

<http://somatosphere.net/2010/special-issue-of-science-as-culture-on-trashed.html/>

## Special issue of Science as Culture on Identity and Narrative in STS

2010-03-09 15:51:00

By Eugene Raikhel

[The latest issue of Science as Culture](#) focuses on a topic which has long been central to cultural anthropology, but remains relatively novel in science and technology studies (STS): first-person narrative and the relationship between scholars and their objects of study. As Benjamin R. Cohen and Wyatt Galusky, the guest editors of the special issue, write in their introduction:

“The purpose of this special issue is to explore how STS scholars embody their scholarship, with regard to living through the ideas, concepts, and complexities of STS knowledge within the world of lived experience. We capture this by threading together notions of theory and experience through the accounts of individuals who generate knowledge, but who also possess that knowledge and attempt to apply it in the world for their own lives. In keeping with the goals of a turn to participation, the voice of the essays is not one that tells others *how to* live but one that encounters and reveals the difficulties *of* living.

The point pervading this set of essays is that the authors come to recognize the value of experience and deliberation within existing technoscientific systems. They find that constructing and seeking to then overcome a binary—between complicity and undermining, or acceptance and rejection, or empowerment and disempowerment—is not the ultimate point of their work. Just as STS scholars have undermined binary constructions of ‘science’ and ‘society’ in decades of empirical work, so too, we suggest, have these authors undermined strict binaries between living within and living without. Key to this conclusion is that in the space and demands for process and deliberation it provided, the essays’ reflective forum made it possible for authors to acknowledge complicity as another variable individuals must confront in work that strives for positive change,” ([Cohen and Galusky 2010](#)).

Here are the titles and abstracts of the articles:

**Wyatt Galusky**, [Playing Chicken: Technologies of Food, Domestication and Self](#)

To engage the mediating and enabling aspects of food technology, I reflect in this essay on my (rueful) attempts at raising chickens. As an incompetent chicken-raising hobbyist and an STS-trained scholar, I came to view my chickens as technologies themselves—results of human interactions with nature, through the overarching frame of domestication. Viewing the chicken-human relationship as a technological one has allowed me to foreground several elements at once. First, the chicken and the systems that sustain it put in stark relief the process of defining nature very specifically. Certain aspects are coveted and augmented while others are disregarded or overcome. Thus, technology does not strictly demarcate artificial from natural, but rather restricts or accommodates fuller forms of nature. Second, these definitions of nature (the chicken in this case) stabilize and enable other technological forms that take the initial stability for granted (e.g. human social and geographic organizations premised on industrialized agriculture). Third, these systems of stabilities, premised on necessarily partial versions of nature, complicate normative decisions on proper human-chicken relationships. In creating a uniform animal, and a relatively cheap and stable source of protein, we have empowered identities that can think about food less as necessity, and more as choice. As a result, we as consumers become increasingly dependent on the systems of domesticated nature that make such choice possible. And when the chicken itself becomes a product of that lifestyle choice (expressed as an element of consumer behavior), its very skeletal structure becomes optional.

**Chikako Takeshita**, [The IUD in Me: On Embodying Feminist Technoscience Studies](#)

This article traces my personal and academic journey through two ‘IUDs in Me’ interlacing personal encounters with the IUD with formal research findings from academic work. I demonstrate that reflecting on my own embodiment of the IUD while conducting academic research on the same technology helped me understand how social and historical conditions constructed my reproductive choice as an American consumer of the device and how such ‘choice’ is constrained by the scientific community’s willingness to develop birth control methods, medical practices, and corporate

profitability. Personally enjoying the IUD and benefiting from studying it academically, I was faced with a moral dilemma between my own empowerment and the disempowerment that many other women experienced in relationship to this technology. As a way to hold my personal body politics accountable towards feminist struggles for reproductive freedom, this essay scrutinizes my bodily experiences by reading them critically against socio-historical and political contexts. I contend that such reflexive embodied scholarship helped illuminate how 'differences' among women were implicitly calculated and actively configured by IUD developers, who constantly revamped the research and discourse around the device over the last several decades in response to changes in social interests, political stakes, and scientific findings. I argue that my reflexive and embodied feminist technoscience studies led to a fruitful theoretical investigation into how the creation of various 'ideal' users mirrors the transnational political economy of women's bodies.

