PAPER TIGERS

A SOCIOLOGIST FOLLOWS CULTURAL STUDIES INTO THE WILDERNESS

It can be an unsettling experience for a sociologist to browse a university bookstore these days. It's easy enough to find the women's studies or gender studies section, African-American studies or cultural studies, but not so easy to locate sociology. This is especially unnerving when each of the other sections is full of books that look a lot like what sociology is supposed to be. Perhaps this is a victory, proof of what journalist Richard Rovere wrote two generations ago: "Those of us who have been educated in the twentieth century habitually think in sociological terms, whether or not we have had any training in sociology." But somehow it does not feel like a victory. Something is missing.

BY **MICHAEL SCHUDSON**

As the body of work called "cultural studies" has grown, the sociology of culture seems to have been elbowed aside.

Cultural studies refuses to be defined or to define itself. Still, some of its features can be discerned. It is something like the extension of literary studies to subjects outside a conventional canon—including science fiction, pornography, rock music, MTV, television generally, popular culture at large. It tends to embrace an anthropological understanding of culture as a whole way of life rather than as a set of privileged aesthetic objects. But if this new discipline sees culture as the universe of social practices, it also redefines social practices as an ensemble of texts, all susceptible to interpretation or deconstruction. Cultural studies seems to promise a sociologically enriched analysis—that is, one that locates cultural objects in relation to the social context in which people produce them and use them. But too often, the result is a sociologically impoverished view of politics and social action. Even more disturbingly, cultural studies shows signs of becoming an insulated and self-confirming field of study. Its most cherished texts—including the one that this essay will examine, Donna Haraway's "Teddy Bear Patriarchy"—are rarely exposed to careful criticism from the outside.

If cultural studies tends to be shy about defining its boundaries, it is often bold in proclaiming its politics. No conservatives need apply. "Cultural studies," writes a leading proponent, Lawrence Grossberg, "may have been (and I would hope still is) opposed to capitalism, its structures of inequality and exploitation...." Since cultural studies arose as a rebellion within established university departments, and since it has often found a home base in politically contested programs, like women's studies, it is not surprisingly characterized by forms of address that testify to shared political principles. Because many scholars who engage in cultural studies are self-proclaimed advocates for women, gays and lesbians, or people of color in higher education, it is easy to see why the fashioning of a distinctive intellectual vision becomes identified with political virtue. But even though political like-mindedness is a familiar and valuable basis for human solidarity, it is a dubious grounding for a whole field of study.

In contemporary sociology and many other social sciences, by contrast, it is taken for granted that conservatives, liberals, and Marxists can and should coexist (though perhaps not too many conservatives and not too many Marxists). In cultural studies, for all its fierce internal debates, there seems to be an unwritten loyalty oath to uphold the trinity of class, race, and gender as the three fundamental dimensions on which difference is present in human experience. Moreover, on the American scene, class regularly drops out of view. Actual work in cultural studies typically focuses on race, gender, and sexual preference. Not only does class recede, but so do other major social bases of discrimination, conflict, and differential power. That the sociologist James Davison Hunter could write a book called *Culture Wars* (Basic, 1991), in which he argues that the fundamental divisions in American life today fall along religious lines, would not make sense or attract much interest in cultural studies.

Whatever the shortcomings of class, race, and gender as a way to discuss the basic dimensions of domination in contemporary societies, these terms certainly have a sociological ring. Equally sociological is the view that the privileged texts of literary or art historical study should be forced to rub shoulders with rock lyrics, science fiction, talk radio, nursery rhymes, and appellate court opinions. Quintessentially sociological is the widespread notion that apparently "natural" categories are in fact socially constructed. Indeed, the whole cultural studies enterprise, as the British sociologist David Chaney suggests, might well be regarded as a subdivision of the sociology of knowledge, which has long taught that "traditions institutionalize ideologies and privilege."

WHY THEN do I believe cultural studies is more in need of sociology than the other way around? One significant problem is that the move from the sociology of culture to cultural studies often involves a slippage from a view that emphasizes the *social* construction of reality to a view that examines the *cultural* or *symbolic* construction of reality, as if this were a process that largely took place outside the social world.

