

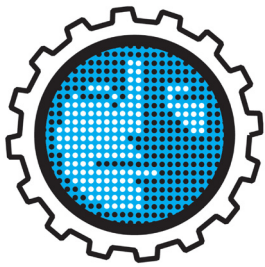
# STS Matter(s)

AY 2018–2019

## A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The best part of directing the U-M Science, Technology & Society Program has been discovering that our STS community is even more dynamic, diverse, and creative than I'd realized.

Over the course of the year, U-M artists and physicians, architects and anthropologists, computer scientists, historians, environmental scientists, and more shared their work in



STS Program events. They represented at least six schools and 14 units. But U-M STS isn't just dispersed over our sprawling campuses. We also are inspired by a set of shared questions about the most important issues confronting the world today. The 2018–19 program showcased the synergistic diversity of STS in Ann Arbor.

The final event of the year encapsulated the qualities that make U-M STS such a rewarding endeavor. TempoRealities, a one-day symposium, explored the theme of time. Graduate students and faculty presented innovative analyses of architectural aptitude tests and acoustic modelling; the syncopation of religious, biological, solar, and capitalist cycles; premodern timekeeping technologies in the Java Sea; the discord between academic seasons in the global North and South; the experience of seizures; and the life-cycles of environmental databases. And that was just the first session! The day's final panel stretched the limits of the

field's own temporal scope with a lively discussion of STS approaches to antiquity. Despite the geographic, temporal, and disciplinary breadth, unexpected convergences kept the room buzzing.

Indeed, time emerged as an unplanned theme of the STS winter program. Not only did the STeMS Speakers Series investigate the "chronopolitics of time," but the STS Rackham Interdisciplinary Workshop organized a timely graduate student panel on the contemporary ubiquity of crisis. And the STS Program left its typical conference rooms to host a discussion about the "Art in the Age of the Internet" exhibition at UMMA.

Add to these a full roster of distinguished invited speakers, faculty and graduate student writing workshops, periodic reading groups, and fabulous co-sponsored events with partner programs such as Digital Studies, Museum Studies, Science, Technology and Public Policy, and Critical x Design, and you have an eventful year, indeed!

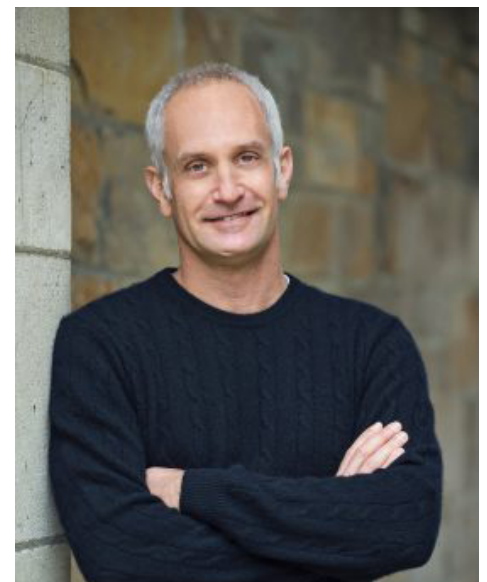
The STS Program is more than talks and workshops, of course. At the heart of our program is the Graduate Certificate Program. This year we welcomed a new faculty member, historian Henry Cowles, who immediately took over directorship of the graduate program. Already he has made a great program better. I had the pleasure of teaching the core course for the STS minor and ended the semester as I always do: amazed by our hard-working, intellectually curious undergraduates and convinced that, in the current "crisis of the liberal arts," STS has a vital role to

play in demonstrating the importance of the humanities and social sciences to a world fixated on STEM education and confused about facts.

These are interesting times to be an STS scholar. The 2018–19 year focused on building connections between STS scholars across our campuses. In 2019–20, we will continue the work of reproducing this community while also reaching out more vigorously to our colleagues in the natural sciences and engineering. Plans are afoot to organize conferences that bring leading STS thinkers to Ann Arbor, too.

If you'd like to become more involved in STS programing, drop me a line!

Perrin Selcer,  
Program Director



### 2019–2020 Program Officers

Program Director: Perrin Selcer

Director of Graduate Studies: Henry Cowles

Director of Undergraduate Studies: Elizabeth Roberts

Program Administrator: Terre Fisher

Speaker Series Organizers: Silvia Lindtner and Joy Knoblauch

Newsletter Editor: Adam Fulton Johnson



Regents of the University of Michigan: Jordan B. Acker, Michael J. Behm, Mark J. Bernstein, Paul W. Brown, Shauna Ryder Diggs, Denise Ilitch, Ron Weiser, Katherine E. White, Mark S. Schlissel (ex officio).

