marttila CC BY 4.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)
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Authors’ selfie while having breakfast at EASST2018 conference (from left to right: Elena, Hanne Cecilie, Helena, Sanna, Joanna and Andrea - Karen is missing from the image). (Photo: Andrea Botero, CC BY 4.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)
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ENCOUNTER, CREATE AND EAT THE WORLD: A MEAL

Michael Guggenheim, Laura Cuch

How can we do STS not about but with food? How can we make the concerns of STS edible? In the workshop Encounter, create and eat the world: a meal at EASST Lancaster we did STS by collectively preparing a lunch. This involved conducting a series of exercises, experiments and tests with ingredients, their relationship to us and the world, and how to prepare them. In preparation for the workshop, we asked all pre-registered participants to:

- Bring two ingredients amounting to 500 g in total (at least one of the ingredients had to be vegan). Such ingredients might be anything that can be eaten without being further cooked.
- Prepare four identical cards for each ingredient with a story about the ingredient inspired by STS.
- Bring their own choice of dinnerware and utensils to eat the food with. This could be anything they liked from the most usual (plate and fork) to the most unusual (some found plastic from the street), as long as ready and clean. They also needed to prepare a two-minute story that they could tell about the sociological, technological and environmental background of these tools.
- Bring one mechanical kitchen tool of their choice (grater, sieve, hammer, peeler, garlic press, whisk...).

Once in the workshop, people sat on tables in groups of five people. The first activity was to pass your eating utensils to the person on your right and tell them the prepared story. Then, each person had to chose a portion of an ingredient from...
each of the other four people in the table. As a result, each person had six ingredients in total. All the packaging and food waste was put to the side before starting the tasting exercises sequence, as follows:

1. Blind tasting: Close your eyes. Then ask your neighbour to feed you a random ingredient. Write down your thoughts.

2. Bengt af Klintberg, “Event score Nr. 8” (Klintberg is a Swedish Anthropologist and Fluxus artist. The event scores are written instructions for actions): Eat an X (orange) as if it were a Y (apple).

Event score versions:
3. Eat an ingredient ‘as a mouse or any other animal (it should be an animal that actually eats this food)’.
4. Eat an ingredient as if it were completely artificial and had no nutritional value.
5. Eat an ingredient as if it had been blessed by the divine.
6. Eat an ingredient as if you suspect it may be contaminated by an infectious parasite.

People were asked to read each corresponding ingredient card after the first three tastings and before the last three and an A3 sheet was provided to write down observations throughout the workshop.

After the tasting sequence, participants had to build a dish taking into account at least two of the following concepts: Gender, Ecology, Politics, Health, Human non-humans, Technology, Religion.

For this purpose, participants were able to choose two herbs or spices to include in the dish. These came from ‘Spiritual Flavours Spice Lab’, which is part of Laura Cuch’s research on food and spirituality (www.spiritualflavours.com). Participants also had to incorporate one element from the waste pile, either as a new utensil or a new ingredient.
Finally, people were invited to:

- Explain how the eating utensils informed/shaped/contrasted with their dish.
- Define a consumption situation that problematised or contradicted the dish logic.
- Make a drawing of the dish.
- Share their dish with the person to their right, whilst telling the story behind it.

Bon appétit!

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Laura Cuch (www.lauracuch.com) is a documentary and fine art photographer, filmmaker and a practice-led doctoral researcher in the geography department at UCL where she’s investigating the relationship between food, faith and everyday material practices of different faith communities in the suburbs West London (www.spiritualflavours.com). Her research interests include the visualisation of urban geographies, as well as the interrelations between photography, health, the body and processes of subjectivity. Laura Cuch also teaches photography at Goldsmiths, University of London.
“STICKY BUSINESS” INSPIRES: ENACTING ETHICS BY ADDING SYRUP TO LABORATORY LIFE

Mareike Smolka

The EASST2018 Conference inspired afterthoughts on concepts and tools that could be useful to enact ethics in my ethnographic research in a neuroscience laboratory. In her talk on normativities in STS research, Sara Bea calls for developing vocabulary that allows for moving beyond a polarity between good and bad to capture how the two are entangled. The presentation on “Sticky business” by Jessica Mesman and Su-Yin Hor responds to this call. I discuss how “stickiness” relates to Helen Verran’s concept of “disconcertment” that has informed my research. I conclude by reflecting on how the notion of “stickiness” could help to enact ethics at my field site. Initiating sticky conversations, I intend to ask neuroscientists to slow down and think about how practices could be improved.

“[W]ays of studying and representing things have world-making effects” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 30). With these words Sara Bea, postdoctoral researcher at University of Linköping, opens her talk on normativities in STS research and storytelling during the EASST2018 Conference. She acknowledges that practices such as observing and representing are ways of intervening and constructing (Hacking, 1983). Researchers constantly make choices: which case to select, who to talk to, what to include or exclude, how to tell stories. They have to decide which ethics they want to enact. Bea proposes that STS researchers should move beyond announcing the bad and promoting the good. She calls for sharpening STS tools and vocabulary to grasp the complex entanglements of good and bad, and to tell alternative stories, which expand the interstitial.

Jessica Mesman, associate professor at University Maastricht, and Su-Yin Hor, lecturer at the University of Technology Sydney, follow this call in their presentation on “Sticky business” in which they introduce the notion of “stickiness” to analyze and intervene in interstitial spaces in health care. Stickiness is in-between fixed and fluid practices; it is sticky between supposedly stiff and preserveable practices on the one hand, and those that seem to be open, flexible, and easy to adjust on the other. Stickiness occurs in health care, for instance, when clinicians make efforts to follow protocols, but are confronted with the hectic and surprises of everyday work, such as an unexpected admission of two patients at the same time or an emergency call (Figure 1). Tension between fixed and fluid produces sticky practices that are stiff enough to be directive and pliable enough to be adjustable to constantly changing work contexts. This tension is productive because it allows for practice improvement. For example, Mesman (Mol and Mesman, 1996) observed how a nurse introduced a drip system for stomach-tube feeding at a neonatal care ward. The nurse intended to optimize the feeding protocol so that she did not have to hold a bag containing food above a baby for a long time with a trembling arm and lots of other things to be done.
Mesman, Su-Yin Hor, and Bea regard the space between two extremes – between fixed and fluid, good and bad – as a locus of potential for intervention, either by telling stories that unsettle the polarity of good and bad or by improving practices. When listening to their talks, Helen Verran's captivating book *Science and an African Logic* came to my mind. Verran describes “disconcertment” as a fairly common but often overlooked “fleeting experience” (2001: 5) when doing research. It occurred to her when she encountered interruptions that did not fit her line of argument during fieldwork, working as a primary school teacher in Nigeria. According to Verran, being attentive to disconcerting experiences enables a researcher to detect productive tensions at actual times and places. Rendering these tensions and actors’ creative practices explicit offers “the possibility of innovation, a way that things might be done differently to effect futures different from pasts” (20). Verran’s concept of disconcertment seems to provide an alternative vocabulary to the notion of stickiness. Whereas sticky moments allow to navigate between fixed and fluid practices, disconcertment protects a researcher from becoming trapped in the foundationalist tendencies of universalism and relativism. By cultivating attention for disconcertment, Verran moves away from her initial conclusion that math is culturally relative, that an incommensurability separates ‘Western’ and ‘other’ knowledges, and that children should be taught either one or the other. She acknowledges how Nigerian teachers navigate between and merge Western and Nigerian maths, how they engage in “sticky business” to resolve tensions.

