ARNOLD FARR INTERVIEW
Conducted on: 10/27/2009
Interviewers: Pamela Mullins, Jordan Hill, Robert Kirsch, and Reed Taylor

RK: I'll ask this as a two-part question. And that's explaining why is negation an ethical mandate of critical theory and how is this critical theory going to help us distinguish between negation one and negation two? And as a result of that understanding is it possible for social movements to fall into the trap of negation one? In other words, could these movements become tempted by one-dimensional thought as other social movements?

AF: The answer is yes and I'll come back to that in just a moment. The difference between negation one and negation two is not the language of the Frankfurt School nor Marcuse himself. There's no clear distinction between negation one and negation two. In my book I make that distinction, because there are two kinds of negation going on. Negation one is the negation of the self or the subject by a certain kind of social order, for instance a capitalist social order or any kind of repressive social order. And what is negated is the self and possibilities for human flourishing. Marcuse even talks about a mutilated sense of reality in certain kinds of social systems. Negation two is the negation of that social order that is repressive in the first place. So, negation two is part of the process of regaining critical subjectivity. So, an example of this is – and Marcuse makes this point – that there are certain so-called "feminine" qualities, even if they're socially constructed, they are useful, and Marcuse wants to apply them universally. Qualities like caring, tenderness and nurturing. You can see how those qualities are present in little boys but are whittled down, become mutilated. When a little boy shows affection or sensitivity, cuddles a doll, someone is there to say, "put that down, that's for girls." So, men never really learn this kind of habit of nurturing in a way that women are allowed to do.

Now with regards to the next question, there are social movements, or even movements of liberation that can become one-dimensional. I touched on this in the talk last night, when I was talking about the way homophobia was used in the black church to affect the election of 2004. So you have a group that's oppressed, say African-Americans, struggling for emancipation, and yet at the same time, the level of sexism and homophobia in the black community is enormous. It affects in a negative way our ability to create a kind of coalition between various kinds of groups.

PM: Is this second negation sort of like double negation, a negation of the negated subject?

ISSN 2162-8793 online

AF: I think two things. One is that there is a negation or an attempt to negate the repressed personality that's been formed by society by freeing the self. This is part of the process of self-deconstruction, also negating those very social structures that create the repressed self in the first place. And those things happen at once; when you do one, you automatically are doing the other.

RK: Is it then fair to say that you are calling forth a critical subject to perform this negation?

AF: That's true, and you can think about this in the whole context of Marxism. This is the function of the proletariat. The function of the proletariat, once it became class-conscious, was to negate the capitalist system that put it at a disadvantage in the first place. Of course that didn't happen the way Marx thought it would, and the project of Western Marxism, especially in the Frankfurt School of thought, is to see what kind of subjectivities are being created in the proletariat, and how to find radical subjectivity, radical consciousness, that would negate the repressive social structure.

PM: There's a lot of debate in Marxism whether you have the revolution, then educate the proletariat, or you have to educate before there's a revolution. I'm thinking of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, and Fanon, with how to get the revolution going. Do you see this sort of self-deconstruction as something that's possible just to happen, or is there something that needs to start that movement? Does that tie into the deconstruction of the structure?

AF: Well the word "movement," and of course we're all hoping for a large scale movement, but for the time being I want to shy away from that, and I think Marcuse does too, to some extent. The reason that we shy away from that term is because it almost suggests that the world is still waiting for the big revolution that's going to happen all of a sudden and change things, but it is pretty clear that is not going to happen.

Of course, Marcuse never gave up hope for such a possibility, and I don't give it up as a possibility either, but at the moment what we have to cultivate are little pockets of human resistance where radical consciousness is developing or can develop. And it develops in a number of places in a number of ways, and I think there always has been various pockets of resistance, even in contemporary theorists, like Iris Young, whose book *Inclusion and Democracy*, talks about this very thing: pockets of resistance, and looking for these pockets of resistance. The movement will come as a result of creating some kind of coalition between these pockets of resistance. A pocket can be a group of people that are engaged in some form of resistance. Or it can be an individual who can become aware

ISSN 2162-8793 online

that something is out of joint. In my case, for example, if one was to look at my life as someone who is engaged in radical politics. My views differ greatly from the dominant views in my society, but I developed in the way that I did because there was a kind of awareness in my little tiny community in South Carolina that things aren't right. The only problem was that people may not have been able to explain why things aren't right. If you have different ways of addressing that and trying to find solutions, then even if those solutions are a false start, you begin to acquire the necessary theoretical tools to articulate what's not right.

PM: So the awareness can come even before education.

AF: Absolutely.

RK: Which speaks to what you were talking about in regards to the tools Marcuse left behind. You could have a moment of refusal which could start the negating process, foster the creation of that radical subjectivity, without necessarily at that point having full-fledged radical subjectivity formed.