GRAD STUDENT PROFILE:  
SRIRAM MOHAN



Sriram Mohan is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His research examines the vernacular cultural production of political claims in relation to emergent digital media cultures and evolving state-citizen relationships in South Asian contexts. His work has appeared in journals like *Television & New Media*, *International Journal of Communication*, and *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. He is also the co-author of an edited volume titled *Global Digital Cultures: Perspectives from South Asia* (forthcoming, University of Michigan Press).

Sriram's dissertation examines the digital production and circulation of cultural artifacts that exemplify the online mediation of contentious politics in southern India. The project is based on over 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork in media capitals across India, with a focus on the southern state of Tamilnadu. It blends close readings of political posters, memes, protest songs, online videos, policy documents, and industrial texts with participant observation and in-depth interviews. Combining media and cultural studies and science and technology studies approaches, the dissertation traces how networked publics emerge in regard to longstanding concerns surrounding mass publicity, democracy, and dissent while grappling with the rise of digital media infrastructures and platforms.

# TEMPOREALITIES

2019 STS SYMPOSIUM

APRIL 12, 2019

INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH, ROOM 6050

## Experiencing Time, Embodying Time

Rebecca Smith, Architecture  
"Architectural Representation and the Temporal Materiality of Sound"

Megh Marathe, School of Information  
"Squiggly lines running through my head: Epilepsy diagnosis using electroencephalography"

Amanda Respass, Anthropology & History  
"Candlenuts, Illumination, and Time: Materials of Navigation in the Premodern Java Sea"

Amelia Burke, Anthropology & History  
"Selling off the Lamb: The Seasonality of Investment in a Moroccan Sheep Market"

Joy Knoblauch, Architecture  
"The Missing Half Second: Affect, Ames, and Arnheim (1949 to 2019)"

Andrea Thomer, School of Information  
"Migration Patterns: Understanding the Rhythms of Natural History Data Work"

Mary Leighton, Anthropology  
"Six Years of Eternal Winter: The Temporalities of Field Work between the Global North and South"

## Special Panel: A Conversation with Joy Lisi Rankin

Lisi Rankin with Henry Cowles

## Apocalypse Now?

Adam Fulton Johnson, History  
"Slime at the End of the Tunnel: Contamination and the Anthropocene in VanderMeer's SF"

Salem Elzway, History  
"The Moving Image of 2019"

Stuart Kirsch, Anthropology  
"Why Pacific Islanders Stopped Worrying about the Apocalypse and Started Fighting Climate Change"

Devorah Gordin, SEAS  
"Bodies in Motion: Climate Change and Migration as 'Threat' in Entertainment Media"

## Is Ancient STS an Anachronism?

Shira Schwartz, Comparative Literature & Judaic Studies  
"Reproducing Rabbis: The Search for Rabbinic Sexology"

Aileen Das, Classical Studies & Medieval Studies  
"Plato the Doctor: Medical Boundary Work in Greco-Roman Antiquity and the Medieval Middle East"

Anna Bonnell Freidin, History  
"How Do Amulets Work?"

Rachel Rafael Neis, History & Judaic Studies  
"Did the Rabbis of the Mishnah Do Biology?"

## NEW FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: ANNA BONNELL FREIDIN



My research and teaching focus on Roman culture from the first century BCE through the third century CE. I am currently working on a book manuscript

that explores how Romans constructed, understood, and mitigated the risks of childbirth. The project blends the study

of risk and uncertainty with histories of gender, the family, imperialism, science, medicine, and magic. My interest in Roman history began at Harvard, where I received an A.B. in Classics in 2008. After Harvard, I pursued an MPhil in Ancient History at Cambridge with a Gates Cambridge Scholarship and then worked on *The Virgil Encyclopedia* (2013) at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C. In 2018, I earned my doctorate in Classics from Princeton through the Interdisciplinary Program in the Ancient World, along with a certificate in Gender and Sexuality Studies.

## ON THE UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

During the 2018–19 academic year undergraduate interest in the STS program remains high, with 43 students signing up for the minor. The core course (“Science, Technology, Medicine, and Society”) continues to attract an energetic group of undergraduates, many of whom reference that course as the reason they want to sign up for the STS minor. The diversity of students’ majors and interests demonstrates the appeal that an interdisciplinary program such as STS has to students who want to expand their educational horizons beyond a single major. In their declarations students commented on the value that STS will offer them in their intended careers, which range from public health to science policy. One wanted to learn about technology and society beyond the level of their “phone-obsessed generation.” Others said simply that

they were interested in adding more of the humanities and social sciences to their curriculum. Or, as one put it, this is “the perfect program to weave my interest in the sciences with my love for the humanities and critical thought.”

