

Sut Jhally, Department of Communication

university of massachusetts, amherst, ma 01060
telephone: 413-545-4609 (office) 413-584-4269 (home)

June 14, 1991

Dear George:

I am writing to you concerning the eruption of debate in the mainstream media (as well as politics) on what has been labeled "Political Correctness". Enclosed is a letter that was written by Stanley Aronowitz, who is trying to organize a regional, and hopefully national organization to counteract the recent highly publicized attacks on leftist scholars and more generally on diversity in higher education. His goal is to identify scholars who would be willing to join and/or help organize such an association, and to have this association counter the conservative National Association of Scholars by holding conferences, publishing a newsletter, issuing press releases, having people available for media appearances, etc. If enough people express interest, we will begin planing a national organizing conference.

I am writing this letter to 15-20 people to try to get names of people who might be willing to be potential members/organizers. If you could write down the names and addresses of some people you know who you believe might be interested, and send that list either to me or to Stanley, that would be of great help. While it is easy to dismiss the attacks on diversity as the ravings of those who have held power in the universities and who do want to give up even one ounce, I think that we may well be seeing the start of a coordinated national campaign against progressive voices and ideas in the academy. We need to figure out a way to fight back and I think Stanley's initiative deserves support.

Thanks for your time and help.

Sincerely

Sut

Sut Jhally
Dept of Communication
University of Massachusetts
at Amherst
MA 01003

Stanley Aronowitz
The Graduate School and
University Center
City University of New York
Ph.D. Program in Sociology
Box 375, 33 West 42 St
New York, NY 10036-8099

This letter is being sent to: George Gerbner, John Cole, Mike Thelwell, Sheila McNamee, Henry Geddes, David Lenson, Bill Strickland, Lee Edwards, Julie Graham, Jules Chametzky, Esther Terry, Bruce Laurie, Howard Gadlin, Douglas Kellner, Gail Dines-Levy, Bertell Ollman, Rohan Samarajiwa, Cathy Schwichtenberg, James Der Derian, Jon Cruz.

905 Union Street
Brooklyn, New York 11215

May 13, 1991

Dear Friends:

These days it seems impossible to pick up a newspaper, magazine or journal without encountering a vituperative essay or "news" story on Political Correctness. Not only such journals as The New Republic, Partisan Review, Commentary and The New Criterion are exercised by the rise of what they term "multiculturalism" in the universities, but popular media such as Time, Newsweek, and the daily press, notably The New York Times have run endless diatribes against "pcs". Even president Bush has warned against restrictions of free speech on the campus.

The Left is accused of tyrannizing the universities with a new brand of academic McCarthyism masquerading as demands for broadening the literary canon to include the works of African Americans, women and third world writers; for advocating faculty sensitivity to racist and sexist utterance, especially their own; and for restricting other racist and sexist speech. The conservatives and some liberal allies claim that PC is now the "unofficial ideology of the university" to which university and college administrators have succumbed, on a broad scale. Implied in this attack is that unless a new dedication to Western Values prevails against what they frequently describe as the excesses of the 60s generation, legitimate intellectual inquiry will die. In short, the barbarians (some of us) are at the gates.

Although the new conservatism is much broader than the efforts of a single organization, there is no doubt about the coordinating role performed by the National Association of Scholars. This organization, formed several years ago to counteract our influence in US intellectual life, has grown to more than 1700 members. It is a well-financed effort to reassert what its activists feel they have lost: ideological hegemony. It has held conferences, published attacks on the left, but presents itself as an embattled minority within academic life.

Until now, writers such as Roger Kimball, an editor of New Criterion and author of the recently published Tenured Radicals, Alan Bloom, Irving Kristol, liberal cultural conservatives such as Irving Howe and left cultural conservatives like Eugene D. Genovese have done most of the talking. The voices of feminists, culturally radical marxists, African-American, Latino, gay and lesbian intellectuals have remained relatively muted. The reasons for this situation may be ascribed to the fact that the conservatives control the media, but it is also a symptom of the disorganization and fragmentation of the left and radical communities in general and the academic "left" in particular. (I prefer the term "radical" for historical reasons, but I mean to be inclusive of all subaltern and marginalized perspectives by this designation).