AF: I think one of the greatest critiques of the rhetoric in the aftermath of the 9/11 event came from my maternal grandmother, who has only a seventh grade education. She and I talked on the phone, and she began talking about how America has never really cared for its own people. There's all this hype about the outside threat, but America has never really cared for its own people. On 9/10, there were kids living in rat-infested homes and going hungry, getting shot in drive-bys and all that stuff that on 9/10 nobody wanted to talk about. There were many lives lost on 9/10 as a result of systemic, systematic and ignored daily violence in America, poverty etc. There is still resistance to talking plainly about the forms of terrorism endured by Native and African Americans in America's history. Now, my grandmother is by no means a radical or even all that progressive, however, there is an awareness, a kind of recognition of the false consciousness of the social order that opens the door for the radicalization of consciousness.

PM: I am really concerned about democracy, because I read a lot of stuff and everyone is saying, "We need democracy! This democracy, democracy!" In the early part of your book, you say a lot about freedom, but you really don't say anything about democracy. You're talking about this freedom in that we have a negative freedom, a kind of "leave me alone," hyper-individuality, where what's happening over there doesn't matter because I'm OK. And how does that negation of freedom, or however we assume it, tie into how we operate democratically in the country. And is there a connection between that negative freedom and putting things into other peoples' hands.

ISSN 2162-8793 online

AF: You are right. I say more about democracy toward the end of the book but still not enough. There are two things I want to talk about, and one is negative/positive rights, and the other voting. Let's begin with voting.

Voting, although we take it to be a political act, is actually the opposite. For example, we vote on the basis of the opinions we have, and you almost have what Habermas calls the "lifeworld," where we live and act and participate in various institutions and communities. But then there's this other world, the realm of politics. In the lifeworld, we vote and send someone as representative to this other world, and we send people away to Washington or whatever, and once we vote we're done making decisions, and now those we've sent to his other sphere make the decisions for us. This is an apolitical move. We're really apolitical. We've been de-politicized. And this is also a result of "expert culture." Everybody's an expert in one tiny little field, and you're viewed as incapable of making any judgments outside of your particular field, so let's leave it to the politicians to make political decisions, and we don't have to get involved in that. That's not what democratic discourse is about.

The second part is that there's an emphasis on negative rights in this country; the right to be left alone. And that is also based on a problematic individualism. This is a philosophical point that has an origin in a particular moment in philosophy, where a person is no longer viewed as a member of a community, but as an isolated, atomistic individual that contains something like metaphysical rights, and we have to protect each one of these atoms and their metaphysical rights. The problem with that, and this is where individualism turns on itself, is it creates a system in which many individuals don't count. One of the reasons why we don't want to say that people who are extremely wealthy ought not make so much money, is because as individuals they have a "right" to make as much as they want. But, what allows them to make that much money is that they participate in a system where, to make the money they make, they have to depend on the labor force. And the labor force, they're individuals too, with rights to certain resources and goods. But notice how individualism only works for a certain number of people. The very notion of individualism is a kind of ideology. But the focus on negative rights makes you lose focus on the kinds of positive rights that people ought to have. Every individual should have the right to the resources necessary for self-determination and self-development, a right to proper education, a right to be properly informed, a right to have adequate housing, so on and so forth.

But these positive rights are not recognized. That's why, in recent years, there's been a development in the literature on recognition. The next book I'm working

ISSN 2162-8793 online

on is going to try to develop some of these ideas. But the notion of rights has to be combined with some kind of theory of recognition, where we have to recognize other human beings in their embodied form as they are actually situated in society. We recognize their situatedness and how resources do or do not get to them.

PM: Do you envision some kind of restructuring of the political constitutional system in order for this to really flourish?

AF: Absolutely! Consider someone who many take to be a "liberal" philosopher, John Rawls. Now I think Rawls is more radical than he is given credit for; the problem with Rawls is his methodology. The methodology is one that is still steeped in the Cartesian subject that's bankrupt at the end of the day due to its perpetual dealing with the disembodied subject and avoidance of theorizing embodiment. But what is so radical in Rawls is the idea that one has to look at and question or challenge the basic structure of society. At the end of the day, Rawls is calling for a change in the basic structure of society, a total remapping. That's a pretty radical move! It goes a little bit beyond liberal, doesn't it? So yes, in this way I think I am consistent with the progressive-Marxist tradition and even the American liberal tradition, but the problem with the American liberal tradition is that it says stuff but it doesn't know what it's saying. Rawls understood the implications of what he was saying, but a lot of people who read Rawls don't understand the implications of what he's saying.

PM: All the rhetoric – be it left, center or right rhetoric – is still disembodied rhetoric. The Enlightenment is still with us even though it failed.

AF: Right, right.

RK: I wonder if I can link this back to our discussion of negation. It seems that at the level of this individualistic discourse, it really focuses on this negation one. The subject is encouraged, or maybe even coerced into negating themselves, saying, "Well you know, in a society of free individuals, this is just the way things are. This is the way things have to be." I was wondering if you could say something about the smoothing-out effect of this individualistic discourse that speaks to a sort-of democracy, but that might have more sinister implications.