Joel Howell,  
Director of Undergraduate Studies  
(2018–19)



## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY STUDIES WORKSHOP

This will be the ninth year of the Science and Technology Studies (STS) Rackham Interdisciplinary Workshop. The workshop includes graduate students from a wide range of disciplines, including Anthropology, History, Information, American Culture, Sociology, Screen Arts & Cultures, Medicine, Classics, English, Romance Languages & Literatures, German Studies, Public Health, and Architecture and Urban Planning. The goal of the workshop is to provide a space for graduate students and faculty members to discuss core texts and to engage with authors who have made significant and recent contributions to STS.

Because the STS landscape is extremely interdisciplinary at its core, the workshop offers graduate students and associated faculty an ideal format to engage with the rewarding complex-

ities of such an expansive, growing, highly relevant field.

Many of the core members of our group are working toward the graduate certificate in STS and have completed the STS core course—giving us a shared vocabulary and methods on which to draw. Our reading group meetings give us the opportunity to explore concepts and methods of the core course, including (but not limited to) expertise, risk, documentation, classification, epistemological claims to objectivity, social constructivism, environmentalism, development, and globalization. We are committed to developing a shared core of knowledge at the interstices of these fields.

Daniel Williford (History),  
2018–2019 STS Workshop Organizer

## NEW FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: HENRY COWLES



Henry Cowles is a historian of modern science and medicine. His research and teaching focus on the sciences of mind and brain, evolutionary theory, and the experimental ideal in the United States and Great Britain. In addition to the History Department, he is affiliated with the Science, Technology & Society Program and the Doctoral Program in Anthropology and History. He is currently completing a book on the psychology of scientific method in the nineteenth century (under contract with Harvard University Press) and starting a new project: a history of habit, from the celebration of daily routines in Thoreau’s *Walden* to the rise of “persuasive technologies” in Silicon Valley and beyond.

## STS WORKSHOP 2018–19 READING LIST

*The Biopolitics of Feeling* by Kyla Schuller

*Edges of Exposure* by Noemi Tousignant

*Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* edited by  
Anna Tsing, Nils Burbandt, Elaine Gan, &  
Heather Anne Swanson

*Documenting Aftermath* by Megan Finn

STS Workshop events are open to graduate students and faculty.  
Join the STS Workshop in 2019–2020! Email: [stsworkshop@umich.edu](mailto:stsworkshop@umich.edu)

UNDERGRAD PROFILE:

NEIL KARR

A year prior to enrolling in the STS minor at U-M in the Winter 2018 semester, I became involved in a project that promotes the use of sustainable technologies in a rural Andean community in Peru called Chakiqampa. Only two months after traveling to Chakiqampa for the first time, I was informed of the STS program by a trusted GSI. Upon returning from Chakiqampa I had more questions than I could handle about both the nature of my own project and the state of technological development in rural Peru: Why is there



4G cell phone service and not a reliable source of irrigation water? How will this region ever become fully modernized without paved roads or a train network? Is modernization even the best goal to have?

Since enrolling in the minor and taking Professor Selcer's core class I have been able to start formulating answers to these questions, think more critically about the design of our next project (a series of garden-sized greenhouses for individual families), and ask new, better questions about an expanding list of technologies. After Michigan, I hope to continue thinking critically about technology and to contribute to the development of a better-managed technological world.

GRAD STUDENT PROFILE: VICTORIA KOSKI-KARELL



management, and consumption of water in Haiti have ensued. I will assess the extent to which drinking water has gone from a trusted common resource to a market commodity, industrialized product, or privately administered good. I will also evaluate whether these changes, driven by local and international actors, are resulting in improved access to safe water, particularly among the poor. Research findings about the ways disease, the environment, and human society influence one another will illuminate factors that promote, perpetuate, or protect against water insecurity, poverty, and illness.

