

**Weekends, holidays and summers help us recoup from the pressures of modern life. So too do academic sabbaticals in garden settings. I have been exceptionally privileged to have recouped in number of such settings. After 25 years in Cambridge, I spent four challenging years as a department chair at the University of Colorado. That was followed by a year at the Center for Advanced Study in the Social and Behavioral Sciences at Stanford. At the end of sojourn a report is requested. I used it to reflect not only on that year, but on the prior four years at Colorado and also, on how the Center might be improved. The adjacent op-eds in the Daily Camera and the article on "Methods and Manners" written in response to that experience may be of interest.**

June 7, 1997

Report on Year at Center for the Advanced Studies  
In the Social and Behavioral Sciences

Gary T. Marx

The time at the Center has been (next to my first year teaching and a sabbatical year in France) the best academic year of my life. It came at a crucial time of doubt in my own career. I had spent the last four years in a highly unprofessional, politicized environment.

I was recruited as an outside chair with a mandate to create a first-class department of sociology. In my eagerness to give something back to a discipline I love, to create the kind of pluralistic and broad department I had known at Berkeley and to move closer to our sense of home in the West, I took the job without really doing my homework. Had I been more careful I would likely never have moved. I would have seen that although Colorado is a wealthy state, it is 47 out of the 50 states with respect to its proportional funding of the university and it has a population that looks with suspicion upon higher education. It had a generally inbred and cowardly administration that long ago burned their bridges to regular academic work, and whether out of career ambitions (don't rock the boat, keep the lid on, show that you can keep the peace), character defects, or

fatigue, they tolerated incompetence, public mendacity, and deceit on the part of the faculty and followed more than led. They were intimidated by the Regents and legislature. The presence of an elected board of Regents (some of whom actively ran on an anti-university, or more properly anti-faculty platform) and who tried to use the university as a stepping stone to higher office, was not conducive to the highest liberal arts ideals. I had a hint that all was not right when the highly conservative head of the Board of Regents, a retired Air Force General, tried to block my appointment on procedural grounds and made remarks about my Berkeley and sociological approach not being what the university needed.

The sociology faculty with only a few exceptions was immobile, non-achieving and threatened by change and high standards. As a result of a hand that remained strong from the grave, the department never created a professional culture, rather it was one of incestuous hiring of its own students who did not do research, cronyism, localism, unreconstructed 60s radicalism and an identity shaped in opposition to the dominant sociology profession.

As a group they give new meaning to the purity of Weber's ideal type as applied to the idea of political correctness. I should have thought more clearly about the consequences of being in a department in which so few had had broad professional experience or been at other universities.

Suffice it to say that in spite of my gentle and always civil and reasoned efforts to introduce considerations of achievement criteria, professional standards and some broad guiding ideas around which to create a niche graduate market that would make an institution with Colorado's limited resources more attractive, I was not very successful.

The experience was bitter because so few of my colleagues offered active support and the administration

was lukewarm once the political consequences of change were clearer to them. In spite of my academic and personal involvement in civil rights issues, I was repeatedly called racist, sexist, elitist, "establishment" and was seen to represent everything that is wrong with American higher education (and indeed society) from some quarters. Being an older, heterosexual (I was attacked because the department did not offer a course in queer theory) white, Jewish (there was a clear current of anti-Semitism on the part of several of my protagonists in their private remarks), male who came from private schools "back east" I was an "oppressor" and part of the problem.

All this was loudly and convincingly communicated to broader publics who were already hostile to the university, whether from right or left wing ideologies. In a small town the news spread rapidly. The sociology department issues were repeatedly reported on the front page of the local newspaper. The police chief actually thanked me for drawing attention away from police issues. Much of my time was taken up crafting public responses to all of this. I was at a disadvantage because as a state employee, I was a public figure and hence the usual laws of libel and slander did not apply. Furthermore, I could not publicly discuss the personnel issues that were at the heart of several controversies.

Almost everything I had heretofore stood for and believed in as a social scientist—the effort to be as objective and empirical as possible; the need to define terms; the importance of logic, imagination and originality; the need to focus on the attributes of the work not on the personal characteristics of the worker; the need to locate our specific findings relative to the discipline, the literature, comparative and historical contexts, and broader issues; the notion that knowledge was possible across observers and that membership in a group was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for understanding; the belief that in a university truth should hold sway; and that persons of different views had an obligation to discuss their disagreements in a civil

and honorable fashion was challenged. In spite of my admiration for Kiplingesque Nineteenth century British individualism and T.R. Roosevelt, it is hard (at least at some level), not to doubt yourself when all about you seem to be doubting you, an insight clearly shown by early group dynamics research.

