HSS Editors’ Hardly-Semi-Annual Report, March 2019 through June 2019

This first report of the new editorship is quite short for two main reasons: First, the Executive Committee just met at the end of March, so only three months have passed since the last semi-annual report. Second, as of this writing, we are not yet technically the HSS Editors (we take over July 1). We do, however, have some details to report from the Utrecht office as well as a general update on the nearly complete transition to the Starkville office.

From the Utrecht office:
The manuscript flood described by Floris in the Spring semi-annual report has subsided. Through much effort, the number of manuscripts currently being processed is down to the normal level of 17 (as of June 14). As of this writing, 5 manuscripts are awaiting pre-assessment and 15 are currently under review.

The September 2019 issue is currently in the proofing stage, nearly done, in fact. The December 2019 issue is full and will be sent for manuscript editing on July 1. The March 2020 issue is currently devoid of manuscripts (Utrecht successfully maintained little to no article backlog) but there are already book reviews standing by.

From the Starkville office:
Acknowledging that we have no grounds for comparison — nor is the transition period yet complete — the transition of the HSS editorship from Utrecht to Starkville has been remarkably smooth. This is overwhelmingly due to the preparatory work done by the Utrecht office. They have translated all their documentation into English, carefully prepared step-by-step handbooks detailing procedures, and patiently answered our many questions. Training wheels, water wings, whatever metaphors you like to capture the act of simultaneously keeping us safe and teaching us independence, they have been those things. We would have wiped-out without the Utrecht team. We cannot thank them enough for their hard and conscientious work.

On our end, the transition has consisted of lots of logistical arrangements as well as a group effort to routinize our bodies and minds around various operational protocols. So, we have our physical offices (both on the MSU campus in Starkville and at CHSTM in Philadelphia) set up, complete with operating phones, computers, shared server space, and email (Projit even has an MSU ID, and is probably eligible to enroll in classes here or something). In April, Marchelle Brain came aboard as the captain of this space, our new Managing Editor. Marchelle has jumped right into operations and already been to Utrecht to mind-meld with Desiree Capel. She has been training the graduate student editorial assistants, overseeing the details of the transition, and communicating with Desiree nearly every day.

About six months ago, we began weekly office meetings to keep track of all the moving parts of the office transition. In May, as the book review office was being set up in Philadelphia and Alix moved to Berlin for the summer, we began conducting these over Skype. Next week these will likely expand into bi-weekly meetings, one just for the Starkville office and one including Philadelphia and the other associate editors (Osiris, CB, and the HSS Newsletter) as needed. These bi-weekly meetings will
compliment the rigid email protocols to allow the six individuals of the Starkville-Philly office to work efficiently and in concert. We (the six individuals in the Starkville-Philly office) have also all engaged in group and individual sessions with a “sandbox” version of Editorial Manager provided to us by the University of Chicago Press to routinize author and referee interactions and identify potential snarls and bottlenecks (and sort them out with UCP).

Floris gave us a couple opportunities to actually get our toes wet during the transition process as well. We have ushered two special sections (a Focus section for the September issue and a Second Look for the December issue) through the publishing process and are grateful for the experience. Floris also regularly asked us to recommend referees, referee article manuscripts, and suggest decisions in light of referee reports. So, again, some good practice on that front.

As described in the Utrecht portion of this report, the September issue is nearly through the editing and proofing stage. The cover and masthead are done. The material for the December issue is standing by, ready to be sent to Joan for editing on July 1. As above, 20 article manuscripts are currently in the review process. 8 more have been conditionally accepted and are either out for additional review or in the process of revision. 11 revise and resubmits are also out (though half of them date back several years and are unlikely to be resubmitted).

We anticipate perhaps not a wave but at least a swell in manuscript submissions in the months of July and August as a result of individuals thinking they can game the editorial transition and/or some end-of-summer productivity. We also already have the March 2020 Focus section lined up (“The catastrophe of history/the history of catastrophe”) and likely for June 2020, a Focus section on the history of science as pedagogy. We are also working with organizers for three more proposals on the end of historical epistemology, baselines, and science films.

Ongoing projects and discussions:
1. We are also starting an internal study on the history of bias in the History of Science Society. Katie Sullivan Thomas, one of our graduate student editorial assistants, is overseeing this project. Generally, it will consist of surveying the publication history, membership rolls, and conference programs to document trends of racial, gender, and possibly LGBTQ bias. This project dovetails with two others: 1) the 2024 Centennial issue, where the results of the project will be included as an article and 2) an ongoing discussion about how to collect demographic data on Isis authors, reviewers, and referees.
2. We are planning on dedicating an issue in 2024 to the celebration of 100 years of the History of Science Society. Grander vision forthcoming.
3. We are in the middle of an ongoing discussion about how to collect demographic data on Isis authors, reviewers, and referees in a way that is helpful but not alienating. The Chairs of the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion and the Women’s Caucus are part of this dialogue. The system we inherited for collecting this information is ad hoc, inefficient, and problematic.
4. We are also in an ongoing discussion with our associate editors and other stakeholders about how to respond to suspected plagiarism in HSS publications. This problem extends beyond the Society’s publications, of course, but we have set up our own internal protocols and plan to regularly review them to stay alert (but not toooo cynical) to potential issues.
5. We are developing a concrete design, schedule, and budget for the public-facing website for HSS publications. This document is attached to the end of this report.

— Alix Hui and Matt Lavine
June 28, 2019