

# Quango-ing the University: The End(s) of Critique-al Humanities

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*how intellectuals seem to have deserted--en masse--their role (and duty) as providers of critical thought, to become communication managers for Capital, whether paid or not.*

-- Patrice Riemens, *CTHEORY: Theory, Technology and Culture*

## **INTRODUCTION: The Humanities, Transnationality, Power and Capital**

1

Critique-al humanities--the knowledges that aim at educating citizens for an inclusive democracy with equal social and economic access for all--have increasingly come under attack by contemporary conservatism and transnational business forces. Conservatives have not only attacked critique-al humanities culturally (as "political correctness" inflicted on the public by "tenured radicals") but, more important, in alliance with global corporate lobbyists, they have also put economic pressure on the critique-al humanities through various legislative and administrative maneuvers, such as cutting their budgets, limiting new hiring, increasing the teaching loads of their faculty, suspending admissions to their graduate programs or eliminating them altogether, and substituting part-time, contingent knowledge workers for full-time positions. My purpose in this text, however, is not to rehearse these fairly familiar anti-critique-al practices of transnational business and their allies in the culture industry outside the university.<sup>2</sup> Instead, I will analyze their operation inside the university itself and show how global business and its agents among university administrators and faculty are working to privatize public education and,

among other things, marginalize critique-al practices that question the priority of "profit" in contemporary society.

Most discussions of the conservative antagonism towards critique-al humanities have taken a broad scope and addressed the humanities in general. However, I will be locating these antagonisms and their consequences for critique-al citizenship in a specific historical setting. I have, thus, focused on one institution, the State University of New York at Albany, and have anchored my text in the recent events in its Department of English.

English Departments are perhaps the most effective sites for such micro-institutional analysis because, traditionally, they have been both the focal point and the institutionally most influential site for the study of the humanities in the contemporary (Anglo-American) university, and also because they enact in their curriculum some of the most radical changes taking place in the relation between the "state" and "civil society" in the emerging postnational world. As transnational capitalism becomes more powerful, the role of the (nation-)state decreases, thereby diminishing the situation of the "national" university itself and changing the place of "national" language/literature departments (such as "English" in the United States). In this new postnational situation, the traditional justifications for the humanities have lost their historical persuasiveness, and, in fact, part of the current "crisis" of the humanities is caused by the collapse of these traditional "defenses." Whether founded, conventionally, on the idea of the stable subject of transhistorical "values" (as in the writings of Gerald Graff, *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflict Can Revitalize American Education*), or on an anti-foundationalist "pragmatism" (as in Richard Rorty, "The Inspirational Value of Great Works of Literature," or Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*) or less conventionally in a more sustained posthumanist analytics (such as Spanos, *The End of Education*)--these "defenses" no longer provide convincing reasons for the continued existence of the humanities because they do not face the material shifts in cultural practices brought about by the globalization of labor and capital. Some writers such as Michael Berube (in his "Standard Deviations: Skyrocketing Job Requirements Inflammate Political Tensions") and Cary Nelson (in such texts as, "Lessons from the Job Wars: Late Capitalism Arrives on Campus" and "Lessons from the Job Wars: What is to be Done?") are not so much engaging an understanding of the humanities in the space of the materialist contradictions between capital and labor as they are reviving a more or less old-fashioned "trade unionism" (what Lenin called "pre-political" practices). Their concern is a populist one: how to improve the situation of the humanities within the existing material structures rather than transforming those material structures. They, like Rorty (whose politics they at times oppose), are "pragmatist" reformers helping the system to correct itself and, in effect, positing that, in spite of all its defects and shortcomings, no other system can be shown to be "better" than the existing one.

In the new situation, the only justification for the "humanities" that is proving to be persuasive for the corporate university, the culture industry/media and the public, at large, is what might be called the "de-definition" of the humanities into "communications skills" at the insistence of transnational business. These skills, which are developed with

the aid of cybertechnologies, are useful practices for an efficient multinational workforce. Part of the "persuasiveness" of this de-definition, of course, derives from the willingness of transnational corporations to invest in the posthumanities (as communication skills) by providing grants, free technologies, experts and other forms of financial aid to the university. Increasing corporate financing of the university--at a time when conservative allies of transnational business in the legislative bodies (national, state and local) are cutting the budgets of colleges--effectively makes the corporate de-definition of the humanities the operative definition. Administrators, Republican-appointed boards of trustees (as in New York State), corporate executives and legislators, as well as their allies among faculty, regard this "de-definition" of the humanities to be a progressive act that demonstrates the usefulness of the university to the public (i.e. business community) and represent it as the "wave of the future." Representing the marginalization of the critique-al humanities as a progressive act has become part of the new conservative populism on campus. It is the new "truth" of the postnational academy because "it works," and "it works" because it "brings in the money."

One of the symptoms of this corporate de-definition of the humanities as communication skills is the closing or marginalization of humanities Departments. At SUNY-Albany, for example, not only was the German Department recently abolished and various modern languages departments collapsed into one department but also attempts were made, by some members of the administration and its conservative allies on the faculty, to break-up the English Department and put in its place a new more resource-full "Department of Writing Studies." The plan for splitting and marginalizing the English Department, however, has temporarily been shelved because of the contradictions that could not be contained even by the Consultants hired by the Administration. These contradictions are part of the global trend in knowledge practices in late capitalism and have to do (as I will discuss later) with the transition of national capitalism into transnational monopoly capitalism.

It is symptomatic of these unresolved contradictions at SUNY-Albany that the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences appointed a task force to restructure the humanities. One of the proposals "de-forms" the humanities into two "mega-departments" by collapsing nearly all the existing humanities departments into one unit and then proposing to build a second, new mega-department for "writing studies," cybermedia and information technologies. This proposal for combined writing-cyber studies again reproduces a discredited logocentric model in which the "represented" is put in a binary opposition to "representational" practices. If this project should fail, it will not be because the Dean, the Administration or their faculty allies have come to a new understanding of the role of critique-al humanities in a democratic society but because this particular strategy has not proved effective enough in dealing with the contradictions of this transitional stage in the relation between global capital and the university. They will soon try another, more complex strategy for implementing the de-definition of the humanities as writing-media-cyber-studies. Such displacing of the "humanities" with "writing studies" is, of course, taking place on a large scale (I shall discuss some exemplary cases below).

I have taken as my tutor texts, the texts and practices of some of the faculty and administrators of SUNY-Albany who have been at the forefront of the attack on critique-al humanities. For an extensive analysis of the issues, I have focused more specifically on two exemplary texts by the Vice President for Academic Affairs at SUNY-Albany, Judy L. Genshaft, as well as on some of her recent practices which enact the educational views articulated in those texts. In May 1996, in response to progressive changes in the English Department at SUNY-Albany, the Vice President annulled the results of a democratic election in the English Department, overthrew its duly elected new chair and, on June 1, 1996, took control of the Department through a surrogate chair appointed from outside the Department. In her texts of May 7, 1996 and May 16, 1996, the Vice President offers her "reasons" and her educational "philosophy" for these actions.

In writing this text, I have taken democracy seriously. I have taken intellectual work seriously. I have taken critique-al pedagogy seriously and acted as a public pedagogue and critique-al citizen in defense of the basic principles for constructing a "good society." I have taken seriously the idea of the "good society" (which has now become a subject of jokes for opportunists and careerist academics).

My text is a defense of the university against those whose interests lie in marginalizing its role as a critique-al space in the emerging cybercommercial culture: those who are imposing the rules of entrepreneurial profit-making on the university. My text is a resistance against de-forming the university into zones of free enterprise and thus depriving democracy of its access to critique-al knowledges that are fundamental to democracy. But my non-cynical approach itself will be marginalized because it will be read as aggressive rhetoric, belligerent in tone and....(supply your own epithet). This is, of course, the "fate" of critique in an age of cynicism.

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To facilitate public debate by and about critique-al citizenship, I have written this text on the shifting borders of the "local" and the "global." To make the issues "concrete," I have addressed the recent "events" that have happened in one specific institution, but I have also tried to show how these "specific," "local" issues and practices are structurally connected to "global" practices--practices that are, in the end, material and economic. One of the side-arguments in this text is that cultural and educational issues--although important in themselves--are always articulations of global material forces. The deformation of the university, in other words, is intimately connected with the new shape of the deployment of capital in the transnational world. The shift of focus in public education from critique-al knowledges aimed at educating critique-al citizens of a democracy (the "good society") to merely skill-full citizens of a pragmatic society of goods (a consumer society) is part of this structural connection.

The reader of this text, therefore, will often find herself in a defamiliarizing zone in which the seemingly "internal" scene opens up to the "external," the "event" shifts to "structure" and the "local" becomes "global." A border text is difficult to read precisely because it is a "genre" on the shifting frontiers of tenuous conventions--it is, nonetheless,

a genre of our times. These are times in which it is increasingly necessary to draw connections and foreground relations and to resist the relentless attempts at "regionalism"--attempts to isolate practices from one another and study them "case by case." The regional "case by case" inquiry is an evasive mode of reading that erases structural connections and thus limits the understanding of issues to an "immanent" and "local" knowledge.

## PART ONE

### **The Symptom and Its Genealogy: The "Crisis" in the English Department at SUNY-Albany**

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In March 1996, the Department of English at SUNY-Albany held an election to choose a new chair. It overwhelmingly elected (by a vote of 25 to 14) Lana Cable--the author of *Carnal Rhetoric: Milton's Iconoclasm and the Poetics of Desire*--over the candidate of an elite power Group in the Department (who was also the incumbent, Interim Chair). In the chair forum,<sup>3</sup> Lana Cable repeatedly marked herself as a "scholar and teacher" and made it clear that her administration would be committed to the principles of free inquiry and due process, thus giving high priority to those practices that are scholarly and pedagogical and to open, democratic spaces for differences--all of which have been marginalized in the Department.

The marginalization of these discourses and practices has taken place over the years in order to maintain, in the Department, an oligarchy, which I have designated by the collective term, "the Group." While its numbers have varied slightly over the years, the "Group" is a coalition of about ten faculty members consisting of traditional Americanists, cultural feminists, creative writers and composition faculty. The Group has been the hegemonic power in the Department: securing for its members light teaching loads; high merit raises; nearly exclusive access to graduate courses and students; membership on choice Department and University committees, and depriving the majority of the faculty in the Department from access to graduate courses, equal teaching loads and any major role in decision making. Moreover, the Group has been closely allied with the dominant power networks in the University--one of its members, for example, is now the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. By Group, it should therefore be clear, I mean an institutional power structure.

