



CALL FOR PAPERS

Science and Technology of the later Nineteenth Century: Zola and his Contemporaries

International Conference (Paris, France)

Thursday 22 January–Friday 23 January 2026

Venues: École Polytechnique (Palaiseau), École Normale Supérieure (Ulm)

This international literary and multidisciplinary Conference on science and technology in the era of Émile Zola is organised by the École Polytechnique, the Émile Zola Society (London), and the Centre d'étude sur Zola et le Naturalisme (ITEM CNRS/ENS-PSL).

We invite proposals for conference papers on all aspects of science et technology relative to Émile Zola, Naturalist thinkers and writers, and scientists of the second half of the nineteenth century. The colloquium works both within and beyond the borders of France. Internationally, scientists in this era engaged in experimental and theoretically in areas epistemological, ethical and political, pedagogical, and social. Scientific advances across the later nineteenth century had major impact(s) on society and culture. The reverberations of scientific and technological change shaped debates and discussion, enabled innovations, and sparked artistic, literary, and scientific controversies. Many of the interrogations of that era continue to resonate powerfully in our own age of accelerating scientific, technical, and technological change.

The conference has four main axes:

1. Scientific memory: its history and its methods

- a. Scientific archives: philological, genetic, and cultural approaches to collections, manuscripts, typescripts, and epistolary sources
- b. Epistemological methods of the later nineteenth century and the cultures of technology: advertising, forms of popularisation, pedagogy, the press, world exhibitions; claims and counter-claims, deception and trickery (Zola), parodies of invention (Villiers de l'Isle Adam), alienation, and naivety (Flaubert).

2. Interdisciplinary approaches to the works of Zola and Naturalist writers.

The focus here is on literary, artistic, documentary, and journalistic representations of science and technology:

- a. Fictions, myths, and visual representations of the writer as physician, scientist, polymath, and engineer
- b. The role of documenters, popularisers, encyclopaedic genetics and poetics (word-and-image representations of technical innovations; the integration of science in narrative fiction); experimental methods and the relations between doctrinal naturalism and naturalist fiction ;
- c. Technophilia / technophobia : values, debates, and controversies around 'progress' (political, aesthetic, moral).

3. The contemporary reception of scientific and technological heritage of Naturalist writers and scientific community of the second half of the nineteenth century: the posthuman, the digital machine, robotics, the postcolonial, European and global entanglements; gender; ethical and cultural challenges. This will allow us to draw out the connections, and also the breaks, between the past and the c20th and c21st, and establish fresh paradigms for understanding the contemporary history of science beyond analogies and symmetries.

4. The editing and interpreting of archives and the cultural legacy of science in the 21st century through the prism of digital technologies (semantic web, digital humanities, Text Encoding Initiative, Artificial Intelligence) and medical advances (genetics, cloning, transplant surgery)

The thematic scope of the colloquium includes (but it not restricted to) the following topic areas:

Agricultural sciences

Animal studies

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Biology

Botany

Chemistry

Civil engineering

Commercialisation of science and technology

Darwinism

Data and information science

Democracy

Determinism(s)

Digital humanities

Dreyfus Affair

Ecologies

Energy science

Entomology
Epistemologies
Ethics in science
Feminisms and science
Genetics and intergenerational transmission
Geometry
History of sciences
Hydrology
Informatics and Zola/his contemporaries
Maritime science
Mathematical sciences
Mechanical engineering
Medical sciences and life sciences
Physics
Physiologies and pathologies
Popular understandings of science
Parody, pastiche, and caricature
Science and belief
Science and gender
Science and race/colonialism
Science and the Republic
Science and sexualities
Scientific gaze
World exhibition
Zoology

We invite proposals (max. 300 words) for papers of 20 minutes. Papers may be given in English or French. Please indicate 4–6 key words that capture your angle of approach to the conference topic. Proposals should be accompanied by a short bio-bibliographic profile.

We also invite proposals for panels of 3–4 speakers including the lead proposer of the panel. Panel proposals, submitted by the panel lead, will comprise an overview and *raison d'être* of the panel together with the proposals of each speaker.

Proposals, individual and panel, should be submitted by 20 juin 2025 on
<https://sciencezola2026.sciencesconf.org>

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