

# The Team

## Preeta Bansal

Preeta is a Visiting Scholar in the Social Machines group. She is working on designs of human engagement practices that allow for cultivation of hyperlocal, deep social ties as an important complement to the more geographically dispersed, loose/weak ties fostered by social media networks. She spent the past two years focusing on the intersection of human engagement design and technology in rural India via LSM and Social Emergence. She is currently working in Lincoln, Nebraska (where she grew up) – together with the head of the Lincoln community foundation, the Mayor, the publisher of the *Lincoln Journal-Star*, the university president, multi-faith congregational leaders, and conservative commentators – designing community fellowship circles to foster deep sharing and listening. She hopes that the creation of new modes of social interaction and organization will allow for deep listening and sharing, storytelling, and transformational (embodied) learning and connections, rather than simply transactional (head-based) interactions, within the community and across divides.

Preeta's background is as a practicing constitutional lawyer. She has always been interested in the outer forms/structures of democracy as well as the “inner work of democracy” – or the “habits of the heart” (termed by Alexis de Tocqueville) formed in the local venues of our lives that bring the constitutional structures to life. She worked in the Obama White House during the first term (2009-2012) as General Counsel and Senior Policy Advisor for OMB. Prior to that, she was Solicitor General of the State of New York, partner and head of the appellate/constitutional litigation practice at Skadden in New York City, and Chair of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, in which capacity she advised on the drafting of the Afghan and Iraqi constitutions. She also was global general counsel for HSBC in London from 2012-2014. During the past two years, she was a committee chair of President Obama's Advisory Committee on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, which focused on poverty and inequality in America. She is a Henry Crown Fellow of the Aspen Institute and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She graduated from Harvard-Radcliffe College and Harvard Law School and clerked on the US Supreme Court, before which she had also argued cases.

Preeta says she “is continuing to learn as I deepen my meditation and yoga practices – and am learning from some of the great world masters. I am also learning more tools for creative writing. And I am loving being back in nature in Nebraska – gardening and exercising.”

## Doug Beeferman

Doug is a software engineer at Cortico. His current focus is describing himself in third person, but when he's not doing that he's helping to build the social scanner, which aims to give journalists access to high-quality local story leads sourced from social media, talk radio, and search queries. He's also interested in some of the more research-oriented questions around how news stories are connected to each other.

Prior to Cortico, he worked for 3 internet companies over nearly 20 years -- Lycos (remember them?), Google, and a machine learning startup called Sift Science. At Google he worked on ad targeting, voice search, and query log analysis. He spends part of his time on Datamuse, his long-term side project that makes sites, apps, and APIs related to dictionaries and thesauruses.

When not working, he indulges in the outdoor delights of the SF Bay Area including running, cycling, and hiking. He occasionally goes on backpacking trips in places like Yosemite or Spain and would like to do more of that in the coming year. He likes northern places, and he's visited Iceland five times over the years, each time for a different purpose; he'll probably find another reason to go next year. Besides travel, he loves lexicography, volunteering, wordplay, and musicals. He plans to vote for Lin-Manuel Miranda for President in 2020 whether or not he's running.

Although his Emacs configuration hasn't changed in 25 years, every now and then he tries to learn something new like improv or Spanish. Recently he's been bingeing, belatedly, on "Bojack Horseman". (This show portrays improv as a cult, but he's convinced that the principles of improv are the keys to personal and professional happiness.)

## **Peter Beshai**

Peter is a Design Technologist at Cortico, which means he does user research, user experience design, and full-stack engineering with a focus on the frontend. He has worked on a variety of projects since starting at Cortico in late July 2017, including a network graph exploration tool, the Cortico Mirror email newsletter, and an administrative tool for creating, measuring, and exploring domains on the Cortico Platform. His work ranges from designing with tools such as Sketch and InVision to building apps with javascript, React, and D3.

Prior to joining Cortico, Peter spent a year working in the front office for the Boston Celtics and another year doing data visualization consulting at Bocoup. At the Celtics, he built a private application used daily by the coaches, scouts, statisticians, and management for developing game strategies and conducting talent acquisition research. The work was similar in nature to Buckets, a project he created as a graduate student that ended up landing him his job with the Celtics. His work at Bocoup ranged from interactive visualizations for exploring data on breast cancer research for Harvard Medical School to exploring hundreds of millions of internet speed tests across the world for Measurement Lab.

When not at work, Peter enjoys going for walks, watching The Americans, reading Bill's book, and playing music. Occasionally he has been known to work on side projects or write educational blog posts on data visualization. He's currently struggling to form practice habits to learn piano, which he plays at a grade 1 level.