The election of Lana Cable as a reformist chair set in motion a series of events that have led to the overthrow of the results of the election by the Vice President and the blocking of reforms in the Department. The Group responded to the election by secretly planning to partition the English Department and cannibalize its resources in order to establish a new enclave of power and privilege for itself called the "Department of Writing Studies." Not only did the Group develop its proposal of "Intent to Establish a Writing Studies Department" in secrecy, but the proposal was submitted to and taken

under consideration by the Administration without the knowledge of the English Department.

The secret proposal to partition the Department was made largely to preserve the privileges of the Group when these seemed to be put in question by the election of a reformist chair and has been strongly opposed (after it was discovered) by the majority of the faculty of the English Department. The Administration has used the existence of the proposal and the opposition to it as an excuse to declare that there is a "crisis" in the English Department and to stage what is an administrative coup d'etat to depose the Chair-Elect and take control of the Department, putting it in "receivership."

Of course, there should be nothing to prevent a group of faculty from proposing to establish a new department. In fact, there is nothing either novel or unusual about establishing a "writing department" in a university since writing programs have become a marketing strategy and a selling point for the university, given the level of writing practices that the average student brings to college and the demands by big business for a workforce proficient in communication "skills." This demand, in turn, expands the academic market for those in writing and composition. However, what makes the Group's proposal unusual is that it not only does not offer any public "reason" (a philosophical or at least institutional explanation) to justify such a program; its main goal is to secure the privileges of the Group by giving it control of the Ph.D. in English (which was approved by the State of New York as a fairly complex intradisciplinary degree in English<sup>4</sup>), removing it from the English Department and transferring it to the proposed new department. In doing so, the Group attempts to block institutional reforms and prevent the development of new knowledges and advanced research in the humanities as these have begun to take place in the doctoral studies within the English Department. The "Writing Studies Department" proposal, in other words, is not undertaking to advance critique-al knowledges but rather is a reactionary act to prevent the production and introduction of new knowledges in the humanities. Even the conservative "Consultants"<sup>5</sup> hired by the Administration have not been able to hide the fact that the proposed establishment of the "Writing Studies Department" is an elaborate scheme to protect the practices of the Group from the critique of contemporary theory. The Consultants write that "According to their own description,<sup>6</sup> though, the devisors of the Writing Studies program want to limit the challenge of much post-structuralist theory by *excluding* it, and they want to limit 'English Studies' to American or even U.S. studies..." (emphasis added, Hulse, et al., "Report to the President" 14). Moreover, at a time when, we are told, there is a budget crisis and many SUNY campuses are closing or consolidating their programs and when English Studies, itself, is becoming increasingly transdisciplinary and integrative rather than segregationist, the proposal offers no coherent theory or rationale explaining WHY this new "Department of Writing Studies" is needed. The "unsaid" of this proposal is analyzed by Rosemary Hennessy (in her text of April 29, 1996):

Given the absence of any intellectual, institutional, professional, or economic justification for the inauguration of a Writing Studies Department separate from English, the only rationale for this proposal has to be seen as lying elsewhere--in political retaliation. This proposal is first

and foremost a reactionary response to changes in the power structure of the English Department, changes represented most immediately by the department's selection of Professor Lana Cable as its new chair.

This proposal for a "Writing Studies Department" not only aims at breaking up the English Department (the main center for the humanities at SUNY-Albany) but also attempts to reroute public funds to support the priorities of a small Group without public discussion and review. In fact the Group has refused to discuss and argue for its proposal and justify its priorities in public.

This arbitrary and arrogant disregard for public accountability is not an isolated act at SUNY-Albany. In their testimony before the New York State "Senate Democratic Task Force on the Future of Higher Education in New York State" (public hearing, February 20, 1996), Professor Luz Del Alba Acevedo and Professor Emilio Pantojas-Garcia, point out there is "a clique of faculty and administrators that wields power [in] the University at Albany through a system of institutional punishment and rewards...[and] run academic units as their private estates and manage insitutional accounts as extensions of their checkbooks."

In their May 1 1996 memorandum to the Vice President, Lana Cable and Warren Ginsberg requested that the "proposal" be subjected to appropriate review and returned to the Department of English so that it can be openly and publicly discussed:

The "Memorandum of Intent" is a proposal conceived in secrecy and forwarded under the cloak of subterfuge. We are convinced it is fractious, badly conceived, illogically developed, ill-timed, and, in some of its provisions, grievable and illegal. Because the "Memorandum" entails the disintegration of the English Department, we demand an end to surreptitious efforts to bypass discussion....The Dean's explicit desire to bypass the English Department's review of a proposal that affects its programs, resources and mission is indefensible and unethical. (p. 2)

On Tuesday, 7 May 1996 at 1:30 p.m. the faculty of the Department of English had scheduled a "Departmental Meeting" (by faculty petition) to publicly discuss and debate the situation. However, in another act of blocking *public* debates, the Vice President arranged a meeting with the English faculty at exactly the same time that the Departmental Meeting was scheduled, 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, 7 May 1996. In other words, the Administration of the University, first removed the names of the signatories from the proposal and obstructed public knowledge of the plan to partition the Department. The Administration then blocked the attempts of faculty to have a public and open debate about establishing a new "Department of Writing Studies," that is, a debate about spending public funds in questionable ways by breaking up the English Department and about distorting the graduate program in the interests of an oligarchy. In usurping the Departmental Meeting, the Vice President acted in a partisan manner and framed the issues in terms favorable to the Administration and the Group and prevented open, democratic discussion. Her meeting with faculty was conducted, as one faculty member

put it, more like a presidential press conference: she read a prepared statement and then took a few questions. She began by reading her statement, in which she says:

I have been aware since the beginning of the academic year...of tensions in the Department. I had hoped, indeed I believe all of us hoped, that the Department would be successful in resolving these differences. Unfortunately, that has not happened; indeed, I am convinced that the situation has grown worse during the year, not better. (May 7, p. 1)

But when I asked her, what were the sources of her information since she had not talked to anyone from the majority of the Department, including any of the younger actively publishing scholars in the Department, she gave an evasive answer to the effect that she had her own sources. As Richard Goldman writes in his letter of June 10, 1996 to Vice President Genshaft:

We are also concerned by your occasional use of such phrases as "I have become convinced..." Convinced by whom? Since two members of the secessionist group spend a good deal of time in the purlieu of the administration, we fear that what you are being given is a version of department history and current events that is to put it mildly contestable. It is, of course, essential that the chief administrative officers hear all sides of the story. (1)

As I will argue in the following sections of this text, the Vice President's views are not only quite partisan but also out-of-date and completely uninformed by the current scholarship in the new humanities. They are, most importantly, totally unhistorical--the time frame for her views are "since the beginning of the academic year" (May 7, p. 1), "in more recent years" (May 16, p. 1), "over the past five years" (May 7, p. 2). It is not clear what makes the "last five years" in the humanities different from the last ten, fifteen or twenty-five years. The intellectual roots of the debates that are now taking place in the English Department go back (in their contemporary formation) at least to 1966, to the watershed symposium at Johns Hopkins University on "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man." What "last five years"?

The Johns Hopkins symposium ("*Les Langages Critiques et les Sciences de l'Homme*") was held at the Johns Hopkins University during the week of October 18-21, 1966. It was the prelude to a two-year series of colloquia and seminars on the state of the humanities. The papers discussed in the symposium were later published as *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* edited by Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970).

The symposium was the first major "problematization" and, in some cases, "deconstruction" of the "foundations" of the main ideas and assumptions ("first principles") that at the time dominated the humanities in both Europe and the United States. These assumptions, in one form or the other (from the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and the views and practices of Russian Formalism and Prague



Structuralism to the anthropological texts of Levi-Strauss; the literary criticism of Todorov and Barthes; the psychoanalytical theories of early Lacan, and even the grounding notions of Anglo-American "New Criticism") were all based on what might very broadly be called "structuralism." They all adhered to the view that texts operated--as Derrida put it in his groundbreaking paper for the symposium, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences"--as structures beyond structurality: that is, structures as a "point of presence" with "a fixed origin" that protected the text-as-structure from the "*free play* of the structure" (*The Structuralist Controversy* 247-48).

In other words, the "text" in the humanities was thought to bear a "meaning" that endowed it with "self-sameness" and an "identity" beyond the "play" of signs and the slippage of language. The purpose of the structuralist theory of "meaning" was to provide what Derrida called "a reassuring certitude" (248). Structure without "center" was, therefore, unthinkable in the humanities whose main goal (during the cold war period) was to secure "certain" meanings and thus constitute a closure that put meaning beyond a critique of its foundations. "Meaning" is made of language, and language is, in Derrida's words, a field of "*freeplay*, that is to say a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble" (260).

Derrida's text, as well as some of the other papers in the symposium, marked the process of questioning, what Macksey and Donato in their 1971 prefatory remarks to the book called, "the very existence of structuralism as a meaningful concept" (ix). It is important to keep in mind that the deconstruction of structuralism and the emergence of "post"-structuralist theories were not the outcome of a centered critique "outside" structuralism, but the effect of the economies of complementarities and aporias within structuralism itself. These economies have turned the identitarian centered "meanings" that underpinned the humanities into playful "disseminations" of indeterminate signs and, in doing so, have deconstructed "reading" and "writing"--the constitutive practices of the humanities.

Composed thirty years after the symposium, the Group's proposal for a "Writing Studies Department," which has had the tacit support of the Administration, still conceives of "writing" quite conventionally. It is a counter-progressive and reactionary move to turn back the clock. It seeks to contain the deconstruction of "reading" and "writing," as even the consultants have made clear, and return to the certitude of centered meanings beyond the critique of poststructuralism. It treats "writing" as a "craft" and returns to the notion of "reading" and "writing" as securing "experience," the "emotional," and the "personal." It excludes any philosophical examination of the constitution of these in language or in materialist history. Like all returns and reproductions, however, "Writing Studies" represents itself as a "new" move ("the wave of the future") and points to its use of new learning technologies such as the computer and (especially in "Creative Writing") cyber-and hyper-texts. This technologism only superficially conceals the underlying preoccupation of writing studies with centered-structures and the certainty of meaning. In his essay, "Gutenberg Galaxy Expands," Umberto Eco hints at this relation and writes:

The real problem of an electronic community is solitude. The new citizen of this new community is free to invent new texts, to annul the traditional notion of authorship, to delete the traditional division between author and reader, to transubstantiate into bones and flesh the pallid ideals of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. (At least this is what I have heard said by enthusiasts of technology. You will have to ask Derrida if the design of hypertexts really abolishes the ghost of a Transcendental Meaning). (36)

In embracing technology, writing studies follows the path taken by transnational capital: it uses new methods to repackage the old ideological practices it needs for its unquestioned reproduction. I will discuss the politics of this uncritical technologism in writing studies later, but it is important to point out here that it is basically a corporate strategy. The capitalist culture industry is a regime of relentless re-packaging of commodities--a process it names "innovation." These "innovations" are ideologically necessary for the reproduction of centered meanings and closural "values" that legitimate, in academic discourses, the stability and security that big business needs for its safe investments. I will return to this alliance of "writing studies" and big business.

