

Anthropology

Personnel and Administrative Changes

During AY2018, Elting E. Morison Professor of Anthropology Stefan Helmreich served as head of the [Anthropology Program](#). Professor Erica James departed Anthropology, moving to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning as associate professor of medical anthropology and urban studies. Associate Professor Graham Jones was awarded tenure and became associate professor with tenure as of July 1, 2017.

Highlights

This past year, we had a very successful colloquium series entitled Imaginaries, Materialities, Territories. One of our four speakers, Héctor Beltrán, so impressed us that we approached the provost to request Beltrán be recruited and made an assistant professor. Beltrán, who in spring 2018 received his PhD in anthropology from the University of California at Berkeley, will be joining us in July 2019 as a postdoc and then continue into an assistant professorship in July 2020. Beltrán, who also holds a SB in computer science from MIT, does anthropological work about computer hacking and entrepreneurship in Mexico and among Latinx programmers in the United States. We anticipate that his research and teaching on cultures of computation will be a big draw for MIT students.

We hosted a reception in November in honor of Professor Stefan Helmreich being awarded the prestigious J. I. Staley Book Prize for his book, *Alien Ocean: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas*. The reception was attended by Michael J. Brown, the president of the School for Advanced Research, who flew in from Santa Fe, New Mexico to present Professor Helmreich with a plaque and a check honoring this achievement.

In response to the Social Sciences Visiting Committee's recommendation from October 2017, we joined our colleagues in the Program in Science, Technology, and Society (STS) and the History Section for a May 2018 three-unit retreat in order to brainstorm collaborations that our units might undertake together—in addition to and beyond our very successful governance and administration of the Doctoral Program in History; Anthropology; and Science, Technology, and Society (HASTS). Already underway as a result of retreat conversations is a series of public talks entitled Democracy, Citizenship, and Technology, organized by Anthropology professor Manduhai Buyandelger, History professor Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, and STS professors John Durant and Michael Fischer. We have also inaugurated a conversation on establishing a computing cultures concentration in the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (SHASS), to be led by faculty from HASTS, including Anthropology professor Graham Jones, History professor Caley Horan, and STS professor Jennifer Light.

Associate Professor with Tenure Manduhai Buyandelger continued work on an ethnographic project entitled, "Disjuncture and Resilience: A Holistic Approach to Real Estate Development in Ulaanbatar, Mongolia," funded by her faculty research grant from the Samuel Tak Lee MIT Real Estate Entrepreneurship Lab. Professor Stefan Helmreich received the 2017 J. I. Staley Book Prize (noted above) for his 2009 book, *Alien Ocean*, awarded by the School for Advanced Research. The prize is awarded to a

living author whose work adds “new dimensions of our understanding of the human species.” Helmreich also received a Katherine Hampson Bessell Fellowship from the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University as well as a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, both of which he will take up in September 2018.

Associate Professor with Tenure Graham Jones’s second book, *Magic’s Reason: An Anthropology of Analogy* was published in fall 2017 and received an honorable mention from the 2016–17 Laurence Wylie French Cultural Studies Prize Committee. Assistant Professor Amy Moran-Thomas finished work on her manuscript on health and environment in Belize, *Traveling with Sugar: Chronicles of a Global Epidemic*, now in press with the University of California Press. Moran-Thomas was also awarded a fellowship to spend fall 2017 at the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, Germany. Professor Heather Paxson began a five-year term as co-editor of *Cultural Anthropology*, one of our discipline’s flagship journals, in conjunction with which she also served on the executive committee of the Society for Cultural Anthropology, a section of the American Anthropological Association.

Professor Paxson also served as the program chair for the annual meeting of the Society for Social Studies of Science, held in Boston in August–September 2017. Professor Susan Silbey served as the MIT faculty chair, an appointment she holds through 2019. She has also been appointed a committee member to the National Academies’ Committee on Science, Technology, and Law, for the Policy and Global Affairs Division. Professor Christine Walley finalized the last component of her three-pronged Exit Zero Project, which, in addition to her award-winning book and documentary, will now include an online archive and interactive website about deindustrialization created in collaboration with the Southeast Chicago Historical Museum. This last component is being funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Anthropology received internal and external funding for ongoing projects. Silbey received funding from the National Science Foundation to continue her ongoing longitudinal study on women in engineering. Additionally, two internal grants were awarded to finish up the Anthropology online module for MITx.

