Introduction
Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience 2

Catalyst Editorial Board

Welcome to the second issue (Spring 2016) of Catalyst: Feminism,

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Theory, Technoscience, an international, peer-reviewed, open-source online journal published twice yearly.

This second issue leads off with an essay that was the recipient of the Catalyst Award at the 25th Annual International UCLA Center for the Study of Women Thinking Gender Conference (April 23-24, 2015). In “Redefining ‘Virgin Birth’ After Kaguya: Mammalian Parthenogenesis in Experimental Biology, 2004-2014,” Eva Mae Gillis-Buck takes up a line of inquiry around reproduction pioneered by Anne Fausto-Sterling and Sarah Franklin. She considers a host of responses to a 2004 experiment reporting the healthy birth and development of Kaguya, a mouse with two mothers and no father, to argue that radical understandings of sex and parenthood can be found even within scholarship that maintains the impossibility of mammalian parthenogenesis. Pathenotes (sperm-free ovum), Gillis-Buck writes, “are queer entities, non-human actors that challenge our cultural dualisms and demand new words to describe their existence.”

In the introduction to our first issue (Fall 2015), we suggested that one of Catalyst’s central aims is to incite new political and intellectual mixing of fields and approaches. Our second issue presents an extended special section cultivated through this catalysis. Over the past year, the journal received a number of submissions on militarism and digital culture. These essays were written from different field perspectives, mostly deriving from sociological STS and media studies. Keenly aware of scholarship emerging on this topic from points in and around feminist STS, the Catalyst editors invited authors into dialogue with one another prior to review so the papers could benefit from sustained exchange. Over the course of six months, we added more writers to the mix: some already active in feminist STS, and others variously working out of media studies, postcolonial studies, digital rhetoric, critical art practice, documentary filmmaking, and media anthropology.

The cover image of this issue of Catalyst features a photograph taken from the documentation of Soldadera, an important recent exhibition.
of works about the women of the Mexican revolution produced by Nao Bustamante, the American performance and media artist internationally recognized for her incisively political work on the body, sexuality, class and Mexican and Mexican-American identity and politics. The soldaderas that concern Bustamante are the women who fought in the Mexican Revolution, the armed national struggle between 1910 and 1920 that transformed Mexican culture. Bustamante conducted extensive research for the project, repurposing archival photographs and films, and affirming the overlooked narratives and perspectives of these women soldiers while also provoking conversation about their various roles in warfare, which included serving as domestic laborers and healthcare workers. Not unlike the contemporary Lioness soldiers described in this issue by Isra Ali, the soldaderas of the Mexican Revolution were enlisted not only for battle, but also to serve as cultural informants, serving as spies for the revolutionary forces and engaging in the tactile work of cultural mediation.

That the fabric of warfare entails the labor and bodies of women is well known, but the nature of that fabric, and how it coheres, is less clear. In other components of the series (exhibited at the Vincent Price Art Museum in 2015), Bustamante invited visitors to touch and to unravel the fringe on a shawl. The garment was modeled after those worn by the Soldaderas, except that the fiber is not silk or cotton, but Kevlar®, the bullet-resistant technical material of warfare developed by the chemist Stephanie Kwolek for the US company DuPont in 1965. A short video shows Bustamante herself in rifle training. Her target, improbably, is an empty dress: A golden yellow gown in the style worn by the Soldaderas that swings gaily from a tree branch, shimmering against the snow.
This dress is one of those tailored according to Bustamante's designs and displayed on mannequins and in vitrines in the Soldadera exhibition. A group of these mannequins appear in the photograph on the cover of this issue. Standing before a wall projection of a film Bustamante made from archival footage dating from the revolutionary period, they are just a little bigger than life in their oversized period dresses, all tailored from the same anachronistic synthetic. Typically used in the manufacture of protective gear for warfare, Kevlar® is an industrial product, a far cry from the linens and leather worn by the Soldaderas who appear in the historical projections.

