English AT CORNELL

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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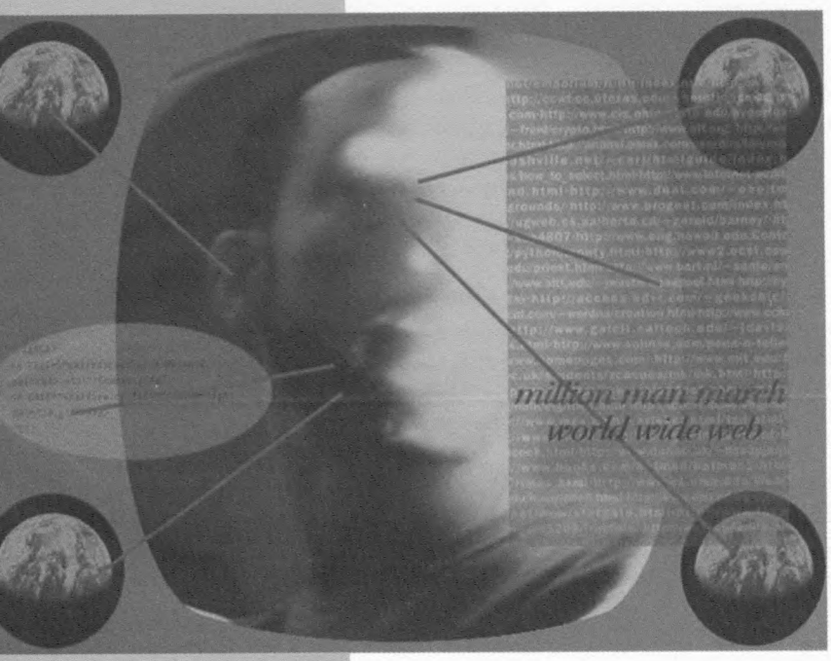
Interfaces:
New Medias/New Digital Frontiers
A Conversation with Timothy Murray

by Nicole Waligora-Davis



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Reginald Woolery
Million Man March/World Wide Web

In addition to being a professor of comparative literature and English, and the director of graduate studies in the Department of Film and Video Studies, Timothy Murray is the co-curator of CTheory Multimedia *and the curator for the Rose Goldsen Archive of New Media Art in the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections at Cornell University Library. His work on behalf of the archive has taken him as far as China and Japan. And while he is currently finishing a manuscript project titled* Digital Thresholds: Electronic Art, Baroque Folds, and Cultural Memories, *and an essay collection,* Digitality and the Memory of Cinema, *Professor Murray, along with Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, has just launched a double issue of* CTheory Multimedia, *titled "Net Noise" (the first installment appeared this summer). In September 2002 Professor Murray gathered together artists and critics for an international art and theory workshop, "Digital Theory," following on the heels of an international exhibit titled Contact Zones, which featured more than 70 media projects for which he is the curator. Professor Murray is a cultural critic whose research interests are as wide as they are deep. He has authored a body of projects as diverse in text as they are in texture and textuality. He has written on Kenneth Burke, Robbie McCauley, Louis Marin, Ben Jonson, Montaigne, Deleuze, and artists like Adami, Francken, and Arkawa. Some of his most recent publications include* Drama Trauma: Specters of Race and Sexuality in Performance, Video, Art *(London: Routledge, 1997),* Repossession: Psychoanalysis and the Phantasms of Early Modern Culture *(University of Minnesota Press, 1997), and his edited collection,* Mimesis, Masochism, and Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought *(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997). His research interests include critical theory; psychoanalysis; race and sexuality studies; and film, art, and performance theory. Courses he has taught range from "Electronic Art, Cultural Memory, and Baroque Theory" to "Critical Surfing." Professor Murray's work is insistently provocative, theoretically rich and rigorous, and deeply influential both in and for a range of fields and disciplines including comparative literature and American, ethnic, performance, and sexuality studies.*

Professor Murray recently shared a glimpse into his teaching and ongoing curatorial projects on behalf of Cornell University.

Nicole Waligora-Davis: ***Would you please discuss the nature of "Electronic Innovations," the course you taught in Fall 2002, and the initiatives and theoretical and pedagogical collaborations that helped begin this transoceanic, technologically interactive class?***

Timothy Murray: A competitive grant from the Provost's Faculty Innovations in Teaching grants funded this course. There are twenty grants a year divided up among the colleges, and three were awarded in the Arts College. The funding was used to acquire the technology to create this live-video streaming seminar. I combined my seminar, "Electronic Innovations," with one taught by Norie Neumark, who teaches at the University of Technology in Sydney. She had been a fellow at the Society of the Humanities, but I knew her in art circles even before then. Norie is a digital artist, a sound theoretician, and had been teaching a course called "Art and Technology." We literally

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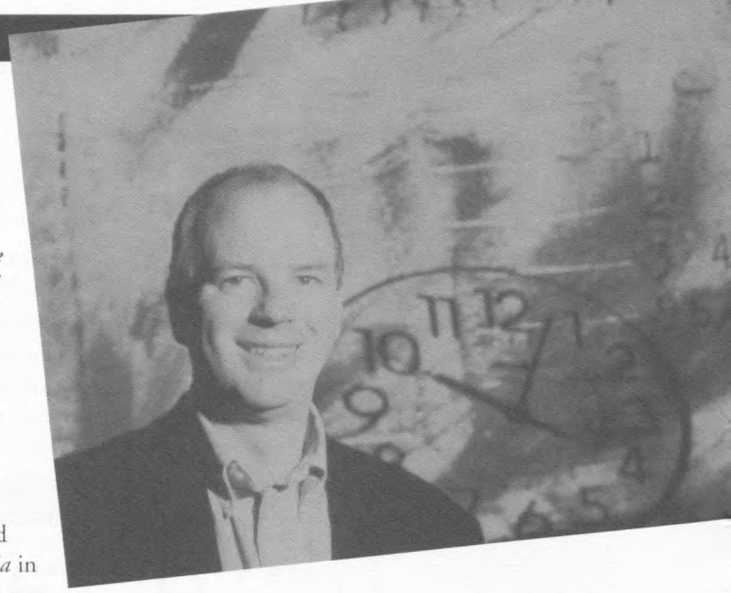
combined our seminars using this live technology, so that I taught on Thursday nights and she taught on Friday mornings, and we had both groups of students on video. I literally could operate the camera in her classroom in Sydney. We had computers in the class as well, and during the moments when we had Internet interference everybody would run to their terminals and turn on their digital classroom technology so that we could converse with each other. We had guest lecturers; I brought in a couple of people and she brought in a number of people. The students did joint projects which were really successful. We created six assigned discussion groups, half of them were my students and half were her students. We used a Web chat room for discussions, required students to comment on readings before class, etc., and a couple of these groups would always present materials to the class. The real advantage was that we offered students the option to create Net-art projects—all except one student elected this option. They worked in groups over the Internet, planning these projects, dividing and assigning tasks. Some of the finished products were very technologically specific and complicated.

