

Advocate

Cultural Studies at CUNY

By Barbara Martinsons

Cultural Studies is not, as recently suggested in the Times Magazine Section, the move that followed deconstruction in the literary — or any other — academic fashion game (1/23/94, p. 25, attributed to Roger Kimball). But the fact that this characterization appeared in the Times is (once again) proof that its often easier to be glib and shallow than to try to understand what's happening. Cultural Studies springs from intellectual roots that developed as modernism [the Enlightenment, Matthew Arnold, the Bauhaus, Impressionism, Realism — or make your own list] seemed to lose its political and intellectual power.

Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, Bakhtin and Derrida, Heidegger and Dilthey, Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, Gayatri Spivak, Fredric Jameson and Donna Haraway.

Cultural Studies in an interdisciplinary practice that is currently developing in various forms on campuses around the country and the world. At the Graduate School, The Center for Cultural Studies addresses the complex concept of culture, including the boundaries and distribution of power both within and beyond the university. Among the areas of inquiry are cultural communities, marginalized discourses, new forms of knowledge and new knowledges, and emerging cultural practices. The developing Cultural Studies curriculum examines the ethnographic, epistemological, technological and textual dimensions of intellectual work and of everyday

life, grounded in both history and theory.

Every year the Center for Cultural Studies puts out a call for Graduate Fellows. Each year's group of fellows (who have in past years been drawn from English, Psychology, Art History, Comp. Lit., Anthropology, Political Science, Sociology and Philosophy) helps to determine the focus of the Center's activities for the following academic year. Over the past few years the Center has considered a variety of topics from the identity of the postmodern self to The New Immigration. This year the emphasis is on technoscience. Each area on which the Center works is connected to a project, a conference, or both.

The CAMEO Project, for example, which tries to practice a reformulated ethnography, explored the intersection of identity, community memory and culture in three Latino neighborhoods in New York City. The Project considered ways in which culture organizes both personal and political identity. One of the outcomes, carried out in collaboration with The New Museum of Contemporary Art and several neighborhood groups, is an installation called *Testimonio*, which ran for four months at The New Museum at 583 Broadway. It is now in the process of being moved to each of the neighborhoods where the ethnographers first met and the members of the communities they would study.

Through the InterAmerican Cultural Studies Network, the Center continues to create an international bridge with other cultural studies group, first in Canada, the US and Latin America, at a conference in Mexico City last spring, and later this spring at a conference in Bellagio, Italy. It is important to the Center to do work in Cultural Studies as a participat-

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The Whole World is Talking

By Kevin Cooke and Dan Lehrer

Halfway around the world, Wam Kat files daily reports on life in Zagreb, Croatia. "I just stood about half an hour in the supermarket downstairs watching a firmly built man....He was shouting at everybody in the shop," he wrote on May 24. "From what I could understand, he said that when Croatia was under the Serbs (in former Yugoslavia), the price of bread was at least half of what it is now. Just a few days ago I heard somebody say that under the communists we had our problems, but now under the capitalists we have our problems too. What is the difference if you work for the

Kat's bulletins, which he posts on his bulletin board, "Zagreb Diary," don't appear in Yugoslav papers or on television. They exist in cyberspace. Kat types them on his own computer in Zagreb and sends them by modem to an electronic bulletin board in Germany. From there, his stories are relayed to computers around the world via the global mega-information stream called the Internet.

"Electronic mail is the only link between me and the outside world," says Kat, writing by e-mail. The Croatian government owns all the major media in the country and is prosecuting a group of journalists for treason.

Kat is only one of the millions of people participating in this community without walls. During other recent cataclysms, the Internet provided an instant, unfiltered link to the world.

"In Russia, during the coup attempt, people were providing live reports on Russian Internet about what was really going on. They were widely circulated on the Net," says Mitchell Kapor, founder of Lotus Development Corporation and now chairman of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a group advocating "electronic civil liberties," primarily freedom of speech

and privacy. "During Tiananmen Square, students were getting the news out and were fundraising through Internet," adds Tom Mandel, a futurist with SRI International, a Silicon Valley-based consulting firm. "There were a bunch of us hungrily reading newsgroups, stuff we weren't getting from reporters." (Newsgroups are open discussion groups where people can post their views.)

But the Net is changing more than just the flow of information; it's changing the way we relate to one another. The advent of global networking is fragmenting and resorting society into what one author calls "virtual communities." Instead of being bound by location, groups of people can now meet in cyberspace, the noncorporeal world existing between two linked computers. There they can look for colleagues, friends, romance or sex. John Hoag, communications coordinator for BARNet, the Bay

who began computer networking in 1986, says, "I met more people online inside a month than I met in the past ten years."

Have modem, will travel.

The Internet is the most powerful computer network on the planet simply because it's the biggest. It encompasses 1.3 million computers with Internet addresses that are used by up to 30 million people in more than forty countries. The number of computers linked to the Internet has doubled every year between 1988 and 1992; this year the rate of increase slowed slightly to 80 percent. To reach it, one needs only a computer, modem, and password. Dan Van Belleghem, who helps connect organizations to the Internet for the National Science Foundation, says, "Nobody has ever dropped off the network."

