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NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION SECTION ON
**SCIENCE, KNOWLEDGE
and TECHNOLOGY**

Volume 6 Number 2 July 1993

THE FORTHCOMING ASA MEETING:

The Annual Meeting of the ASA will be held in Miami Beach, Florida August 13-17, 1993. Please note the following events at the meeting:

1) The SKAT Council will meet Friday, 3:30 PM August 13 at 4:30 in Conference Room 5.

2) CORRECTION: The ASA Preliminary Program incorrectly lists the SKAT business meeting for 11 AM Saturday August 14; the correct time is 9 AM.

3) Remember the SKAT reception, held jointly with the Section on Environment and Technology, on Sunday evening, August 15 at 6:30 PM. Please plan to be prompt, as E & T will already be there in the room and will have the first chance at the food if we are not there! The Merton Award winner will be announced at the reception.

4) SKAT sessions:

a) session 84, Refereed Roundtables, Saturday August 14, 8AM, Sociology and Neural Network Research, Education's Role in Science and Technology, Political Aspects of Science and Technology

b) session 100, Research-Front Studies of Science and Technology, Saturday August 14, 10AM

c) session 117, Science, Technology and Feminist Theory, Saturday August 14, 1:30 PM

d) session 131, Looking Toward SKAT's Future, Saturday August 14, 3:30 PM

Between Design and Choice: Social Shaping of New Reproductive Technologies

Rosa Haritos
Cornell University

During the first weekend in April, the Department of Science and Technology Studies at Cornell University held an interdisciplinary workshop entitled, "Between Design and Choice: Social Shaping of New Reproductive Technologies." Some fifty scholars, working within various fields but sharing a common S & TS approach, came together and focused their attention on recent technological advances related to genetics and human reproduction. Their goal was to explore how techniques such as genetic testing, in vitro fertilization, ultrasonic imaging, and hormone research (to name but a few) have both shaped and been shaped by our understandings of childbearing, disease, gender, and the family. Conceived as part of Cornell's graduate training program in science and technology studies, the workshop was funded by grants from the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy.

The tone for the workshop was set by two keynote addresses. In a talk entitled, "Frankenstein and the Embryos: Science Fiction in the Debate about Embryo Research", Michael Mulkey focused on 'fictional narratives' and examined how science fiction is linked to our perceptions of reproductive technologies. Mulkey demonstrated how images of 'mad scientists' and their 'frankensteinerian' creations were very much a part of the parliamentary debates concerning embryo research in Britain, illustrating the point that in order to make up their minds about what risks need to be guarded against, members of parliament took into account a 'fictitious, futuristic view of reality'. Moving from narratives to practice, Adele Clarke examined the differential industrialization of several key processes of human reproduction starting from the late 19th century. In her talk, "Modernity, Postmodernity and Human Reproductive Processes", Clarke examined how 'new' reproductive technologies actually transformed human reproduction. Clarke suggests that while modernity was concerned with 'mechanistic intervention and the control of human reproductive processes', post modernity is concerned with 'reconstitutive intervention and the transformation' of reproduction.

The remainder of the papers were divided into three panels, each of which explored a fundamental set of questions within a social studies of science and technology framework. The first panel consisted of a series of empirical studies of reproductive technologies. Although the papers focused on a variety of technological innovations -- ultrasonic imaging, home pregnancy tests, contraceptives -- they all served to illustrate the political and social embeddedness of reproductive technologies.

The second group of papers examined gender and reproductive technologies. These papers ably demonstrated how gender identity and gender issues define and are defined by constructions of technologies. The papers called attention to the need for studying reproductive technologies from a cultural perspective: one that places technology within a broader, cultural context. As cultural contexts define attitudes, beliefs, and practices, reproductive technologies are conceptualized in both social and physical terms that are culture specific.

The last set of papers examined social responses to genetic and reproductive technologies. These papers explored legal and policy implications of reproductive technologies, and examined the various assumptions about science and technology that are promulgated in these contexts with an eye on the consequences of such assumptions and definitions.

Group discussions, led by myself and Andrea Burrows, served to facilitate discourse around common themes. While a variety of issues were considered, discussions focused upon three central issues:

1. Control and Intervention: Who controls and who is controlled by reproductive technologies? What arguments are used for the legitimation of control and intervention? What are the consequences of such actions?
2. Normalcy: What are the definitions of a 'normal' or 'healthy'? How 'universal' are these definitions? How are these concepts linked to 'perfectibility'?
3. Access: Who has access to reproductive technologies? How does access differ within countries? How does it differ between industrialized countries and underdeveloped countries? What are the consequences of differential access?

