

Catalyst Lead Editing as Creative Worldbuilding

Laura A. Foster

Indiana University Bloomington

fosterl@iu.edu

Nassim Parvin

University of Washington

nassimi@uw.edu

Anne Pollock

King's College London

anne.pollock@kcl.ac.uk

Abstract

In this piece for the 10th anniversary issue, one of *Catalyst's* early lead editorial teams reflects on their experiences. A short collective introduction offers a metaphor of the journal as a garden that was inherited when it was already spring. Then, each of the trio in this lead editor team—Anne Pollock, Nassim Parvin, and Laura Foster—shares her reflections in turn, foregrounding different scales of the endeavor: cultivating authors, peer reviewers, and audiences; cultivating spaces of scholarship through design, accessibility, and trusting communities; and cultivating institutional alliances toward sustaining the journal and, with it, a flourishing ecosystem of scholarship in feminist technoscience.

Keywords

journal editing, worldbuilding, feminist peer review, accessible design, institutional support

Think of the journal *Catalyst* as a garden. As lead editors, we inherited that precious garden when it was already spring. The founding lead editorial teams had done the challenging work of starting the garden, and as its care and management fell to us,

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we felt an incredible sense of responsibility. The young plantings were still so vulnerable. But we also had anticipation and excitement: The seedlings were already impressive and beautiful, and there was promise of so many flowers and fruits to come, and of the visitors that the garden would attract. We welcomed the opportunity to do our part to sustain this precious garden, building on what was there and finding new ways to foster its growth and flourishing. Aware from the start that our seasons in this role were finite and that others would come after us to lead the tending and growing of this garden, the project was only ever partially ours. Fortunately, the garden of feminist technoscience that we inherited was and is a community garden. For us as lead editors, it was heartening to see how many were keen to join us and contribute to this work that has built this beautiful journal and, more broadly, created a space of feminist worldbuilding. In this reflective piece, we each contribute a section in turn that considers particular dimensions of the work before providing a joint conclusion.

Cultivating Authors, Reviewers, Editors, and Audiences— Anne Pollock

Our time as lead editors was a time of transition from the start. Deboleena Roy at Emory University had been centrally involved in the early planning work of setting up *Catalyst* with her Emory colleague Elizabeth Wilson, among others, and by 2017 was ready to take a turn as a member of the lead editorial team. I was nearby at Georgia Tech at the time, and Deboleena invited me to join her as part of an Atlanta-based lead team to commence in 2018. I had also been involved in conversations about the journal's planning but less centrally so, and I was excited about the opportunity, expressing enthusiasm and immediately suggesting that my Georgia Tech colleague Nassim Parvin would be an ideal complement to the team. But our new lead team would not be precisely Atlanta-based: I was already planning my move to King's College London. And so from 2018 to 2021, we were a lead team operating at a distance, with Deboleena leading on the institutional elements, Nassim on design and digital infrastructure elements, and me on peer review elements—all in close and mutually supportive collaboration.

My role, which I took over from Banu Subramaniam, focused on managing peer review for Independent Research submissions, and I also played a role supporting the guest editors of Special Sections. This was a good fit for my talents and passions, because of its combination of breadth and depth: I could draw on my large and diverse network of feminist STS scholars, and connect deeply with authors and reviewers in developing the work.

I found the work of supporting authors, especially early-career scholars developing their first contributions to our expanding interdisciplinary domain, to be profoundly rewarding. Many times, what started as seeds of ideas buried in

diffuse text became well-argued, compelling contributions to the flourishing field of feminist technoscience.

Moreover, I found working with peer reviewers to be surprisingly meaningful as well. The peer reviewer guidance for *Catalyst* had been structured in such a way that it shifted the task away from its conventional focus on exclusionary gatekeeping, and toward encouraging authors to contribute to growing the field. Even in cases in which pieces were ultimately not a fit for our venue, we strove to provide feedback that authors would find helpful. This was all part of an intentionally feminist peer review practice, and I could tell that that intentionality was also meaningful to authors and reviewers. During pandemic times, when recruiting peer reviewers was a broadly challenging endeavor across scholarly publishing, things were different at *Catalyst*: It became clear that peer reviewers in feminist technoscience prioritized this work for *Catalyst* even amidst so many burdens on their time, and that we all saw great value in the individual pieces that we were working to foster and the publishing ecosystem that we were collectively cultivating.