In AY2018, Anthropology once again hosted several visiting students and postdocs. Kera Street came to us from the Divinity School at Harvard University as an AY2018 Mellon Predoctoral Fellow and was supervised by Graham Jones and Heather Paxson. Lai Sze Tso began the second year of a two-year postdoctoral associate term, and taught two undergraduate subjects. Avi Marciano Gilburd joined us as a research affiliate from Ben-Gurion University. We hosted exchange scholar, John Lunsford, from Cornell University.

Teaching and Curriculum

Manduhai Buyandelger taught 21A.01 How Culture Works, one of our core subjects, in spring 2018 as well as 21A.104 Memory, Culture, and Forgetting, an undergraduate subject that meets with a graduate section. Stefan Helmreich taught 21A.500 21A.500[J] Technology and Culture in fall 2017 and co-taught 21A.157 The Meaning of Life with Heather Paxson in spring 2018. Graham Jones taught our other core class, 21A.00 Introduction to Anthropology: Comparing Human Cultures, as well as 21A.520 Magic,

Science, and Religion in fall 2017. Amy Moran-Thomas was on leave. Heather Paxson taught 21A.111 21A.111[J] For Love and Money: Rethinking the Family in fall 2017 and along with co-teaching 21A.157 The Meaning of Life with Stefan Helmreich, taught one of our CI-M subjects, 21A.155 Food, Culture, and Politics, in spring 2018. Susan Silbey taught a graduate-level research methods class, 21A.819 Qualitative Research Methods in fall 2017. Chris Walley taught one of our CI-H subjects, 21A.461 What is Capitalism?, in fall 2017 and taught 21A.120 American Dream: Exploring Class in the US and 21A.410 Environmental Struggles during spring 2018.

As has been the case for several years, faculty participation in HASTS, as well as in PhD programs in the MIT Sloan School of Management and in the Department of Urban Studies continues to be well in evidence with faculty members serving as graduate student advisors and on dissertation committees. Helmreich served on 18 doctoral committees (six as principal advisor; three of his total were outside MIT [one at New School University, one at McGill University, and one at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution]). Jones served on five dissertation committees (three as principal advisor; two of his total were outside MIT [one at the University of California at Los Angeles, and one at Harvard]), and was advisor to one of our 21E majors, as well as a first year advisor. Moran-Thomas served on three dissertation committees and was an advisor to an undergraduate double major and one of our 21E majors. Paxson served on five dissertation committees (two as principal advisor; one of her total was from Harvard). Paxson also was also on the thesis committee for a master's student in the MIT Media Lab and she is an advisor to one of our undergraduate 21E majors. Silbey served on eight dissertation committees (four as chair), and Walley served on seven dissertation committees (two as principal advisor; one as co-advisor; two of her total were outside MIT [one at Harvard, and one at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland]). Walley was also a committee member for a master's student in Comparative Media Studies.

Publications

Buyandelger continued work on her book, *A Thousand Steps to Parliament: Women Running for Election in Postsocialist Neoliberalizing Mongolia*, under preliminary contract with the University of Chicago Press.

Helmreich published one peer reviewed journal article, "A Wave of Mud: The Travel of Toxic Water, from Bento Rodrigues to the Brazilian Atlantic" (with Eliana Santos Junqueira Creado) in *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros*. He also published "Radio Ocean," a chapter in *Tidalectics: Imagining an Oceanic Worldview through Art and Science*, an edited book published by the MIT Press (2018), as well as commentaries, in *Twentieth-Century Music*, *Current Anthropology*, *The Wire*, *Environmental Humanities*, and *Marine Policy*. Three of his articles were translated into other languages (French, Japanese, and Russian).

Jones's second book, *Magic's Reason*, was published by the University of Chicago Press. The book also served as the centerpiece of a symposium, and in the pages of *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, for which Jones wrote a reply entitled, "Magic, An Appreciation."

Moran-Thomas continued work on her book *Traveling with Sugar*, to be published by the University of California Press in 2019. She published "Glucometer Foils" in *Limn* (in a special issue titled "Little Development Devices/Humanitarian Goods"), and "Mine" in the *Cultural Anthropology* online "Hot Spots" series.

