

Governing intent. Responsible innovation and the politics of geoengineering

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Scientists in the emerging and highly politicised area of geoengineering are struggling to make sense of their responsibilities. Geoengineering presents profound questions about not just the products of innovation, conventionally understood through risk assessment, but also the processes and the purposes of research. Geoengineering has become a new test case for upstream public engagement and research governance. I will talk about the work I have been doing with UK scientists who proposed the first outdoor trial of a Solar Radiation Management technology and the stakeholders who challenged them. STS researchers have revealed that the politics of emerging technologies, whether genetic modification, stem cell therapies, nanotechnology or synthetic biology, go beyond the assessment and management of risk. Political disagreements over the direction of innovation emerge as vital, yet are often obscured or scientised. Early scientific research in the area of geoengineering forces the question of intent to the surface – why is research happening? Where is innovation pointing? But the governance of intent demands new institutional and conceptual frameworks for responsible innovation.