On Perennial Debates in the "Force Fields" of Martin Jay

An Interview with Martin Jay

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This interview was made in Berkeley on May 5, 2003 by Beybin Kejanlıoğlu, who would like to express her gratitude to the Turkish Academy of Sciences for its support; to Constance Rivemale both for her particular, precious help in transcribing the tape attentively and for providing a peaceful environment in Berkeley to work comfortably; and to Wendy Schlesinger for the proofreading and her invaluable editorial suggestions.

I would like to begin with your "big books" and a sort of continuity in your areas of interest that I deduced from the contextual information you had provided. You mention Marcuse as the figure who piqued your interest in the Critical Theory and it seems that this interest has led to The Dialectical Imagination *(1973), to Adorno (1984), and eventually to* Marxism and Totality *(1984) (as a result of the misquotation, "Total Break with America", which was attributed to you by a newspaper as early as 1969). You also link* Downcast Eyes *(1993) to Marxism and Totality in terms of totalizing gaze. Is there really such continuity or am I dispelling a false harmony and continuity at least at the level of object of inquiry?*

Well, certainly, there was no intention at the very beginning of the work I did on the Frankfurt School to spin out different books that dealt with interlocking themes. It is only a *post facto* reconstruction that allows me to see some kind of continuity. I would not say I can discern an overarching logic, but at least some issues and concerns link different projects in an associative way so that themes of an earlier one are revisited and re-described in a different vocabulary in later ones. These in turn intersect with the subjects of various occasional essays, which do not fit precisely under the rubric of the three larger books that you have mentioned or the current project on the notion of experience, but which also betray my perennial obsessions. So I would say yes, there are continuities but they are informal, unintended ones. Only in retrospect does a career seem to have any meaningful shape, which is fortunate because it means when you are in *media res*, the future is still filled with surprises.

Can I ask a question about your forthcoming book which is on discourses about experience? You have already published works on experience and Benjamin, Dewey, and Foucault. What is the story behind "experience"?

This is also a book that goes back to the beginning of my work, but then veers off in new directions. The Frankfurt School itself was very anxious about what it saw as the decay, decline or withering of something called experience. In their specialized vocabulary, the German word *Erfahrung* stood for the healthy type of experience –involving narrative communicability and the partial integration of subject and object– as opposed to the impoverished type known as *Erlebnis*, which implied subjective immediacy and intensity without meaning. So, I was alerted from very early on to the fact that experience was a problematic issue and one that might even be seen a barometer of the crisis of modernity. In another context, when I examined the French critique of ocularcentrism, the issue of what constitutes a valid visual experience, whether it be a reliable indicator of an external world or a seductive mystification produced by ideology, also brought home to me historical variations in the status of bodily experience. Visual experience is never innocent because it is inevitably filtered through cultural mediations; it too may be in danger of becoming degraded or corrupted (although

ironically via the surplus of images that bombard us rather than by their scarcity). Finally, I have always been interested in the vexing issue, with which we struggle all the time, of the authority, legitimation, ground, or warrant for the truth claims we make or values we hold. Is it possible to base such claims or values on who we are, or more precisely, on what we have experienced as particular individuals or members of a group? The exigent issue of identity politics, still so important in the American academy, and I am sure elsewhere as well in any multicultural context, raises the issue of experience as a legitimating ground, which shuts out those with different backgrounds. As a result, exploring the contemporary function of experience as a ground of knowledge and values is also one of the motivations of this essentially historical project.

Positions are also questions of what...

What we call "subject positions" and their relationship with epistemological and ethical authority is at stake here.

I was thinking of asking this later but as you have just mentioned the cultural mediation I can ask it now. In your recent work and also in some other earlier ones related to vision, you emphasized irreconcilability of culture and nature.[2] Can you comment on this?

