

SUSAN LEIGH STAR (1954-2010)

Susan Leigh Star was a pioneer in the study of organizing information. Much of her work was guided by interests in both technology and feminism. She is best known for developing the concept of boundary objects and invisible work. Star passed away unexpectedly on March 24, 2010.

INFLUENTIAL WORKS BY TOPIC

History

- Religions of the Mind: Brain Research and the Quest for Scientific Certainty (1989)

Science and Technology

- Ecologies of Knowledge: Work and Politics in Science and Technology (1995)

Communication and Computer Science

- The Cultures of Computing (1995)

Sociology

- Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences (2000)
- Standards and their Stories: How Quantifying, Classifying and Formalizing Practices Shape Everyday Life (2009)

"THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF INFRASTRUCTURE"

- Applied ethnography to the "mundane" aspects of cyberspace, its infrastructure
- Defined infrastructure as having a *relational*, not objective, definition, comprising the following dimensions:
 - Embeddedness
 - Transparency
 - Reach or Scope
 - Learned as part of a membership
 - Links with conventions of practice
 - Embodiment of standards
 - Built on an installed base
 - Becomes visible upon breakdown
 - Is fixed in modular increments, not all at once or globally



CREDIT:
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CONNECTIONS

- **Mark Zachry** - Interviewed Star in 2008. Discussed her career and contributions in-depth.
- **Lucy Suchman** - Anthropologist well-known for her work in HCI. Built off Star's work in "the intersections of lived experience, technologies and silences," for her paper "Remote Control: Asymmetric Entanglements of Bodies and Machines."
- **Yrjö Engeström** - Influential figure in Activity Theory. Star authored a chapter of his book *Cognition and Communication at Work*.

CONTRIBUTION

Susan Leigh Star's contributions to the areas of sociology, computer science and beyond are too vast to list. She is described as having a "profound understanding of technology with a humanistic perspective." She was "among the first" to bring ethnography into information science and "[t]hrough her original and path breaking work," she contributed many new insights and methods to our field.

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