Perhaps in the future with distance and less to do I may reflect more on the broader implications of this. I have written about it in an oblique way elsewhere by offering 37 moral mandates for aspiring sociologists. In that sense the Colorado experience helped me more clearly understand what I believe in.

I offer more detail above than you need with fifty reports to read, but I do so to convey a sense of how angry and distraught and even doubtful I had become. Maybe the emperor was naked or scantily clad at that. Perhaps I really was out of step and a dinosaur. Perhaps it was time to get out of the way. I was in danger of not only doubting myself, but becoming too cynical about the softer social sciences. I was fearful about the possibility that Colorado was a bellwether for what was happening to American higher education. My lack of success in winning over more of my timid colleagues as active supporters was depressing and boosted my confidence in neither the righteousness of my cause, nor in my powers of persuasion.

This story suggests a vital function the Center can play for persons coming off experiences such as the above. It can be restorative. The last year for me was the garden after wandering in the desert. It was a healthy, well balanced meal after spoiled food. It was deprogramming after an effort at brainwashing. It was a reality wake up call. Simply being around highly intelligent, productive, decent and professional colleagues reminded me that there was life after, and outside of, Boulder. It helped me to frame the Boulder experience as atypical and extreme and to see that my sample was much too small for any national or personal conclusions. The positive response from Center colleagues

to my interlocutions and research helped my confidence.

### **Center Activities**

So in the first instance my time at the Center was very important psychologically for me. In addition, after clearing the decks of accumulated obligations in November, I got a lot done (a central chapter on the ethics of surveillance for my book; a chapter for an edited volume on the policing of protest and a book review and two encyclopedia articles.) I made progress on other chapters dealing with types and dimensions, neutralization, and anonymity and I revised and finished my paper on moral mandates and a paper on computers and the environment for a French book.

I started two discussion groups—one on academic lives and the other with Paul Rock and Jutta Allmendinger on social research and public policy with questions to guide the groups. I also occasionally participated in the rational choice group and gave a presentation on work in progress on the sociology of surprise and led a discussion with the family group on privacy and technology as they effect intimate relations.

I interacted the most with Paul Rock and Lois Weithorn. In retrospect we should have taken the initiative and had a series of structured debates to more directly engage the issues that divided us. There was rarely enough time to do that at the Wednesday presentations. A visitor from Mars asking just what it was that the various fellows all have in common would be hard pressed to find an answer. That would have been much less true in earlier periods of the Center's history. Surprisingly for many, disciplinary identity seemed stronger than I recall from my previous stay.

In this regard the Center is a microcosm of the broader social science world and sociology in particular, which is increasingly fragmented. Absent greater consensus, there is perhaps a need for mechanisms that can channel the different starting points and disparity into better scholarly exchanges.

If the Center is to better serve a communal function and maximize what it offers that is distinctive, the integrative threads and the ethos of synergy need to be more strongly developed.

The lesser cohesiveness may also be related to the much larger proportion of persons here without their spouses. This had several consequences 1) colleagues were more likely to be absent visiting their spouse 2) for some it facilitated a monk like work regimen 3) in the case of the males at least, the sociability role that females disproportionately play in bringing groups together was relatively absent. There was less reciprocity and less social initiation than I recall from before. The single males we had over did not invite us back for dinner. Certainly, we need to respect and not discriminate against two-career families. But the Center need not be so neutral here. To the extent that the current policy damages community, then thought might be given to favoring persons whose spouse or partner (when present) can be present, other factors being equal.

Everybody is very busy and academics seem busier than ever before—whether as a result of e-mail, the march of bureaucracy, cost-cutting measures, greater opportunities and perhaps careerism pressures. The addition of phones to the studies is much more than a symbolic break with the past. While I had some wonderful and deep exchanges with a few colleagues, I had some very disappointing experiences with others. These were surprising given my uniformly positive experience of a decade ago. Let me offer some examples.

One person I sought out was an expert on a philosophical topic I had written a chapter on, but I knew relatively little about. I gave the individual the chapter in October and asked for suggestions. I never received any response. This person was also absent from three presentations I made directly touching the topic.

In another case, I sought out a person doing related work and indicated that I would like to learn about his

project and read materials from it. I gave him some published things I had written but did not request comments. I wanted to know what he was doing. He never responded, although I asked him several times and he kept promising he would share some materials on the project.