The analytical distinction between the social and the cultural is not always easy to keep straight, but it seems to me fundamental. It goes like this: The "social" is people interacting, and the "cultural" refers to the perceptual frames, symbolic structures, and narrative conventions governing how they do so. For instance, "murder" is a cultural label that refers to one person's taking another person's life without legal warrant. "Murder is wrong" is a cultural injunction inscribed in religious and legal texts and available as cognitive schema in people's heads. It is discourse, revisable and contestable. On the other hand, a given act of killing may or may not fit the legal and moral category "murder," but killing takes place regardless. It is social rather than cultural, behavior rather than consciousness. It makes a living person a dead one. While discourse affects the fate of the perpetrator (first- or second-degree murder? premeditated or not? mitigating or aggravating circumstances? justifiable homicide?), no words and no social constructions resuscitate the victim. Of course, we experience the world through culture. Different societies, and people differently situated in a single society, may see death, or aging, or kinship in very different ways. But no person and no society can escape addressing death, aging, and kinship.

Now, there are several cultural studies traditions, and my criticism is not applicable to all. One tradition grows out of the British effort to write about the relationship between culture and society in a way that keeps ever present the "lived experience" of human beings as they make use of a common stock of symbols and images, religious values, moral outlooks, and received attitudes toward the body, nature, work, and play. Richard Hoggart, for example, showed the complex ways in which working-class Britons drew meaning from pulp litera-

CULTURAL STUDIES SHOWS SIGNS OF BECOMING AN INSULATED AND SELF-CONFIRMING FIELD OF STUDY.

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ture. And E.P. Thompson explained how the most politically active British workers of the early nineteenth century were able to condemn the capitalist order because of their long-standing belief in the "Englishman's birthright." While these writers, who did much of their best work in the Fifties and Sixties, took pride in their socialist political commitments, their intellectual orientation and methodological precepts were not essentially foreign to conventional sociology. Of course, followers of this tradition do not wish to distinguish between the "social" and the "cultural"; they insist strenuously that it is dangerous and misleading to draw such distinctions. According to Raymond Williams, the cultural, linguistic, and symbolic are "indissoluble elements of the material social process itself." The old distinction between "base" and "superstructure," they argue, has to be jettisoned. Although this seems to me a risky blurring of concepts, it works well enough in British cultural studies, which has as strong an identification with sociology as with literary studies and where a doggedly empiricist style of work keeps the study of culture anchored in "lived social experience."

But in the United States, where cultural studies has borrowed from French more than British intellectual culture, a different tradition has grown. Here, a notion of "lived experience" figures only marginally; the primary concern has been to rethink the nature of the literary text itself. One of the messages of this multistranded line of work has been to demonstrate that each human "subject" is created by linguistic formations that exist prior to the individual's consciousness. No knowledge can be unattached to prevailing ideologies, and if a particular intellectual act is not directly subversive, it must by definition be involved in reinforcing the existing relations of power.

What follows from this is important: If knowledge (and culture) arise in a ready-made discursive setting, all knowledge is necessarily in the service of power—whether anyone intends it to be or not. After all, knowledge is inevitably knowledge "for." This is the common kernel of cultural studies and the sociology of knowledge. But if this insight becomes the end, rather than the opening, of inquiry, then trouble begins. "Knowledge for" is also "knowledge of," to adapt a distinction made by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. This does not presume that "science" and other human representations must be accurate recording devices of a real world. But nor should we assume that knowledge is *only* ideology or only the projection of the "positionality" of the observer onto some object in the world. Neither the one extreme (that the object itself dictates how it will be known and represented) nor the other (that the object does not exist for human knowledge except as humans project themselves onto it) is defensible. Nor is either extreme position very interesting. The first denies human agency; the second denies the world. Both deny the problem—which is to comprehend the relation between