It is one of the perennial problems of all Western thought, and I am sure not only Western thought alone. Whatever we construe as a natural given of our biological, environmental context seems hard-wired and resistant to change. What we construe as historical or cultural is considered more or less variable, amenable to human intentionality, and open to radical improvement (or vulnerable to degradation). Although the terms in which this opposition is cast change, the alternative is very hard to overcome. Today, it may be sociobiology, for example, on the side of nature and a deconstructionist version of textual uncertainty on the side of culture. Intellectual historians are aware of the fact that these debates have undergone many different variations, while never coming to a very clear and positive resolution. It is perhaps a good thing that this

2
See especially, Jay, Martin (2002). "Cultural Relativism and the Visual Turn." *Journal of Visual Culture* 1(3).

is the case, for it reminds us that do not know really what the limits of human creativity are. But we are also aware of the fact that there are indeed limits. So, it is a question of testing the mix in specific cases without having an a priori transcendental account of what the inherent balance between constraint and creativity, between nature and culture, might be. This battle, of course, is now being waged at the deepest levels through practical human interventions in what was traditionally considered the natural. Such innovations as cloning, the cyberization of the human body and its replacement or extension through prosthetic devices and genetic engineering mean that what we once saw as the limits of nature may in fact be changing. But what will never happen is that they will entirely be effaced. What we call "nature" is one way to name those limits and thus to restrain the danger of overweening human hubris.

If we return to the early 1970s, you seemed to get a critical review by an exponent of the Critical Theory of ignoring the predominance of Marxist Humanist influence over the Institute's early years on the one hand, and be alerted by an attack of structuralist Marxists to label the Critical Theory as Marxist Humanist on the other.[3] Was it a battle on two fronts or only against "scientific" structuralist stand?

- Structuralist Marxism was never very powerful in the United States and I myself was never drawn to it. It always seemed to me improbably mechanistic and philosophically reductionist, as well as politically dangerous. I never found it plausible, although I had friends in Britain who tried to convince me of its value. So it was very easy to be critical of the scienticism of structuralist Marxism, which seemed in spirit a continuation of Engels' version of naturalist, automatic, determinist Marxism, Marxism without the subject or human agent. What was a bit more of a departure was to be critical of a kind of sentimental Marxist Humanism, represented by Erich Fromm, at least in his later years. My initial work on the Frankfurt School showed that they were critical of both of these alternatives. Although at the time they were assimilated to Marxist humanism, especially to the Hegelian Marxism associated with Lukács, Gramsci

3
For instance, one of the points raised by Douglas Kellner against Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination* is its underestimation of the influence of Lukacs and Korsh on the Frankfurt School. See, Kellner, Douglas (1973). "The Frankfurt School Revisited: A Critique of Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination*." *New German Critique* 4. In line with such a view yet from a structuralist Marxist standpoint, Göran Therborn interpreted The Frankfurt School as a variant of Marxist Humanism, especially through analyzing Horkheimer's and Marcuse's essays on the Critical Theory. See, Therborn, Göran (1970). "The Frankfurt School." *New Left Review* 163. Jay's defense of the position of the Frankfurt School as a critique of both "scientific" and "humanist" Marxism is in: Jay, Martin (1972). "The Frankfurt School's Critique of Marxist Humanism." *Social Research* 39(2) (Summer); republished in *Permanent Exiles*. NY: Columbia University Press, 1985.

and Korsch, they understood the limits of the essentially idealist notion of a metasubject of history, an expressive subject of history, a totalizer of history, as if it were a single narrative. A similar conclusion was drawn by Habermas in his own career. There is, in fact, a specific moment in the *Positivismusstreit*, the debate over positivism,[4] where he rejects the quest for a Hegelian metasubject and embraces a more pluralist notion of two, interactive, but irreducible modes of being in the world, which he calls labor and communicative interaction. This new approach reflected in a way a ratification, albeit in a different vocabulary, of the same move made by Adorno and some of his colleagues in the Institute when they questioned the notion of an expressive, metasubject making history out of itself. When Adorno talked in *Negative Dialectics*[5] of the preponderance of the object, this signaled a check on the hubris of the fully constitutive human subject. In Critical Theory, to return to your question, there was a two-front war, one against structuralist Marxism, and the other, a little bit less obvious, against a strong version of Marxist humanism.

