Careful engagements

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There has been a long running discussion within the social sciences and humanities on how researchers engage with their fields of study and what this bring about. While some researchers argue that by engaging and being too close to the studied field, the researcher is compromising 'objective' or 'neutral' positions; others warn that by being too distant the researcher fails to understand or improve problematic or unethical conditions. This edited volume will add nuances to this discussion by developing the understanding of 'careful engagements' as a generative mode of knowledge production that takes place between researchers and their research fields. The chapters in this volume will discuss the researchers' ambitions and motivations to engage as well as the dilemmas emerging when they do so.

Much points to the possibility that this issue is increasingly important. There is a growing interest in the applicability of social science and there is much focus on developing methods to establish links between research and other practices. Action-research is for instance being revived to counter the overly quietist tradition of knowledge generation that according to some researchers has developed throughout the latest decades (Haraway, 2016; Star, 1991). On the one hand, many researchers want to engage more and be useful in an increasingly polarized world, and on the other hand, many research grants come with stipulations about partnerships with actors outside academia. Thus, we believe the research community is ready for fresh thinking about this important issue.

In Science and Technology Studies (STS) some work has already been done in regards to developing theories and methods to establish closer links between research and other practices (Bruun Jensen, 2007; Zuiderent-Jerak & Bruun Jensen, 2007). Indeed, in 2014, The Society for Social Studies of Science launched a new initiative to highlight this issue, posing the question, how do STS researchers participate in 'Making and Doing' politics and science? This has been an inlet ever since. Zuiderent-

Jerak (2015) suggests that one of the crucial problems in these discussions is that the act of engagement is detached from the discussions of production of knowledge. By 'twisting the lions tail', he proposes to understand 'interventions as situated experiments', that is, as a generative mode of knowledge production. It will be interesting if this idea is given a central position in the chapters of this edited volume. In the below, we will identify two ways of approaching engagement from a theoretical perspective of care. Importantly, while it may seem that the two approaches are separate and not in dialogue there are indeed many 'partial connections' (Strathern, 2004) between the two (see Linden & Lydahl forthcoming). We hope that these approaches will serve as inspiration for thinking about careful engagements, but indeed, we see that other approaches can also be fruitfully used.

We call the first approach 'care in practice'. This is an understanding of care as persistent tinkering. To tinker is to shape and arrange humans and aids in ways that suit them (Winance, 2010). As such, care (and careful engagements) emerges in relation to continuous experimenting with people and aids. Care in practice scholars have emphasized the importance of studying goods and values within the setting under study, rather than engaging with and bringing in normativities from the 'outside' (Mol, Moser, & Pols, 2010). Thus, care in practice employs a form of empirical philosophy aiming to study facts, concerns, ideas of good and values produced in situ (Pols, 2015; Pols, Pasveer, & Willems, 2017). The core of Pols' research is empirical ethics, which studies normativity in practice. Drawing on observations and situated analysis researchers can engage carefully and make suggestions for improvement. In this context, Pols (2008) stress the promises of being re-scriptive (rather than descriptive) and suggestive (rather than abstract and quiet) by interfering 'in the practices studied, and by opening up implicit notions of good care for (self) reflection' (Pols, 2008 p. 52). Latour insists that the researcher should continue describing to get a nuanced description of the assembly of interest (Latour, 2005). Pols is inspired by this, but also by feminists. In principle, a description is always partial (Haraway, 1988). Thus, the concept of re-scriptions clarifies that the description is the researcher's partial observation. The notion of re-scription thus emphasizes that the researcher in some sense comes in-between the description and the observed.