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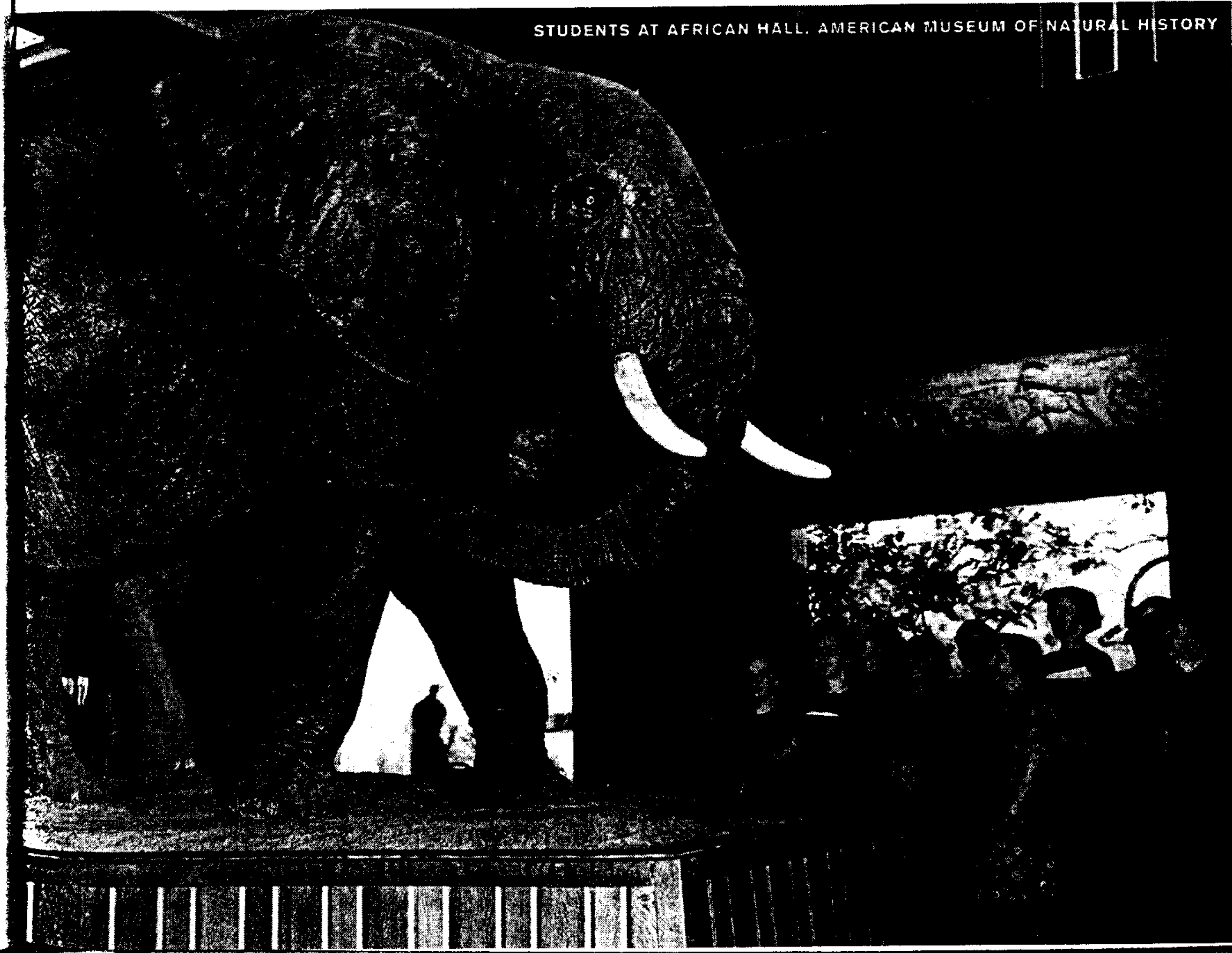


STUDENTS AT AFRICAN HALL. AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

human knowledge and the world that human beings seek to know.

IN ORDER to bring these general remarks down to earth, I would like to look closely at one much-admired paper in cultural studies, Donna Haraway's "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908–1936." This paper was first published in *Social Text* in 1984 and was later incorporated into Haraway's influential 1989 book, *Primate Visions.* The essay was singled out in a review of *Primate Visions* by the historian of science Margaret Rossiter as a "stellar" chapter; it was hailed in a 1991 collection of essays on "the poetics and politics of museum display" as "the most compelling analysis to date"; and it was reprinted in 1994 as an "exemplary" piece in a reader on social theory. If cultural studies has created its own canon, this essay has a strong claim to belong in it.