> *Talking about non-identity theory and negative dialectics, you mentioned Adorno and Habermas but there is an important difference as Habermas is trying to find a positive alternative through communicative rationality and also your writings show this tension between them.*

-That is true. I am always reluctant as an intellectual historian to take sides at the outset, and instead to listen carefully and generously to the people I study. The hope is to extract from them the strong points of their thought, rather than dismiss them by fixating on their most vulnerable weak points. Both Habermas and Adorno have a lot to teach us, even though they do not fully come together as a coherent program. For example, Habermas alerts us to the abiding importance of intersubjective communication, based on the need to make persuasive arguments rather than prophetic pronouncements or aesthetic intuitions. Adorno, in contrast, teaches us the limits of communication in the present world, and the need to

4
Albert, Hans (1976). *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*. Trans., G. Adey and D. Frisby, London: Harper Torchbook.

5
Adorno, T. W. (1973). *Negative Dialectics*. Trans., E. B. Ashton. NY: The Seabury Press (originally in German, 1966).

be suspicious of the model of intersubjective transparency when there are objective impediments to its realization. It is not true that there is always a transcendental possibility for communication, because real interests and differential capacities undermine the workings of an ideal public sphere. Habermas himself, of course, knows all this, but Adorno is more persistent in seeking out its implications, which necessitated resorting to theoretical practices that may be esoteric and even elitist in their resistance to easy understanding.

> *I wanted to come to the metaphor, 'force fields' that you use when I asked about the tension between Habermas, Adorno and also others. It is one of your books title, it is the heading of your column in Salmagundi, and it is a model of analysis that you applied to Adorno, to the history of critical theory, to the field of intellectual history, and even to yourself.*[6] *In what sense do you use this metaphor? Is it both temporal and spatial? Is it different from "constellation"?*

It is a metaphor I have gotten from a number of different sources, mostly from Benjamin and Adorno, but it is also there in Bourdieu. They all understood that a cultural or intellectual field is not a static and fixed structure, but dynamic and filled with explosive tensions. As I tried to show in *Cultural Semantics*, my most recent collection of essays, every word needs to be situated in a constellation of its counter-concepts and near equivalents. We can't make sense of terms like "freedom" or "experience" or "theory" unless we think about the surrounding words against which they are pitted or the sedimented meanings, sometimes even contradictory ones, they have accumulated through their usage over time. Included in this imperative is the need to think about how they are translated into other languages, or often cannot be easily rendered with a single equivalent term. So, we have to be aware of etymologies, of issues of translatability and of contextual relations. Connected to these concerns, of course, is the issue of power, which gives the "force" in any force field its larger meaning. But what the concept of constellation tells us is that the power is not simply ours as creators

6
See, Jay, Martin (1993). "Introduction." in *Force Fields*. London & New York: Routledge.

of the elements in a culture we identify as the forces in a particular field. For, after all, the stars in a constellation exist prior to human constitution, even if we can make meaningful patterns out of what is given to us.

In addition, we have to be aware of how our own enterprise is part of the on-going process, which prevents us from having a God's eye view above the constellation or field of forces. We have to acknowledge the temporal dimension in our interaction with the past, for we too are part of an historical stream that never ceases flowing. This, in fact, is a part the excitement of doing this kind of work. For you realize that you yourself are contributing in a small way to the moving of the constellation forward, perhaps even leaving behind some of the positions you held on to in the past. If you live long enough, you recognize that some of the positions you espoused, say, in 1970, are no longer viable. The concept of force field thus alerts you to the importance of what has been called the residual and emergent dimensions of any culture: what has been left from the past, remaining non-synchronous in the present, and what are the potentialities that may be realized in the future, emerging in the present, but not yet fully actualized. So, 'force field' is not simply a static concept, but also a temporal one. Present and future are engaged in a kind of complicated negotiation, which is dynamic and uneven because we are always moving by fits and starts into a future which maintains traces, residues and fossils of the past. These, however, can also suddenly and explosively disrupt the smooth flowing of history, as Benjamin has pointed out in his critique of historicism.

Keywords as part of the subtitle of your Cultural Semantics, "emergent and residual culture"... They are pointing out Raymond Williams...