## **Sam Carliles**

Sam joined the team in February 2017 and does software and machine learning engineering for Cortico.

Formerly, Sam did software engineering. In 2012 he joined an adtech startup called Mediaglu as a data scientist, where he developed a product which resulted in the acquisition of Mediaglu by AppNexus in 2014. Before and during this time, he did a PhD in Computer Science at Johns Hopkins University with a focus on machine learning, particularly analyzing and extending Random Forest regression methodology.

When not at Cortico, he is tending cats, reading, and expanding his exposure to new software technologies, currently the Kotlin programming language.

## **Winston Chen**

Winston Chen is a Research Affiliate at LSM, and currently contributing to various product concepts at Cortico.

While not at Cortico, he works on education apps at Voice Dream, a company he started in 2012. Before that, Winston was CTO at Kalido/Magnitude, a data management software company.

Winston is learning sous vide cooking. He has experimented with lamb riblets, rib eye steak, beef chuck, eggs, lobster, and octopus. Sous vide lobster is a transcendental experience.

## **Eric Chu**

Eric is a first-year PhD student in the Social Machines group working on developing machine learning methods that can hopefully be used for improving communication. Eric's current interests in the field include generative models, continual learning, and intrinsic motivation, each of which may be a step towards more general AI. Most recently for his Master's thesis, Eric worked on learning emotional arcs in movies that can in turn be used to help predict audience engagement.

Eric received his BS in electrical engineering and computer science at UC Berkeley. He then spent a year as a data scientist at Facebook, where he worked on catching 'bad' ads that contained content that was pornographic, violent, racist, etc.

In his spare time, he likes to play sports and watch Bay Area teams (go Warriors, Niners, Cal, Giants, and Sharks). He's currently learning how to dunk — it's a technique thing, right? He also recently signed up for some woodworking shop training.

## **Wes Chow**

Wes is a part time software engineer with Cortico, and a part time CTO with Chartbeat. He helps connect research from the Laboratory for Social Machines to Cortico's production systems.

Wes fell into an interest in media as CTO at Chartbeat, where he helps build tools publishers use to analyze and understand their data and audience. At Cortico, he's interested in exploring trust and divisiveness in society, and how they are affected by the consumption of media.

Previous to Cortico, Wes built trading infrastructures for early high frequency trading shops, and lead the team that created Songza Radio, which was acquired by Google Music.

In his spare time he's teaching his kids to be better than him at everything, and works on ill advised side projects such as writing his own text editor.

He's learning how text editors work, and it ain't pretty.

## **Lisa Conn**

Lisa Conn is a Partnerships Advisor to Cortico, and previously helped build and deploy the Electome at the Laboratory for Social Machines, part of the MIT Media Lab.

She's worked in community organizing, politics, and civic-tech for almost a decade, in leadership roles at Hustle (peer to peer texting for political campaigns), FWD.us (tech advocacy organization, focused on immigration reform), and Obama for America. Full time, Lisa is a strategic partner manager on Facebook's new Community Partnerships team, where she leads the Civic and Politics vertical, helping Facebook build empathetic, impactful, and civically-engaged communities around the world through product development and leadership training.

When she's not working, she loves day-trip adventures, seeing both good and bad movies, eating at new restaurants, taking exercise classes, escaping to her parents' house on the beach, doing pro-bono consulting for first time political candidates, finding excuses to go to Ikea, and getting deeply involved in the many projects of her amazing friends.

She is currently learning how to navigate a big company, avoid San Francisco traffic, and not blink in pictures.

## **Kathy Cramer**

I am currently the faculty director of the Morgridge Center for Public Service at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Campus, which bridges the campus and community through service and learning, and I am a professor in our political science department. I have been a professor there since earning my PhD, back in 2000. I study the way people make sense of their world through communication with others and how that matters for politics.

When I am not working, I love messing around with my 10-year-old daughter, Rosemary, riding my bike, talking with my friends, and making cards for the people in my life out of scrap paper. I am learning what to see and do in Amsterdam since I'll be giving a talk at the University of Amsterdam in a few weeks.

## **Matt Dunne**

Matt is leading the effort at LSM to develop a rural trust network to elevate the voices of small town America and bridge distances between potential collaborators in different communities using a social platform.

Prior to joining LSM, Matt served 11 years in the Vermont House and Senate, helped grow a VT-based software company to over 100 people and was Associate Director of the Rockefeller Center on Public Policy at Dartmouth College. Matt was also appointed director of AmeriCorps\*VISTA under President Clinton. In 2007, he started Google's Community Affairs division out of a former bread factory in White River Jct, VT, where he led all local US philanthropy and engagement, including the Google Fiber rollout and orchestrating educational and development initiatives in Google's data center communities across rural America. Currently Matt is the also the Executive Director of the Center on Rural Innovation in Hartland VT. Matt has a BA from Brown University with honors in Public Policy.