I approached one colleague whose work I knew and said I would welcome the chance for a quiet lunch to learn about her current research. She told me how very busy she was and all the trips she had to make, but agreed that we should have lunch when things settled down. Several months later at 11:45 she suggested we have a "quick" lunch. We chatted a bit at lunch and then at 12:30 she excused herself because she had to get back to work. To paraphrase an old Scandinavian joke, "did you come here to work or to eat?" But I did feel that something was wrong here.

In another case, I wrote a lengthy supportive comment after a presentation and suggested issues the talk had raised for me and offered some references. I also asked the presenter for the exact reference from something mentioned in the talk. I never got the reference, nor did I even get an acknowledgement of my comments.

The public policy discussion group went well and we had some good meetings. Yet it was noteworthy that the four colleagues whose work is most involved with public policy chose not to participate.

No one can bat 100% and I am very grateful for the feedback I was able to get and give and the positive interactions I did have. But perhaps expectations should be clearer with respect to the fact that the Center is not just a holding company for the interests of individual discipline-based academic entrepreneurs. Rather it is a learning unit in which community citizenship and exchanges, particularly with those who are not just like ourselves should play an important role.

## Questions or Answers?

Most of the talks were a summing up of current projects and were a bit pre-recorded. In my talk I circulated a list of nine problems I have in my study of surveillance and society (e.g.,-- the nature of social change, making sense of contradictory social trends, the nature of social science knowledge and understanding, social v. technical determinism, single, multi and inter-disciplinary understanding). Rather than reporting on a finished project, I talked about my project by illustrating each of the problems. I asked for help. While I got some good ideas from the talk, almost no one directly engaged my questions or gave me help with them. I am not sure what that means, but I expected more and wish that other presentations had had more of this quality of research as a challenge and a wrestling match rather than the canned presentation of research results.

Some colleagues simply didn't seem to have any doubts.

Perhaps for other scholars it is only with long term relationships, trust and strong egos that they feel comfortable revealing their questions and doubts. Yet what better place to seek help than the Center with its variety of experts?

My experience this past year leads me to ask what are the goals of the Center and how are they prioritized? Is the Center simply an office and time supplying resource permitting one to do what could be done anywhere if given freedom from the usual demands? For some fellows it seemed to be only that. Certainly the Center could not do a better job of making it easy and even delightful for academics to do their usual salmon run. To the extent that individual career enhancement is tied to contributing to the advancement of knowledge one cannot fault this.

Yet I feel to just come here and do more of the same is to miss a unique chance. Rather it should be an opportunity for expansion. To not use the Center to develop new perspectives and generate new synergies and



to not contribute to the group is unfortunate. Like American society more generally, we may have moved too far in the direction of giving the individual scholar freedom to pursue his or her own goals absent attention to the commons.

There is a lot of ground between the current situation and turning the Center into a boot camp or a contract research organization. As funding the Center becomes more challenging this is a good time to think about its core mission and goals.

I would give greater emphasis to intellectual broadening, social science integration and to the enduring issues that cut across our fields and the contemporary topics so many persons study. This is not to suggest that individuals study anything differently, but that a bit more of the time at the Center be spent in 1) asking "how can others here inform my work and how can my work inform theirs?" 2) "what are the implications of my work and that of my colleagues for the enduring issues of social science/inquiry"? The mature scholars are certainly ready for this and the younger one would be well served by thinking beyond their narrow emphases.

I don't suggest that colleagues be forced to do anything they are not receptive to. However a factor in coming here might be that fellows want to expand their horizons and encounter new ideas and methods and seek to maximize interaction with a diverse group of highly talented persons, not because they simply want to do business as usual, or collect another deserved merit badge.

I would also give greater emphasis to persons who are personally challenged by the issues they deal with and whose high level of uncertainty and doubt fuels their passion to find partial answers. This is in contrast to the cool professional/technician who has the method and the answers. I wish the level of intellectual angst, skepticism, energy and passion was higher.

A criteria for evaluation should not be only immediate productivity but does the Center facilitate doing things that most persons do not do at home? Here the issue is not being away from demands, but coming into a special environment with very talented persons who are different from one's self with respect to discipline and experience. I don't know much about the special working groups but they certainly seem in principle to do some of this. Yet as with my experience ten years ago, this can also be divisive and can isolate the specialists from others, even as their own solidarity is enhanced. The same might be said of the cliques that seem to naturally form among those from the same discipline. If the social psychologists from different places get the chance to have lunch together everyday they are clearly doing something they can't do at home and the sustained interaction is good. Yet in one sense this is safe and is more of the same and represents an under-utilization of part of what the Center has to offer.

Rather than trusting to luck and the occasional chance conversation or discovery of something useful from another field or perspective, this could be more systematically structured.