The second approach has been called 'critical care' (Martin, Myers, & Viseu, 2015). A key issue in this approach is to draw attention to questions of power, to the non-innocence of caring and to the exclusions produced and reproduced in and through care (Martin et al., 2015). In relation to careful engagements, critical care scholars add an important dimension to careful engagements. Asking what 'we are encouraging caring for?', Bellacasa (2011 p. 92) urges the researcher to not only study how care is enacted in the practice under study, but also to think about our own care and concerns; what worlds we, as researchers, want to question, encourage and strengthen through our research

and our engagements. Thus, critical care presents itself as 'more than following the actors and less than showing the way' (Bellacasa, 2017 p. 143). In his essay 'What if ANT wouldn't pursue agnosticism but care?' López-Gómez (2019) makes a similar argument. While agnosticism through sorting frictions was indeed useful to open up critical discussions about political and social implications of science and technology, López-Gómez found that an agnostic repertoire 'seemed to make me quite insensitive towards the violence of the aforementioned frictions, to its uneven distribution and consequences for the actors at stake; it was as if I could point out the struggles without being touched or moved by them' (López-Gómez, 2019 p. 7). Therefore, López-Gómez suggests to use care as a heuristic for 'taking sides, participating, acting, making a choice, taking a position, but without taking for granted a general or fundamental principle on which these actions would safely and coherently be grounded'(López-Gómez, 2020 p. 10).

We invite contributions to this edited volume that reflect on careful engagements from the approaches presented above or others. How can we more precisely draw on ideas of care to perform careful engagements? How can we make re-scriptions and what does it imply to be suggestive? What inequalities do we risk producing especially when there is funding involved in the research? How do we take sides without taking a fundamental principle of action for granted? What tensions and obstacles do we meet while we strive to engage carefully? How does careful engagements affect academic work and output? Are there examples of careless engagements? The volume provides theoretical reflections about these issues and questions as well as a number of empirical examples of strivings with careful engagement.

Hacking (1983) considers observations and experiments in sciences and argues that science cannot simply be understood as a matter of understanding different aspects of the world. In addition, science is to be understood as a tool to change the world. In line with this, we want to move from only theorizing to engaging and thus interfering in the fields of study. However, some STS researchers reject the dichotomy between description (understanding) and intervention (tool to change) and make the case that STS has always been engaged; by way of offering different perspectives, by taking part in discussions, by attending sites. This critique is useful to make the point that any description, always and in one way or another, participates in the world and thus to make a distinction between 'intervention as performance' and 'intervention as an act of will' (Elkjaer & Nickelsen, 2016). Descriptions exist in the world, and are therefore always coming in-between parts of the world.

Some researchers, however, propose the design of avowed intervention experiments as an interesting non-strategic and non-detached scholarly method (intervention as an act of will). The

purpose being to learn from controversies, to care for the collectives studied without violating concerns for reflexivity, situatedness and mess (Zuiderent-Jerak, 2015, 2016). By analyzing researchers ways of intervening in the fields studied, Jensen proposes three different modes of engagements (Jensen, 2012). (1) 'Invitations' where analyses are done from a quite marginalized position. (2) 'Availability', where the researcher is invited not only to describe, but also to participate in discussions with the studied collective. (3) 'Composition' where the researcher is involved in creating new relations and effects by mediating between previously unconnected actors. Here, the researcher often faces substantial difficulties in holding everything together. The latter engagement is criticized by some researchers for costing the researcher's clear-sightedness and special role as an independent actor.

These kinds of participations in research projects are interesting. In the context of careful engagements and the mentioned critique, the notion of intervention are in some uses of it fruitless. First, intervention may bring with it ideas of one-way causation implicating that the interventionist does something unidirectional to actors in the studied field without being implicated him/herself. In fact, during field studies, often proponents will try to influence other participants, including researchers. The researcher may even be seen as an attractive (and influential?) collaboration partner that is in the position of telling the story of certain groups and thus has the possibility to strengthen this group (Nickelsen, 2009). Second, the notion of intervention may be seen as quite monolithic and can lead to the imagination of bringing in a new pervasive order or a new epoch (Ruppert, Law, & Savage, 2013). When stepping into their fields of study, researchers may prefer to draw on a nuanced vocabulary. In relation to this, Law proposes to shift 'intervention' with the notion of 'interference'. Interference, he argues, modestly helps us direct our attention toward a number of different orderings (Law, 2002, 2006, 2009). Interference moreover implies that several orders intertwines and perform into one another.