Waligora-Davis: ***Is this a course that you will sponsor again?***

Murray: Yes. Because our leave schedules overlap it may be two years before we are able to reconvene the course. We realize that it works even better the second time around. Students really had to get used to working in the technological mediations since all of the discussions that we had were on a screen; they themselves were on the screen. Since one of the things we were pondering in this course on digital theory was technological mediation, when we had technical problems we theorized them, and instead of turning them into a deficit we turned them into an advantage. Two of the students did Net-art projects on the technical problems, turning them into theoretical reflections on the degradation of information. It was really interesting.



Waligora-Davis: ***While in many ways the impetus for the kinds of conversations enabled during your international art and theory workshop, Digital Terror, are fairly obvious, could you please share some of your own thinking on the critical topography of this workshop, its timeliness, and its relationship to*** **CTheory Multimedia*?***

Murray: *CTheory Multimedia* is an electronic theory journal that I co-curate with Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, who are the editors and founders of *CTheory*. They launched the first issue of *CTheory Multimedia* in the late 1990s. It was really unusual and pioneering to produce a multimedia journal. And while they were here as Society Fellows we teamed up, and that's when they decided that they would be interested in working with Cornell and me. The "Digital Terror" workshop came out of a special issue of *CTheory Multimedia* called *Wired Ruins,* and was co-sponsored by *CTheory* and the Rose Goldsen Lecture Series. The workshop was based on an international group of artists who had been doing work on the terror of technology and surveillance, and technological infusions for a long time.

Waligora-Davis: ***As you look at digital art across time, do you feel that there has been a shift in the kinds of projects being produced, and are these projects a response to the different kinds of terrorisms that have become more public and more pronounced since 9/11?***

Murray: About forty percent of the work in *Wired Ruins* preceded 9/11. These are artists who have been thinking for a long time about cultural miscegenation, the promise of technology, and the disadvantage of technology in that regard. One really interesting Israeli feminist artist, Horit Herman-Peled, who has been working on what she calls "digital terror" for a long time, was invited to the workshop but was unable to attend. So it depends, obviously there has been a lot of new work lately but the older work actually has more reflectivity in it; it's less "reactionary." And there is newer work coming out that is responding to things like the Homeland Security Act and all of the negative views toward digital technology that arise because of the tracking and the coding and the mapping of people. There are really important projects being done in relation to this, but it was important to us that that number of *CTheory* not just be anchored in the issues of 9/11, but also that these broad issues—especially the relationship between digital terror and ethnic paranoia which is a historically complicated issue, and has now become maybe a little more pronounced in certain areas because of digital stereotyping and tracking—get addressed. The other thing that has been going on in the digital world is growing critical attention on the relations of race and technology, race and the Internet, but even still at the time we were talking about it, we were concerned that that specific discourse would delimit the breadth of the problem; that it is not only about race, but about ethnicity, and paranoia, so that we really wanted to push in the workshop and the special issue the boundaries and make them as wide as we could. And that happened in the workshop with Ricardo Dominguez, who is a very activist Latino media interventionist, Keith Piper, who is a well-known black British artist, and a couple of other presenters such as Patricia Zimmerman of Ithaca College, and there were other people there as well who work on this whole range of issues technically and formally.

Waligora-Davis: ***How did you become invested in digital art and performance theory? Do you feel there was a particular moment that your research and theoretical interests began to dramatically shift toward this kind of work?***

Murray: I was working with video art, and in the early '90s I started teaching a course at Cornell on video art in relationship to cinema studies, all of which are directly related to pedagogy, drama, and theater performance, the leading categories at the time that were becoming increasingly institutionalized. In the video world many of the leading, more interesting independent artists naturally started migrating to digital platforms, and that happened particularly strongly in Australia, Germany, and Canada. It was natural, then, for those of us who were curators or specialists in video at the time to become interested in video art. This is exactly what happened to me, partially because of a colleague I work with in France, Anne-Marie Duguet, who is one of Europe's leading curators and a professor of art at the Sorbonne. Norie Neumark was involved in the Australian version of all of this. There they had one of the largest breakouts or developments in digital and media production in the world, because in the early 1990s the Australian film commission targeted 30 percent of its fellowship funds to new media production, which gave birth to an entire generation of new media artists. And this is why our collaborative course "Electronic Innovation" was so important, because there are huge communities of new media artists in Australia whose distance from us makes them relatively inaccessible, and because of the importance of a Pacific Rim sensibility, which is so different from our Atlantic, urban orientation, even though we live in Ithaca.

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Waligora-Davis: ***Could you share more about your preservation work as curator for the Rose Goldsen Archive of Digital Multimedia Art?***

Murray: The Cornell Digital Library publishes *CTheory Multimedia* and part of the project of *CTheory Multimedia* includes archiving older issues on the Web, so that it is both a publication and a digital archive. I used the paradigm of that archive to think more broadly. I had curated a large international show of CD-Rom art, called *Contact Zones*, and realized that this art in the very, very near future was going to be inaccessible on most machines, or just drop out of sight. I began to feel that it was imperative for us to start creating an archive for this work because maybe for the first time in art history we could have decades of work that could just disappear. Cornell University Library graciously entered into this collaboration and we named the archive after Rose Goldsen, an activist sociology professor at Cornell who fought strenuously against the commodification of media. I thought it would be a fitting tribute to her, in conjunction with the Rose Goldsen lecture series, to create this archive in the library. The archive is housed in the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, and will be germane to people interested in hypertext, ethnic studies, and what we are calling comparative American studies. It was unbelievably courageous of the library to extend the paradigm of printed matter into media, and it will be an extremely important collection of CD-Rom and Net art. One of the things that we have already worked out is that the archive will serve as the repository for the Rockefeller Foundation's annual competition in media art. All the artists who are nominated will have dossiers and book samples in the archive. Having just been named, the archive has already received tremendous interest and it already houses artworks by about 150 artists. There are a number of Net-art collections that want duplicates to be housed in the archive preservation facility. Hopefully, people will end up using this work in their classrooms and students will profit from access to it.

The digital art community is very organized because of digital and electronic sites; it is a heavily communicational world, so that artists from relatively isolated or marginalized places are able to engage in exhibition practice. One of the real goals of the archive is to be as broadly international as possible. We want there to be in the archive an extremely strong Latin American influence, a particularly strong Asian influence from China and Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong, and needless to say North America, and Eastern Europe, which has a very strong and visionary art world that is highly dependent on new media interfaces.

We are trying to establish liaisons in Japan, and in China we are becoming affiliated with something that is brand new, the Dongtai Institute, which is a cultural institute. The associate director, Shin-Yi Yang, is a Cornell graduate in art history. We are working on ways that the Goldsen archive could collaborate with the projects affiliated with this institute.

The content load of new media art is so deep. This is a global community enterprise, which may sound rather utopic, but remains true for the current moment. Obviously there are artists who are trying to capitalize on this, as their work is extremely expensive and needs financial support, but so far I think those of us who are really responsible for curating the first generation of new media artists have been very careful to avoid hierarchies between the "new" and the "old," the "experienced" and the "young"; it's more nuanced than that. So that I could have in the *Contact Zones* exhibition Keith Piper, one of the world's leading black artists, and Leah Gilliam, who at the time was a young African American woman whom almost no one knew about, both in the same show with the same clout. Or a young artist, Jody Zellen from L.A., who was still in college and doing brilliant work. What is exciting about this is that the work speaks louder than the reputation of the artist, or the clout of the gallery.