I approached Mesman after her presentation to ask how stickiness relates to Verran’s concept of disconcertment. Mesman appreciated my comment as an incentive to scrutinize how stickiness overlaps with disconcertment and what it enables researchers to see and do that disconcertment does not. Stimulated by Bea’s call for sharpening vocabulary and tools to capture normativities in STS research, I reflected upon what stickiness could do for my own research. My ethnographic fieldwork in a European biomedical research institute where neuroscientists study the impact of Buddhist meditation on healthy aging has been influenced by Verran’s work. I have been watching out for neuroscientists’ creative and innovative practices for dealing with diverse kinds of tensions: How do scientists comply with ethical standards while struggling with the bureaucratic burden that grows with increased regulation? How do supervisors take responsibility for acquiring ethical approval of research projects that they co-conduct with their PhD students without interfering with a student’s learning process? How do researchers deal with their uneasiness when they show videos of disabled individuals or scenes filmed in Third World countries to research participants to capture how these videos were displayed in the context of a meditation research project left me with a feeling of disconcertment. I had the impression that these videos perpetuated negative stereotypes about minorities and foreign countries. However, Verran's book does not provide guidance for what to do with my disconcertment besides including it in my fieldnotes and eventually in my dissertation. As Verran developed her conceptual tools only after returning from her fieldwork to Australia, she merely enacts ethics in storytelling by foregrounding what tends to get “excluded, marginalized, forgotten, unconsidered, or disfigured in the process of normalizing social and political action” (Schillmeier, 2011: 514). Yet, I was wondering how I could use my feeling of disconcertment as a tool to actively engage the setting that I am studying to find out how I could bring value to those who I am studying (cf. Downey and Zuiderent-Jerak, 2017: 225). For this purpose, the notion of stickiness seems to be useful. As an ethnographer at a ward, Mesman enacts ethics both in writing and at her field site. When writing about sticky moments and actors’ productivity in adjusting practices, she increases their and others’ awareness of resources available for resilience (Mesman, 2007). At the ward, Mesman uses video-reflexive ethnography (VRE) as a method to capture sticky moments in daily routine on film. Discussing the video footage with health care practitioners, Mesman intervenes by stimulating reflections on how to adjust fixed protocols and cultivate creative practices. She actively contributes to practice optimization, for VRE requires practitioners to sit down and reflect on their practice for a while. Inspired by Mesman and Su-Yin Hor’s “Sticky business”, I will try to decelerate
the pace of laboratory routine by asking neuroscientists to sit down with me on a regular basis. I will bring moments in which I have felt disconcerted up for discussion and ask scientists to answer questions that probe for ethical and societal dimensions of their research (cf. Fisher, 2007). Initiating sticky conversations, I enact ethics by adding some syrup to laboratory life so as to make it a little more sweet, tasty, and hopefully better.

Mareike Smolka studied sociology and philosophy (2012-2015). She specialized in a STS research master (2015-2017) at University Maastricht where she has been working as a tutor and enrolled as a PhD researcher in 2018. Her research is supervised by Cyrus Mody, Cornelius Borck and Darian Meacham, and is affiliated to the Institute for the History of Medicine and Science Studies Lübeck. It has been awarded with scholarships from the Center for Cultural Research Lübeck and the German Academic Scholarship Foundation.

Fig. 1: Presentation slide from the presentation on “Sticky business” by J. Mesman and S.Y. Hor: The pictures juxtapose a fixed hygiene protocol and the fluidity of actual hygiene practices in moments of emergency that leave no time to properly clean up the work space.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Mareike Smolka studied sociology and philosophy (2012-2015). She specialized in a STS research master (2015-2017) at University Maastricht where she has been working as a tutor and enrolled as a PhD researcher in 2018. Her research is supervised by Cyrus Mody, Cornelius Borck and Darian Meacham, and is affiliated to the Institute for the History of Medicine and Science Studies Lübeck. It has been awarded with scholarships from the Center for Cultural Research Lübeck and the German Academic Scholarship Foundation.

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SCIENTIFIC IDENTITIES:
HOW TO RE-ENGAGE WITH IDENTITY AND ITS POLITICS

Sarah Schönbauer, Rosalind Attenborough

At this year’s EASST in Lancaster, our four-session panel aimed to draw attention to scientists as agents under construction. We asked how scientists’ identity-making, belonging and being in a place and community is continuously done and re-done. The presentations were diverse, but often engaged with the capacity of epistemic regimes to shape (and be shaped by) epistemic subjects, for example in relation to place and mobility; when discussing evaluative regimes of excellence and impact; and when debating novel policy agendas such as “open science”. We argue that it is important to focus on, and conceptualise, the continuous (re)construction of scientific identities and associated impacts on epistemic and social processes in today’s research environments.

WHY RE-ENGAGE WITH IDENTITY IN STS?

At EASST 2018, we organized a full-day panel on the topic of Scientists – agents under construction. Exploring the scientist – or the researcher, the knowledge-maker, the academic – as a category of person may seem strange, even old-fashioned, given that STS has worked hard to produce accounts of knowledge construction that are relational and contextual, in which scientists are parts of a network. Moreover, STS has fought for knowledge construction that includes those who are not given the label and authority of “scientist” or “expert”. However, it was neither the aim nor the outcome of the panel to essentialise the person of...
the scientist. Instead, the emphasis was on "under construction": scientists not only as producers of knowledge, but as products-in-the-making of knowledge cultures. As Bulpin and Molyneux-Hodgson (2013, p. 93) have argued, focusing on the empirical production of the epistemic subject highlights how "machineries of knowing" (Knorr Cetina, 1999) construct both the subjects and objects of science. Accordingly, we believe this perspective can enrich approaches that focus on knowledge production, while also drawing attention to historically and culturally specific ways of being a scientist, how these change over time, and how they are entangled with political struggles of our time.

Of course, scientists’ identities have not gone unstudied. Transformations to research landscapes over past centuries and decades have been studied extensively, and some key works have examined these transformations through the lens of scientists’ changing lives, roles and selves: for example, Law’s Organising Modernity (2004), Daston and Galison’s Objectivity (2007), and Shapin’s The Scientific Life (2008). But there are many contemporary changes to research landscapes that are either new or becoming particularly acute, for example: rise of evaluation procedures as measurements for scientific success; increasingly short-term employment contracts in some countries; the implementation of novel policy agendas such as responsible research and innovation (RRI) and "open science"; and a focus on inter- or transdisciplinarity in academic work. Our panel was partly inspired by our curiosity and concern about how such changes participate in constructing today’s scientists, especially as changes overlap and the figure of the scientist must respond to myriad combined and contrasting demands.

With the hope of prompting reflective and diverse submissions, we posed questions such as: How do researchers form identities and what are the practices, norms and values that these are based upon? What role does identity play for researchers, their communities and, their institutions? And: How are researchers making sense of their identities, and thereby accommodating to or resisting the conditions of research environments?
Exploring identity together

Our idea to re-engage with scientific identities was inspired by a track at 4S/EASST 2016 in Barcelona and a follow-up workshop in Vienna in 2017 entitled “Community and identity in contemporary technoscience”. Following our call for abstracts, we realized that we were not alone with our reflections and concerns. We received great interest in our panel, both in the form of submitted abstracts – which resulted in 18 accepted abstracts, and eventually 13 presentations across four sessions – and in the form of a large audience at EASST 2018 in Lancaster. The group of scientists brought together by this panel was heterogeneous, coming from STS and STS-related fields and mirroring a wide-ranging interest in reflecting on scientists, their self-understandings, and broader implications for science. The presenters were able to shed light on aspects of scientific identities and circumstances of identity construction that are varied but nonetheless lead to common themes and concerns.

The first thematic group largely consisted of empirical studies that explored natural scientists’ navigation of spatial belonging in individual careers or institutional contexts, often influenced by a prevalent neoliberal regime in the academy. Sarah Davies drew attention to scientists’ concepts of “luck” and “choosing” in their diverse narrations of their career-associated international mobility; Niki Vermeulen* and Andrea Nunez Casal highlighted aspects of spatial belonging and identity that emerged through the upheaval of a research institute’s relocation; and Sarah Schönbauer examined dynamics of conformity and resistance that were simultaneously part of scientists’ belonging to their workplace, and alignment to its corporate identity.

In a second thematic group, the presenters engaged with identity in the context of prevalent regimes of success, excellence, impact and projectification in academia. Alexandra Supper for example showed how nascent researchers navigate a tension between independent and project-aligned identities in doctoral dissertations; Kay Felder* and Ruth Müller discussed how reviewers for the ERC attribute excellence to researchers when they assess CVs and projects; Wolfgang Kaltenbrunner*, Sarah de Rijcke and Ruth Müller explored how scientists make sense of and negotiate the conventions that underpin the assessment of academic CVs; and Justyna Bandola-Gill showed how academics navigate the UK’s research impact agenda in a knowledge culture that also demands excellence.

Fig. 3: Group picture with some presenters: Thomas Franssen, Niki Vermeulen, Alexandra Supper, Andreas Roß, Wolfgang Kaltenbrunner, Kay Felder, Sarah Schönbauer, Rosalind Attenborough, Justyna Bandola-Gill
The third thematic group engaged with policy and/or funding agendas that set out to transform knowledge-making fields: Andreas Röß* and Philine Warnke made the case for responsible research and innovation (RRI) as a regime with the capacity to shape scientists’ subjectivities; Rosalind Attenborough examined how scientists construct “openness” as an epistemic virtue both within and outside of “open science” agendas; and Thomas Franssen mapped the resource-driven emergence of the digital humanities as an epistemic regime. Also linking with this theme, Mirko Suhari showed that transdisciplinary energy research is an emerging epistemic regime shaping new scientific subjectivities.

Finally, two presentations captured particularly systematic, potentially generalizable views of how scientific identities can be conceptualized and studied: Anna Kosmützky* and Romy Wöhlert proposed a large-scale study of professional identity formation in international collaborative research projects; and Anja Bauer* and Karen Kastenhofer’s empirical study presented Technology Assessment (TA) practitioners as agents under (re)construction, for whom previous academic socializations are key among several contextual identity-forming factors.