Matt lives with his family on the farm in Hartland where he grew up; they raise sheep, chickens, and blueberries. Most recently Matt has been learning to graft fruit trees leading to over 30 apple, pear, and plum trees now producing across his property.

## **Marc Exposito**

Marc Exposito is a designer and prototyper from Barcelona, Catalonia. He is a 1st year graduate student working with the learning team (Storyblocks project), and collaborating with some democracy projects. Previous projects involve AR/VR, Adaptive Interfaces, Wearables, Automotive Products, Learning Systems, and Human Augmentation. Most recently, he worked as an Interaction Designer at IDEO.

Marc loves doing archery and playing basketball. Oh! And he is learning how to make pottery and getting better at drawing.

## **Lauren Fratamico**

Lauren is a first year masters student in LSM. She is eagerly looking forward to starting a big data-centric research project in the lab soon!

Prior to joining the lab, Lauren received a bachelor's from UC Berkeley in Computer Science. She then moved to Vancouver, Canada to pursue a master's from the University of British Columbia, with a thesis surrounding educational data mining and user modeling. After that, she worked first as a software developer and then as a data scientist at a small startup focusing on recommender systems for brick and mortar stores. A common theme among these have been applying areas of computer science to real-world problems, and she is looking forward to continuing to do this at LSM.

Outside of work, Lauren likes to ride her bike. Recently, she rode 240 miles in one weekend and came down with a fever as a result, so likely won't be trying that again anytime soon.

Lauren is currently learning how to run further distances, and she signed up for a half marathon in a couple months to ensure that that happens on the sooner side.

## **Marshall Ganz**

Marshall Ganz is a Senior Lecturer in Public Policy at the Kennedy School of Government, where he teaches, researches, and writes on leadership, organization, and strategy in social movements, civic associations, and politics.

He grew up in Bakersfield, California, where his father was a Rabbi and his mother, a teacher. He entered Harvard College in the fall of 1960. He left a year before graduating to volunteer with the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project. He found a "calling" as an organizer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and, in the fall of 1965, joined Cesar Chavez in his effort to unionize California farm workers. During his 16 years with the United Farm Workers, he gained experience in union, political, and community organizing, became Director of Organizing, and was elected to the national executive board on which he served for 8 years. During the 1980s, he worked with grassroots groups to develop new organizing programs and designed innovative voter mobilization strategies for local, state, and

national electoral campaigns. In 1991, in order to deepen his intellectual understanding of his work, he returned to Harvard College and, after a 28-year "leave of absence," completed his undergraduate degree in history and government. He was awarded an MPA by the Kennedy School in 1993 and completed his PhD in sociology in 2000. He has published in the American Journal of Sociology, American Political Science Review, American Prospect, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, and elsewhere. His newest book, *Why David Sometimes Wins: leadership, organization and strategy in the California farm worker movement* was published in 2009, earning the Michael J. Harrington Book Award of the American Political Science Association. He was awarded an honorary doctorate in divinity by the Episcopal Divinity School in 2010.

When he is not working he likes to watch Game of Thrones, go to the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Opera, and walk around Fresh Pond. He also likes to read history, visit ancient places, and go back to California. One new thing he is trying to learn is how to encourage proactive response to the Trump opportunity.

## **Nabeel Gillani**

Nabeel is a first-year PhD student in Social Machines, working on tools and interventions to help analyze and bridge understanding gaps across communities. Before coming to MIT, he was a Product Manager at Khan Academy, where he helped work on tools and methods to support the organization's analytics, digital fundraising, computer science, and classroom/educator engagement efforts. Prior to that, he helped co-found an online marketplace to connect students and organizations to solve real-world problems together. He received a BS in Computer Science and Applied Math from Brown University, and an MS in both Education (Learning and Technology) and Information Engineering (Machine Learning) from the University of Oxford.

In his spare time, Nabeel likes to play basketball and go to Wendy's (a habit he's trying to break). Currently, Nabeel is trying to learn more about inequality - in particular, how technology, left unchecked or unprincipled, can exacerbate it.

## **Allen Gorin**

I was born in Brooklyn, the most populous borough of New York City. I was the third of four brothers, happily married for 42 years, and have three married children and four grandchildren.

I studied many areas of science in college, changing majors several times. I received all three degrees in Mathematics (which, after all, underpins all science:), with a doctoral dissertation in differential geometry. I was motivated by Einstein's popular book on Relativity, deciding that I wanted to know what a tensor was, and how space could be possibly be curved.