Waligora-Davis: ***What new work can we anticipate seeing in forthcoming issues of*** **CTheory Multimedia?**

Murray: This is difficult to say. The next issue will be a follow-up to our recent *Net.Noise* issue with greater emphasis on electronic music in contrast to cultural sound. Because we make editorial decisions collaboratively, I can only project my own interests in such areas as cultural cartography, psychic scansion, and digital divides.

Rethinking Race and Ethnicity at Cornell University

by Sunn Shelley Wong

If the past decade's worth of programming at the annual American Studies Association meetings serves as a prime indicator of shifting intellectual currents within the field, then, clearly, one of those currents has been generated by scholars trying to rearticulate the fields of American studies and ethnic studies. (A note on nomenclature: *ethnic studies* here refers to the institutional formation that emerged in the late 1960s that took as its subject matter the interdisciplinary study of African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, and U.S. Latinos. While not without its attendant controversies, I use the term here because the field has been largely institutionalized under that name. An alternative term—one used by the Cornell English Department—is *minority studies*.) American studies, too, is not without its own referential instabilities and one of the recent shifts has been both geopolitical and ideological, a shift from a focus on the United States of America to that of the hemispheric Americas. To rearticulate American studies and ethnic studies is to presuppose a degree of separateness. While the fields themselves have emerged as separate institutional entities, the groups that form the respective subjects of these fields have been historically entangled. The current rearticulating makes visible epistemologically and institutionally that which had always been historically evident in sociopolitical relations. Recent developments at Cornell indicate some of the directions that this campus is moving in to rethink the linkages between American studies and ethnic studies.

In January 2002 a coalition of students (Cornell University Coalition for Ethnic Studies) asked Provost Biddy Martin to establish a task force on the future of ethnic studies programs on campus. The Provost appointed this task force in February 2002, consisting of a large number of students, the deans of the Arts College and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the respective faculty directors of the Africana Studies and Research Center, the American Indian Program, the Asian American Studies Program, and the U.S. Latino/a Studies Program, and other faculty members and administrators. The Task Force on Ethnic Studies met frequently throughout the spring and fall of 2002.

Earlier institutional efforts to address the situation of racialized minorities at Cornell, such as the 1975 Report of the Trustee Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Minorities and the 1984 Report of the Trustee Subcommittee on Minority Education, had recommended that colleges and departments take responsibility for developing and improving course material based on minority experiences and perspectives, and that the mainstream curriculum incorporate perspectives of minority people more often. The work of this task force both builds on, and departs from, these earlier efforts. In assessing the results of those earlier reports, the task force recognized that, on the one hand, creating ethnic studies programs has been a singularly important step toward discharging the above-mentioned responsibility. On the other hand,

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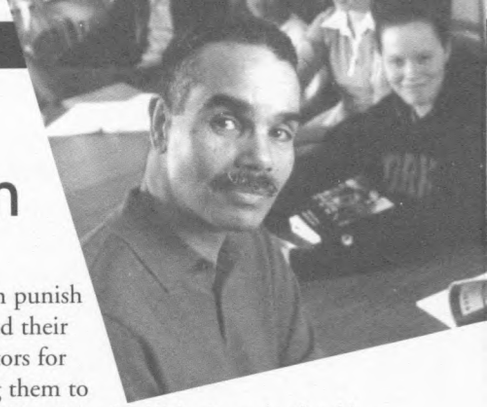
Hungers: Reflections on Affirmative Action

by Ken McClane



We could settle this whole race mess over a long lunch.

From a conversation overheard on a New York City bus.

Some months ago a good student of mine, during a luncheon to celebrate his fine stories, told me angrily that he had not been accepted to Harvard because of "affirmative action." Had this remark come from someone who was small-minded, racially insensitive, or less socially involved, I would have been saddened but not surprised. But that it came from a student who had worked in area prisons helping inmates to write better, who had struggled to increase his fraternity's awareness of social injustice, and who had, in wonderfully wrought stories, written tenderly about every manner of dispossession, I was sufficiently stymied. This student had written poignantly about a young woman's inability to see the implications of her own self-absorption, in prose as trenchant as Annie Dillard's; in a luminous novella, he deftly conveyed the small misfortunes of a romantic businessman, "lost in his own irrelevancies." Like Raymond Carver, with whom he shares much, my student's stories were always pithy, world-wise, and full of human empathy. He understood human beings, he was usually generous, and I expected much of him. But here, I was confronting someone hurt, sullen, and disconsolate—someone as cut off from good sense as a stone. It was painful and ugly.

As Gunnar Myrdal quipped, race in America seems to turn everybody insane. And this occurs, I think, because race, in this country, remains the province of the patently unexamined. Race—whatever else it is—is a notion informed by a multiplicity of tributary ones, all involving our difficult, ill-explored histories, and all inexorably personal. That we fail to understand America's racial past—as James Baldwin brilliantly shows—stems from a congress of self-deceptions and self-deformations, all of which, in various guises, seem to inhabit us like errant cells. On the one hand, we speak about our "great progress," and there has been much progress indeed, as I am the first to concede; on the other—and with far too great frequency—we seem to confront the inevitable paralysis: why won't the racial problem end? What do *these* people want? Why the incessant, dreary carping about race?

...Americans are afraid to acknowledge how PAINFU PER

Much of this "racial fatigue" stems, I submit, from America's unique ability to view race as something we've largely confronted, since it has been with us for so long, and we've spent so much psychic time on it. (Here, of course, we confront the American penchant to confuse involvement with evolvement, as if spending a week with an unopened book is the same thing as reading it.) And by the same token, Americans are afraid to acknowledge how *painfully* personal our confrontation with race is, as if such a concession would dislodge the earth's axis. And yet one has simply to look at our fiction, from Melville to Faulkner, Emerson to Cheever, to comprehend how indissolubly race remains at the center of the American psyche—it haunts us, like that terrible white whale, reminding us that it is our imaginings of "the other," indeed, which can send us to hell. And, of course, it is not simply our imaginings, but how we act on them, that is central: rape, lynching, Jim Crow, "separate but equal," three-fifths of a person, miscegenation laws, slavery. Whatever else can be said, our confrontation with race, certainly, has been dramatic, brutal, and agonizing. That we haven't been able to respond adequately to our participation in this mess, that we will argue that slaves are stupid and incapable of learning on the one hand, and then punish them and their benefactors for teaching them to read on the other, this ill-logic, quite frankly, enters the realm of the pathological.

Much of the affirmative action debate is focused, at least in the media, on the ideal of fairness. Is it fair to use legal or academic remedies to reverse previous historical wrongdoings? Are the sins of the fathers and mothers vested on the children? Should my child be made to pay for the horrors of slavery, even if she had nothing to do with them? And on and on. But the real sting of affirmative action as it is experienced by whites, I maintain, is that it reaffirms—and my student certainly feels this, even if he hasn't fully understood its ramifications—that the world is often capricious, unintelligible, and brutal. My student *feels* it; but he does not yet understand its fullest implications, and these implications, I would argue, are essential to understanding the world and his place in it.