The categories of authors, peer reviewers, and editors are porous, and these contributors also form key parts of the journal's audience. Its profile rising, the journal was given the [Society for Social Studies of Science \(4S\) Infrastructure Award](#). Keen to continue the work of *Catalyst*'s founders in developing a simultaneously prestigious and inclusive venue for feminist technoscience, our team also took on outward-facing field-defining work. Our five-year anniversary event, held online during the COVID-19 pandemic and organized through Nassim Parvin's Design and Justice Studio with funding from the Mellon Foundation together with our Book Review Editor Sonja van Wichelen and board member Mara Mills, alongside our Managing Editors Caroline Warren and Aditya Anupam, was a highlight.

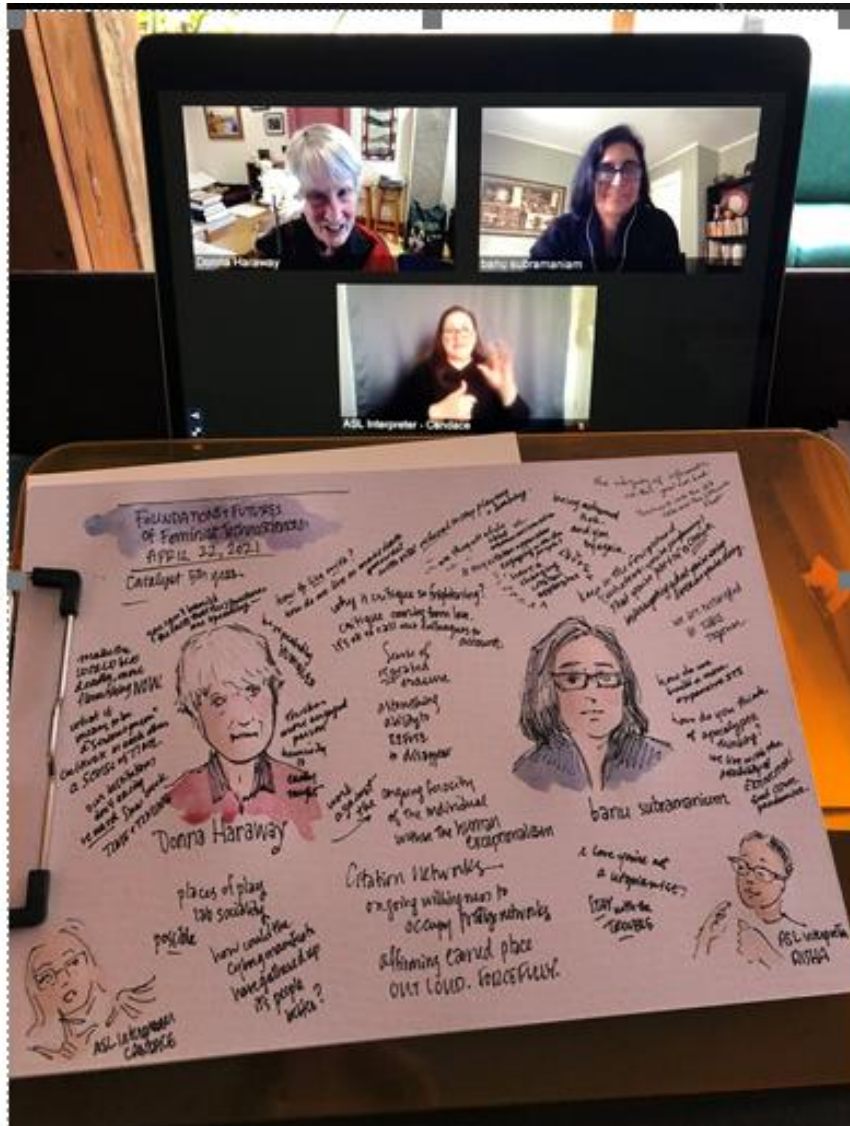


Figure 1. Jojo Karlin participated in the fifth anniversary events and created this illustration of the conversation between Donna Haraway and Banu Subramaniam. Information about the artist: <https://www.jojokarlin.com/about/>

