

STS Conference
The Economy of Promises
Montreal—August 2020

Recent scientific developments in artificial intelligence (AI), particularly in what is called “deep learning” has led to a renewed interest in the possibilities of applications of new algorithms to a wide range of fields (medicine, industry, automotive, etc.). This mirrors the fervor for technological progress already observed in the previous decade with nanotechnology and genomics. Discourses linked to these technological advances are typically framed in terms of an inevitable technological future that has, however, yet to unfold. Such discourses are even more prevalent when a given technology is viewed as a liberating force or a means to revolutionize human and social life.

Forecasting, projection and anticipation are all part of scientific research and technological innovation. In their article on the sociology of expectations, Borup et al. (2006) acknowledge that “very little in innovation can work in isolation from a highly dynamic and variegated body of future-oriented understandings about the future.” Research and innovation are framed by such understandings, that stimulate investment and organize scientific and technological fields.

Nonetheless, these expectations are subject to a great deal of uncertainty, since it is not guaranteed that technological advances will reach a point where they are fulfilled. This has led several sociologists and researchers to speak of an “economy of promises” (Joly, 2010), “technologies of hope” (Leibing and Tournay, 2010), a “technoprophecy” (Chateauraynaud, 2005) or a “prospective technoscience” (Brown, Rappert, and Webster, 2000). These terms describe the conjunction between prophetic discourses on science and technology and their actual development, a phenomenon that has real and numerous consequences. In fact, the whole field of research is driven by a rhetoric of promise, from the supervisor, who seeks to convince a student to work under their supervision, to governments that decide to fund a laboratory over another one on the basis of its ability to innovate. This dynamic has its own performative effect, that shapes the relations between science, technology, and society.

We invite submissions on the social impacts of multiple forms of representation of technological future, and the “economy of promises” that relate to the following areas of interest of Science and Technology Studies (STS):

- public policies and investments;
- research funding;
- university research orientations;
- economy;
- sociology of the scientific field;
- socio-scientific controversies;
- relationship between science and the public;
- media coverage of science and research;
- philosophy of history;
- history of sciences;
- means of knowledge mediation;
- new roles of researcher-entrepreneurs;
- reconfiguration of research-industry links;
- actors and dynamics of innovation;

- socio-material worlds.

Presentations of 20 minutes in French or English will be accepted. We particularly welcome the following topics:

- Economic predictions;
- Announcements of a 4th industrial revolution;
- Promises and research funding (promises formulated to receive a grant or the rhetoric of research grants);
- Social dynamics of post-secondary education;
- Sociology and Anthropology of Technological Futures
- Promises and climate change (forecasts to change policies, geoengineering, government promises—e.g. COPs—, expert committees, etc.);
- Rhetoric of hope and fear in technological governance and regulation.

Proposals for papers (between 200 and 300 words) must include a title and a short resume.

The CIRST encourages student participation. A portion of the program will be reserved for graduate students presentations. Two travel grants will be offered to the most promising proposals from Canadian graduate students.

It is also possible to propose a panel of up to 4 speakers. In addition to a summary of the panel's theme (between 200 and 300 words), the organizer must provide the names of the speakers, a summary of their presentation (200–300 words), and a short bio for each participant.

All documents must be sent **before January 10, 2020** to the following address: cirst@uqam.ca.

Accommodation and travel expenses **will not be covered**, but daytime meals will be provided to the participants.

The conference will take place during the week of August 24–29, 2020. The exact dates will be confirmed in the spring of 2020.

Organizing committee: Daniel Letendre (CIRST), Guillaume Dandurand (University of Sherbrooke), Florence Lussier-Lejeune (UQAM)

Scientific committee: François Claveau (University of Sherbrooke), Yves Gingras (UQAM), Vincent Larivière (University of Montreal), Mathieu Marion (UQAM), Florence Millerand (UQAM), Éric Montpetit (University of Montreal)