AF: Well this individualism is, I think, very sinister because it forces people to simply not see what's going on, to not think in terms of structures and systems and how they work. We can't even think historically! We teach history, but we just teach a chronology of events and maybe a few causes for particular movements or event in history, but that doesn't take us far enough because we never

ISSN 2162-8793 online

understand ourselves as historical beings and the implications of that. So this whole focus on individualism does allow people to just accept things the way they are, and critical consciousness is whittled down. And you hear that rhetoric everywhere particularly from those who are living good lives, who are wealthy, for example. They see their wealth as based on some individual merit, not how the system works.

I start a chapter in my book by talking about affirmative action for the wealthy, something like that. My wife, actually, when we were in Philadelphia at St. Joseph's University worked in a summer program where there were students who didn't quite make the cut, but they got a chance to redeem themselves - if their parents had six thousand dollars to pay for a summer program. If you take math and English and pass with a "C," you can get in at the fall. My wife was reviewing a paper by a student, an anti-affirmative action paper, and she made him realize that he was a recipient of Affirmative Action. It wasn't race-based, but wealth-based affirmative action. She said, "you didn't earn your spot into St. Joe's because you were smart, or on your merit. It's because your parents had the six thousand dollars for this summer program, that other parents didn't have."

But we're taught to think that people are where they are because of their own intelligence, their own effort, and their own merit, or their own morals. They're the good and the beautiful – they've done the right thing! And the rest of us, well, we just keep making bad decisions.

RT: In your article, "Restricted Eros and One-Dimensional Morality," you call for a critical theory approach to what you see as a depoliticization of politics and the need for revolutionary consciousness/conscience. Given these multiple manifestations of one-dimensionality, how can we find space for religion in this reintroduction of political action into our consciousness? And how does this fit into a non-essentialized non-secularized concept of religion? Given the explicit link in your book from liberation philosophy to liberation theology, what role do you see religion playing today?

AF: Religion can play a role. I did some team teaching at the University of Pennsylvania with my friend, Andy Lamas. And the courses we taught together, at some point, dealt with religion, because they were all social justice based courses; I think you have to engage religion. Religion has a huge impact on our society; so many people in our society are religious in one way or another. It'd be a huge mistake to ignore religion.

One of the things Andy and I did in our class was say to our students that in the debates about religion, they often come down in terms of a dichotomy between

ISSN 2162-8793 online

the secular and the sacred. So you have the secularists who want to take down religion altogether. People who are religious oppose that which is secular. But we said to them if you want to get into that kind of debate, you're not going to have it with us, because we have no interest in that debate. That's not the real dichotomy. The real dichotomy is not between the sacred and the secular, but between egalitarianism and hierarchy. And then one of the things we do in the class, we read religious literature and secular literature. We show them that if you read the history of Western Philosophy, secular philosophers, you find two things going on in their texts. You find a certain line of argument that supports hierarchy and oppression. One of the greatest moral thinkers of the last few hundred years, Immanuel Kant, you find hierarchy and oppression in some of the comments he makes about women and people of African descent. You find hierarchy of races when he talks about the progression of races. He argues that Europeans represent humanity in its most mature stage, Asians represent humanity in its adolescent stage, and Native Americans and Africans represent humanity in its infantile stage. Very oppressive. At the same time, one of the greatest tools for emancipation is in his work. So you have this oppressive strand, and this liberating strand, right there in the same author.

You can do this with religious literature, even scripture itself. I can show you in the Christian Bible, going even as far back as the two Genesis stories. We can talk about how one supports hierarchy and oppression, and one supports equality and egalitarianism.

So the question for us is not whether you are religious or not religious, but what side do you fall on within a particular tradition. And in various traditions, we found incredible allies for emancipation and liberation. And I think that those allies need a coalition, and we need to cultivate our relationship with them, because ultimately we are fighting for the same thing. We may have differences of opinion; nevertheless we are fighting for the same thing. Cornel West makes an interesting distinction in his book *Democracy Matters*. In Chapter 5, he makes this incredible distinction between Constantinian Christianity and Prophetic Christianity. One of the arguments you could make is that Christianity has become one-dimensional. The Constantinian form has become the dominant form. The Prophetic version, you can hardly find anywhere. Nobody's reading the social gospel anymore, and liberation theology is not getting any attention. The only time it got any attention in recent years is in a negative way, when Jeremiah Wright made his comments, and people discovered he was a student of liberation theology. So, liberation theology was in the news for a moment, only to be criticized by people who have never read any of it.

ISSN 2162-8793 online

There are members of the Frankfurt School who take religion very seriously. In fact, my favorite theologian, Paul Tillich, was a good friend of Theodor Adorno. He was Adorno's dissertation director. They used to hang out together, having dinner parties at Tillich's house. Adorno would come and play the piano. There is also Erich Fromm who took religion very seriously and even engaged Thomas Merton for a while in an exchange of letters on religion. Recently Habermas has entered discussion on religion.

PM: Most of the religious aspects we see in terms of religion and the nation is always that individualistic religion, and to me, the core of religion is a concern that we are in this web of being as connected to all other beings. If you take that Eastern approach where you see everything as completely connected, then it starts to matter more what goes on in the ghetto, because that reverberates back. It's not just possible to isolate and wall off segments of society.