In February 2019, I was awarded a National Science Foundation Cultural Anthropology Program Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant. My project, advised by Dr. Scott Stonington, is based in the coastal city and surrounding rural areas of Saint-Marc, Haiti near the mouth of the Artibonite River, which was contaminated with cholera bacteria in October 2010, sparking one of the largest cholera epidemics in recent history. With the disease now endemic, substantial changes in the political economy,



2018-2019 STeMS SPEAKER SERIES

"Alternative Facts and States of Fear: Reality in the Age of Climate Fictions"  
Joanna Radin, Yale University (October 8, 2018)

"Unbalancing the Senses and Sciences of Moving Fascia: Practicing Research"  
Joseph Dumit, University of California-Davis (October 22, 2018)

"Community as Ecofact or Artifact: Myths Of Meritocracy and 'Fun Work' in North-South American Field Science Collaborations"  
Mary Leighton, U-M Anthropology (November 5, 2018)

"The Sentimental Body: Medical Humanitarianism and the Late Colonial Public in Indonesia"  
Kevin Ko, U-M History (December 3, 2018)

"Back to the Future: An STS Approach to Markets"  
Larry Busch, Michigan State University (February 11, 2019)

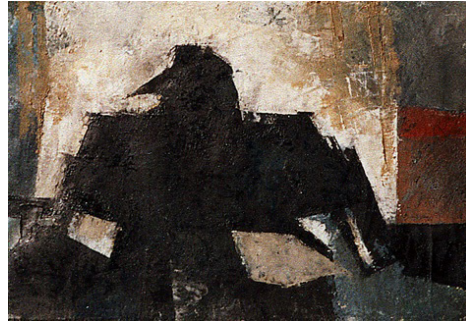
"Just in Time: The Chronopolitics of the Queue"  
Julie Chu, University of Chicago (March 18, 2019)

"Race and Erasure: A People's History of the 'Normal' Body" (Distinguished Lecture)  
Laura Stark, Vanderbilt University (April 8, 2019)

*Thanks to 2018-2019 STeMS Speaker Series Organizers Kentaro Toyama and Melissa Creary for a great year's program!*

## GRAD STUDENT PROFILE: ELIZABETH MCNEILL

My research examines the entanglements of the history and philosophy of biology, scientific narrative, and the (un)knowability of nonhuman animals, as explored in 19th–21st-century scientific and fictional literature in the German-speaking world. I have spent this semester developing my dissertation project by writing a paper on Günter Eich's 1951 radio play "Sabeth." Featuring a human-sized raven who learns to speak by repeating the name of his interlocutor Elisabeth, "Sabeth" layers mediated and mediating narrative forms and a multitude of voices in ultimately making space for nonhumans within the speech act. Chief among these mediated forms is the scientific report which frames the entire radio play, as well as the natural science lesson on corvid intelligence which opens the radio play. I am



especially interested in how Eich connects both of these forms of knowledge production and communication to the rich history of talking birds. This is a line of enquiry I am continuing to develop by placing it in relation to the larger literary and scientific history of talking animals as well as notions of "parroting" language and "parroting" knowledge.

## GRAD STUDENT PROFILE: MEGH MARATHE

I work on epilepsy, studying how seizures are experienced by people with epilepsy (including myself) and how they are diagnosed by clinicians, with a particular focus on self and time. My work draws heavily upon the ontological turn in science & technology studies and the notions of crip time from disability studies and the body electric from medical anthropology.

Late in 2018, I began ethnographic fieldwork in a large midwestern teaching hospital, observing trainee epilepsy doctors learn to diagnose seizures using EEG. As a scholar of disability studies and science & technology studies ready to critique their every move, I was surprised and relieved to find careful, hard-working, and highly-trained doctors working individually towards "zero seizures, zero side-effects" and as a discipline "towards a world without epilepsy" (note: a world without epilepsy, not seizures) in service of patient-centric care. Indeed, most

people with epilepsy share these goals. As a computer scientist trained in the basics of electrical engineering, however, EEG itself—a procedure with solely confirmatory (versus predictive) power in clinical diagnosis originally developed to detect parapsychological phenomena but which instead helped establish the physiological (versus psychological) pathology of epilepsy—and its active use and infrastructural status in clinical neurology (and beyond) both fascinates me and makes me nervous.

I was recently awarded a public scholarship grant by the Rackham Program in Public Scholarship and a mini-grant by the UM Initiative in Disability Studies to pursue my second line of inquiry: articulating the lived experience of seizures through in-depth interviews with people with epilepsy and participant observation of patient advocacy events in collaboration with the Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan.

## ALUMNI UPDATE:

### KEVIN DONOVAN

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

Kevin P. Donovan is now a lecturer in the Centre of African Studies at the University of Edinburgh. He is revising his dissertation into a book, *Sovereign Scales: Frontiers of Value in East Africa*, which examines how sovereignty and value were remade in the wake of empire. It foregrounds the infrastructures and techniques through which economic relations and temporalities were reformulated by postcolonial states and how East African citizens perforated the state's logics of economic rule.