Bustamante’s gun skills belie the logic of failsafe warfare design: her practice bullets lodge in the dress, evidence that the Kevlar® has resisted her assault on the fabric of warfare, but cannot fully keep it in check. The bullet tears are evidence of the vulnerability of the war game and its material arsenal to critique, and of the status of women as crafty perpetrators of fabric, mediation, tactility, and also as agents with a propensity to poke holes in putatively failsafe invention.
In *Attachments to War*, the book forthcoming from Duke excerpted in this issue, Jennifer Terry writes: “Attachments are relational. They can be strong, fragile, unstable, enduring, motivating, demoralizing, profitable, or devastating.” She emphasizes that war and biotechnology are, at this point in history, intimately and mutually attached. Bustamente’s attention to the material conditions as well as the metaphoricity of warfare’s technical fabric is refracted in the scholarly works published in this issue, all of which engage in ideas about the technological and biomedical aspects of war as the new everyday in digital times. Marisa Brandt, a communication studies and feminist STS scholar, and Emily Cohen Ibañez, a media anthropologist and filmmaker, both consider the immersive technologies used in military trauma therapy with war veterans. Brandt examines virtual militainment in an essay that offers a sustained discussion of *Bravemind* (formerly *Virtual Iraq/Afghanistan*), the immersive system used by the US military to provide psychological treatment for veterans diagnosed with neurological disorders. Brandt shows how *Bravemind*, though introduced as a tool for remediating PTSD and other
conditions, extends and reifies depoliticized logics of gendered trauma-narrative production. What is at stake in the virtual system, she shows, is not the ability of warfighters to share their memories of war (which is the goal on offer), but rather the ability of veterans (most of them men) to take control of their affective responses—and to do so in a system in which authority is displaced from the therapist (most of whom are women and civilians) to the virtual system.

Lucy Suchman and D. Andy Rice both consider simulation systems, with Suchman focusing on FlatWorld, an immersive military training simulation developed between 2001 and 2007 at the University of Southern California’s Institute for Creative Technologies. Suchman’s paper draws from an ongoing ethnography to take up, specifically, two archival sources: a tour video of FlatWorld staged by its designers in 2005, and a documentary about the program. At this juncture in her study, Suchman pursues the question of the ways in which boundaries between the real and the virtual are maintained and also traversed. How, she considers, does simulation training become performative of the real? And whose imaginaries are at play in the program’s design and promotion? Turning to Judith Butler’s classic 1993 text Bodies That Matter, Suchman tracks the different ways in which bodies are materialized in FlatWorld. The bodies involved include not only American users and the simulated American and Iraqi figures, but also the system’s researchers, producers, and trainers. Her account points to slippages and resistances through which the virtual system becomes the grounds for the production of the binary “us and them,” friend and enemy, in the course of training. Rather than showing us discrete identities performed and produced, Suchman shows the movement and slippages that occur within bodies and between them, in the shifting contexts of promotion, instruction for use, and play.

Training to train, and learning to see how military simulation works, is a level of consideration to which we need also to attend in order to better understand the practice of training for acts of war, and training as an act of warfare in itself. This is the territory of D. Andy Rice, as well, who considers embodied practice and the production of the real. His focus is
the live training simulations conducted at the Fort Irwin National Training Center in the California Mohave Desert, a veritable Baudrillardian “desert of the real” where proximity to Hollywood becomes an opportunity for the development of sets and the recruitment of talent to orchestrate for the US military simulated improvised explosive device attacks, suicide bombings, beheadings, sectarian infighting, protests, raids, and sweeps. Though multiple repeat performances with live actors, four thousand soldiers prepare for deployment, with filmmakers documenting the process live. One of the contributions Rice makes is to interpret the body of the camera operator in phenomenological terms, allowing us to see how the live staged performances and the performed simulation are integral with the embodied performance of its filming, just as journalists are embedded in the territory of war. Rice invites us to consider how cinematic structures of affect extend outside the theater and are turned on the world itself, in this case the world of the live-performed war simulation which precedes and models the real of war.

