Preface

The Society for the Study of Nanoscience and Emerging Technologies (S.NET) set out in 2009 to build an international community of scholars and practitioners engaged with nanotechnology and other new fields of technoscience. Since then, the annual meetings of the society—robustly attended by multidisciplinary scholars, policy actors, and civil society organizations from across the globe—have shown that S.NET provides a lively forum with added value for many different people interested in new and emerging technologies. The 2012 conference, which took place from October 22 to 25 at the University of Twente in the Netherlands, testified to the society’s vibrant and interactive engagement across boundaries of science and culture. It featured a multitude of panel sessions, keynote speeches from academic, practice-oriented, and artistic angles, an OECD policy workshop, and various other formats for discussion.

Although nanotechnology remained a central topic of discussion at the conference, other emerging technologies, such as genetic modification, synthetic biology, personalized medicine, enhancement technologies, and geo-engineering, were frequently brought to the fore. It is illuminating to connect and compare these technologies, because their relatively novel character raises similar questions and concerns. Some concerns are more analytical: How do innovation processes evolve? What forms of governance and social engagement have developed alongside such processes, and what are their possibilities and limitations? What underlying values and conceptions of the future inform the systems of innovation, as much as the attempts to govern them? When trying to understand such issues, however, normative questions are usually not far away. How can we improve the societal, moral and cultural embedding of emerging technologies? Which problems and (potential) value conflicts are being addressed, which ones are ignored, and which new ones arise? Both sets of issues were frequently addressed against the background of the concept ‘responsible (research and) innovation’: definitely a focal point of attention of the 2012 conference. As typical for the S.NET constituency, many researchers have been linking up with scientists and engineers, as well as ‘lay’ publies and policy makers. The work presented is therefore not only rooted in academic discourse, but also informed by and intended to be of help to those struggling with the complexities of innovation on an everyday level.

In view of this ambition, it is great to see a selection of papers presented during the 2012 conference finding their way to a larger audience via this volume. It is also very gratifying that what has long been informally described as a book series has now actually turned into one officially. We thank the editors as well as the authors for their work in putting this volume together, and we are looking forward to continue conversations at the 2013 S.NET meeting in Boston.

Marianne Boenink, Bärbel Dorbeck-Jung, Anne Dijkstra, Kornelia Konrad
Organizers S.NET Conference 2012
University of Twente