In her dealings with the English Department, the Vice President has demonstrated a disturbing lack of historical understanding of these issues and an unfamiliarity with the theoretical and "disciplinary" contestations and arguments in contemporary humanities. The Vice President thus has framed the institutional contradictions and knowledge conflicts in the English Department at SUNY-Albany in a simplistic way as one of "tension between literature and writing" (May 7, p. 1), echoing the views of the Group.

In an out-dated manner, the Vice President represents as a "disciplinary" matter what is at root a historical and material contestation. The theoretical debates and conflicts in the profession at large or their continuation on the micropolitical level in individual "departments" are always, in the last instance, contestations over the material practices in culture and institutions.

As Sandra Fischer explained in a "chat" on the Internet with David Schwalm, Vice Provost for Academic Programs at Arizona State University (June 17, 1996):

The English Department here for years has been run by virtue of old-fashioned privilege and governed by elitist practices. Those who have been willing to engage in careerism have managed to gain themselves cushy political sinecures and scandalously light teaching loads, basically subsidizing their free time with the hard work of the other faculty--the other faculty being primarily literary scholars, although careerism cuts across the usual boundaries, and the privileged elite here have been writers, writing theorists, old fashioned feminists, and a few old fashioned literary history types. A couple of new faculty are cultural theorists, Marxist feminists. They have joined with the exploited literary scholars to critique and challenge the nondemocratic elitist operation of the department. They have done so vociferously and relentlessly, so some

have labeled them trouble-makers, but they, let me reiterate, are joined WITH the majority of the department. We recently elected a chair, overturning the elitist structure--their candidate didn't win. So they secretly formulated a schism petition, bypassing all democratic and intellectually valid procedures, and tried, without the knowledge of the English Department, to take with them in a "new" department (again, comprised of a textual editor of literary documents, a couple of creative writers, a couple of old-fashioned feminists, and a couple of composition theorists) all secretaries, AND the doctoral program. The grand irony is that this Doctoral Degree is supposed to be based on a Nexus of Discourses, self-aware critique of one's place in the discipline. When the critique began, these people fled. So please, don't try to make this into some sort of writing vs. literature political situation or turn the Marxist feminists into the heavies. It isn't and they're not. It is about elitism, privilege, power, and disregard for the work of one's colleagues, all of which the majority of this department have tried to fight. When we began to succeed to question the old practices, the privileged faction ran.

The purpose of the Vice President's May 7 meeting was not a serious discussion of intellectual priorities but a preemptive strike by which a series of substitutions quickly took place: the substitution of a department as a friendly "atmosphere" for a department marked by intellectual rigor; the substitution of a department as a "delivery" system for a department whose purpose is to inquire into the production and "making of knowledge"; the substitution of emotional tranquillity for scholarly seriousness. Teaching, in a research doctoral program, was represented in this meeting as a form of therapy. All conflicts, contradictions and contestations over the "truth" in the humanities, it was made clear, should be put aside in the interest of friendly "atmosphere," "consensus" and "emotional" calm, and the Department was turned into a "delivery" system for tranquilizing lessons.

But, the so-called "crisis" in the English Department is not simply a subjective matter: a question of intellectual differences and emotional discord. Or to be more precise, these intellectual differences are rooted in the objective material conditions of the workplace. One of the major inequalities in the Department is the labor relations. There is an oligarchy (signatories of the "proposal" for partitioning the Department and establishing a "Department of Writing Studies") who routinely teach a course load of 2-2 or (usually) fewer courses a year (that is, two or less courses each semester)--under various procedural alibis that are not made public and in spite of the fact that most of them have not published any books of scholarship for a decade or more. The rest of the Department has regularly been teaching course loads of 3-3 and 3-2 courses a year (that is three courses each semester, or three courses one semester and two courses the other).

The May 7 meeting with the Vice President, in other words, was not so much an inclusive discussion with faculty on the knowledges and institutional practices in the English Department as it was a signal that the interests of the Group will be protected. The meeting, in short, was aimed not at a debate over priorities but at showing "who is

the boss" on this campus. The "boss" not only overthrew the newly elected chair of the Department and "appointed" her own chair, but, through the appointed chair, largely kept the existing power structure in place. The non-elected chair immediately re-appointed as Director of Graduate Studies in English a faculty member who is said to be among those who have signed the proposal to partition and dismantle the Department of English and break-up its integrated Ph.D. program. In other words, a faculty member--who is said to have formally advocated to the Administration (by signing the "Memorandum of Intent to Establish a Department of Writing Studies") the removal of the interdisciplinary English Ph.D. from the English Department--is now (after the administrative coup d'etat of June 1, 1996) put in charge of the English Department graduate program and supervision of its Ph.D.! The coup d'etat, in short, re-secured the oligarchy. As Helen Elam writes, "the administration [has] turned the English Department into an occupied zone--occupied precisely by the forces that are against change and against the improvements that change would bring" (June 7, 1996 letter to President Hitchcock, p. 2).

## 2

Unlike such well-known public university systems as California's research universities (Berkeley, Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Cruz,...), SUNY's research universities (Buffalo, Binghamton, Stony Brook, Albany) have not achieved a world-renowned level of research and pedagogy. The reasons are many and complex: including such various factors as the tax base; relations to local and state governments; underlying theories of citizenship and education, and also the role of ideas and intellectuals in the two systems. This is not the place to examine why one public education system (California) has been so much more effective than another (SUNY). However, an examination of the history and institutional practices in the Department of English at SUNY-Albany will clarify, on the microlevel, some of these reasons. The pre-history of the English Department at SUNY-Albany--the fact that it was originally part of a Teacher's College--is as important to the specific forms of its current "crisis" as is its recent institutional history in which its current Ph.D., as I will map out shortly, is influenced by the dominant practices of its previous graduate degree, the D.A. At the center of any institutional accounting of the differences between the English Department at SUNY-Albany and the English Departments in other systems, such as the California research universities, lie the differences by which matters of research, scholarship and pedagogy are treated.

The Department of English at SUNY-Albany (more than any of the other English Departments in the "flagship" universities of the SUNY system--the research centers at Buffalo, Stony Brook and Binghamton) has had a troubled history. One main reason is that in this Department research, scholarship and rigorous pedagogy have, for the most part, been abandoned in favor of "service." The valorization of "service" has immediate *material* reasons: faculty who focus on "service" often receive ample and immediate rewards, ranging from high merit raises to "Excellence in Service" awards, "Collins Fellows," "Distinguished Service Professorships," to other material rewards. At SUNY-

Albany it seems, it has become more important to be, in the words of the Vice President, "important citizens of the campus" (May 7, 1996 text, p. 3) rather than active, publishing scholars who participate in the knowledge contestations of the time and practice rigorous pedagogy. "Rigor" and "rigorous" are, in fact, the subject of jokes and mockery among the Group and their students.

Being "important citizens of the campus" is what provides "power" for faculty and not their intellectual work, their publications and research, or their pedagogy. In fact, in one committee meeting when I argued for the intellectual rigor and excellence of the Ph.D. program, one colleague (part of the Group) told me that he was sick and tired of hearing me use these words. "Intellectual" and "rigor," in short, are taboo words: they are associated with ivory tower "idealism" and impracticality and treated as terms of derogation and sites of bad jokes. An anonymous text, "Boundaries of the Gnosos or noses, or sneezes heard recently on the third floor of the Humanities Building" (one of the anonymous texts that, from time to time, circulate in the Department to mock "intellectuals" and the philosophical and theoretical issues they raise in their texts and their classes), is exemplary of this anti-intellectualism which, when faced with sustained argument, takes refuge in nervous laughter. However, when "jokes" have failed to silence the intellectuals, other means are deployed to block, delay and finally suppress efforts for reform and change in the Department's practices and programs in support of more intellectual rigor, research and new knowledges in teaching and scholarship. These include resorting to procedural mechanisms--such as invoking "Robert's Rules of Order" to suppress debate; walking out of committees to prevent a quorum--and behind-closed-doors deals. But, the tactics deployed to defend the status quo are not limited to these. As an advocate of institutional reform and curriculum change, I myself have received (as recorded in the police files) anonymous telephone calls and graffiti attacks--on the wall outside my office--aimed at intimidating and silencing me.

The valorization of "service"--as opposed to "intellectual" and "pedagogical" work--in the Department is part of a larger national trend in the corporatization of the university. Like corporations, the university is putting more and more emphasis on the "loyalty" and "service" of its employees. The notion that scholars and pedagogues are "employees" of the university and derive their "identity" from their "loyalty" (as shown by their "service") to the institution more than from their practices as intellectuals and knowledge workers is beginning to prevail. Like corporations, the university tends more and more to reward those who do its errands and do not raise questions about the principles and consequences of its policies. The privileging of "service" over intellectual and scholarly work is part of de-forming the university from a place of "critique" to one of "bureaucracy."

It is symptomatic of the marginalization of principled intellectual work that there is no "Distinguished Research Professor" nor "Distinguished Teaching Professor" in the English Department. The work that has been represented as "scholarly" in the Department has been, for the most part, works of "editing" (of anthologies of others' work), "textual editing," "textbooks," "study aids," "bibliographies," etc. Scholarly work--the product of original basic research, intellectual discovery and sustained conceptualization that

contribute in a significant way to advances in the humanities--has been marginalized in the Department. A "book," in other words, has been understood more as a physical object (anything between two covers) than an intellectual construct--a work of rigorous conceptualization and an original contribution to human knowledges as a means for praxis.