AF: I'm reminded of the song by Depeche Mode, "Your Own Personal Jesus." This idea of personal salvation again. This is one of the ways in which Marx was right: he talked about how the base affects the superstructure. The dominant form of contemporary Christianity is totally something that is created by capitalism, or seen through the lens of capitalism. The whole radical individualism that's involved in it, and now the whole mega church thing and this prosperity gospel and all of that. I could go on and on. If people actually understood some of these teachings out of these different religious traditions, you could come away with a different form of life, where there might not be room for this radical individualism.

JH: Just to give you a little context, because I'm coming from a different background (and that's what's so great about ASPECT), I've been studying for the past few years in the lineage of what you could call Peace Historians. They come from the tradition of Howard Thurman. This lineage goes back in that direction.

The first question I have, and I'll try to use your terminology: in today's rebel's quest to find their own modes of expression in relation to the irrational rationality of the status quo, to what degree does their understanding of the situation allow them to intentionally utilize the stagnant status quo in the project of entering their new modes of expression, indeed their revolution, into the public discourse? This is, of course, related to the notion of one-dimensionality and two-dimensionality. To what degree, if they're beginning to work with these notions, can they intentionally go about using the status quo for its own downfall? To what degree do you and Marcuse believe that is possible?

ISSN 2162-8793 online

To give you a concrete example, in my reading of your take of one-dimensionality, to what degree it's possible if there's an understanding of that if they're trying to form this new consciousness to be able to use those systems against themselves – to what degree that might or might not be possible?

AF: I think that it's possible, but there are two things I see going on in Marcuse, too. One is that rebels will always have their impulses co-opted. This is what Marcuse's essay "Repressive Tolerance" is about. Tolerance comes out of peoples' struggles for liberation. So people who are fighting for liberation, or toleration, only for the mainstream to coopt that term, by saying, "let's tolerate everybody and everything and every idea."

Here's an example: Rick Santorum, who was a Senator in Pennsylvania, was invited by the trustees at St. Joe's to give the commencement address a few years ago. The faculty protested it because we didn't ask him to come, and it was right around the time he said some horrible things about people with differing sexual orientations. And we opposed his coming, but he came, and when it was his turn to speak, a number of us walked out in protest. We did watch his speech on the news. He used the language of tolerance, and being tolerant and following your heart and people can disagree, but follow your heart. So, tolerate the bigot, which is very weird. So these things can be co-opted, and Marcuse's aware of it. I've been writing about ways in which the terms "multiculturalism" and "diversity" have been co-opted now.

But also, there are modes of expressions used by the status quo, but they're used only in the abstract form, and can be used more concretely by people who are fighting for liberation and social justice. There are two ways of thinking about the dialectic of enlightenment. You can think about Horkheimer and Adorno's as a negative critique of the Enlightenment, but you can also think about it in Habermas' terms as the Enlightenment as an "unfinished project." The reason it is unfinished is because it did get some concepts, ideas, or emancipatory tools started. But they get taken up by the status quo and used for purposes of domination, as opposed to their real purposes. This is why Marcuse always believed that sheer activism isn't enough. You can't separate activism from intellectual work. Because we are in a battle over ideas, and a battle over words, and what words mean and how they ought to be applied, because concepts, ideas, are the tools that we use to shape society. Again, these concepts, these tools have been divorced from forms of embodiment, and that's the problem. And what we so-called "rebels" have to do is insist on the embodied manifestation of these ideas. If there's no embodiment, then it's pointless to talk about it. But the status quo – it's problem – is its insistence on talking about these disembodied ideas as if they exist. As if equality or color-blindness or democracy really exists.

ISSN 2162-8793 online

I think we're so far away from understanding embodiment that this is where the battle has to take place.

RT: Here's an example that might aid the discussion: the idea of revolutionary music and how a lot of that has been pretty obviously co-opted by the larger music labels. Even hip-hop, reggae, and there's debate about where it should go now and how you should understand that. Is it possible to use some of these tools and not fall into this trap of becoming "mainstream," or becoming just more white noise?

AF: I think it's possible to use these tools because some of these tools are really emancipatory. But they are not having any emancipatory effect because of the way they're being used. But one has to always be cognizant of the way in which one uses a tool, and I think that gets lost. What are you using that tool for? What are you trying to do? But what happens is you think about early hip-hop artists or the underground artists now, they have an understanding of what they're trying to do in music. There are others, who, they have a clear understanding, too, but not about liberation, but about bling. So if bling becomes the reason for doing the music, then of course, it's not going to have emancipatory potential.

The problem is how do we hear from these artists who still are a part of the freedom struggle? My daughters found a song from a woman a while back, and they play it on their iPods all the time, but she's not mainstream, nobody's signed her, it's an incredible song – Miss Nana's "Got a Lot of Problems in My Hood." She's doing this critique of "the hood" and the lack of resources, and the kinds of problems that develop from lack of resources. Now I think this should be broadcast on mainstream radio, but you'll never hear it.