I was then fortunate to have been recruited by Larry Rabiner, one of the fathers of speech recognition. I spent >20 years at Bell Labs, researching how to build machines which learned spoken language via interactions with people within a complex environment. One of the most interesting domains was 'what people said to telephone operators', which led to the development and national deployment in 2000 of AT&T's 'How may I Help You?' voice natural language technology, interacting with millions of customers each week. I consider myself fortunate to have been involved from the birth of these ideas to their impact on the real world.

On a side note, the system was first turned on during the big international ICSLP conference in Beijing. I asked several colleagues to present my papers there, so that I could be present for the 'birth' of our system.

On 9/11, I was in London. Took me 10 days to get home. I was quite peeved that someone had knocked-down one of my favorite restaurants: 'Windows on the World', in the North Tower of the WTC. Growing up in Brooklyn, we learned "don't get mad, get even", at which point I became a Scientific Advisor to the Federal Government, joining them full-time eventually to grow their human language technology efforts.

After some cardiac adventures in 2011, I was forced to retire (but am not idle:) Between working out at the YMCA, going for walks, my own research and interacting with the students at LSM, I keep quite busy. I also continue as a research affiliate at the JHU Center of Excellence for Human Language Technology.

I try to have three items on my calendar each day, in the categories of physical, mental and social. My hobbies include reading science fiction, woodworking, and playing with my grandchildren. Rolling around the floor with two (identical) twin boys can be quite taxing but very enjoyable.

I look forward to several more decades, so long as they change my battery every 7 years :)

## **Jim Gray**

I work at the intersection of child development/learning and digital technology to foster the positive growth of kids, families, and communities. I believe in the saying that "there's nothing so practical as a good theory," and having a "bias towards action." I'm thrilled to be joining LSM and the Media Lab, where I think I will feel free to playfully explore both the grandest ideas (we are hacking evolution), and work closely with a talented team and partners to build and deploy tools for real kids in Boston and beyond.

My career has spanned teaching (preschoolers, tweens, grad students), research (Center for the Influence of Television on Children, Harvard Project Zero, Center for Innovative Learning Technology, LeapFrog Kid Lab), and making/marketing/evangelizing learning technologies in business and nonprofit settings (LeapFrog, SF Bay Area edtech startups, Sesame Workshop). Mostly, I have led and participated in teams to make playful toys, tools, or games of some kind. I consistently advocate for deep learning, where possible, like having kids explore the mathematical concept of equivalence with a virtual balance scale game mechanic.

Currently I'm moving with my wife (Seeta) and twin 7 year-old girls (Iyla, Eesha) back to the Cambridge area, where we first met at the Harvard GSE computer lab. When not moving or working, I like quiet activities like hiking in a forest, meditating, photography, museums, and swimming. I also love messing around with my kids to make cardboard hideouts, parachutes, and new toys. Seeta and I relax with a good British crime drama on Netflix. My current fun learning project is Minecraft.

## **Anneli Hershman**

Anneli is a second year PhD student in the Social Machines group working on the Playful Words team to develop child-driven and machine-guided technologies that empower children to share their voices with others, while teaching important literacy skills and fostering a love of reading and writing. Anneli's particular interest is in storytelling and how it can motivate young learners and families by providing self-expressive, socially collaborative, and playful literacy learning opportunities. To explore this, Anneli works on a project called StoryBlocks, which aims to bring a new level of interactivity into children's educational media and stories while promoting empathy, social-emotional development, and literacy development through storytelling.

Anneli received her BA in psychology, focusing on neuroscience, from San Diego State University, and her master's in child development, focusing on Literacy Learning, from Tufts University. Her work in literacy learning has been motivated by her own experiences with dyslexia. Because of this, she wants to understand how the brain learns to read and design tools to translate that research into practice with high reach and scale for all families. She has had a lot of experience in education, working as a therapist, preschool teacher, literacy instructor, tutor, researcher, online literacy curriculum creator, and designer.

Something she's currently learning is: "I have always loved the creative process of cooking new meals with unique ingredients. I am currently learning how to combine my passions of cooking and writing by maintaining a food blog that I share with my best friend. Admittedly, the cooking part is proving easier than the blogging part for me..."

## **Andrew Heyward**

Andrew is a Visiting Scholar at the Laboratory for Social Machines and a Senior Advisor to Cortico.

His main project is the Social Scanner, an AI-based tool designed to foster more responsive journalism, and indirectly, more engaged citizenship, by helping editors and reporters discover and investigate relevant and resonant stories before they break out into the open. Andrew is also involved in other "mapping and surfacing" initiatives at both the Lab and Cortico, helping to give voice to "underheard" segments of the population and to reinvigorate local journalism in underserved areas.