The history of this marginalization of scholarly practices and research is a long one and has led, among other consequences, to the Department's Ph.D. being "deregistered" by the State of New York Department of Education in 1975.<sup>7</sup> According to Cyril Knoblauch (now Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences), writing in the *ADE Bulletin*, the deregistration was a "catastrophe" ("Albany Graduate English" 21). But the "deregistration" of the Ph.D. was not perceived to be catastrophic enough to transform the practices of the Department. The "self-examination" following deregistration led to a denial and a defensive withdrawal from the scene of contested knowledges. It simply enhanced the Department's dominant practices and its "pragmatic," anti-intellectual approach as the Department expanded its "doctor of arts," which according to Knoblauch, was "designed to prepare English teachers rather than research scholars and to attract writers" (21). Thus officially limited to a D.A.--a teaching degree--for many years, the Department became (again) a teacher training department.<sup>8</sup> As Knoblauch characterizes it, "We've been...too restricted by the nature of our degree to compete with other schools in producing literary scholars" (21). In short, for much of the last twenty years, the work in the English Department has been in relation to a non-scholarly program. This genealogy of the practices and pedagogical priority of the "pragmatic" and anti-intellectual has played a significant role in producing the conditions that underlie what the SUNY-Albany Administration calls the "crisis" in the English Department. This same "pragmatic" (anti-research and anti-scholarly) approach--supported by big business and the new corporate management styles in the university--is now sweeping the nation and working to break up humanities departments (such as English) as research units and put in their place pragmatically-oriented" programs, such as "writing studies."

In the late 1980's (at the height of the revolution that had transformed the humanities in research universities in the U.S. and Western Europe) the University at Albany was made painfully aware of the fact that its claim to being a world-class "research" university remained an empty one without strong research departments in the humanities and especially in English. The University, therefore, in 1986-87 began preparing to reinstitute the Ph.D. after an examination of the state of the discipline showed that the "viability" the D.A. degree had been "seriously affected" (Knoblauch, "Albany Graduate English" 21) by the new revolution in the humanities, the emergence of new knowledges and the reshaping of the post-national university itself. In 1987-88 the university set up a committee and in 1988-89 hired an external consultant to provide the committee with advice on how to rearticulate the graduate curriculum in English.

The place of "English" in the transnational university, however, is highly layered, complex and symptomatic of the contradictions of the university itself, at this historical moment of transition. On the surface, with the decline of the nation-state and the diminishing importance of national identities and culture in a post-national world, one

would think that departments of national literatures and language, such as English, are a thing of the past. This is a perception that is further enhanced by such "internal" shifts in the politics and production of knowledges as the development of transdisciplinary work (e.g. "cultural studies"). On the other hand, "English" has become the *lingua franca* of transnational business and, as such, has acquired a post-national privilege and prestige in the university. Also, as I have argued in my "After Transnationalism and Localism: Toward a Red Feminism" and as some other theorists have emphasized, transnational capitalism itself still relies heavily on "local" states and local cultures and identities (strengthened by various "local" state ideological apparatuses such as national and regional literatures).

Developing the theories that he first put forth in his *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony*, William I. Robinson writes in his essay, "Globalization: Nine Theses on Our Epoch," that transnationalism works not only through a "dense network of supranational institutions" but also it "requires the nation-state to perform three functions" (18-19). These are the adoption of fiscal policies favorable to transnational business; supplying the basic infrastructure necessary for global commerce, and providing social control, order and stability by ideological work such as advocating nominal "democracy" (in place of old-style military dictatorships). Robinson concludes: "we are not witnessing 'the death of the nation-state' but its transformation into a neo-liberal state" (19).

We see the contradictions between "post-nationalism" and "ultra-nationalism" on the global level in the sudden outbreak--in the midst of transnationalism--of "nationalist" movements, such as those in Eastern Europe, Ireland and other parts of the world. This contradiction also marks the institutional practices in the contemporary university and its English Departments because the work of Departments of national literatures and languages (such as English) are part of the ideological work of this stage of transition to transnationalism. Departments of English have now become, like all transitional practices, sites of numerous conflicts between residual and emerging practices.

The so-called "crisis" in the English Departments (the favorite subject of conservative weeklies and journals) in the U.S. are not simply the effects of local politics and a clash between "canon" teachers and "canon" busters, or "writing" and "literature," or "American Literature" and "British Literature," or (more recently) "political correctness" and conflicts between "literature" and "theory." The "crisis" is rooted in material shifts in capitalism itself, and English Departments are one site relaying the conflict resulting from this shift. The conflict is between, on the one hand, a "transnationalism" founded upon *consumption* practices--and the identities derived from them--and, on the other hand, the assertion of the class solidarity of working people (articulated, in part, in the work of resistance knowledge workers) who oppose transnationalism not in the name of some localist cultural identities (such as those expressed by the Social Movements activists and old cultural feminists) but in support of a collective internationalism based on *production* practices and class struggle. The defense of "transnationalism" in the university is done not only by administrators, who are embracing corporate management models, but also by various faculty groups that see the rising global capitalism as "the

wave of the future" and do whatever is necessary to support it. At times this support takes the form of a defense of post-national practices and at other times a revival of intensely nationalist and localist acts.

This incoherence in the practices of the transnational university is quite evident in the practices of the Group in the Department of English at SUNY-Albany. On the one hand, the Group has attempted to marginalize "literature" (national identity) by advocating "Writing Studies"--English as a transnational communication skill that is not tied to a department of national identity. On the other hand (as an attempt to shore up local identities to carry out the ideological work of transnationalism), it not only advocates "literature" but also "national" literature and goes even further and foregrounds "regional" literature. In their report, the Consultants unwittingly hint at these contradictions. They write that the Group that has advocated establishing a "Writing Studies" department will provide "excellent training for business" (p.11), that is, it will supply transnational capital with communication skills. But they also point out that the Group also wants "to limit 'English Studies' to American or even U.S. studies" (p. 14). It is this reductionism (of "writing" to a functional practice suitable for "business" and "literature" to the cultural products of a "nation") that marks post-al transnationalism itself--a sign that shows its claim for inclusion is, in actuality, merely a set of exclusions. Transnationalism becomes in practice little more than a form of neoregionalism or neonationalism. It is, as many have pointed out, the name for a new nationalism: the Americanization of the world. "American" is the nationality of the transnational. In the same manner, its advocacy of "democracy" is, in actuality, an opposition to democratic governance and a thinly concealed institutionalizing of the dictatorship of the "free market."

In short, the place of the "English Department" in the contemporary university is shaped by the contradictory ways in which the university is accommodating the "needs" of the rising transnational corporations. It is no longer deemed "realistic" for the university to be a critique-al space for questioning the practices of these corporations or a site for educating internationalist citizens committed to the idea of the "good society" of economic equality. Yet the university cannot entirely abandon the project of critique-al humanities without undermining its own legitimacy as a place of knowledge and violating its democratic principles. The university thus engages in such contradictory acts as simultaneously undermining, while nominally supporting, the faculty and practices involved in critique-al studies. Moreover, the SUNY-Albany Administration supports the Group's agenda only to the extent that this agenda has its own agenda and reflects the practical and pragmatic (anti-intellectual and contra-critique-al) interests of big business and transnational capitalism. The Administration, in short, is sustaining its own pragmatic institutional interests rather than supporting any individual persons in the Group: it will abandon and discard any and all persons the moment their practices no longer overlap with those of the Administration and its business allies. For the post-national university the idea of the "good society" based on open democratic critique is cynically displaced by the notion of a pragmatic, practical "consumer society" founded on networking and the silencing of critique.



In the complicated emergence of "new" world orders, Departments of English have thus become both "more" and "less" important in the contemporary university. As focal points of the humanities in the university they have become an integral part of the ideological work of the university in relation to transnationalism. A major research university without such a site for the ideological training of the labor force cannot claim to be a serious player in the games of transnationalism. At the same time, for a research university to neglect critique-al knowledges, particularly in the focal disciplines of the humanities, would jeopardize its intellectual credibility. A recent institutional move by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign captures some of the contradictions of the "humanities" and their relations to the post-national universities. Having achieved an international reputation in sciences and cyber-research, the University recently announced that it will put new emphasis on the "humanities." It has, therefore, established a new "Program for Research in the Humanities" whose purpose is to enhance the place of the humanities in the university and thus make its claim to being a world-class ("international") university more believable. Without a strong humanities program, the university, will be known at most as a "technological" university.

## 3

These contradictions are played out in the rearticulation of the graduate program in English at SUNY-Albany. Recognizing the need for advanced (critique-al) research, the university committed itself to hiring scholars from a new generation of knowledge workers trained in the contemporary scholarship that has revolutionized the humanities since the late 1960s. It committed itself, in short, to bringing in those knowledges that have been largely suppressed and marginalized in the Department. "Hirings throughout the 1970's and 1980's" in the Department "reflected the commitment at Albany to quality undergraduate teaching and to the graduate emphasis on writing and pedagogy" (Knoblauch, "Albany Graduate English" 21). In contrast, the new hirings, in the 1990's, represented a break with the existing practices, and this "break" itself quickly became part of the rising conflict: the conflict between the newer scholars, who are theorists, and those pragmatic "teachers" who have accumulated power and privilege by marginalizing scholarship and theory and putting "service" at the center of their work. In its teaching the Group has emphasized practical matters such as classroom procedures, student enrollments, the length of time it takes to finish the degree (stressing the need to push students through quickly). Its guiding frame in teaching has been the privileging of the emotional (rather than the intellectual): teaching as "nurturing," "pleasure," and "counseling"--a form of therapy rather than critique. This conflict (rooted in the material power of the Group) is one of the significant lines of division in the Department and is much more complex and quite different from the one that Vice President and her advisors conveniently draw between "writing" and "literature" (May 7, p. 1).

To posit the existing conflict as one between "writing" and "literature" is to show a lack of historical awareness of the changing world and the way these changes are relayed through the movement of scholarship and its institutional politics in the contemporary

academy. The tension between "writing" and "literature," in fact, had already come to a head in the academy in the 1970's, and by the late 1980's, it (like the old conflicts between "American" and "British" literature scholars of an earlier generation) had been transformed by the "theory" revolution. The resuscitation of the "writing" and "literature" feud as a *current* conflict by the Group and the Vice President shows how the Group in the English Department and the SUNY-Albany Administration are caught up in contradictions and outdated knowledges that lead them to (re)live the cold wars of the "composition" fights and "canon" debates. It is also a telling demonstration of how the new knowledges (and the contestations they have given rise to) have been blocked by the Group. The English Department at Albany has been dominated by those who--in their defense of the status quo and the interests of big business which opposes critique-al education--are fighting phantom wars over issues that were transformed quite a while ago. They have thus turned the Department into a quaint world with a quaint list of enemies and register of friends: a world out of step with the changing realities in which Toni Morrison has received the Nobel Prize and even the slimmest anthologies of Anglophone literature have large sections devoted to non-canonic writings by women and multicultural writers as well as post-canonic (experimental) texts. Yet, in the English Department at Albany the "news," according to the Group, is about the revision of the "canon" and (a quite provincial understanding) of "experimental" writing. The local understanding of "experimental" (in the writing program) is over half-a-century behind the times. It is essentially populist, non-philosophical and entirely mechanical, based on an eclectic adoption of "imitative form" (collage, chance composition) and some warmed over techniques of traditional surrealism (automatic writing, etc.) sutured to cyber "things." The philosophical notion of experimental writing aimed at critiquing the logocentric practices of the Western imaginary is an alien concept in this quaint world which still regards busting the "canon" to be a progressive act. It is odd to still claim, for example, that "experimental" literature (of the kind practiced in the Department) is subversive when the standard anthologies routinely print stories by surfictionists and hypertextualists.