Haraway's essay presents New York City's American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) as an important participant in the politics of culture. She treats the powerful dioramas and artful taxidermy in the museum's African Hall as a readable text, one that purports to offer objective knowledge of the world of nature. In her view, however, the main purpose of African Hall is not to afford understanding of the natural world but to reproduce and naturalize a master narrative of race, class, and gender in a capitalist society.

The best way to grasp the hall's meaning, she implies, is to review its genesis—in this case, to tell the story of how its stuffed animal specimens were collected on African safaris: "I want to show the reader how the experience of the diorama grew from the safari in specific times and places, how the camera and the gun together are the conduits for the spiritual commerce of man and nature, how biography is woven into and from a social and political tissue." Incorporated in *Primate Visions,* the essay becomes part of a sprawling, multifaceted, ambitious attempt to describe Euro-American primate studies as a story Western science tells itself in ways that reproduce the social inequalities embedded in its own presuppositions. Considered on its own, the essay looks at the life of Carl Akeley, the taxidermist who designed African Hall, to show that the museum's exhibits display "a history of race, sex, and class in New York City." What is revealed in the hall is not Africa but America, "a tale of the commerce of power and knowledge in white and male supremacist monopoly capitalism."

At this point, a skeptical reader should be on guard—the leap from the specifics of reading a museum exhibit to these wooden and formulaic abstractions is risky, especially when the abstractions presume that "America" can be fully represented by a set of universal categories (white, male, capitalist) whose distinctly American inflection is nowhere broached. Still, the essay operates from what appears to be a sound sociological premise—that, as the late UC-San Diego sociologist César Graña wrote, "museums...have ideologies."

IN HER CELEBRATED ESSAY, DONNA HARAWAY ARGUES THAT AFRICAN HALL REVEALS "A HISTORY OF RACE, SEX, AND CLASS IN NEW YORK CITY."

So, on guard or not, readers move on to a few engaging pages in which Haraway takes them into the museum through its great Central Park West facade, past the gift shop (stopping to read a photobiography of Teddy Roosevelt), and into African Hall. Haraway is a perceptive guide; some of her remarks on the dioramas are striking, especially her observation that in each diorama "at least one animal...catches the viewer's gaze and holds it in communion." This is an informative tour, though it is not clear what justifies Haraway's pronouncement that "the central moral truth" of the museum is "the effective truth of manhood," which is "conferred" on the visitor who "passes through the trial of the museum." Apparently deriving this claim from some of Teddy Roosevelt's words on the walls just inside the main building, Haraway concludes that any visitor to the museum—in the 1920s or today—becomes "necessarily a boy in moral state." (Or, as revised for the book, "necessarily a white boy in moral state.")

As Haraway understands it, the hall's grand theme is the use of "the hygiene of nature" to "cure the sick vision of civilized man." But she never explains how this cure is effected or what it has to do with the intentions of master taxidermist Carl Akeley. How a ritual that symbolically brings "boys" through "the trial of the museum" into manhood is equally a curative rite to repair decadent civilization is a neat trick never explained. Are the boys sick and decadent, too? Or does the curative trip to the museum inoculate innocents against a decadence that has not yet affected them?

Of course, the idea that "nature" can be a cure for the ills wrought by civilization is a long-standing theme in American thought, well marked in *Walden* and extending back at least to the agrarianism of Thomas Jefferson. But it does not necessarily entail the pessimism and sense of decline Haraway rightly sees in the views of some museum trustees. After all, it is possible to seek solace, even salvation, in nature without holding grand and dark views about the corruption of civilization. One of the most popular novelists of the 1910s and 1920s was Gene Stratton Porter, whose novels were among the top ten best-sellers in 1918, 1919, 1921, and 1925. Her belief in the redemptive quality of nature could not have been further removed from the cultural pessimism that Haraway attributes to the museum leaders. ("'Good cheer! Good cheer!' exulted the Cardinal," is the opening of Stratton Porter's sunny account of bird life in *The Song of the Cardinal.*) Readers who felt lost or displaced in the onrushing, urbanizing society of the Twenties may have found solace in her pastoral ethic, but Stratton Porter herself seems to have shared none of the anxiety of the museum trustees.

