



## **Ann Johnson**

May 28, 1965 – December 11, 2016

Ann Johnson, Associate Professor in the Department of Science and Technology Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences, died tragically at the age of 51 from endometrial stroma sarcoma, a rare cancer. She is survived by her husband Mark Stevens, her son Evan, her sister Katie Lewandowski, and her parents Jim and Elaine Johnson. A celebration of Ann's life was held at Cornell in February 2017, followed by a memorial service in April at the University of South Carolina, where she taught for a decade before joining Cornell in 2015. Upon hearing the news of her death, organizers in the Society for the History of Technology and the Society for Philosophy and Technology announced that they would convene panels at their upcoming annual meetings to celebrate her scholarship. The journal, *Engineering Studies*, recognized her valuable contributions as a peer reviewer and the journal, *Technology and Culture*, published a memorial to honor her work in the history of technology.

Ann embarked on her remarkable interdisciplinary career by majoring in history and theatre at the College of William and Mary. In 1990, she completed an MFA in Technical Design and Production at the Yale School of Drama. That led to an assistant professorship in Theatre Technology at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, which she held from 1990 to 1995. Somehow Ann found the field of the History of Science and Technology and entered the prestigious Ph.D. program in that area at Princeton University. She finished a dissertation there in 2000 on the history of the engineering knowledge and culture involved in designing modern automobiles, under the supervision of the late Michael Mahoney. While at Princeton she also found time to be a Visiting Instructor at her Alma Mater, the Yale School of Drama, and an instructor at Fordham University in the Bronx. Upon receiving her Ph.D., she became an assistant professor of the history of science and technology, first at Fordham from 2000 to 2004, and then at the University of South Carolina in 2004.

Ann was extraordinarily productive as a scholar and a teacher at South Carolina, where she held a joint appointment between the departments of History and Philosophy, receiving tenure in 2009. During those years she published on a wide range of topics in the history and philosophy of science and technology. Her historical articles ranged from the mathematization of engineering in the United States in the nineteenth century, to automotive design, computer-aided design, finite element analysis in engineering, reliability, and chemical pollution of the environment in the twentieth century, to the politics and discourse of nanotechnology as an emerging technology from the late twentieth century to the present. In philosophy, she wrote on the relationship between pure and applied science, national identity and science, and the social and epistemological issues involved in computer-aided analysis in chemical engineering.

Professor Larry Glickman in History, who was Ann's colleague for many years at the University of South Carolina, recalls that "Ann was a mentor and someone who built communities among her students and among her colleagues." She "was proud of her students, both undergraduates and graduates." Professor Jill Frank in Government, also a former colleague of Ann's in South Carolina, emphasizes the fierce dedication Ann brought to the issues of interdisciplinarity, research, epistemology, gender, professionalization, and, above all, to her family.

Ann is best known as a scholar for her book, Hitting the Brakes: Engineering Design and the Production of Knowledge (Duke University Press, 2009). In the book, which grew out of her dissertation, Ann rethought how scholars in her field should consider the historical and epistemological status of engineering knowledge. Rather than addressing the old questions of whether engineering was an applied science or an autonomous body of knowledge, Ann investigated the mutual production of knowledge, artifacts, and communities in the invention, design, and commercialization of the antilock braking system, a significant socio-technical system. She deftly analyzed many of the issues that formed the basis of Engineering Studies, an emerging interdisciplinary area in Science and Technology Studies. She did not restrict her history of the antilock braking system to one country or specialty, but followed the interdisciplinary work wherever it was done--in Britain, the United States, and Germany. Ann situated her study of engineering in its national and international contexts to explicate the themes of government-sponsored industrial research, metrology, testing, technology transfer, design, priority disputes, proprietary knowledge, and the role of users in technological change.

What held her diverse body of scholarship together was Ann's sustained quest to understand the construction of scientific and engineering knowledge, and the design of technology, in relation to the formation of knowledge communities in the U.S. and Europe from the nineteenth century to the present.

Knowing of Ann's impressive record of scholarship and the mentoring of graduate students while she was at the University of South Carolina, the Science and Technology Studies Department at Cornell was delighted when she accepted our offer in 2014 to join us as an Associate Professor. She quickly received tenure here and taught undergraduates and graduate students with distinction, not only in her specialty, the history of technology and engineering. She also taught two new courses, Life Sciences and Society and the Philosophy of Medicine, to meet the needs of the department's large undergraduate major in Biology and Society. By the

end of her first full academic year at Cornell, in 2015-2016, Ann had become a valued colleague and mentor to undergraduate and graduate students. Several of them looked forward to adding her to their Ph.D. committees in the next academic year.

Sadly, Ann's third semester at Cornell, the fall of 2016, was to be her last. We all marveled at how Ann frankly discussed at a departmental retreat at the beginning of the semester the recurrence of her cancer and that she planned to teach in the fall while undergoing treatment. We admired her courage and steadfast resolve throughout the semester to continue to be a scholar, teacher, and colleague at Cornell—how she would show up at departmental meetings, seminars, and colloquia, even when the effects of her medical treatment were plain for all to see.

When we think of Ann, we remember her humor, forthrightness, kindness, and collegiality. We admire the fact that her commitment to her family was as strong as her commitment to her scholarship and teaching.

*Written by Ronald Kline (Chair), Sara Pritchard and Suman Seth*