



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM
Institute for Information Law

Center for Quantum and Society Colloquium

When History is too Important to be Left to Historians: The Death of the Cold War State and the Birth of Quantum Technologies

by Susannah Glickman
(Stony Brook University, New York, USA)

8 April 2026
REC A3.15



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This lecture uses the biography of Cold warrior and famous physicist John Wheeler to examine a series of crises of the Cold War US state and how they contributed to 1) the field of quantum technologies 2) the fields of history and philosophy of science, apart from history and philosophy proper and 3) the remaking of US scientific institutions in the subsequent two decades. It will first discuss the Cold War status quo, then the crises that emerged from the mid-60s to the 1970s. The responses to these crises paved the way for our present set of techno-economic ideologies and infrastructures. They force physicists like Wheeler to imagine physics and reality (with implications for how they imagine the past, history, and future). The crises also prompt the profession to reimagine the role of physics in politics, the economy, technology (especially computing), and history.

These crises were experienced as a profound rupture by physicists and eventually a broader swath of elites. For physicists like Wheeler, this feeling of rupture inaugurated a new interest in history and in discovering ways of stabilizing and predicting the future, e.g., laws of techno-economic development. High tech's ascendance reinforced the sense of rupture and rearranged power and produced new elite networks into which old elites like Wheeler were injected. This all led to a reimagining of the role of certain technologies as world historical i.e., the birth of a new progressivist-developmental ideology (e.g., Moore's Law). Imagined quantum technologies are a solution to these crises and an articulation of the responses to them. They succeed at getting long-term funding because they fit neatly within the new ideology their proponents helped craft.

Speaker

Susannah Glickman is an Assistant Professor of History at Stony Brook University. Glickman received her PhD in history from Columbia University in 2023. Her dissertation, titled *Histories, Tech, and a New Central Planning*, concerned how the politico-economic category of 'tech' demands the production of speculative institutions, narratives, histories and ideologies.

Practical details

Date: 8 April 2026

Time: 3:30 to 5:00 PM (CET
Amsterdam)

Location:

- Roeterseilandcampus, REC A3.15, Amsterdam Law School, University of Amsterdam, Nieuwe Achtergracht 166, 1018 WV Amsterdam.

- Online via Zoom (please register on our website).