Yes. I have enormous respect for Williams, who is one of the figures I will be discussing at length in my book on experience. He grappled with many crucial issues with a great deal of learning and sophistication, and had an enormous influence especially in Britain,

and to some extent in the United States, in cultural and literary studies. He was always, to be sure, a bit outside the Frankfurt School's theoretical tradition. He reviewed my first book in *The Guardian* generously, but the review was also a critique of Critical Theory's legacy, as he understood it. He was never fully comfortable with the Hegelian Marxist theoretical dimension of their work, and was also a more of an anti-elitist populist than they were, upholding a more expansive notion of culture. Whatever the differences may have been, the landscape of the 20th century, at least the leftist thought, without Raymond Williams would be a very barren one indeed.

Elitism and populism ghost is everywhere.

Yes, it is a perennial debate.

When I went back to the metaphor of force fields and your approach, I realized that your writing style seemed to complement it. You use "in one sense... in another sense...", "on the one hand, ... on the other hand", and often "ironically" and "paradoxically". Is it a conscious attempt?

I think irony is the sea in which we all swim. We do not have the ability to get beyond it, to have an absolutely positive, clear-cut, non-paradoxical, non-ironic stance on many of the most fundamental issues. So, my writing tries to be true to the complexities of the problems I find compelling and not hide my own very limited ability to find conclusive answers. What I want to do is to be honest to the dilemmas rather than try to short-circuit them. I have always been very distrustful of a kind of writing that radiates unearned authority. Intellectual history is learned commentary with only some modest critique of the ideas and thinkers we study. One should maintain a certain humility in the face of the achievements of the figures of the past whose work is worth resurrecting and commenting on. Despite our hindsight, we have to resist feeling utterly superior to them. That is why I try to be generous to different positions, even to the ones that seem politically problematic to me, and wrest from them

meaningful insights, which may in fact be useful even if they are based on assumptions or values that I would not myself share.

An open text?

I am not, I think, an experimental writer. I try to write lucidly and for an audience that is, if not popular, at least broadly educated. My writing never mimics, say, Bataille, Derrida, Deleuze or other experimental philosophers, although I try to be fair to the complexities those writers have introduced through their style and avoid overly homogenizing paraphrases of their ideas.

...

You mentioned one of the most obvious influences over you as being Adorno's works. In which terms do you think you diverge the most from him?

Adorno had the confidence to judge with authority many things. He had very strong opinions, which were rarely hidden. He knew, for example, that Stravinsky, Hindemith and other figures in the history of music were on the side of something deeply regressive, even reactionary. And he was equally certain that other figures, Alban Berg, say, or Schoenberg, were progressive, and in more than just musical terms. I am a little less confident that I have road map that allows me to make those historical judgments about the way the world is going. In fact, Adorno himself, if you look at his writing carefully, tacitly undercuts that very assumption, because he was sensitive to a number of conflicting temporalities, including decline and repetition as well as progress. I am even less assured in my own judgments than Adorno was about how we can assign historical significance to different cultural phenomena. That is one salient difference.

In Downcast Eyes, *you say "Merleau-Ponty occupies a pivotal place in this narrative" because of his incomplete alternative philosophy of the visual. Also, his book,* Adventures of the Dialectic, *inspired your book,* Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukacs to Habermas. *Do you consider him an important force in your work?*

Well, it is a good question. Merleau-Ponty is someone I respect enormously. He did not finish his final work on vision and his politics were moving in directions that were never really fully reached. As a result, we can see Merleau-Ponty as a transitional figure, moving away from his earlier existentialist or phenomenological Marxism, away from a faith in the lived body as primary towards a belief that language was no less important, away from a faith in gestalt psychology to an interest in psychoanalysis sparked by a nascent dialogue with Lacan. In short, Merleau-Ponty was moving in interesting directions, but was prevented by his early death from achieving all he might have in reaching his goals. After its eclipse during the heyday of structuralism, phenomenology has, of course, come back into fashion. There has been a recent interest shown by film theorists, for example, and thinkers in the pragmatist tradition have recognized shared interests. And so Merleau-Ponty remains a powerful figure into the 21st century, who has survived his premature burial at the hands of his foes.