The three-part event featured Donna Haraway and Banu Subramaniam in conversation about “Foundations of Feminist Technoscience,” Moya Bailey, Max Liboiron, Tania Pérez-Bustos, and Thao Phan in conversation about “Futures of Feminist Technoscience,” and a Crip Feminist Dance Party. Discussion of the role of *Catalyst* in sustaining and advancing feminist science studies, including this anniversary event, closes the recent book *Our Science, Ourselves: How Gender, Race, and Social Movements Shaped the Study of Science*, and also uses a garden metaphor: “The seeds planted long ago are continuing to bear fruit” (Kuljian 2024, 219). For me, that anniversary event epitomized *Catalyst* as a labor of love—a lot of labor, and a lot of love.

With an eye to ensuring that future editorial collectives would have an easier learning curve, we decided to implement a rotating transition: Deboleena rolled off the lead editorial team in 2021 (replaced by Laura Foster); I would do so in 2022 (replaced by Aimee Bahng); Nassim would do so in 2023 (replaced by a new structure entirely!). I have been glad to continue to have opportunities to support *Catalyst's* flourishing, across scales: on an individual level as a formal or informal advisor to junior scholars keen to publish there, on a collective level as a continuing Editorial Board member, and at the intersections of other domains of STS scholarly infrastructures in my capacity as president of 4S. It is an honor to have this chance to reflect in its tenth anniversary issue on my small contributions along the way to *Catalyst's* project of feminist worldbuilding.

Cultivating Spaces of Scholarship: Design, Accessibility, and Trusting Communities—Nassim Parvin

Joining the editorial team of *Catalyst* was both exhilarating and scary. I was both the most junior member of the team with a disciplinary background that was not represented widely either in the editorial team or the author list till then. This turned out to be an opportunity to see the journal with fresh eyes and to find out ways that it can be more open to feminist work in design studies, media arts, and other adjacent fields. As a first step, I immersed myself in the past issues and was immediately struck by a few things. Compared to other journal venues in the field, I was impressed that it was ahead of its time in accessibility, providing both HTML and PDF formats. Yet platforms and possibilities had improved since the initial design, and the time was ripe for a design refresh to improve the journal's visual cohesion and contemporary appeal. This gave us the opportunity to elevate the journal's aesthetic to better reflect the quality of its content.

In talking with former editors and contributors to the journal, I was able to gain an understanding of some of the constraints that they had navigated as a new journal leading to the existing look and feel. These included low budget, emphasis on minimizing labor while offering both HTML and PDF options for readership as well as an uncompromising principle of accessibility. In consultation with my students, including the generous contributions of Ridhima Gupta, Aditya Anupam, Yash Lara, and Ren Zheng, we built on these principles to further develop the aesthetics of the journal with attention to details such as text margins and choice of typefaces to broader page layouts to accommodate different kinds of images and graphs, accessible captioning, consistency across formats, and ease of implementation across platforms.

Redesigning the layout also served as an opportunity to critically engage with the different epistemologies and research methodologies that the journal aims to support. In rethinking the form, we revisited our commitments to diverse modes of knowledge production and representation. This involved a renewed focus on

our existing “text and image” genre, exploring how it might evolve to more intentionally foreground the work of artists, designers, and scholars who engage with a broad spectrum of materials—from archival photographs and artistic works to data visualizations, graphs, and maps, and thus create a space for interdisciplinary conversations that unfold not only through text but also through visual argumentation.

We used this new foundation to make the process of putting together each issue smoother and more collaborative, while also opening the journal up to a wider range of readers and viewers. At the same time, we more explicitly solicited creative genres and worked with our authors to further develop their pieces in order to exemplify critical feminist and creative approaches to STS scholarship—such as a speculative mapping of smart cities (Dortdivanlioglu 2021), to a satirical piece on tech startups in India (Gupta 2020).