Let's look again at my student's situation. As I suggested, he had applied to Harvard, he had done very well in his classes, he had good SAT scores, and he is extremely talented. By his own lights, he deserved to get admitted. And yet he was not.

Now, let's look at Harvard's predicament. They, as Cornell, get thousands of applications for a very limited number of spots. Harvard's admissions officers will tell you that they could responsibly admit 90 percent of their applicants, although the actual admissions rate in 2002 was 11 percent. Thus, my student, as well as many others, could well have been admitted. And yet let's take this simple-minded conjecture further. If we exclude all of the people of color, less than 7 percent of the entering class, my student still has only the faintest hope of acceptance. Yes, those few minority students did foreclose some of his possibility to attend Harvard—and many of those minority students, interestingly, would have been admitted no matter what the criteria (Harvard gets the *best* students in the country). And, just as poignantly, legacies (students whose relatives attended Harvard) took up 25 percent of the

The pasts of his ancestors lean against
Him. Crowd Him. Fog out his identity.
Hundreds of hungers mingle with his own,
Hundreds of voices advise so dexterously
He quite considers his reactions his,
Judges he walks most powerfully alone,
That everything is—simply what it is.

From "The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith"

by Gwendolyn Brooks

places in the admitted class. Unless my student's father or mother attended Harvard/ Radcliffe, he was even more numerically displaced by these students. And we should also include the bevy of talented athletes, and others who were admitted, say, for being violin virtuosos, who are also important to a university's sense of itself. In all honesty, there is a universe of variables here, and I haven't begun to discuss the fact that human beings, in a room, read those admissions folders—human beings who, variously impassioned, decide who would make the best Harvard student. It is all, frankly, a creative act of social engineering—it's a universe defined and shaped by people who, in W. D. Snodgrass's rhetoric, are "all vaguely furiously driven." This is not to say that the admissions board does not know what it is doing, or what it intends the Harvard class to look like, it is simply to state that the human imprecates everything.

My student at lunch, understandably, was not being analytical about his situation: he was hurt. And yet this brings me to a larger truth.

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our confrontation with race is

He was hurt, and his hurt, at least from *his* vantage point, could be explained. It was those people of color who had denied him his Harvard placement, not the vagaries of an admissions process, where not everyone, sadly, can be admitted. Injustice is always easier to bear if it can be explained; and, understandably, it was far easier for my student to believe that black and Latino students (whatever their qualifications) were the cause of his disappointment than to interrogate the absurdities of an often indifferent universe. And then, too, if affirmative action was at the heart of Harvard's decision, my student's performance was never truly in question, at least as he imagines it. That his good work was not as meritorious as another admitted Harvard student; that he was not as creative or as intellectually enterprising as John Winthrop from Temple, Nebraska, or Ken Smith from Harlem; that his lack of playing the piano, or the truth that he played the piano gracelessly—all this, of course, was not important to my student's calculus. Undoubtedly, there were any number of reasons why my student was not accepted. Years ago, when I sent a poem to *The Nation* magazine in the hope of getting my first acceptance in a national magazine, the editor penned me a quixotic note. "Dear Ken McClane," he wrote, "had this been Monday I would have accepted this." The editor was telling me, and it was important knowledge, that national magazines get hundreds of submissions—good, even interesting, poems often get turned down. Had my poems come earlier in the week, the editor might have been more accommodating, and I could swagger about, my poem soon to appear. But "time and chance" intervened, or, as my students are wont to say, "Shit happens." Sadly, we don't always get what we deserve or desire.

The weight of my student's pain is, of course, real—and I do not wish to diminish it. But his pain has nothing to do with affirmative action, and much to do, I hazard, with life's peccadilloes. We spend most of our lives trying to ensure our futures, to forestall suffering: parents want the best for their offspring; I want to create the best opportunities for myself. It is understandable, in a terrifying universe, to want to bring shape and contour to the incommensurate. But there are no givens in life. No one can ensure that she will take a breath tomorrow, or see the moon tonight. We can try—we can seek to mitigate the possible and diminish the ponderous—but the world, alas, does what it does.

Now, this is not an earthshaking revelation. And yet my student must realize that his anger was ill-placed; that his pain, in reality, could only teach him something if he would unpack it; if he would, like the finest critic or watchmaker, interrogate its inner mechanisms, its springs, joinings, and dalliances. My student was suffering because it hurt to be denied—and yet one is often not listened to, taken into account, corroborated. As the spiritual laments, "Lord, why leave me here?"

To a large degree, my student's failure to comprehend his predicament stems from a lapse of imagination. He could not, or would not, interrogate the machinations of judgment—in the first instance, because it was painful; in the second, because, at bottom, it would suggest, alas, that there are intelligences (ways of seeing, valuable ones) he can barely fathom. For that black student from Harlem, who was accepted at Harvard, may have been smarter than my student: he may have had higher board scores, class rank, and intellectual heft; or he, just as importantly, might have been the first student in his ghetto school to take advanced calculus, daily venturing to Columbia University, after he took care of his aged grandmother and five siblings, and before he worked five hours a night at the local pharmacy. This narrative, of course, my student would fail to contemplate, since his own sojourn, one culled out of hurt and disappointment, caused him to be imaginatively lead-footed. The gift of the imagination, ultimately, is the gift to appreciate another: to see, alas, that I am in you and you are in me.

And this is why the affirmative action debate has so befuddled so many potentially well-meaning people. The argument which suggests that we need a "race-neutral society," though offered with good intentions by some, is a spurious one—it conveys, at least to people of color, that their historical experience is either a hindrance to community, or is of no importance, which, of course, is hardly palatable to someone who loves her "colored" self, and finds in her color, as she should, much to be proud. And this reasoning suggests, once again, a terrible paucity of imagination: whites, for their part, have often had the privilege of acting as if they were "color blind," although their legalisms, in court and country club, suggest quite the opposite. And, until recently, whites have not had to see their color as a badge of privilege, power, or malfeasance; they have not been made to see themselves as white.

And yet people of color have always viewed their pigmentation as an essential barometer of their historical reality—of who and what they are—albeit in far different ways than often envisioned by their countrymen. As Gwendolyn Brooks and Toni Morrison evince, a people's struggle to survive is never merely a litany of dispossession, pain, or nullification: no one is a mere sociological construct. No matter how deformative slavery was, blacks forged lives, created art, and made their exalted way in the world. If I am the benefactor of the Collegiate School, the oldest private school in America, I am also the offspring of 147th Street in Harlem, where I learned to celebrate the quiet decency of those around me: those who had been given so little materially and yet proffered so much spiritually. To deny race, at bottom, is to deny them.

After a long discussion, my student, to his credit, began the process of examining his anger. He let go of his cloying to half-truths; he sensed, and powerfully, what it meant to enter the deep water, where failure cannot be explained or reasoned away. This, I think, is the hardest thing for a human being to accept: that life cannot always be tamed, or channeled; that life, at bottom, is terrifying. My student, in the weeks to come, began to listen more to those inmates he tutored; he began to take their stories to heart, to see in their private invocations their desire to see the world made anew. "I never really listened to them before," he told me. "I never understood how much I could learn from them. I never realized that we're all so frightened and vulnerable. I never realized," he said very slowly, "that they held the key for me."