Paxson published “Gold Rush Opportunists, Hippie Goat Ladies, Latino Newcomers: California Entrepreneurs Dream of Cheese” in the December 13, 2017 edition of *The Conversation*, which was picked up by the Associated Press and reprinted in the online editions of the *Chicago Tribune* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She also had one of her earlier articles translated into French and reissued.

Presentations

Buyandelger gave an invited talk at Brandeis University in November titled “Electoral Selves and Campaigned Lives: The New Economy of Democratization in Postsocialist Mongolia.” She also gave a presentation on MIT culture entitled, “‘Best Practices’ and Experiences from Bottom Up” at a November MIT-Mongolia Pilot Program Workshop on administration of higher education.

Helmreich gave a talk, “The Limits of Life,” presented at a symposium entitled Life As It Could Be: Astrobiology, Synthetic Biology, and the Future of Life, held at the Library of Congress in September. At the Boston meeting of the Society for the Social Study of Science, in September, he gave a commentary titled “Articulated Listening” on the panel, “Sounding Worlds.” At the 2017 History of Science Society Meeting in Toronto, Ontario in November, Helmreich presented a discussant commentary, “Life Forms and Lifetimes” at the panel on life forms. At the American Anthropological Association annual meeting held in Washington, DC in November, he presented a paper, “From the Waterwolf to the Sand Engine: Living with Waves in the Netherlands” for the panel on oceans and he gave a commentary, “The Bureaucracy of Elements” for a panel on elements. In January of 2018, he gave a talk, “Wave Science and Its Forms” at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, in Berlin, Germany. He gave a similar presentation in February at Logistical Nightmares: Stories from the Global Supply Chain, held at the Goethe-Institut, Amsterdam, the Netherlands and organized by the Centre for Research Architecture, Goldsmiths, University of London. He gave a prerecorded keynote commentary, “Deep Frontiers” at the New Museum Triennial Public Program, Mining the Deep Sea Frontier, in New York.

Jones was a discussant on the panel “The Poetics of Denial: Knowledge-Making and Expertise in a ‘Post-Fact’ World,” at the annual meeting of the Society for Social Studies of Science held in Boston in August–September 2017. He was also a discussant for “Inter/faces: Semiotic Approaches to the Materiality of Computer-Mediated Communication” at the American Anthropological Association Meeting in Washington, DC in November 2017. In December 2017, he gave a talk, “Magic’s Reason: Powers of Illusion in the French Colonial Imagination” at the Global France Seminar at MIT. He gave a talk at Montserrat College in February, “Language, Protest, and Resistance.” In May and June 2018, he gave four talks: “Magic’s Reason: An Anthropology of Analogy” at the University of California at Irvine and the University of California at Santa Cruz; “Toward a Unified Theory of Magic” at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario; and “The Future of Magic’s Past” at the Centre for Ethnographic Theory, The Open University, London, England.

Moran-Thomas gave several talks last year, including “Sugar High: Thresholds between Religion and Medicine” at Harvard University in March 2018, “A Global Perspective on Diabetes Care” at Lowell General Hospital, and “Planetary Health and the Global Diabetes

Epidemic” at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, Germany in November 2017. In addition, she presented two papers at the Society for the annual meeting of the Society for Social Studies of Science, held in Boston in August–September 2017: “Animate Thresholds: Diabetes and Chronic Life at the Edge of the Sea” and “Struggles for Equitable Design: Black Box Medical Devices and Conundrums of Practice.” She also presented “Filtering Global Health at the American Museum of Natural History” at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in December 2017.