In regards to finding oneself as a researcher in front of several orderings in the field studied, Bruun Jensen proposes the notion of sorting attachments,

> A performative approach would be concerned with the specific elements, which the researcher attempts 'to make cohere' in theory and practice, and which kind of event this occasions. I refer to this process as sorting attachments. Sorting refers here to the practical activity of figuring out how to engage with other organizations, institutions or agendas as part of conducting research. The term attachments points to the fact that no such engagement is innocent, since all actors come packaged with sets of cultural, political and economic relationships as well as institutionally sanctioned commitments (Bruun Jensen, 2007 p. 239).

Thus, as part of careful engagements the researcher may want sort attachments that is to figure out how to engage with different parties. Proponents and actors may, as mentioned, have very different ideas, commitments and values and they perhaps even want to enroll the researcher to strengthen their own agenda (Nickelsen, 2009). Therefore, Zuiderent-Jerak and Jensen put forward the proposition that engaged researchers ask themselves,

> Which partial connections with the field do my approach, discourse and activities strengthen? Which partial disconnections do they establish? In addition, what kinds of normativities are enacted through these? (Zuiderent-Jerak & Bruun Jensen, 2007 p. 232).

We would like these questions and reflections to saturate the chapters of this volume, and to this we add attention to the roles we play in our studies and our own care and concerns (Bellacasa, 2017; Martin et al., 2015).

Lynch (2009) proposes to enact the researchers engagement through a number of local-interactional spaces. These are spaces and opportunities where the researcher can reflect on his or her observations with the studied collective. This approach emphasizes that being there and communicating with informants and participants involved in the research makes a difference. In this operational strategy, careful engagements may well take form as an ongoing explicit reflection on the part of the researcher, while interacting and communicating with participants from the studied field in this kind of spaces. In relation to this concrete example of how careful engagement may be operationalized into a research design, Vikkelsø (2007) points to situations where engaged researchers risk acting as tools on behalf of certain influential participants. This may be the case in projects where one group wants to fight another group's resistance to obtain a certain goal and needs the legitimacy of the researcher to do so. In order to avoid engagement in ethically questionable relationships like this, engaged researchers can for instance present good descriptions such as executive summaries and/or pro et contra discussion papers. This refers to what we formerly discussed as re-scriptions and suggestive research. Undoubtedly, good descriptions can be both careful, engaged and influential. Again, this example points out the importance of sorting attachments among the normativities, agendas and controversies faced by the researcher.

Viewed from the perspective of STS, careful engagements take place as exchanges (and is a result of exchanges) between many networks and thus occasions a number of transformations. These may best be seen as 'many-way causations' where a number of actors observe, persuade, negotiate, and influence by using diverse tools in order to achieve multiple overlapping goals and spread their ideas, and aspirations (Nickelsen, 2009).

We do not want to define in advance what careful engagements are or ought to be (this is the aim of the book). Rather we want to keep it open since this topic undoubtedly can be approached in many different ways. Importantly however, we cannot simply understand careful engagements on a distance scale as a matter of appropriate proximity or distance to a field. One way of approaching careful engagements is to understand it as thinking aloud with the studied collective about what you do. Again, it is not just a matter of thinking, it is perhaps in particular about putting experiments into action, seeing what is happening and learn from it. The obstacle for careful engagements is not the normative deficit in secluded research, nor researchers' normativity. Rather, the challenge is for researchers to find ways to deal with the normative excess that flourishes in the many relations in which they take part. The difficult and interesting part is how the researcher meets the many normativities and how this compares to the researcher's own professionalism and normativity. In this relationship, the researcher has a lot to give and much to learn. This is the relations and occasions we want to scrutinize in this book.

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