Like many conservatives, the Group is caught up in contradictory desires: its concern to "conserve" the established order (thus its preoccupation with U.S. literature, for example) and its interest in "technology" (thus the interest of some in the Group in "cyber" things as a synecdoche of the "wave of the future"). These are the kinds of contradictions that, for instance, mark the practices of such other contemporary conservatives as Newt Gingrich. He incoherently both advocates such Victorian notions as "family values" and wants to give a "lap top" to every American. The Group, on a local level, and the Republicans, on the national scene, articulate the contemporary contradictions of transnationalism. For both, "cyber" things are devices for supporting capitalism. Gingrich says: "every American will have a cellular phone, which will probably be a fax, which will probably be a modem, which will probably in some way tie them into a world--whether they want to or not, frankly, every American will be competing in the world market with Germany and China and Japan" (Rosenbaum, 1). The Group's positions, like transnational capitalism itself, is an opportunistic amalgamation of incoherences: conservative "values" and new "technologies."

As a consequence of these contradictions, the Group, in the English Department at SUNY-Albany, still considers it "progressive" in 1997 to advocate as "new" what is elsewhere commonplace--such as teaching non-canonic literature and accepting the legitimacy of "composition" pedagogy and the use of cyber-textualities. The careerist Group has, by appropriating the means of representation in the university and "access" to the Administration, named itself "progressive." What is represented as "progressive," however, is a conservative opportunism that takes the shape of the situation in which it unfolds. The politics of the Group's "progressivism"--becomes perhaps more clear when one considers some of the institutional practices of the Group. One particularly telling incident concerns an act of "aggravated harassment" against me.

On 5 November 1996, one of the walls outside my office was covered with graffiti--the aim of which was to intimidate me into stopping my struggles to establish a democratic workplace in the English Department, one free from intimidation and harassment and dedicated to equality of labor. To put this in context: I have fought for several years to reach such goals, and during this time, I have faced hostilities ranging from being shouted down and silenced in committee and departmental meetings to receiving anonymous telephone calls harassing me for speaking out. My efforts have focused particularly on establishing equal labor relations among faculty by instituting a universal course load in which all faculty (except those with administrative duties) teach the same number of courses. The members of the Group have been stridently opposed to such equality and have over the years routinely taught course loads of 2-2 and often fewer courses a year (that is, two courses or less each semester) while the rest of the faculty have taught 3-3 and 3-2 courseloads for the year.

In the context of these struggles, the "graffiti incident" was quickly picked up by the main newspaper in Albany, the *Times Union*, and the Fox television news network as well as the student newspaper. The *Times Union* news item reported that:

University at Albany English Professor Teresa Ebert arrived at work Tuesday to find the following words drawn on the wall next to her office: "Freedom is obedience, you schizophrenic. Or should I say fool?"

A peace symbol followed the phrase. It was scrawled in black ballpoint pen.

Ebert, a Marxist, said she believes the graffiti is meant as an attack against what she is described as an ongoing fight for equity among professors and her support of an altered curriculum within the English department at the university....

"I took this as a direct targeting of me. I take the graffiti as aimed at trying to silence and intimidate me," said Ebert, who edits the international journal, *Transformation: Marxist Boundary Work in Theory, Economics, Politics and Culture*.... *Times Union* (6 November 1996)

In the English Department meeting of 7 November 1996, the incident of the graffiti on the wall outside my office was discussed, and Rosemary Hennessy proposed a motion "for the Department to go on record recognizing the incident as an act of violence, harassment, intimidation, an impingement on Academic Freedom, and to censure future actions of this sort" (Minutes of 11/7/96 Department Meeting, 2). The motion was opposed by the members of the Group--the vote was "11 in favor and 7 opposed" (Minutes of 11/7/96 Department Meeting, 2)

In response to this opposition, a group of graduate students in English wrote a memo to the President of the University, "not only to register our shock and dismay that public intellectuals have refused to condemn a hate crime against a fellow faculty member, but also to express our concern for intellectual freedom in the university." In their memo they point out that

while the police investigate an act against [Professor Ebert] which they regard to be aggravated harassment (a class A misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in prison and a \$1000 fine), seven members of the English faculty voted AGAINST supporting a statement for the formal departmental minutes that condemned the act as a violence. This occurred minutes after the department engaged in a discussion, led by Dean Pipkin, of hate crimes. (Hawkins, et. al., "Thinking Anew," Memo 13 November 1996)<sup>9</sup>

Some of those members of the Group who opposed the motion to condemn the incident as "an act of violence, harassment, intimidation," identify themselves as "feminist" and constitute the core of the ruling elite in the Women's Studies Department. This "elite" has been described by Luz del Alba Acevedo, an Assistant Professor in Women's Studies and Latin American and Caribbean Studies (in her letter of July 13, 1995 to the University President protesting abuses of power in Women's Studies), "as a clique of *corporate women* bent on holding on to positions of power within this institution and perpetuating reductionist, racist and sexist forms of feminism which have been contested by new knowledge in feminist scholarship."<sup>10</sup>

Another member of the Group, who is also said to have voted against the motion, has in fact been chairing the taskforce for establishing a harassment-free workplace in the College of Arts and Sciences.<sup>11</sup> His main efforts, it is reported, have been focused on establishing "civility" in the workplace--this is a telling revelation of the politics of power when that power is put in question and critiqued. The discourses of "civility" have become the ideology of an establishment attempting to suppress any questioning of its own privileges.<sup>12</sup> In short, "progressive," at SUNY-Albany, has come to mean: aggressive defense of one's own privilege, opposition to equity, and supporting violence against oppositional intellectuals who fight for equality in the workplace and rigorous scholarship and teaching.

This representation of the most conservative elements of the English Department at SUNY-Albany as "progressive," like similar representations of "progressivism" in the

ludic academy and the culture industry, in general, follows a familiar pattern and has a recognizable structure. The opportunist-as-progressive enters the existing debates by first siding on safe issues--such as supporting the expansion of canonic readings at Stanford to include multicultural texts --against "extremist" paleoconservative positions. Having thus acquired "progressive" credentials by doing so, the neoprogressive then turns around and re-obtains more or less the same ideological effects that the paleoconservatives have worked for, but in a "reasonable," "nonextremist" rhetoric. For instance, in their *Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy*, Knoblauch and Brannon first criticize D'Souza and his paleoconservative *Illiberal Education* (34-47), thereby establishing their own identity as liberation teachers. However, in a second move, they attack (in a very calm and reasonable rhetoric) radical left pedagogues, such as Ira Shor, who are seen as the "real" threat to the status quo (66-73).

There are, of course, various "local" variations on this structure of representation. For example, at the height of the power of the national university, the teaching of "composition" was placed on the margins of English Departments, and consequently, the teaching of literature has been seen as "elitist." As a result, teaching "composition" and writing are represented as anti-elitist attempts to "empower" students (to get a good job for example?). Therefore, the teaching of "composition" (because it is not "elite" literature) has become, in-and-of-itself, essentialized as an "identity" (for instance, "progressive") for the composition teacher in the SUNY-Albany English Department. I put aside here the institutional history that, as Donald Morton discusses in his post of June 26, 1996 on the Internet,[13](#) has resulted in the reversal of the relation between "literature" and "composition" at SUNY-Albany: the writers and composition persons are in positions of power (from the Deanship of the College of Arts and Sciences and several Chairships to the Directorship of Graduate Studies, and dominant membership on such central committees as Graduate Advisory Committee, Graduate Admissions Committee, Workload Committee) and thus have run the Department.

Moreover, the notion of composition and writing as marginal subdisciplines is, itself, an out-dated notion. With the emergence of transnational capitalism and the postnational university, "Writing Studies" have become the center practices. Not only are composition and writing persons now among the highest ranks in salaries because of their high market value, but they are also the favored faculty in Colleges of Arts and Sciences as far as the administration is concerned. This new centrality of composition and writing privileges the pragmatic rhetoric and practices of neoprogressivism--the opportunist-as-progressive--which is becoming dominant in the postnational university just as it has been for quite a long time in the English Department at SUNY-Albany. It is this brand of "progressivism" that transnational capitalism needs to assert its conservative agenda with a human face--pleasing rhetoric and congenial persuasion for utilitarian effects.

Owing to this institutional history, in which new knowledges have been blocked and marginalized and service has taken the place of scholarship, the Department in the early 1990's (when it started to rearticulate its graduate program) did not have any systematic research program in the new humanities nor did it have any rigorous pedagogies based on the new ground-breaking theoretical reunderstandings of humanities (poststructuralism,

Marxism, postcolonialism, New Americanism, Lacanian and post-Lacanian psychoanalysis, queer theory, postmodernism, materialist feminism, New Historicism, critical race theory...). The Department (under pressure from the Group worried about the lessening of its power) has been conducting its teaching in a different era and zone of history than the one that has informed active scholarship. To be more precise, for a considerable time now, there has been a "disconnect" between what is being done in the Department by the Group and the active world of scholarship. Not only the issues but also the mode of inquiry itself tend to belong to a pre-theoretical era and are thus non-self-reflexive and commonsensical. For example, the Group has defended its work against the demand for intellectual rigor by repeating the old clichés of cultural feminism that "rigor" is a "masculinist" trait and thus is not appropriate for a "nurturing" pedagogy. In their unself-reflexive defensiveness, the members of the power Group fail to realize that what they have represented as a defense of women is actually a retrograde, patriarchal form of reifying and essentializing women as non-conceptual and as non-thinkers who can, at best, tell "stories" about their "experiences" and have no capacity to analyze them rigorously and relate them to the socioeconomic conditions that have, in fact, produced them.