Andrew's overall interest in the future of journalism arises from his long career in television news, first at two local stations and then mostly at CBS News, where he served as a producer, executive producer, and eventually President for nearly a decade.

In his spare time, Andrew plays squash, rides his bike, and reads both fiction and nonfiction. He is discovering or rediscovering classic mysteries and thrillers of the last century. On the nonfiction side, he enjoys history, biography, and books about behavioral economics.

Andrew is slowly learning how to cook properly. The operative word is "slowly."



## **Sneha Makini**

Sneha is a second year Master's student in the Playful Learning Group. She is working on an application called Picture Blocks, a different way of creating pictures combined with language learning. Picture Blocks learns semantic associations between words, and hopes to play a role in improving engagement and vocabulary in children.

Sneha spent most of her life in Bangalore, India. This is where she completed her undergraduate degree studying Computer Science, and went on to work for three years in the software and gaming industry. During this time, she also worked with open-source organizations such as Systems, GNU Mailman, and Wikipedia, as part of Google Summer of Code.

In her free time, she enjoys sitting by the Charles esplanade, on her favorite bench named Pi (3.14). She hopes to get better at machine learning and playing the ukulele.

## **David McClure**

David is a first year Master's student in the Social Machines group working on projects at the intersection of computer science, linguistics, and the emerging field of "cultural analytics." Specifically, he's interested in using large data sets to study ways that language varies across different spatial, temporal, and cultural contexts - and how those differences can be leveraged to help us learn about cognition, ideology, group identity, and worldview at large scales.

Before coming to MIT, David was the technical director of the Stanford Literary Lab, a group in the Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis that used computational methods to study literature. He also managed engineering efforts at the Open Syllabus Project, a data-mining project at Columbia that is building an empirical view of trends in the modern university by analyzing a corpus of over 1M college course syllabi. Before Stanford, David spent three years as a software engineer at the Scholars' Lab, a digital humanities center at the University of Virginia, where he was the lead developer of Neatline, a digital map-making framework supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Library of Congress. His writing has appeared in Literary and Linguistic Computing and The New York Times, and his work has been covered in Time, the Atlantic, The Chronicle of Higher Education, The Washington Post, Business Insider, FiveThirtyEight, and WNYC. Before getting into data science and software engineering, David studied literature at Yale in the Humanities program.

## **Juliana Nazare**

Juliana is a second-year PhD student in the Social Machines group working on the Playful Words team. Her particular interest is in family engagement and how we can build small community networks to encourage family co-engagement in the learning process. To explore this, Juliana works with others on the Playful Words team on a project to pilot small literacy learning networks with a third person in the loop, a "family learning coach," who uses data analysis tools to translate children's learning moments to parents and provide ideas for short parent-child activities based on children's on-screen play.

Juliana received her BS in electrical and computer engineering from Olin College of Engineering and her master's from the Lifelong Kindergarten Group at the Media Lab, where she focused on building tools to support family literacy programs and bilingual learners. Her past work before coming to the lab was in the field of adult education, creating curriculum and helping run an evening school that taught web design and computer science.

I've always loved having plants in my apartment, but have never been good at taking care of them (really, I had a cactus that didn't survive). I have recently started growing a bunch of tomatoes and herbs (they've taken over my apartment), and I'm hoping to branch out (haha) into more houseplants once I get the hang of it. One of my childhood dreams was to grow an avocado plant from a pit, so I'm slowly working up to that.

## **Shayne O'Brien**

Shayne is a first-year master's student in the Laboratory for Social Machines working on the Situated Learning project to decrease political polarization in the U.S. Currently, Shayne is interested in how ideas and social movements propagate within and between social communities over time in an effort to determine hidden variables that motivate thought proliferation. He is also interested in macro-level scaling of ethnographic research.

Shayne received his BS in Applied Mathematics from State University of New York at Geneseo and is interested in applied machine learning, natural language processing, and data visualization. Before coming to MIT, Shayne worked on diverse projects including increasing electrical grid connectedness in rural Kenya, computationally analyzing the Trans-Pacific Partnership for Congress, creating AI to augment customer service agents, and establishing methods for light detection and ranging data analysis and visualization. Shayne is a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow and originally hails from Long Island, New York.

I'm learning kickboxing! I recently realized that while I love fitness and being active, the diversity of the physical activities I do is pretty low. One of my goals over the next year is to change that.

## **Shana Opperman**

Shana joined the team in May 2017 and supports Operations & Deployment across Cortico and LSM. You'll see her spanning program management, systems strategy, recruiting & branding.

