

Sonja Jerak-Zuiderent

# Making contact Doing difference

impossibilities  
of letting life end

An inquiry into listening for difference,  
touching storytelling, and metaphysical commitments  
in (spiritual) care and scientific practices

23rd November 2022

10.15 CET

Hybrid Lecture

University St. Gallen

Room 52-7024

and on Zoom

Scholarship in Science and Technology Studies has since long focussed on "action [as] an unanticipated gift from the *ispositive*" (Gomart and Hennion, 1999: 222). One of the possible corollaries of blurring the dichotomies between humans and non-humans and between activity and passivity when studying technoscientific practices, is that the embodied (epistemic) practices of how people address the question of how to live and what to do is good, i.e. their metaphysical commitments, tends to get lost out of attention. Feminist and decolonial STS scholarship has therefore proposed a '**thinking with care**' that takes into account new actors and thoroughly unsettles and seeks to change the conditions of what counts as ethico-political agency. This calls attention to 'contact zones for incommensurabilities'. Such zones usually tend to be at best ignored as sites where 'nothing's happening' (Becker 1998; Lydahl 2021) or at worst destroyed by imposing what is familiar, known, established as a salient, common form of knowing. I am particularly interested in the potential of cultivating an empirical-theoretical sensitivity to our own bodily experiences and presence as analytical sites to foster and navigate such contact zones for incommensurabilities and explore their potential for doing difference together. Thinking ethnographically and drawing on a practice of embodied sensibility to both disconcertment and wonder in scholarly work (Jerak-Zuiderent, 2020), I explore how such contact can help foster practices that acknowledge metaphysical commitments, for example through '**touching storytelling**.' I draw on empirical moments of contact in relation to ethnographically explore how spiritual care can get dynamically embedded 'closer to home' and how 'good science' gets done. Touching storytelling as a practice is "not a promise of enhanced contact with 'reality', but rather a chance for participating in re-doing it." (Puig de la Bellacasa 2009: 310). It becomes an embodied (epistemic) practice of learning to not loose contact with the **metaphysical commitments** of an '**other**'.

**Sonja Jerak-Zuiderent** is Assistant Professor of Social Studies of Science, Technology and Care at the Department of Ethics, Law and Humanities at the Amsterdam University Medical Centres. She has published numerous articles on "good care" in *The Sociological Review*, *Science as Culture*, and *Social Studies of Science* and is finalizing her manuscript *Generative Accountability: Comparing with Care* (forthcoming MatteringPress).

Organised by the SNSF-project "(Im-)Possibilities of Letting Life End"  
and the Technology Studies, University of St. Gallen