So there are people in music who are still fighting for liberation, but how do they get heard? And how do we remind people of what they're saying, even from the music that they do here; people take it and do weird things with it. Springsteen was very upset when Reagan wanted to use his "Born in the USA," totally misunderstanding his meaning. Or people who sing along to Bob Marley's "chant down Babylon," not understanding that they're Babylon.

And this is why we need more interdisciplinary research. We actually need to teach this stuff, and one of the things about education that's problematic is that we insist on teaching traditional texts. Got to know what old dead white guys said! But we need courses on music. We need a class just on rock and roll, hip-hop, and across the country this is developing. This is a new movement and there's some resistance to it in a number of institutions, but slowly more and more people are beginning to do it. We sit down and talk about what you're

ISSN 2162-8793 online

listening to and how you're hearing it. What you're hearing might not be what you think; they might be saying something else. Might be nice to dance to, but there's a critique in there, so what's the critique?

RT: If I can push you just a little bit further: if some artists are directly trying to instigate change through their fame – U2 for example – and they're pushing for raising money for AIDS in Africa. I see this being very problematic because instead of actually addressing the issues, it's basically trying to get people to throw money at it or feel better about themselves, that they're doing something. Is this how we should try to be coordinating the international movement? Do you see potential in that or do you see that as merely enforcing these cooptations?

AF: I have a two-pronged approach. First, to just raise money is not enough. It helps: I'm glad someone's doing it, but you have to have a critique that goes along with it. Otherwise, people give a little bit of money and they've done their part. Giving money is one way of not dealing with the issue, so it definitely has to have a critique along with it, not just concerts. Other things have to happen beyond money.

RT: And that's been commodified too! It's cool to have the red iPod! It's cool to save Tibet or give money to AIDS in Africa, and yet what are we really doing?

AF: Something about it becomes "cool" and it becomes commodified, exactly right.

PM: And things that can't be so easily commodified seem to disappear. Public Enemy, for example, and their trenchant critique. You have them on the scene for a little bit, but they're not easily commodified and sold back to the white public, so they fade.

AF: Right

JH: To close this question, I want to talk about the context of today's rebels. You talked about how we need to provide the context/dialog that shows them how to listen to songs. Let's listen to what they're talking about. So it seems that today's rebels, based on your answer, might want to be focusing on providing venues that allow for us to show context of things that listeners or readers might not have otherwise been able to engage with because the dominant forms of the mainstream are not providing them with the tools with which to do so, so that's one way that we might go about moving forward in that sense.

ISSN 2162-8793 online

AF: Right, and I think that this is part of coalition building. And I don't know how this is going to happen or even know what it means, but so many of us work in isolation and when we start seeing how to connect, people like this, these artists, might get a venue. Let's use the influence that we have to get these people heard. Little things like that, making connections, is a start. It's a start. Who knows? It could go a long way.

RK: I'd like to ask about the idea of commodification. It seems we've pretty adequately covered the idea that this critical subject, with the proper tools, can fend off the forces of one-dimensional thought, and that's good. But what I want to ask you about is not necessarily the cooptation but the creation of this sort of faux-rebellion. There are obvious examples in any kind of advertising literature. Like right now, Miracle Whip is the salad dressing choice of rebels. Seriously, the tagline is "don't be so mayo," because real rebels use Miracle Whip. So you have not a cooptation, but a creation whole cloth, of what it means to be a rebel from this status quo. So we've looked at it in terms of how the subject can resist pressure or change the status quo, but I want to ask from the vantage of what it means that the status quo foists subjectivities upon the subject.

AF: This is something that's been going on a while. Marcuse saw all this stuff in *One Dimensional Man* about creating goods that satisfy one enough to put unhappy consciousness to rest temporarily. We feel free because we have a choice of goods, and now this is taking it just a step further. Not only do we feel free, we feel like rebels because we choose Miracle Whip! What to do about that? We can't stop companies from this kind of advertising, and I think the best thing we can do is a situation like that and say, "how stupid." But that doesn't change the fact that there's a real project here. I'm not hung up on the labels. I want to focus on what the project is, and then words like that tend to have less meaning. So when they get used in that stupid way, it doesn't have anything to do with the project.

I've had debates with people. I belong to a vacation resort for left-wingers, if you can imagine such! In New Hampshire, called the World Fellowship Center. A few years ago when I was on the board we talked about how to reach out to more people and attract minorities and younger people, and in the midst of all that, we were making a plan for our next flyer and trying to make it as open as possible. A debate came up over whether to call ourselves "leftists" or "progressives." There were a number of people, who made arguments, on both sides, but I came down on the side of "progressive," because it's a word more people are familiar with and more people identify as, especially young people. Leftist is sort of an old term now, referring to my parent's generation. Most people of your generation don't call themselves leftists. There are a few: you guys might! But there are a lot

ISSN 2162-8793 online

of people who are engaged in the same kind of project that we're engaged in who never thought about that term and never used it and so I don't think they should have to use it. We don't need the term. A couple of friends use the term "leftist" for historical purposes, but it's like nostalgia. You've forgotten what the project is! If it's all nostalgia, then this whole new generation out there, who aren't attached to that term, you're marginalizing them! The idea is to stay focused on the project of liberation. I could care less what terms you use, but I want to use the most inclusive term. I don't know if "leftist" is the most useful term.