**Summing up**

So why do we think it is worthwhile to engage with the identities of scientists, after all? The volume and variety of thematic engagements that the presenters made with scientific lives, roles, and subjectivities, shows that there is a vibrant curiosity in STS to engage with the **being** and belonging of scientists. We believe there is also a demand for more conceptual tools and conversations that develop identity in an STS context. And, 100 years after Weber’s famous lecture on “Science as a Vocation” (Weber 1918/19, 1946), we call for debates on how scientific identity might take shape today in relation to current responsibilities and challenges that transcend changes in the academe, such as societal reconfigurations (e.g. latent individualization) and political changes (e.g. Brexit, the increase in right-wing tendencies, and the post-fact conundrum). These circumstances have been raised in critical commentaries, for example Vermeulen (2018) argued in the context of UK academic strikes that “within our own academic community spaces for debate and discussion are crucial…we need to, for instance, pay attention to the identity of scientists” (p. 5). We believe that it is important to stay with this trouble and stay attentive to what is to come, to the logics that might undermine our worlds as scientists, and to critical approaches that promote liveable and valuable spaces of knowledge production. While these developments and diagnoses are not exclusive to the academic world, it is nonetheless crucial to re-engage with identity in STS, and to articulate how it can be used as a conceptual tool to understand the politics of **being** and belonging in the world of science.

**References**


Track at 4S/EASST 2016, Barcelona/Spain, 31 August - 3 September: '(Techno)science by other means of communality and identity', Convenors: Karen Kastenhofer (Austrian Academy of Sciences), Sarah Schönbauer (University of Vienna), Niki Vermeulen (University of Edinburgh).


Fig. 4: The panel hosts: Rosalind Attenborough and Sarah Schönbauer

Sarah Maria Schönbauer was a microbiologist before starting her PhD at the Department of Science and Technology Studies, University of Vienna. After completing the postgraduate program 'Sociology of Social Practices' at the Institute for Higher Studies, Vienna, and fieldwork in Austria and the US in life science laboratories, she was granted a Dissertation Completion Fellowship of the University of Vienna. Following that, she became a researcher and lecturer at the Munich Center for Technology in Society, TU Munich. In her work, she has been concerned with subjectification practices of life scientists, their identity work, and more generally with academic knowledge cultures in transition.

Rosalind Attenborough is a PhD candidate in Science, Technology and Innovation Studies at the University of Edinburgh. Her research investigates contemporary meanings of “open” in science, drawing on historical context, policy documents, and primarily, interviews with biological scientists. She has a previous disciplinary identity as a biologist and has worked for PLOS, an open access scientific publisher.
Meetings — this year's EASST theme — closely recounts my conference participation and attendance. I had just submitted my dissertation (for its defense) the day before the conference. As a result, all I could think of at this singular moment of my PhD was the many familiar and unfamiliar faces I would meet and converse with over the next three days. Yet I wasn’t going to EASST to listen and absorb other scholarly research only. Instead, I had planned and prepared for myself a very active and participatory schedule — chairing a panel I had co-organized, then presenting a paper on my dissertation in a different panel, and finally commenting at a lunch panel. In hindsight, it seemed like I was testing my academic aptness. Although meetings was the conference theme and in some way framed my participation, my actual research focus was on design and STS. Put differently, it was a conversation on the confluence of design and STS.

This conversation on design and STS began as a reunion of two STS doctoral students at 4S 2017 in Boston. Sharing common interests with Peter Fuzesi from Lancaster University in questions around user-technology interactions, the corresponding design processes, and practices, and the role designers play in defining what we understand as design, to submit a panel proposal for us came across as a fitting opportunity to expand our conversation. The proposed open panel “Situating designs” (B07) inquired into the situatedness of design practices and artifacts. The call ultimately brought forth eight papers and two sessions from a multiplicity of disciplinary backgrounds (from architecture to education) and research perspectives: social work for health (Jade Vu Henry, Peter Fuzesi), post-colonial transformation design (Nicholas Baroncelli Torretta), collaborative processes for urban and rural infrastructure development (Sampa Hyysalo, Kostas Latoufis), and design knowledge production and ethnographical methods in/for design research (Bernhard Böhm, Yutaka Yoshinaka, Goetz Bachmann). While as panel convenors we had the opportunity to stir the direction of the conversations and discussions on questions around design practice and how STS interacts with it, we chose to step back and assign that role to our two discussants who work in the confluence of design and STS — Daniela Rosner and Alex Wilkie.

Although both discussants probably did not deliberately take up the conference theme as a point of orientation, their approach emphasized two aspects of meetings that opened up the conversation in different ways. Alex Wilkie rephrasing Latour’s famous title about the missing masses provocingly asked the panelists in the first session about “the few missing things” either in their presentation or research — what are the problems of design education, where are the politics in
a participatory design education project, how can we avoid Western ontologies in decolonization projects, where and how do we understand transformation and transformative processes. Wilkie’s questions and some of the audience’s questions reminded of what is already at stake in the confluence and perhaps in the collaboration of STS and design—namely, that the seeming interdisciplinarity of both areas of research and practice is not generally predisposed to a mutual language of interdisciplinarity. More often, they act inward and outward in very traditional and disciplinary way.

Daniela Rosner’s commentary in the second panel, on the other hand, focused on how the research presented by the four speakers acknowledged how STS and design are connected, as well as how their work reconnects to broader questions prefiguring that. For instance, whereas ethnographers in different social disciplines have intensely studied and recognized their impact on their subject of research, designers adopting ethnographical methods for project-based work either miss this level of awareness or are being to gain that. Other papers, as Rosner noted, revealed a similarity of recognition processes of care practices, maintenance work, or user design activities, which have been essential in the past two decades of STS research and are now taking place in design and engineering work. This “slow” approaching also happens between STS and design as Rosner’s research work and design practice of Rosner (2018) display, but also many other more recent examples demonstrate: reflective design (Sengers et al., 2005), adversarial design (DiSalvo, 2012), studio studies (Farias & Wilkie, 2015), or the special issues in Design Issues (2004) and Diseña (2018).
While the papers in our panel offered a broader focus with a particular emphasis on practice, the special issue of the bilingual (Spanish, English) publication Diseña 12, edited by Ignacio Farias and Tomás Sánchez Criado, and launched at this EASST conference looks at the methodological confluence of design and STS. Titled “Re-learning Design: Pedagogical Experiments with STS in Design Studio Courses,” this collection of essays and design-research projects presents reflections on how the design disciplines and their actors encounter and collaborate with the social sciences, in particular, with STS. I had the privilege to be invited as a guest commentator on the journal launch along Teun Zuiderent-Jerak, and thereby continue some of the conversations from the “Situating designs” panel. But whereas in the panel I could quietly listen to other scholars’ perspective, here the challenge was to comment in 15 minutes on over 300 pages of incredibly diverse and rich material, primarily the work of design professionals and design scholars. Turning the focus onto pedagogy in general and STS pedagogy in “slightly different sites,” as Zuiderent-Jerak called it, helped narrow down and allowed us to reassess our position and the challenges as STS scholars within academic institutions. As many of us often end up being hired in technical universities or engineering departments, the question of pedagogy and the confluence of different pedagogies, be that STS and design, calls for a shift from the predictive model of reading and teaching literature to more experiential pedagogical activities that might involve the practices of design, architecture, engineering, art, and many others. The journal launch at EASST emphasizes the importance of these conversations about our interactions with other substantially different disciplines regardless if that means for research or for teaching.

Finally, and perhaps in continuation of what began in Boston, I met Zoë Robaey, a postdoc researcher on biotech and society at TU Delft, at the Lancaster train station on the way to Manchester airport. She had attended our panel on design but time constraints and convenor duties limited a conversation between us. The overcrowded Saturday morning train offered unforeseen possibilities that EASST’s full schedule would probably not have opened for us. From discussing about her experience in working as a philosopher in an engineering design department and the kind of research one can accomplish in this setup, to how different STS and design appear to be in different parts of the world, this unplanned EASST meeting hopefully opened up new avenues for collaboration, research, and exchange on the confluence of design and STS.

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Yana Boeva is a postdoc research associate on tech innovation and creativity at the LEONARDO – Zentrum für Kreativität und Innovation at Nuremberg Tech – Technische Hochschule Nürnberg. She recently completed her PhD in Science and Technology Studies at York University, Toronto. Her dissertation, a multi-sited and multinational ethnography of makerspaces, explored the social and historical dimensions of maker practices in relationship to professional design.
STILL “IN ITS INFANCY”? AFTERTHOUGHTS ON THE RELEVANCE OF STS ANCHORS IN GERMANY

Tim Schütz

Young STS scholars are regularly reminded that STS in Germany has yet to be institutionalized and remains “still in its infancy”. In light of this, the EASST 2018 meeting on ‘STS in Germany’ provided an opportunity to discuss the increased anchoring of scholarship via a new and open platform or network. In this afterthought section, I would like to briefly reflect on the discussions I had surrounding the development of such an institutional body, drawing on my experience as a conference attendant with substantial STS training in Germany and, forthcoming, the United States.

