

### The Difference—and Promise—of *ESTS*

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#### Abstract

In this final editorial for the 2020–2025 Editorial Collective, we reflect on how we have worked to action on our key editorial commitments, which included: cultivating greater transnationalization in the field, deepening open access infrastructures, foregrounding pedagogies as a vital domain of STS scholarship and practice, and engaging audiences beyond STS. We share how editing *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* has foregrounded different dimensions, namely of community, infrastructure, and labor, in the context of running a scholar-led and -run journal like *ESTS*. Understanding the journal in this way, we suggest, surfaces both the *difference*-and *promise*-of a diamond open access journal like *ESTS*.

#### Keywords

diamond open access; transnational STS; pedagogy; scholar-led journal; editorial transition

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## Introduction

This issue marks the end of the editorial tenure of our collective. We started transitioning into the editorship of *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society (ESTS)* in 2020, just as the COVID-19 pandemic was setting in. Working as a transnationally distributed collective at this time meant figuring out how to work together, balancing professional and care responsibilities across time zones during a moment of global crisis. Until that time, *ESTS* had operated under the founding editorship of Professor Daniel Kleinman, established in 2015 as the diamond open access journal of the Society for Social Studies of Science (4S), with the goal of promoting the widest range of scholarship in STS. We assumed editorship with the express goal of building on this legacy in a few different ways, including: cultivating greater transnationalization in the field, deepening open access infrastructures, foregrounding pedagogies as a vital domain of STS scholarship and practice, and engaging audiences beyond STS.

Over the course of pursuing these editorial goals and running the journal for the past five years, we have taken away some learnings that we believe are important to underscore for the broader STS community. We offer them here as part of our ongoing effort to share what we have been learning about scholarly publishing and as scaffolding for the incoming editorial collective as it embarks upon steering the journal in new directions with fresh energy and insight. Regardless of particular editorial priorities, we believe that it is productive to understand scholarly journals like *ESTS* as having a few key dimensions. Among these are:

## Community

Journals, as we have noted before, are technologies of community-building ([Editorial Collective 2022](#)). The role of scholarly journals in building and maintaining scientific communities and transformations in scholarly publishing has been a rich focus for STS scholarship. We know that journals can be key sites of delineating the contours of scholarly communities, signaling both openness and limits. Indeed, STS scholarship too has flourished through several important journals, including *Science, Technology, & Human Values (ST&HV)*, *Social Studies of Science (SSS)*, *Science as Culture*, and in more recent years, *ESTS*, *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience*, *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society*, and *East Asian Science, Technology, and Society (EASTS)*, to name but a few.

But, as we (and many others) have frequently said, STS scholarship at present is dominated by Euro-American ideas and institutions. Much has been written about the need for the field to pluralize, along many different axes, but tangible movement in this direction has been slower. As Noela Invernizzi and Sofia Foladori-Invernizzi ([2025](#)) demonstrate in this issue, transnationalization in the field has been increasing, but decentering Euro-American dominance in the field remains a formidable challenge ([Rodriguez-Medina and Harding 2025](#)).

One definite goal for our collective, therefore, has been to promote greater transnationalization in the field. The community we have sought to build is decidedly transnational, drawing in scholars and scholarship across genealogies, generations, languages, and regions. Thus, we have sought to publish research and discussions that engage the question of transnationalism, empirically, conceptually, and methodologically. The thematic collection on TRANSnationalizing STS ([2023a](#)) is one example of this commitment. Other collections (e.g. Innovation Studies and STS ([2023b](#))) and standalone essays are also informed by this sensibility. We have also pursued initiatives that help foster transnational STS,



through panels and roundtables at 4S conferences on language politics, STS networks and collaborations, supporting STS events in India and Kenya, and co-organizing NSF (National Science Foundation) writing workshops at 4S conferences.