**Saul Halfon, [Encountering Birth: Negotiating Expertise, Networks, and My STS Self](#)**

The births of my two children—one in the hospital, one at home—provide a context for thinking about being an STS scholar and practitioner in our technological world. Birth has long served as a site for critical encounters with expertise, medical systems, and technology, and has inspired a great deal of the scholarship and activism that characterizes the women's health movement. Although well versed in that literature, I was unprepared, emotionally, socially, and technically, for birth in the clinic. This is a story, therefore, about learning what I already knew: that expertise is situational and social and cannot be wielded alone; that socio-technical networks are durable and powerful, requiring well-articulated material resources to challenge; that language is slippery, situational and historical and cannot be reliably carried from one point in time to another; that encounters with technology reach to our core emotions of love, fear, hope, and disappointment; and that our technological desires are culturally situated. Being an effective STS practitioner and scholar requires a daily engagement with the technoscientific networks that surround us through personal reflection. This paper thus explores personal narrative as a mode of analysis that recognizes that all theory is

ultimately situational and begins with our own experiences of the world. It simultaneously theorizes the quandaries of being an STS scholar, giving birth in the twenty-first century, and theorizing from narrative.

**Martha McCaughey**, [Got Milk?: Breastfeeding as an 'Incurably Informed' Feminist STS Scholar](#)

'Got Milk?' considers the author's own commitment to and experience of breastfeeding as a mother/intellectual, examining ways of theorizing embodiment and complex bio-social practices while also showing just how complicated living/embodying feminist STS theory can be. Many breastfeeding advocates are naive about nature, technology, and gender issues, and many feminist STS scholars focus on the pregnant body, rather than the lactating body, to discuss gender, technology, and embodiment. Pro-breastfeeding materials often represent breastfeeding as an organic practice free from the intervention of medical experts and technologies. The author's experiences of the physical difficulties of breastfeeding, the management of breastfeeding by medical experts, the lack of social support for the practice, and the lack of a non-essentialist feminist discourse about the importance of breastfeeding left her wondering on what grounds she could and should justify her commitment to breastfeed her children. Ultimately, recognizing that breastfeeding is an embodied practice that is not free from technological intervention or other social and political contexts can counteract the romanticized, essentialized representations of breastfeeding for a stronger, if more contingent, 'cyborg' breastfeeding advocacy.

**Jody A. Roberts**, [Reflections of an Unrepentant Plastiphobe: Plasticity and the STS Life](#)

My adventures with plastic have provided a personalized tour of many of the tools and concepts that STS scholars use to unpack the lives of others. This essay explores my efforts to figure out how to use those tools and concepts on my own life. Examining those efforts has required me to assess the tension between my academic investigations into the toxicity of the plastic materials of everyday life and the ways my own life's possibilities—and in

particular the life of my daughter—are inextricably linked to those materials. Drawing on recent work in STS, particularly that of Donna Haraway, I suggest that these experiences are a form of ‘becoming with’ the world. In a larger sense, I argue that they offer an opportunity for a more politically engaged scholarship and hope in knowing that STS interventions can matter. This essay situates my work within current STS scholarship that examines concepts of risk, facts, and uncertainty. Ultimately, it aims to use the plasticity of my STS life as a way to demonstrate how our scholarly focus on the politics of risk might be incorporated into advocacy for a politics of concern.

**AMA citation**

Raikhel E. Special issue of Science as Culture on Identity and Narrative in STS. *Somatosphere*. 2010. Available at: [http://somatosphere.net/2010/special-issue-of-science-as-culture-on\\_\\_trashed.html/](http://somatosphere.net/2010/special-issue-of-science-as-culture-on__trashed.html/). Accessed July 6, 2019.

**APA citation**

Raikhel, Eugene. (2010). *Special issue of Science as Culture on Identity and Narrative in STS*. Retrieved July 6, 2019, from Somatosphere Web site: [http://somatosphere.net/2010/special-issue-of-science-as-culture-on\\_\\_trashed.html/](http://somatosphere.net/2010/special-issue-of-science-as-culture-on__trashed.html/)

**Chicago citation**

Raikhel, Eugene. 2010. Special issue of Science as Culture on Identity and Narrative in STS. *Somatosphere*. [http://somatosphere.net/2010/special-issue-of-science-as-culture-on\\_\\_trashed.html/](http://somatosphere.net/2010/special-issue-of-science-as-culture-on__trashed.html/) (accessed July 6, 2019).

**Harvard citation**

Raikhel, E 2010, *Special issue of Science as Culture on Identity and Narrative in STS*, *Somatosphere*. Retrieved July 6, 2019, from <[http://somatosphere.net/2010/special-issue-of-science-as-culture-on\\_\\_trashed.html/](http://somatosphere.net/2010/special-issue-of-science-as-culture-on__trashed.html/)>

**MLA citation**

Raikhel, Eugene. "Special issue of Science as Culture on Identity and Narrative in STS." 9 Mar. 2010. *Somatosphere*. Accessed 6 Jul. 2019.<[http://somatosphere.net/2010/special-issue-of-science-as-culture-on\\_\\_trashed.html/](http://somatosphere.net/2010/special-issue-of-science-as-culture-on__trashed.html/)>