Taking advantage of yet another medium, the audio/visual, the workshop provided participants with further grist for the mill in the guise of a home-made video. The main feature was a newly released documentary entitled, *Underexposed: The Temple of the Fetus*, written and produced by Kathy High.¹ The film addresses the complexities of surrogate motherhood and in vitro fertilization through the eyes of Jesse, a woman who is a participant in a futuristic reproductive experimental program called Egg Retrieval Program, or ERP. In a creative mix of fictional and non-fictional clips, High focuses attention on the political, economic, and social uses of these technologies. In addition to this film, clips from other well known movies such as *Frankenstein*, *The Meaning*

¹ For those interested in obtaining this film, it can be rented from Video Data Bank, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 37 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60605. (312) 899-5172. The fee for the rental is \$75.00.

of Life, and Everything you Ever Wanted to Know about Sex but Were Afraid to Ask, further illustrated the multi-faceted meanings embodied in reproductive technologies.

In conclusion, the contributions made at the workshop addressed more than the impact of reproductive technologies on all our lives. The participants sought to identify and understand the complex assumptions about society and science that are incorporated in these technologies. Convincing arguments were put forth that further dispelled the myth that science and technology are 'value-free' or 'neutral entities', and illustrated how these practices are socially constructed and shaped by a vast array of contexts: in the laboratory, in medical practice, in the courts, in politics, or in the media. The list, of course, is by no means exhaustive. Perspectives from the economic and ethical arenas must also be addressed in order to further enhance our understanding of the construction of genetic and reproductive technologies.

For further information concerning the workshop contact Debbie VanGalder, Department of Science and Technology Studies, 632 Clark Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY., 14853. Phone (607) 255-6043, Fax (607) 255-6044.

SKAT SECTION ELECTION RESULTS:

Chair-elect, Karin Knorr, to serve 1993-1995 as Chair-elect and 1996-1998 as Chair;

Council Members, Cheryl Leggon and Peter Taylor, to serve 1993-1996;

Student Council Member, Monica J. Casper, to serve 1993-1995.

Congratulations to the new officers.

NEW PUBLICATIONS BY SKAT MEMBERS:

Riley E. Dunlap, George H. Gallup, Jr., and Alec M. Gallup, "Health of the Planet," (Princeton: George H. Gallup International Institute, 1993)

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION:

The Sociology of Emotion section invites members of SKAT to participate in a major roundtable session with the theme "Infusing Social Institutions with Emotions," at the 1994 ASA meeting in Los Angeles. The topic stems from James Coleman's 1992 presidential address (see text in ASR, Feb. 1993) in which he proposed that new, rationally-constructed social institutions are needed to replace older, nonfunctioning social forms, and that sociologists should address how the new institutions can be built. In keeping with his theoretical bent, Coleman stressed the rational incentives that would make the new institutions effective. But the Emotions Section challenged Coleman (in a debate between him, and Sally Bould and Amitai Etzioni in the February 1993 Emotions Section Newsletter) on the ground that social institutions don't succeed on the basis of rational incentives alone. They must also induce suitable EMOTIONS - commitment, trust, liking, hope, respect, enthusiasm, loyalty, confidence, satisfaction, etc. - in their participants. Coleman agreed and urged members of the Emotions Section to provide understandings of how the important emotional microfoundations of macro institutions can be created.

The Emotions section is responding to the challenge, but also invites all sociologists with interests in institutional structure and performance to contribute to this topic from the unique perspective of their institutional interest. Papers, ideas for discussion topics, etc., should be submitted to Viktor Gecas, Dept. of Sociology, Washington State University, Pullman WA 99164. Deadline: Dec. 31, 1993.

FROM THE EDITOR:

Having been editor of this newsletter for about three years, and having never yet contributed an editorial or article of my own, I am compensating for this omission in the present issue, with a discussion of my recent trip to Hanoi, Vietnam, and to China. Please send me YOUR contributions: essays, notices about your new publications, summaries of dissertations in progress, calls for papers, etc. Send to Maurice Richter, SKAT Editor, Sociology Dept., SUNY-Albany, 1400 Washington Ave., Albany NY 12222, home phone 518-869-6720, fax 518-442-4936, e-mail MR274@rachel.albany.edu

REPORT FROM VIETNAM

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Maurice N. Richter, Jr.
State University of New York at Albany