I was very proud of my student.

Faculty RETIREMENT

Carol Kaske

Most Cornellians know that to find out what's going on in town, you need to look outside it. Carol Kaske proves a case in point. You can attend meetings of the Modern Language Association, the Renaissance Society of America, the Medieval Institute, the Dante Society, Spenser at Kalamazoo, the Milton Society, the International Neo-Latin Association, and the list goes on. At each one you'll either hear Carol delivering a paper or you'll meet someone spreading the news about her latest achievement. The same will happen if you visit university centers around the world: Cambridge, Mass., and Cambridge, England; Florence and Phoenix; Tokyo and Beijing. The girl has been everywhere.

What our community does know is a succession of courses and seminars that have educated some of our best and brightest: Western Literature, The Bible and Ancient Authors, Allegory and Epic, Mallory and Spenser, the Spenser Seminar, and the team-taught Culture of the Later Renaissance that Carol co-organized more than two decades ago with the participation of faculty members from nine different departments. It knows as well Cornell's multidisciplinary Renaissance Colloquium that Carol jump-started three decades ago and has nurtured to a level of national fame.

Carol's publications range with the same polyphrenia from dozens of acclaimed articles on Dante, Chaucer, neo-Platonism, and scripture to her definitive books on Ficino's *De vita* (1989) and *Spenser's Biblical Poetics* (1999). The principle animating them is a steady focus on *Dichtung* with a heady dose of *Wahrheit*—not *the* truth, or this or that truth, but a truth that poetry reflects in our pluralistic universe. This last phrase, drawn from the title of Carol's celebrated essay on Spenser, points to the synergy that has lit up her work since her graduate study at the Johns Hopkins University and her early teaching at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Duke University, and the University of Illinois.

For nearly four decades at Cornell, Carol has performed an enormous amount of heavy-lifting in the department of English, and has made it look easy. Among her colleagues in Medieval and Renaissance Studies across the college, she has been the wind in our sails and will remain a permanent player on Mount Olympus. To legions of students who have fanned out from Goldwin Smith Hall, she is a teacher beyond compare. In this way, too, you need to look outside Ithaca to find out what's going on here. We fully expect to do this, as Carol embarks upon a busy retirement that will have her contributing to conferences, publications, and a reprisal of teaching some of her most cherished courses.

-William J. Kennedy
Comparative Literature

Reminiscences of the Arts College as it was from 1963 to 1967

by Carol Kaske
Department of English

When Bob and I joined the faculty in 1963, there was plenty of money for education, and universities were sorely in need of Ph.D.s. In 1966, the Professors-at-Large Program and the Society for the Humanities were founded. Olin Library had just been built to house books and provide study space for faculty and graduate students. As a result, the college still has not one but two copies of basic books in every field. The example of Sputnik spurred governmental and nonprofit organizations (e.g., the NDEA) to pour money into all the disciplines.

Courses We didn't have grade inflation then. Professors routinely assigned students Cs and Ds. The typical jock and fraternity man aspired to what we all called the gentleman's C. Final exams were routine even in English courses, scrawled in square exam books at scheduled hours in proctored classrooms. In English, even the grad students had to take a factual, comprehensive written exam. The faculty could grade without fear or favor because they were not officially evaluated by the students. As the Vietnam War heated up, professors went easy on the men to keep them out of the draft. Except for Freshman English, courses tended to be large, the range of subjects small and traditional.

Intellectual Life The better students evinced a broad intellectual curiosity. Telluriders leaned more to the right than to the left. The students did form one protest group, the SFE or Students for Education. One of their grievances was the uniformity and the literary orientation of Freshman Composition. In response, the present system was instituted—one which broke the monopoly of the English Department over Freshman writing courses and created the dizzying array of subjects (143 in Fall, 2002, and expected to increase), from which first-year students can choose today.

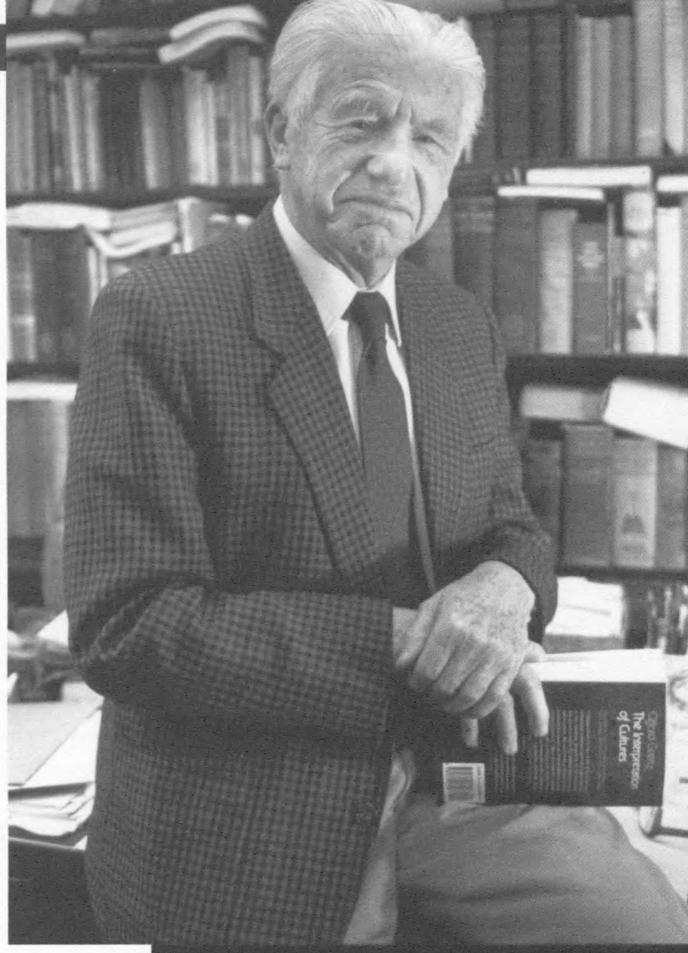
Social Life An atmosphere of genial playfulness prevailed—an atmosphere revived more recently by the appearance of a pumpkin on the tip of Uris Tower. Many people brought their dogs to campus. About half of the population smoked. The university had just given up the role of parent to the students and was starting to play the role of social worker.

There were quite a few women, at least in English courses. They were feisty, speaking up in class about as much as did the men. Perhaps in consequence, the men tended to date women not from Cornell but from Wells and Ithaca College. Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics had not yet arrived in significant numbers, and those who had tended to keep or were kept to themselves.

Fraternities and sororities controlled the social life, but the bright, industrious students could still assemble their own circle of intellectual friends. After the students became politicized in opposition to racism and the Vietnam War, this distinction broke down because the counter-culture was inescapable and intrusive. The bright, the studious, and the stupid, along with many Greeks and faculty members, stood shoulder to shoulder. All was changed, changed utterly: A terrible beauty was born.

*Steve Parrish, Bruce Roebal, Mike Abrams, David Grossvogel, Marvin Carlson, Joe Dallett, Larry Williams, Felicia Ackerman ('68), and Tom Hill all helped to shape this memoir. All errors are of course my own; I welcome corrections and comments.

