

# STS Matter(s)



Program in Science,  
Technology, & Society  
University of Michigan



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## A Message from the Director:

Welcome to another dynamic year for the Program in Science, Technology and Society at the University of Michigan! Our program continues to thrive and push in new directions.

The interdisciplinary training offered by our graduate certificate program has proved a tremendous asset for our PhD students as they seek academic employment. **Robyn d'Avignon** finished her dissertation on technological knowledge and small-scale gold mining in Senegal; she was appointed as assistant professor of history at New York University. **Tara Dosumu Diener** began a postdoc at Stanford, where she continues to work on maternal health care in Sierra Leone. **Daniel Hirschman** began an assistant professorship in the sociology department at Brown, where he continues his research on the invention of the economy and economic indicators. As a postdoc at Virginia Technology, **Davide Orsini** launched a new project on nuclear decommissioning; he is now an assistant professor of history at Mississippi State University. Finally, **Emily Merchant** is completing a postdoc at Dartmouth, continuing her work on the history of demography, and will start her tenure-track position in STS at the University of California-Davis in Fall 2017. Current certificate students are presently in the field conducting research

in India, Kenya, Morocco, and elsewhere, as well as much closer to home, in Ann Arbor and Detroit. Our undergraduate minor continues to grow as well, presently enrolling 54 students from across the university.

We are also thrilled to welcome several new faculty members to the program. **Melissa Creary** from the School of Public Health works on sickle cell disease in Brazil. **Casey Pierce** from the School of Information works on knowledge management and technology use in healthcare organizations. Medical anthropologists **Zhiying Ma** joins us via the Michigan Society of Fellows with an interest in mental health and chronic illness in China. Sociologist **Erin Cech** works on inequalities in the recruitment and retention of women, LGBTQ, and racial and ethnic minorities in STEM fields.

As our program continues to grow, so does our intellectual life. See page 2 for a list of this year's talks, and follow us **@MichiganSTS** to see live tweets reflecting on those talks and the conversations they spark. Better yet, join the conversation in person, at one of our events!

Gabrielle Hecht, Director

## New Faculty Spotlight



Casey Pierce is an Assistant Professor in the School of Information. Her research focuses on how technology influences knowledge sharing, work practices, and organizational outcomes. In this line of research, she has examined social media use in organizations, technology implementation during a federal policy change, and how employees work across geographic boundaries. Currently, Casey is studying how telemedicine for eye care shapes knowledge sharing and perceptions of expertise among optometrists, ophthalmologists and primary care physicians.



# Graduate Studies

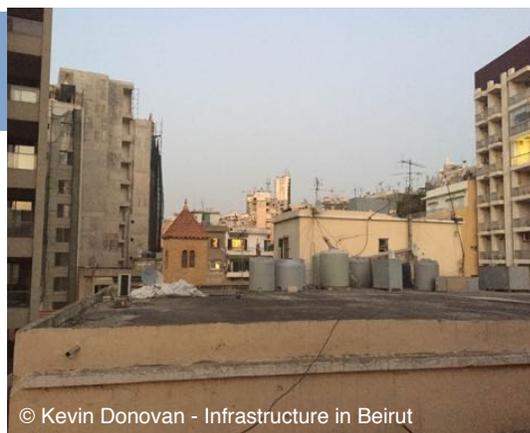
## Angela Perone



A PhD candidate in the joint program in Sociology and Social Work, Angela interrogates discrimination against LGBT older adults operates in long-term care facilities, focusing on Detroit and its segregated suburbs. LGBT adults are more likely to have families of

choice, or strained relationships with biological family members; this means that they are more likely to live in long term care facilities or nursing homes as they age.

As Angela notes, bodies and spaces in these environments are constrained by a variety of formal and informal rules, which can change based on the whims of individual caretakers or shift workers. "This becomes especially problematic for those for whom bodies are a really important site of identity and identity construction." Not conforming to unwritten rules about dress or presentation can lead to conflicts with staff and other residents. "They might be prevented from having dessert, or it can be something so innocuous as 'I didn't



© Kevin Donovan - Infrastructure in Beirut

get offered peas.' It may seem trivial, but when your environment is so controlled people feel really traumatized." Angela's research employs ethnographic and sociological methods, and draws on her prior work as a civil rights attorney with the National Center for Lesbian Rights. Angela also serves as the Director of SAGE (Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders) and as an appointee to the Michigan State Advisory Council on Aging.

## STeMS Speaker Series

Our 2016-2017 Speaker Series features an exciting line-up! Hannah Landecker (UCLA) kicked off this year's events with a talk that critically examined the logics of food production and feed efficiency, and their contributions to current understandings of metabolism and growth.

