

A game of cat's cradle: science studies,
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A Game of Cat's Cradle: Science Studies, Feminist Theory, Cultural Studies

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Configurations

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

A Game of Cat's Cradle: Science Studies, Feminist Theory, Cultural Studies

Donna J. Haraway (bio)

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with that insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency.¹

(Nature(TM) + Culture(TM))dn = New World Order, Inc.

n=0

“Nature” is a *topos*, or commonplace. Nature is a topic I cannot avoid. It is the imploded, densely packed location for the simultaneously ethnospecific, cultural, political, and scientific conversations about what the allowable structures of action and the possible plots in the sacred secular dramas of technoscience—as well as in the analysis of technoscience—might be. This nature, this commonplace and topical commons, has possessed me since I was a child. To inhabit this nature has not been a choice, but a complex inheritance. I was riveted by natural law and fixed in the time zones of the Christian liturgical year, and then set loose in the culture medium of the molecular biological laboratory. For people nurtured in the worlds in which I grew up, whatever else it also is, nature is good to think with. **[End Page 59]**

Nature is also about figures, stories, and images. This nature, as *trópos*, is jerry-built with tropes; it makes me swerve. A tangle of materialized figurations, nature draws my attention. A child of my culture, I am nature-tropic: I turn to nature as a sun-loving plant turns to the sun. Historically, a trope is also a verse interpolated into a liturgical text to embellish or amplify its meaning. Nature has liturgical possibilities; its metaphoricity is inescapable, and that is its saving grace. This nature displaces me definitively by rooting me in its domain. The domain in which I am so organically rooted in the last years of the twentieth century is the fully imploded, fully artifactual, natural-cultural gravity well of technoscience. We do not so much swerve into this well as get sucked into it irrevocably. We had better learn to think this nature, this common and shared place, as something other than a star wars test

site or the New World Order, Inc. If technoscience is, among other things, a practice of materializing refigurations of what counts as nature, a practice of turning tropes into worlds, then how we figure technoscience makes an immense difference.

In this meditation, I want to suggest how to refigure—how to trope and how to knot together—key discourses about technoscience. Rooted in the (sometimes mainstream and maelstrom) cross-stitched disciplines of science studies, this short essay is part of a larger, shared task of using antiracist feminist theory and cultural studies to produce worldly interference patterns. Because I think the practices that constitute technoscience build worlds that do not overflow with choice about inhabiting them, I want to help foment a state of emergency in what counts as “normal” in technoscience and in its analysis. Queering what counts as nature is my categorical imperative. Queering specific normalized categories is not for the easy frisson of transgression, but for the hope for livable worlds. What is normal in technoscience, and in its analysis, is all too often war, with all its infinitely ramifying structures and stratagems. All too often, the war of words and things is the luminous figure for theory, explanation, and narrative.

A lurking question stalks the project of refiguration: How can science studies scholars take seriously the constitutively militarized practice of technoscience and not replicate in our own practice, including the material-semiotic flesh of our language, the worlds we analyze? How can metaphor be kept from collapsing into the thing-in-itself? Must technoscience—with all its parts, actors and actants, human and not—be described relentlessly as an array of interlocking agonistic fields, where practice is modeled as military combat, sexual domination, security maintenance, and market **[End Page 60]** strategy? How not? Let us work by learning to play an old game. After all, ever since World War II...



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