



STS TIMES

The Newsletter of The Committee on Science and Technology Studies

May 2008

www.brown.edu/Faculty/COSTS/

Volume 1:1

Eat Food

In February 2008 COSTS and the Office of the President were pleased to welcome Michael Pollan to campus. This award-winning author of *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *In Defense of Food* drew a crowd of more than 1,000 people, not only from campus but from all over Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

With the help of undergraduates David Schwartz '09 and Natalie Jablonski '10, COSTS was able to bring together Brown students, faculty, staff, as well as local farmers, restaurateurs and community non-profits in a single conversation on the science, production and eating of food.

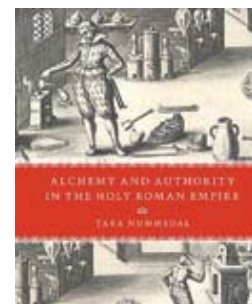
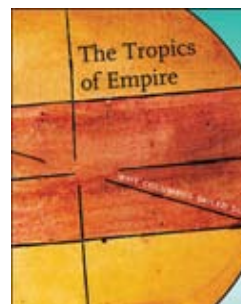
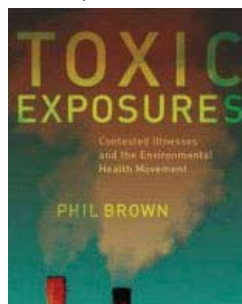
Pollan visited the Southside Community Land Trust and City Farm in Providence. He was the guest of honor at a lunch prepared by 12 Brown undergraduate students, who used local produce and food that they had grown and harvested. The lunch was served at the Mad-dock Alumni Center.



David Schwartz '09 and Michael Pollan at City Farm
Photo: S. Gaye, SCLT

Congrats on New Books!

Congratulations on books recently published by the Committee on Science and Technology Studies (COSTS) faculty members and supporters at Brown:



Toxic Exposures: Contested Illnesses and the Environmental Health Movement, by Phil Brown, Professor of Sociology, was published in July 2007 by Columbia University Press. Focusing specifically on “contested illnesses,” Brown shows how the debate over the origins of these illnesses has prompted scientists and citizens to create an environmental health and justice movement that has revolutionized scientific thinking and policy. Through coverage of dominant biomedical models, how scientific findings are made available to the public, and the changing nature of policy, he offers a new perspective on health and the environment, and the relationship between people, knowledge, power and authority.

In *The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies*, to be published in May 2008 by The MIT Press, Nicolás Wey-Gómez, Assistant Professor of Hispanic Studies, rewrites the geographical history of the discovery of the Americas as part of Mediterranean Europe’s gradual awakening to the natural and human resources of the tropics. Examining the epistemology which gave rise to the colonialist argument that the newly discovered peoples in the ‘hotter’ latitudes of the globe were ‘by nature’ subject to others or slaves, he links Columbus’s southbound route with today’s divide between the industrialized North and the developing South.

Alchemy and Authority in the Holy Roman Empire, by Tara Nummedal, Assistant Professor of History, was published in December 2007 by the University of Chicago Press. Nummedal positions the everyday alchemist of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Holy Roman Empire at the center of the development of early modern science and commerce. The book reveals diverse understandings of what “real” alchemy was, and who could practice it. It also connects little-known practitioners to the issues of commerce, trust, and intellectual authority in early modern Europe.

Congratulations also to Deborah Cohen, Associate Professor of History, who received the Morris D. Forkosch Prize and the Albion Prize for her book *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions, 1830-1945* (Yale University Press, Dec. 2006), and to Ethan Pollock, Assistant Professor of History, for his book *Stalin and the Soviet Science Wars* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

Note From the Chair

Anne Fausto-Sterling

Number 1. Volume 1. This is an historic newsletter. The first ever for the Committee on Science and Technology Studies. We have come far since the late 1990's when three of us plotted to apply for support from the Wayland Collegium to conduct a faculty seminar in Science and Technology Studies. We got the grant, started reading and talking, and never stopped. We also acted. Two years ago we started a new concentration called Science and Society and last year we graduated our first, official concentrators. This year we hired a part time Administrative Coordinator, Michele Duff, who has ably written and produced this newsletter. Thanks especially to her! And we also run lots of campus programs aimed at helping us all better understand how science, technology and society intersect. Join us. Students: consider concentrating in Science and Society. Students, faculty and members of the Brown Community: come to our events. Welcome to all.

