

Occasional Talk

with

Elizabeth Reddy

Tue. January 16, 2018

1:30 - 3:00 p.m.

Tempe campus - MU Gold Room 207

“Like a Donkey Playing the Flute”: Developing Environmental Risk Mitigation Technology in Mexico and the US

In the past twenty years, over 1.35 million people were killed by so-called “natural hazards”. Earthquakes are the most deadly of them all. In this talk, I address one technology that has been celebrated as potentially lifesaving in the face of the unpredictable temblors that are inevitable in many places around the world: earthquake early warning systems. These systems register earthquakes and alert people within range seconds, or even minutes before seismic waves reach them. I draw on ethnographic research to explore the work of pathbreaking Mexican engineers who have developed and managed an earthquake early warning system for over twenty-five years, now marginalized in conversations about a new system planned for the West Coast of the United States. I demonstrate that this marginalization perpetuates a troubling politics of knowledge in which Mexico is a site of extraction, not innovation, and that it may have consequences for the people at risk from earthquakes in the US. I build on insights in this case to frame new questions about data infrastructures and institutions in the US-Mexico borderlands-- and environmental data justice efforts that might bridge them.

Please RSVP here: goo.gl/Jfyxgt

Dr. Elizabeth Reddy has brought a critical feminist lens and keen interest in the co-production of material and social conditions to bear on inquiries about how experts are trained to solve technical problems; how they design tools, technologies, and policies; and how they develop and manage crucial communications. Her recent work focuses on seismicity and how experts develop new technologies to mitigate environmental risks in the United States and Mexico. She holds a PhD in cultural anthropology from the University of California at Irvine.

