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## Inaugural Issue of Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, and Technoscience

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By Anna Zogas

There is an exciting new [open access](#) journal! The inaugural issue of **Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, and Technoscience** can be found [here](#), and the Editorial Board's Introduction can be found [here](#). Enjoy!

### [Black Feminism's Minor Empiricism: Hurston, Combahee, and the Experience of Evidence](#)

*Lindsey Andrews*

In this article, I argue that the Zora Neale Hurston's early twentieth-century anthropological work and the Combahee River Collective's 1977 Black Feminist Statement can be read as part of a genealogy of Black feminist empiricism: a minor empiricism that rejects positivist empiricism, strategically mobilizing dominant scientific practices while also developing an onto-epistemology specific to Black English and what Combahee terms "black women's style." Their works make tactical use of positivist empirics to critique and counter legal and medico-scientific circumscription of Black women's lives, while simultaneously participating in this counter-practice of Black feminist empiricism. As both Combahee's statement and Hurston's first ethnography, *Mules and Men* (1935), reveal, Black feminist empiricism is grounded not in traditional scientific virtues such as transparency and objectivity, but instead in opacity and subjectivity, which make it unavailable for use for purposes of legal subjection, while simultaneously revealing the raced and gendered implications of a legal system dependent on positivist values.

### [Surrogate Humanity: Posthuman Networks and the \(Racialized\) Obsolescence of Labor](#)

*Neda Atanasoski, Kalindi Vora*

Historical forms of domination and power, encompassed but not limited to social categories and hierarchies of difference, get built into seemingly non-human objects and the infrastructures that link them, thus sanitizing digital media technologies as human-free. Rather than questioning the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the human, fantasies about the revolutionary nature of new media and technology developments as posthuman carry forward and re-universalize the

historical specificity of the category “human” whose bounds they claim to surpass. To begin to theorize some of the ways in which the notion of a revolutionary network of humans and things is both racial and racializing, the first part of this article develops a reading of Sylvia Wynter’s theorization of modern “man” as fundamentally constructed through racial-scientific notions of the biological and economic. We then think Wynter’s notion of homo-oeconomicus alongside Rifkin’s postulation that in fact the infrastructure revolution marks a paradigm shift away from capitalism. Through an analysis of several contemporary platforms (including Alfred and Amazon Mechanical Turk), we address the global-racial erasures and disappearances undergirding techno-utopic fantasies of a post-labor society. At the same time, as we argue, it is insufficient to merely point out the way in which human racialized and gendered labor underwrites techno-utopic fantasies. Instead, we move to a consideration of the epistemological and material shifts as well as legacies tied to prior post-Enlightenment revolutionary thought, such as that of Franz Fanon, to reconceptualize who or what can count as human. In conversation with feminist science studies scholarship on the posthuman, we grapple with what it means to think the subject of labor, and the human as subject, outside of the biological-economic imperatives of prior imaginaries.

[“El tabaco se ha mulato”: Globalizing Race, Viruses, and Scientific Observation in the Late Nineteenth Century](#)

*Jih-Fei Cheng*

This article traces the earliest identified recorded descriptor for viral infection: the racialized Spanish expression “el tabaco se ha mulato” (“the tobacco has become mulatto”). The phrase appears in the late nineteenth-century travel writing of French colonial scientist Jules Crevaux, written as he journeyed through post-Spanish Independence Colombia and observed the demise of the once-thriving tobacco industry. I theorize the literary translations and visualizations, or what I call “visual translations,” of the phrase across scientific and historical texts that cite Crevaux to track the refraction of racial, gender, and sexual discourses in virology. I argue that the phrase refers to the historically dispossessed Indigenous and Black subjects of the nascent Colombian republic and their resistance to subjection when forced to work the tobacco fields. The article historicizes virus discovery at the juncture between science, nation-building, global industrialization, and the disciplining of race and sex under the long shadow of Euro-American empire. Drawing upon Ed Cohen’s concept of “viral paradox,” Nayan Shah’s notion of “strangerhood,” and Mel Y. Chen’s framework for thinking about “queer animacies,” I deconstruct the visual, conceptual, and etymological roots of the phrase “el tabaco se ha mulato” to argue that the expression renders the virus as both “queer” and “strange” to the nation. The virus signifies

the mulato subject as a stubborn challenge to racial hierarchies and to the host-guest-parasite relation, both of which are foundational to the social organization of the nation and polis. This signification insistently refuses the human/non-human binary that undergirds racial regimes and biological conceptions of life. In turn, I expand historical thinking about race, submit that pandemics result from global industrial resource extraction rather than merely poor hygiene, and offer a framework for “queer decolonizing.”

### [Heart Feminism](#)

*Anne Pollock*

This article considers wide-ranging heart-centered approaches to understanding bodies, objects, and personhood. It puts these into in tension with other ways of approaching questions of life and embodiment, especially ones inspired by neuroscience, to argue that thinking with the heart has value for feminist theory. The heart that is my object traverses scale, and the paper’s analysis moves from the inside out – from heart cells, to hearts and circulatory systems, to women interpellated into heart health, to public debates on personhood that mobilize fetal heartbeats and contested cases of women on life support. I draw on biological and lay ways of understanding the heart, and on mundane intimacy of knowledge of the heartbeat as a sign of life and personhood. Articulating the body through the heart provides opportunities to theorize the body and the object in new ways, pushing back against rhizomic and egalitarian aspirations and toward nuanced accounts of power. The engagement with the heart is speculative and wide-ranging, a provocation for feminist theorists to think with the heart.