### 2016-2017 Schedule

- **September 12:** "The 'Butcher's Philosophy': Situating Human Health in a Metabolic Landscape" *Hannah Landecker, University of California, Los Angeles*
- **October 31:** "Social Media in Political Branding: Narendra Modi and the New Twitter Technocrat" *Joyojeet Pal, U-M School of Information*
- **December 5:** "Toward Anti-Ontology: The Unmaking of Chronic Pain in Thailand" *Scott Stonington, U-M Anthropology, Global Environment and Health, Internal Medicine, VA Hospital*
- **January 30:** "Innovation on the Reservation: Information Technology and Health Systems Research among the Papago, 1965-1980" *Jeremy Greene, Johns Hopkins University*
- **February 20:** "Ctrl+Z: The Right to be Forgotten" *Meg Jones, Georgetown University*
- **March 6:** "Incidental News: The Consumption of Current Events Information among Young People" *Pablo Boczkowski, Northwestern University*
- **April 10:** "The Seductions of Quaternification: The Politics of Measuring Human Rights and Gender Violence" *Sally Engle Merry, New York University*

Join us in 1014 Tisch; 4-5:30 pm



© Daniel Williford - View from Agadir's Former Casbah, Morocco.

## Merideth Garcia



Merideth's dissertation examines how students, teachers, and learning spaces are co-constructed through the presence of information technology, such as laptops and cell phones, and how those technologies are themselves shaped through these interactions. Observing in classrooms in two, socioeconomically different high schools in the Ann Arbor area, she argues that as technological initiatives and digital assignments increasingly shape modern classroom spaces, they raise important questions about distraction and what it means to learn in a digital environment.

Debates about whether technology has fundamentally shifted learning and attention in so-called "digital natives" are at the foundation of her research. "A lot of those arguments [about neuroplasticity and learning] are rooted in brain trauma and recovery research, and not in research related to everyday practices." Nevertheless, such arguments inform classroom practices. Merideth finds that many teachers "don't know how much their own expertise or familiarity with technology plays into their new role in the classroom." A 10 year veteran of classroom teaching, Merideth has a "deep commitment to diverse classroom spaces and a respect for diverse ways of engaging with material." As she says, "I'm interested in social definitions of normativity and technology and the relationships between them...in high school classrooms, and STS has really laid the foundation for that."



# The Matter(s) of STS

This year's third annual University of Michigan STS mini-conference, *Translating Bodies*, showcased an array of projects about the tools and techniques involved in working and embodied knowledge-making. Mini-conference participants also considered the work done by practitioners of STS across sites and disciplines, as well as how this work is made visible to us.

In his opening keynote, **Joel Howell** (History, Internal Medicine, Health Management and Policy) traced the motions of bodies alongside the production of medical knowledges. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "knowledge came to be embodied by dead bodies." No longer did physicians think about disease as abnormal fluxes of imbalanced humors dispersed throughout the body. Instead, they started to look for specific locations of disease, often using cadavers to

interrogate the body's interiority. Howell discussed two 19<sup>th</sup>-century case studies in which moving bodies changed medical epistemologies: obstetric puerperal fever in Vienna, and the trafficking of cadavers to and from Michigan Medical School. Although Howell's talk attended to lived bodies and cadavers in translation, he is himself a body that translates: as a practitioner of both medicine and history, Howell moves between spaces in the medical sciences, social sciences, and humanities on a daily basis.



Keynote Speaker: Joel Howell, MD/PhD

## STS PechaKucha

Making its third annual appearance, the STS Pecha Kucha challenged speakers to dispatch their talks with speed: 20 slides, 20 seconds each! **Amanda Greene** (English) offered a glimpse into the work of Lee Miller, a surrealist photographer and war correspondent. Miller's light techniques created an aesthetic of injury, centering viewer engagement with art on the boundaries of bodily form in novel ways.

**Merideth Garcia** (English & Education) reported on her work with literacy and technology in high school settings (see the feature on her work on page 2 of this newsletter). **Camilo Sanz** (Anthropology) attended to lack of synchronicity between the rhythms of tumor growth and medical care in Colombia. Sanz examined the complex ways in which the Colombian universal healthcare system works for and against low-income patients. **Chad Monfreda** (Public Policy) offered an imaginative talk on returning to the primacy of arts and philosophy as a mode of radical political participation, especially amid ongoing debates about the Anthropocene.

**Nick Cobblah** (English) brought 19<sup>th</sup>-century word problems to our 21<sup>st</sup>-century attention, arguing that, like other genres, mathematical word problems shape how readers view the world around them, sometimes reflecting and disseminating harmful notions about race and gender through their choices of content, characters, and style.

