



Trevor Pinch

January 1, 1952 – December 16, 2021

Trevor Pinch, Distinguished Professor of Arts and Sciences in Science & Technology Studies (S&TS) at Cornell University, died at the age of 69 from cancer. In addition to his position in the S&TS Department, he also held an appointment in Sociology, and his research and teaching crossed many disciplinary boundaries in the arts, sciences, and humanities. A memorial celebration of his life was held on January 1, 2022, which would have been Trevor's 70th birthday, at the Forest Home Chapel near where he lived for most of his time at Cornell. Further memorial sessions and gatherings will be held at the Society for Social Studies of Science annual meeting in December 2022, and on the Cornell campus in September 2023.

Trevor grew up near Norwich, England and remained a life-long fan of the Norwich Football Club. A few months before he died, and despite the advanced stage of his disease, he traveled to Norwich to attend a match. His youthful recreational interests included sailing in the Norfolk Broads and playing in a local rock and roll band. He even built his own music synthesizer and used it in the band. He also managed to excel as a student. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in Physics from Imperial College, London, but then decided

that he was more interested in studying science and technology from a sociological and historical perspective. He gained admission to the post-graduate program in sociology at the University of Bath, where he received his Ph.D. in 1982 for a dissertation on the development of solar-neutrino research. During his studies at Bath, he began a long-term collaboration with his dissertation advisor, Professor Harry Collins, resulting in a series of books and articles. After receiving his Ph.D., Trevor worked as a Lecturer and Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of York, before moving to the U.S. to take up an Associate Professor position at Cornell in 1990 when the new Department of Science & Technology Studies (S&TS) was being formed (he was promoted to Professor in 1994).

As a central member of the S&TS Department for the remainder of his life, Pinch served as Department Chair and Director of Graduate Studies for much of that time. While acquiring international recognition for his research, he also was an active and revered teacher of large undergraduate courses and mentor of numerous Ph.D. students in S&TS, Sociology, and other graduate fields at Cornell. Many of his students went on to careers at major universities in Sociology, Science & Technology Studies, History, Communication and Information Science, and other fields. Pinch loved and excelled at teaching. Despite having been diagnosed with terminal cancer in 2017 and undergoing repeated and debilitating surgeries and chemotherapy treatments in hopes of arresting it, he maintained his teaching activities to the very end. Testimonies from his former students following his death uniformly praised the way he inspired them, and the way he conveyed his broad and multifaceted knowledge in an endearingly informal and self-effacing way. A former student, Pablo J. Boczkowski (Ph.D., Cornell S&TS, 2001), who is now Professor of Communication Studies at Northwestern University, recalled his first meeting with Trevor: “I was invited for brunch at his house and as a proper *porteño* I showed up very dressed up ... only to be greeted by the world-renowned scholar wearing an orange t-shirt with a hole in it and two different socks! I remember thinking that he didn’t seem to take himself too seriously and I really liked that.” Adelheid Voskuhl (Ph.D., Cornell S&TS, 2007), Associate Professor in History and Sociology of

Science at the University of Pennsylvania, remarks that “Trevor was a giant, as a person and as a member of our field. We can see his imprints on every aspect of it, institutionally, socially, intellectually.” Nicole Nelson (Ph.D. Cornell S&TS, 2011), Associate Professor in the Department of Medical History and Bioethics at the University of Wisconsin, Madison observed that “Trevor had a great way of taking students' ideas seriously but also reminding us that the stakes are not really so high, and that academia can and should be a place where there's great fun to be had in tossing around ideas.”

Professor Pinch's research made remarkably broad and diverse contributions to the social sciences and humanities. His personal openness and wide-ranging intellect enabled him to expand his horizons through collaborations. The majority of his 18 books and edited volumes and more than 150 articles, are written and edited with others. By drawing upon his own knowledge and practical skills, as well as those of his many collaborators, he was able to give original and informative treatments to the interrelations between social and technical activities. Despite the variety of fields and topics he covered, his work was unified under a social constructionist perspective that reveals the depth to which communal affiliations and rivalries pervade scientific discourse and practice.

Although his contributions to sociology of science were substantial, Professor Pinch is best known for his work in developing a social constructionist treatment of technology. His edited volume (with Wiebe Bijker), *The Social Construction of Technological Systems* (MIT Press, 1987) was an immense success for establishing a framework for conceptually and methodologically integrating science studies with historical and social studies of technology. Their book was a major landmark for establishing the field of STS (an acronym conveniently covering both Science, Technology and Society and Science & Technology Studies).

During his years at Cornell, Professor Pinch became prominent in yet another novel trans-disciplinary area in the humanities and social

sciences: Sound Studies, a field encompassing such topics as the history of musical instruments, the urban “soundscape”, the use of sound in research as a method of observation, and controversies surrounding cochlear implants. His most notable contribution to Sound Studies was *Analog Days* (co-authored with Frank Trocco; Harvard University Press, 2002), a history of the development of the Moog synthesizer and its importance for popular music. He also played the synthesizer (including the one he assembled in his youth) and performed with James Spitznagel in a duo fittingly named The Electric Golem.

Professor Pinch served as President of the Society for Social Studies of Science (4S) and received numerous awards and honors. These included the J.D. Bernal prize for career achievement from the 4S, and the Robert K. Merton Professional Award from the Science, Knowledge and Technology Section of the American Sociological Association for his book with Collins, *The Golem: What You Should Know about Science* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Testimonies by his collaborators and other international figures in the fields in which he worked acknowledge how much more there was to Trevor as a person than his impressive achievements indicate:

I wanted to say how important and kind and fun and brave Trevor has been to the whole STS community. — Bruno Latour

Saying that he has been immensely important to our field, is repeating something you all know. Not just from his impressive range and quality of publications, but because Trevor was life itself. Such a creative mind and lucid writer ... sparkling with energy, full of humor Evenings with Trevor ... were cheerful as the colorful stories he had to tell. ... Trevor embodied the ideal colleague. — Wiebe Bijker and Karin Bijsterveld

The most important thing I learned from Trevor is gratitude.

I don't mean the platitudinous "practicing gratitude" thing that goes around every so often. Trevor had this "I can't believe I get to do this!" affect about him. He just lived it; if he worked at it, it produced the kind of effortlessness one finds in a master musician. — Jonathan Sterne

Trevor was a very sweet person and a very sweet friend. I have a very bright picture of him, smiling in that calm and friendly way that was so special. He helped me in many ways. — Richard Swedberg

It was that generosity of personal and intellectual spirit preserved from his early hippy years that made him such a great partner in our research and in our joint writing projects but also made it natural for him to shift to other projects when the music changed. He just went with the flow of felt goodness. And that's why he had no enemies and that's why everyone loved him and why we are all going to miss him. He was the only Trevor. — Harry Collins

Professor Pinch is survived by his wife Dr. Christine Leuenberger, who is a Senior Lecturer in S&TS at Cornell, and their daughters Dr. Benika Pinch, a Principal Scientist II at Novartis Institutes for Biomedical Research, and Annika Pinch, who is studying for the Ph.D. in Media, Technology and Society at Northwestern University, and his sister Alison Fey Vickers, who lives in Trimley St. Martin, Felixstowe, United Kingdom.

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