Formerly, Shana led technical and creative production for an experimental adtech team at Google called Art Copy & Code. She managed operations and development across software eng, design, marketing, finance, legal to bring new ideas from concept sketch to prototype to final product, + campaign creation w/ partners like Nike to beta test. The team's work won 80+ top industry awards for innovation. She was tapped to run a special project for the Google Cultural Institute and re-located to Paris to capture, preserve and provide access to Performing Arts across twenty countries. Fun fact, she got to stand on Carnegie Hall's stage!

When not at Cortico, she is finishing her MBA at MIT Sloan and pursuing an interest in tech's effect on human memory. She is an astronomy enthusiast, 60s/70s/80s music fan, and cooker/baker who wings it

sans recipes, except when it comes to her Yiayia's 30-layer baklava.

She is currently learning how to keep her plants alive, as well as how to structure a website mostly from scratch.

## **Heather Pierce**

Heather is the senior administrator for the Laboratory for Social Machines. She's worked at the Media Lab for a total of eight years with a nine year break when she stayed home with her four children ages 12 - 6.

Born and raised in Connecticut she spent many summers visiting her father's family in San Angelo, Texas. Many of these trips from Connecticut to Texas were done by driving with her and her younger brother in the back of a pickup truck.

When not at work, or on a sports field, Heather enjoys watching Game of Thrones, reading, cooking dinner for friends and family, drinking wine and spending time with her kids by taking walks or watching movies. She is currently learning to channel her Trump frustrations by being a more engaged citizen within her small community.

## **Bill Powers**

After working for the last three years as a Research Scientist at LSM, I've just re-upped as a Visiting Scientist at the lab. I'll keep a hand in news/public sphere projects following on Electome, while working half-time with Cortico on its initiatives in related areas.

I was born on a U.S. Army base in Arizona, but spent most of my childhood in Rhode Island, where both sides of my family have their roots. As an undergrad at Harvard, I studied History and Literature, writing my honors thesis about the clash of humanistic concerns with science and technology just after World War II. I did a graduate fellowship at the University of Madrid, then moved to Washington, DC, where I worked as a US Senate staffer specializing in foreign affairs, intelligence and military issues. From there, I joined The Washington Post, working initially in the investigative unit, then as feature writer and columnist with a growing focus on the media. I next moved into magazine writing as media critic for The New Republic, National Journal and The Atlantic.

As a fellow at Harvard's Shorenstein Center I wrote a paper entitled "Hamlet's BlackBerry." That led to my 2010 book by the same title, which uses history and philosophy to help readers navigate life in a digital world. Through the book, I met Deb, Russell, Mike and Andrew at Bluefin Labs, where we did a proto-Electome project around the 2012 presidential election. I joined LSM when it started up in 2014.

I live in Orleans on Cape Cod with my wife, Martha Sherrill, who writes books and screenplays. Our son Will is a freshman at Harvard.

What I'm learning about: Zen philosophy. I was first exposed to it when Martha, Will and I spent part of a year living in the Japanese city of Kamakura, which has more Zen temples than any place on earth. The more I live and work with technology, the more revelatory I find Zen's point of view.

## **Deb Roy**

Deb Roy is Director of the MIT Media Lab's Laboratory for Social Machines, Associate Professor at MIT, co-founder of social venture Cortico, and Chief Media Scientist of Twitter. He leads research at MIT at the intersection of human and machine communication, advises technology start-up companies, and serves on the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Artificial Intelligence and Robotics and the Knight Commission on Trust, Media and American Democracy

In his spare time Deb enjoys eating meals cooked by his daughter and getting whopped in ping pong by his son.

He is currently learning fine woodworking, hopeful that someday his projects will not look like a four-year-old did it.

## **Nazmus Saquib**

Saquib is a PhD student at LSM. His current interests are in instrumentation and design of learning environments to enable data-driven and informed interactions between learners and teachers/parents. At LSM, he has done a year-long design sprint to solve a tricky problem: how do we systematically measure a child's interaction with block-based toys and create meaningful information out of this data? To solve the first part, he employed techniques from tangible sensor networks and swarm robotics to instrument blocks in order to sense any arbitrary block configuration (small Lego structures, pattern/geometry blocks, map puzzles etc.). For the second part, he is actively researching ways to embed the temporal and topological play data in a simple and intuitive geometric space for parents/teachers.

Saquib has a BA in Physics & Computer Science, and an MS in Applied Mathematics. Before joining LSM, he did his second MS degree at the Media Lab in the Social Computing group, where he designed RF sensors to instrument children's shoes, and mapped real time social networks in Montessori classrooms using the tool.

