

Minutes of the Meeting of the Science, Technology, and Medicine (STM) Special Interest Group of the Society for Medical Anthropology (SMA) at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), Saturday, November 22, 2008, San Francisco, CA.

Overview

- Introductions
 - Scheduling problems
- The past year's activities
- New business
 - Visibility of the group
 - Procedural issues
 - Discussion of possible themes for the year
 - Panel type and status
- The way forward
- Action items

Introductions

João Biehl, who could not attend the meeting, had discussed the meeting's agenda with Alex Choby, Betsey Brada, and Adriana Petryna. Harris Solomon who has been coordinating the listserve is currently doing fieldwork in India. Alex, Betsey and João attended the meeting of representatives of SMA Special Interest Groups to report on the activities of the STM during 2008.

Alex and Betsey brought the meeting to order, and all those present introduced themselves. Joe Dumit stopped by to introduce himself, to introduce the International Society for History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Biology (ISHPSSB), and to let STM members know about the launch of the journal, *Anthropology Now*, which he left to attend. Deborah Gordon and Linda Hogle, both of whom also had to leave early, introduced themselves. All others present introduced themselves.

Scheduling conflicts

Various members pointed out that several SMA Special Interest Groups (SIG) had been scheduled to meet concurrently, including the Critical Anthropology & Global Health Group. João B. and other SIG representatives had brought this problem to the attention of Vinay Kamat, the Special Interest Group representative on the SMA Board. It was generally acknowledged that many of those interested in the STM group were unable to attend, and that the topics discussed at the STM meeting would be introduced to the broader membership of the group via the email list.

The past year's activities

Alex C. presented the STM group's accomplishments for the past year. These included: creating and maintaining an email list on Google; the merger of the Science, Technology and Medicine interest group and the Pharmaceuticals Study group; and sponsoring panels at conference.

Email list: The email list is hosted by Google. At last count, 89 people subscribed to the list. The group has used the list to plan and advertise the

conference panels we have organized. Harris Solomon has been running the list, and will continue to do so.

Merger: At last year's AAA meetings, the Pharmaceutical Study group asked to merge with the STM group and we voted in favor of the merge. João B. and Janice Graham have revised the mission statement to reflect the merger. This statement has been approved by the SMA Board and has been posted on the SMA website.

Panels: At last year's AAA meetings, the STM group sponsored a double panel with special invited status that played on a theme upon which the group had agreed to concentrate for the year. When the STM group and the Pharmaceutical Study group merged, they brainstormed together to find a theme for 2008, eventually agreeing upon "collaboration."

This theme has been reflected in both panels the STM group organized for 2008. The first of these panels took place at the Joint Meetings of the Society for the Social Studies of Science and the European Association for the Study of Science and Technology in Rotterdam in August. At the STM meeting that took place at the 2007 AAA meetings, Alex C., Lara Braff, and Betsey B. volunteered to organize this panel. The panel titled "Shifting Involvements: Collaboration and Relatedness in Science and Medicine" involved five papers and a discussant. Paper topics built on theme of "collaboration" and ranged from in vitro fertilization practices in Mexico to psycho-pharmaceuticals in India to intellectual property issues around new cancer diagnostic technologies.

The second panel sponsored by the STM group was a double-panel with invited status at the 2008 AAAs titled, "Collaborations, experiments and care at the frontiers of science and medicine." This panel, organized by João B. and Alex C., was jointly sponsored by the Committee for the Anthropology of Science, Technology, and Computing (CASTAC). There was a call for papers through the list-serve and all the twelve abstracts submitted made it into the session. The first half of the panel was chaired by João B.; the second half was chaired by Chris Furlow from CASTAC. There was great interest in the panel, with some 150 people in attendance.

New business

Alex C. and Betsey B. introduced the agenda for the rest of the meeting which involved: deciding whether the group should again pursue a theme around which to organize panels for the coming year; brainstorming what that theme might be; soliciting volunteers for committees to organize panels for the coming year's conferences; and thinking through the logistics of those panels, e.g., should we to apply for invited status or not.

Other questions on the table included: How can the STM group make itself more visible and attract more members? Should the group organize a paper prize, and if so, who would volunteer to work on this? How is the STM section of the SMA website working for people? Is there a way to make the web more agile?

Visibility of the group

There are some concerns around the visibility of the STM group. Sponsorship by interest groups is not listed in the AAA program. Michelle P. observed that interest groups used to be able to sponsor sessions. She suggested

that Alissa Silber (?) would know more about this issue. The Council on the Anthropology of Reproduction (CAR) tried to get the AAA to list them as sponsors in the AAA program, but it didn't happen. She also noted that the CAR increased their visibility by putting together a book prize and a paper prize.

Alex commented that we wanted to discuss the possibility of a paper prize. She asked if anyone was interested in forming a committee of people who could figure this out. Michelle P. indicated her willingness to advise in the process.

Procedural issues

Before addressing any of the questions on the table, Lakshmi Fjord observed that many of the people involved in the STM group were not present. She suggested that these questions ought to be posed to the group via the email list with the caveat the discussion be given a time limit. Members who are already working on particular projects could use the opportunity to organize a panel and allow other people to join it. She emphasized that it was important that the activities of the group be diffused throughout its membership and be as inclusive as possible.

Alex C. agreed that the processes should be inclusive, but also offered that if any people present were interested in forming an idea for a panel, they could indicate so now. Megan Crowley-Matoka agreed, observing that the meeting was an opportunity to begin the planning processes.