As Luz del Alba Acevedo has put it: "in the name of supporting women, a new form of anti-feminism has been instituted...an anti-feminism that suppresses the work of progressive women." This anti-feminism, she points out, is the result of the dominance in the University of "a clique of *corporate women* bent on holding on to positions of power within this institution and perpetuating reductionsit, racist and sexist forms of feminism which have been contested by new knowledge in feminist scholarship" (for the full text, see endnote 10).

In the dominant retro-pedagogies, experience is taken to be a transcendental "given," and everything else is seen as deriving from it. Some of members of the Group and their students have called this rejection of rigor "deconstructing" rigor: however this populism represented as deconstruction further reveals how the Group has controlled and limited knowledge of the contemporary critical vocabulary--let alone theories--in the Department. There is little self-reflexive awareness that, for example, Derrida's deconstruction of "rigor" is a philosophical and not a populist, experiential and opportunistic undertaking--that it is itself a highly rigorous analytical work. Rigor cannot be dismissed by appeal to "experience," but "experience" is all that the Group's pedagogy has offered.

Of course, throughout this time, there have been other pedagogues and scholars in the Department who have insisted on the necessity of "other" knowledges, for example, Helen Elam has taught the "literary" not in the traditional sense of reflecting experience but as the site of the undecidable and the indeterminate, the space of heterogeneity and difference. This critical de Manian notion of the "literary," however, has been at odds with the idea of literary/aesthetics of the Group who have understood aesthetics in the traditional logocentric sense of textual harmony--the fusion of language and experience--that De Man calls "aesthetic ideology" or in terms of the old avant-garde idea that simply reversed the view of the "beautiful." The "literary" in Elam's practices has long been

marginalized in the Department by the writing faculty and its allies, who have tried to protect the "sameness" of their practices from the "difference" of the "literary" in its radical de Manian sense of the alterity of the rhetorical.

Similarly, Richard Goldman's pedagogical practices--which have insisted on a double-reading of the traditional and the new and thus have opened new discursive spaces for establishing subtle and layered set of relations between heterogeneous and non-identical textualities in history and their "aesthetics" and "literary" counter-memories--have, like Elam's pedagogy, been simply placed on the margins.

Other "differences" have been marginalized as well. Warren Ginsberg, for instance, has taught literary history in light of Bakhtin and Foucault, and Diva Daims has foregrounded the concept of class and class analysis in her pedagogies. Moreover, in "rhetoric" only the sanctioned version of the conventional writing faculty has been recognized as valid knowledge. For instance, the work of Lana Cable in contemporary rhetoric (as in her reading of Milton) has been the "other" of the dominant notion of rhetoric in the Department and has thus been excluded. "Rhetoric," in the English Department, has only one meaning: the logocentric view that underlies the work of the hegemonic Group. Although the Department has declared its "interest" in matters of gender and race, the psychoanalytic study of these questions, as in the work of Jennifer Fleischner and Eleanor Branch (who recently resigned from the Department), has been considered, for the most part, beyond the purview of the accepted study of these issues. Since, as I just hinted, inquiries into "gender" have for the most part been monopolized by the Group, such texts as Sandra Fischer's feminist reading of Ophelia (which was given prominence when recently reprinted in an anthology) has never been recognized for its analytical nuances.

4

Over the years, the English Department at Albany has been subjected to the process that Noam Chomsky calls "manufacturing consent"--forging a department of consensus without "conflicts" by the violent suppression of dissent. In a letter to me, after reading the first draft of my "Quango-ing the University," one colleague wrote:

Much other evidence of what you claim came to mind: members of the Group holding committees hostage--refusing to accept losing an issue and repeatedly calling for yet another vote (after working behind the scenes to alter someone's vote) until they win, by virtue of the composition of the committee; the literal shouting down of oppositional voices (you, I know, have experienced this); refusing to report the minutes accurately...I testified that the Writing Track Proposal had NOT come through the Writing Committee, of which I was a member,...in the minutes this came through as "the proposal has the endorsement of the Writing Committee" or some equivalent statement); the intimidation of junior faculty (I was

told by a member of the Group what she thought I should and should not say in meetings--before I was tenured);...[another colleague] was told by a member of the Group that she had voted wrong on an issue--before she was tenured; this combines with a sort of insidious racism, too...[one member of the Group] also scheduled meetings during the teaching time of faculty who he knew to be in opposition to what he wanted to happen. The most horrible thing is the talk talk talk of the Group to the graduate students in ways that really do breach professionalism.

Oppositional ideas and practices have been marked as social pathologies, as obstructionist and as examples of non-cooperation. At the core of these repressive distortions has been the reduction of all forms of difference to personal eccentricities.

The "conflict"--which the Vice President, in her reductionist view of the Department, regards to be a novel thing that has developed in "recent years" (May 16, p.1) or even more short-sightedly "since the beginning of the academic year" (May 7, p. 1)--has a long history in the Department of English. It has not been visible in public simply because it has been coercively banished to the "underground" of the Department and erased from public discourses by a violence that has controlled power in the Department through such practices as distributing rewards (from the number and kind of courses to student funding), controlling access (e.g. to the graduate program and to policy making committees) and direct intimidation. Several graduate students have described some of the ways this system worked in awarding teaching assistantships and other funding:

One of us was a recipient of two years of funding based on the "hear-say evidence" of a "friend" of the acting graduate director at the time. Some got no funding, and there were not then nor are now clear reasons for why, other than some students were favored, some weren't. Much of what we are attempting to call into question now has this silent history that is just now being openly discussed--and meeting with great resistance. (T. Montgomery, D. Kelsh, T. Nespeco, J. Torrant, Memo to Interim Vice President Judy L. Genshaft, May 14, 1996, 3)

In her June 7, 1996 letter to Karen Hitchcock, the new President of SUNY-Albany, Helen Elam protests the administration take-over of the Department and recounts the long history of hegemonic power that has blocked change in the Department.

This is a department that has been in trouble since I came here in 1977, and at each juncture political maneuvers by department members close to the administration have made it impossible for the department to improve....The English Department, off and on over the last nineteen years (with one 5-year exception), has been overly influenced by a small clique who clings to power and who manages to do so by virtue of its close ties to the administration. These are people in touch with only a narrowly defined segment of the profession, yet they are the ones heard by the SUNY-A administration. Awards (like the Collins award) are passed to



one another, promotions and salary raises are achieved without the substance to back them.... Hence a climate is created in which people who publish, who are in touch with a broad segment of the profession, who do well by their students, feel completely abandoned by this administration, unable to create paths of access to it or to be heard by it. Indeed, to even attempt to establish contact with the higher echelons of the administration is considered "out of line." So much for democracy and for access. (p. 1)

Especially silenced in the Department have been "oppositional" theories, pedagogies and transgressive new knowledges that have played a transformative role in and outside the academy. In the late 1980's, the University deemed it essential to begin hiring new faculty from among those scholars who have been trained in the theories of the new humanities and new knowledges. Consequently, in order to receive approval for establishing the new Ph.D., the Department published a series of advertisements over several years in the *MLA Job List* similar to the job description for which I was hired.

Text of the *MLA Job List* announcement:

SU OF NEW YORK ENGLISH 1400 WASHINGTON AVE.,  
ALBANY, NY 12222

*SEARCH EXTENDED:* We are searching for a literary theorist, *rank open*, for our doctoral initiative in *Writing, Teaching and Criticism*, designed around the interrelationships of theory, rhetoric, creative writing and pedagogy, as well as for undergraduate teaching. Candidates interested in Marxism, feminism, or their intersections, minority literatures and theories, the history of English studies, and the relation between theory and pedagogy are especially welcome. Letter, *vita*, and dossier to Professor Warren Ginsberg, Chair.

I was among the first of several scholars to be hired from a new generation scholars with a wide range of research projects and extensive training in critical and cultural theory, postmodern pedagogies, and cultural studies. The very first person brought to Albany for the new Ph.D. program was Rosemary Hennessy--a materialist feminist with extensive and rigorous work in cultural studies and queer theory. In the following years more were hired, although three of the new scholars--all theorists and critics of color--have now resigned, mostly because of the ill-treatment they received as junior faculty--a problem that even the conservative consultants have commented on (*Report to the President*, p. 4). Collectively, the work of this new generation has opened up new spaces for different knowledges and pedagogies in the Department, and consequently, put in question the founding assumptions of the practices of the Group.

In their "Memo" to the Vice President (May 14, 1996), T. Montgomery, D. Kelsh, T. Nespeco and J. Tarrant (all graduate students in English) analyze the conflicts in the Department between the old order and the emerging knowledges, which have made the Group "uncomfortable." "This uncomfortableness," they explain, "is...necessary if we are

to produce the kinds of knowledges a terminal degree promises." "Learning," they continue, "is a struggle; it necessitates grasping differences, grasping something that one has not known before, being alienated from what one was before..." (p.2). Their "Memo" is an authoritative text in that its writers have taken courses from a diverse number of faculty in the Department both before and after the new institution of the Ph.D. Their "Memo" places the "conflicts in a historical context. They review their studies over the recent past (when the "atmosphere" of the Department was "tranquil") and challenge the charge of the Group that the Department has become recently frustrating for graduate students (a point that the Vice President dwells on in her text of May 7, 1996 without making explicit her own sources for such a subjective evaluation). During this earlier time of seeming tranquility, Montgomery, Kelsh, Nespeco and Torrant write,

things were actually not so great for many graduate students. We believe that one reason for this is because for many graduate students it indeed was "friendly." That's the point. Due to the unquestioned departmental politics--who was there to question?--which remained privatized for the most part, decisions for funding, teaching assistantships, adjunct summer teaching opportunities, faculty teaching load, and much more were made often along those lines of "friendly atmosphere" for some, not "friendly atmosphere" for others. (2-3)

The introduction of new knowledge practices, necessitated by the new historical situation, has undermined the unquestioned "authority" of the privileged Group and turned their classes--for the first time in the history of the Department--into places of emerging contestations over knowledge. These contestations have been built into the new Ph.D. program (as I will discuss at length later). In short, the absence of "conflict" in the "good old days" in the Department was not because it functioned smoothly but because it was dysfunctional: it simply did not pay attention to what university (graduate) studies were supposed to be--sites of intellectual interrogation and critique. In contrast, the new Ph.D. was conceived and subsequently approved as a program that recognizes contestations over knowledge as the core of graduate studies.