### [Depression, Biology, Aggression: Introduction to Gut Feminism \(Duke University Press, 2015\)](#)

*Elizabeth A. Wilson*

An excerpt from Elizabeth A. Wilson’s book, *Gut Feminism*, which was published in August, 2015.

### [Enchanting Catastrophe: Magical Subrealism and BP’s Macondo](#)

*Jackie Orr*

Remembering the late 19th century deployment of spiritualist technologies (divining rods, witching sticks) to locate oil deposits in the Americas, this visual essay situates U.S. petroleum culture in an occult genealogy of capitalist sorcery and supernatural materialism. The essay re-imagines the branded “BP” oil spill as an enchanted disaster unfolding across implicate orders of colonial phantasm, new subsea infrastructures of petro-capitalism, and the mundane inferno of deep time. How to envision the BP disaster—and its expansive subsea digital archive—as a ‘magic

site,' where natural and supernatural blend? What can magical subrealism offer as both an analytics of contemporary power and a style of performative feminist conjuring? How really to think, with oil, the thought that thought may be unhuman?

### [The Vanishing Object of Technology](#)

*Joanna Zylińska*

This video essay offers a poetic meditation on the changing ecology of our everyday technical setups. It focuses on the gradual disappearance of cables, leads, and wires from behind of our computers, music systems, TV sets, kitchen equipment, and other domestic devices that rely on the continuous supply of electricity for their functioning, to explore the aesthetics of such workaday entanglements. Interweaving shots from underneath the artist's desk taken over a period of one month into a haunting installation of lines, grids and traces, it proposes an intertwined textual and visual engagement with a unique moment in the history of technology.

### [On Writing About Illness: A Dialogue with S. Lochlann Jain and Jackie Stacey on Cancer, STS, and Cultural Studies](#)

*S. Lochlann Jain, Jackie Stacey*

In this dialogue, S. Lochlann Jain and Jackie Stacey put into conversation their respective monographs, *Malignant* and *Teratologies*. Drawing on perspectives in feminist science studies and cultural studies, the discussion dovetails their first-person accounts and the critical analyses in their books.

### [Difference Work: A Conversation with Lilly Irani](#)

*Lilly Irani, Monika Sengul-Jones*

In this interview, Lilly Irani draws on her decade of ethnographic research into globally distributed micro-labor and her experiences with Turkopticon to sharply articulate for us what's at stake in these processes—and how and why “virtual work” and “digital labor” matter conceptually for the politics of feminist science and technology studies.

### [Science & Justice: The Trouble and the Promise](#)

*Jenny Reardon, Jacob Metcalf, Martha Kenney, Karen Barad*

Over the course of the last five years, a worldwide financial crisis combined with plummeting trust in institutions has led to significant changes in the organization and funding of research and education. These changes have troubled the very foundations of universities, but they also have created new opportunities to re-imagine and re-form practices of

knowledge production, a key concern of Science and Technology Studies (S&TS) and feminist science studies (FSS). Here we reflect on how these changing institutional landscapes as well as increased demands for substantive ethics training create openings for novel institutional practices that embody core insights of S&TS and FSS. Specifically, we describe the creation of the Science & Justice Graduate Training Program at University of California, Santa Cruz. Taking its inspiration from recent feminist science studies re-workings of responsibility as response-ability, the SJTP created novel pedagogical and research practices that enabled collaboration across all divisions of the University. A focus on justice proved critical to our efforts. In its call to attend to the first principles that shape collective life, justice allowed us to open up the space of research ethics in novel ways, and helped us to create the basis for working across disciplines on shared problems and objects. As S&TS and FSS increasingly move toward generating new modes of gathering and practices of care, we suggest that justice might open up models of collectivity that fit better with the current zeitgeist and produce the kind of responsive knowledge and institutions long imagined.

#### [A Discussion on Experiments and Experimentation: NIH to Balance Sex in Cell and Animal Studies](#)

*Daphna Joel, Anelis Kaiser, Sarah S. Richardson, Stacey A. Ritz, Deboleena Roy, Banu Subramaniam*

In 2014, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) proposed a new policy to promote “sex parity” in research. As an extension to the 1993 NIH Revitalization Act which mandated the inclusion of women and minorities in clinical trials, the new NIH policy will require scientists to include “sex” as a variable in both animal model and in vitro cell line-based research. The end goal is to ensure that NIH funded scientists “balance male and female cells and animals in preclinical studies in all future applications” (Clayton and Collins 2014, 283). The curators of this section asked four interdisciplinary scholars to discuss this proposed policy.

#### [Ebola and its Discontents](#)

*Elke Mühlberger, Deboleena Roy, Pamela Scully, Banu Subramaniam, Jennifer Terry*

In the wake of the Ebola outbreak, the editorial board curators of this special section ask three interdisciplinary scholars to reflect on the global pandemic.

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