Isra Ali introduces a sustained interpretation of the role of tactical compassion offered to US women soldiers enlisted into contemporary warfare—specifically, their placement by the US military in Afghanistan and Iraq, in the 2010s, in special ops programs such as Lioness that are explicitly designed to use women as mediators and as cultural intelligence gatherers in situations where direct violence and male presence have been recognized to be less than successful, namely in situations where local women are off limits to male soldiers. The promotion by the US military of women soldiers’ presence as non-threatening “support” in the war zones, Ali explains, seems to be motivated by a sense that women can better perform what she describes as tactical tactility, the work of performing as soldiers of compassion, currying trust and promoting information sharing among women and men in Muslim communities. This labor has been encoded as a special form of competence performed both by women soldiers and women journalists after the military cultural turn, a point in the early 2000s at which the relative ineffectuality of the logics of violence was widely recognized. Ali cautions that in its enlistment of
women into the most critical zones, the military may come off as progressive and progressing to a neoliberal pro-war feminism. We must recognize the problematic situation, she notes, not only of US women soldiers performing in this gendered scheme of empowerment through enlistment into tactical compassion, but also that of Muslim women, who are situated as being in need of rights and empowerment on the model of the US woman soldier.

Kate Chandler’s essay offers a comparative read of the paradigm of the “unmanned” drone. Placing the term in historical context, Chandler reminds us that the term and the idea of pilotless operation predate the digital-era technology. Interpreting aspects of this history from the Cold War and earlier, Chandler shows the configuration of this technology’s particular strategies of misrecognition of subjective control. She also interprets a problematic text of the antiwar feminist art NGO Code Pink: Women for Peace, in which the humanization of war technology is achieved through a narrative framing that situates the woman as soldier-perpetrator in a maternal relationship to her victim, a civilian who the fictionalized soldier conflates with her own child.

We would like to conclude with a distinction about catalysis in interdisciplinary exchange. One often hears that interdisciplinary encounters can break down barriers between fields, which suggests that mixing creates a combination of fields that is integrally new and whole in its fabric. We wish to trouble that notion, suggesting that disjuncture and difference, the tenuousness of loose and weak threads, are internal to all fields and essential to the creative process of generative work. In this issue of Catalyst, many of the authors have never met in person; their papers are neither necessarily more unified as a group nor internally broader in scope as a result of their exchanges. The dialogue among these papers did not simply galvanize an argument or view, but rather generated a stronger sense, within each paper, of the specific threads of approach and politics informing each contribution. The result is a set of papers that reflect on each authors’ own field claims and histories, shaped and clarified by mutual inducement to identify stakes, working in some
cases not only with but also against some of the standards and expectations of both familiar and newly approached fields.

One might say of any project, identified as interdisciplinary or not, that the outcomes are never predictable or safe, and that by opening a project to other fields one has to forgo conditions such as consistency, authority, and unity of position. Reading within and across these papers, one can find new threads as well as older lines of thought about the digital, about visual digital practice, and about feminism and militarism. Challenging violent technologies, logics, and representations, the authors are passionate about the politics that their research marks and approaches.
The editorial board warmly thanks managing editor Cristina Visperas for her production leadership and creative contributions to the journal in its first two years of production. Welcome to Hannah Zeavin, managing editor for Summer 2016. We thank Monika Sengul-Jones for the original web design and for continuing contributions to infrastructure and promotion and Paola Mendez, Brenda Johnson-Grau and Alexandra Apolloni of UCLA, Caroline Warren of Emory and Hannah Zeavin of NYU for their assistance on Issue 2. The editorial board eagerly awaits our next issue, "Black Studies and Feminist Technoscience," co-edited by Cristina Visperas, Kimberly Juanita Brown, and Jared Sexton.

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References