Faculty Steering Committee Members and News

- Lundy Braun, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine and African Studies
- Justin Brookes, Philosophy
- Phil Brown, Sociology and Environmental Studies
- Anne Fausto-Sterling, Molecular and Cell Biology and Biochemistry, current chair of the Committee on Science and Technology Studies
- Samuel Greenblatt, Clinical Neurosciences (Neurosurgery) and Neuroscience
- Sherine Hamdy, Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at the Cogut Center for the Humanities, Anthropology, STS
- Evelyn Lincoln, History of Art and Architecture
- Patrick Malone, American Civilization and Urban Studies
- Tara Nummedal, History
- Joan L. Richards, History
- Nicolás Wey-Gómez, Hispanic Studies

Patrick Malone has completed a draft of his book manuscript on "Waterpower in Lowell," to be published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lundy Braun, Anne Fausto-Sterling and other co-authors published an article "Racial Categories in Medical Practice: How Useful Are They?" in PLoS MEDICINE (Sept. 25, 2007).

Evelyn Lincoln has designed a new Freshman Seminar for next year on the history of scientific illustration in the Art History Department.

Sherine Hamdy received the Social Science Research Council Book Fellowship for *Our Bodies Belong to God: Islam and Bioethics in Egypt's Organ Transplant Debate*, and organized a lectureship series on "Bioethics and Culture" and the "Fishes and Loaves" event.

Spring Events Review

It was a busy Spring! Events sponsored or co-sponsored by COSTS include:

"Reclaiming Water and Power in India's Krishna Valley," Roopali Phadke, Macalester College (*Taubman Center*)

"Fishes and Loaves," film clips and panel discussions on the politics, ethics and science of food production

Science Narrative: "Galileo's Daughter, Longitude," Dava Sobel, science journalist (*Department of English Great Nonfiction Writers Lecture Series*)

"In Defense of Food: The Omnivore's Solution," Michael Pollan, Author of *In Defense of Food* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (*Office of the President*)

"The Pharmaceutical Person," Emily Martin, NYU, (*Lectureship Series on "Bioethics and Culture": The Herbert H. Goldberger Lectureship Fund, The Dean of the Faculty, The Department of Anthropology, COSTS*)

"Empires and Science: Contact, Authority, and Collaboration"

"Signal (1): The Body of Transductions and Cascades -- Hormones, Neurotransmitters and Growth Factors after 1960," Hannah Landecker, Harvard and Rice, (*MCM*)

"Belonging Made Visible: The Hidden History of Unanticipated Activism in Special Education," Rayna Rapp, NYU, (*Lectureship Series on "Bioethics and Culture"*)

"Affect and Artificial Intelligence: The Case of Walter Pitts," Elizabeth Wilson, University of New South Wales, (*MCM*)

For details, visit the COSTS website.



STS Alum

"I took the course "Introduction to Science Studies" with Chris Amirault in my junior year. Now studying for my Masters in Science, Technology, Medicine and Society, I return to the ideas and discussions I first encountered in that course. Particularly, I feel as if that class introduced me to a new language with which to talk about science and scientific knowledge. My experiences in my Science and Society classes have helped me to be aware of my own opinions and perspectives and to have the confidence to articulate them. Looking back at my concentration, I really enjoyed the classes I took and the types of dialogues in which I engaged with Brown students and professors."

Emma Zuroski graduated in 2006 with a Science and Society degree. She is now studying at the London Centre for the History of Science, Medicine and Technology, a program jointly run by Imperial College London, University College London and the Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine. She is working on an MSc in Science, Technology, Medicine and Society.



STS Q&A

An interview with Sherine Hamdy, Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow and Assistant Professor of Anthropology. This is the first in a series of conversations with members of the steering committee about their perspective on Science and Technology Studies.



Q. Why is Science and Technology Studies important today?

People today are generally more aware of the contested nature of scientific authority. We might read in the paper or see on the news that a particular food is healthy, only to hear scientists later say that it is not good for you. Or that some scientists have concluded that hormone replacement therapy is good for women, while others say that the risks and negative side effects are too great. There are arguments about the impact of global warming, about the potential dangers of certain vaccines, about business interests in the testing of drug safety. It is clear that questions about what counts as science do not just happen in a laboratory hidden away from wider social interests. Understanding how particular institutions that grant scientific authority are connected to wider social patterns is incredibly important.

Science and Technology Studies (STS) gives us the tools to study what goes into the making of science, what particular ideas, methods and theories come to be seen as authoritative or “factual.” One important branch of STS focuses on the impact scientific practices and technologies have on various groups of people. STS scholars have shown that the same technology could lead to drastically different social effects in different time periods or among different groups of people, and that the impact of technoscience can be quite far from what the original scientists might have intended.

Q. Why is the STS perspective important in your field/area of expertise?

As a medical anthropologist, questions about what counts as authoritative science or knowledge about the body are central to my work. In my own research, I became interested in the ways in which different groups in Egypt regard certain medical practices, such as cataract surgery, new reproductive technologies, organ transplantation, as beneficial or not. I am also really interested in the intersections between science and religion. I think there has been a very particular history of the relationship between modern science and religion in Western Europe and North America that people tend to assume is universal. I am studying very different relationships between scientific and religious institutions in the Muslim world.