Other than being a researcher, he has a deep commitment to mentoring under-privileged and aspiring researchers. His initiative in Bangladesh named KolpoKoushol (*Imagination Engineering*) mentors undergraduate and high school students in solving local problems using hardware and data science tools. Several open sourced tools have been created so far under this initiative that address problems in law and journalism in Bangladesh.

In his spare time, he is a hobbyist musician, playing guitars and drums. He wrote and recorded some Bangla folk rock songs a few years ago, and someday would like to publish his own album. Someday.

## **Martin Saveski**

I'm a 3rd year PhD student in LSM studying the media ecosystem and how it's impacted by social media. I am not only interested in observing and studying the world, but also changing it—which is why I am very passionate about running experiments and testing different interventions. One example of this is

our FlipFeed project: a Chrome extension that allows Twitter users to step into someone else's Twitter feed and be exposed to information outside of their bubble.

I did my undergrad in computer science and master's in data mining. I have always been fascinated by data and algorithms, in particular how computers can "learn" from historical data and—almost magically—exhibit intelligent behavior. I love doing applied work which led me to do internships in industrial research labs including Yahoo, Amazon, and LinkedIn. Ironically, I worked on building recommender systems: the algorithms that create the filter bubbles we are now trying to break. (I am being sarcastic: I still think they are useful, we still need to deal with information overload, though I now realize that we need to rethink what these algorithms optimize for).

In my free time I like to listen to podcasts (most of my conversations lately start with "so I was listening to the podcast that says ..."), brew beer (new to this, still learning), and swim (it has been a great way to release stress). Lately, I have also been learning more about mediation—I'm trying to incorporate it into my daily schedule, only with partial success so far.

## **Alex Siegenfeld**

Alex is a third year physics PhD student working in the Laboratory for Social Machines to understand political polarization and ways to combat and/or effectively coexist with it. He is interested in the large-scale aspects of political polarization that are independent of the details of how individual humans behave. To this end, he is currently using methods from statistical physics designed to capture the collective behavior of systems with many interacting components in order to understand the effect that geographic self-sorting of individuals is having on the geographical distribution of political opinion.

Born in New York City and raised in Connecticut, Alex developed early interests in chemistry, physics, and math. As an undergraduate at MIT, he majored in physics and mathematics and conducted theoretical research on a variety of solid-state systems. Originally interested in combining chemical intuition with mathematical rigor to further the understanding of materials with exotic and useful properties, he spent his first graduate year working on topological superconductors and Fermi liquid theory. He has since shifted his focus to applying concepts and methods from statistical physics to further the understanding of social and political phenomena. In addition to his research in LSM, he is currently studying the mathematical properties of political representation in democratic voting systems at the New England Complex Systems Institute.

In his free time, Alex enjoys piano, tennis, contract bridge, and reading. He is currently learning about the science of making cocktails, tapping into his original passion for chemistry while avoiding the difficulties of cooking.

## **Russell Stevens**

As Deployment Lead at the Laboratory for Social Machines at the MIT Media Lab and a Co-Founder of Cortico, Russell focuses on research planning and deployment of media technologies that tackle complex social problems. He is currently helping lead LSM and Cortico media analytics programs that use machine learning and artificial intelligence to analyze public sphere conversations and behaviors.

Prior to joining LSM, Russell spent 15 years as a partner at the strategic communications agency SS+K, guiding the company's consulting and business development operations. During this time, he provided strategic and marketing counsel for brands and non-profit clients including the Citibank, the U.S. Department of Education, LIVESTRONG, Obama '08, msnbc.com, ChildObesity 180, and General Motors.

Russell's background includes two years as a research associate at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, writing about the emergence of new media channels during the 1992 presidential election and their impact on political discourse. Russell holds an M.A. in public policy at the Kennedy School and a B.A. in government from Dartmouth College.

Something Russell is learning now is how to cope with the recent departure of one daughter [Olivia] to college and the approaching departure of another [Corinne] – also presumably to college ... but one never knows.

## **Ivan Sysoev**

Ivan is a third year PhD student on the Playful Words team at Laboratory for Social Machines. He is investigating how technology can be built to help kids acquire literacy in a child-driven way. His main project is SpeechBlocks, a smartphone app that allows children to explore the relationship between spellings and sound principles through open-ended play. Ivan believes that sense of wonder is one of the most important components of quality life, and looks for the ways to support and cultivate it.

Ivan came to the the domain of children learning from the field of Computer Science. He studied it as an undergraduate and Masters' student at the Novosibirsk State University, Russia, before taking another Masters' with an emphasis on Artificial Intelligence at Georgia Tech as a Fulbright student.

