

Politics and Ethics of STS Research

Graduate Seminar open to all PhD students (+ advanced MA & postdocs if interested)

Organisers: Patrick Bieler & Jörg Niewöhner

What and why?

Over the last half century, *science and technology studies* have thrived through critical engagement with established and emergent scientific and technological cultures. Situating, slowing down, diverting, recalibrating, or stopping all-too-modern developments has been STS' *raison d'être*.

What does this mean today? We live in anthropocenic times. Deep transformations of our material world, our socio-technical collectives, and our narratives are desperately needed. Yet it has also become a post-truth world where the critical voice of enlightenment all-too-often rings hollow. What is our role? Do we need to be activists or at least fiercely political? Do we need to be beacons of reason? Which fields and whom do we engage and how? Do we observe, do we co-laborate? Where do we find the optimism, the enthusiasm, the care for others and ourselves? How do we sustain empirical efforts and critical thought in the face of so much complexity, so much bad faith, and so much suffering in the world?

This seminar cannot provide answers to these fundamental questions. Yet it can provide a space for exchange around some of the answers and ideas that are out there and that are being pondered and developed at the department. Framed in terms of the politics and ethics of our own research practices, the seminar can be a space where some of the deeper and more unsettling concerns can be articulated: intellectual concerns about the manifold layers of power and hegemony in our research practices, personal and emotional concerns about our own role in a particular field or in the academy writ large, professional concerns about who to become and where to go as critical scholars and citizens, normative concerns about whether there is a point to what we are doing, and – last but certainly not least – concerns how to actually work with informants, interlocutors, partners in appropriate ways across disciplinary and professional boundaries.

These are some of the dimensions of what we hope will become an ongoing discussion among graduate students and beyond at STS Munich.

Planned Sessions

We would like to frame this discussion in four blocks each lasting roughly a half-day:

Prep-Session: To introduce the idea of the seminar, clarify interest and feasibility, agree upon texts and formats

Tuesday 7.5.2024, 3pm, STS Department & hybrid

<https://tum-conf.zoom-x.de/my/joergsoffice>

Session 1: What are we doing as STS scholars? How can we care?

Tuesday 18th of June, 2-6pm | Suggested Reading:

- Puig de la Bellacasa, María (2012): "'Nothing Comes without Its World': Thinking with Care." In: *The Sociological Review* 60 (2), 197–216.
- Stengers, Isabelle (2023): *Making Sense in Common: A Reading of Whitehead in Times of Collapse*. University of Minnesota Press. (Section 4: What can society do?)
- de Laet, Marianne, Annelieke Driessen & Else Vogel (2021): "Thinking with attachments: Appreciating a generative analytic." In: *Social Studies of Science* 51 (6), 799–819.

Session 2: What are we doing with whose concepts? Provincialising STS and acknowledging significant differences inside STS

Thursday 20th of June, 2-6pm | Suggested Reading:

- Law, John & Wen-yuan Lin (2017): "Provincializing STS: Postcoloniality, Symmetry, and Method." In: *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal* 11 (2), 211–227.
- Gabrys, Jennifer (2019): "Sensors and Sensing Practices: Reworking Experience across Entities, Environments, and Technologies." In: *Science, Technology & Human Values* 44 (5), 723–736.

Session 3: What are the politics of our practices? Should we be activists? Is there room for reason? Tuesday 2nd of July 2024, 2-6pm | Suggested Reading:

- Woodhouse, Edward, David Hess, Steve Breyman & Brian Martin (2002): "Science Studies and Activism: Possibilities and Problems for Reconstructivist Agendas." In: *Social Studies of Science* 32 (2), 297–319.
- Stevens, Sharon McKenzie (2008): "Speaking Out: Toward an Institutional Agenda for Refashioning STS Scholars as Public Intellectuals." In: *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 33 (6), 730–753.
- Kinchy, Abby J (2020): "STS Currents against the 'Anti-Science' Tide." In: *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* 6, 76–80.
- Collins, Harry, Robert Evans & Martin Weinel (2017): "STS as science or politics?" In: *Social Studies of Science* 47 (4), 580–586.

Session 4: Interdisciplinary Collaboration - how to work in and with our fields?

Thursday 4th of July, 2-6pm

- Criado, Tomás Sánchez & Adolfo Estalella (2018): "Introduction. Experimental Collaborations." In: Adolfo Estalella & Tomás Sánchez Criado (Eds.): *Experimental Collaborations. Ethnography through Fieldwork Devices*. Berghahn, 1–30.
- Barry, Andrew & Georgina Born (2013): "Interdisciplinarity: Reconfigurations of the Social and Natural Sciences." In: Andrew Barry & Georgina Born (Eds.): *Interdisciplinarity: Reconfigurations of the social and natural sciences*. Routledge, 1–56. (reading until p. 26)
- Bieler, Patrick et al. (2021): "Distributing Reflexivity through Co-laborative Ethnography." In: *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 50 (1), 77–98.