Q. Can you give a real-world example of an issue that STS scholarship has affected, is affecting now, or is likely to affect in the future?

It is clear that we all as a society are, for better or worse, directly impacted by and even constituted by technoscientific institutions, and yet we do not equally share decision-making roles in science. This is changing. STS is relatively new to the academy as a field of study in its own right. But critiques of particular practices in science and technology have been longstanding from feminists, those tackling racism, disability rights groups, environmentalists and anti-warfare activists who have been motivated to make science more democratic. This means that the scientific community should better reflect the larger social demographic (and include non-whites, and women) and that there should be better engagements between scientists and nonscientists. Medical school curricula now invite patients with genetic or other disabilities to come speak about their conditions. The fact that patients are now seen as informants with important medical expertise is a clear change from even just a decade ago. I am not sure that we could credit STS scholars with this change, but disabilities’ and patients’ rights groups share with STS scholars concerns about making the recipients of technoscientific interventions more involved in the making of that knowledge and in decisions about its use.



Announcing:

The Humanities/ Science Project

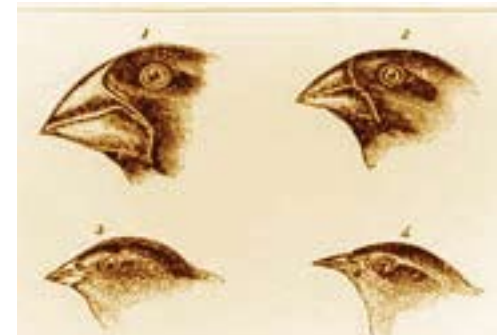
Critical Conversations About Life and Knowledge

The Cogut Center for the Humanities and COSTS are pleased to announce a three-year collaborative program linking the sciences and the humanities. The collaboration will promote interdisciplinary seminars and research groups that bring together scholars in the sciences and humanities, including Cogut Center postdoctoral fellows, visiting as well as Brown faculty members, and graduate and undergraduate students.

In 2008-2009, we will celebrate the bicentennial of the birth of Charles Darwin (b. 1809) by focusing on the scientific and cultural history of evolutionary theory in the 150 years since the publication of *The Origin of Species*.

We will open with a talk in October 2008 by renowned Darwin biographer Janet Browne, author of *Darwin's Origin of Species: A Biography (Books That Changed the World)* (Atlantic Books, 2006).

Suggestions for developing programs for 2008-2009 and beyond are welcomed.





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Science and Public Policy

The Taubman Center for Public Policy & American Institutions and COSTS launched a four-part lecture series on Science and Public Policy in fall 2007.

“Science and technology represent some of the most challenging policy issues in the contemporary period,” said Darrell West, Director of the Taubman Center for Public Policy and John Hazen White Professor of Public Policy/Political Science. “Our Science and Public Policy lecture series brings prominent experts to campus for meetings with faculty and students, and opportunities to learn about cutting-edge research. The seminars sponsored as part of this series have attracted a wide range of people from across campus and contributed to greater understanding of these important subjects.”

Shobita Parthasarathy, the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan, presented “Building Genetic Medicine: Assessing and Regulating Ethically and Socially Controversial Technologies” in October.

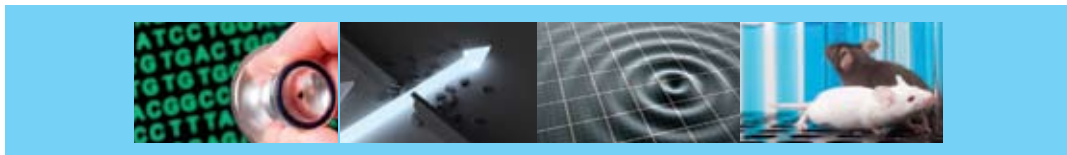


In November, David Guston of the Department of Political Science and the Center for Nanotechnology in Society at Arizona State University presented on nanotechnology in “Toward Anticipatory Governance of Emerging Technologies.”



Steven Epstein of the Department of Sociology at the University of California, San Diego, and the Director of its Science Studies Program, presented “Inclusion and Difference: Gender, Race, and the New Biopolitics of Medical Research” in December.

And in February 2008, Roopali Phadke, Environmental Studies Policy and Politics, Macalester College, presented “Reclaiming Water and Power in India’s Krishna Valley.”



Attention Undergrads

If you’re interested in learning more about Science and Technology Studies at Brown – and whether a concentration in Science and Society is for you – check out our website.

You can also contact Professor Fausto-Sterling, Chair of the Faculty Committee on Science and Technology Studies, at Anne_Fausto-Sterling@brown.edu.

For more reading: Look for two student publications – both can be found on campus – that cover topics of interest to STS scholars:

The Catalyst: Bridging the Gap between the Sciences and Humanities

The Triple Helix: A global forum for science in society (published with support from COSTS)