This might happen in a variety of ways:

1. Make available a voluntary (?) pre-Center evaluation or diagnostic of an individual's career work or a particular project by scholars outside of the individual's discipline and favored methods and theories. They should answer the questions "what questions would I ask of this work?" "what bodies of literature, ideas or methods might advance it?" "What are the implications of this work for the core issues in social science?"
2. Have several outside consultants review each incoming class and note the possible connections they see and ideas they have for fruitful cross-discipline/field interactions. For example if that had been done for our group the humanist/social scientist division

would have been apparent and we could have started by responding to a staff initiative to structure some debates around these very different ways of understanding social life.

3. Give higher or the highest priority to the Center as a place for intellectual growth via encounters with other disciplines and perspective and methods. A stronger community norm would enhance the sense of collective purpose and make it less likely that individuals be off in their cocoons.
4. As part of the initial application, or perhaps better at a later stage where individuals are being seriously considered, ask potential fellows to indicate how they might use a Center year to do something different and to expand.
5. Perhaps have several distinguished Center lecturers from the outside who could broadly address questions that cut across the social sciences and that get at the core of our knowledge and our undertaking. Several fellows could then respond before it was opened up to general discussion. While I don't advocate a Central theme as with the Princeton Center. I think more attention should go into a mission statement that stresses the advancement of social science knowledge in ways beyond single disciplinary specialization. This might also tie into efforts to raise funds.
6. Greater initial efforts to socialize fellows into a Center ethos that stresses learning from others outside of one's usual world and that we are a community. Concrete examples of good and bad Center behavior should be offered. Now fellows are given mixed messages. They are in fact told to do their own thing yet when the indicators of cohesiveness/communalism (attendance at lunch and the presentations, time away from the Center, attendance at Friday social gatherings) look relatively bad as they did this year, fellows are made well aware of

this. This creates confusion. I suggest more clearly defining the communal obligations/opportunities at the start.

7. Thought might even be given to having a letter of understanding or a soft contract with fellows in which they acknowledge the goals of the center and agree to abide by its rules and to offer more in return -this might be serving in a mentoring role for a younger scholar, participating in at least one Center sponsored group on a broad social science topic, planning one of the lectures mentioned in #5 above, helping the Center raise funds or in some administrative fashion related to the individual's expertise. In a way fellows get off too easy. If we expect 20% of our usual efforts to go into university service it is not unreasonable to ask that fellows here serve the Center's goals as well.

### **Personal Development**

Finally in response to Neil and Bob's memorandum requesting this report I will briefly respond to item number 5 "what personal development or changes occurred during the year -in competence, skills, subject matter, opinions, attitudes, perspectives, or plans."

Intellectually there were no big changes. I did however generate an extensive list of things to read from psychology and anthropology as a result of colleague's suggestions. I see how from a developmental perspective one issue is that there is not enough surveillance of children, especially those at risk and I must balance that with opposing civil liberties concerns. I also realize that it is not necessary to try to reduce my cultural materials on surveillance to traditional social science methods and that they can stand alone. I hope to collaborate with Saul Morrison combining sociological and literary materials on surprise and perhaps space and time and perhaps with Lois Weithorn on issues around families, children, technology and privacy.

With respect to personal development, Aah feel good, as James Brown sings. I feel good not only because I had a very productive year, but because I gained two needed perspectives. The year helped me see the Boulder experience as atypical and not cause for decrying the falling of the sky. Public universities are filled with conflicting values and local histories-may conspire to produce unhealthy environments. I got caught up in a complicated and unfortunate situation. I did my best and in a way I am very proud of. More than that one cannot do. That I had only three hard years out of three decades in the university is something to be thankful for. I fought the good fight, stood for principle and had some impact. I also see how those of us who have been privileged to come out of, and stay in, elite institutions are not representative of American higher education. Our institutions protect us and our colleagues in general share our values. It was restorative to be back in an environment where those values were honored.

The year also helped me better locate myself relative to the social sciences. After disciplinary grounding at Berkeley, I moved to a Social Relations and then an Urban Studies Department. I don't regret those decisions, but I have always felt a bit homeless relative to the seemingly non-anomic persons so ensconced and fluent in their disciplines. Yet now more clearly than ever, I see my marginality and breadth as a strength. In seeing how the narrow focus of so many of my colleagues this year (whatever useful knowledge their specialization revealed), also kept them from seeing other things, I became more aware of the distinctiveness of my ability to frame and articulate issues in fresh ways. To be able to do this in the company of elite of American social scientists is a very good feeling. Fitzgerald said that there are no second chances in American life. He was wrong. And I am deeply grateful to the Center for being what it is and for giving me a second chance!