We also simplified the logo for clarity and timelessness, and introduced a modular grid system for the cover design to allow for greater flexibility while maintaining visual coherence across issues, making the journal’s evolving identity more legible while easy to refresh and customize from one issue to another. One exciting result of the stronger visual design was that artists became more enthusiastic both for having their work featured and for creating original covers that responded to each issue, accompanied by artist statements and commentaries (Figure 2).

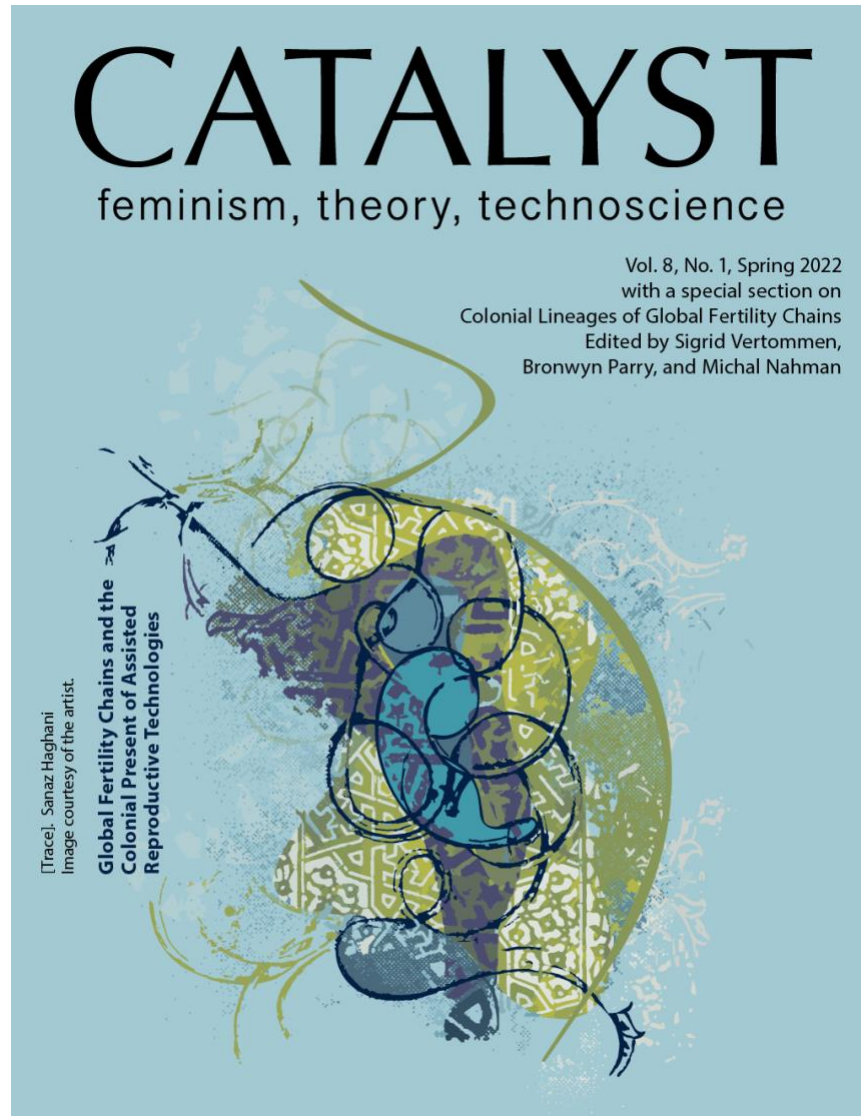


Figure 2. Artist Sanaz Haghani's response to the Special Section on Global Fertility Chains

The bold, consistent look of our covers also helped us build a stronger online presence, especially on platforms such as Facebook and former Twitter. Our audience grew dramatically—we gained ten times more followers—and that helped bring more attention to our contributors, even those who were not active on social media or may not have the time or tools to promote their work. Together, through renewed attention to design nuances—from the fine details of page layout to the thoughtful inclusion of art that reflected each issue's sophistication—and with a strengthened online presence, we cultivated scholarly spaces to advance the reach and impact of feminist thought.