PM: Much like "feminism" has become a dirty word. I meet young women who don't want to be called feminist. I think the term "leftist" has been taken up in the political rhetoric so much and sort of demonized that you're going to see a lot of young people not wanting to identify with that, because that's bad stuff.

AF: I think keeping focus on the project and keeping people focused on the situation and the ways in which whatever the ideas are that lead to liberation – equality, democracy, that they are "not yet." And they can do crazy stuff with these terms if they want.

RK: I guess to push this a bit further then, even beyond terminology, there is a counter project going on. So there's a project of liberation, there's also a counter project of domination. And as silly as some of these examples sound about condiments or what ironic message you want to send with a t-shirt you just bought, that is indeed part of a counter project. So would it be fair to say it's equally vital to be aware of that counter project that is also trying to prevent the liberation project?

AF: Even in the midst of liberation, we need to know how whatever we're doing is being coopted.

RK: Or maybe even short-circuited! The "great refusal" might be reduced to a t-shirt. The Che shirt, the shirt that sends three dollars to some vaguely understood organization of stopping AIDS in Africa. So you have a conglomeration that's ready for this.

AF: Right.

PM: Do you think there are other ways of getting this awareness outside the classroom?

AF: Absolutely. I just speak about the classroom so much because that's where I spend so much of my time. But there are so many other ways and I encounter

ISSN 2162-8793 online

people who are doing different things in support and I see it as a division of labor. We all have our particular niche. We can figure out a way of engaging creatively who we are and make a difference, but I think all kinds of things people are doing can make a difference. Every once in a while, some creative revolutionary artist gets through. And some of the stuff happening outside the classroom has to come in, too.

RT: So do you think the university, at least the land grant university like Kentucky and Virginia Tech is the right place? Looking at the student body as compared to the community surrounding it?

AF: One of the right places. Now universities have their problems, too. They've been coopted and are driven by market forces, but there is at least the kind of façade of progressive thinking and free speech and free thought, that is more easily shut down in other areas, that you can still find certain ways to give voice to ideas here in the university. And even if there's an attempt to shut them down in the university there's still enough creativity in the university to give voice to problems in that context.

RT: But even within the educational structure, do you see it as more the larger research university or more the small liberal arts or community colleges?

AF: I'll take all of them! Take it where you can get it. When you look at the wide range of types and sizes of universities, you find, again, this radical stuff. I could give you a long list of great schools with stuff going on. And there are others who are conservative and support the status quo, land grant universities, too.

But there are some new essays by Marcuse on education that I just got and read. There's a link between traditional education and one-dimensional education and *bildung*, which is fascinating.

PM: For instance pursuing a master's degree to get that next pay grade, not for knowledge and praxis.

AF: Right.

RK: Which always makes me think of a line from Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*, where the torturer says, "Don't fight it son! Confess quickly! You'll ruin your credit!" So there's this obvious "right" way to do this or your life will be severely affected. I think that's a level of domination that has been especially erased or smoothed over to a really large degree, that to me seems like it should be a very pervasive, obvious problem, but that doesn't seem to be the case.

ISSN 2162-8793 online

AF: Right, right.

PM: Like getting a credit check done in order to get a job.

AF: Right.

JH: I want to share a brief experience with you and maybe you could give commentary. I was involved in the protest that took place during the 2008 DNC in Denver, Colorado. What happened with that was that it was planned for almost three years in advance of the event itself. By the time the event occurred in terms of coalition building, a number of coalitions got build and then in the six months before, those coalitions tried to start working together. So these separately formed groups, as the convention came together, started to try to actually work together, one of the things that occurred was that we learned that in a post-9/11 world, the government is, through labeling things as potential national crises, they are able to declare martial law for *x* amount of time on a certain area. Street by street. What we discovered as it got closer and closer, this happens with any major event, these are called disasters before they occur. That gives them the ability to establish martial law, though they don't say so in so many words. So one of the projects of these coalitions that were doing the work to become a broader coalition, had their goal to bear witness and share with Americans and the world this idea that before the DNC started, until the day after, the following Friday, approximately ninety square blocks of Denver become a disaster zone, and thus came under martial law. There were 40,000 police officers in that ninety-block area. And one of the most interesting things that occurred is they're able to suspend the Bill of Rights if you're labeled as an "enemy combatant," and any of those 40,000 police officers are given the authority to label any individual or group as "enemy combatants." And if they do so, effectively PATRIOT ACT II allows them to then strip you of freedoms. So the way that they dealt with this in both of the contexts was to create a "free speech zone." And that zone was a hundred by a hundred yards of twelve foot tall cast-iron fencing. Everybody said this reminds me of images that I've seen of concentration camps, because it allowed the policing force to walk the perimeter day and night, and at nighttime they would turn lights on, because this was the only zone in the ninety block area where your first amendment rights were protected. What I'm trying to highlight here is, acknowledging that movements tend to get co-opted, and in fact many areas of this movement did, I'm wondering where yours and Marcuse's argument would be on attempts of contemporary movements – in the past few years – to actually highlight those elements of the state which are doing these things that most people don't even know are occurring. If you were to say, "Did you know that the DNC was declared a disaster and thus they were able to do whatever," is

ISSN 2162-8793 online

there a benefit in trying to bear witness, regardless of how successful it is. The media machine doesn't put that out there. Is this still working in a one-dimensional model or are there at least glimpses of creating a critical citizenry?