Another important figure –at least important for me- is Arendt. You have really had an uneasy relation to her.

Yes, I do.

In your work on Marcuse, you use her as a corrective, then came your article, "The Political Existentialism of Hannah Arendt", which is really an attack on her, later in your works on Heller and on aesthetics, ideology and politics, you praised her for her appropriation of Kant's reflective judgment[7].

It is an excellent question. My ambivalence has to do with the availability and reception of her ideas and with my own understanding of them over the years. When I first used her against Marcuse in that very early article of 1969, *The Human Condition*[8] gave me a way to question the Marxist humanist belief in the metasubject of history. Later, I recognized that Habermas had come to similar conclusions, partly through his reading of Arendt as well. When several years later, I wrote the "Political Existentialism" essay, my

7
Jay's works on Arendt mentioned in this question, "The Metapolitics of Utopianism" (1969) and "The Political Existentialism of Hannah Arendt" (1978) are in *Permanent Exiles*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985; and "Women in Dark Times: Agnes Heller and Hannah Arendt" (1992-93) and "'The Aesthetic Ideology' as Ideology: Or What Does It Mean to Aestheticize Politics?" (1992) are in *Force Fields*. New York and London: Routledge, 1993.

8
Arendt, Hannah (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (in Turkish, *İnsanlık Durumu*. Trans., B. S. Şener. İstanbul: İletişim, 1994).

thinking was influenced by long discussions I had in 1974-1975 in Oxford with Isaiah Berlin, who disliked her enormously. I was also struck by the fact that Margaret Canovan, in the book[9] I had been asked to review for *Partisan Review* –it soon became a longer essay of its own– never mentioned Heidegger or acknowledged her debts to German existentialism. This made Canovan unaware of certain dangerous moments in Arendt's work, which had set her against from the more radical-liberal values that I found attractive in someone like Habermas. But then, when I began to look at the work that came out posthumously on Kant's political philosophy, I came to admire Arendt's imaginative reading of the Third Critique and its importance for critical judgment, something of which I was unaware of when I wrote the "Political Existentialism" essay because her lectures were not yet published. I then was able to draw on her arguments in two later pieces I wrote on the aestheticization of politics and the political theory of Agnes Heller, who had herself moved from a Lukásian position to one close to the later Arendt. My most recent work about her is the response to the volume edited by Craig Calhoun, *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics?*[10] Here I am critical of some of the uses to which certain commentators have put her, turning her into a Nietzschean postmodernist *avant la letter*, moving her once again too much into Heidegger's orbit. When I wrote that afterword to the Calhoun collection, I had just read her correspondence with Mary McCarthy,[11] in which she says some pretty unpleasant things about race relations in America in ways that also alerted me to problems in her work, most notably the rigid separation of social from political issues. Richard Wolin's recent book, *Heidegger's Children*,[12] deals extensively with her debts to Heidegger in a way that reminds me of the criticism I expressed in "The Political Existentialism of Hannah Arendt" back in the 1970s. Although I would not agree with every aspect of Wolin's critique, which underestimates the virtues of many of her arguments, I found it fascinating to see how much that essay anticipated the later discovery of her debts to Heidegger, both personal and political, which she had tried to cover up for many years. In short, my

9
Canovan, Margaret (1974). *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*. Dent: Harcourt

10
Calhoun, Craig and John McCowan (eds.) (with an Afterword by Martin Jay) (1997). *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

11
Arendt, Hannah et al., (1996). *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy 1949-1975*. Harvest Books.

12
Wolin, Richard (2001). *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Lowith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

relationship over the years to Arendt's legacy is a complicated story, which was complicated still further by another factor I haven't yet mentioned: the hostility that existed between her and members of the Frankfurt School, especially Marcuse and Adorno.

But Benjamin...

