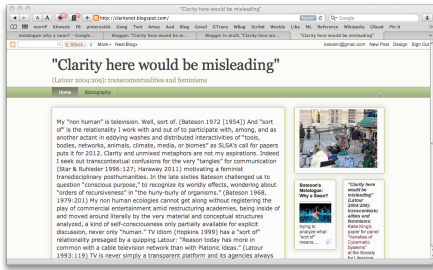


Handout: King, for “Varieties of Cybernetic Systems” at the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts (SLSA) Annual Conference: Non-human; 30 September, 2012, Milwaukee WI

“Clarity here would be misleading” (Latour 2004:209): *transcontextualities and feminisms*

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“Daughter: why a swan? / Father: Yes - and why a puppet in Petroushka?  
 D: No - that's different. After all a puppet is sort of human - and that particular puppet is very human. / F: More human than people? / D: Yes. / F: But still only sort of human? And after all the swan is also sort of human. / D: Yes. ...  
 “D: But what about the dancer? Is she human? Of course she really is, but, on the stage, she seems inhuman or impersonal - perhaps superhuman. I don't know. / F: You mean - that while the swan is only a sort of swan and has no webbing between her toes, the dancer seems only sort of human. / D: I don't know - perhaps it's something like that.” (Bateson 1972 [1954]:33)

• “People often cannot see what they take for granted until they encounter someone who does not take it for granted.” (Bowker and Star 1999: 305)

**NON HUMAN? WHY TELEVISION?**

Television helps us recognize our distributed human being, as it works as both metaphor and reality for how stories and actions are partially human and non human.

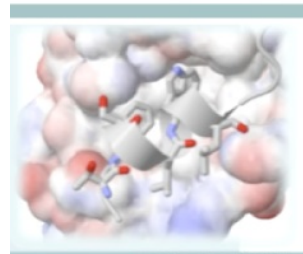
**VIBRANTLY MATTERING**

How to be an agent among the complex worldly processes humans are not the controllers of, but bits within; studies of emergence and self-organization. EMBEDDED REALITIES across transmedia storytelling. "Academic practices of all kinds are now also enlisted as kinds of transmedia storytelling. I call these Queer Transdisciplinities, but not in a move to enlist them in identity politics, although sometimes they very explicitly and quite properly are, inside my own feminist fields of interest and attention. Rather, my point in naming them thus is to watch them ‘queer the pitch’: they require us to attend to, to learn to be affected by, the political economies of knowledge worlds, to how interlinked now are the economies of entertainment, knowledge laborings, globally restructured academics, governmentalities, and infrastructures of communication." (King 2011, “Queering the Pitch.”)



**DOUBLED CONSCIOUSNESS IN PLAY**

Bateson taught that as animals and children learn to play they come to know that there are some ways a play self can and must be separated from an everyday self, and they learn to perform this separation in interactive cognitive and social communication forms of “not”: they amuse themselves by performing the communication “this is not it.” The puppy nips, but not hard enough to injure. (Violence? Not.) The teen kisses in spin the bottle, but not necessarily the person they like the most. (Sex? Not.) Yet at the same time there are also other ways in which these selves simply are not separated, in certain physiological processes and psychological equivalences. The nip actually hurts a bit, the kissing blush and stammer. A double consciousness of being in both these states at the same time is possible, as Bateson puts it in formal terms, because play creates its own commentary in itself about itself as an intense and pleasurable interactive dynamism — communicatively social, as well as neurological and hormonal. Such metacommunications — or communications about communication — are performed by embodied selves at multiple “levels” of organic and social system, some sequentially, some simultaneously. (Bateson 1972, 1979)



**A FEMINIST TRANSDISCIPLINARY POSTHUMANITIES:** Under global academic restructuring –

- movement among knowledge worlds is mandated -- in terms hardly consistent
- interdisciplinarity -- justifies consolidated units and resources
- restructuring promotes an easily assessed instrumental practicality, as if the standard for good interdisciplinary methodology was easy assessment
- disciplinary chauvinisms – are made urgent, personal and compensatory
- quantitative assessments of productivity and authority -- measures for advancement, status or just getting a job done
- establishing and maintaining authority in an environment in which many knowledge worlds compete
- the empirical, the data-driven, the concrete, and the local are all more manageable, more easily broken up into task, then held accountable to a very particular set of folks and their properly urgent ethics
- Yet diverging knowledge worlds keep making such management problematic, uneven, partial, at times virtually impossible