He is also continuing joint research with fellow Michigan STS graduate Emma Park. In summer 2019, they will return to Kenya to examine the rise of "shareholder citizenship," meaning the re-routing of political belonging through the ownership of corporate securities.

At Edinburgh, he teaches on topics in economic anthropology and African studies, and he is getting involved in the university's long tradition of STS.

## NEW FACULTY SPOTLIGHT:

### ANDREA THOMER

Andrea Thomer is an assistant professor in the School of Information. Her research interests broadly include data curation, information organization, and computer supported cooperative work in scholarly contexts. She is especially interested in the curation and use of natural history museum data; the impact of information organization on information use; and data infrastructure sustainability—on the scale of decades and even centuries. She is studying a number of these issues through the "Migrating Research Data Collections" project, a recently awarded Laura Bush 21st Century Librarianship Early Career Research Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

## STS KUDOS

**Kristen Connor** (Anthro-History) was awarded a Fulbright and SSRC-IDRF in 2018 to support her dissertation research (currently ongoing) provisionally titled, “States of the Sky: Meteorology and Rainmaking in Uganda, 1860-Present.” This is in addition to the NSF-GRFP which she was awarded in 2015.

**Daniel Williford** (History) won the 2018 Mullins Prize (Society for the Social Study of Science) for his paper “Seismic Politics: Risk and Reconstruction after the 1960 Earthquake in Agadir, Morocco.” The article was published in the October 2017 issue of *Technology and Culture*.

**Elizabeth Roberts** (Anthropology) received two awards in the 2018-2019 academic year! Roberts won the 2018 Rudolf Virchow Award for a Professional Paper, for her “What Gets Inside: Violent Entanglements and Toxic Boundaries in Mexico City,” *Cultural Anthropology* 32 (2017). This award comes from the Critical Anthropology for Global Health interest group of the Society for Medical Anthropology. Roberts also received the 2019 Elizabeth Caroline Crosby Research Award, an U-M internal award for to support the career advancement of women in STEM Fields.

**Adam Fulton Johnson** (History) was awarded the biennial dissertation prize from the Forum for History of Human Science. He also has an article, “Documenting the Multisensory and Ephemeral: Navajo Chantway Singers and the Troubles of a ‘Science’ of Ceremonialism,” forthcoming in the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* (Summer 2019).

**Christian Sandvig’s** (SI/Communication Studies) project, “Sensing Algorithms: A Collaboratory,” will be funded by the University of Michigan’s Humanities Collaboratory through the 2020 academic year. This project asks: What can be done to reveal algorithms at work and unearth elements of their operation that are otherwise inaccessible? “Sensing Algorithms” will write new algorithms to reveal what is hidden within existing ones, a matryoshka of the digital. This group will take the organizational form of an art collective to join together art, design, music, architecture, cultural studies, computer programming, the digital humanities, and humanistic scholarly critique.

**Victoria Koski-Karell** (MSTP/Anthropology) is participating in a community-based research project, “Global Citizen Science: A Comparative Study of Arsenic in Rice Consumed in Haiti.” The project was recently awarded a \$60K MCubed grant. Using an interdisciplinary, multi-method approach grounded in the concept of “citizen science” from a global perspective, this project is pursuing the first-ever rigorous comparative study of inorganic arsenic concentration in rice consumed in Haiti.

**Matthew Hull** (Anthropology) has received the J. I. Staley Prize for his book, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan*.

**Sriram Mohan** (Communications) recently published an article, “Localizing YouTube: Language, Cultural Regions, and Digital Platforms,” in the *International Journal of Cultural Studies* (2018).

### ALUMNI UPDATE:

#### EMILY MERCHANT

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS



Emily Merchant is Assistant Professor of Science and Technology Studies at the University of California, Davis, where she teaches courses on gender and science, the history of medical technologies, and data analysis and visualization.

Emily is currently writing a book, tentatively titled *Prediction and Control: U.S. Demography and Global Population, 1920-1974*. As climate change becomes increasingly palpable, we hear frequent calls to reduce the number of humans on the planet, paired with lamentations that, due to the history of eugenics and coercive population control programs, direct efforts to slow population growth are not politically feasible. The book places these claims in historical perspective by tracing the path by which Americans came to see population control as the solution not only to environmental degradation, but also to social inequality at national and international scales. It focuses on the ways demography, the social science of human population, contributed to and challenged popular ideas about the consequences of population growth and about which approaches to population control are acceptable and which coercive.

Emily’s next project will explore how social scientists use genomic data and the reciprocal relationship between this research and popular ideas about the genetic roots of social outcomes.