

AsSIST-UK 2019 Conference Science, Technology and Innovation Studies: Critical Inquiries in Theory and Practice

Alliance Manchester Business School,
The University of Manchester, UK,
9 -10 September 2019



AsSIST-UK's 2019 national conference was, for the first time, a free-standing event where colleagues from across the country (and beyond) could come to present their work and share ideas.

The Conference was superbly hosted and coordinated by AsSIST-UK members based at the Alliance Business School¹, assisted by the Association chairs and volunteer students, who ensured all went well as delegates moved around the excellent new buildings and facilities of the School.

Around 80 Members attended, some arriving a little jet-lagged from the 4S meeting in New Orleans. While our numbers were considerably less than the gathering there, we enjoyed a rich variety of papers across seven main themes, and two excellent Plenary sessions.



The first of these, by Albena Yaneva. *The Good Experiment: How Space matters for nanoscience* explored her recent STS research tracing the architect and scientist at work where science in the making and architecture in the making (labs, corridors, spaces, landmark science buildings) are co-produced, asking how does architecture contribute to the changing nature of scientific practice and the larger networks of scientific production? Her lecture was illustrated using a case study of the National Graphene Institute in Manchester, its senior staff recipients of the Nobel Prize. She showed how the scientists

themselves became the architects in the building design, but also how there are parallels

¹ Kieron Flanagan, Barbara Ribeiro, Maria Karaulova, Julia Kasmire, Sam Robinson and assisted by Robin Williams, Andrew Webster, Matjaz Vidmar and Holly Crossley

and interaction between the fields in terms of the mirrored processes of experimentation, modelling and visualisation.



The second Plenary was an entertaining double act – literally – by Claire Marris and Jane Calvert: they performed a play they had written based on their experiences as STS researchers participating in a 'policy room' in the field of synthetic biology - an account that can be read in the more formal context of their joint paper that appeared earlier this year in *Science, Technology and Human Values: 'Science and Technology Studies in Policy: The UK Synthetic Biology Roadmap'*.



Exploring their experience via a play, gave a real sense of the context in which their ideas, strategies for engagement, trials and tribulations were experienced and dealt with. It proved not only an enjoyable event for delegates but one that offered some important lessons too, about the difficulties STS has in opening up a shared space where critically constructive debate might be had.



The paper sessions were equally valuable. We had a strong programme of papers across the board but in particular the sessions/tracks on STS and architecture and the urban, on AI, on health and biomedicine and on 'animal entanglements' seemed to generate a lot of interest and engagement, with common themes emerging across the grouped sets of papers, in part because of the ample time given for discussion. For example, the first group of papers in the Health

and Medicine theme with contributions from Rachel Hale on genetic diagnostics, from Peter Fusezi on assistive technologies, and Andy Bartlett's paper on gene therapies and temporalities, all pointed to the interpretative work in biomedical science and practice and in

particular how this generates diverse ontologies – of what genetics uncertainties mean, of the design of medical devices, and how gene therapy techniques (such as CRISPR) make new biomodifications possible.

Abstracts for these and all other papers are available at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XH_6jW58DR1zbnFMZ4pTihPohDvcRYTA/view

AsSIST-UK Doctoral Prize

The Conference was also the venue for another first – the award of AsSIST-UK's PhD prize for the best thesis of 2018/19: the £250 is awarded to a PhD thesis that demonstrates outstanding quality in the STS/Innovation Studies field and one that meets one or more of the following criteria:

- exploring the links between STS and Innovation Studies
- links to other disciplines and working across the sciences and humanities
- different forms of public/policy impact and engagement
- opening up novel areas of inquiry for STIS.



This year's award was made to Dr Clémence Pinel, for her thesis *Enterprising environments: Knowledge production in epigenetics in two British laboratories*.

The thesis was of outstanding quality, originality and interdisciplinarity. It speaks across STS and Innovation Studies, a key criterion for the award, and in doing so has taken STIS understandings in new directions, particularly through its concepts of "research entrepreneurship" and "data care". The thesis was undertaken at KCL under the excellent supervision of Professors Barbara Prainsack and Chris McDevitt. The picture shows Clémence receiving the award from Andrew Webster.

PFSTIS

The UK's Postgraduate Forum for Science, Technology and Innovation Studies held a network meeting on the final day of the Conference and discussed how best to support PhD and ECR researchers in UK universities. Julia Kasmire chaired the meeting which concluded with a number of actions for AsSIST-UK to take forward with the Forum.

New AsSIST-UK Executive Committee

Finally, the new AsSIST-UK Executive Committee met after the event to plan for the year ahead. The new EC membership and roles are:

Chair: Robin Williams, Edinburgh

Vice-Chair, Barbara Ribeiro, Manchester

Communications and Membership: Andrew Webster, York

London-area rep: Anne Marie Coles, Greenwich

Marie-Claire Brisbois, SPRU Sussex

ECR rep and link to the PFSTIS: Julia Kasmire, Manchester

PhD rep and link to the PFSTIS: Matjaz Vidmar, Edinburgh

Further updates on EC planning will be posted on the Association's website:

<https://assist-uk.com/association-for-studies-in-innovation-science-and-technology/>