I am persuaded that one cannot be smug about the charges that some radicals have trampled on notions of dialogue in the academy. Zealous pursuit of political and intellectual justice has sometimes resulted in left authoritarianism. But the implication that such excesses are rampant on the campus, generalizing from a few

incidents such as the charge of racism suffered by Steven Thernstrom at Harvard, for example, is no justification for the immense anti-radical barrage currently underway. Nor are the political issues facing students and faculty accurately depicted. For example, it is simply a falsehood to claim that the left is the new academic establishment, that its political wisdom is near-hegemonic or that the dominant tendency among radicals is illiberalism, in the sense that academic freedom is denied. The attack has other, more nefarious purposes than saving liberty.

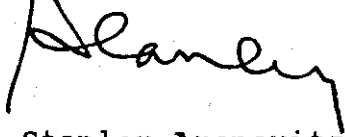
Although, in his report on PC, Times writer Richard Bernstein acknowledged in his "pioneering" October 1990 piece that the use of the term on the left was largely "ironic", Right wing and culturally conservative liberal critics have chosen to ignore this fact and have proceeded to weave a narrative using a fabric of half-truths. They represent the academic left as a juggernaut whose defeat is the condition of maintaining American freedom. Clearly, the situation is alarming, but not for the reasons proclaimed by conservatives. If there is any McCarthyism, we should look for it in the old precincts- on the Right itself.

I am writing to you in the hope that you will agree that the persistence of academic left and radical fragmentation can have disastrous results. The Right is correct in one crucial respect: there are new winds on the campus. The nature of legitimate intellectual knowledge is under interrogation. Such issues as canonicity, cultural diversity, inter or non disciplinarity, the question of the neutrality of science and technology as well as social justice issues such as open admissions for African American, Latino, Asian and white working class students, and affirmative action for women and other excluded groups, are all under scrutiny. However while the Right speaks in a single voice as a definite intellectual ideological tendency on its own merits, the radical academy increasingly speaks through disciplinary associations, but not in its own name. As a result, the media, at least in the past year, have had an easier time reflecting a single voice on basic issues of knowledge and education.

This letter to some friends calls for the formation of an association of radical college and university teachers and staff that can address the public issues of university life; constitute itself as a defense apparatus for politically-inspired tenure battles at the national level; and be a forum for addressing the broad intellectual and economic issues facing us all without becoming a trade union caucus. If you agree with this general proposal, write your own letter to ten or fifteen friends who might help organize the association, enclosing this one if you wish (or not). Ask them to write down lists of potential members/organizers and send them to you or me. When we have more than a few interested people, with your participation, we'll call a small meeting to plan next steps. Next year we may be in a position to have a national organizing conference for a membership organization or it may remain an organizing committee which, however, could take initiative on pertinent issues, publish a newsletter, establish a defense fund and so forth.

Let me know what you think.

Best



Stanley Aronowitz

This letter is being sent to the following people:

Dick Flacks	Susan Douglas	Andrew Ross	Nancy Fraser
Henry Giroux	Mary Russo	George Lipsitz	Dana Polan
Cornel West	Barbara Harlow	Juan Flores	Jean Franco
Linda Brodkey	Jane Marcus	Michael Apple	Donna Haraway
Michael Dyson	Fred Jameson	Ben Agger	Larry Goodwyn
Michael Ryan	Bruce Robbins	Barbara Ehrenreich	Sean Wilentz

2101 Woodland Glen Lane
Champaign, Illinois 61821
1 August 1991

Stanley Aronowitz
905 Union Street
Brooklyn, New York 11215

Dear Stanley:

Henry Giroux sent me a copy of your letter proposing a new organization of "radical college and university teachers and staff." I have sent the letter out to fifteen more colleagues, along with a copy of this letter. I am writing because I wanted to at least raise a question with you.

I agree with everything that you say in your letter, but I still have one problem. That concerns the wisdom of forming what would be, basically, yet another single issue political group. For although you envision it speaking to a range of broader questions, your basic charge suggests a group to address the challenge of the Right in colleges and universities, a group defined defensively in opposition to the NSA.

I keep wondering why the Left always seems to be responding defensively these days, but still, it may be necessary. My real concern lies in the effects of such single issue (or constituency) groups on the Left. Interesting, the Right has found ways to articulate such fragmented groups into some sort of alliance, while the Left seems totally incapable of doing that. Myabe its already a cliché to talk about the self-destructive fragmentation of the Left but I think we'd better address it before we contribute even further to it.