She was close to Benjamin but argued with Adorno and others in the Frankfurt School about the meaning of Benjamin's legacy. Both Adorno and Arendt were claimants to Benjamin's legacy, as were of course other friends like Scholem.. I agree that my relation to Arendt is a very mixed one. I did not know her very well. I met her only once or twice. I still respect her and still read her with a great deal of benefit. For example, I used her in a long review essay I did on Christopher Hitchens' and George Stephanopoulos' books on Bill Clinton in which they attacked him for lying. I was able to find complicated 'arguments about the inevitability, perhaps even virtue of mendacity lying in politics in Arendt's work.[13]

"Mendacious Flowers"?

Yes, that is right.

What differentiates your attitude towards "the body art" (as you used it in your recent work on Dewey and democracy) from "academic woman as performance artist"?[14]

In the piece I recently published on somaesthetics and democracy, I argue for the potential of transgressive performance art, art which uses the mutilated, violated body as a site of experimentation, to raise questions about the relations between art and the body politic. Perhaps its primary function is to challenge traditional notions of aesthetic sublimation and organic wholeness, which then can be translated into political terms, supporting the ideal of an organic, often ethnically defined state. My earlier essay. 'The Women Academic as Performance Artist" has a different goal. It is a qualified defense of the foregrounding of the speaker's actual body, performatively self-conscious about the roles it plays in our culture, as opposed to an allegedly neutral transcendental mind,

13
Jay, Martin (1999). "Mendacious Flowers." *London Review of Books* 21(15) (29 July) in which Jay draws on Hannah Arendt's 1968 and 1971 essays, "Truth and Politics" and "Lying in Politics." (in Turkish, see Arendt, Hannah (1996). *Geçmisle Gelecek Arasinda*. Trans., B. S. Sener. İstanbul: İletisim). The books that Jay reviews are: Stephanopoulos, George (1999). *All Too Human: A Political Education*. London: Hutchinson and Hitchens, Christopher (1999). *No One Left to Lie to: The Triangulations of William Jefferson Clinton*. London: Verso

14
Jay, Martin (2002). "Somaesthetics and Democracy: Dewey and Contemporary Body Art." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 36(4) (Winter): 55-69 and "The Academic Woman as Performance Artist," first published in *Salmagundi* in 1993 and republished in *Cultural Semantics*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1998.

which suppresses the fact that it is always situated in specific bodies, specific histories and specific ways of presenting themselves in the world.

But in both cases, the hope is that becoming aware of the suffering, gendered, culturally constructed body can ultimately stimulate a discussion of what performativity is tacitly arguing, what the doing means. In short, the goal is transcending immediate responses of astonishment or disgust or outrage, in order to take seriously what deeper changes the provocation tries to realize.. My own personal inclination is less to perform in a transgressive way–I'm not sure I have the imagination or courage to attempt that– than it is to take the performative interventions of others seriously, but then ultimately to move to the level of discourse to consider what they mean. Some people, I am sure, will see this as a betrayal of the very challenge performativity makes to discourse. I prefer to see it as a way to take the best out of both.

So, it is related to the "culture of critical discourse".

That is right. We are all in that culture to some extent in the modern world, even though it would be a mistake to idealize it and fail to acknowledge the practical impediments to its full realization. Conversely, its disappearance or discrediting would be an enormous loss. It is hard to imagine what kind of world we will be living in if we were to return to more authoritarian modes of legitimation in which the status or charisma of the speaker was more important than the arguments he or she uses. It is also, I think, an advantage to have a plurality of cultures of critical discourse -epistemological ethical, aesthetic, etc.- in which the protocols of argumentation may vary to some extent, but the principle of persuasive argumentation still holds. But we also have to recognize the limits, both historical and perhaps intrinsic to language itself, which prevent the full realization of an ideal speech situation. Something like Derrida's notion of democracy as a political arrangement always to come in a future that is forever beyond our grasp expresses this situation. Oddly enough, he is close to Habermas in this regard, for the ideal speech situation

is always still to come, always a desideratum or regulative ideal. So, democracy, for both of them, is not a given state, but a striving that needs perpetually to be renewed, but never achieves final closure.

Is there a shift in your works, as I sensed it, from communicative rationality to the artistic forms of experience like body art, like middle voice in novels?