M. H. Abrams AT NINETY



Class of 1916 Professor Emeritus Meyer Howard Abrams, known to countless friends, colleagues, and students as Mike, turned 90 in 2002. M. H. Abrams remains without question the most distinguished scholar ever to be affiliated with the Cornell English Department. Between 1945, when he first began teaching in Ithaca, and his retirement in 1983, Professor Abrams's name was virtually synonymous with literary studies at Cornell, and his presence continues to be felt in the halls of Goldwin Smith in ways both tangible and intangible. He often shows up to check his mail, drop off manuscripts for typing, meet with students and colleagues, and generally play the role of elder statesman with all the geniality and grace at his command. His appearance at the colloquium for entering Ph.D. students last fall was a highlight of the semester for those in attendance, and plans for a repeat performance are already in the works. But Professor Abrams's influence goes much deeper, showing itself above all in the atmosphere of intellectual openness and collegiality that the Cornell English Department exhibits at its best. Though Abrams has devoted much of his energy in the past twenty years to critiquing newer developments in literary theory, he has done so with an unfailing respect for his opponents that provides a refreshing contrast to the name-calling and guerrilla tactics in which many academic polemicists engage.

The ability to explore a range of intellectual positions with sympathy and curiosity while reserving the right to question their claims has been at the heart of much of Professor Abrams's scholarly work. While other critics of his generation staked out rigid positions and defended them against all rival views, Abrams has always preferred to acknowledge the plurality of productive approaches to literary works, measuring their insights and their limitations alike with great tact and subtlety. The very title of his magisterial study of Romantic aesthetics, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), suggests the equally compelling claims of mimetic and expressive theories of art. Abrams's famous essay, "Five Types of *Lycidas*" (1961), with its playful nod to Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, offers an elegant taxonomy of then-current critical approaches to a seminal lyric poem, noting the merits and defects of each. A later essay, "How to Do Things with Texts" (1979), provides a similarly balanced assessment of the reading practices of Jacques Derrida, Harold Bloom, and Stanley Fish. Abrams's indispensable *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, which has gone through seven editions since its original appearance in 1957, has equipped countless students of literature with pithy explanations of all the key concepts of literary criticism.

But Professor Abrams's contribution to scholarship goes well beyond the rehearsal of other critics' theories and arguments. His monumental work, *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), offers the fullest, most comprehensive account of Romantic literature and its renovative energies to be found in print, while *The Correspondent Breeze* (1984) gathers invaluable essays on particular Romantic themes and genres. Indeed Abrams's scholarship on the Romantic period is almost single-handedly responsible for conferring new interest and complexity on a body of literature that the New Criticism had largely dismissed as sentimental and flaccid. Students and sometime colleagues of Abrams like Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, and Paul de Man built on his work to make Romanticism the cornerstone of theoretical reflections on literary language and rhetoric in the 1970s. Abrams's presence in the English Department alongside younger scholars like Stephen Parrish, Reeve Parker, Mary Jacobus, and Cynthia Chase established Cornell as a world center for Romantic studies.

Abrams's most direct impact on classrooms throughout the world has undoubtedly come through his general editorship of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, and his close involvement in many other teaching anthologies published by W. W. Norton. The very fact that the *Norton Anthology* has for some critics come to represent the canon in all its institutional hegemony attests to the remarkable staying power of this collection, which has dominated the field for four decades despite a host of challengers. Much of its success can be attributed to Abrams's insistence that the contents be continually revised to reflect new interests and discoveries. With its formidable apparatus of period introductions, headnotes, textual notes, and appendices, the *Norton* set the standard for all subsequent scholarly anthologies, including those that codify emerging literatures by women and minorities.

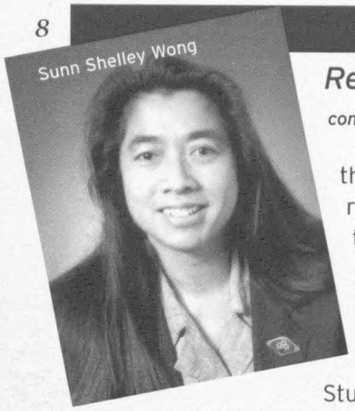
Perhaps the accusation Professor Abrams has most frequently met is that of being unduly affirmative in his readings, particularly of Romantic literature. While fully acknowledging the tragic dimensions of the works he expounds, Abrams usually finds the balance coming out on the side of reconciliation or even joy. In his essay "Rationality and Imagination in Cultural History," he cheerfully admits that this may be a purely temperamental bias, and those who know him can confirm that his essential disposition is toward gaiety rather than gloom. Even at rest his face seems to be perpetually smiling (for a stark contrast, consider just about any photograph of his prize student Harold Bloom). Both by precept and example, Mike Abrams has taught generations of students and colleagues not only how to read great literature, but how to draw strength and serenity from it in the face of life's inevitable hardships.

–Roger Gilbert
Department of English

Alumni NEWS

Saundra Morris (Ph.D. 1992) received the Bucknell University 2003 Presidential Award for Teaching Excellence. An associate professor of English and senior fellow of the Social Justice college of Bucknell University, Morris co-edited with **Professor Joel Porte** *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1999). She also recently received Bucknell University's Forest D. Brown Award for promoting community service and political action, an Inspirational Teaching Award from the Bucknell graduating class of 2000, and was appointed for a term as the Stanley J. Kahrl Visiting Fellow of Literary Manuscripts at Houghton Library, Harvard University. Professor Morris serves as the Director of Graduate Studies in English at Bucknell.

Lauren Weisberger (B.A. 1999) recently published her first novel, *The Devil Wears Prada* (Doubleday, 2003).


