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Special Issue Introduction Embarking on adventures

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STS Encounters is published by the Danish Association for Science and Technology Studies (DASTS). The aim of the journal is to publish high quality STS research, support collaboration in the Danish STS community and contribute to the recognition of Danish STS nationally and internationally.



Special Issue Introduction

Embarking on adventures

Danholt, Gahoonia, Johansen et al.

One of the central objectives of STS Encounters is to support the broad variety of STS research and communities, both in Denmark and abroad. Indeed, we see the field of STS as a delightfully heterogeneous assortment of different approaches, concepts and cases, which in their sheer diversity makes being a researcher and student of STS something like an adventure. While you may know where to begin, say with familiar theories or working alongside treasured colleagues, it is quite difficult to predict where STS will take you, and rightly so! Embarking on such adventurous journeys with and alongside STS exposes us to different research topics, approaches and concepts, but also to different articulations, positions and genres. In short, different ways of being and doing STS. Or different ways of *being in STS* and *being an STS* researcher.

This special issue is a celebration of the uncertain yet thrilling adventures of being and doing STS, staged as a collection of five recent professorial inaugural lectures. In some ways, publishing such lectures has become something of a minor tradition. Over the years, STS Encounters has published inaugural lectures by, in order of publication, Torben Elgaard Jensen (2013), Klaus Hoeyer (2014), Signe Vikkelsø (2016), Brit Ross Winthereik (2018), and Mette Nordahl Svendsen (2018). Often to great fanfare (or so we tell ourselves...).

In the spirit of adventure, we believe that inaugural lectures are not only interesting but also highly relevant for the STS community in several ways. First, they are usually written for and delivered in spoken form and thus carry a relaxed and informal tone. Eschewing the disciplined rigor and largely pre-defined structures that neatly follow the beaten path of more traditional research publications, inaugural lectures offer a more intimate, personal, and often playful narrative of and engagement with the complexities and complications of doing

research. They foreground the personal trajectories and idiosyncrasies of living in and with STS that are often manifestly absent in the classical article or book chapter.

Second, they often provide historical accounts. They exhibit a process of becoming and becoming-with. They shed light on the various contingencies, material, practical, conceptual as well as social, institutional, political, cultural aspects that have played parts in the speakers' journey to their present place and position. They are accounts and about being accountable. The telling of such stories, although they are never full accounts, invites us to think about circumstances and what makes up and pieces together the becoming of a professor in STS. Which is, of course, never just an individual achievement. It takes a village, as it were.

Third, such lectures also often express programmatic declarations and ambitions that point towards possible and/or desirable futures, as much for the researchers themselves as the field of STS. In so doing, they also take stock of the field and present a version of the STS as it is experienced by the speaker. A version that the reader may think with and relate to, and that perhaps opens up to new ways of thinking, doing and relating to STS. Caught between the past, present, and future of being in and with STS offers a stimulating temporal playground from which to experience the field anew, or to revisit long-standing issues or interests from a different perspective. We might even suggest that the very diversity of the lectures published in this issue evince the profound and professional enjoyment of embarking on the adventures of STS. Thus, we invite you along for the ride and we hope that reading and thinking with this collection will provide, if nothing else, a glimpse of a field both anchored in strong traditions and generous communities yet always staying in motion, charting new trajectories and drafting new practices of creative, critical, and caring forms of research for the future.

The State of STS, in Denmark and elsewhere

Over the last decade, we have in Denmark seen an increase in STS professorial appointments. In preparation for this special issue, there were actually three additional recent STS professors, who appreciated but politely declined the invitation to publish their lectures in STS Encounters. Similarly, we have witnessed an increase in the size of the national and international STS conferences. Indeed, STS research seems to have extended its presence, reach, and uptake considerably over the last decade. For an STS journal, the increase in STS professorships is obviously something positive, and we believe it signifies the consolidation, appreciation and importance of STS, in research, higher education, and in the Danish society more broadly. It also means that local STS research communities at the different Danish universities are growing and, from our perspective, flourishing. More professors and senior staff usually also mean more early-career researchers and, as we noted in the beginning, helps cultivate and nurture the kind of adventurous diversification we find so valuable in our field. The possibilities for finding a home in and to help contribute to the Danish STS community have never been better! At the same time, professors set research agendas, shape educational programs, and build personal and professional networks, both within and outside of the university, and of Denmark. They become the names and faces associated with the field, thereby becoming exemplars for ways of being and doing STS. Thus, from perhaps a slightly less optimistic angle, we might worry that STS is slowly turning into a 'normal science', in the Kuhnian sense. That the growing recognition, institutionalization, and consolidation of STS research in Denmark, as evidenced by the recent professorial appointments, means that the days when the field was young, emerging, playful, and provocative is behind us. That STS has become old, predictable, and, frankly, boring. Playing the same old tune again and again, rather than improvising and inventing anew. This may be a bit too cynical and simplistic, because when, how and from where does a field become "normal science".