## Finding Translations

**Melissa Creary** (Public Health) talked about the politics of publication in Brazil surrounding sickle cell disease and race. She traced the co-production of sickle cell disease through state policy and activist claims-making. Creary argued for a new politics of publication – one that acknowledged both the racism that undergirds sickle cell in Brazil and the need for typological categories. **Scott TenBrink** (Information) recounted his experience building platforms for citizen interaction design in Jackson, MI. TenBrink has created innovative, sustainable platforms for citizens to use, especially in order to communicate with their local governments. **Sophia Brueckner** (Art & Design) offered imaginative ways to design interactive user platforms that positively shape mood, affect, and

mental well-being. Drawing on tactile responses to warmth and the central tenets of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Brueckner's empathy boxes provide users with haptic and emotional connections to other anonymous users. **Kentaro Toyama** (Information) offered a provocative talk on the generalizability of STS approaches, arguing that canonical STS scholars like Bruno Latour do a better job of specifying social-natural knowledges and practices than generalizing about them beyond their original contexts. Toyama challenged conference participants to consider what it means to draw universal conclusions from specific technoscientific configurations.



The Empathy Box: Sophia Bruecker  
[www.sophiabruecker.com](http://www.sophiabruecker.com)

## Mishaal Khan

Mishaal graduated in spring 2016 with a degree in History. She currently works as a medical scribe in the Kellogg Eye Center and a docent at the Museum of Natural History, while applying to medical school. During her undergraduate years, Mishaal



took many medical history courses as well as the STS core course. A Flint native, she wrote a final paper examining responses to contaminated water in the city. People discussing the Flint water crisis would "say that we need to fix the pipes, and all the focus was on the water itself. But I grew up there, and there already were a series of problems that the water crisis really highlighted. High rates of poverty, lack of employment and educational opportunities, vacant homes, homicide, violence, substance abuse and psychiatric illnesses," Mishaal said. "STS helped me argue that the solution for Flint must entail social, racial, political and economic development, not simply infrastructural or technological fixes." Mishaal enjoyed the synergy of her classes in biology and those in history and STS. She hopes to stay in Michigan for medical school so that she can continue working with communities in Ann Arbor and Flint.

## 2016 4S/EASST Barcelona

Several graduate student and faculty members of UM's STS program attended the joint meeting of the Society for the Social Studies of Science (4S) and the European Association for the Study of Science and Technology (EASST) in Barcelona this year. The conference – titled *Science and Technology by Other Means* – challenged attendees to think through alternative ways of knowing, articulating, and performing science and technology in both public and private spaces. Participants considered the emergence of non-traditional actors and collectives within contemporary technoscience figurations. The joint meeting pressed speakers to rethink how new sites of knowledge production and praxis have generated imaginative and contentious discussions about accountability, expertise, ecology, and community.

One of the highlights of the conference was the #QueerSTS4S meetup for scholars at the intersection of LGBTQ studies and STS, co-coordinated by our own Stephen Mollidrem (American Culture). STS program members who presented their research included:

- Cindy Lin (Information): "Aspirations Here/Elsewhere: Alternative World-Making for Hackers and DIY Biologists"
- Gabrielle Hecht (History) and Paul Edwards (History/Information): "Fighting the Technosphere, and other Anthropocenic Angsts (A Kitchen Debate)"
- Jean Hardy (Information): "Queer Technologies and Rural World-Making"
- Katie Wataha (History/Medicine): "Go To the Bat, Thou Scientist: An Animal History of Ultrasound"
- Seyram Avle (Information): "Made in Africa: Making, Doing, and the Labor of Future-making"
- Shobita Parthasarathy (Public Policy): "Grassroots Innovation and Gender Order in India"
- Silvia Lindtner (Information): "Making China: The Open Source Phone and the Nation as a Design Material"
- Stephen Mollidrem (American Culture): "Infrastructures/Governing/Queerness: How Health IT Infrastructures "Program Queer Health"

Finally, Gabrielle Hecht's *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade* (2012) received the 2016 Rachel Carson Prize from 4S for outstanding book of social or political relevance in the area of STS.



## David Markey

David is currently a sophomore with plans to major in History, with minors in entrepreneurship and STS. He took the STS core course out of curiosity, and was drawn in by the way STS looked at historical moments. "We read one text about different

inventions and their effects on the world. Instead of just describing the concrete effects of a particular invention, like the compass, the STS perspective talked about how the compass, navigation, and new interpretations of the skies and astrology all coalesced at one moment to allow Europeans to go around India. It was really mind-opening thinking about history through that kind of broad lens." David has a particular interest in American and military history, and used his final assignment to explore how social media acts as a mediator in the United States' engagement with ISIS. He focused on the way that social media creates new landscapes of conflict, both in ISIS's attempts to recruit followers and in attempts to stymie recruitment by governmental and corporate agencies. He is interested both in teaching and in law, and is considering graduate school in history or law school.