The “rigor” of transcontextual feminist methods comes into play when we welcome peripheral participations (robust across sites) as well as work for an exquisite sensitivity to each horizon of possible resources and infrastructures, local exigencies, and differential memberships (plastic and local). Transcontextual feminisms as I have come to understand them, work to remain curious, even about

and in the midst the affects of affiliation and disidentification, scoping extensively and scaling intensively among *Ecologies of Knowledge*. (In memory of Susan Leigh Star and her work such as Star 1995)

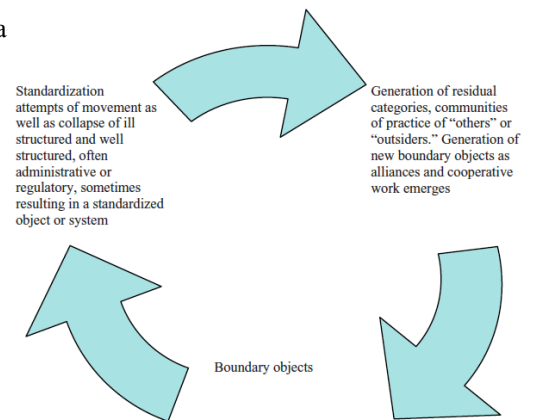
**INTENSIVE PRACTICES**, *knowledges, definitions, boundary work: closely negotiated among relatively bounded communities of practice; such as disciplines-in-the-making, local alliances, threatened units, long-lived organizations; emphasis on rigor and membership*

**EXTENSIVE PRACTICES**, *knowledges, definitions, boundary work: speculative connections, practical coalitions, trial and error learning; such as transdisciplinary projects, transmedia storytelling, alternative practices-in-the-making; emphasis on peripheral participation and the edges of standardized practices*

- **EXTENSIVE investigations perpendicularly analyze relative and relational shifts across authoritative and alternative knowledges**
- **EXTENSIVE displays can work without displacing INTENSIVE work of specific communities of practice**

## ENTANGLED

Leigh Star refers to Gregory Bateson when she reflects on the origins of the concept of a deeper into the relations between developers and users, it became clear that a kind of communicative tangle was occurring. I used the work of Gregory Bateson, who had studied these sorts of communicative mishaps under the heading of ‘double binds.’ As with Bateson’s work on schizophrenics, and what he called ‘the transcontextual syndrome,’ the messages that were coming at level one from the systems developers were not being heard on that level by the users and vice versa. What was obvious to was a mystery to another. What was trivial to one was a barrier to another. Yet, clarifying this was never easy. The users liked the interface when they were sat in front of it. Yet, they did not know how to make a reliable working infrastructure out of it. They would ask the ... team, who would reply in terms alien to them. I began to see this as a problem of infrastructure – and its relative nature.” (Star 2010: 610)



## TRANSCONTEXTUAL TANGLES & BOUNDARY OBJECTS

Such reflective analysis of “the transcontextual syndrome” led feminist theorist Susan Leigh Star to this concept “boundary objects,” which, in a last essay before her sudden death in 2011, she defined as “organic infrastructures” that address “information and work requirements” as perceived locally and by groups that wish to cooperate.” (Star 2010:602; Star & Griesemer 1989, Star & Ruhleder 1996, Bowker & Star 1999)

## A DOUBLE BIND IS

- **intense**: needing fine discriminations between kinds of messages for urgent appropriate response as survival appears to be at stake
- **contradictory**: and this at two different orders of message, each of which denies the other
- **unvoiced**: not permitting the meta-communicative statements that check one’s choice of what kind of message is appropriate for response, or otherwise making such checks of context impossible, inappropriate or meaningless. (See Bateson 1972)

## WORLD COUNTER-PARTS, A SENSORY MEDIUM AND A SENSITIVE WORLD

New media infrastructures, boundary objects, and processes of learning also work across redistributed agencies, ones not located simply in the consciousness of individual humans in seeming control, but rather ones emergent across materialities of social media old and new, together with beings and economies and knowledge workers and neurobiological systems, affecting and being affected. "Thus body parts are progressively acquired at the same time that 'world counter-parts' are being registered in a new way. Acquiring a body is thus a progressive enterprise that produces at once a sensory medium and a sensitive world." (Latour 2004: 207)

**References (more online): With appreciation and wonder always from inspirations by Donna Haraway and SF feminisms....**

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