

Final colloquium of IFRIS and LabEx SITES

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Troubles in Transitions

This final colloquium of IFRIS and LabEx SITES offers a unique opportunity to reflect on the evolution of the diverse research fields that have intersected over the past 15 years. IFRIS has established itself as a significant hub for research on science and innovation within society, sparking inquiries into the future trajectory of these fields. From the outset, social and historical studies of science and technology have played a central role in shaping IFRIS's activities. However, numerous research projects that fall outside the traditional domain of Science and Technology Studies (STS) have also been part of the journey.

We position this conference at the crossroads of taking stock of past research and observing the shifts in research objects, methods, and relationships with the world. Over the past decade, significant disruptions have taken place, from the acceleration of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic to the financial crisis, the rise of nationalist political movements, and the advent of "new" wars across various regions. Additionally, we have witnessed the emergence of feminist movements, driven by anti-patriarchal and anti-sexist critiques, and ongoing advocacy for control over women's bodies. These developments are not disconnected from the contested institutionalization and medicalization of gender issues.

The construction of public discourse through disinformation and the production of ignorance raises pressing questions about the rise of a 'post-truth' regime (Girel 2017). It is difficult to imagine that these upheavals have not influenced our research—both in shaping our scientific directions and the very way we conduct our research.

The 'Anthropocene moment' (Hamilton et al. 2015) is evident in the increasingly accepted recognition of the geological impact of industrial development and the human origins of climate change. This shift challenges the separation of science and politics, pushing us into an era characterized by critical reassessments of industrial progress and uncertain futures. Moreover, this moment calls for a dual pluralization of knowledge and temporal regimes. Not only has the linear trajectory of societal control over the future been disrupted, but the diversification of knowledge regimes (Escobar 2017) and corporeality regimes (Mol 2002) also demands more precise analysis. Researchers must engage with the multiplicity of modes of existence and their inherent frictions, while also considering the interplay of scales within macroscopic realities—realities that represent not just contexts but also futures (Pestre 2013). These complexities fuel our reflection and commitments as scholars navigating futures complicated by the simultaneous emergence of dystopias, concrete utopias, and

rationalized anticipations under the guise of transition policies. This raises the question of our role in critiquing and contributing to the governance of sociotechnical transitions (Beck et al. 2021). More fundamentally, it compels us to examine the decline and destabilization of established sociotechnical regimes, exploring concepts like ‘doing less’ or ‘doing without’ (Goulet & Vinck 2023) and considering the possibilities of living within the ruins of capitalism (Haraway 2016).

The proliferation of concepts ending in ‘-cene’—Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Necrocene, Thanatocene, Technocene, Urbanocene, etc.—illustrates the wealth of research emerging in the humanities, social sciences, and beyond. Scholars are exploring the ongoing transformations across various dimensions, whether focusing on sociotechnical discourses, legal frameworks, public policies, industrial strategies, or social movements. The cabinet of curiosities in our research has grown significantly, leading to intersections between STS and other fields like Environmental Humanities, Transition Studies, Digital Studies, and Infrastructure Studies. The rise of gender and decolonial studies has also introduced epistemic tensions within more traditional disciplines like history, sociology, and anthropology.

This ‘Anthropocene moment’ fosters a growing awareness of the historicity of our present and a proliferation of perspectives on historical truth (Gadamer 1996). The emergence of critical historical consciousness, rooted in the progress of knowledge and production, signals a departure from modernity, raising anxieties about where to land (Latour 2017). Classic critiques of presentism (Hartog 2002) and the acceleration of time (Rosa 2010) now intersect with new forms of historicity. These forms question the scientific administration of nature and society, as articulated in critiques of ‘high modernism’ (Scott 2021). Even the countdown imposed by climate change does not guarantee ecological super-modernization given the radical uncertainties and conflicting narratives. The notion of history as either complete or causally defined by material conditions is in flux. The intellectual trend that once called for the historicization of sociology to study societal transitions (Berthoud and Busino 1995) now seems reversed. The paradigm of the long-term, central to the historiography of *Annales*, has been challenged by the growing interest in bifurcations, trajectories, and presentism fueled by public mobilization around memory issues. As Fernand Braudel once remarked: ‘Whether we are discussing the past or the present, a clear awareness of this plurality of social time is essential to a common methodology for the human sciences’ (Braudel 1958: 726).

The trend extends beyond the pluralization of time; it also encompasses the diversification of knowledge systems and associated ‘worlds’ amid global frictions too often attributed to the inevitability of globalization (Tsing et al. 2020). Challenges to the entrenched nature/culture divide in Western metaphysics (Descola 2005; Amer Mezziane 2023) and the decolonial critique of epistemic asymmetries experienced by the Global South (Santos 2017) are issues of concern both in international institutions (such as IPBES) and in academic work. These developments prompt us to consider new onto-epistemological openings (De la Cadena & Blaser 2018), which are relevant to STS as they extend earlier work on the performativity of science. This work highlights the power of research to configure modern sociotechnical universes based on specific imaginaries (Jasanoff & Kim 2015) and the establishment of partially compatible multiple worlds (Mol 1999). Shifting the focus from ‘science as an institution’ to ‘the practices of science’ has also allowed us to restore the place of the invisible, the forgotten, and the sacrificed in the scientific enterprise, modernization, and innovation—whether in the North or the South. It has become clear that the construction of scientific facts results from a joint performance by scientists and the entities they study. Moreover, once established, these scientific facts are deployed in the world and transform it.

These challenges are compounded by the difficulty of redefining terrestrial habitability while considering all relevant actors, including those on the margins of modern socio-technical worlds. The heterogeneity of knowledge and expertise extends beyond reliance on situated knowledge in the ‘crumbs’ of modernizing and postcolonial systems and the life experiences they sustain (Haraway 2016). Making visible what is happening—or not happening—through the mechanisms of technoscience remains an unfinished process, one that is undoubtedly too slow or even inadequate to address the many accelerated changes ahead.

If we are to take this Anthropocene moment seriously, we must recognize it as a new state of affairs and a new set of facts to be made visible. It is a state of affairs shaped by a range of fears, misinformation, and the aporias of ignorance, whose impact and circulation are amplified by the vast expansion of digital technologies in recent decades. This movement is of such informational and energetic magnitude that it affects

all forms of life and their potential for reorganization. The issue is not simply one of fake news or organized climate skepticism; more fundamentally, it is about the establishment of 'truth' and the creation of public evidence in our work with 'evidence workers.'

As we strive to stay afloat and find solid ground, the challenge remains to continue investigating and reflecting on our research objects in the tradition that defines these studies. This conference aims to explore how these significant phenomena are reshaping the very objects of research on science and innovation. These developments cannot be understood without analyzing the modes of knowledge production and dissemination, the practices of knowledge circulation, and the reconfiguration of public and private institutions associated with them. Moreover, we must scrutinize the logic behind the redeployment and repositioning of science and technology in interaction with contemporary societies. Through this conference, we seek to highlight the emergence of new research questions, objects, methods, and ways of doing science. While this scientific conference marks the conclusion of IFRIS and LabEx SITES, it certainly does not signal the end of our intellectual journey.

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