Cultivating Institutional Alliances—Laura A. Foster

One of the central challenges of our time as co-lead editors of *Catalyst* was advocating for sustained institutional support. As the journal grew in scope and reputation, so did the workload and the need for reliable infrastructure. After serving two years as co-book review editor with Sonja Van Wichelen, I joined as co-lead editor in June 2021. Building off previous successful requests for institutional support made by Murphy (University of Toronto) and Deboleena Roy (Emory University), I wrote a detailed proposal and spoke to administrators at Indiana University Bloomington to make the case that feminist journals like *Catalyst* are not only intellectually vital but also deserving of real institutional investment. This work required translating our values of collaboration, accessibility, and mentorship into the language of metrics, rankings, and visibility, and the request was approved. *Catalyst* received three years of funding to go towards copyediting costs and a graduate student manager, which included full tuition, fees, and health insurance. I received a course release and ultimately redirected the additional funds awarded for marketing, outreach, and conference travel to fully support the work of our long-time copyeditor, Joanne Muzak, whose expertise has been essential to maintaining the journal's high editorial standards.

Unlike many journals anchored by traditional publishers or professional societies, *Catalyst* is collectively run and intentionally independent. That independence is a strength, but it also means we must continually build and maintain the scaffolding ourselves. We highly depend upon institutional support and time from our editorial board members. For example, Mara Mills (NYU) contributed a summer graduate assistantship and copyediting support through her research funds; Irina Aristarkhova (University of Michigan) also allocated funds to help cover copyediting costs; and the 4S Council provided funding to support graduate student managing editors in training their successors. I also worked diligently with the Indiana University Foundation to set up a [foundation account](#) to enable the journal to receive more long-term funds and enable donors to give a tax-exempt donation to *Catalyst*. This institutional support was central to the long-term survival of *Catalyst* and its commitment to anti-racist, queer, trans, and decolonial feminist work. It enabled us to keep the journal Diamond Open Access, uphold rigorous editorial standards, and respond to the growing volume of submissions from scholars across disciplines and regions. These efforts helped strengthen the journal, allowing new branches to emerge—each one extending *Catalyst's* reach while remaining grounded in feminist commitments.

At the heart of this effort was the belief that feminist publishing isn't just about producing scholarship—it's also about mentoring the next generation of scholars, editors, and thinkers committed to collective knowledge-making. Graduate student involvement has been a core part of *Catalyst's* editorial model since the beginning, not only for what students contribute to the journal but also for the hands-on training they receive in feminist publishing. From 2019 to 2024, this

included Yash Lara, Caroline Warren, Sara Kass, Hoan Nguyen, Lauren Savit, Michelle Pfeifer, Aditya Anupam, Sandra Carpenter, Ren Zheng, Janelle Li, Sunny Jeong-Eimer, and Hyo Jung. As managing and assistant managing editors, they developed concrete skills in open access publishing, digital production, collaborative editing, and critical engagement with intersectional scholarship. This is not peripheral to the journal's mission—it is a strong element of the mission. Our editorial model is rooted in feminist commitments to shared labor, care ethics, and accountability, which means that graduate students are co-creators in the mission and vision of the journal.

My role also included bolstering the institutional operations of the journal to ensure its long-term sustainability. I focused on streamlining our editorial workflows by clarifying timelines and reviewing final manuscripts prior to production. Recognizing the need to formalize our publishing practices in ways that aligned with open access ethics and author protections, I drafted a new author/artist publishing agreement that updated our copyright policies and licensing terms. I also collaborated with Anne and Nassim to strengthen our Editorial Board and its governing processes, inviting new members who reflected the journal's commitments to intersectional, transnational, and decolonial feminist scholarship. Most significantly, I helped envision and implement (along with Irina Aristarkhova) a new editorial team structure in 2024 by introducing associate editors, a move designed to distribute labor more equitably, support mentorship across career stages, and ensure the editorial collective could continue to grow in scale and ambition without sacrificing our feminist values of collaboration and care. This new structure allowed the editorial collective to branch out by sharing responsibility across a wider network and allowing new ideas, methods, and voices to take root.