Never, since I began to teach 38 years ago, had I faced a situation like this. I was standing in front of a class of freshman sociology students at the University of Hanoi in Vietnam. I knew what these students had learned about my country. They had all seen the wreckage of a B-52 bomber displayed in front of Hanoi's Military Museum, and the pictures in that museum showing civilians in Hanoi killed and injured and buildings reduced to rubble by American bombs, and pictures of Vietnamese soldiers and civilians fighting against "US and puppet forces," and they had all been told that the continuing American economic embargo has retarded Vietnam's recovery... and now an American professor was talking with them. Perhaps they had seen a few Americans before (several Americans study at the University of Hanoi), but they certainly had not seen very many of us. They kept their eyes glued on me as if they were trying to guess, from my facial expressions and gestures, what I might be saying in a language that they could not understand. But whenever I paused for translation, and they learned what I had been saying, faces all around the room lit up with friendly smiles.

When I called for questions, there was only silence. But then I explained that most American professors, in contrast to most professors in some countries such as China where I once taught, want and expect to be questioned and challenged by their students. I invited questions again, and got plenty of them, and the atmosphere in the classroom became cheerful and friendly. The thought occurred to me that, if they had been born 25 years earlier, many of these shy, gentle and delightful students would have been, to Americans, "enemy soldiers."

The Sociology Department at University of Hanoi has faculty interested in (among other things) sociology of science, urbanization, the transition from the traditional to the modern family, the role of women, delinquency, changes in the management of business enterprises, and homeless children. The Department is developing an MA program. In doing so it has less autonomy than an American university department would ordinarily have. Under arrangements that may reflect French and/or Soviet influence (Vietnam is a former French colony with a Soviet-style political regime) there is in each academic discipline a nationwide committee that oversees curriculum planning for that discipline in all universities in the country.

In addition to the University of Hanoi, I also visited a unit of the National Center for Scientific Research, which was once developing into an institution that would focus on basic research like the former Soviet Academy of Sciences, but which has recently developed in a different direction with increased emphasis on applied research and consulting services. These visits, however, were merely incidental: I was in Hanoi (May 8-17, 1993) primarily to visit the Institute of Science Management of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment. I gave five lectures at the Institute's Graduate School, on various aspects of the sociology of science and technology. The invitation to visit Vietnam came because researchers at that Institute heard a paper that I read at the 1992 meeting of the Society for Social Studies of Science in Gothenburg, Sweden. My paper dealt with university-industry relations in China. I was told that Vietnam was coping with some of the same issues that my paper had discussed.

In my lectures at the Institute in Hanoi I emphasized that science does not need, and tends not to flourish with, highly centralized controls, pointing out that in the US we have no Department (or Ministry) of Science, no Soviet-style Academy of Science, and no comprehensive national science policy (and no governmental body comparable to the Soviet or Vietnamese "State Committee on Science and Technology" that would have the authority to formulate such a policy).

I was able to clarify this point by making an analogy involving the control of Hanoi traffic, which includes only a few trucks, buses and cars (mostly taxis), in a vast sea of bicycles, swift and silent motorbikes, and "cyclos." (A cyclo is a tricycle, with two forward wheels and one rear wheel, and a chair in which one or two people can sit perched atop the two front wheels, and a man in the rear who propels the cyclo forward with his powerful leg muscles.) In the absence of traffic lights and traffic police at many major intersections, traffic in Hanoi spontaneously regulates itself with remarkable efficiency and gracefulness. Heavy traffic flows through busy intersections in all directions simultaneously, with people tending to slow down, but not necessarily stop, as they approach an intersection, and the traffic interweaves itself so that ordinarily no one collides with anyone else (although I was told that collisions do occur). I suggested that, given favorable conditions, scientists will also tend spontaneously to space themselves appropriately among research topics and specialties, even if not as easily as drivers space themselves in Hanoi traffic.

I explained that "proposal pressure" could sometimes affect the allocation of NSF funds among specialties, and that there is a good reason to allow this to happen: scientists will spontaneously move toward those areas that

are most "ripe" for further advances. I pointed out that many NSF program managers are really university professors who work for NSF only temporarily with leaves of absence from their home institutions. I stressed the importance of the distinction between employers of scientists and sponsors of their research: an American professor may be employed by a university but his/her research may be sponsored by NSF or some other agency. And, I pointed out that under our peer review system, a younger scientist might be called upon to evaluate the work of an older one, which is not the way things are usually done in Vietnam, a conservative country in some respects despite the prevailing revolutionary ideology.

