

## Situated Knowledges

### I • Preliminaries

- A. Intro
  - 1. Say a few things about this paper. Suspect people will have had strong reactions to it.
  - 2. Paper itself
    - a. *Very famous*. — Part of the “canon” of the “situated cognition” movement
    - b. Yet not part of cog sci at all.
  - 3. Haraway
    - a. Primatologist. Wrote a book called *Primate Vision* in 1990 (and an earlier book on metaphors etc. in developmental biology as early as 1976?)
    - b. Teaches in the History of Consciousness Program at UCSD.
    - c. Has become something of an academic superstar, icon for feminist sociology of science
    - d. Also (from what I know of her) a very gracious, intelligent woman. So pugnacious attitude in writing is something of a (political) act. We will talk about that in a moment.
- B. Paper
  - 1. Why are we reading it?
  - 2. Why assign it right after Haugeland?
  - 3. Spend a few minutes explaining this, to put it in context.
  - 4. Two parts
    - a. **Part I — Context:** Theoretical Scaffolding in terms of which I will analyse it
    - b. **Part II — Content:** Step through the paper, section by section.

### Part I — Context

### II • Groundwork • I — Self-reference

- A. Very elementary point: just remind ourselves of it
- B. Intro
  - 1. Cog sci studies how cognition work—qua subject matter.
  - 2. I.e. (as always) at one level of remove
    - a. **Meta-level** (level of observation): us, theories, models, claims, etc.
    - b. “Object level” (I prefer “**subject level**”): what cognition is like

3. But of course we ourselves (qua theorists) are also cognitive
  4. So if our theories are right, they should apply to us
  5. Call this the **reflexivity** (kind of *self-reference* or *self-applicability*) of cognitive science
  6. We are *using*, not just *mentioning* our minds/brains (◆)
- C. Leads to certain constraints
1. Seriousness
    - a. Cf. standard remark to undergraduates: shouldn't write a paper making some claim in cognitive science unless one is prepared to take it to hold of one's friends, family, and lovers—and of oneself.
    - b. This is *us* we are talking about (obviously enough)
  2. Reflexive integrity condition
    - a. What we say, about how cognition is, we should say in a way which is consistent with the content of our (subject matter claims).
    - b. I.e., if one doesn't think cognition consists in the formal axiomatisation of world knowledge, and reasoning in the logical deduction of (valid) consequences of our knowledge, then one shouldn't adopt a model of scientific theory *axiomatising this claim*.
    - c. Call this consistency check a criterion of **reflexive integrity**
- D. "Living" our theories
1. Consequences of integrity condition can be seen when one starts advocating non-standard cognitivist theories
  2. Traditional third-person stance
    - a. One way to understand this: normally, we do cog sci (including here in 3M) from a *third-person point of view*
    - b. What would it be like—what is it like—for *some critter* ("over there") to be embodied, situated, to use distributed representations, etc.
    - c. I.e., something third-person—thereby kind of **safe**
  3. First-person
    - a. But since it is *us* we are studying, the question arises as to what it would be (or is) *like* for these views to hold of us
    - b. What it is like in our theorizing
    - c. What it is like in our daily lives
  4. I.e., **what is it like to live** under the strictures of situated cognition (rather than just making detached third-person claims involving them).
- E. Keep that question in mind.

**III • Groundwork • II — Metaphysical / epistemological consequences**

A. Start with this chart:

|                    | <b>Cog Sci</b>                | <b>Feminist Epistemology</b>   |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| <i>Predecessor</i> | logicism (GOFAl)<br>modernist | modernist "view from nowhere"<br>(white, male, upper-middle-class, European) |

|                    |  |  |
|--------------------|--|--|
|                    | hypothetico-deductive  | pure, disconnected, objective, universal knowledge   |
| <i>Reactionary</i> | pure dynamicism<br>antirepresentationalism                                 | pure social constructivism (strong programme)<br>pure textualism (“endless plays of signifiers”) |
| <i>Successor</i>   | “situated cognition”<br>(embodied, contextual,<br>rep’n-dependent reality) | feminist epistemology<br>“critical empiricism”   |

## B. Intro

### 1. Classical model

- a. Formal, abstract, conceptual representations, over which hypothetico-deductive processes of logical inference are defined
- b. Everyone knows the story
- c. For discussion, call this model **logicist**

### 2. “Situated” movement has (with lots of variation) adopted a variety of themes, in opposition:

- a. Embodied: materiality matters
- b. Connected with action, bodily movement: not pure ratiocination
- c. Fundamentally perspectival (context-dependent)