So some people fretted about that "sick vision" of civilized society a good deal more than others. But Haraway does not specify where anxiety about civilization was located and how it was channeled. She suggests that Carl Akeley and the trustees believed civilization to be sick and the encounter with nature to be a possible cure. Yet the trustees may have worried more about socializing the not-

yet-civilized than about redeeming the civilized. After all, a large part of the museum's educational function was to reinforce the social control of New York's immigrants—not to provide therapy for its civilized elites. Museum president Henry Fairfield Osborn was frank about his hopes to reach the urban masses: "Nature teaches law and order and respect for property. If these people cannot go to the country, then the Museum must bring nature to the city." Haraway herself used this quotation as an epigraph for the version of "Teddy Bear Patriarchy" that appeared in *Primate Visions*. But it works against, or at the very least complicates, her argument.

Haraway's talk of "moral boys" and "sick civilization" may be just a bit of rhetorical excess as she warms to her theme. But these terms keep her from ever addressing the question of what message real-life visitors to the museum took from the exhibit. Haraway knows that different people experience a museum in different ways. But how exactly are readers to understand her insistence that African Hall encodes a single narrative about white, patriarchal capitalism and that it situates every visitor to the museum as a "boy in moral state"?

What I take to be going on here is a kind of experiment in interpretation. That it ultimately fails, as I will try to demonstrate, is no crime; that the essay is cited reverently rather than answered critically, however, should give us pause about the culture of cultural studies. This is not to deny the achievement of "Teddy Bear Patriarchy" as an original attempt to direct attention to museums as cultural constructions. My objection is not to the aim of the essay but to the superficiality of its sociology and its oddly ahistorical history. My objection, further, is to its celebrity. The wide use of the essay and the deference to its canonical standing seem to signal an interpretive community that shares with it several central assumptions. The first of these is that the important thing to know about the cultural world is that the discourses that govern it are the constructions of a system of monopoly capitalism and white patriarchy. The second is that it is an act of political virtue and intellectual courage to demonstrate the constructedness of these discourses or of the cultural artifacts to which they give rise. Finally, it is presumed in Haraway's essay (though not everywhere in her writings) that such demonstrations override any need to inquire about whether, how, or to what degree some aspect of what we can only term "reality" nonetheless constrains a given discourse.

I LEAVE aside now the question of how real people read museums.

CARL AKELEY IN SOMALILAND

CORBIS BETTMANN

Haraway's approach is literary rather than sociological. It tells us nothing about what meaning actual visitors take from African Hall. But it can still be examined on its own terms. Is the approach Haraway adopts to interpretation convincing in its own right?

Her essay relies on a series of synecdoches; in each instance, a single part of the museum stands for the larger whole. Each of these conversions has to be convincing for the analysis to succeed. That is, the reader must be won to the view that, first, the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial entry and African Hall stand adequately for the AMNH. No other part of the museum ever speaks in this essay—no dinosaurs, no Margaret Mead Hall of Pacific Peoples, no Stephen Jay Gould columns in the museum's magazine, *Natural History*.

The second synecdochic link is that the meaning of African Hall lies in the original plans that were drawn up for it and in the collecting, by gun and photograph, of the materials that were to go into its dioramas. This link makes a powerful claim of authorship on behalf of safari leader, taxidermist, and great white hunter Carl Akeley, whose life history takes up much of the essay. The fact that African Hall did not open until ten years after Akeley's death is mentioned, but no mention is made of how his original plans may have been altered by the passage of a decade; indeed, no mention is made of just how extensive or complete his conception of African Hall was at any point.

This second link may be justified—I have no evidence to the contrary. But museums are complex organizations that compete in a sometimes hostile environment for public notice, private donations, and academic approval. In Haraway's account, there is only a broad cultural discourse represented by the museum's trustees, the museum's president, Henry Fairfield Osborn, and the mastermind of African Hall, Carl Akeley. This discourse goes into the museum machinery at one end and the African Hall exhibits come out the other. In between, a void: no social organization, no social conflict, no contention.

