

Remembering Mario Biagioli, A Scholar Who Reimagined Science and Society

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Submitted: November 4, 2025

Accepted: November 18, 2025

Abstract

Our journal remembers with deep gratitude Mario Biagioli (1955-2025), a towering figure in the STS community who served as member of *Tecnoscienza*'s International Advisory Board since 2012. We honor his legacy through Alessandro Delfanti's tribute, which traces Biagioli's groundbreaking contributions from the study of Renaissance courtly networks that enabled Galileo's endeavour to the investigation of contemporary circuits of science, law, and economics, celebrating his intellectual generosity and enduring influence as scholar, mentor, and builder of collaborative communities.

Keywords

Mario Biagioli; Galileo; courtly networks; intellectual property; science as social practice; moral economies of science.

Few figures embody Science and Technology Studies' intellectual range, political concerns, and transdisciplinary foundations as fully as Professor Mario Biagioli (1955-2025). His passing leaves an immense void in our community. Mario was a historian, theorist, and teacher whose work redefined what it means to study science as a social practice. Across four decades, his scholarship bridged history, law, philosophy, and cultural analysis. The breadth of his knowledge and his disciplinary flexibility made Mario the rare full-fledged intellectual. He could move seamlessly from the definition of property in Roman law, to the diaspora of Soviet engineers, the history of the garage as a symbol of Silicon Valley's political economy, the role of French critical theory in STS, and of course the political underpinnings of Renaissance science.

His first major book, *Galileo, Courtier: The Practice of Science in the Culture of Absolutism* (1993) took Mario back to his native Tuscany. The book broke from the conventional image of Galileo as a lone scientific hero, situating him instead as a figure deeply embedded in the courtly world of patronage, politics, and persuasion. Science, Biagioli showed, was not merely the accumulation of empirical facts – it was a performance of credibility. Galileo's telescopes and letters were as much instruments of social negotiation as of discovery. By tracing

these networks of public reputation building, Biagioli participated in building a vision of science as a communicative practice. His follow-up, *Galileo's Instruments of Credit* (2006), extended this analysis, exploring the economies of trust and authorship that structured early modern science. In both books, Biagioli revealed how technologies of inscription – images, texts, tools – shaped the very meaning of objectivity.

These studies became foundational texts for a generation of STS scholars, demonstrating how epistemic norms and social institutions co-construct one another. His massive edited collection *The Science Studies Reader* (1999) defined the field for many years, both showcasing the wealth and depth of STS scholarship at the time, and inviting us to study the many factors that shape and are shaped by science as a human enterprise deeply enmeshed in the societies it emerges from.

In later years, Mario turned his attention from early modern courts to the contemporary circuits of science and law. His research on intellectual property, plagiarism, and patenting illuminated how scientific authorship operates within the global knowledge economy. This is work that has deeply influenced me. A postdoc at the University of California Davis in the mid-10s allowed me to work with Mario and strengthen my ability to look critically at intellectual property. Just a few short days before he passed, I was pitching to some colleagues the idea of inviting him to Toronto to discuss some new ideas about the patenting system. Mario's co-edited volume *Making and Unmaking Intellectual Property: Creative Production in Legal and Cultural Perspective* (2011) remains a stepping stone for those who study patents and copyright from a cultural viewpoint.

Overall, he argued that the rise of the knowledge economy blurred the boundaries between scientific discovery and commodified invention, raising questions about ownership, credit, and the moral economies of science. His work on the history of plagiarism and academic misconduct revealed how technologies of measurement and evaluation – citation indices, metrics, rankings – reshape scholarly behavior. In *Gaming the Metrics: Misconduct and Manipulation in Academic Research* (2020), co-edited with Alexandra Lippman, Biagioli brought STS insights into the heart of academia's present crisis. He examined how systems meant to quantify knowledge often distort it – encouraging strategic behavior over genuine inquiry.

For Mario, transdisciplinarity was not a slogan but a way of thinking. Over his career, he held appointments across history, law, and communication, at institutions including Harvard, Stanford, and UCLA. At the UC Davis Center for Science and Innovation Studies, he built spaces where historians, social scientists, legal scholars, and natural scientists could engage as equals. At UCLA, where he was Distinguished Professor of Law and Communication, Mario continued to expand STS conversations into new terrain – digital communication, data governance, and the politics of innovation.

What made Biagioli's scholarship so enduring was his capacity to engage with science in such rich ways. He could be deeply critical of science as an institution, yet profoundly admiring of its creativity and capacity for self-renewal. He insisted that STS is not simply about critique – it is about understanding the conditions that make knowledge possible. He saw fraud and misconduct not as mere deviations from science's ideals, but as reflections of its deepest social structures. He invited STS scholars to look at our own academic practices with the same skeptical lens we apply to others.

Mario's humor and generosity made him a beloved colleague. He approached intellectual debate with playfulness and empathy, able to disarm complexity with a well-timed joke or an unexpected historical analogy. Ever the generous mentor of junior scholars, organizer of conferences, and editor of collected volumes, he spent time and energy to make other people's work visible and generate new ideas through the connections he so loved to establish and nurture. Sometimes I think that the extent to which he saw knowledge as produced collectively and within webs of communication, collaboration, and creativity is what defined him as a scholar, advisor and colleague.

Mario Biagioli's passing on May 17, 2025, marks the loss of one of STS's most original voices. Yet his voice is still with us – in the books and articles that continue to shape our and many other fields, in the students and collaborators who carry his questions forward, and in the broader ethos of STS as a field committed to reflexivity, transdisciplinarity, and justice. Probably more than anything else, Mario's endless curiosity about how people build meaning together is the lesson we must continue to renovate and carry forward. Doing so without him will not be easy.