One of the interesting things about the NSA is how closely its extreme Right wing is plugged into the broader new conservative alliance. Unless we can accomplish something similar, I think such an organization, while perhaps pragmatically useful, will serve only short term interests. Somehow, what we need to be thinking about is a broader organization, one in which we can contribute, as intellectuals, to the reinvigoration of an organized Left public presence. That is what I would like to see come out of your initiative.

Keep me informed about the response to your letter. And if we do get to the point of trying to organize a national meeting, it would be good to have it as broadly representative of the national academic Left as possible, and accessible to people from all over the country.

Hope everything is well with you and your family. (Say hi for me.).

Best wishes,

Lawrence Grossberg



**THE ANNENBERG SCHOOL FOR
COMMUNICATION**

UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

3620 Walnut Street Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104-6220

August 20, 1991

TO: Stanley Aronowitz
Larry Grossberg

FROM: Larry Gross 

I am responding here to Stanley's original letter and to the reply to it by Larry Grossberg included with his 2nd generation transmittal. I am also sending copies of all three -- Stanley's, Larry's, and this letter -- to an additional fifteen or so people, thus not breaking the academic chain letter (of course, many people will be receiving multiple copies of Stanley's original letter, possibly with other cover notes...).

In general I am sympathetic with the basic point raised by Stanley's letter. The right has succeeded to a remarkable degree in capturing the symbolic battleground of current political/ideological struggles. After their stunning success in turning the term 'special interests' into a label now applied routinely to women and any/all minorities, they have moved on to fashion effective weapons out of terms like 'political correctness' and 'multiculturalism.'

Larry's response raises concerns about the fragmentation of "single issue (or constituency) groups on the Left." I think there is a danger here of mistaking the nature of the problem(s) we face. The fragmentation Larry worries about is in a way precisely the political face of multiculturalism. People who share common bonds -- of gender, race, sexual orientation, etc. -- have come increasingly to demand that their voices be heard as distinct parts of a polyphony, not merely used to swell the chorus of a vanguard or a Grand Old Party. We will not defeat the unity of conservative ideology by trying to impose a matching centralized unity on the left. Rather, I think we have to face up to the tactical challenge presented by the "new conservatism" and match their strategies with ones of our own.

Simply put, I see the National Association of Scholars as chess piece the right has placed on the political board. They have provided a name and an address and a telephone number for the media's rolodexes and thus made themselves more available and more effective in shaping the terms of discourse in the current struggles. Of course, it doesn't hurt that they can feed their lines to the White House for presidential speeches, or that the media are already resonating to their frequency.

The nature of any organized response must be both appropriate to the challenge and true to the realities of the multivocal left. A left/radical organization might help even the balance somewhat if it could counter the right's chess piece with an equal and opposing piece. As long as there was no illusion of submerging the distinctness of "constituency groups" in a centralized consensus. Not an easy task, but one worth contemplating seriously. It is also essential that such an association articulate a clear and unwavering commitment to freedom of speech, both on campus and off.

December 11, 1991

Dear Sut:

This is a belated reply to your letter of June 14 to me and others about PC. I have been backed-up with projects and commitments (and still am) and unable to do anything not already on the list (and many things that are on the list) and what others can also do so well.

As you know, I am trying to launch the CEM and am struggling to find time for next steps. I agree that Stanley's initiative deserves support and am willing to do what I can to support it but cannot take any initiative for the time being.

Our Gulf War book, with your excellent contribution in it, is going to press. Enclosed are two copies of a draft of my chapter, for your information and comment. (Please tell Michael that this is a new version and give him one copy.)

Incidentally, I greatly enjoyed "Dreamworlds."

With best regards.

Sincerely yours,

George Gerbner
Professor of Communication and Dean Emeritus



FACULTY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF THE DEAN

September 27, 1994

Professor George Gerbner
Dean Emeritus
The Annenberg School for Communication
University of Pennsylvania
3620 Walnut Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104-6220

Dear Professor Gerbner:

Thank you for your letter of June 3, 1994 written on behalf of Dr. Jhally. Your comments will be very useful to the Search Committee for the School of Communication Chair.

Sincerely,

Ronald G. Marteniuk
Dean and Professor,
Faculty of Applied Sciences

RGM/sd

