

# EDITORIAL

## *Theory and practice*

by Henrik Karlstrøm

The relationship between theory and practice is central to science and technology studies - in many ways the field was started in an attempt to dispute representations of this relationship that were too fixed, too neatly delineated, too self-satisfied. Too often, accounts of scientific and technological developments rested on a description of the process as a linear movement from theoretical insight, through experimental testing and to final implementation. The claim of STS was that there is more going on here than a simple movement from theory to practice, from laboratory to invention, from idea to execution. Rather, more can be gained from paying attention to the actual movement back and forth between our ideas of the world and how the world operates - things may be more complex than they seem. This issue of NJSTS features three articles which, while topically different, offer an illustration of the knotty relationship between theory and practice.

In her article on digital game-based learning in school settings, Helga Dís Ísfold Sigurðardóttir explores the difference between educational theories of how computer games can aid learning and what goes on in Norwegian classrooms. There seems to be an engagement deficit in many of the existing educational games that are produced with learning specifically in mind, a lack that is not necessarily present in games that are really made for entertainment purposes. Maybe there is more to learn from a zombie apocalypse than from pedagogically correct math problems?

Writing about the work that goes into making Denmark's first 'renewable island' an actual reality, Irina Papazu shows the difference between the official rhetoric of state-supported green energy

projects and the reality of small island communities who need something that will bring jobs and a sense of purpose (which is not to say they don't also support green energy projects). Of course, this sideways shift on the way from theory to practice could just signify a mutually beneficial arrangement.

Similarly, Alex Rushforth demonstrates the gap between the topical slogan 'translational science' - in theory signifying a concerted movement from basic research to practical application in the medical field - and the actual reality of research in medical research facilities. When many practitioners adopt the language of translational science in order to appeal to funding committees, crossing their fingers that pointing to earlier successes or making vague promises of inroads to cures for important diseases, the neat picture of a concerted movement from medical theory to practical cure becomes more complicated.

With these theoretical-practical considerations in mind, the cover image of this issue, of a young woman working as a wireless operator during WWI with circuit diagrams on the wall behind her and a partly assembled radio transmitter in her hands, seems fitting. Helen Campbell has surely been instructed in the theory of radio waves and their properties, but what she is dealing with here is the actual assembly of apparatus, perhaps a different beast all together.

In other news, this is my final issue as editor of NJSTS. [Tomas Moe Skjøtsvold](#) will be taking over the helm of the ship. He is a researcher at the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture at NTNU working in the field of societal transitions, with a particular focus on questions of energy and sustainability. No doubt he will bring to the journal new theories of journal management, and no doubt the practice of it will be much improved.

Setting up this journal with a great editorial team has been an example of the movement from idea ('we need a journal of our own, damn it!') to implementation (for example, this issue, our sixth). Along the way we have dealt with everything from gathering a prestigious and international advisory board and making contacts in the wider STS community to the minutiae of choosing a logo for the journal that could look good and signify both 'something Nordic' and 'something STS' (see Figure 1).

We landed on the *skigard*, the wooden roundpole fence that has been used in the Nordic countryside since the Iron Age to mark off property and fence in livestock. We thought it could work as a metaphor for various attempts to create separations, for example between nature and culture, or society and individual, or, yes, theory and practice: tangible, but fragile, permeable divisions. In this sense,

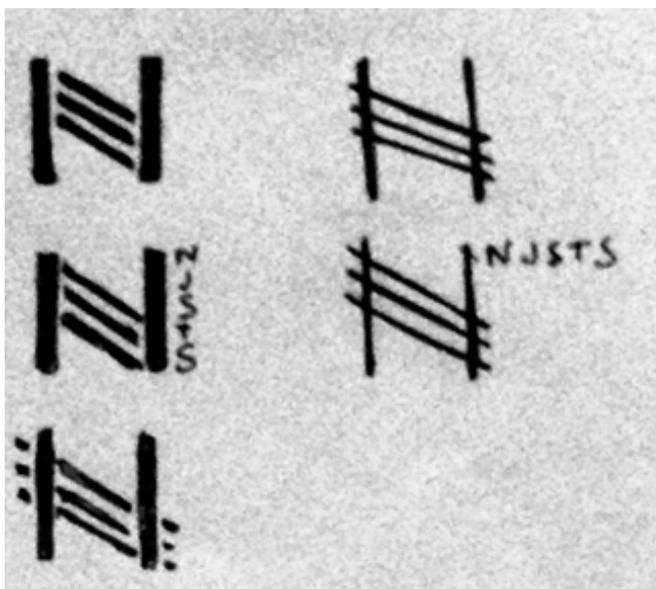


Figure 1: First draft of journal logo, conceived over pizza and beers.



it could signify STS itself, with its boundary objects, trading zones and travelling concepts. Or it could at least be a stylish 'N'.

As the Norwegian song has it, a skigard cannot last forever. Luckily, old wood is easily replaced, and so it goes with the new NJSTS editorial team. In addition to our new editor, the team is being supplemented by Ivana Suboticki, who works on issues of urban sustainability and infrastructure (as a first taste of her interests,

read her book review in this issue) and Jenny Melind Bergschöld, who works with welfare technologies and policies.

With careful maintenance and the occasional replacement of poles, a skigard can last generations, constantly replaced but somehow always recognizably the same. May the same be true of NJSTS going forward.