The contestations and conflicts, contrary to the Vice President (who repeats the self-serving narratives constructed by the Group about the Department), have not been ruinous of the Department but, as Montgomery, Kelsh, Nespeco and Torrant explain, are absolutely necessary to actually restore and develop "balance" in a Department that under the hegemony of the Group has tried to prevent "other" knowledges from being anything more than subject of gossip, jokes and parodies (see the anonymous memo, "Gnosis..."). This is perhaps the place to repeat and make more explicit what I have already implied in my references to "other" pedagogues who were teaching in the Department before the new Ph.D. Although the immediate source of the emerging "conflicts" over knowledges has been the post-Ph.D. history of the Department, the "crisis" has its deeper roots in the long-standing suppression of "other" knowledges in order to protect the material privileges and power of the ancient regime. As one faculty of long-standing explains: the crisis and conflicts existed in the Department even when the new faculty were still in graduate school!

As a result of the material differences, the English Department has become an incoherent workplace--intellectually, pedagogically and professionally. It is a workplace in which what one says is in sharp contrast with what one does. This is a department in which, as a humanities scholar, one teaches "equality" for all but one lives under severely "unequal" conditions. This is a department in which one teaches "freedom of ideas" but one is severely limited in what one can say in the course of daily life: the "minutes" of the Department are closed to dissenting ideas and voices, and the ideas that are expressed through public texts, memoranda, committee meetings and notes that do not conform with the party line of the Group are marked as "obstructionist."

The "crisis" is invented to mystify these material contradictions as merely "cultural"--as "intellectual differences" and their "attendant emotions." This is not a sudden *cultural* eruption but the surfacing of material contradictions that have developed over a long period and within an increasingly thick institutional context of politics and its history. These conditions, in other words, have not come about overnight or because of the "ideas" of one or two or five or fifteen people--contrary to the stories that are floated around. These personalizing stories are now routinely circulated to the popular media, which is more interested in sensationalizing events according to the logic of the status quo than in rigorous analysis of the historical process. It is reported that on one local talk-show, for example, the audience was recently informed that "One Marxist" has ruined/can ruin/will ruin an "English Department." These narratives, which personalize historical processes and demonize and scapegoat progressive intellectuals,<sup>14</sup> have a long tradition in the anti-intellectualism and the fear of the "other" in U.S. history. This fear and anxiety, of course, has had its most violent outburst in recent times in McCarthyism and the persecution of intellectuals it legitimated. The story ("One Marxist...") derives its plausibility from this panic about the "other," and like all panic stories that demonize individuals, it aims at justifying the existing power relations and thus represents material contradictions as cultural and political differences.

McCarthyism--contrary to the official view--is not part of a dead past. It is a very active presence informing on-going practices. In the "vision" statements that various faculty members of the English Department prepared for the Consultants, for example, one faculty states that the "crisis"--the move to partition the Department--is the consequence of "disruptions" caused by "the Marxist agitators" and asks the Consultants to use their "considerable authority" to advise the Administration on how to silence these oppositional intellectuals. Since the Administration is concerned about the lawsuits that will inevitably follow if it "reassigns" or "restrains" dissenting tenured faculty, he/she asks the Consultants to "advise the Administration about its rights and authority with respect to tenured faculty members" and to teach it how to get around "tenure" protection by using "tactics employed by businesses to solve personnel problems...without producing protracted lawsuits." The writer, however, is not satisfied by simply getting rid

of "Marxist agitators" among the faculty. She/he wants all dissent silenced and requests that:

The consultants will advise the administration about ways of deterring a few particularly vocal graduate students (utterly unrepresentative of the entire population of MA and Ph.D. candidates) from engaging in department discourses and governance--since the students don't have tenure, this should be easier than solving the problems posed by tenured faculty.

End of Part One; Go to Part Two in this issue.

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### Notes for Part One

1 This is a shortened version of my text, "Quango-ing the University," which will be published in *The Alternative Orange* in fall 1997.

2 For general discussions of such issues see, for instance, Robert K. Fullinwider, ed. *Public Education in a Multicultural Society*; John K. Wilson, *The Myth of Political Correctness: The Conservative Attack on Higher Education*; Michael Berube and Cary Nelson, ed. *Higher Education Under Fire*; Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren, ed. *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*; Jeffrey Williams, ed. *PC Wars: Politics and Theory in the Academy*. For more theoretical and philosophical critiques of the university, pedagogy and their relation with late capitalism see Donald Morton and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, ed. *Theory/Pedagogy/Politics*; William Spanos, *The End of Education: Toward Posthumanism*; "Symposium: The Subject of Pedagogical Politics"; Teresa L. Ebert, "For a Red Pedagogy"; and Bill Reading, *The University in Ruins*.

3 In a long debate in the Department in 1995-96, the younger faculty, along with some of the more senior "other" faculty (who had long questioned the hegemony of the Group), argued that before the election of a chair, the Department should hold an open forum for a public debate of the policies and plans of the candidates. The Group--which has a long history of acting behind closed doors and through its "network" in the university and of refusing to debate in public the assumptions, priorities and consequences of its practices--strongly opposed holding an open meeting, but lost the vote on the issue. The open forum for the candidates for chair is one of many attempts to open up Departmental practices to more democratic processes, which have been opposed by the Group.

4 SUNY-Albany's Ph.D. in English (formally called the "Ph.D. In English: Writing, Teaching, Criticism") is an intradisciplinary degree that brings together such traditionally disparate practices as "critical theory," "literary history," "pedagogy," "creative writing"

and "composition." The aim of the program is to provide a global synthesis which is called a "nexus of discourses" in the formal proposal for the degree. Although some faculty and students refer to this degree as "interdisciplinary," it is in actuality an "intra"disciplinary degree attempting to provide a broad understanding of practices that are traditionally placed within the institutional space called "The Department of English."

5 In the Fall of 1996, the SUNY-Albany Administration, hired four consultants to decide the best administrative and organizational structure for the "English Department" to "deliver" its programs. The consultants were hired over the strong objections of many faculty and graduate students, who have argued that there is no "crisis" in the Department but rather a normal contestation over modes of production and dissemination of new knowledges and the shape of curriculum and that public funds would be better used to support graduate students and not consultants. Some faculty members have insisted that if consultants were to be used, at least they should be chosen from among those members of the profession who are active in contemporary theoretical contestations over the shape of the humanities, and submitted a long list of over thirty such scholars, including Houston Baker, Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler, Stanley Fish, Marjorie Garber, Henry Giroux, Gerald Graff, Stephen Greenblatt, Fredric Jameson, Barbara Johnson, Cary Nelson, Mary Louise Pratt, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Paul Smith and Gayatri Spivak. The Administration, however, has selected a group of largely conservative academics who have not been very active in discussions of the shape of the humanities in the wake of the "theory" revolution of the last two decades or so. They are: Clarke Hulse (University of Illinois at Chicago); Erika Lindemann (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill); Mary Poovey (The Johns Hopkins University) and Robert Weisbuch (University of Michigan). Their "report" is an unimaginative, bureaucratic rehearsal of some of the most common views and even clichés about academic governance, higher education and the state of the humanities. Rather than offering any insightful analysis into the so-called "crisis" of the Department in relation to radical changes in the contemporary humanities, they simply map out three options for organizing the Department: divide it, keep it in receivership or keep it as it is. For each option they provide, in a very pedestrian manner, a list of "pros" and "cons," and eventually they recommend keeping the status quo. The consultant's approach to institutional "change," critique-al contestations and the debate over the future of the humanities is perhaps most clearly articulated in their reaction to this text I have written ("Quango-ing"). I have given all four consultants a copy of the working draft of this text, in addition to a number of other texts that I had written and circulated in the Department. In reaction, they write that such "institutional analysis" "however insightful in parts, has exceeded any bounds of ethical, civil, or professional discourse" (p.2). Critique, in other words, is uncivil, unethical and unprofessional because it disturbs the peace and demystifies the reified structures of power. What do the Consultants themselves offer in place of analysis? This is an example: "In our two-day visit, we ourselves experienced the frozen postures, loud sighs, and frequent interruptions of one colleague by another that characterized this poisoned atmosphere" (p. 4). In place of a rigorous "critique," we get a New Age-ish analysis of "body language"! For the Consultants the problem of "governance" in the Department, to give an example of their analysis, is not one of "power" but is "at root" "a problem of civility" (p.4). One wonders if any of them has read/heard about the contemporary discourses on power/knowledge and the way they

articulate institutions and practices? "Civility," as Benjamin DeMott points out, has become a discursive means to suppress the questioning of power structures and to accept what "is" as what "ought to be."

6 "Their own description" of the Writings Studies program (by the "devisors") has never been made public out of fear of a public critique and debate by the Department and the public-at-large that would have to foot the cost of the new "Writing Studies Department." It is telling that the consultants not only do not condemn such "secrecy" but, in fact, encourage it. Before their arrival on campus, they requested that each faculty write a statement in which they will map out their "vision" of the future of the Department. The Group argued that such statements should be written anonymously. In other words, the Group advocated that, in place of an open, democratic debate about public education, we should produce "private" communications. The Department, however, rejected secrecy and voted for signed texts to be sent to the consultants but (in a regrettable move) agreed to remove the names of the writers when these vision statements were made available to the Department. This is the comment of the consultants on the matter: "We believe that the action [i.e. the vote to publicly disclose the statements to the Department even without names of the writers] inhibited some members from preparing statements and affected the contents of others" (p.1). Open critique and debate, as I have already stated, is seen by the consultants as "unethical." Secrecy, however, is desirable, professional and ethical? Why should pedagogues, who argue in their classes about diverse positions, feel "inhibited" about arguing in public? If they are afraid of "power," then why do the consultants refuse to recognize it and instead say that "at root" the problem of governance is a "problem of civility" and not power?

7 Between 1963 and 1975 the Department offered "some thirty [Ph.D] degrees," which averages about 2.5 degrees a year ("A Proposal for a Ph.D. in English" 1).

8 Between 1971--when the D.A. was established--and the time of the completion of "A Proposal for A Ph.D. in English" (the early 1990's), "seventy-six degrees" were awarded, an average of about four D.A. degrees a year ("A Proposal for a Ph.D. in English" 1).