Sunn Shelley Wong

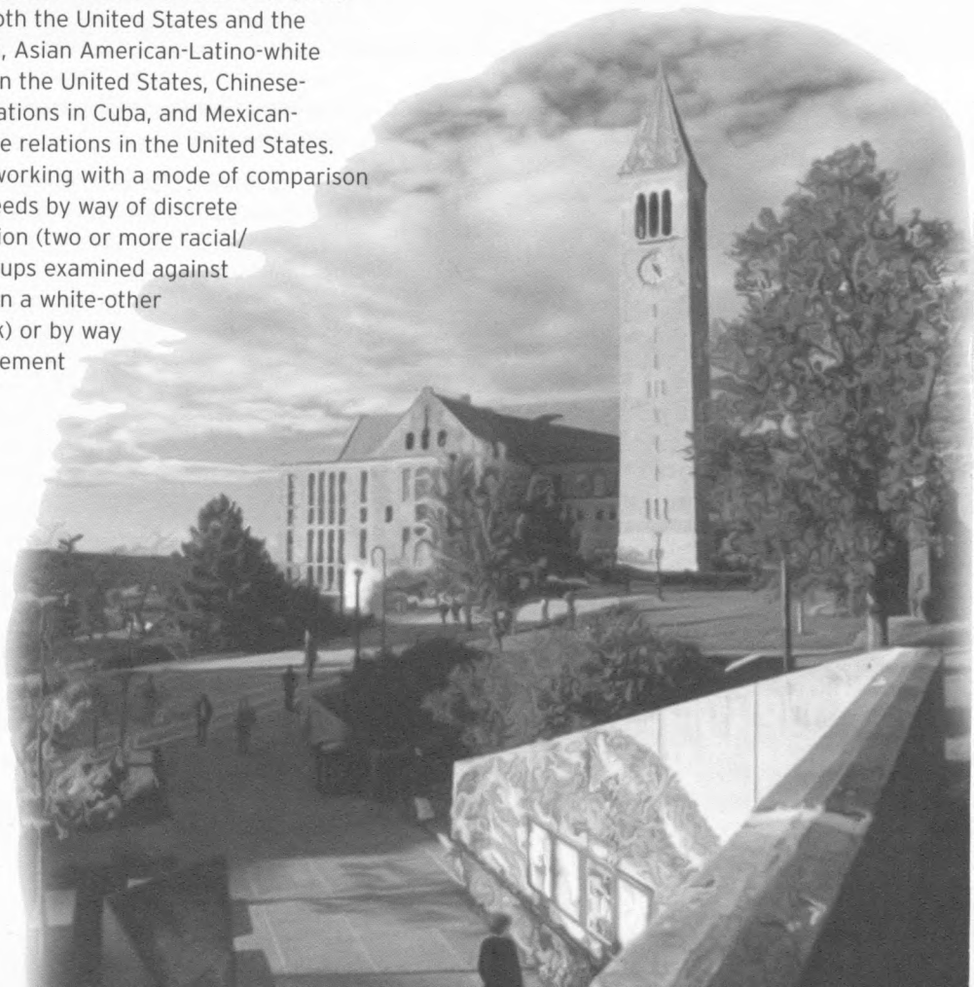
Rethinking Race and Ethnicity at Cornell University

continued from page 3

the task force also realized that while the creation of Latino Studies (then called the Hispanic American Studies Program) and Asian American Studies in 1987 was a welcome addition to the already established Africana Studies and Research Center and the American Indian Program, the mere existence of these academic units had not answered the question of how well Cornell had systematically and effectively addressed the larger issue of ethnic studies as a way of achieving a broad-based liberal education. The task force concluded that the university needs to provide more financial resources to develop and sustain these units as viable, autonomous, and vital centers of academic study and research, and that it had to develop ways to demonstrate how ethnic studies as a field of inquiry has significant implications not just for students belonging to racialized groups, but for all students. To put it another way, the task force found that it was now necessary to not just find ways to infuse new ideas and approaches into mainstream culture (as the language of the 1975 and 1984 Reports would have it) but to move beyond that to develop ways of demonstrating how ethnic studies engages with and transforms prevailing modes of knowledge production within the university.

The Task Force on Ethnic Studies issued its report in May 2003, and recommended, among other things, increased funding for faculty lines and operating expenses for the respective programs, the funding of staff members for student support services, and the intellectual re-siting of ethnic studies within the institution of the university. As part of that effort to re-situate ethnic studies, the report recommended that the Provost immediately appoint a faculty committee to explore the possibility of creating a center or institute for the comparative study of race and ethnicity. The task force recommendations neither emerged from, nor enter into, an intellectual vacuum. One of the English Department's recent capital campaign proposals, for example, focuses on "America's Cultures," and notes that faculty members in the Departments of English, Comparative Literature, and History, and in the Asian American, American Indian, and Latino/a Studies programs are currently moving forward on various paths toward course and program development in the study of comparative literatures and cultures of the Americas, by sponsoring courses at the graduate and undergraduate level that link ethnic American literatures, cultures, and societies to one another and to canonical American literature, and both of those to Canadian and Latin American literatures, cultures, and societies. Though it remains to be seen what institutional form the comparative study of race and ethnicity will take here at Cornell, it is clear that this venture is tapping into already existing intellectual interests and energies. It is worth repeating here, as the Task Force on Ethnic Studies' report is careful to note, that the creation of an institutional site for the comparative study of race and ethnicity is not meant to absorb or displace the individual ethnic studies programs. The comparative work will provide a necessary complement to, rather than a substitute for, the work currently being undertaken by those programs.

The volume of scholarly research and publication that makes comparative analysis of race and ethnicity its operative category has been increasing of late. This would include, for example, research on African American-American Indian relations, Asian-black relations in both the United States and the Caribbean, Asian American-Latino-white relations in the United States, Chinese-Latino relations in Cuba, and Mexican-black-white relations in the United States. Whether working with a mode of comparison that proceeds by way of discrete juxtaposition (two or more racial/ethnic groups examined against each within a white-other framework) or by way of entanglement (includes whiteness as an axis of social relations but considers equally interactions between or amongst various racial/ethnic groups), this comparative research both provokes new questions and provides new understandings of the complex racial/ethnic landscape of the Americas. The emphasis on comparison opens up a way of tracking the dynamic tension between discreteness and entanglement (the vicissitudes of identity politics might prove a useful example here) and tracking the political fortunes of the idea of discreteness across space and time. It invites us to ask, for example, how the ideological and political valences and consequences of discreteness play themselves out at various historical junctures, and how historical and geographical contingencies determine the respective foregrounding or back grounding of discreteness and entanglement within both academic and political discourse. The recommendations of the Task Force on Ethnic Studies are significant in themselves for the ways in which they will shape the pedagogy and research on race and ethnicity on this campus, but they also point to some exciting new directions in the comparative study of race and ethnicity both nationally and transnationally.



[1] *Exceptions to this include the University of Michigan's Program in American Culture, which includes under its umbrella American studies, African American studies, Asian American studies, U.S. Latino studies, and American Indian studies.*

Faculty NOTES

Stuart Davis received the College of Arts & Sciences' Paul Advising Award for his distinguished work with students.

Alice Fulton received the prestigious Rebekah Jonson Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry from the Library of Congress for her poetry collection, *Felt* (W. W. Norton & Co., 2002).

Biodun Jeyifo's *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics, and Postcolonialism* will be forthcoming this fall from Cambridge University Press.

With essays on Louisa May Alcott, Dr. Seuss, L. Frank Baum, and Salman Rushdie, **Alison Lurie's** *Boys and Girls Forever* (Viking Penguin, 2003) examines classic children's fiction and its authors.

Pembroke Magazine honored **Robert Morgan** by publishing a collection of fiction in his name. His latest novel, *Brave Enemies,* arrives this fall from Algonquin Books.

In *Facing America: Iconography and the Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, Fall 2003) **Shirley Samuels** explores the body of the nation imagined both physically and metaphorically, arguing that the Civil War marked a dramatic shift from identifying the American nation as feminine to identifying it as masculine. Samuels illustrates how the simultaneous advent of photography and the Civil War produced a changed understanding of how transformative media can promote new cultural and national identities.

Daniel R. Schwarz published *Broadway Boogie Woogie: Damon Runyon and the Making of New York City Culture* (Palgrave/St.Martin's Press, 2003), treating the influence of Runyon's writings on New York City culture.

Former Chair of the English Department (1999-2002) and of the John S. Knight Writing Program (1986-1992) **Harry Shaw** was recently appointed Senior Associate Dean to the College of Arts and Sciences and began his term in July. He assumes this position from **Jonathan Culler,** whose term ended in June.