### 3. Up the ante

- a. One can buy into this situated line in a shallow way
- b. But when one digs into it more deeply, one begins to realize that some of the consequences are much more radical than one might at first have thought.
  - i. Started to see this last week, with Haugeland: different kinds of representation are different because they *represent (or register) different worlds*
  - ii. So changing one’s view of the kind of representation is a *metaphysical* commitment
- c. Can’t tell what a representation *means* unless one understand how it ties into action
- d. In fact whether it is *true* isn’t determinable independent of how it is *used*

## C. Feminist epistemology

1. Donna’s paper: what it is like to live by various non-logicist epistemological and metaphysical commitments
2. She comes to these positions out of a feminist critique of science, rather than out of a anti-GOFAI critique in cognitive science
3. But many of the themes are *identical*:
  - a. Embodiment matters
  - b. Perspectival knowledge
  - c. Not pure rationality
  - d. The nature of the representation affects the content—which in turn affects what you take the world to be like.

## D. Terminology

### 1. Distinguish three kinds of view

- a. **Predecessor** or **classical**: what it is in place, what we are fighting our way out of
- b. **Reactionary**: an overly extreme definition in opposition to the predecessor view

- c. **Successor:** what we want
- 2. Cog sci
  - a. Predecessor or classical: *logicism*
  - b. Reactionary: *there are no representations*. Everything is pure dynamics, etc.?
  - c. Successor: how can we understand representation, intentionality, etc., in a way that accepts the (deep) truth implicit in the critique of the classical view, without throwing everything away [[update: cf. my “Rehabilitating Representation” paper, written 1999]]
  - d. Cf. Tony, me, others: rescue representation, but recognize its partiality, embodiedness, intrinsically perspectival character, etc.
- 3. Feminist philosophy of science
  - a. Predecessor or classical: dubbed “white, male, European, upper-middle class”
  - b. Reactionary
    - i. There are two (interestingly)
      - $\alpha$  Strong programme in **social constructivism**: everything is socially constructed; there is no reality, realism, objectivity, or truth
      - $\beta$  Pure **textualism**: all there is is an “endless play of signifiers,”—just text, without any real-world meaning. (from literary criticism)
    - ii. These two themes go handily together, but are different (the second is essentially antimetaphysical, whereas the first is a very strong metaphysical stance).
- 4. Similarities
  - a. This isn’t just a formal parallel
  - b. There are strong relations between the epistemological and metaphysical commitments of the two views.
  - c. Logicism—pure, non-perspectival, objective knowledge, whose normative status (truth) is independent of how it is used, is *the same view we are both fighting against* (◆)
  - d. She is fighting logicism more on the subject level: as *what it is like to be lived*
  - e. We are fighting logicism from one level of remove: as *characterisation of critters*
  - f. But the same “target”
- E. Politics
  - 1. Talk a moment about politics
  - 2. Two tenets of situated cognition
    - a. You can’t assess what a representation means, or evaluate its truth, without understanding how it is used (how it arises up out of, and leads to) *embodied action*.
    - b. Representation is *normative*: some representations are *good* (or better); some are *bad* (or worse). Question is where those normative constraints derive their power.
  - 3. Drop down to the subject level—of what it is live by such a canon
  - 4. Two ways to understand it
    - a. Pragmatically
      - i. Can’t understanding a claim (scientific or otherwise) w/out understanding its politics
      - ii. Can’t assess the truth of a claim without judging it politically.
      - iii. Can’t be committed to a claim without taking a political commitment

- iv. ... etc.
- b. Theoretically
  - i. *Truth* is not separable from *goodness* (ethics, politics, morality)
  - ii. ¶31: “ethics and politics covertly or overtly provide the bases for objectivity in the sciences as a heterogeneous whole.”
- 5. In sum

- ◆ The inexorably political nature of scientific discourse is a direct consequence of two things we believe:
  - a) Tenets of situated cognition (content depends on how it is used); and
  - b) Intrinsic reflexivity of cognitive science.

- 6. Note
  - a. Haraway *talks about* the politics of science (since she, too, engages in a level of semantic ascent, as does anyone writing about the sociology or epistemology of knowledge);
  - b. She also *writes very politically* (which honours the integrity condition).
  - c. That part is good.
  - d. She is also writing out of the reactionary middle phase (which—imho—is bad)
- F. Conclusion
  - 1. In sum, I take Donna as writing about what it is to live by tenets that we (in situated cognition) take to be inexorable characteristics of embodied, embedded cognition
  - 2. That’s why what she has to say is so interesting.
  - 3. Plan
    - a. Say a few word about the paper itself.
    - b. Three sections. Look at in turn.