As the final program of EASST 2018 was published, it promised to be an exciting opportunity for a close engagement with STS scholarship in Germany. A pioneering group of researchers from around the country had secured a lunchtime spot at the Marketplace to discuss the need for a new method of anchoring the STS community. At the time of handing in my own paper, I had just joined the first cohort of Master’s students of a new STS program at the Goethe University Frankfurt. While the productive outcomes of the STS Germany meeting – attended by over 110 people – has already been documented online,¹ I would like to draw attention the importance and benefits of such a new platform. Hence, for this afterthought contribution, I draw on the discussions I had as a participant and young scholar just starting to navigate STS from Germany and the United States.

A large part of the STS meeting consisted of working in groups, where we were invited to write down expectations for a new STS institution. At our table, the discussion quickly focused on the need for such a project to be led by, and to serve, emerging scholars. During the discussion, I became acutely aware of how similar possibilities for participation had shaped my own pathway into STS. In 2012, the start of my training as a Cultural Anthropology minor coincided with a burgeoning STS focus within my own institution. Introduced in part by new faculty members, our cohort was offered a small set of courses and lectures including STS topics. Moreover, scholars like Friederike Gesing, Michael Flitner, Katrin Amelang, and Michi Knecht then erected the Bremen NatureCulture Lab in 2014, an open intellectual space for research at the intersection of cultural anthropology, human and cultural geography, and STS.²

Importantly, the lab provided opportunities to engage collaboratively with students, faculty members, and external participants. The former included workshops, reading seminal works in STS, and engaging classes, with the introductory course “STS for all” being a unique highlight. In one instance, it was taught in rotating fashion by a group of six faculty members from the departments of Sociology, Computer Science, and Human Geography. Moreover, the lab hosted a series of lectures that showcased the work of both national and international scholars. From the student perspective, the lab provided a platform from which to figure out the boundaries of STS and enable conversation with more established disciplines, such as Media and Communication studies, which I majored in. Given this configuration, it was much easier to integrate STS approaches into my own research projects with confidence.

¹ The report, which has been written by Jörg Niewöhner in representation of a host of other colleagues, can be found here: https://www.dests.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/STS-in-Germany---We-will-go-on.pdf
² See http://naturenkulturen.de for meetings, recorded lectures, mailing lists and affiliated blogs.
During the “STS in Germany” lunchtime meeting at EASST, I became acutely aware of how the landscape of taught STS programs in Germany has grown in only a few years. Many of these programs had come to my knowledge only during my research for a future Masters degree. During my studies, I had followed the development of STS at Humboldt University which, as part of their degree in European Ethnology, offers opportunities for electing an STS-emphasis. I also kept an eye on Leuphana University Lüneburg and Siegen, given their innovative takes on digital media and STS. Lastly, there had been a rise in explicitly STS-oriented programs at the Technical University of Munich and the Goethe University Frankfurt, the latter of which I eventually chose for my graduate education. A deciding factor was the program’s interdisciplinary design, which integrates specific courses from Sociology and Human Geography.  

With the emergence of different STS programs in Germany in the background, the lunchtime meeting threw into stark relief the lack of an overarching body to unite them and communicate amongst them. To guide the discussions on the contours of such an institution, several STS scholars were granted the opportunity to represent groups already in existence. As Niewöhner summarizes in his report, many are long standing associations, such as the German Society for Science and Technology Studies (GWTF), or are catered towards younger scholars at the edges of various subjects, like the Interdisciplinary Network for Studies Investigating Science and Technology (INSIST). Eventually, the discussions at our table pointed out the fine but significant differences of these existing organisations, based in their diverting definition of STS, gender politics, or attention to disciplines beyond history and sociology. (See, e.g., [https://twitter.com/outputin22/status/1022467253210689539](https://twitter.com/outputin22/status/1022467253210689539) ) Back in Frankfurt, I surely found myself in great company at the monthly Frankfurt STS Kitchen meeting and in vivid discussions with my cohort. Yet, I also felt the need to scale up such opportunities for collective thinking. From the perspective of a novice scholar, there are plenty of reasons
Meeting Afterthoughts

to motivate this. Of greatest importance to myself were the larger intellectual task of determining the direction of STS in an inherently interdisciplinary course environment; the drive to experiment with collaborative forms of research; and laying the foundation for possible career paths in and outside of academia.

Despite a diversity of ideas on how to proceed with the design of such an institution, for example what is meant by ‘open’ or ‘network-like’ structures, its international direction was undisputed. In discussing the outcome of the meeting with friends and colleagues, I was quick to correct myself when I referred to it as a ‘German STS’ meeting, rather than a meeting concerning ‘STS in Germany’ more broadly. The need to make future STS scholarship accessible for a broader audience is already palpable given that most of the programs mentioned above are taught in English. Thanks to a Fulbright scholarship, I am able to complete my Masters degree alongside other graduate students within the STS community at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). To a substantive degree, this opportunity to build bridges between the universities arose through the connections I fostered years ago as an active member of the Bremen NatureCulture lab. When asked about STS in Germany, I can now point to visit the DESTS website and join its mailing list, where future steps are meant to be discussed.6 Once again, I find myself drawing links in yet another Cultural Anthropology department where STS presents a growing emphasis.

At the same time, I am immersing myself in innovative projects at UCI, which could lend inspiration to the formation of an STS network in Germany. One outstanding example is the Platform for Experimental and Collaborative Ethnography (PECE) conceived by Kim and Mike Fortun, which offers a range of possibilities to bring scholars together. On the one hand, I am using its features as part of a student research group on toxicity, vulnerability, and ‘late industrialism’ in Southern California. There, we use an instance of PECE – the Disaster STS network – to discuss and archive our findings. On the other, I learned that the Society for the Social Studies of Science (4S) runs their own instance as an independent archival, publication, and work space. Examples include digital posters that serve to represent ongoing STS research in Irvine, Turkey and ‘Across Borders’. As an open source project, PECE is under constant development, but also attentive to the shifting politics of publishing, (qualitative) data management, and forms of collaboration. Experimenting with such an ‘instance’ could be a worthwhile experience for figuring out another STS network in Germany. Ultimately, it shares a goal that was articulated at the lunchtime meeting: solidifying the STS community and making its scholarship relevant for audiences beyond its own confines.

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REPAIRING MACHINES, CRAFTING RELATIONSHIPS
MEETINGS OF HUMANS, MACHINES AND
OTHER NON-HUMAN WORLDS

Kostas Latoufis

A ‘Meeting (with) Soil’ introduces the Permaculture principle of ‘Use the edges and value the marginal’ and sets the tone for my first encounter with a social science conference. Through an intimate journey in situating design, I reflect on the relationship between humans and the machines they take care of, as well as the possible futures of sustainability which emerge while making kin with similar tribes of people.

The theme of this year’s 2018 EASST conference in Lancaster University was ‘Meetings – Making Science, Technology and Society together’. Coming from a technical university and with an engineering background, this was my first encounter with a large conference in the social sciences, so the theme ‘Meetings’ was exceptionally relevant.

It all started with ‘Meeting Soil’, a walk in the university Eco-Hub gardens, part of the ‘Edible Campus’ project, where students practice Permaculture and organic gardening. I felt at home here, as I have been practicing Permaculture for some

Fig. 1: ‘Meeting Soil’ at the Eco-Hub gardens of the ‘Edible Campus’ project (Source: Kostas Latoufis)
years in grassroots projects in Greece (School of the Earth) and have just started a Diploma with the UK Permaculture Association. Meeting participants of the conference in the middle of a vegetable garden was something that I had never experienced at any of the engineering conferences I have previously attended. The ‘Meetings’ inspired by the conference title appeared even more promising following this warm and heartily welcome, while the interdisciplinarity of the encounter echoed in very familiar ways.

A key Permaculture design principle is to ‘Use the edges and value the marginal’. According to David Holmgren, one of the fathers of Permaculture design, ‘the interface between things is where the most interesting events take place. These are often the most valuable, diverse and productive elements in the system’ (Holmgren, 2002). These are the spaces where elements with diverse origins meet, and these meetings create new elements and functions in systems. They create diversity and resilience, not only in a biological sense, but also in a social. In a similar way, this conference was an attempt to create more edge, more surface for interaction between sometimes radically different elements. It was an attempt to create and also to sustain diversity.

The work I brought with me to share in this conference was all about sustaining diversity. It was about sustaining the sociotechnical diversity of machines (in this case small wind turbines) and their makers. As well as sustaining the long-standing farm traditions of tinkering and tweaking, that produce intimate human-machine relationships between humans and the machines they repair.