9 The representative of the central Administration in the Department, Louis Roberts (a professor of classics and "Interim Chair" during the time English Department is in receivership) has acted in a manner that, in effect, is partisan and supports the interests of the Group, as I have indicated in a number of my public texts including that of 5 May 1997 addressed to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Among other actions, he has appointed as Director of Graduate Studies, a member of the Group who is reported to have signed a petition to partition the English Department and to break up its graduate program; he given majority representation (and thus votes) to the Group and its allies on both the Graduate Advisory Committee and Graduate Admissions Committee; he has failed to make public the source of funding for a faculty from the Group who claims to have paid sabbatical leave; he has ignored the request by graduate students to appoint a committee to examine the grievance of a graduate student against the Director of Graduate Studies. On 5 May 1997, after receiving another anonymous harassing telephone call, I wrote the following memorandum to the Vice President for Academic

Affairs in which I have described his treatment of the earlier act of "aggravated harassment" against me--the graffiti on the walls of my office:

I have not addressed this matter [the 2 May 1997 harassment] to Professor Roberts because he has so far failed to face and deal with "problems" in the Department of English. In fact, on 5 November 1996, when I reported to him the harassing graffiti written on the walls outside my office in the Humanities Building, he trivialized the harassing graffiti (in an interview on "Fox TV News," video available) as a "Halloween prank." (The case is being investigated as "aggravated harassment" against me.) It is telling, and obviously, not helpful in establishing a harassment-free workplace when the representative of the University's Central Administration in the English Department not only does not take affirmative action to secure such a workplace open to critical and intellectual exchanges but actually trivializes harassment against critique-al intellectuals. (5 May 1997 Memo to Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs)

[10](#) Luz del Alba Acevedo's 13 July 1995 letter to the University President on the institutional politics and abuses of power in Women's Studies and other departments in the College of Arts and Sciences points out some of the other dimensions of this opposition to condemning violence against a woman professor by a self-styled "progressive" Group. Her letter situates their actions in a larger institutional context.

When the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences expressed lack of confidence in its previous Dean, Judith Johnson, professor of "creative writing" in the English Department and, at the time, chair of the "Women's Studies Department" called for an emergency meeting of the faculty of that Department on July 11, 1995. Luz del Alba Acevedo (assistant professor of Women's Studies and Latin American and Caribbean Studies) wrote on July 13, 1995, to the then President of the University:

Dear President Swygert:

I am writing to strongly *object* to the resolution passed on July 11, 1995 by a group of Women's Studies faculty in support of Dean Judith Gillespie of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and that portrays this dean as a defender of the principles of "affirmative action" and "diversity" in our university. This resolution is scheduled to be sent to you today. I am attaching an unsigned copy of this resolution.

I *object* to the resolution for several reasons: (1) the "*emergency*" nature of the meeting in which the resolution was passed; (2) the secrecy of the agenda; and (3) the *lack of representation* of the breadth of the department's faculty.

The "*emergency*" meeting was convened by the Chair of Women's Studies (WSS) Judith Johnson but unlike my other colleagues I was not



informed of the meeting by the chair of the department and the agenda was only disclosed to me upon my seemingly unexpected arrival at the meeting.

This "*emergency*" meeting was attended by only nine faculty members (out of over 40 core, joint and affiliated faculty), and *I* was the *only* woman of color and non-tenured faculty present. No other faculty, tenured or non-tenured, known to have intellectual and pedagogical differences with Professor Judith Johnson or Dean Gillespie were there. I was one of the two faculty members who voted against the resolution. The other faculty that voted against, however, did so on the basis of her disagreement with the proposed way of getting faculty signatures not because of her lack of confidence in the dean or dissatisfaction with the administrative practices of this deanship.

Upon disclosing the agenda, it became clear that this meeting was organized by a group of political allies of the Dean in reciprocity for the favors she has dispensed to them. The central objective of the meeting was said to be, to strategize on ways to support the dean without being seen by the university community as "girls supporting girls." It was argued that, "the dean has served the department well," in spite of some (unidentified) "mistakes."

The "*emergency*" meeting was called and conducted by a political "*clique*" allied to the dean (Judith Johnson, Gloria DeSole, Bonnie Spanier, Francine Frank, Judith Fetterley, Joan Schulz, Linda Nicholson, and Glenna Spitze). *I object* to the biased content of the resolution. The intellectual and pedagogical interest of a Women's Studies department facing the challenges of the 21st century are not being served. *The resolution, in my view, masquerades the fact that the dean serves well only the interests of a clique of corporate women bent on holding on to positions of power within this institution and perpetuating reductionist, racist and sexist forms of feminism which have been contested by new knowledge in feminist scholarship.*

Moreover, I vehemently *object* to the fact that the resolution attempts to portray the dean and her allies as progressive and their opponents as those who are opposed to the principles of gender equity, fairness, and diversity. *My* experience as an assistant professor in the departments of Women's Studies and Latin American and Caribbean Studies, is quite different. During the last two years I have seen:

The abrogation and transgression of university procedures and rules in personnel matters to fit predetermined recruitment, retention and promotion decisions that favor the wishes of Dean Gillespie and her



political allies in the departments of WSS, English and LACS without regard of intellectual standards and academic integrity;

The alarming salary increases of Dean Gillespie's friends (check UUP salary records) in the midst of a budgetary crisis and a college wide promise of pay equity;

The deepening hostile working environment that has led to the intimidation, harassment and persecution of non-tenured, minorities and women faculty in the departments of WSS, English, and LACS.

The departure of a significant number of "minority" faculty from this institution can be seen as symptomatic of the existence of a hostile working environment.

The WSS department has, over the years become, in the name of anti-racism, the place of a new form of racism. I am attaching my letter of resignation from the Diversity Committee of the WSS department which explains some of the main forms of this new ("anti-racist") racism and show that it has been an on going practice. The WSS department presents itself as supportive of women, their research and teaching. In fact, in the name of supporting women, a new form of anti-feminism has been instituted in the WSS department, an anti-feminism that suppresses the work of progressive women. A new generation of feminist scholars like myself have been the target of a witch hunt to devalue our strong scholarly records and disrupt our academic contributions in order to prevent us from speaking out against the *power abuses* of this political clique.

Any deanship should not nourish and protect the consolidation of a power clique that supports only the corporate women's "ways of knowing" nor should any deanship represent an undemocratic, secret, and vindictive style of governing. This is why I, as many other faculty members in the CAS, do not have confidence in the leadership of Judith Gillespie (and her political allies). It is time to commence the opening of democratic academic spaces for truly intellectual exchanges and constructive administrative practices. This is the opportunity for the University at Albany to move forward to the 21st century in a progressive and positive fashion and eliminate the negativism, strife and fear that have prevailed.

11 On 4 March 1996, I wrote the following memorandum to the College of Arts and Sciences "Ad Hoc Committee on Harassment" (David Griggs-Janower; Glenna Spitze; Harriet Temps; Ronald Bosco, Chair):

I am enclosing a copy of *The Alternative Orange* for each of you as members of the College "Ad Hoc Committee on Harassment." In this issue, Jennifer Cotter gives an analysis of her own harassment as a

graduate student in the English Department at Syracuse University by a professor in creative writing (pp. 21-30 see also pp. 86-88 "Letters to *The New York Times*").

What makes Ms. Cotter's analysis of special significance (and thus important to the task of your committee) is the complex manner in which she demonstrates how her being sexually harassed was connected to her being harassed because of her oppositional political practices as a Marxist-Feminist. Any policy on harassment codified by your committee needs, I believe, to address the question of harassment in relation to the political views and practices of faculty and students on campus. A harassment policy that does not clearly articulate the procedures for dealing with harassment because of the oppositional politics of the victim will not be comprehensive and thus will fail to be useful in a university workplace--where ideas are to be allowed to be freely disseminated and not subjected to coercion, intimidation or physical threats nor suppressed through the manipulation of institutional procedures. These fundamental principles are affirmed in the University's "Pohlsander Resolution" (attached to the "Faculty By-Laws of the University at Albany, State University of New York").\*

If you wish to have more direct information from Ms. Cotter concerning the case of her harassment (which was extensively discussed in such national media as *The New York Times*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *USA Today*, as well as in various broadcast and print media throughout New York State), I will try to get her address for the committee. Please let me know if I can be of any help in your inquiries into this singularly important issue for building a democratic and safe workplace for intellectual and pedagogical practices for all at the University at Albany.

\*"Pohlsander Resolution" (Approved by the Faculty September 8, 1970)

In this troubled world there is a need for places in which the disciplines are taught, their frontiers extended, and their usefulness for solving the problems of man explored. We assume that the University is such a place. That purpose implies the following:

- (1.) That this University be an open and inclusive society devoted to free and untrammelled teaching, learning, and research, and that members of this society be assured the right of dissent, freedom from coercion and intimidation, and freedom of political association and activity.

(2.) That this University be dedicated to the search for truth and that in its corporate capacity it does not officially endorse any particular version of the truth be it a matter of political or social philosophy or scientific theory.

(3.) That this University and this faculty be committed to due process and to persuasion through reason as the only acceptable means for governing and improving this University.

*Faculty Handbook 1994-96, University at Albany, State University of New York, pp. 65-66*

[12](#) Benjamin DeMott, in his essay, "Seduced by Civility," argues that the "current civility boom" is one of the "indicators of rising establishment impatience with the notion that...class interests stand in ever sharper conflict...[and the] establishment refusal to accord courtesy to any insider critique of the mega-rich, and establishment eagerness to bash those who dare to murmur moral objections to the *moeurs* of the stylish professional classes" (16) The discourses on "civility" "define the issues," according to DeMott, as "the decline of civility, not of fairness, justice or decency among the privileged," and, he goes on to say, "tightly bind old myths of classlessness to new scams of civility--that inequity is verbal; flows from tone, not structure; bears no relation to power differentials" (16, 18). In contrast, the "new incivility," for DeMott, is "a flat-out, justified rejection of leader-class claims to respect, a demand that leader-class types start looking hard at themselves...Which, as I said, is exactly where civility discourse encourages them not to look" (14).

[13](#) Morton writes:

The situation at Albany is a complex and layered one....The Albany Department of English, like many other humanities departments (in the wake of the theory revolution of the last fifteen years or so) is encountering internal conflicts over what knowledge is, what the humanities are, what the new configuration of an "English" department should be...One thing that is specific to Albany and therefore makes the Albany program different from nearly all other programs, is that while writers (composition faculty, creative writers...) at most universities are marginalized, at Albany they are the center, and they are the persons with institutional privilege, power and access to the administration. This is because of the history of "English Studies" at Albany (June 16, 1996 Internet post).

[14](#) On the question of "scapegoating," read the Memorandum of May 7, 1996 by Hawkins, Kelsh, Nespeco, Pittman and Montgomery. The Memorandum analyzes in

detail how the shift in the order of knowledge, the introduction of new knowledges and the need for institutional reforms in the Department have all been resisted.