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Editor's Note

Welcome back to a new semester, and a new incarnation of the **CUNY Graduate Advocate**. Our February issue introduces several features, to help offset the blues this nasty, short, cold and brutish month. In time for Valentine's Day, we celebrate whatever erotic heat we can generate with the help of our epistolary goddess of love, *Ask Aphrodite*. Send your tempests to her teapot for March, care of the **Advocate**, and see what she can brew for you. Another innovation we kick off this month is a series of regular columns, featuring first-person singular takes on what Winona & Co. might describe as "Reality Bites." For *Valkyrie in Valhalla* and *Unemployed Man in the Free World*, it might be fair to say that reality merely nibbles.

Our Artist's Portfolio this month introduces a 29-year-old painter, Curtis James, whose powerful portraiture has already landed one of his works, *The Hands of Labor*, on the walls of the White House. If our portfolio piques your interest, you can see several of his works at St. John the Divine during the month of February, or at the Harlem Street Gallery.

Finally, we feel lucky to feature the work of novelist Charles Naylor for our *City Sites* column. A native New Yorker who has studied English literature at CUNY Grad Center, Charles Naylor inaugurates what will be an open forum for reflection and thoughts about the City which is—for better or worse—our campus and our home. What distinguishes our graduate experience from that of our peers at more sheltering, insular institutions is the challenge of taking the City on its own terms, with all that it entails for our daily lives. We teach throughout the five boroughs; our students are remarkable for the diversity of their origins, viewpoints, and for the challenges they face. The City University of New York is still a place of hope and opportunity. It

Learning while we teach, we struggle against the austerities of an administration which believes the humanities are a luxury in public education. The **Advocate '94** hopes to be a collage of voices, catching us *in medias res*, as it were, of our individual and collective odyssey through the CUNY doctoral epic.

The Advocate welcomes letters. Please include your telephone number for verification.

All letters are subject to editing in the interest of clarity and to meet space requirements.

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Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

In one of the editorials in the December, 1993, issue of *The Advocate* you referred to me and G. Ganter, albeit anonymously, as "pompous twits". The editorial went on to imply that we attempted to censor the newspaper, and called for a paper that is independent of the DSC.

To respond first to the name-calling, you certainly damage your credibility by using the student newspaper to insult fellow students who might even be "pompous twits", whatever this means.

Still, I think that this insult demonstrates more than pique and points to the heart of *The Advocate's* recent, and, perhaps, future politics. When I called the former editor, Christina Pretto, prior to publication, I expressed concern that the student newspaper was unnecessarily hurting a single student. I felt it was wrong-headed for the student newspaper to criticize a single student, no matter what his "faults" are in this particular case, when the fact is that the GSUC administration; whether represented by Economics EO Michael Grossman, Vice President Floyd Moreland, or President Horowitz, has been variously arrogant, abusive and incommunicative. This seems more newsworthy when we are part of an undemocratic institution where an individual student, or even the DSC, has almost no power or recourse to redress wrongs. I told Christina she could do whatever she wanted and that the DSC could not and would not interfere with publication. I added that the article would upset people and that she would be criticized. Unfortunately, the editorial offers an all too familiar conflation of criticism and censorship.

The idea of an independent or "objective" newspaper is problematic, especially if one is dependent upon advertising revenue. What if *The Advocate* accepted ads from The Dining Commons (on the 18th floor) — which they do not — wouldn't they feel compromised when students wanted coverage of

poor food service? As for objectivity, this position presupposes that some are purer than others, especially impure DSC members, and that readers are unable to differentiate and interpret the politics behind a given article.

I agree that *The Advocate* needs overhaul, or more specifically a redefined purpose. This newspaper is the only vehicle GSUC students, and their government, the DSC, have to force this institution, and CUNY in general, to treat everybody fairly and according to due process, and to fulfill this public university's mission. *The Advocate* should tirelessly pursue pro-student news stories and encourage all students (even DSC Steering Committee members) to write and get involved with the student government.

Anything short of this is an acute betrayal of trust.

Andrew Long,
DSC Co-Chair,
Student Affairs

Ed. We do take dining hall ads. Sorry, Andrew. If you want to take out an ad, we'll be happy to take that also.

Dear Editor,

As one of the student leaders described as "a pompous twit" for suggesting the title of the Michael Yomi cover story be changed, I would like to explain my reason. I felt the article should be called "Yomi Refuses to Take Exam" rather than "Organized Support for Yomi Falters" because the article doesn't say much about how student support for Michael Yomi has faltered. Rather, the article details the controversy around Michael's refusal to take the exam. And as the December 14th rally showed, student support for Yomi is still strong.