## Part II — Content

### IV • SK • I — Towards a Successor Science

- A. Intro
  - 1. Trying to escape from (and decry) a certain kind of *extreme reaction* to the classical picture
  - 2. Written from “within” the reactionary view (not within the classical view)
- B. Escape from reactionary view
  - 1. Limits of extreme views of
    - a. Social constructivism (strong programme)
    - b. Textuality
  - 2. Benefits of
    - a. Marxism
    - b. Objects relation theory

- C. Quotes: escape from [what I am calling] the reactionary period
  - 1. ¶3: “learned of the inexorable role of signifiers, etc., but cannot be paranoid, or completely relativist *for political reasons* <= interesting.
  - 2. ¶4: strong programme: all is rhetoric [not enough]
  - 3. ¶5: “those of us who would still like to talk about *reality* with more confidence than we allow the Christian right ... ”
    - a. I.e., no matter how much we admit that the ways we know the world are affected [by our concepts, culture, conditioning, etc.] our sense of reality must have more to it than desire”
  - 4. ¶7: totalizing social constructivism was like “electroshock therapy”, which “lays us out on the table with self-induced multiple-personality disorder.”
  - 5. ¶29:
    - a. “lose the body itself as anything but a blank page for social inscription”
    - b. “radical reduction of the objects of physics or of any other sciences to the ephemera of discursive production and social construction”
- D. Doesn't want to slide from reactionary back into the classical (logician) view
  - 1. ¶10: “Don't need a doctrine of objectivity that promises *transcendence* ... that *loses track of its mediations* just where someone *might be held responsible*”
- E. Wants
  - 1. Wants a conception of objectivity that
    - a. Recognizes what is right about the reactionary feminist response
    - b. Yet doesn't slide into the extreme view which evacuates the result of any power
  - 2. Aim for a “successor science” [Harding's phrase]
  - 3. *Responsibility* for epistemic accounts (from somewhere, take responsibility for them, etc.)
    - a. Constant theme in §1.
- F. Quotes [for what is wanted in a successor science]
  - 1. ¶7: “historical subjectivity”
  - 2. ¶7: “‘embodied’ accounts of the truth”
  - 3. ¶9: “feminists have to insist on a better account of the world”
- G. Successor science
  - 1. **READ** from 187/0/-7 ⇒ 187/1/7 (◆)
  - 2. “Feminists have stakes in successor science project ... ¶ ... limited happiness.”

## V • SK • II — Vision as a Metaphor for Successor Intentionality

- A. Intro: cf. Intentionality
  - 1. Here (3M) we have talked a lot about intentionality, directedness, etc.
  - 2. In O3 I use metaphors of light and sight for intentional directedness (natural)
- B. Preliminaries
  - 1. She wants to avoid binary oppositions
- C. ¶13
  - 1. Wants to force people to *take responsibility* for their actions

- a. Not just the *colouring* (specificity of the content) of what they see
  - b. But also the *action consequences* (politics) of their looking
  2. Hence: “unrestricted gluttony”. Only makes sense when you see that intentional acts have political consequences
  3. “God-trick”: the (logician) illusion that one can look, and see only what is the case, as if from no perspective, while denying the political (and other) consequences of the act of looking.
- D. ¶15
1. She wants an embodied vision that takes concrete facts about the act of seeing seriously
  2. Me: want to do that, but also admit that seeing (reference) is distancing (without erasing the facts about the see-er’s end of things)
  3. 190/7:
    - a. Several interesting quotes:
      - i. “objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment.”
      - ii. “not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility”
      - iii. “only partial perspective promises objective vision”
      - iv. “objective vision that initiates, rather than closes off, the problem of responsibility for the generativity of all visual practices.”
      - v. “feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledges, not about transcendence and splitting.”
      - vi. “become answerable for what we learn how to see”
    - b. I agree with all of these
    - c. What I want is some sense of *what vision is, in particular, such that it has these properties.*
- E. ¶16
1. Eyes “build in ways of seeing”—cf. Haugeland
  2. Not allegories of infinite mobility and interchangeability
    - a. Harkens back to our discussion of translation between and among representations
    - b. This is another of the “costs” of taking situatedness, non-conceptual representation, etc., seriously
  3. Cf. last sentence: “understanding how these visual systems work, technically, socially, psychically, ought to be a way of embodying feminist objectivity.” Cf. cog sci! (◆)
- F. ¶17
1. “Standpoints of the subjugated are preferred because in principle they are last likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretative core of all knowledge ... they are savvy to modes of denial through repression, forgetting, and disappearing acts.
- G. ¶18
1. “partial, locatable, critical knowledges” [so far so good]
  2. “sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology”
    - a. Still, by my lights, too textualist—too much as if *talking* is the only thing we do.
  3. Argument for *particularity*—cf. O3