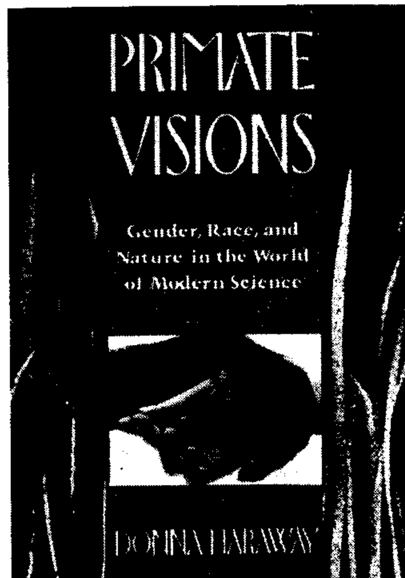
And no passage of time. The third synecdoche is that African Hall in 1921 (the year, Haraway reveals as if uncovering the deep secret core, of both a key collecting safari and the AMNH-hosted Second International Eugenics Conference), or perhaps in 1926 (the year of Akeley's death), or at least in 1936 (the year of the hall's opening), represents the unaltered meaning of African

HARAWAY GENERALLY PROCEEDS AS IF THE AFRICAN HALL DIORAMAS ARE PRESERVED IN AMBER.

Hall at the time of Haraway's essay in the 1980s. As white patriarchal monopoly capitalism is a transhistorical structure, so apparently are its expressions and representations. That the meaning of a cultural object can change over time does not stir Haraway's interest, at least in the main body of her essay.

But if there's anything that recent work in cultural history has established, it's precisely the variability of an object's meanings. We know, from Lawrence Levine, that Shakespeare was popular melodrama in America in 1850 and a high-culture classic by 1920. And we know, from John Higham, that even the meanings of cultural objects more fixed than a dramatic text—at least as fixed in time as a diorama—change radically in their meanings. In the 1880s the Statue of Liberty was taken to be a symbol of how American republican government, established with the aid of France during the Revolution, served as a beacon to the world. By the Twenties and fully by 1940, it came to have a meaning never dreamed of by any of the individuals or groups responsible for its development and installation in New York Harbor. It came to mean "Welcome to America!" It became an inspirational greeting to new immigrants, a meaning the immigrants themselves conferred on the statue. But Haraway generally proceeds as if the African Hall dioramas are preserved in historic amber, untouchable by the shifting interactions of text and context.

In her conclusion, Haraway does finally acknowledge that "basic ideologies and politics shifted." And, in the *Primate Visions* version of her essay, she adds that "even the racial doctrines so openly championed by the Museum were publicly criticized in the 1940s, though not until then." But this nod to history is too little and too late. And it does nothing to complicate her assertions about the museum's "central moral truth." Moreover, she is just plain wrong to claim that scientific racism was not publicly criticized until the 1940s. Haraway cites John Higham's *Send These to Me* (1975), but she doesn't appear to have noticed one of its central points:



"As early as the late 1920s, a decline of racism in intellectual circles set in. The eugenics movement waned; the Nordic cult lost its vogue. The change reflected the emancipation of American thought from biological determinism."

EACH OF Haraway's synecdochic links stretches her materials to the breaking point. If we tried to walk a similar interpretive path with different materials, her sleight of hand might be more visible. For instance, let me propose that the essence of New York University is represented in its imposing Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, completed in 1973 as part of a major redesign and development of the Washington Square campus. Further, let me argue that the meaning of the library is biographically located in its architect, the modern master Philip Johnson. Johnson, into the late Thirties, was attracted to the Nazis. He was a vocal fascist sympathizer, and, like others who spoke the language of eugenics, he was anxious about "race suicide." If I am of a mind to see fascism as the dark truth of capitalism, I can proceed to argue with a logic parallel to Haraway's in "Teddy Bear Patriarchy" that the truth of NYU is fascism. I do not need to know what NYU students or faculty read or write any more than Haraway needs to know what visitors to the AMNH experience; I do not need to complicate the story with the plural or changing meanings of NYU to be assured that I have reached the central moral truth of the institution. If NYU is its library, the library its architect, and its architect a fascist, NYU is fascist.