In his free time, Ivan likes to read fiction. It delights him to dive into oases of imagination, to look at our world in light of possible alternatives, and this process helps him to develop a deeper understanding of other human beings. He practices writing stories of his own, and also enjoys drawing. He is happy that his current work allows him to connect his multiple interests - in Artificial Intelligence, software design, storytelling, drawing, and curiosity-driven learning.

## **Prashanth**

Prashanth is a second year PhD student in the Social Machines group. Prashanth is focussed on developing learning models that can understand data from news, entertainment, social media, etc. and unearth the latent semantic structures. These learning models have been applied to analyze the interaction of media and their behavior in various domains including politics, food and video based storytelling.

Having completed his undergraduate program in Computer Science at Anna University (Chennai, India), Prashanth worked as a Software Developer in the Auto-Optimization (R&D) team at Media.net (Directi) powering Yahoo Contextual Ads. He developed a content-aware image ads model that generates contextually relevant image ads for a given article. His work was at the intersection of NLP and computer vision. During his Masters program at Laboratory of Social Machines, he got the opportunity to explore a

wide range of research problems and built a comprehensive NLP framework for media ecosystem analysis.

Besides my research interests, I have always loved putting my thoughts into words. It may be simple compilations of my deep concerns on complicated issues or complicated analogies on simple things around us. But I have never organized them properly. Hoping to formally organize my thoughts first and then weave them into words eventually.

## **Soroush Vosoughi**

Soroush is a postdoctoral associate at MIT and a fellow at the Berkman Klein Center at Harvard University. His main interests lie at the intersection of natural language processing, machine learning and network science. Specifically, he is interested in the formation and propagation of information and misinformation on social networks. Soroush was the technical director of the Electome project, leading a team of graduate students working on algorithms for automatic analysis of election-related content on social media.

Soroush is an "MIT lifer", having received his PhD, MSc and BSc at MIT. For his PhD, he developed algorithms for automatic detection and verification of rumors on social media. For his MSc, he was involved with the Human Speechome Project, where he developed a computational model of word acquisition. He was also a UROP at Deb's old group (Cognitive Machines), where he worked on the language, vision and planning subsystems of an interactive physical robot that learned to communicate in human-like ways.

In his personal time, Soroush likes to go camping and stargazing. Nowadays, Soroush is learning how to be an amateur astronomer and also how have a better work-life balance.

## **John West**

John West does computer-assisted journalism at Cortico—using code and words to build tools and craft stories. Previously, John has worked as a computer-assisted journalist during the Electome project at the Laboratory for Social Machines at the MIT Media Lab. He has also built stories for many top companies, helped engineer the digital publication, Quartz, and has written about the future of news. John is also an MFA candidate in nonfiction writing at the Bennington Writing Seminars and the technical director of Et Cetera Gallery, a home for online and IRL narrative experiments. He is learning how to use a DSLR, much to the chagrin of everyone he photographs.

## **Alice Ann Wilson**

Alice Ann is a Senior Advisor to Cortico. Her focus includes communication strategy and branding, working with the founding team to architect the key messaging tent poles of Cortico and providing guidance for the brand expressions of the organization. Alice Ann will also consult in defining audience tiers and assisting the team to plan seamless brand touch points from primary audiences to broader outreach.

Alice Ann has a career history and ongoing interest in the evolution of branding as the expression of “a shared pursuit” between organizations and communities in both consumer and cause areas. As Chief

Creative Officer of the Brand Studio CAA-GBG, Alice Ann runs a multi-disciplinary studio of artists and designers that work collaboratively to realize causes and brands with cultural resonance.

Alice Ann lacks spare time but is a casual renovator of “special” properties and an architectural interiors enthusiast. As a retired professional dancer, she continues to commit to internal practices that provide positive outputs at a more comfortable speed including cooking, yoga, and drawing.

## **Eugene Yi**

Eugene is president of Cortico and a deployment strategist for LSM.

His main role is to support Cortico's growth and direction in ways that help build a healthy public sphere. His LSM role includes developing a symbiotic relationship between Cortico and LSM so that: 1) researchers are empowered to deploy their research in socially impactful ways, and 2) Cortico technologies become a media analytics resource for LSM to conduct faster, iterative research.

Eugene's interest is in responsible uses of technologies in governance. He has worked previously at Twitter leading the Asia Public Policy team, the U.S. State Department, and the U.S. Department of Defense.

For fun, Eugene spends his time working on DIY hardware projects, cycling, and enjoying art exhibits.

Eugene is learning how to oil paint through YouTube videos.

## **Ann Yuan**

Ann has been involved with the Electome, FlipFeed, and Social Mirror projects at LSM. Previously, Ann worked in advertising and education technology. Outside of work, Ann likes to make soup. Ann is currently trying to get better at Go.