The session in which I was presenting, B07 ‘Situating Design’, was convened by Yana Boeva (York University) and Peter Fuzesi (Lancaster University). The presentations sparked lively discussions on themes such as ‘Who gets to situate design?’ by Nicholas Torretta (Umea University) and his colleagues. They advocated for the need to listen, learn and love during the process of designing, and this
concept of intimacy in design echoed in a very coherent manner with the pre-
carious engineering culture (or design style) of ‘Makeshift Engineering’ which I
discussed in the session. The engineering culture I have been studying as a re-
searcher, but practice as a producer of locally manufactured small wind turbines
(Kostakis et al., 2016), exists only in relationship to an intimate web of encoun-
ters between humans, machines and other non-human worlds. A crafts-based
(Sennett, 2009) engineering design ‘process’ - or attitude - that allows for think-
ing-while-making or designing-through-use (Brandes et al., 2009). Further discus-
sions in the sessions on how intimacy between humans and machines can be
created through acts of mending and repair (Denis and Pontille, 2014) provided
useful insights, along with the comments of Samps Hyysalo (Aalto University)
on the Biographies of Artifacts and Practices, and his work on local innovations on
mobility in Siberia with Svetlana Usenyuk (Aalto University) (Usenyuk et al., 2016)
which had provided great inspiration for me in the past.

Further insights were brought to light from several other sessions and presenta-
tions, such as the idea of ‘stabilized instability’ in hacker tournaments by Marcin
Zarod (Kozminski University) which echoed with the on-the-fly technical solutions
put together from users of locally manufactured small wind turbines in the face of
a failure. Ideas on how research and development in technology can be democ-
ratized were brought to light through the experiences of Willow Leonard-Clarke
(Cardiff University) in the Lammas Ecovillage in Wales. Just like with locally manu-
factured small wind turbines, other locally sourced and natural materials (e.g. clay
for building), empowered users by supporting techniques that allowed for experi-
mentation and further learning. This was in contrast with industrial materials such
as concrete that require a laboratory if experimentation is to happen. Concepts
of ‘Radical Technology’ (Harper et al., 1977) were once again revisited, opening
up possible futures of sustainability and social equity. Meetings such as these,
Meeting Afterthoughts

bring one closer with others who share similar passions. In our ‘response-ability to mend,’ as Jonnet Middleton (Lancaster University) proposed, we come together as kin, and ‘shape possible alternative worlds of our own (re)configuring’ within the dominant order. With such kin we met in Plenary No2 ‘Meeting Energy’ with activist Kelly Gillian who participates in direct non-violent action campaigns against the fracking industry near Lancaster, and in Plenary No3 ‘Meeting Machines’ with Sampsa Hyysalo (Aalto University) and Robin Williams (Edinburgh University) and their work on the Biographies of Artifacts and Practices approach, as a practical tool for STS scholars (Hyysalo et al. 2018).

Looking back at the EASST 2018 conference, I am left with a sense of a warm welcome, the excitement of the discovery of many generative edges, and a feeling of kindred. Thank you all for making this happen!

References


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WHY SHOULD A MASTER’S STUDENT GO TO EASST CONFERENCE?

Artemis Papadaki Anastasopoulou

WHEN IN LANCASER, I COULD NOT FAIL TO NOTICE THAT THERE WERE NOT MANY MASTER’S STUDENTS ATTENDING THE EASST CONFERENCE. IN THE TEXT BELOW, I OUTLINE WHY I THINK MASTER’S STUDENTS SHOULD ATTEND CONFERENCES SUCH AS EASST. I WRITE ABOUT MEETINGS WITH PEOPLE I WOULD NEVER HAVE THE CHANCE TO INTERACT WITH, BUT ALSO ABOUT THE PROCESS OF FINDING ONE’S OWN PERSONAL INTERESTS IN THE STS ARCHIPELAGO. FINALLY I REFLECT ON THE RESTRICTIONS MASTER’S STUDENTS MIGHT FACE AND HOW REFLECTING ON THEM AND CREATING THE SPACE FOR STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE WILL BE BENEFICIAL FOR STS AS A FIELD.

Why were there so few Masters students attending the EASST conference? That was a question which I kept coming back to while in Lancaster. A week after the EASST conference, while discussing with a postdoc about my experience there, he mentioned that when he was a Master’s student he never attended such a conference simply because he did not see himself as part of the community. Giving a consistent answer to why Master’s students don’t attend the conference would be beyond my scope, but drawing on my own personal experience as a Master’s student at the EAAST I explore the reasons why I believe Master’s students should attend the EASST conference and touch upon the practical issues that might restrict them from doing so.

BEING IN THE SAME ROOM WITH YOUR HEROES AND HEROINES

It’s 10 a.m. on Wednesday, 25th of July, and I am in front of Lancaster University’s Catholic Chapel where a group of people are gathering for the ‘Meeting Soil’ excursion. The registration desk is not open yet so no one is wearing name tags. As we head to the Ecohub garden and the permaculture grounds we are asked to communicate in small groups about who we are, why we are here, but also how we feel about being there. I was excited! What a great conference opener, meeting new people in a garden just to talk—first names only, not much academic talk, just talk. I mention to those I am with that I am based at Vienna University. Someone else remembers that she attended an EASST conference in Vienna back in 2000, where, after an excursion to the anatomy museum, she was on the same bus with Donna Haraway and Susan Leigh Star. Her tone was excited as she shared her memory.

Later in the afternoon, I am sitting in a panel discussion. In front of me are my own STS heroines and heroes, many of whom who I know only by reading their name tags. I was enthused. I had read their work in my first semester, so I felt I knew them a little. The feeling was great, but I didn’t get to speak with them. On the other hand, I spoke to many other people whose work I had never read. I spoke with a person who is teaching design students, a librarian from Mexico and a PhD student who is doing fieldwork in India. At these conferences, there are many people whose work you have read in your studies, and they become important to you. I was looking forward to seeing them, and listening to their talks; but I realised that...
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the conference wasn’t only about this. It was also about all the other spontaneous meetings you would never otherwise have had. All the people you wouldn’t have heard of or talked to otherwise.

ON MAKING DECISIONS

The moment I got in my hands the conference programme I felt overwhelmed. SO MANY PANELS! Who should I see? The programme was 300 pages long and I needed to make decisions quickly. This pushed me into a filtering process. It was a practical question; I couldn’t go to all of them. I had to choose. This process of filtering invoked a reflection on my own interests, forced me to explore them and to ask myself: which panel will you go to now? It helped me to reflect on my own research and what I feel connected too, but also what other areas I am interested in. I left the conference with a sense of security around what I want to pursue (at least in the near future). It functioned as a filter through which I became more focused, grounded and content.

In the past, I have had many discussions with other students about our academic paths. STS offers so many interesting avenues of study that, when choosing a Master’s thesis topic or a PhD topic, it is easy to feel restricted by the need to pursue just one topic. There is a loss involved when you are interested in so many things, but have to choose just one. At least, this is a feeling that I have had many times. For me, the conference offered a space where I could navigate my several interests and get the chance to explore them further. I got to hear talks and discuss them with people, see what they are currently working on, understand if I could see myself researching these topics and approaches.

Of course, while there are many good reasons why Master’s students could benefit from conferences such as this, there are also a number of reasons they might not be able to do so. These days, being granted a visa can be a problem faced by academics, Master’s students included. From personal experience, I know at least one person who couldn’t join this conference due to visa issues. Finance can also be a considerable barrier. Are both Master’s and PhD student’s considered to be in the same category when fee reductions are considered? PhD students often get funds to go to such a conference whilst Master’s students don’t; so categorizing these groups as the same may disadvantage Masters students. These comments are offered as food-for-thought, for practices of inclusion. My suggestion here is that Master’s students have much to benefit from attending such conferences, just as STS has to benefit as much from such students being there: helping to build community, challenge traditions and create new spaces for an expanding STS.

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WHAT SHOULD BE THE MAIN PURPOSE OF A CONFERENCE?

Guillem Palà

What should be the main purpose of a Conference? Perhaps to make our work known, or to discuss it with others? Or even, if lucky, trying to extend the limits of the apprehensible? I think it is essential to keep these questions in mind when we scrutinise how a Conference format makes us relate with one other.

As a young scholar, the mere fact of receiving an acceptance e-mail from a senior researcher, telling me that my paper proposal made sense, and encouraging me to take part in a specific panel was a gift given before the big event. The possibility of sharing my paper, for the first time just by myself, felt like an achievement. The challenging task of preparing the right slides already gave me the feeling that I could contribute in an on-going discussion. The excitement of every previous step is something you feel in your bones.