With a critical range that carries her from Ralph Ellison to William Faulkner, Sigmund Freud to Theodor Adorno, G. W. F. Hegel to Jose Marti, **Hortense Spillers's** work has shaped and continues to reshape the fields of African American cultural and literary criticism, feminist theory, and race studies for the past three decades. Her recently published *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (The University of Chicago Press, 2003), gathers together for the first time her deeply influential and equally political essays from the 1980s forward.

NEW FACULTY Members

Douglas Mao joined the faculty last fall as an associate professor. He received his B.A. degree in biology from Harvard in 1987 and a Ph.D. degree in English from Yale in 1993. He taught at Princeton from 1993 through 2000 and at Harvard for the following two years before coming to Cornell in 2002. His principal field of study is British, Irish, and United States literature, especially poetry and fiction. While his other interests include gender studies, gay and lesbian studies, literary theory, aestheticism, and aesthetics, he has also been working on psychology and anthropology in the early twentieth century. His book, *Solid Objects: Modernism and the Test of Production* (Princeton, 1998) explores literary representations of inanimate things in relation to the legacy of aestheticism, the problem of commodification, and the coalescence of existential crisis. He has also published individual essays on Stevens, Pound, the New Critics, Fredric Jameson, personal beauty in aesthetics, and the meanings of "culture" in the twentieth century; this year, he completed a long essay on Auden, another on Auden and Lewis, and a third on Adorno in relation to Judith Butler. His ongoing larger projects include a study of modern literary thinking about human development and a collection of essays on modernism co-edited with Rebecca Walkowitz of the University of Wisconsin. He has served on the boards of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, the Society for the Study of Narrative and Literature, the Modern Language Association's (MLA's) Division on Late-Nineteenth- and Early-Twentieth-Century English Literature, and the Modernist Studies Association (MSA). He will assume the presidency of MSA for 2003–04.

Douglas Mao

Masha Raskolnikov is an assistant professor of English literature. She earned her B.A. degree at Wesleyan University and her Ph.D. degree at the University of California, Berkeley. She is currently working on a book tentatively titled *Body and Soul: Middle English Debate and the Gender of Allegory*, the research for which will be supported by her participation in the Cornell Society for the Humanities and in the Mellon seminar series during the 2003–04 school year, and by an American Council of Learned Societies fellowship in the spring of 2004. At Berkeley she was the editor of *Critical Sense: A Journal of Political and Cultural Theory*. Her article, "Between Men, Mourning: Time, Love, and the Gift in the *Roman de la Rose*" is forthcoming from *GLQ: A journal of lesbian and gay studies*. In graduate school she published an article on Vladimir Nabokov's most Cornellian novel, *Pnin*, in a collection titled *Nabokov at the Limits* (Garland Academic Publishers, 1999), and she was thrilled, this past spring, to give a guest lecture on this text to the comparative literature survey course that Nabokov used to teach. Her teaching and research interests include Middle English literature, Latin and vernacular medieval literatures, theories of representation, allegory theory, medieval philosophy and rhetoric, contemporary critical theory, feminist and queer studies, and theories of translation. At Cornell she has taught first-year writing seminars on the transformations that the story of the Trojan War has undergone through the ages, and on medieval understandings of the body. She also helped organize a conference titled Conversations in Feminist Theory. This fall she will be teaching a mixed graduate/undergraduate seminar titled "Sin, Confession, and the 'Invention of the Human'" at the Society for the Humanities.

Masha Raskolnikov

Letter FROM THE CHAIR

The Department of English has had an exciting and rewarding year, which we are glad to share with our friends and alumni. In the fall semester we were very proud to learn that Professor Alice Fulton was the winner of the Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry, a prize sponsored through the Library of Congress and designed to recognize the most distinguished book of poetry by an American author, published in the last two years. Professor Fulton's prize-winning publication is her collection of poetry, *Felt*, published by W. W. Norton and Company. Many of you know Professor Fulton's writing from her earlier books—*Feeling as a Foreign Language*, *Sensual Math*, *Powers of Congress*, *Palladium*, *Dance Script with Electric Ballerina*, and *Anchors of Light*. We urge you to continue to follow Professor Fulton's career.

Meanwhile, another of our prize winners, Professor Robert Morgan, whose novel *Gap Creek* (Algonquin Books), as many of you remember, was a featured selection of Oprah Winfrey's Book Club in 2000, was honored with a special collection of fiction published in his name by *Pembroke Magazine*. Many of you will want to look for Professor Morgan's new novel, *Brave Enemies*, forthcoming this fall from Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. The Cornell English Department has been a very visible and lively place indeed for contemporary authors. In the fall, through the sponsorship of the Eamon McEneaney endowment, we hosted a visit by the Irish writer Edna O'Brien, whose novels—such as *In the Forest*, *Down by the River*, and *Johnny I Hardly Knew You*—have brought contemporary Irish life to an international audience. This coming year the McEneaney fund will enable us to hear the Irish poet Seamus Heaney read from his works, and discuss the craft of writing, on the Cornell campus. We are proud and honored to have the opportunity to sponsor these events through the McEneaney endowment, which has been established in honor of our beloved alumnus, Eamon McEneaney, who lost his life in the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001.

We are celebrating the publication of *Black and White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (University of Chicago Press) by our well-known critic and scholar of American and African American literature, Professor Hortense Spillers. Professor Spillers's work has been at the forefront of African American and American literary criticism for many years. This new study gathers many of her most important contributions, and stands as a testimonial to her stature in her field. Many other ongoing projects have kept us busy and productive in 2002–03. Among these are Professor Mary Pat Brady's new book, *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space,* which has captured the attention of critics in her field of Latino/a studies and beyond; Professor Timothy Murray's *Digital Intensities: Electronic Art, Baroque Vision, and Cultural Memory* (University of Minnesota Press); and Professor Biodun Jeyifo's new *Modern African Drama: Norton Critical Editions* (W. W. Norton 2002).

We sent 98 seniors out into the world this May at our Commencement event. We wish them all the best of luck in the years to come. In May 2004 we are calculating that our graduating class will number about 150 strong—the largest in recent memory. We are inclined to attribute this growth to our devotion to teaching and to the engaging diversity of our undergraduate courses, in classes such as Professor Wetherbee's "James Joyce's *Ulysses*," Professor Sawyer's "Politics and Culture in the 1960s," Professor Gilbert's "Introduction to Modern Poetry," and Professor Samuel's "Nineteenth-Century American Novel." But whatever the explanation, we are eagerly welcoming the new influx of students of English and American literature. Next year will see the rebirth of the English Majors' Club, and, with a little luck and a little extra support from our alumni and friends, we may be able to provide our students with a Hallway Lounge of their own, in the English alcove on the second floor of Goldwin Smith Hall.

Meanwhile, we hope all our friends and alumni across the country and the world are still reading the literary and cultural works that we devote our lives to creating and understanding here in the English Department. These works, as we all know, can lead us to meanings, insights, and hopes that we might not easily find in other places. They can help us see beyond ourselves and our times.

Best wishes,

Laura Brown

Laura Brown
John Wendell Anderson Professor of English

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