[0:00:00] Intro Music

Timothy Neale: Welcome to Technoscience. Podcast recorded at 2019 Society for the Social Studies of Science Annual Meeting in New Orleans. Produced by Timothy Neale

Laura Foster: and Laura Foster. This podcast is a new initiative to share the exciting work being done in Science and Technology Studies, or STS, with wider audiences who are curious about the field. It's here to offer an approachable way to learn more about this interdisciplinary and engaged field.

Timothy Neale: Before we begin, we would like to acknowledge that this podcast was recorded on unceded Indigenous land. We recognize the first peoples of Louisiana including the Chitimacha tribe, Coushatta Tribe, the Jena Band of Choctaw Indians, and the Tunica-Biloxi Indian Tribe.

[0:00:52] **Laura Foster:** In this podcast series, you'll hear interviews with STS scholars about a range of issues including what the field means to them, some of its big debates, and what its future yet might be.

Timothy Neale: To quote the feminist philosopher Donna Haraway, "Technology is not neutral. We are inside of what we make and it's inside of us. We're living in a world of connections and it matters which ones get made and unmade."

[0:01:17] **Laura Foster:** With those guiding words, let's go to this episode's interview.

Intro Music

[01:27] **Konstantin Georgiev:** My name's Konstantin, I'm a PhD student at the Department of Anthropology at Rice University and I am here today with Michelle Murphy who is a professor in the History Department and the Women and Gender Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. Thank you for joining us today!

[01:45] **Michelle Murphy:** Thank you!

[01:47] **Konstantin Georgiev:** We've been starting a bit of these interviews with just a general introduction by way of asking how did you actually end up in academia?

[01:55] **Michelle Murphy:** I didn't actually know when I was applying for graduate school that when you apply to graduate school the idea was that you are trying to be an academic. And you know, I was filling my application before the internet and had no idea what I was doing and I didn't have any mentors, and I had to answer this question, "Why do you want to do a PhD?". I was like, "I gotta think about something really creative and cool" and I couldn't come up with any good

answer, so I wrote "professor", and I was very surprised and relieved to find out that that was the one and only true answer that you're allowed to put at the time. So I didn't really know what I was getting into until I arrived at graduate school and then when I arrived at graduate school I was like, "Oh, ok, I guess I've gotten into this thing" and the kind of reason why ended up sticking with it is that I was passionately into what I was doing, and that's how I ended up on that trajectory.

[02:49] **Konstantin Georgiev:** And do you have any idea or would you want to speculate a bit what would've happened if you had not come to academia?

[02:56] **Michelle Murphy:** Well, my fantasy when I was younger was to be someone who designs LEGO sets and I recently met someone who did that and I was so impressed and envious. But I think, you know, when I think about the passion and the drive, about what moves me, I think probably some kind of activism writing is what's underneath what I'm doing. And I probably do a version of that, however it manifested.

[03:21] **Konstantin Georgiev:** Aren't you in a way already doing that with all the evidence initiatives you have?

[03:29] **Michelle Murphy:** Yeah, I think that that's the kind of academic work I do. And if I wasn't doing it in a university, I'd probably be doing something like that in a non-profit or in some community work, or some other kind of space.

[03:39] **Konstantin Georgiev:** And in terms of your specific research interests, what was it that brought you to the field of STS itself, once you were in grad school?

[03:47] **Michelle Murphy:** Well, I actually found STS as an undergraduate and this was the 1980s. I was a science student and I took biology and I was also taking kinds of biological anthropology and I was so angry at the racism and the sexism that I was being taught as well, as the colonial... and I didn't have a language for it, so I just started off ranting and would rant, like, "This imperialist, patriarchal, sexist," you know, this would be in my undergraduate papers. And this wasn't really serving me well as a student in terms of the sciences. Then I found a few little things that existed at the time. You know, in 1985 you had Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* for example, there was some feminist biologists like Hillary Rose who were beginning to publish feminist science studies and so I found these few things and that began my path of science and technology studies. So it really came out of trying to cope with being in the sciences when they

were full of so much, I would say oppressive logics. And then finding this little bud of a beginning of a field and following it. And so there's a way that I kind of think of myself as a second generation feminist science studies, because these works were just beginning to come out while I was a young person and then I found them and I followed them and that's what I became.

[05:11] **Konstantin Georgiev:** And since we're already on the topic of influences and things that informed your thought, is there any significant debate or a book besides the ones you already mentioned, that you could just mention as very influential to your work?