Fast-forward into the future: and here I am, in Lancaster, the expected crucial moment of the Conference has finally arrived. After enjoying two sessions of profoundly embodied discussions around Feminist Figures, my time to share the results of many months of work has come. With noticeable anxiety, I start talking about ontology, ethics and ecology, about shared worlds and speculation, about the doors that the closing of a PhD thesis also opens. Applauses ensue and I shyly walk back to my seat. As agreed, questions are going to be asked at the end, after all interventions have been presented, hence allowing a closing discussion of the whole panel. After my presentation, I try to focus on the last paper presented: a fascinating exploration on the spherology of feminisms presented by Amanda Windle. Once done, the time given to weave our arguments with other presentations finally arrives. I take a chair, a pen, a notebook, and I glance into the crowd, nervously.

The general discussion opens up with a question regarding a paper telling several stories of ecofeminism (Moore, 2015), closely related with Starhawk’s argumentations, presented on the plenary of the previous day. In a beautiful answer the presenter discusses how theory and practice are born in the same soil. The second question is partially related to the first one, but this time addressed to another speaker, Joan Haran, who wonders about the possible world configurations that the Spiral Dance (Starhawk, 1979) can enact. One time and another, through every single question, an exciting conversation unfolds, materializing some of the statements given the day before in the plenary session. The panel discussion presents lovely shades of these arguments, which I enjoy as a spectator, without taking part.
Once the session closes, I ask myself: why haven’t I taken part in this conversation? I conclude that perhaps it’s just me, but that it is not such an easy task to get involved in the discussion of a particular panel. It might be tough to explore a new field of study where you do not know the exact conversations the convenors are looking for. In addition, I also consider that the format can also be an obstacle for new outside voices wishing to take part in a conversation.

In the next days, these open questions reverberated throughout the Conference. Progressively, I came to believe that I was not just wondering about possible Conference formats that could enable young scholars to actively take part and enrich conversations. What is at stake, I think, is mainly how we want to relate to one other. What becomes centre-stage are the ways in which we might want to deploy academic or scholarly care, in order to cultivate “a speculative commitment to contribute to liveable worlds” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011: 100).

During the Conference, I really felt that STS succeeds in practising this kind of commitment in the critical ways in which manifold situations, topics, and events are explored. Other panels I attended, such as “Intimate entanglements in science and technology” (Lopez and Latimer) and “Of other landscapes” (Danyi and Spencer), indeed brought strong examples of it. Nevertheless, even though STS succeeds in attentively caring for our particular objects of study, I think we should also deploy the same care for the ways we relate to each other.

I believe the speculative commitment Puig de la Bellacasa asks for would make us go beyond asking questions in the end or right after each presentation, rigorous time control or kind answers. This speculative commitment addresses the very soil, the grounding of our meeting formats where new practices may be born. Attending and wondering about those ecological conditions to materialize care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017) would be beneficial not only for those who are already on our first steps, but for our STS community as a whole.
So, in conclusion, I ask again: What should the main purpose of a Conference be? If I have learnt something in the process of obtaining a PhD, it is that we have to become attentive to the sensibilities embedded in the practices we share, to place the ethical wondering in the foreground. Could a Conference also be an opportunity to experiment with new ways of practising scholarly or academic care? Could we imagine innovative formats allowing more liveable Conference experiences? Then, how can a Conference become the soil, the grounding where new forms of caring for each other may be born?

**References**


Guillem Palà is an independent researcher, who recently obtained a PhD. in Person and Society in the Contemporary work by the Autonomous University of Barcelona. His work was focused on analysing the "Barcelona ICT Citizen Conference about digitalization of society", an adaptation of the consensus conference mechanism performed in order to include senior citizens in public participation. Nowadays, departing from Gabriel Tarde's work, his main interest is to explore the possibility of moving towards an ecological differently speculative ethical proposal.
Invent your job: Some thoughts on embracing invention in the doctoral workshop

Violeta Argudo Portal

This afterthought presents a few reflections from the pre-conference doctoral workshop which was based on the theme: “Invent your job.” Here, I introduce some of our invented jobs, and provide a few observations about how we embraced the opportunity to invent, where these inventions stemmed from, and the worlds inhabiting such inventions. The afterlife of this workshop has taken the form of thinking through what we did by not doing it otherwise.

The stairs of Alex Square on campus were the meeting point for the EASST 2018 pre-conference doctoral workshop at Lancaster University. With the introduction round finished, a key motivation for attending to the workshop popped up more or less immediately: “we are going to be talking about jobs.” Indeed, the workshop was named “Invent your job.” It took me a little while to realize that I was not as moved by the theme itself as others peers might have been. As a first year PhD student from Spain who has just made the move into STS, I have enough to do just believing that this PhD makes some sort of sense. So more than the theme itself, I was drawn to this event as an opportunity to meet and learn from other PhD students or early-stage researchers. This short text gives me the chance to think through some questions that arose during this event. Such as how to invent new jobs for STS scholars? Also, what might such inventions say about the academic worlds we inhabit, and this pre-conference event itself?

Fig. 1: “Walking with concepts”
Courtesy of Dara Ivanova
Our one-day journey began by ‘walking with concepts.’ Everyone brought some pieces of paper with some STS concepts written on them and we exchanged these papers between us as we began our walk to Lancaster city center. The pleasant weather and peaceful landscape helped to diffuse the uncomfortable-ness of ‘conceptual icebreaking’. Half way to Lancaster we were encouraged to redirect our conversation to ideas and proposals related to jobs. Once in Lancaster we broke up in a few groups to keep on working on our inventions. We had some fun, and came up with a few proposals. Several ideas arose around providing spaces, and people that would facilitate translation in higher education settings such as universities or research centers. These spaces might take the form of a ‘translation office.’ The translation services would focus on translating among disciplines, providing a service that would improve communication and multidirectional understanding. When thinking about this ‘job’ interdisciplinary research projects/groups or international scientific collaborations were presented to be the principal target. What would be the role played by the STS scholar in this type of office was discussed without getting to decide what the role(s) would be.

A retirement-writing-house was also proposed, a mobile app to link research interests, and different jobs linked to institutional politics. However, the proposal that really sparked my interest involved opening up a film production cooperative. When I proposed this ‘job idea’ was mainly linked to generate ‘jobs’ that take advantage of visual materialities but also to encourage acting and thinking beyond written forms. This idea grew through collective suggestions such as organizing a film festival or designing audiovisual devices that would enact STS theoretical imaginary. Another fellow attending the workshop put forward an idea she had been thinking about, an ‘STS Circus’ that would perform community problematizations and that would tour to several local communities. However, having talked all these proposals through, another fellow and I shared a similar thought: the proposals were not compelling enough for us. Instead, we started thinking about a theatrical figure ‘the disruptive’ to be included in several settings. We thought this character could be played by an STS scholar to bring about discussions and inquiries that tend to be silenced. ‘The disruptive’ could be played in all sorts of settings such as policy design meetings, city council assemblies, department reunions, job interviews, etc.
After having presented above some of our ‘invented jobs’, I will finish sharing some thoughts about how the ‘inventions’ were crafted during the workshop. Almost all job descriptions were associated with a well-established STS concept such as mobile immutable, translation, boundary object, and so on. I think that there was an intention to draw such concepts back to our lives, taking them as devices that would make easier embracing invention and situating it. However, instead of drawing concepts into our everyday lives, I wonder now if we got swallowed up by those concepts.

The ‘invented’ jobs, in general, were framed through futuristic lenses, figured within an ideal, dream-job, narrative. The majority of us did not approach our inventions as something you could start working on tomorrow, hence, embracing invention was implicitly linked with postponing action. Also, we seemed to be seduced by the prospect of inventing ‘dream-jobs’, and ended up inventing highly time-consuming jobs. Putting jobs at the center of our lives demarcated what could be thought to be invented, in fact, there were no proposals of 15h/week jobs, or even jobs that did not entail a long-term continuity. When inventing a job, we were at the same time reinforcing particular ‘regimes of living’ (Collier and Lakoff, 2008:23).

So, while some of our inventions did not seem entirely radical, we did (literally) jump fences during the morning; when walking through several meadows, skipping trodden paths and avoiding cow dung. In fact, we drew on the narrative of ‘jumping the fence’ when approaching our inventive practices, considering and questioning it as an idealized phrase, such as thinking ‘out-of-the-box.’ Could we both ‘jump’ and ‘stay reasonable’ at the same time? I am approaching this ‘staying reasonable’ in relation to the “uses of use” of Sara Ahmed (2018 and upcoming) that is illustrated by the sentence: “the more a path is used the more a path is used.” Perhaps mobilising clichéd concepts to ground our invention, pushed us to leave unattended other, more surprising, openings our experiences and imagination often open up. As noted before, this reflection does not speak about what should have been done, but to think about what we did in failing to do it otherwise. This reflective exercise guides the main question that has stayed with me after the workshop, how could we learn to invent the worlds we wish to inhabit?