In Vietnam I visited Hanoi only. Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam (and formerly capital of French Indo-China) has a recent history very different from that of Vietnam's largest city, Ho Chi Minh City (formerly "Saigon"). During the recent war, South Vietnam including Saigon was in effect occupied by more than half a million American troops, and was thus extremely heavily exposed to American influence, while North Vietnam including Hanoi was fighting on the other side and was subjected to American bombing but never saw American soldiers on the ground. Very few Americans have visited Hanoi in the two decades since then.

Visiting there was not easy. In addition to the usual difficulties that people can expect to face when they venture into societies very different from their own, there are special problems for Americans and some others who visit Vietnam. The absence of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the United States complicates the process of getting a Vietnam visa: I got mine in Hongkong (after signing the required statement promising to obey Vietnamese laws). If an American gets into trouble in Vietnam, there is no US Embassy there to help. The US embargo against Vietnam means, among other things, that Americans in Vietnam cannot use credit cards, travelers checks or personal checks (and, incidentally, paying for things in cash with Vietnamese currency is awkward: money comes in small denominations only, and when I was there a single US dollar was worth almost eleven thousand Vietnamese dong). There are severe restrictions, imposed by the US government, on what Americans can purchase in Vietnam, how much they can spend there, and what they can do there, and on relations with Vietnam generally. To conform with the embargo I refrained from doing some things that I usually do when I travel, such as buying picture postcards and mailing them to friends. Fortunately from the standpoint of those who are interested in relations with academic institutions in Vietnam, the rules of the embargo include certain relevant exceptions, but I will not go into the complicated details of that here. One Vietnamese researcher who recently visited several universities in the United States told me that he was

pleasantly surprised to find that the embargo did not prevent fruitful communication with his hosts.

Vietnam's international relationships are in bad shape, with American hostility, with a long history of Chinese-Vietnamese tension, and with the collapse of both the Soviet Union and East Germany where many of Vietnam's highly educated personnel were trained. The isolation of Vietnam reveals itself in many ways. There are relatively few commercial flights between Hanoi and cities outside Vietnam: e.g., three flights weekly in each direction between Hanoi and Hongkong (only about an hour and a half away), and in planes that are not especially large. When we landed at Hanoi, our jet made a U-turn and taxied back on the same runway we had just landed on; it seemed that no one else was in any hurry to use the runway. There is no direct electronic mail link between the United States and Vietnam, although there is an indirect link that operates for one hour on Fridays only via a university in Australia; any message sent in either direction waits until the following Friday before it is transmitted. There are so few Western visitors that museums generally have their exhibits labelled in Vietnamese only: the Military Museum, with some signs in English, is an exception. Even though the US embargo rules allow for an exemption pertaining to "informational materials," there are Vietnamese scholars whose talents are being largely wasted because financial obstacles prevent them from obtaining adequate information about what is going on in their respective fields in the world outside Vietnam. Books are also hard to obtain for students, even though, with Vietnam not adhering to the international copyright system, they are sometimes reproduced without permission from copyright holders. Vietnam's isolation is reinforced by internal political controls. Visitors to Vietnam are required to register with the local police soon after arrival (I was a guest of an institute, so this was taken care of for me). Visitors are warned against bringing into the country either pornographic or anti-socialist literature.

The political isolation of the country has not prevented the appearance, in Vietnam, of certain trends that are also manifested elsewhere. Many research institutes in Vietnam have had their government appropriations cut and have been told that they should make up the difference by selling their services to people and organizations willing to pay for them. One research institute that I heard about had its government appropriations cut to about 20% of what they had been, and the institute succeeded in earning enough to compensate for that huge loss. There seems to be little awareness in Vietnam that research institutes in neighboring China have been undergoing similar experiences. I did not succeed in having any good two-way conversations in Vietnam about internal developments in China, even when these

developments parallel those taking place in Vietnam. And the parallels are quite profound. Both countries have been reforming their economies, adopting some features that might be called "capitalistic," and moving away from Soviet-style arrangements pertaining to the organization of science, but without abandoning either the official commitment to socialism or the principle of Communist Party rule. But problems in Chinese-Vietnamese relations are deeply rooted. I saw a magnificent mural in a Hanoi museum depicting Vietnamese fighters engaged heroically in an ancient battle against Chinese forces. And, in February 1979, while I was visiting in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou (Canton), war erupted between the two countries again, and my Chinese tour guide was afraid that Guangzhou would be bombed by the Vietnamese Air Force using captured American planes.