However, this is not our experience as editors of STS Encounters. Obviously, there are recurring themes, theories, and interests that across Danish STS, including questions related to digitalization and democracy; sustainability and the green transition; infrastructures of governance, surveillance, and (cyber)security; the potentials and perils of data-intensive technologies and computational systems (and, more recently, generative AI); and, more broadly, experiments with concepts, methods, controversies, and modes of critique within and between STS and related disciplines. At the same time, while we often find common ground in exploring these different issues, fields, and perspectives, a brief look at the program for the recent biannual Danish Association for Science and Technology studies conferences, the Danish contributions to other Nordic or European STS conferences, as well as the workshops, seminars, and events hosted by Danish STS researchers and communities will quickly reveal that diversity, playfulness, and, perhaps, provocations continue to animate Danish STS. In the words of Annemarie Mol (2002: 55), Danish STS might be "more than one—but less than many." Put differently, we seem to have deftly avoided the strict standardization and homogenization that can result from institutional consolidation and recognition. This, we believe, testifies not only to the critical importance of the field and its adventurous spirit, but also to the deep care and intellectual generosity characteristic of the Danish STS community as a whole. The delicate balance between disciplinary adventurousness and strong institutional anchoring should not be underestimated nor taken for granted.

As the relevance and importance of STS today seems more important by the minute, empirical and conceptual analysis of the complexities of digital technologies in society seems crucial. The production of critical knowledge and practices related to climate change and its consequences, as well as the contestation of that knowledge, is and will continue to be a battlefield. However much one would like that controversy to reach closure, realistically and unfortunately, nothing seems to suggest that this will be the case in the near future. Here, STS has a lot to offer both in terms of analyzing and grasping these

dynamics, but also for thinking about and offering ways to intervene in them and provide imaginaries about alternative futures. Relatedly, the role of scientific knowledge and the ‘social contract’ between politics, science and democracy is being radically reconfigured, if not irrevocably eroded. STS is resourceful in threading a path that cannot be reduced to a binary choice between either imagining a re-introduction of scientific expertise as an authoritarian regime—a MAGAfication of science and research—or its complete inversion: being ‘just politics’. What STS teaches us is exactly that science-, and research-, and society-building are and always have been matters of weaving and sustaining relations between manifold interests and actors. A matter of community-building with and in a more-than-human world. We are in dire need of critical sensibilities to continue to believe in and sustain that type of world-building, in contrast to the application of brute force by megalomaniacs. The question and challenge to STS is thus how to disrupt the disruptors by other means than theirs. And the answer to this is not to lose hope in the strength of community-building over megalomania and to keep on keeping on. Indeed, we suggest that STS might lead by example, continuing to help compose a common world of political inclusiveness, epistemic diversity, and relations of care across (more-than-human) differences.

The Lectures

We have chosen not to summarize the five lectures in this introduction. We believe they should be read on their own terms and in their own words. Instead, we will briefly indicate some shared concerns that we have noted and found interesting, namely *historicity*, *community*, and *engagement*.

First, as already noted, inaugural lectures often encourage the speaker to take stock of a life in research, weaving together personal anecdotes and professional trajectories into a narrative of ‘becoming,’ suspended between past, present, and future.

We take this to indicate the broader importance of *historicity* as a condition for being and doing STS.

Historicity is central to the inaugural lecture as a genre. In telling the story of becoming a professor, each lecture also historicizes the chair itself. This is to be expected from the genre, but nonetheless we think it matters – that in outlining the future research agendas which will contribute to Danish STS in the years to come, the professors also articulate the paths behind them. The genre of the lecture insists that the path ahead is to be understood through the paths traversed so far.

The lectures also demonstrate the breadth of and differences in the ways that scholars enter their role as professor. While the contributions all outline a specific mode of engagement with society at large, they also point to how becoming a professor in STS is a matter of engaging with the knowledges and politics of sometimes very different disciplines and professions. Given the field’s commitments, this is unsurprising. But the personal dimension of this deserves emphasis. Entering these roles often means working outside one’s comfort zone, having one’s expertise questioned, and still choosing to take a stand – insisting that the particular sensitivities and engagements you bring to a shared understanding of science and technology *matter*.

Second, while the weaving of historical narratives in the inaugural lecture often is anchored in individual trajectories (for good reasons!), the importance of *community* for being and doing STS should also be self-evident in our present collection. Stories of interactions, relations, and collaborations with friends, colleagues, and mentors sit comfortably alongside accounts of learning new methods, encountering new theories, or taking up new positions. Again, the personal and the professional become entangled, revealing the professorial existence as, at the same time, an individual *and* collective achievement.