I want to thank Dara Ivanova for organizing the workshop and all the attendees for sharing such an intense day!

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Invent Your Job?: On Embodying STS Practice

Samantha Breslin

The pre-conference workshop for doctoral students and early career scholars was suffused with tensions between the goal of creating new ways of living STS practice by inventing our jobs and futures, and the necessities of subsistence and sustenance. These tensions wove through the theme and potential rewards of the workshop, the selection of participants, and the challenges participants faced in inventing sustainable ways of doing STS. However, participants also demonstrated how to embody STS practice through situated collaboration and engagement with one another.

What if the most radical invention we can suggest is for a job with stable employment? This was one of the questions and ideas to emerge out of the pre-conference workshop for doctoral students and early career scholars to “Invent your job.” This question exemplifies some of the challenges and tensions that wove throughout the workshop as we contended with the workshop’s goals to “think out of the box” and create and invent ways of doing STS-engaged practice beyond academia. Recognising our own desires to pursue STS as part of our future lives and careers, this question opened for consideration the necessary realities of sustaining ourselves now and in the future, in the context of contending values of competition and cooperation/collaboration.

I applied to join this workshop with some trepidation. I was excited about the idea of meeting new scholars and about finding ways of doing anthropology and STS that are not bound by the structures of academia and academic career paths, which are also increasingly unavailable (see Figure 1). Yet, I also worried that the work of “inventing your job” repeated the kind of neoliberal admonishment that we should all become entrepreneurs of ourselves (Foucault, 2008). The implication being, if we are only passionate, innovative, and entrepreneurial enough (which is never enough), we will succeed in life and opportunities will abound. The flip-side, of course, is that if we don’t

Fig. 1: Hiring trend of anthropology PhD graduates 1985-2014
(Speakerman et al., 2018: 10.1371/journal.pone.0202528.g005)
succeed, then we just need to work harder, invent better, to create our jobs and place within the system. In many ways, these are common liberal and neoliberal refrains.

My concerns dissipated as I met the organizer on the bus on the way to the University, and during the organized walk from the University to town. Everyone I met was friendly, engaging, and doing fascinating STS work on topics ranging from wine-making to co-living spaces. But the tensions in the workshop’s framing re-emerged after we sat down to lunch and to work more intensely on a subset of job ideas from what we had developed during our walk. First, there had been planned presentations by two speakers, who would discuss their own experiences and creative job inventions. However, one couldn’t attend because of illness, demonstrating the contingency of our bodies and lives that works as a counterpoint to any notion of triumphant invention. The other presenter preferred to speak in small groups during the walk rather than present themselves as an authority on unconventional job creation, embodying an STS commitment to situated engagement and collaboration.

We were also told that there had been much competition for participation in the workshop – that there were many students and early career scholars who wanted to attend but were not selected in order to keep the workshop size small. Similarly, one sub-group of workshop participants was meant to be voted for and chosen as “future-makers,” with their job descriptions published in the EASST review. There was little we could do about the first situation, which we had all consented to in applying to the workshop. However, participants also pointed out that publishing a single description inherently created a competition, with the elected future-makers in essence “winning” the job creation exercise and the opportunity for publication as the reward. The prize of a publication also further feeds into the glorification of citation counts and other metrics that work to reify and quantify our lives and selves. Here, however, some participants found an opportunity to intervene. After some discussion among workshop participants, it was decided that we would rotate between groups; as many of us wanted to discuss multiple projects, it would work against promoting a single project or idea, and there would be more opportunity for discussion among different people. Ultimately, everyone would have the chance to contribute to a final collaborative publication.

As I rotated between the tables, and even as we were working to invent creative new ways of doing and living STS – through circuses, through visual practice, as translation, towards new ways of meeting, and as trouble-makers – a question that kept arising, was how do we make this practical? How do we make sure people actually will hire us? How do we fund this endeavor, and in a sustainable way? How do we make others see that this is useful and important? As we were trying to invent new careers – and futures – we were necessarily contending with the realities of sustenance and subsistence. In many of the careers and projects we developed, what was needed to enable and promote these exciting STS endeavours was indeed stable employment to support a kind of academic freedom where STS practitioners could translate, mediate, and stay with the trouble (Haraway 2016). At the same time, participants showed and embodied the small and meaningful ways in which we can live an STS life, by resisting forms of competition and glorification and instead promoting situated collaboration and active engagement with one another.

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Samantha Breslin is an anthropologist with a background in computer science, currently working as a postdoctoral fellow in the Faculty of Business Administration at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Her research centres on the reproduction of norms and inequalities relating to gender, expertise, and neoliberalism in technology education and practice.
Climbing over Fences. Afterthoughts on the Pre-Conference Doctoral Workshop „Invent Your Job!“

Inventing your job is a difficult but not an impossible task. There are ideas by others, that you can join or take the effort of shaping your own ideas to a degree that you can convince and motivate others to join you. There are role models who have successfully constructed their own unconventional job and could help as an inspiration. However, getting engaged in existing structures by communicating STS sensibilities outside of academia could be one first step.

„Invent Your Job!“ — I could not think of a more challenging calling to start into some conference days. Besides the last-minute preparation of my own talk and studying the conference’s program I started the EASST Conference days in Lancaster with the most pressing question — what am I doing after my PhD?

The organizers of this pre-conference doctoral workshop made it even more complicated by asking: how could STS knowledge, sensibilities and practices be translated into existing job qualifications outside of academia or — vice versa — how could we design the spaces ourselves that make place for these STS capacities?

Spoiler alert: These questions were not answered in the workshop nor am I presenting any results in my afterthoughts either. But I got — at least — some perspectives where one could keep on searching for answers.

The organizers offered a set of unconventional settings for exchanging „wild ideas” about discovering or inventing jobs in unknown terrain: We visited a time-honoured castle with a panoramic view to the North Sea, had sandwiches in a theater, hiked along bumpy meadows and climbed over several fences. During this hike in the English countryside we were holding STS concepts like „invisible infrastructures” (Star, 1999), „human-machine-interaction” (Suchman, 2007) or „intra-actions” (Barad, 2007) scribbled on small sheets of paper in our hands that should lead us in our discussions. The bumpy underground, the STS concepts and the personal stories of unknown researcher from different countries were inspiring ingredients to think about unconventional jobs in the future.

We all agreed that there are new societal challenges that urge for new solutions that cannot be found only within existing institutional structures: Hidden political perspectives become louder in European and American countries and the new technologies have unprecedented implications: Navigation apps, search engines and other algorithmic tools shape everyday practices and labour on a small scale but on a large scale technological innovation has become an imperative on political and economic level, shaping contemporary society as a whole. Algorithms make decisions and split up societies into filter bubbles where everyone can spread or follow distinct thoughts rhizome-like on the internet. Software establishes new structures of being instructed, controlled and governed.

Those new power and knowledge hierarchies have to be discussed publicly but there is still an enormous lack of communication strategies that explain opaque software processes to a democratic audience for a better understanding. But is it possible to turn an STS analysis of „invisible infrastructures” into marketing or...
government strategies? Could product advertisement sound differently if it would be inspired by an STS understanding of „human-machine-interaction”? And: How much compromises are needed by getting engaged into economic and political structures with STS concepts in mind?

The projects that were developed in the workshop went from an STS driven circus to interdisciplinary translators for companies or constructing get-together apps. All of the ideas had in common that they would bring together spheres and groups of people who are split up by any boundaries. They would use new technology but also well-known analog ideas to inspire new thoughts between them.

Science and Technology Studies have largely elaborated analytical and conceptual tools for societal questions that could be transferred into the fields of software construction, data security, consumer protection and design of platforms for democratic participation. Regarding these ideas we found common role models or best practice projects like the city government of Barcelona who tries to implement new communication tools in politics, letting people participate by deciding online where to spend the public money first — restructuring public water infrastructures, a new swimming pool or computers for schools? In such a project new media becomes an experimental platform for a modern understanding of lived democracy.

STS is known for creating problems and using mess and arguments to arrange and display structures in a different way, constructively redefining terms that were taken for granted. Not only in academia but also on the job market STS knowledge could help investigating new emerging question of shaping society and daily interaction or finding unexpected connections between interdisciplinary spheres: Making infrastructures visible for a larger public, finding terms between disciplinary boundaries, analyzing thought-provoking but understandable phenomena that tell something about society.

Motivating people with your own ideas and searching for constructive structures that support your idea was one main recommendation that I took from the workshop. But „Join a union” was another: There are already existing channels to make a change and look differently on society outside of academia. It seems to be a negotiation if oneself has to fit in a job description or if a job description has to fit in one's own imagination. Jobs can be invented but they could also be discovered in unknown terrain by climbing over fences.