[05:25] **Michelle Murphy:** There are two things that I wanna mention. One is Donna Haraway and there's, uhm, she says this sentence, she asks this question which is, why should a body end at the skin, where does it end and begin? And that question has become so important to me. Because it's a way of formulating, like, I could say, "What is a chemical? Where does it begin and end?", "What is reproduction? Where does it begin and end?" You know, "What is the economy? Where does it begin and end?" And that question is such a door into a whole kind of research trajectory and so that question had moved me and motivated me and kind of, I re-pose it in many, many ways over and over, I would say, over my work. And so, you know, one, I feel, has to give honor to the importance of Donna Haraway in that. But more recently I would say I find the work of indigenous science and technology studies scholars—obviously Kim TallBear opening up the field—so profound. When I was in graduate school and proposed a work that might be called an indigenous science studies project, I couldn't figure out a way to do it, I couldn't find the supporters, I couldn't find the teachers. And so the birth of this field has been like a tremendous change for me and my work. And then you know you can look at Kim TallBear, or could look at someone like Max Liboiron who's brought forward methodological considerations that have also been I think very powerful and important for figuring out how to do work in a good way. these are already questions that we're having and are part of feminist science traditions, right, which is not just analyzing science, but taking up that—you could almost say normative—question about the purpose of doing it and you could figure out how to do things better, how to do things in better relation, in good relations, right. And so those deliberations of the bad ways and the good ways that we're going about doing our methods and the ethics, like Max Liboiron brings fore and surfaces, that would be like another kind of point of tension and excitement that motivates me.

[07:25] **Konstantin Georgiev:** Since the idea of this podcast is to kind of bring 4S outside of the walls of this venue and this conference, maybe we should also mention the basic question—what is

STS? And if you had to explain it to someone who is very new to the field or hasn't heard of the field, what would you say?

[07:43] **Michelle Murphy:** I like this question! And I want to answer it in two ways. So, one is like what would be the kind of normative explanation? You know, I might say something like—you know, if I'm talking to my grandma or something like that, I would say something like, "It's the critical study of the practices of science and technology. And we think of science as being just in a lab, but in our field we see the way science works in all of the bits of the world, right. It's in the table, it's in our streets. So it's kind of following that trajectory of science." So I would say something like that.

But when I answer it in a different way, it's about what I want science and technology studies to be. You know, there's the version of, "Oh, it's the meaning of anthropology and history, and sociology, and what not", but then there's the question of like—and this is a question we've taken up at the Technoscience Research Unit, the Technoscience lab in Toronto,—which is the version of sciences we want to imagine and be part of. And that's one where the project is to remix the disciplines, right, as opposed to just see them as all contributing to science and technologies studies. To be kind of creative, playful, critical in our relationship to technoscience, to have participants that go beyond the academe, to include artists, activists, ordinary people and so on, and that's the version of science and technology studies that, you know, I want to be a part of.

And so to make that version, the genealogies that we have to think of as constituting the histories of science and technologies studies are very different. So, you know, often when I'm teaching science and technology studies, one of my favorite starting places is Fanon. You start with Fanon… what is science and technology studies if we start there and build genealogy that way? And so I like this question because it's one that really matters to me. But it matters to me because I think we could do a better job and we have this kind of responsibility how we are reconstituting and how we answer that question, and what counts as STS, it's like part of what we need to be thinking and talking about together.

[09:47] **Konstantin Georgiev:** And since you brought up Fanon, I remember you... I don't remember, mentioning or showing, this reader that came out recently with his, just a lot of published so far works…

[10:00] **Michelle Murphy:** Yes, *Freedom and Alienation,* or *Alienation and Freedom,* I forget.

[10:02] **Konstantin Georgiev:** Exactly, yeah, you just mentioned it at a workshop that you were last year and later on I got it from my roommate, I went through it and I was very impressed to see that inside it there were also playwright and, like, this whole variety of non-academic texts. So, in terms of producing knowledge, which you do a lot, also in different forms, would you mind talking a bit about this push to remix the disciplines, or to create text and evidence that are beyond the pure academic abstraction, and maybe just even talk about the ways in which you design the spaces within which you work?