Foregrounding STS pedagogies has been another mode of expanding the STS communities. STS scholars have troubled the boundaries between research and teaching, and the many other ways in which scholarship unfolds. Challenging a linear model of knowledge-production, Gary Downey and Teun Zuiderent-Jerak (2021) has termed this as a form of “critical participation.” A rich body of work in the tradition of “Making and Doing” has emerged from this sensibility. For our collective, this has taken the form of producing material for classroom instruction, and in turn, understanding STS in the classroom as a form of scholarship that many of us undertake. The Thematic Collection on Pedagogical Intersections (2024) exemplifies this in particular, along with several standalone publications reflecting on STS pedagogies as well as offering material to support classroom instruction.

### **Infrastructure**

Scholarly journals can be understood as infrastructures for scholarly communities. They are platforms for reporting, discussing, and reflecting on findings, concepts, and trajectories for the field. As with *ESTS*, they can be sites for experimenting with newer forms and configurations of scholarship. They are also platforms that allow diverse authors, reviewers, and readers to be in community.

Scholarly journals also require infrastructure. *ESTS* runs on Open Journal Systems (OJS), the open-source platform developed by the Public Knowledge Project (PKP), reflecting our scholar-owned ethos. Unlike proprietary journal management systems, maintaining an OJS-based journal required sustained engagement by the editorial team: configuring, maintaining, and occasionally hacking the infrastructure ourselves. One of our first tasks was upgrading OJS to a stable version, which included surveying best practices in governance, publication impact, inclusive web design, and branding. Many of these aspects have required periodic and ongoing updating. We've also had to develop workarounds when the infrastructure constrained our choices, such as implementing multiple Creative Commons licenses, a need driven by funder mandates but unsupported natively in OJS.

Infrastructural labor extends beyond software. Our initiatives like publishing research data on the STS Infrastructures platform illustrate this (see 2022 for context, on the [STS Infrastructures platform](#)). Developing policies for data publication and configuring them digitally has been an important milestone. For the field, this infrastructuring helps understand the problems and pitfalls of publishing research data, a demand that is increasingly made by various funding organizations. Events we organized (as mentioned above) have likewise served as infrastructural work for a more transnational STS. The diversity that we seek in the field, we realize, will need a reorientation of both community values and the infrastructures that undergird them.

Infrastructures can encode and foreclose possibilities of what we can/not publish. Remaining attentive to these entails ongoing infrastructural work crucial for publishing in ways that can enable and extend scholarly commitments of care, criticality, and inclusion that are fundamental to STS.



## Labor

The publishing process, to invoke a classic STS concept, is blackboxed. Many of us often interface with only limited aspects of scholarly publishing. As authors, reviewers, and readers, we often interact with proprietary content management systems that form the backbone of corporate-led publishing. Thus, while we are often very familiar with preparing manuscripts for submission and engaging with the subsequent peer review process, much of what goes into subsequently bringing manuscripts to publication often remains invisible. Copy-editing and production work is often contracted out to teams removed from the content of the manuscripts, with little investment in ensuring that key aspects of manuscripts are drawn out for maximum effectiveness. Overall, scholarly content is hierarchically separated from questions of form, design, and effectiveness.

Being a scholar-owned and -run journal, we have had to think through carefully about this aspect of scholarly publishing. Over time, we systematized the copy-editing and production workflow into a series of steps required to take the manuscript to publication. The process engages with everything from reading a manuscript for accuracy and flow to reference checking, inline linking, picture-editing, license selection, page layouts and planning subsequent promotional activities. Doing them well and with care, makes it possible to surface the best in manuscripts. Over the course of our editorship, *ESTS* has published in both PDF and HTML formats in multiple Englishes, figured out system hacks to enable multiple licensing options, and worked through lively software infrastructures which are never quite stable—be they the OJS content management system that *ESTS* runs on or softwares such as Microsoft Word® and Adobe Acrobat® whose internal communication protocols keep breaking down on account of periodic upgrades. Needless to say, these are labor-intensive processes in ways that are often not recognized in our broader scholarly community. These also slow down the process of publication, on the one hand holding out the possibility of more considered scholarship, but on the other hand, at odds with contemporary demands placed by universities and institutions to keep publishing in ever greater quantities at dizzying speeds.