AF: This is part of the process of keeping people afraid of an external enemy. After 9/11 you get PATRIOT ACT I and II, and people let it fly, there's no protest. They're afraid. I do think that in your example, and your question of how we deal with that and let people know that this is happening, there's a question of technology. My response to what you're saying connects to my response to one of Robert's questions.

RK: I guess maybe it has to do with my question about the relationship of humanity and nature, how political action has been reduced to text message, or forwarding the email chain, telling your politician to vote for this or that measure.

AF: My response is that this is both good and bad. There's a loss of human contact when replaced with a machine. The upside of this, however, is that it does give us ability to reach a large number of people quickly. In situations like this, we have to be aware of the negative side of technology, but also its creative, liberatory uses. So in Jordan's context, get out your cell phones, take pictures, and put it on the web.

PM: Like Iran, and the use of Twitter, etc.

AF: I think the state needs to know that everything it does can be seen; we're all watching. Free speech is supposed to happen everywhere – no zone – just free speech. People were doing this when Bush was elected, and they were put in these free speech zones.

RK: I want to follow up on this embodiedness. Maybe I'm just a very literal person, but I want to bring it down to the level of the corporeal. It seems that for liberation philosophy, the body itself is an important aspect. It seems that's where, especially when you consider that's where drives originate, that this is very important. But it seems that we can put this against the individualistic discourse. We can bring it to the level of the body, but not this hermetically sealed unit that engages the world from behind the bubble, but a body "in the world," interacting with it. So, when I think about these technological dynamisms that we have in terms of what we can accomplish and who we can communicate with, there does seem to be this sort of darker side to it, and if we rely only on chain emails to voice our legislative preferences and if we end up voting via text message we lose something at the level of the body, and so I was wondering if you could speak to the complexities of this technological dynamism that may

ISSN 2162-8793 online

have these sorts of liberating potential but also have these dominating consequences as well.

AF: I'm very concerned about what may happen to us as embodied beings with certain modes of technology. At some point the question will have to be raised about the possibilities for intimacy. Another worry is that we're more and more communicating with each other through machines. We have "friends" now, who we've never met or seen…

RK: Sorry to interrupt, but yeah, on Facebook it says you're *now* friends, as if you weren't before…

AF: Right!

RT: Yeah, you're not really married 'til you're Facebook married!

AF: Yeah, that's interesting. One thing I've noticed to, even the use of the cell phone and people who are affected by that. I've watched my students, how at the end of class, they automatically go to the cell phones. You know, in college, every day you're around the same people, because of scheduling. So you automatically get to meet people as you walk. But now you do not have to talk to them. So now you come to college and you have four friends, because now you have the same friends, because you go to the cell phone. We're becoming more and more detached in that way, and I don't know where that's going to go. I'm worried about that, but I'm not sure how worried to be, so let me just back up and talk about embodiment in two ways.

One is this whole problem of losing bodily contact, because of technological development. So that's problematic and I'm not sure exactly what to do about that. I think we could be more cognizant of that, so that we can make a concerted effort so that we don't become more isolated. What's happening is we're already in a society that has an emphasis on atomistic individualism. Now that connects to the other notion.

The second, and the way in which I deal with embodiment in the book, is by trying to talk about embodiment in opposition to abstract notions of rights. We have this abstract rhetoric about rights, equality, democracy, who we are, and all that kind of stuff. We take these ideas to be real things. People are equal. What do you mean? Where? Well we believe in equality. Where? But if you look at bodies, real human bodies and the relations these bodies have to each other, to the larger landscape of society, and you get to think about space and where people are located and where resources are located, you see that all those things

ISSN 2162-8793 online

are not true. So we have to think about embodiment. One of the things that happened in the history of philosophy and oppression is that people from the beginning were oppressed in terms of their embodiment. Sexism and racism are based on embodiment. So it seems weird to me that people, who are originally oppressed in terms of embodiment, are not yet liberated but we want to claim liberation has been achieved but we don't want to think about embodiment. If you start with embodiment you have to end with embodiment. We start with embodiment to detect oppression, but somehow we forget that. We think about liberation without dealing with bodies. It's good to say, "we're colorblind." Well, as a victim of racism, I don't want you to be colorblind. I don't want you be racist either, but I'm a black man, everybody knows that. Look at me! I hope you didn't just realize that! You can recognize me as black and not discriminate, and if you can't you've got a problem. But if you say, "Arnold, I can't tell if you're a black man," well I say you're a liar and I don't know if I can hang around you. So see me as what I am and that's a black man but then treat me with decency. And one of the positive things that come out of that recognition, is the hope that at some level you can recognize some of the struggles I've been involved in, too, and perhaps you can join and become an ally. So this is why I think embodiment is so important. You can't have a democracy without grappling with embodiment. The worry that you put forth here, is are we in a situation where we've already avoided dealing with embodiment, and is that going to get worse? That's the scary thing to me.