**Bibliography**


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ON BEING USEFUL? SITUATING THE STS RESEARCHER IN SCIENCE AND POLICY

Jasmine E Livingston

What follows is not a reflection on a specific event during the conference, but rather brings together some strains of thought and discussions that I had throughout the conference, to connect with an ongoing dilemma that I have as a PhD researcher. As my research deals with science-policy interactions, in international climate change politics, it does away with simplistic linkages between science and policy in line with STS approaches. It recognises that science is not ‘used’, simply ‘taken up’ and absorbed by policy. Indeed, where it has utility, this utility is based on social processes of validation, trust, and negotiation, rather than on scientific merits alone – in the words of Jasanoff (2004), it is co-produced. As a researcher therefore, I continually find myself in a dilemma about how to present the utility of my science, or my contribution, and its place in society – in particular how answerable we should be to the funders of our research. This question relates to our place as academics in society, and more specifically as a personal dilemma for me undertaking my PhD in environmental science, which means that I work in an environment where the utility of research is expected and encouraged. More generally as a doctoral student nearing the end of their PhD of course the question of utility also evolve around consideration of the future job market.

I attended the Pre-Conference doctoral workshop, which encouraged us to think about how we could be creative about the jobs of the future. Thinking not just about what jobs we would like to do, but also how we could potentially create the ideal job for ourselves. Bringing many current doctoral students, and recent graduates into contact to talk about these questions was stimulating and interesting. For the first part of the workshop we partook in walking discussions, walking from Campus to Lancaster centre. The walking discussions involved both discussing STS concepts that we, and others, were using in our research, and what our plans for the future were. Walking in the fields, listening to the birds, and connecting with the land juxtaposed nicely with discussions about the stress of finishing your PhD, and the concerns and uncertainties of the future. The future is uncertain for many recent and future PhD graduates, most of us at the workshop were not yet sure if we wanted to stay in academia, or attempt to forge our paths outside. Is this a dilemma about our usefulness and utility in the so called ‘real world’? One theme that emerged was the conflict between academic accolades and those that are valued by society. As STS scholars, we are often engaged in very concrete and applied subjects and cases, but yet at the same time enjoy getting lost in concepts
and theoretical terms, which disconnects us from the systems, groups, and individuals that we study. At this workshop it was easy to find ourselves again getting lost in idealistic and entirely hypothetical situations – for instance we created a new government department, entirely focused on doing things otherwise, and disruption from within. Whilst fun and creative this also highlights the challenges of thinking about our utility in the current way that society is set up. The verdict that I took away from the workshop is that while academic studies in STS prepare us very well for the weird and wonderful, they are challenging to translate to real world situations.

Despite this feeling of slight pessimism about the utility of my work, and the ability to connect and explain, particularly our theoretical approaches to those outside academia (or even my colleagues in different fields), I think that as STS researchers we have many skills and attributes that connect us intrinsically to the unique challenges we are currently experiencing politically and socially, across the globe. This was highlighted very clearly in our panel – What do we still not know about the IPCC? – which dealt with how the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is being approached as a research site 30 years on from its inception in 1988. Here discussions surrounding the role of expertise, of social inquiry into scientific processes, and understanding science-politics relationships were central. As the IPCC has been around for a long time, it has been subject to much critique, debate, and improvement over the years. In turn backlash against such critique is also common, particularly from those involved who believe in science's ability to speak truth to power and see critical accounts as being detrimental to the authority that science has developed. As a result of this, the IPCC's situation in a Post-truth world, is something that is worth considering, particularly from an STS perspective, and something that we as scholars of science and technology have something to contribute to. The role of experts of all sorts are under fire, and a debate over whether STS contributes to this climate of scepticism has ensued (Collins, Evans, & Weinel, 2017; Lynch, 2017; Sismondo, 2017). Thus, the 'usefulness' of knowledge – be that the knowledge produced by an international panel of climate change experts, or the knowledge produced in a doctoral dissertation which studies this – is once again at the centre of investigation.

This brings me back to the question of the utility of my PhD research, or how to consider the utility of our STS education outside of the academic field. My location within an environmental science department means making use of STS approaches are not easy, as my deconstructive approach is often taken as criticism without any suggestion of improvement. Following my time at EASST, and
the discussions that I had with individuals at the pre-conference doctoral workshop, and our panel, I was inspired to hear about other environments where STS researchers and predominantly natural scientists work more closely together. I could see that these kind of environments require careful planning and thought, rather than taking the form of an add on, but if done right they really contribute to a feeling of utility on the part of the STS researcher. The dilemma I have presented is a personal one, but I also feel that there are implications for the field of STS particularly through a need to help and encourage young researchers to foster their sense of relevance in a broader field – both within academia and outside. In turn, this is a dilemma about the role of research in politics, and indeed society more broadly, and our place as researchers within this.

REFERENCES

Jasmine Livingston will defend her thesis at the Centre for Environmental and Climate Research, Lund University, in November. Her research deals with the knowledge politics of climate change, particularly looking at the role of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and how its practices of knowledge making contribute to the making of so called policy relevant knowledge on climate change.

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First, I came to realise that there was a wide range of jobs that were available for STS researchers, along with different ways to enhance my job-hunting skills. In the pre-conference workshop, I had the great pleasure to meet and work with another twenty-one people from the US, Germany, France, UK, the Netherlands, and Italy among others. A senior researcher from an University in Berlin shared her precious experience that university departments preferred to accept new post-docs with their own funded projects, rather than offer new positions. Potential projects can be funded by national and transnational funding bodies like ERC.
(European Research Council) or the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG) as well as one’s potential collaborative institutes like museums or companies. In her case, she got financial support by a project organised by a museum, which was also her subject of study. With this project she got a position at the university she is currently working. Also, some people I met told me that since they conducted their Ph.D studies on relationships between government and environmental scientists or urban planning, they could work as officers or consultants in government offices or NGOs they used to do research on. To a great extent, a job that moves between the academia and industry exactly fits the needs of many STS students whose topics are extremely close to public and applied sectors or are precisely about the science-public relationships. After all, knowledge and experience learned during the Ph.D fieldwork bring great advantages when people go back to their field and work with their previous informants. What’s more, I came to know an US-based lady who, enthusiastically dedicated her life to helping build up interdisciplinary collaborative teams. When I asked her, “are you researching interdisciplinarity?” She answered, “I am not merely working on that, interdisciplinarity is my life!” Her simple answer best captures the transferability and boundary-crossing that lies in the core of STS studies. It is quite cool to transfer knowledge and expertise gained through research with practical and wider implications like a set of technologies or protocols. Besides, it is also of great help to communicate with some early doctoral students with whom I am able to share my fieldwork experience during the most difficult first two years of doctoral research.

Secondly, those who have stronger research abilities may secure a better job earlier. One way of enhancing that is to learn from talks in the panels and articles one may exchange with others during the conference. Indeed, there were so many insights worthy of careful mentioning and discussions taking place in the panels, during the panel break and at the final banquet. For instance, the presenter from University of Nottingham reported that interdisciplinary collaborations can be considered both as a process and as a result, even within one person who is experienced in multidisciplinary skills. I reflected on my own experience and realized
that I assumed that expertise of various disciplines were distributed across different people, totally ignoring cases in which individuals managed to work alone in an interdisciplinary way. Also, I learned other literature that was highly related to my own topic from colleagues from Germany and the Netherlands. A researcher I met while waiting for cups of coffee was from Polytechnic University of Valencia. He generously shared his articles discussing index calculations and analyzing benefit-cost on collaborations, which I would definitely cite in my forthcoming articles.

Thirdly, situating oneself in a wide research network helps to see a greater landscape of global knowledge production, and potential collaborations may be established with people in this network. But how can we build up our research network as junior researchers? Attending conferences and making a full use of the time there is a good start. For instance, during the dinner after the long march and discussions with people in the pre-conference workshop, Alexandra Endaltseva from Linköping University, Florentine Frantz from the University of Vienna and me came up with the idea of organizing a post-conference writing-up group, which was supposed to be attached to the EASST annual conference agenda. There are three reasons for doing this: first, since ideas are exchanged and generated during the conference, it would be great to write them down as drafts or even monographs when ideas are still fresh; second, potential collaborations initiated at the conference can be put forward and made concrete when people are still physically close to each other; third, being together will help many of us become more productive and work efficiently. In addition, keeping informed of the research updates and highlights in the field, keeping in contact with peers and colleagues, and exchanging writing drafts may also help extend the personal research network. This optional post-conference writing-up group only requires of a big house (which could be a cheap one), accommodations, and most important, a schedule for writing and for discussions with participants. In this way, we may make the fruitful results from meetings more solid and concrete. With fresh ideas, more studies may be conducted, ending up with more publications on one’s CV; potential collaborations may not only enhance opportunities of hunting a good academic position, but also even create one.

*To protect personal privacy, names used in the report are pseudonyms except for Endaltseva and Frantz because they share the property of this idea with me.

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