

FLASHBACKS

WHAT CAN A CONFERENCE TALK DO?

August 10, 2019

by *Yesmar Oyarzun*

It is October 1994. The Rolling Stones might already be playing at the Superdome when Bruno Latour arrives at the 1994 installment of the Society for Social Studies of Science's annual meeting only to find that his hotel arrangements have fallen through. And he is not the only person to experience woes with the arrangements at the since-closed Clarion Hotel. Fortunately, long-time 4S secretary Wes Shrum lets Latour crash in his room.



4S NEW ORLEANS



analysis and critique of the “modern” and the nature-culture divide. Latour, already a prolific STS scholar, may or may not be sitting in the crowd when Donna Haraway made what some in attendance have described to me as the talk that truly pushed her to prominence as one of the preeminent STS scholars of our time.

Copyrighted Material

Donna J. Haraway



Simians, Cyborgs, and Women
The Reinvention of Nature

Copyrighted Material

Haraway too had enjoyed prominence before this talk, having published her “Manifesto for Cyborgs” in 1985 and the also now canonical “Situated Knowledges” piece in 1988. Moreover, both had already been compiled in her 1991 *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. By 1994, she is already a full professor at UCSC where she has today reached the status of Professor Emerita.

The talk Haraway gave that day is one that changed lives, one that people remember, and one that survives in citations. Unfortunately, a copy of the text has been lost to history. What is certain and remembered, though, is that Haraway’s paper entitled “Never modern, never been, never ever: Some thoughts about Never-Never Land in science studies” was a

thoughtful and fierce feminist critique of Latour’s *We Have Never Been Modern*. Notably, the critique had to do with how feminist literatures had already been produced that would easily be evidence against claims made in Latour’s critique. One attendee remembers the lecture as the “star performance” of that year’s conference.

In recognition and celebration of this event, its upcoming 25th anniversary, and 4S’s return to New Orleans this year, the Flashbacks team will be sitting down for a short interview with Donna Haraway. Unfortunately, Dr. Haraway won’t be in attendance for this year’s conference, but those interested can see what she has to say about that conference and where we’ve gone since then by visiting the Flashbacks blog on or after August 26th.



4S NEW ORLEANS



Orleans, it seems fitting to reflect on the impact of gathering together and exchanging ideas, even or especially when we disagree. New Orleans has long been a site for the exchange of ideas and, though we cannot forget that this has been influenced by both a history of pre-colonial trade and exchange and



violent colonial undertakings, it is one of a few places in America where the result has been a unique set of cultural traditions that include an unforgettable food and music scene, among others.

The 1994 conference will be remembered as a moment when STS, and 4S in particular, came into its own. It was a strong year for the exchange of ideas, having been co-hosted (for perhaps the last time, but that's a more complicated story) with the History of Science Society and the Philosophy of Science Association. That year, 4Sers showed up. Even more, women- feminists- showed up and made an impact. What will graduate students have to say about the 2019 conference in 2044? That's up to you.

