Power, technology and the phenomenology of conventions: on being allergic to onions

By Susan Leigh Star

Presantation:
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Susan “Leigh” Star (1954-2010)

- The moral-political consequences of classification systems
- L*?
Consepts

- ANT (Latour)
- Feminism
- Heterogeneity
- Standards/conventions
- Marginality
- Multiple membership
- High tension zones
What does STS do?

• Sociology of science:
  – Study of heterogeneity (the nature of opposition, or contrariety of qualities)
  – Understand standardization

→ Star is searching for: Alternative modes of heterogeneity
Many ways of having many faces

• We become multiple for many reasons:
  – 1: The executive (Pasteur, exercise of power)
  – 2: The tortured split self
  – 3: The marginalized
Supporting the monsters

• Unlike Latour, wants to take sides.
• Wants to start with the outcast and the monster. Ourselves as monsters, cyborgs, impure.
• **Refuse the images of the executive** where the work that is delegated is not shown. **Not become pure.** Accept **multiple membership.** Refusing translation.
• “…a collective resistance (...) the personal is political” (Star 1991: 30)
The problem with (techno)science

• Science freezes knowledge inside black boxes
• Technology has played a mayor part in problem solving (ignored before)
• Science has in a larger sense legitimized other activities
• As a social glue, has a special place in making social order.
How truths are made

• **Interessment**: Translation of knowledge from one realm to another. And disciplining it to stabilize a powerful network.

• How to discuses the suppressed? Is this goal meaningless or is the creation of scientific fact bias towards the victor, and warlike?
Mission: provide some tools to help these discussions.

• 1: Find resources to do more work on traditionally underrepresented perspectives
• 2: Using multiplicity as the point of departure
• 3: How to model (not translate) the heterogeneities in any network
Being allergic to onions

- McDonald’s scenario
  - value system and behaviors
- Adjusting politics and market
  - the field of “special needs”
- Two illusions;
  - misfit between standardized/conventional technological systems and individual needs
  - perfect flexibility
Sociology of technology’s many faces

• McDonald’s market success
• McDonald’s culture of exclusion
• Feminist analysis VS ANT approach;
  - including the “non-user”
  - heterogeneity
  - cyborg; relationship between standardized technologies an local experience
Critique of ANT

• Stabilizing networks over time
• Lack of irreversibility
  - science studies
  - establishing the Truth
  - who benefits from networks externalities?
• Establishment of new communities;
  - either too expensive or alternative communities are developed
  - Becker’s analysis of maverick artists (1982);
    - how external politics affect communities of practice
  - “(...) the sets of conventions are never stable for non-members [within networks]” Star 1991:41
Distribution of the conventional

• Looking beyond human/nonhuman (actor) mingling
  - beneficial networks, for whom?
    - the former, user and maintainer of networks
  - boundaries within networks
  - establishment of meeting point between externalities and internalities, also within science studies
  - establishment of standards
• “The productivity paradox” (David 1989);
  - economy – technology – production
The transition regime hypothesis

- Invisible work of practice
- balancing membership
- politics of identity

they are critical for the economics of networks
high tension zone

• a kind of zero point between dichotomies: male/female, society/technology, either/or
• Jan: transsexual surgery example
• elements of splitting involve:
  -- multiple membership
  -- maintaining the 'high tension' zone while acknowledging the cost of maintaining it
  -- the cost of membership in multiple arenas
  -- multivocality and translation
Multiple memberships, multiple marginalities

- multiple memberships play itself in the human relations
- change from marginality to membership

We are all marginal in some regard, as members of more than one community of practice.
Concluding thoughts

• Star wants tools to be able to talk about the outsiders, the people in the high tension zones.
• She wants flexible standards within science and society
• But what form of society does she really want?
Freaky, freaky canine cyborgs