PM: I always wonder if, in fact, the embodiment is really what allows the revolutionary consciousness. I often think that perhaps African Americans have a special access to a revolutionary consciousness because of the situations they've been placed in. I go back to Dubois' double-consciousness. The fact that you would have a double consciousness gives access to a revolutionary consciousness, that a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant doesn't get so much. How do we get to the consciousness of people who don't have that immediate access?

AF: It's going to be a long, slow haul, but I think the doors are already being opened. I think, for example, that one of my heroes, Patricia Hill Collins, and the very moment you started talking, my mind went to *Black Feminist Thought*. Two things going on that made me think about that.

One is that passage she quotes from Sojourner Truth: the "Ain't I A Woman?" speech. She's in a position that she sees contradictions in our society that a lot of people aren't able to see. So women need to be helped over puddles and into carriages, but ain't I a woman? All these essentialist claims, universalist claims about women, and ain't I a woman? These contradictions are precisely what she

ISSN 2162-8793 online

was able to see, and you become sensitive to them. And in that book she goes on to talk about her strategy in writing that book and how she intentionally violates all the rules of sociological methodology, because those rules don't allow her to talk about the black experience. In her book she talked about black feminine experience, and how she's not going to engage Durkheim and Weber, but she's going to talk to people like her mom and her aunt and other women in the black community. And it gives you a very different look at things, and I think more and more people are beginning to do stuff like that, and what does that mean for people who don't belong to these groups? How do we get them to see? Time and pressure, which is actually taking place right now, with the radical growth of Women's Studies and Africana Studies, or literature, or White Studies, which is carried out by people who have seen these struggles. There are people creating a literature for others.

RT: To talk about interdisciplinarity, you've talked about Race Studies and Women's Studies. But I still think that it's marginalized. It's lip service; one week in the semester and that's it. Maybe it's because the lecturers aren't really engaging it, but form my own experiences, the students don't want to hear it. It's a real challenge to make them read stuff that would challenge their privilege. Do you see this as changing at a larger level in the undergraduate?

AF: Yes and no. There's a huge amount of resistance at the undergraduate level, because they're coming out of a context where they're so shaped by sexism, racism, and homophobia, but for me this is what it means to be an educated person. I tell them you have to understand your society and the people in it. But one of the things I do is I talk about subject positions in the beginning and how we occupy different subject positions, so I aim to show them where they occupy in their subjectivities. They're different and you have different relations in those positions. But I also need to think about how I occupy the position of the oppressed: black. But I also occupy the subject position of the oppressor: male. Students have to understand that we're not preaching at them, this is a human struggle. I'm open about my own struggles, how I was raised to be sexist and homophobic, and my own identity has had to become unraveled in certain ways. This is part of the human project and if we're serious about equality and democracy we would have these kinds of conversations.

Another strategy I've used in the past, too. When I was at St. Joseph's a colleague and I were asked to give a presentation at the American Philosophical Association on teaching gender and race in Jesuit schools. She came to my office to work on our presentation, and she apologized for being a white woman talking about race. So what we have to do is forgive each other in advance so that we can have a conversation. And I find that when I give a public talk about

ISSN 2162-8793 online

race, the first thing I would do is ask the audience for forgiveness. Forgive me and I forgive you. The reason I ask for your forgiveness and why I forgave you is because we're about to talk about race, which is a subject we have not yet learned to talk about. And we've not yet learned to talk about it because it's a very sensitive topic, and we're all implicated in one way or another, and conversations become hostile or we shut down because it's inevitable when you talk about something you've never learned how to talk about, you're going to say something that may sound insensitive or something that may be offensive. But if you never have the conversation you're never going to solve the problem. So we forgive each other in advance, we give each other room to say something stupid, and we'll put it out there and deal with it when the time comes. That makes them relax a bit. Some of them will get it, and you will awaken a critical consciousness.

RT: On an institutional level, how do you link this to interdisciplinary studies? How do you avoid marginalization?

AF: In my experience as a program director, I have pointed out how unfortunate it is that we have to have Africana Studies and Women's Studies. I say that because it's so essential that these voices, which are not normally heard, get heard on university campuses. But the purpose of these programs is to make themselves unnecessary. To the extent that, if the voices of women get heard that's great, but the problem is that these programs can be marginalized, and dealing with race is going to be left with black folk in Africana Studies, and gender to Women's Studies. Then the white male can still walk into the classroom and do "real" philosophy. So when I say that these programs should make themselves unnecessary that implies that we have arrived at a point in our history where oppressed people have been given proper voice and members of dominant groups (or former oppressors) are in complete solidarity with the oppressed. Once we have achieved such solidarity oppression itself will fade into our past. However, we are nowhere near that moment so we must have the remedy/poison of these special programs as well as an informed and active critical theory of society.

ISSN 2162-8793 online