This commitment to fortifying the internal infrastructures of the journal also extended to forging alliances across the broader field of science and technology studies. In 2022 *Catalyst* helped lead the field of STS by co-organizing a writing workshop in Cholula, Mexico, that was financially supported by 4S and held just before the joint 4S/ESOCITE (Estudios Sociales de la Ciencia y la Tecnología) meeting. The workshop was for early-career scholars from the Global South based at institutions primarily in Latin America, but also including India and the United States. The event was co-led by a transnational team of editors from across the 4S-affiliated journals, including *Catalyst* (Laura Foster and Anne Pollock), *Science, Technology, & Human Values* (Timothy Neale and Courtney Addison), *East Asian Science, Technology and Society* (Wen-Hua Kuo), *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* (Aalok Khandekar, Noela Invernizzi, and Emily York), *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society* (Leandro Rodriguez Medina), and *Social Studies of Science* (Nicole Nelson). Leandro Rodriguez Medina also arranged onsite logistical support and catering that created an incredibly welcoming and supportive space for participants.

Together, this transnational team reviewed applications and facilitated two days of collaborative programming that supported early-career scholars through mentorship, community building, and structured peer review of draft manuscripts. The workshop exemplified *Catalyst's* long-standing commitment to decolonial feminist praxis and to shaping the conditions of knowledge production beyond publication alone through collectivity. By fostering transnational dialogue, mentoring emerging scholars, and rethinking the infrastructures of scholarly publishing, the workshop contributed to a more inclusive and globally connected STS field. It also strengthened relationships among the 4S-affiliated journals, modeling the kinds of inter-journal collaboration that are necessary to support the next generation of feminist and anti-colonial STS scholars. These collaborations were like grafts from other gardens, strengthening our shared canopy and allowing the flourishing of feminist technoscience across new terrains.

Conclusion

We reflect on our time as co-lead editors with deep gratitude—not only for how *Catalyst* has grown but for the many tending hands that make it possible. Like any flourishing garden, the journal depends on care at many scales: tending to individual editors, authors, reviewers, and readers; cultivating shared spaces through design, accessibility, and community; and securing the institutional roots needed to sustain its growth. Through these practices, *Catalyst* has fostered vibrant worlds of feminist technoscience—worlds where emerging scholars are mentored into publication, where new genres of critical inquiry take shape, and where collaboration is grounded in care rather than competition. We have endeavored to, drawing on Ruha Benjamin's (2022) evocative articulation, "grow the world we want." *Catalyst* is not a product, nor is it finished, but it is an ongoing worldbuilding process—a shared, evolving space for growth, care, and renewal. We are honored to have helped tend it for a time, and excited to see how it continues to take root and flourish.

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Author Bios

Laura A. Foster is associate professor of Gender Studies and Affiliate Faculty in African Studies and Maurer School of Law at Indiana University Bloomington. She is also a Senior Research Associate in the Intellectual Property Unit at the University of Cape Town, Faculty of Law. She is author of *Reinventing Hoodia: Peoples, Plants, and Patents in South Africa*, and currently serves on the editorial boards of *Catalyst* and *Science, Technology, & Human Values*.

Nassim Parvin is a Professor at the University of Washington (UW) Information School, where she also serves as the Associate Dean for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access & Sovereignty (IDEAS). Her research integrates theoretically-driven humanistic scholarship and design-based inquiry. Her papers have appeared in design, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), and STS venues. Her designs have been deployed at nonprofit organizations and exhibited in venues such as the Smithsonian Museum. She is the co-author and co-editor of the book *Technocreep and the Politics of Things Not Seen* (2025).

Anne Pollock is professor of Global Health and Social Medicine at King's College London. She is author of three books, most recently *Sickening: Anti-Black Racism and Health Disparities in the United States* (2021), and coauthor with Nadine Ehlers, Anthony Ryan Hatch, and Amade Aouatef M'charek of *The Racial Cage* (2025). She currently serves as the president of the Society for Social Studies of Science, and as an editor at *BioSocieties*.