Third, the lectures are in different ways concerned with *engagement*. Unsurprisingly for STS researchers, they stipulate the importance of being engaged in societal matters or vice versa being engaged by societal matters. Their various accounts grapple with the question of the social contract between society and research/academia; how

to position oneself between the university and the 'outside world', and, especially, how engaged research can come to make a difference, however understood.

Finally, the themes of historicity, community, and engagement are inextricably linked. To give just one example, becoming 'a professor' entails increased expectations of various kinds of engagement, both inside and outside academia. As expectations of engagement grow, so does the need for communal belonging, whether in research collectives, university departments, or personal networks.

New Encounters

Finally, this special issue is not only a celebration of the recent professorial appointments in Danish STS but also marks the first special issue composed by STS Encounters' new editorial collective. In this last part of the introduction, we will briefly introduce the current team of editors and what you can expect from STS Encounters in the coming years. We are happy to announce that Peter Danholt and Kasper Ostrowski are continuing as members of the editorial collective, but they have now been joined by Simy Kaur Gahoonia, Ask Greve Johansen, and Frederik Vejlin.

Peter Danholt is Associate Professor at the Department of Digital Design and Information Studies, Aarhus University and co-head of the STS Centre at Aarhus University and the research program Cultures and Practices of Digital Technologies. He has been editor of Encounters since 2014. His current research is on the sociotechnical practices of social work and digital systems and data.

Kasper Ostrowski is managing editor of STS Encounters. He is also a cheese scholar, academic radio montage entrepreneur, empirical printmaker and daily orchestrator of the Center for STS studies situated at Communication and Culture at Aarhus University, Denmark. He holds a master's degree in Dramaturgy and Multimedia and a PhD from Information and Media studies at Aarhus University.

Simy Kaur Gahoonia is a Postdoc in the section for Technologies

in Practice at the IT University of Copenhagen, and member of the university's feminist technoscience lab ETHOS Lab. Simy's ongoing work investigates digitalised student-wellbeing measurements and interventions in the Danish public school system. Prior to this, she completed her PhD on technology comprehension (teknologiforståelse) as a science-in-the-making, by exploring its attendant experimentations, pedagogical development work and curricular articulation. Simy is particularly interested in advancing STS in educational research, not least for critical studies in educational technology (edtech).

Ask Greve Johansen is a Postdoc in the Digitalization, Democracy, and Governance section at the IT University of Copenhagen. Ask is concerned with how the value of natural resources is narrated, calculated, and otherwise enacted in bureaucracies, and the material-semiotic histories and futures of political strategies and -economies. He holds a master's degree in sociology from the University of Copenhagen and a PhD from the Department of Sustainability and Planning at Aalborg University.

Frederik Vejlin is a Postdoc at the Department of Digital Design and Information Studies at Aarhus University, affiliated with the STS Centre. Frederik is an anthropologist of technoscience with a deep interest in the experimental dimensions of science and social life. He works at the intersections of sociocultural anthropology and STS, with a regional focus on Japan. He primarily uses ethnographic methods to study the complex configurations of sociotechnical imaginaries, more-than-human relations, and experimental practices in Japanese (social) robotics and AI research. Frederik can be reached at f.vejlin@cc.au.dk.

Now that we all know each other, a few words about the future of STS Encounters. Even if the editorial collective is new, we have no major transformations planned. While we have no official certifications, STS Encounters remains committed to keeping STS research open access in a time where the practices of academic publishing are only getting increasingly predatory. There are no and never will be fees or processing charges required for publishing with us, and all publications are freely available via our website on tidskrift.dk. In that spirit, we are currently

working towards acquiring the Diamond Open Access Standard (DOAS). At the same time, 'access' is also a complex and multilayered phenomenon. Even if our publications are free to read and download, this does not automatically mean that they are accessible in a broader sense. Thus, we also remain committed to continuously improving the accessibility of our content for people with different disabilities. From Volume 15, Number 1, 2023 and onwards, STS Encounters is partially conformant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1, Level AA. See our [Accessibility Statement](#) for more details or reach out to Kasper Ostrowski (imvko@cc.au.dk) for other inquiries.

On the content side, we have several things in the pipeline. STS Encounters has various exciting articles-in-progress at different stages of the publishing process. We also have an experimental double issue on the intersections of STS and art underway, guest edited by Hannah Star Rogers and Louise Whiteley. The sheer scope and variety of forms and modalities of contributions to these issues is a first for STS Encounters. An adventurous logistical challenge that we hope can enrich and expand the kinds of publications we can accommodate in the future. In the same vein, if you are a part of a research project or group, who are on the lookout for a venue to publish your exciting STS-related research, do not hesitate to reach out. The same, needless to say, goes for individual researchers.

STS Encounters will also be represented at the upcoming DASTS2026 conference – Encountering Infrastructures - hosted on June 29th-30th by Aalborg University in Copenhagen. We hope you will join us in exploring the collective adventures of doing, being, and thinking with STS once again. The STS Encounters Editorial Collective

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