I think we all have been affected by the ways in which modern life is increasingly aestheticized, for good or for ill. Aesthetics as a discursive realm has also become much more central, as the importance of cultural studies has begun to move aside more traditional social and political alternatives. And, of course, the linguistic turn in philosophy has made us all more aware of the rhetorical, figural, even literary dimensions of even the most rigorous theory. As a result, aesthetic experience has emerged as laboratory for all types of questions about the human condition and contemporary society, and works like Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*[15] have become central works in many different disciplines. Even Habermas has been forced to think more about aesthetic issues than would have seemed likely at the beginning of his career. In a piece I wrote a few years ago, "Habermas and Modernism",[16] I tried to figure out what he meant by aesthetic rationality, which occasioned a very thoughtful response by him. And of course, those thinkers we call poststructuralist have made us very sensitive to the interactions between aesthetics and politics, to what Paul de Man called "the aesthetic ideology," which was a theme I tried to address in another essay in the 1990's. I suppose at a time when politics itself has become so much an issue of images and symbolic displacements, it is inevitable that we find ourselves dealing indirectly with issues like democratic theory, nationalism or the state through the medium of aesthetics.

A recent collection of essays, Canonic Texts in Media Research (2003), is divided into five parts: the Frankfurt School, Columbia School, Chicago School, Toronto School and British Cultural Studies. Part of your work seems to cover the canon of media studies. One can also add

15
Adorno, T. W. (1997). *Aesthetic Theory*. Eds., G. Adorno & R. Tiedemann. Trans., R. Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Also Trans., C. Lenhardt, London, 1984 (originally in German).

16
Republished in Jay, Martin (1988). *Fin-de-Siecle Socialism and Other Essays*. New York: Routledge.

your narrative of photography, your works on Benjamin, Kracauer, Barthes, Metz to list a few,[17] and your emphasis on politics and aesthetics, intersubjectivity, communication. I am wondering about your thoughts about the place of culture, communication and the media in your intellectual history.

I have a good friend named Mark Poster,[18] who is also an intellectual historian. He has gone much further than I in taking seriously the implications of contemporary media, cyberspace, virtual reality, the internet and digital technology. In comparison to someone like him, I am very much an amateur. But I think all of us, because of the fact that we live in a world thoroughly mediated by computers in a way that was totally impossible to imagine as recently as the 1980's, recognize how powerfully shaped our world is by the new media and technologies. We are all caught in webs that are indeed worldwide and deterritorialized, for good or for ill. As a result, it has become increasingly impossible to avoid thinking about even previous technologies which have had an impact on culture in ways that once were ignored or taken for granted, understanding them as vehicles of thought that have a powerful effect on the substance of what is said. Even though the medium may be not the entire message, it is nonetheless enough of it that we can't avoid grappling with all of its effects, hidden or on the surface. Just as the linguistic turn in 20th-century philosophy compelled us to attend to the ways in thought was always inevitably presented in written and spoken forms that inflected, the inexorable expansion of communications and information technologies have directed our attention at the history of previous media. For example, the history of the book has become a staple of cultural history after the pioneering work of scholars like Roger Chartier.[19] The Frankfurt School was, of course, interested in the radio and the cinema, as well as the phonograph record, in the creation of the culture industry. To the extent that my own thinking is indebted to theirs, I have also had to confront these issues, but I would not pretend that I have made any real contribution to media studies, which demands an expertise I clearly lack.

17
Katz, Elihu et al., (2003). *Canonic Texts in Media Research. Are There Any? Should There Be? How About These?* Cambridge: Polity. Jay's works related to the media and communication are very dispersed to cite all yet his pieces on Kracauer were republished in *Permanent Exiles*, op cit; his narrative of photography and his views on Barthes and Metz are in *Downcast Eyes*, University of CA Press, 1993.