If I made such an argument, would it be seriously entertained? Would people judge my work "stellar," "compelling," and "exemplary"? I do not think so. Why, then, has Haraway's essay escaped close scrutiny? Why has an argument stretched so thin seemed so attractive to so many? Her argument's logic is just the same: AMNH is its African Hall, African Hall is Akeley's and Osborn's visions, their visions were rankly racist and sexist, so the AMNH is racist and sexist, or an example of Teddy Bear Patriarchy.

Part of the appeal of Haraway's essay, no doubt, is its promise to take a close look at the racial thinking of the Twenties. About that Second International Eugenics Congress that the AMNH hosted in 1921: Haraway is onto something here. AMNH leaders were indeed important figures in an effort mounted on behalf of scientific racism at the time. The trouble lies in her implication that this campaign was typical of racial discourse in the time span her essay surveys. The eugenics movement, after all, lost the battle for the hearts and minds of the American elite. In the Thirties and Forties, scientific racism gave way to a greater recognition and acceptance of cultural differences. And no one played a more significant role in this development than a former AMNH employee, Franz Boas, the most politically influential and very likely the most intellectually important American anthropologist ever.

SO WHY does Haraway highlight the 1921 conference as if it were especially indicative of the moral truth of AMNH? Why not the fact that the Eugenics Congress's next international conference, in 1932, also in New York, attracted fewer than one hundred people? Or the fact that later in AMNH history a hall would be dedicated to Boas's student Margaret Mead? Indeed, it is probably fair to say that the museum is today more closely identified with Mead than with

Teddy Roosevelt or the relatively unknown Carl Akeley. Haraway reports correctly that eugenics was a significant movement in 1921, coloring the views of museum trustees and officials. But she fails to mention the conclusion of Higham and others that it was essentially dead by the time African Hall opened.

If description and historical accuracy were important here, the AMNH's connection to race, class, and gender would have been contextualized so readers could actually understand it. Haraway fails to do this. Implicit in today's coding of "class, gender, race" is that "race" refers to a distinction between white and nonwhite rather than, as was the case among Protestant elites in the Twenties, between Nordic and non-Nordic. Certainly racism toward African Americans was part of the worldview of New York Protestant elites in the Twenties. Nineteenth-century Americans were taught in school about a hierarchy of races, with Caucasians invariably deemed the highest and Negroes the lowest. But the language of race shifted at the turn of the century, and the racial divide that elites worried most about was between people of northern European heritage and the immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, particularly the Jews.

Haraway observes that the notorious popularizer of scientific racism, Madison Grant, an AMNH trustee, was worried about "the importation of nonwhite (which included Jewish and southern European) working classes." This aside is misleading. The immigrants Grant worried about did not simply include Jewish and southern Europeans—this was the *primary* group that troubled and threatened him. In his influential racist tract *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), a work that identifies its author as a trustee of the AMNH and includes a preface by Henry Fairfield Osborn, Grant makes this abundantly clear. He devotes the book to showing the differences among "the three main races of Europe"—the Nordic, the Alpine, and the Mediterranean, and the point of the book is to demonstrate the superiority of the Nordic to the others. Grant mentions but in no way dwells on "Negroids" and "Mongoloids." Of course, racism directed against African Americans runs more deeply, more centrally, and more enduringly in American history than prejudice against Jews and southern and eastern Europeans. But this is not what was at stake in Grant's work.

The problem here is not only the imprecision about what "race" meant to the originators of African Hall. It is a failure to recognize how badly scientific racism was reeling by the Thirties, how genuine was the Boasian victory. Indeed, a new and powerful intelligentsia committed to a cosmopolitan vision of the world transcending race and ethnicity emerged and came to dominate intellectual life from 1930 into the Sixties, as historian David Hollinger has argued. A powerful liberal consensus developed, cutting right across the lines that the Madison Grants of the world had wanted to keep strictly separate.

Of course, that liberal consensus was never complete. Anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant, and above all anti-black sentiment persisted and persists. But if the liberal consensus continues to be challenged, it remains very much alive. Many of this tradition's leading figures from the Twenties and Thirties, such as Walter Lippmann, Franz Boas, and John Dewey, are still read and argued about, while Madison Grant is at most a historical footnote. By what screwball logic, then, does Haraway land on Grant as the animating spirit of the white patriarchal capitalist vision that dominates American society?

