

## **Agential Conversations: Interviewing Postdoctoral Life Scientists and the Politics of Mundane Research Practices."**

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*This talk is based on a paper I have written together with my friend and colleague Martha Kenney (UC Santa Cruz).*

Science and Technology Studies (STS) projects often aim at understanding social problems and epistemic challenges in the sciences and, more generally, in the technoscientific worlds we inhabit. However, it is often unclear if and how these projects can help address the problems they identify. Following (feminist) STS scholars such as Donna Haraway, John Law, and Karen Barad, Kenney and I argue that social science methods always interfere with the contexts they study and suggest that, thus, these mundane research practices might also open up opportunities for addressing the problems they diagnose.

We have investigated this hypothesis by re-analyzing the concrete interference effects of interviews I conducted with postdoctoral life scientists in Austria and the U.S. in the course of my PhD work<sup>1</sup>. This work showed how current career rationales that foreground individualism, mobility and competition have corrosive effects on the social cohesion among life scientists, hindering collaboration, teamwork and knowledge exchange. In the course of this paper we re-interpret the interviews I conducted as '*agential conversations*,' dynamic interpersonal practices that not only produced the data that lead to these findings, but also interfered with the 'business-as-usual' in the life sciences. We suggest the interviews thereby created situated moments of reflection, connection and disruption that might allow us to better respond to these issues that affect scholars in the life sciences and beyond. Navigating the borderlands between scholarly analysis and activism, this paper follows approaches of scholars such as Maria Puig de la Bellacasa or Annemarie Mol, aiming to contribute to crafting a vocabulary for rigorous and politically engaged research that explicitly adheres to the ethico-political commitment of conducting research not only about, but also for the people and worlds we study.

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