Despite economic reforms and consequent economic progress, Vietnam remains a poor country. One not-very-precise but interesting indicator of this may be mentioned: there are only a few hundred people, in this land of about 70 million, who have 286 or 386 computers in their homes. And, although Vietnam has given considerable emphasis to education, there remain schools without computers. Of course, poverty is not incompatible with attractiveness as perceived by visitors, and Hanoi is in some ways an extremely attractive city, with tall shade trees even in downtown areas, beautiful parks, no visible air pollution (at least during my visit, although there was some blowing dust), traffic that flows smoothly and with reasonable quietness along wide boulevards, and interesting things to see; and the portion of countryside that one glimpses en route to and from the Hanoi airport is stunning in its beauty. In Hanoi, as in some other parts of the world where widespread poverty is found in a warm climate, the lives of ordinary people are comparatively highly visible: many people find it more comfortable to spend leisure time outdoors, and even to eat meals outdoors, rather than in crowded and poorly ventilated homes, and most people travel around the city in open vehicles (bicycles, motorbikes, and cyclos) rather than in closed ones (cars or buses). Some residents of Hanoi are worried that, with further development, their city might someday become "another Bangkok," which reminded me of complaints that I used to hear about Phoenix becoming "another Los Angeles." As for the remote countryside, a Western visitor whom I met in Hanoi, who has travelled widely around Vietnam, told me that ecological damage there is immense and potentially tragic, with large forests being rapidly destroyed.

After Vietnam I went to China, to Beijing and Tianjin, both fabulously modern cities by Hanoi standards. As we were about to land at Beijing airport, airline personnel asked us to turn in to them the newspapers we had been reading during the flight. At the airport, a passenger entering or leaving

China with any printed matter is required to go through Customs clearance in the "red" rather than the "green" line (i.e., in the line of passengers who have something to declare to the Customs officers). Around Beijing one no longer sees the numerous billboards that were posted everywhere during my first visit fourteen years ago, with slogans like "Long Live Chairman Mao's Revolutionary Line;" instead, in mid-May 1993 there were signs everywhere saying "A More Open China Awaits Olympics 2000." Some other changes since my first visit are astounding. Arriving at Beijing airport in 1979 I found only two planes on the ground in addition to our own. Flying out of that airport a few days later I noticed that there were only two international flights scheduled to arrive during the entire morning: a Soviet jet from Moscow and a Chinese jet from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Today the airport is filled with planes from all over the world, too many to permit an easy count. In 1979 as we drove into the city from the airport we encountered only two motor vehicles en route, and those two had collided with each other; in May 1993 the road into the city was filled with cars (mostly taxis).

In my hotel in Beijing I bought the Wall Street Journal and listened to Cable Network News. The Chinese authorities have to make such foreign media available to visiting foreign business people and tourists or else these visitors might not come, but efforts are made to prevent access to such media by ordinary Chinese people; for example, publications such as the Wall Street Journal, Time and Newsweek are available only at special locations and can be bought only with foreign currency. But China is indeed more open than it once was: in 1979 I went into the lobby of my hotel in China to try to buy a Western newspaper, and the only publications available were the collected works of Chairman Mao, which I could buy right there in the hotel in any of twenty languages.

A few days after leaving Vietnam I was lecturing to some undergraduate sociology students at Nankai University in Tianjin, where I had taught in summer 1986. (Almost no one in America has ever heard of Tianjin even though that city has more people than New York City has, perhaps almost a million more.) While facing those students in their classroom I remembered that Americans of my generation, when they were young, fought in Korea against young Chinese people like those I was now talking with, just as a later generation of Americans fought against young Vietnamese people like those I had talked with a week earlier, and just as young Chinese and Vietnamese people fought against each other in 1979. All of that seemed as bizarre as a war would be in which two of my classes at the State University of New York at Albany would fight on opposite sides. But I did not discuss these thoughts in the classroom at Nankai. Instead, I told the students there something about American society,

which must seem like a very strange society to them. Perhaps the hardest thing for Chinese students to understand about America is the fact that we have no "work units." In urban China a worker will ordinarily live with his family in a dormitory-like residence provided by his work unit, and send his children to a school provided by his work unit, and get medical care as needed from his work unit's clinic, and (although this is now apparently changing), have to get permission from his work unit to quit his job even to take advantage of a better job offer from elsewhere. I tried, with only limited success, to explain how a society can function without work units in this sense, and then I asked for questions, explaining that in America (in contrast to certain other countries!) it is customary for students to question and challenge their teachers, and the students responded just as I hoped they would, and just as students in Hanoi had responded a week earlier.

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Editor: Maurice Richter (address on page 5)