Paxson gave an invited lecture, “Safe Passage or Risky Transit? Moving Perishable Foods across the US Border,” at the University of Oslo in Norway. She presented two working papers: “‘Don’t Pack a Pest’: Biosecurity, Gastropolitics, and the Permeability of Food Borders” was presented at the workshop on “Edible Feminisms: On Discard, Waste, and Metabolism” at the University of California at Los Angeles, and “Moving Perishables across Borders in a Global Economy of Qualities” was presented at Logistical Nightmares: Stories from the Global Supply Chain, held at the Goethe-Institut in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and organized by the Centre for Research Architecture, Goldsmiths, University of London. She offered discussant commentary on the panel, “Places Remade: Scientific Discourses and the Making of Places in the Postcolonial Context” at the annual meeting of the Society for Social Studies of Science held in Boston in August–September 2017. She presented a paper, “The ‘Working Landscape’ of American Artisanal Dairying and the Naturalization of Nature as Working” at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Washington, DC in December 2017. At the same meeting, she gave a discussant commentary on the panel, “Cultivating Life and Livelihood at the Limits of Late Industrialism.” Paxson moderated the panel discussion, “The City Talks: Family Lineage,” in conjunction with the photo exhibit *(un)expected families* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Walley continued to deliver lectures after screenings of her film, *Exit Zero*. She offered a screening at Northeastern University in September 2017 and at the University of Chicago and Roger Williams University in November 2017. At the American Anthropological Association annual meeting in November 2017, she was chair for the panel, “Ethnographies of the Rural White Working Class in the Age of Trump,” was a presenter for a round table, “How is the Trumpocene Going? Anthropologists Reflect on the Last Year,” and also gave a discussant commentary for the panel, “Intimate Exposures.”

Contributions to MIT and Outside Communities

Anthropology faculty members served on a wide range of committees and boards at MIT. Buyandelger served as undergraduate officer for Anthropology for the academic year, as well as the SHASS diversity representative. She continued as a faculty mentor and liaison for the MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives’ MIT-Mongolia Program, and also continued to serve on the MIT Faculty Newsletter Committee. Helmreich continued as head of Anthropology and also continued to serve on the Steering Committee for the HASTS PhD program. He also served on the MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology Symposium Committee, the MIT Visiting Artists Committee, the Kelly Douglas Prize Committee, and the Anthropology Curriculum Committee. Jones served as minor advisor for Anthropology and was on the Anthropology Curriculum Committee. He also served on the following MIT committees: Institute

Committee on Student Life; Digital Humanities Steering Committee; and the MIT Museum Collections Committee. Paxson served as a member of MIT's Food and Sustainability Working Group and on the Committee for Renovation and Space Planning, and the Working Group on West and Northwest Campus. She served a sixth year on MIT's Commencement Committee and co-chaired the Advisory Committee on Graduate Student Stipends. She was a member of the Anthropology Curriculum Committee and served as a first year advisor. Silbey served as chair of the MIT faculty. Walley served as concentration advisor for Anthropology. She also maintained her involvement with MIT's First Generation Program and was involved with MIT's efforts to rethink job training for industrial workers as part of the Future to Work Initiative.

Outside of MIT, Buyandelger served as a reviewer for *American Anthropologist*, *Inner Asia*, and *Mongolian Studies: Journal of the Mongolia Society*. Helmreich served on the editorial boards of *Cultural Anthropology*, *Environmental Humanities*, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, and on the advisory boards for *Culture, Theory and Critique*; and *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, and Technoscience*. He was an article referee for *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *American Anthropologist*, *Cultural Anthropology*, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, as well as a manuscript reviewer for Duke University Press, the University of California Press, and the University of Minnesota Press. Jones served on the editorial committees of *Ateliers d'Anthropologie*, and *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*. Moran-Thomas served as a peer reviewer for the National Science Foundation, *Biosocieties*, *Medical Anthropology*, *Social Sciences and Medicine*, and the University of California Press. Paxson served as program chair for the annual meeting of the Society for Social Studies of Science, held in Boston in August–September 2017. She served as co-editor of *Cultural Anthropology* and on the editorial boards of *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* and *Engaging Science, Technology and Society*. She was on the advisory board of the Cheese of Choice Coalition and for the *Graduate Journal of Food Studies*. She reviewed articles for *BioSocieties*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, and *Gender, Place and Culture* as well as a manuscript proposal for Bloomsbury Academic. She reviewed fellowship applications for the Radcliffe Institute. Paxson began a four-year term on the executive committee of the Society for Cultural Anthropology, a section of the American Anthropological Association. Silbey continued her work as an editor of studies in law and society for Cambridge University Press, and was on the editorial board of *Quantitative Sociology*, *Engaging Science, Technology and Society*, and *Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Science*. She was also special editor for *Work and Occupations*. She reviewed for *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, and *Regulation & Governance*. Walley was a board member of the Working-Class Studies Association and an advisory committee member of the New England Historical Project at New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center. She was a manuscript reviewer for Duke University Press and an article reviewer for *American Ethnologist* and *Religion, State & Society*.

Stefan Helmreich

Program Head

Elting E. Morison Professor of Anthropology