

Transformation: Science, Technology, & Human Values, 1977-1987

Science, Technology, & Human Values

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Viability and vitality determine the future of any periodical, whether mass-market magazine or niche academic journal. Early in the life of the newsletter that became *Science, Technology, & Human Values (ST&HV)*, subsidies from US taxpayers and two universities sustained the first aspect. Economic and political forces, inside and outside the academy, influenced the second at a time when those same pressures were reshaping the scholarly publishing industry. I will let others appraise the journal's intellectual history and instead offer reflections about its survival, infrastructure, and watersheds.

In Spring 1977, I was finishing my dissertation, blissfully searching for images of science and scientists in *Cosmopolitan*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and similar collections at the Boston Public Library. Then, Rae Goodell called and said that Vivien Shelanski was moving to New York. Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government was looking for a new editor for the newsletter. As an off-campus graduate student, the prospect of a part-time job—working on topics that dovetailed with my research interests and past experience in the magazine industry—seemed a dream. Although Vivien delayed the move for a year, her expertise in law and ethics proved invaluable. We collaborated well, even coediting both editions of the project's first book, *Law & Science: A Selected Bibliography*.¹

With grants from the National Science Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, and Bell Laboratories, and underwriting from Harvard, issues 1-29 had been produced in-house. Long-term viability in the publishing marketplace, however, required paid subscribers and earned income. One of my first tasks was to create a circulation and subscription system for a publication that had heretofore been mailed gratis to anyone who requested it, anywhere in the world.

From the outset, content had been eclectic, with the “Bibliography” and “News” sections most popular among teachers developing new courses. In 1979, establishment of MIT’s Science, Technology, and Society Program prompted a significant transition. As I worked with Harvard and MIT general counsels to develop formal agreements for co-ownership by the two universities and publication by MIT Press, the negotiations made driving through Boston traffic circles seem easy. The outcome, however, provided a more professional presentation and expanded circulation—on the route to vitality and viability.

Connection to MIT Press brought new consulting editors, an expanded editorial advisory board, more robust peer-review process, and, with Press encouragement, development of special issues. In 1981, the first special project explored public communication of science and technology. We transformed other commissioned content into successful MIT Press books, *Quality in Science* (1982) and *Creationism, Science, and the Law: The Arkansas Case* (1983), bringing revenue back to the journal. The creationism volume’s array of trial excerpts and expert commentaries from legal scholars, philosophers, and historians exemplified *ST&HV*’s distinctive multivariate, multidisciplinary approach to contemporary topics and audiences.

Although the journal steadily included more female voices, diversification remained a slow process. Women had bylines on over a quarter of the articles in the forty issues produced during my watch, and that proportion increased in my last five years, but more could (and should) have been done. To my regret, the self-perpetuating editorial advisory board contained only one woman (Dorothy Nelkin) until 1983, when Shirley A. Jackson agreed to join.

That same year, John Wiley & Sons began publishing *ST&HV* on behalf of the two institutions. In exploring topics such as fraud, gender discrimination, secrecy, human sexuality, environmental justice, regulation, professional ethics, and nuclear power, the journal’s interior reflected the growth of scholarship applied to understand the impacts and implications of science, technology, and medicine.

The publishers’ mandates to keep pages lively and reactive required a lot of energy and hard work between 1977 and 1987, supplied by the young people who served as production or managing editors (Susan Howe, Robin Grossman, Melinda Thomas, Lisa M. Buchholz, and Nancy A. Ferrari) and editorial assistants (Judith Parker, Beverly Gudanowski, Betts Carlton, Jane Joel, Patricia Andrade, Loretta Lynch, Sana Siwolop, Sarah Slaughter, Wayne Koestenbaum, John Henry Gianvito, Jeanne Crandell, David Grant,

Hazel Rovno, Shari H. Yokota, David Cheney, John Zilber, Betsy Hanson, Richard Davies, Daniel Grossman, Mary Manger, Stacey Frank, James Taylor II, Jacqueline Gregory, and Cynthia Closky). Unflinching support from advisors like Harvey Brooks and Melvin Kranzberg sustained the editor through rough spots, but those twenty-nine staff members represented the publication's heart and soul. Their crisp summaries of current literature and conference reports, antennae for "horizon" topics, abundant good humor, and generous spirits kept the office going when budget cuts or irritated board members threatened its equilibrium. I did not thank them enough at the time and cannot thank them enough now. The journal's success is their legacy.

In my final year, 1987, I helped negotiate another change, when Wiley purchased all rights to *ST&HV* from Harvard and MIT. Although Wiley invited me to remain as editor, I declined, having decided to turn the helm over to Susan Cozzens and 4S.

Next Challenges

As someone who has studied as well as run journals, I must raise the obvious question: What purpose does *ST&HV* serve, a half-century later, for *all* participants in the dance? A "journal" can be accessible or pedantic, pejorative or political. In its trajectory from subsidized, typed newsletter to respected, peer-reviewed journal, *ST&HV* has been all of these. Yet, its origins lay in genuine concern about the world beyond academe, about responsible communication and ethical research. In that first special issue, forty years ago, Anne Branscomb (1981) emphasized that

it is precisely at the level of presenting systematized human knowledge to non-scientists that the communications system breaks down. Our society has not determined whether it is the responsibility of the professional scientists to communicate only to their peers, or also to elected or appointed government officials, or directly to the public. In an authoritarian society, such questions are easier to decide than in a democracy, because controlling decisions are fewer and rarely more sophisticated. Democracies at least theoretically assume that each citizen can competently make decisions that may be personal in nature, but collectively affect the body politic.

Throughout the current global pandemic, the result of that breakdown has banged at our front doors, grieved our families, and rattled our political systems. *ST&HV* stands at another turning point in how (or whether) it

responds to the challenge, either staying inside the system and silos of academic discourse, or once again looking honestly at the world outside for both answers *and* questions.

Marcel Chotkowski LaFollette, who edited *ST&HV* from 1977 to 1987, also served as Editor of *Science Communication*, 1990-1998. She is author of *Making Science Our Own* (1990), *Stealing into Print* (1992), *Science on the Air* (2008), *Reframing Scopes* (2008), *Science on American Television* (2013), and a forthcoming history of pioneering female science journalists.

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Note

1. The first paperback edition, *Law and Science: A Selected Bibliography* (1978), compiled by Morris L. Cohen, Jan Stepan, and Naomi Ronen, was produced in-house. Two years later, MIT Press published an updated, hardcover edition, *Law and Science: A Selected Bibliography*, compiled by Morris L. Cohen, Naomi Ronen, and Jan Stepan.

Reference

- Branscomb, Anne W. 1981. "Knowing How to Know." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 6 (36): 6.