The editors allege that they were being "censored" because student government members were critical of the article as it stood in draft. The bylaws of *The Advocate* clearly give the editors total fiscal

Letters to the goddess may be dropped in the Advocate mailbox in the DSC Office

Ask ♥ Aphrodite



and supervisory control—even the Media Board, which is responsible for hiring the editor, is excluded from editorial power.

It worries me that reporters Christina Pretto and Michael Weinstein still don't understand the key issues in the Yomi case. They don't understand how much control an Executive Officer holds in a department, both formally and informally, nor have they looked into the allegations of racism in the Economics department. However, I fully support the editors' right to publish what they see fit.

G. Ganter,
DSC Steering Committee
and Media Board member

Student government at the graduate level— A popularity contest, social events, stepping stones to the good old boy network? This was my impression of the Doctoral Students Council for most of my years at the Graduate Center. That was until recently, when faced with dismissal from the Educational Psychology Program after ten years and at the proposal stage of my dissertation.

At the advice of a friend, I contacted Andrew Long, President of the Doctoral Student Council, and explained my plight to him. With great speed and concern, Mr. Long responded to my situation, and pursued it in an aggressive manner. He provided me with valuable counsel which enabled me to formulate an effective defense of my position, and contacted administrative officials on my behalf. His help made me feel like there was someone on my side, at a time when I felt most alone.

In October of 1993, Associate Provost Ms. Pamela Reid ordered my reinstatement to the Educational Psychology Program. At this time, I would like to publicly express my deepest appreciation to Mr. Long and Ms. McGann for their help in this matter. Mr. Long has remained in contact with me and shown great concern. I would also like to thank Dr. Reid for her most professional and humane attitude in her treatment of me, and for how these proceedings were conducted. If any other student at the Graduate Center is experiencing similar difficulties, I would strongly urge that you contact Mr. Long. He and the DSC are there for us.

Jack Weinstein

Dear Aphrodite:

I came to graduate school to improve my mind. Ever since the term began, however, I've been improving it by having really intense conversations with this guy after class. But just when he's in the middle of making some important point, I start thinking about the color of his eyes. I can't believe I'm doing this. I came to graduate school for intellectual stimulation. I feel so shallow.

—Anxious in Anthro.

Dear Anxious:

Obviously you haven't been in graduate school long. Graduate students don't have time to cultivate meaningful relationships outside of school. Several of my girlfriends haven't had a date for years. In the academic environment, think of these conversations as an equivalent of dinner and a movie in the real world. So don't feel so shallow, he's probably thinking about your eyes too.

—Aphrodite

Dear Aphrodite:

I always thought New York was a wild place. One of the reasons I chose to go to the Graduate Center was because I hoped I would meet interesting people and do exciting things with them. Then I went to a DSC party: My high school prom was more exciting. Some people were dancing but that came to an end when this drunken student leader launched into a long speech denouncing someone named Reynolds. The girl I was talking to started chanting: "no justice, no peace." Everyone joined in except me. She looked at me like I was a worm and muttered something about going back to 80th Street where I belonged. What's with these people anyway?

—Disillusioned in Doctoral Studies

Dear Dis:

When will you people learn? Remember those students in high school that you wouldn't be caught dead talking to? The ones in student government? Well what do you think happened to them after they went off to college? Sure, some of them made

their careers defending Robert Chambers, Jr. and Lorena Bobbitt, but most went to graduate school and majored in politically correct fields of study. In fact an informal survey of student government members taken at the last DSC party discovered that the average age at which student leaders lost their virginity was 18. Need I say more? Remember this: student leaders never die. They just move on to the next school and give more bad parties.

—Aphrodite



Dear Aphrodite:

As any graduate student does, I spend a lot of time in the library. One evening, intent on my studies, I lost track of the time and stayed later than usual. Looking up, I noticed that I was alone in the main reading room except for this woman—I'll call her "Darlene." Sure she's beautiful, but she's also smart and in several of my classes. As the library was about to close, I asked her if she'd like to go out for a drink. She told me that she made it a policy not

to date fellow students. I'm outraged. I didn't ask her to sleep with me. I'm not even sure I asked her for a date. I just wanted to get to know her better. Is this what p.c. has brought us to?

—Frustrated in French

Dear Frustrated:

Stop being so pretentious. It's obvious you were hitting on "Darlene." Otherwise you would have written me about an encounter with a "fellow student" and have given her a non-gender specific pseudonym.

—Aphrodite

Dear Aphrodite:

Some students in my department seem to be everywhere. They're on every committee, at every party, and are on a first name basis with all of their professors. Compared to them, I feel totally inadequate. Is their ease around the department a sign of their genius? Should I hate them or decide that I don't care?

—Insecure in English

Dear Insecure:

You're obviously a first year student. Take it from me, these people you see around the department are even more insecure than you are. After all, they're several years closer to not getting jobs than you are. The only difference is that they've been doing this for so long that they can worry and be on a first name basis with their professors at the same time. Besides, in a year or two they'll be holed up in a garret somewhere wrestling with the ghost of Emily Dickinson and you'll be on all the committees.

—Aphrodite

