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Top of the Heap: Michael M.J. Fischer

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By Hannah Gibson



For this instalment of the Top of the Heap series, I spoke with Michael M.J. Fischer, Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities, Professor of Anthropology and Science and Technology Studies at MIT, and Lecturer in Social Medicine in the Department of Global Health and Social Medicine, Harvard Medical School.

Michael M.J. Fischer

Elizabeth Wilson's new book [Gut Feminism](#) (Duke 2015) arrives just in time and is on the top of my pile: a chapter from it is also in the new feminist STS online journal [Catalyst](#). Wilson's challenge for feminism to think with, rather than against, biology is refreshing. So too is a different take on depression: the opening pages on the brain and the cognitive-centric bias of psychiatry and feminism are great (and lucidly written).

Lei Sean Hsiang-Lin's [Neither Donkey nor Horse: Medicine in the Struggle over China's Modernity](#) (Chicago 2014) comes highly recommended by a number of friends and looks like a richly detailed integrative account. [Liz Chee Pui Yee](#) has just finished a fascinating dissertation at the National University of Singapore on pharmaceuticals and animal-based drugs

between 1950 and 1990 based on archival materials and interviewing which I've been following, and so I am looking forward to seeing how that articulates with Lei's work.

The edited volume [Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime](#) from editors Bolton, Christopher, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., and Takayuki Tatsumi (Minnesota 2007) is on my must-get-to list. Ever since the mid-1990s when a group of us began thinking about social theory, ethnography, life histories and technoscientific imaginaries (viz. the *Late Editions* volume called "[Technoscientific Imaginaries](#)" (Chicago 1994), I've been trying to integrate science-informed novels (e.g. [Richard Powers](#)), film, and visual materials. This collection comes highly recommended by friend and colleague [Ian Condry](#).

Renée C. Fox has a new book, [Doctors without Borders: Humanitarian Quests, Impossible Dreams of Médecins Sans Frontières](#) (Johns Hopkins 2014). This is the third major study by anthropologists and medical sociologists of MSF (see also [Didier Fassin](#) and [Peter Redfield](#)), and I look forward to the triangulation. She has been an inspiration in the field and I expect this to be good.

Michael Marder's [Plant Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life](#) (Columbia 2013) is also on the list: he is right that we have been so focussed in recent years on animal companion species that the rich tradition of thinking with plants (except as drug sources) needs reviving. ([Natasha Myers](#) has been doing some of this as well.) He's a really interesting thinker and I suspect that while not ethnographic or social-institution minded, this will be stimulating.

Richard Primack's [Walden Warming: Climate Change Comes to Thoreau's Woods](#) (Chicago 2014). While I'm fascinated by the classics in their own contexts, it is refreshing to think about restudies that insert old exemplars into the contemporary world. Primack has been doing fascinating work on forests and conservation, and I'm looking forward to taking a walk in the woods with him, climate change in mind.

[Michael M. J. Fischer](#) teaches at MIT in Science and Technology Studies and Anthropology and co-teaches an Introduction to Global Health course at the Harvard Medical School. He's been championing the anthropology of science and technology as an ethnographic and social theory contribution distinctive from SSK and ANT, ethnography as experimental form, and the contemporary global or transnational circuitry of STS as opposed to what he calls the obsessive Euro-American-centric canon, e.g.

"Biopolis: Asian Science in the Transnational Circuitry" (2013). With Joe Dumit, he edits the Duke University Press series, *Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices*; and with Byron Good, Mary Jo DelVecchio Good, and Sarah Willens, he co-edited [A Reader in Medical Anthropology: Theoretical Trajectories, Emergent Realities](#).

Image: [Book and Candle](#), Paul Mood

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