## The Difference of *ESTS*

Across the world, scholarly publishing and societies today are at a crossroads. Many forces—institutional, financial, and geo-political—are eroding away spaces for considered deliberation. The ascendancy of big tech, transformations to university spaces, ongoing techno-ecological and military conflicts are formidable challenges of our times. The rapid evolution and incorporation of AI technologies into scholarly production pose additional challenges. *ESTS*, and 4S, have the opportunity—and responsibility—to document and offer sustained reflection in such contexts.

Doing so requires creative and ongoing experimentation with content, form, and genre. For this, it is crucial for 4S to have an OA journal like *ESTS*, not only because it allows a broad audience to access STS scholarship, but because it gives the community control over the means of scholarly production. This is not easy, because it means that editors, authors, reviewers, and readers have to approach a “journal” not just as an outlet for their research outputs, but as something that they claim ownership over by providing their time, energy, and resources. If we all claim ownership over our journals, then we get to have a greater say over how our work gets used. This is particularly crucial as publishers and universities make deals with big tech companies to permit their data to be scraped. If the scholarly journal is indeed a community building technology, we believe it is imperative that, as scholars, we



steward and own our own community technology rather than outsourcing and trusting it to commercial players who primarily see community as yet another site for generating profits.

It is perhaps useful to think here with a metaphor: this is the difference between renting and owning our own home. The STS community needs to own a home for STS, without worrying about evictions, unfair rent increases, or nosy landlords. But ownership also entails responsibilities. If we own the house, then we need to run and maintain it, down to the infrastructure, and undertake the labor that this entails. We need to understand its quirks and the things we need to do to keep it running smoothly, and to improvise it to achieve different ends. From our editorship, we see that, in addition to all of its other valences, the “Engaging” of *ESTS* also means learning how to take care of a home for the discipline.

This is the difference between a scholar-owned Diamond OA journal, such as *ESTS*, and other types of journals, most of which are owned and run by five big corporate publishers ([Butler et. al 2023](#)). Having our own Diamond OA journal is important for the STS community to retain our freedom to experiment and play in the face of ongoing world-historical transformations. It is incumbent upon us, therefore, to keep insisting on open access as a shared community value and commit the resources—of time, labor, finances—necessary to realize this promise.

### Issue 11.3

The final issue of Volume 11 features three *Original Research Articles* and one *Engagements* piece. Vivian Underhill and Jessica Smith’s ([2025](#)) *Engagement* on carbon sequestration focuses on a range of technologies meant to reduce and minimize carbon emissions to the atmosphere and controversies surrounding them to sketch some of the ways in which STS scholarship brings insights and new directional agendas to carbon sequestration. Luis Felipe R. Murillo, and Erin McElroy ([2025](#)) reflect on the tensions between the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project’s (AEMP) organizational practices and the logics of software development bringing lessons learned for the STS scholars working collaboratively with developers who bring their own corporate software dependencies, methods and collaborations. Noela Invernizzi, and Sofia Foladori-Invernizzi ([2025](#)) ask how transnational is STS with a focus on the global mission of the Society for Social Studies of Science (4S) in relation to its epistemic diversity—through its annual conference and journals tracking its transnational progress in collaboration. Christy Spackman, Katie Ulrich, Etienne Benson, and Andrea Ballesterro ([2025](#)) explore the relationship of innovation in relation to maintenance and repair. Two case studies utilize “retooling” as an analytic—on water reuse technologies in the US, as well as efforts within the sugarcane biofuels industry in Brazil.

We would like to conclude this editorial by acknowledging all anonymous reviewers who have contributed to the present volume. We are truly grateful for their time and generous engagement, which has made it possible for us to continue developing the journal.

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Last but not the least, we welcome the new transnational editorial collective led by Erika Szymanski and Gregory Hollin into running the journal. We look forward to *ESTS*'s journey under a new editorship and hope that the experience is as rewarding as it has been for us. We strongly believe that *ESTS* affords an editorial collective to understand and go beyond the limits and failures of conventional publication. We hope the incoming collective can leverage *ESTS* to this end, and explore new and exciting ways to flex and sustain the STS community.

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