18
Mark Poster's books related to the contemporary media include: *Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Context*, University of Chicago Press, 1990; *The Second Media Age*, Polity, 1995; *The Information Subject*, G&B Arts International, 2001: and *What's The Matter With Internet?* University of Minnesota Press, 2001. See also, www.humanities.uci.edu/mposter/

19
Chartier, R. (1994). *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Cambridge: Polity.

My last question is also related to the field of communication. Communication scholars almost always feel uneasy about the field, whether we are political scientists, sociologists or else. I want to come to the issue of interdisciplinarity. In your account of interdisciplinarity of the Critical Theory, you drew both on Horkheimer's and Adorno's addresses in 1931, the former arguing for the interaction of critical philosophy and empirical research, and the latter for science and philosophy as incompatible modes of cognition.[20] The latter challenging the former -you located this amalgamation in Adorno's work. Can it be extended to the other members of the Institute? Is it the same issue you raised in terms of the negative dialectic of culture and nature?[21]

Adorno came to be the most important critic of the overambitious totalizing project of the early Horkheimer, at least tacitly. In *Negative Dialectics*, his consistent refusal to mediate the unreconciled contradictions of late capitalism through a philosophy that could claim to overcome them on the level of thought betrayed his loss of faith in the integrative project of early Critical Theory. In fact, as early as his essay on "The Idea of Natural History, which he wrote before officially joining the Institute, showed a resistance to the idea that the nature/culture or nature/history opposition could be sublated or *aufgehoben*. Although he was himself a polymath working in many different fields, his work tried to express performatively the famous aphorism of *Minima Moralia*[22] that "the whole is the untrue." One of my recent essays, "The Menace of Consilience, Keeping the Disciplines Unreconciled," forthcoming in the *Stanford Humanities Review*, returns to this issue. "Consilience" is the term that Edward Wilson, the Harvard sociobiologist, adopted for the overcoming of disciplinary boundaries through the imposition of a common natural scientific explanatory scheme. Against this utopian project, I argue for a logic of metaphoric displacement, which allows us to translate roughly from one discipline to another, but never to subsume them all under one rubric. Each discipline is, of course, historically grounded, and has had to assert its relative autonomy against its neighbors, even as it

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For Horkheimer's inaugural lecture in 1931, see Horkheimer, M. (1989). "The State of Contemporary Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research." Trans., P. Wagner. in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*. S. E. Bronner & D. M. Kellner (eds.). London and New York: Routledge; for Adorno's inaugural address of 1931, see Adorno, T. (1977). "The Actuality of Philosophy." *Telos* 31(Spring).

21
Jay, Martin (1981). "Positive and Negative Totalities: Implicit Tensions in Critical Theory's Vision of Interdisciplinary Research." *Thesis Eleven* 3 (republished in *Permanent Exiles*, op cit.: and "Cultural Relativism and the Visual Turn." see note 2).

22
Adorno, T. W. (1978). *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*. Trans., E. F. N. Jephcott. London: Verso (in Turkish, Trans., A. Doğukan & O. Koçak, İstanbul: Metis, 1998).

negotiates the boundaries that separate them and allows the importation of ideas and methods from the outside. Disciplines emerge and they sometimes amalgamate with other disciplines, so there is no hard and fast division of territory or labor. But interdisciplinarity, which is one of the most insistent buzzwords of the day, should not mean a project to overcome all distinctions in the name of a master discourse, like Wilson's consilience. The distinctions are healthy because the world in which we live is a world which is itself fractured and therefore cannot be reconciled on the level of theory or method. As I argued before about the impossibility of finding a way beyond the nature/culture opposition, there is no way to overcome the distinction between, for example, sociology and psychology or politics and aesthetics. We sometimes get impatient with such distinctions because we want to get back to something that feels more organically whole, something that we may fantasize exists on the level of the prereflexive life world prior to the differentation of the subspheres of expertise. This is not, to be sure, an entirely vain desire, as the differentiation can go too far and creative feelings of alienation. A field like 'communications', which straddles different more traditional disciplines, is a healthy reminder that these boundaries are not permanent, although I imagine it too also has created its own sense of internal integrity and external boundary-maintenance, which then allows it to compete in the marketplace for the scarce resources of academic life. Let us hope that in the 21st century, a thousand new disciplines will arise to thwart the imperative to subsume them under a master discourse that pretends to have a totalizing gaze of the whole.

Thank you very much.

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His books are:

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He has regular column in *Salmagundi*.