

October 22, 1993

Mr. Gaddis Smith
Director, Yale Center on International and Area Studies
85 Trumbull Street

Dear Gaddis:

As I mentioned to you today, I am writing to thank you for asking me to serve on the Council on West European Studies for this academic year. I am going to decline and am writing to explain why, and do some musing aloud.

I want to express a sense of frustration and sadness over the decline of the Council on West European Studies at Yale. Please know that I am not writing to complain, but rather to offer my comments. I have had a long association with the Council and with the Yale Center, or Concilium, as it was then called. I served as Associate Chairman and then as Chairman for about six years, until I resigned after becoming Master of Branford College in January, 1983. During my term of service, we sponsored an annual series of lectures on a specific theme (the topics nineteenth-century social change, the talks for which became essays, were published in 1979, and are still in print; comparative urbanization; women and work; society and politics in modern Germany come to mind). I am not patting myself on the back, because such a program was very much a group effort. The Council seemed very active in those days, due more than anything else, to commitment by faculty working in West European Studies, and a great deal of hard work by Heather Salome, the administrative assistant. We were able to do that because the Council had been granted funds from the Concilium's director.

My commitment to the Concilium and to the Council was quite strong. I benefited from summer research funds provided by the Concilium (and the Yale Center has copies of six or seven of the books I have written or edited, and in each I have thanked the Concilium or Yale Center). A good many of my doctoral students, and those of other members of the Council, also enjoyed the largesse of research funds allocated at 85 Trumbull. I am truly grateful for assistance I--and my students--have received, but see this as no reason not to say what I think.

Upon my return to Yale last January, after almost two years away in France, I was amazed to see that the very survival of the Council was at issue. It may be that my impressions of what has been going on are wrong (though just about everyone who has mentioned anything about the Council to me has expressed more or

the same view). The Council had appeared to be in good shape, as its direction changed toward an emphasis on European integration. Bill Parker raised money. Then several things happened. On the one hand, the standing and visibility of Area Studies at Yale seems to have declined. This is, I think, quite unfortunate. Certainly the departure ten years ago in rapid order of Albert Fishlow and then Al Stepan, both of whom served as Director of the Yale Center certainly made Yale a much less visible and active place in Area Studies. (Fishlow's departure, in any case, appears to have been followed by a decision to de-emphasize Area Studies in the Economics Department, and this hurt). Not only were Fishlow and Stepan productive scholars in their field (both Latin American Studies), but their activity, energy, and commitment to Area Studies enhanced the Yale Center's visibility. Thereafter, some of the life appeared to go out of the Area Studies side of the Yale Center, though not, of course, out of some of the individual councils, above all, East Asian Studies.

The continued rise in importance of Strategic Studies and International Studies has been a good thing. This veritable juggernaut has embellished Yale's reputation even more on that particular map, to a great extent because of your reputation and hard work. Just as you were the most energetic and effective History Department chairman since I have been at Yale, you have infused the Yale Center with an energy it lacked since the two Als departed. But with the rise of International Relations, International Security, and other worthy programs, Area Studies has been de-emphasized, even as your distinguished leadership pumped more life into the Yale Center. It is distressing that the individual councils have lost even the right to award their own small grants and that the chairpersons of each council must go begging to the Director's Office to obtain funding for any ad hoc projects. Just about everything seems to be run out of the director's office these days. Demoralization among people active within the general field of West European Studies is quite deep.

The case of West European Studies is sad, if not pathetic. Last semester I received a call from the director of the West European Studies Council of New York asking if I could shed some light on what has been going on. He lamented the fact that the Council office is now open but two mornings a week. Yale also has had the embarrassment of having to turn down a substantial grant (\$40,000 ?) from a German foundation because of the Council's chaotic situation. I was not asked to attend a meeting last January to discuss the Council's fate, so I cannot attest to what has been happening (I was invited to a subsequent dinner, but could not attend). In any case, the Council itself appears to be larger than ever, but also with virtually no money and no prerogatives, and--to repeat--totally demoralized, with last year's Chairman, Henry Turner, quitting, it appears, in disgust, and taking with him, or renouncing, the large German grant.

I am not, to be sure, looking for scapegoats to explain the Council's decline, and have listened to various explanations for that fact. But one thing symbolizes the Council's demise and perhaps also of the relationship between the Center and the Council on West European Studies.

This is the issue of what appears to be a rather long and apparently mean-spirited, if not vicious, little war fought by the staff of the Yale Center against Heather Salome, the Council's long time and extraordinarily able, and independent, administrative assistant. I read several of the proposals she made for the reorganization of the Council and of the relationship between the Center and the individual councils and believed that they were interesting and perhaps even helpful. I enclose a copy of the gag-order sent to her last June 21, because she had been thinking outloud about the Council's situation. It really is quite an amazing letter ("None of this is intended in any way...to limit your free speech as a private citizen."). This letter, send by Mr. Foltz, then the Council's Acting Director, is demeaning to Yale (and I would think perhaps even grounds for union, or perhaps even legal action). It certainly is contrary to the spirit of the Yale and, at least for many years, the Yale Concilium/Center. It does, at a minimum, leave one--especially one who was gone for a while and who remembers what would now seem to be the good old days--wondering what in the world is going on over there, and why. I am sending a copy of a letter to two officers of the University, and trust I am not violating some other sort of gag-order against Yale Center related correspondence with officers of the University.

At any rate, it is clear that Yale needs a strong presence in West European Studies. A bright, shiny new building will be nice for the Yale Center, but it will not solve the Council's problems. If one thinks of Area Studies with reference to West European Studies, in the largest sense of the term, in the United States as represented by a map, with activity and reputation represented by large dots, rather like maps showing the comparative size of cities, Harvard and several other places would be large dots for big urban agglomerations, Michigan and other active programs would be medium size dots, and Yale would now be represented by a small dot, as if it were a bourg, or small market town, if that. This despite the productivity of many of the scholars working in the field of West European Studies. Such a circumstance strikes me as sad. And so, for reasons you well understand, I decline to serve on a Council that has lost most of its prerogatives and visibility. I do so not to say, "So, there!" (there are, in any case, lots of people who can go to Council meetings, even if it appear that such gatherings have virtually no significance), but rather because it is not clear that the Council is worth anyone's time these days! Certainly the apathetic detachment of some of the relevant Yale faculty is also to blame, and I may not be helping by bowing out. To repeat, I put a good deal of time and effort into the Council for some years. But I doubt that excessive centralization of authority, funds, and everything else (as well as the incredible lack of civility and common sense reflected by the enclosed letter) can do anything but drive more faculty away. If the goal of the Yale Center and its staff has been to kill off the Council of West European Studies at Yale, it seems to have succeeded.

Sincerely



John Merriman

Encl.

cc President Richard Levin
Provost Judith Rodin