[10:50] **Michelle Murphy:** That's such a great formulation. I completely agree that that's what's so inspiring about Fanon. When you look at his body of work, right, there's the scientific writings, then there's the writings that are figuring out how do we work and live together inside of this hospital or this clinic. Then there's the political writings figuring out what is the decolonial project, then there's the creative, poetic playwright writings. And so to look at that as a kind of a gifted legacy of the kind of genres... Plus, he's making diagnoses, he's doing things, right, he's part of a revolution, so you know, it's hard to get more inspiring than that. So in terms of thinking about like that kind of openness to genre, I think that that's an important invitation to feel. And so you know that we have "Making and Doing" now at 4S I think is so important because it opens up in an even greater way the question of genre, right, than just the poetic, or the anthropological, or the ethnographic or whatever. Into these many forms like this podcast. So there's some of these kinds of makings that we have been doing at the Technoscience Research Unit, we just built an app, we are now at the alpha version of an app, we have digital products, we have products that are not for academics, but are for the community and people that we are in collaboration with. We have of course academic writing, policy writing, media things, so you know, feeling very open to that. But then another important product is how to be together inside of a university, make our ethical relations with one another, write them down, make our protocols for how to inhabit together the university we want to be in. And that's another genre of product. And so when we look at someone like Fanon, we can see him struggling with that too. So yes, I would say all those kinds of things come together as part of my vision, or I think all of our visions of what is possible in science and technology studies, or why we're here in this place, at 4S instead of maybe at another discipline.

[12:59] **Konstantin Georgiev:** Since you brought up "Making and Doing", maybe we should actually say to those who are not at the conference that this was this venue at the conference yesterday where people could present various projects from mapping to zines and films and so on. It's very interesting that you brought it up. I was also very impressed by the amount of non-scholarly and scholarly work that's going on there and intermingling. From the things that you saw

there, do you have anything that struck you, that you were particularly impressed by in terms of, I don't know, specific project, or a genre, or anything?

[13:36] **Michelle Murphy:** I think that, I hope I'm going to get the name right, the Contra* podcast that Aimi Hamraie does in kind of crip technoscience, and I think it's really impressive. There's also a lab associated with it and I think it really captures some of the things we were just talking about in terms of projects that are about a community, relations and ethics, connection between academics and non-academics. So in terms of thinking about crip studies, but also disabilities politics, and how it connects academics, but also writers who are non-academics, and activists and so on, so that project actually really stands out to me as a beautiful example of what we can do and what making and doing opens up. You know, when we're doing our written analyses, we have these genres like ethnography, right, or archival work and these kinds of things that are very restricted visions of how we collaborate with non-academics and how we interact with them. In my science studies writings, I've been, one of the things I've been writing about in my entire career is about the place of non-academics, non-paid scientists in making scientific knowledge. And so I think, "Making and Doing" as a space where you see science studies scholars figuring out really exciting ways to be working with a greater range of what we might call the experts, when it comes to things like disability studies, or access, or running a museum, or making a musical studio and you see that kind of being put into interesting practice. That's what I find really exciting because it kind of exemplifies some of the hopes that our disciplinary legacies make seem as if it is hard to make those collaborations. But if we start from a different place, those collaborations come up in a different way. So I was excited about it.

[15:38] **Konstantin Georgiev:** One thing that strikes me as very important and impressive in this conference is definitely this work that's been put into providing these spaces to actually practically test out things that we love to speak about, and we love to speak about ethics, but maybe we don't stop that often to think about our own ethical practices and changing them. I am kind of reminded again of what you said at the beginning of this conversation about the LEGO constructors and it sounds a lot like what's happening within this conference... Well, I guess that's it. Thank you for joining us today at Technoscience!

[16:16] **Michelle Murphy:** Thank you so much, it's great talking to you!

Music outro

[21:16] **Laura Foster:** You've been listening to Technoscience - a podcast recorded at the 2019 Society for Social Studies of Science Annual Meeting in New Orleans. And produced by Laura Foster

[21:26] **Timothy Neale:** and Timothy Neale in association with the Society and with support from Alison Kenner, Teresa Hoard-Jackson, Aadita Chaudhury, Konstantin Georgiev, Juan Franscisco Salazar, and Duygu Kasdogan. The intro and outro music is by the Young Fellaz Brass Band from New Orleans, Louisiana. Find them on Instagram and gmail @youngfellazbrassband. That's Fellaz with a Z.

[21:49] **Laura Foster:** Thanks for listening and catch you soon for the next episode.