WHY does it matter if Haraway got the history wrong, so long as her main point—that science is socially constructed in the service of power—remains correct?

If the past is dead and should be dead, as Haraway seems to believe, then it really doesn't matter a whit. But if, as William Faulkner put it, "the past is never dead. It's not even past," then it makes a very big difference that Haraway translated the Twenties "Nordic" into the Eighties "white" and blended in her postmodern Cuisinart the liberalism of Boas with the racism of Grant. If it is worth knowing what achievements in our past we can draw on for strength and inspiration, then the errors here are serious, and it is shocking that in the ten reviews of *Primate Visions* I have read, and the many mentions of the work I have come upon, not once has any of this been noted.

In the end, it is not Haraway's essay itself so much as the absence of serious published criticism that disturbs me. Cultural studies, especially in its postmodernist or poststructuralist vein, has features of a social movement and some of the edgy self-confidence of prior intellectual movements—psychoanalysis comes to mind. Psychoanalysis developed its own critical terminology, it offered an epistemology that ran counter to standard scientific practices, it promised emancipation through critique, and it took on a messianic cast. It also introduced new methods and frameworks for understanding human behavior that many people, even those who remain dubious about the project as a whole, have found valuable. Postmodern cultural studies may be following suit. I hope it does not follow psychoanalysis in constructing defense mechanisms. Psychoanalysis is famous for having perfected a method of discounting criticism by treating it as a symptom—"if you disagree, you are resisting." I see signs that cultural studies is succumbing to that sort of solipsism. It needs not

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

BY ASSUMING THAT POLITICAL AND MORAL PRESUPPOSITIONS ARE BEYOND RATIONAL DEBATE, CULTURAL STUDIES COCOONS THE LEFT FROM HAVING TO DEAL WITH THE RIGHT.

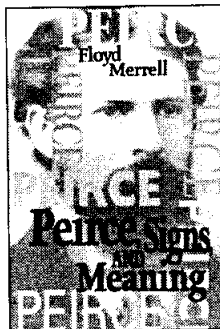
only to generate criticism from within its own set of political assumptions (which it does, often and heatedly) but to respond to criticism that calls those assumptions into question.

CULTURAL studies correctly emphasizes that no knowledge is innocent. But this dictum also applies to the fervent belief that "no knowledge is innocent." That claim serves ends just as the claim of scientists or journalists to objectivity does. Most obviously, it is a rationalization for expanding and making relevant the fading place of literary studies in our culture. It also protects political presuppositions from critical examination because it takes for granted that political and moral presuppositions are beyond rational debate. They are discourse in the service of power.

This shortchanges everybody. It cocoons the left from having to deal with the right—surely a bad idea at a time when the left's presence seems to be evaporating in the culture at large. Oddly enough, it also diminishes culture. If culture is only the discursive shaping and serving of power, there is no place for the radical assertion that power is designed and valued to serve culture. Take, for example, Clifford Geertz's *Negara* (1980), which argues that the elaborate court ceremonies of the Balinese state were not designed to reinforce the rulers' power but rather that the rulers' grasping for power was driven by their desire to perform and control the ceremonies. In a similar vein, Chandra Mukerji argues in *From Graven Images* (1983) that the industrial revolution served to justify a fashion for calicoes; it wasn't, Mukerji believes, that a fashion for calicoes served to enrich the emerging industrial bourgeoisie. If anything, culture is more important, not less important, than the theoretical presuppositions of cultural studies acknowledge. The tendency to reduce culture to the emanations of preconstituted power positions trivializes culture and ignores the complexity of politics. To improve on this with the familiar claim that culture is "contested terrain" is no solution. Yes, culture is contested terrain. And, yes—thanks in part to cultural studies—we can now say, "of course it is." But when we say that, we have reached the beginning, not the end, of analysis.

Michael Schudson is professor of communication and adjunct professor of sociology at the University of California at San Diego. A different version of this article will appear this fall in *From Sociology to Cultural Studies,* a collection of essays edited by Elizabeth Long (Blackwell).

Peirce, Signs, and Meaning



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