Adriana Petryna observed that the panels organized by the STM group over the last two years have built on each other, and the STM meetings at the AAAs have been opportunities to discuss ideas the group could build on for the coming year. She suggested that, since this process has been working, the group could use the meeting time to brainstorm a few themes that that group could follow in the coming year. She encouraged those present to build on the momentum of the past two years' activities.

Alex C. concurred, suggesting that those present who wanted to volunteer could do so, and that those present could begin to brainstorm themes.

Discussion of possible themes for the year

Andi Johnson suggested that the group pull forward some of the themes that came out the STM-sponsored double-panel that had been held the day before, including ideas about active awaiting, temporality, and scales of times. Adriana P. suggested focusing on non-institutionalized spaces, different temporalities, and the challenge of continuity over time vis-à-vis global health. Lakshmi F. noted that small-scale technologies get lost in analyses of science, technology and medicine. She suggested we interrogate what kinds of interventions count as STM, and push for the inclusion of different ways of knowing and different kinds of expertise in our analyses.

Megan C-M. suggested 'the temporality of hope' as a theme, which would allow the group to explore the things we don't quite know yet, what's been taken for granted, and what cannot be taken for granted. Betsey B. asked if the group could think about this in terms of 'foreclosure'. Andi J. and Alex C. suggested that 'closure' could imply both a closing off and a laying bare, and pointed toward temporality.

Ian Whitmarsh said that he and João B. had been talking about the market and the state, the way the one facilitates or impinges upon or controls the other. Alex C. pointed out that two years ago the group had sponsored a panel on bodies and economies. In order to not repeat ourselves, she suggested the group think of another way to frame the issues. She reminded the group that the theme for next year's AAAs is, "The ends of anthropology."

Adriana P. said she had heard a shift in how people were positioning themselves vis-à-vis large scale interventions, that there were observing global health interventions in action, rather than after the fact. She was struck by how Clara Han's paper examined how people envision futures in the absence of any architecture for them. She saw Han's paper asking how people imagine futures in contexts of danger and uncertainty beyond the question of more immediate ends.

Alex C. said she saw the conversation moving provisionally in the direction of 'temporality' as one possible structuring idea. She asked those present if they wanted to put forward the theme of 'temporality' to the rest of the STM group via the email list. Adriana P. observed that 'temporality' gets used a lot suggesting we think about something like 'breakthrough' instead. Michael suggested we push the AAA's proposed theme to think about the ends of industrial bio-genetics, for example, in relation to the imagined end implied in the endeavor. Betsey B. asked if the panel could perhaps combine the themes of 'breakthrough' and 'foreclosure'.

Alex C. brought the discussion to a close, saying that she and Betsey B. will write up a paragraph introducing this theme and the other themes. An email will be sent to the group outlining the suggested themes, and indicating a window of time within which the group can discuss them before reaching a conclusion. (It was left unclear exactly how this conclusion will be reached.)

Panel type and status

The discussion turned to the question of whether the STM should apply for invited status for the panel it sponsored at next year's AAA meetings. There was also a question whether about the type of panel the STM would sponsor: Should the group apply for invited status for a double panel, two regular panels, or one regular panel?

Some of those present had suggested that perhaps the STM should not apply for invited status in order to make it possible for other groups to sponsor invited-status panels. Adriana P. told the group that invited status was very competitive, and that a large number of very good panels were not accepted. She also reminded the group that a double session is something of an event. The program committee may want to give invited status to other's group's panels, but they may also recognize the quality of the panels that STM organizes. Michael, commenting on the crowd at the STM panel the day before, observed that it says something that people can't get in the door of the panel.

Lakshmi F. asked for clarification regarding whether, in the instance that one applied for invited status and was rejected, the panel would just go into the general pool of panels for consideration. (This was left unclear.) Michael said that the acceptance rate for invited status applications this year was really high, but he didn't know why.

Lakshmi F. asked what was gained by thematically linking the panels organized by the STM group for a given year. Alex C. explained that the point was to begin a conversation, and then continue the conversation with a different (or slightly overlapping) set of people in a different context. It was a way, she proposed, of beginning a conversation amongst people who want to be in contact, but she agreed with Lakshmi F. that the process should be as open to new interlocutors as possible.

Alex C. directed the conversation back to the question of what type of panel to sponsor and whether to apply for invited status. Lara B. suggested there was no harm in applying for invited status. Alex C. agreed with Adriana P. that the double session has been something of an event and has attracted people to the group.

The way forward

Alex C. asked the group assembled if any of those present were interested in participating in organizing committees for the coming year's three conferences (4S SMA, and AAA). She asked that people indicate whether they would like to participate in an organizing committee, and the order of conferences for which they would prefer to help organize a panel on the sign-in sheet that was being circulated.

She also asked if anyone present would assemble a committee to look into the logistics involved in setting up a paper prize. Lara B. volunteered to ask the Council on the Anthropology of Reproduction how they had gone about it, and Ramah McKay volunteered to help her.

Action items

1. Compose and send an email to the STM Google list explaining the suggested themes for the year and soliciting input.
2. Recruit members to committees that will organize STM-sponsored panels for the three conferences this coming year (see list):
 - a. SMA;
 - b. AAA;
 - c. 4S.
3. Organize a committee to look into the paper prize.
 - a. Lara Braff and Ramah McKay have volunteered to check with CAR about how they organized theirs.
4. Website business (we didn't really discuss this much):
 - a. Adding and refining syllabi;
 - b. Making a link to the Google list.

Reported by Betsey Brada