- a. “relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally.”
  - b. This is good.
- H. ¶19
  - 1. 191//1 still as if all we do is talk! I *violently* disagree.
  - 2. various quotes betray her fundamental values [ok]
    - a. 192//6: knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination.”
    - b. “hope for transformative knowledge”
    - c. “sever check and stimulus of sustained critical inquiry are jointly the ground of any believable claim to objectivity or rationality not riddled with breath-taking denials and repressions”
    - d. “the unmarked category would really disappear”
- I. ¶20
  - 1. “Difficulty, responsibility of moving vantage points”
    - a. This is a phenomenally important point to me; the “stuckness” of perspective, the inability ever to wholly extricate oneself from the particularities of one’s (particular) position—and the normative and ethical (as well as emotional and political) consequences of that.
- J. ¶21
  - 1. Unsure about first dozen lines
  - 2. “here is the promise of objectivity: a scientific knower seeks the subject position not of identity, but of objectivity; that is, *partial connection*”
    - a. Cf. link to Marilyn Strathern [1987]
  - 3. denial of possibility of a “full” or “neutral” (from nowhere) position. [“fetishised perfect subject of oppositional history]
  - 4. “optics is a politics of positioning”
  - 5. the stance against “self-identity” I take to be an argument against the *transparency* of self-knowledge? If so, that (claim) is surely right.
- K. ¶22: positioning (and responsibility for positioning)
  - 1. “politics & ethics grounds the struggle for the contests over what may count as rational knowledge”
  - 2. Exactly. Cf. opening remarks.
- L. ¶s 23–27
  - 1. Attempts to get past “reactionary” statements of what a successor science will be like
  - 2. Ends up as a *call* for a pastiche: a continuum, from the particular to the more general, that is responsible throughout
    - a. This of course is what I think the story in O3 does.
- M. Conclusion (of §2)
  - 1. Acute in its *lived understanding* of what a successor epistemology would be like
  - 2. Knows nothing of cog sci
  - 3. Quit here?



**VI • SK • III (“Objects as Actors”) —**

- A. Search for realism
  - 1. ¶28
    - a. “faithfulness of nay object of knowledge ... to a ‘real world,’ no matter how mediated for us and no matter how complex and contradictory these worlds may be.”
    - b. Search for some kind of “successor realism.”
  - 2. ¶29
    - a. “lose the body itself as anything but a blank page for social inscription”
    - b. “radical reduction of the objects of physics or of any other sciences to the ephemera of discursive production and social construction”
- B. Object as agent
  - 1. ¶31: “situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource, never finally as slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in his unique agency and authority of ‘objective’ knowledge.
    - a. Not sure this is warranted?
  - 2. “ethics and politics covertly or overtly provide the bases for objectivity in the sciences as a heterogeneous whole”
  - 3. ¶32: surprises and ironies, coyote and trickster
- C. Point
  - 1. Seems to be not just dynamicism, but interaction between that and the embodied practices of uncovering and discovery: they will *disrupt* the “subject,” which may well fight back.
  - 2. She talks of *conversation*, but again I think that is too textual
  - 3. Semiotic-material agents
  - 4. Crucial bit is that the *boundaries emerge in (negotiated) interaction* (◆)

**VII • Conclusion**

- A. Haraway
  - 1. Ultimately dissatisfying positive program: because it doesn’t distinguish anything as anything else. Not *specific* enough (cf. Lilly Tomlin).
  - 2. But that objectivity, etc., have the properties she says, I think that is right.
- B. O3:
  - 1. Designed to bridge
    - a. From field theory (in physics)
    - b. To feminist politics
    - c. Subsuming (successor) cognitive science in between.
  - 2. No one has understood this (or at least taken it seriously)

**Notes**

**VIII • Section I**

- A. Paragraph 1
  - 1. Woman wrestling with the term ‘objective’ who
    - a. Admits to being embodied, partial, and perspectival
    - b. Has been branded as embodied, partial, and perspectival by the powers that be
  - 2. If admit limitations, “they” dismiss. They don’t admit they are limited. How do we survive?
- B. Paragraph 3
  - 1. Only people who *believe* the objectivist myth are non-scientists (and certain φers of science)
- C. Paragraph 11
  - 1. Linguisticisation of “reduction”—explicable, if not great (remember: written from reactionary point of view)  
Not a happy paragraph

