

*"Herbert Marcuse taught me that it was possible to be an academic and an activist,
a scholar and a revolutionary."*

-- Angela Y. Davis

10

Things

to know about



2011 Conference

www.MarcuseSociety.org

1 *Marcuse is back.*

This renaissance is an affirmation of negation. It is an affirmation of the relevance of critical theory – in all of its emancipatory manifestations. This conference is organized by the INTERNATIONAL HERBERT MARCUSE SOCIETY, but it is bigger than our small group, and it is about more than the important critical theorist **Herbert Marcuse**. With concrete hopes for what we will question, learn, imagine, struggle for, and create together, we warmly invite you to join us in Philadelphia at the University of Pennsylvania—once the academic home of W.E.B. Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah, Noam Chomsky, and Donald Trump; the contradictions of this place will amaze you. (By the way, we will not be meeting at the Wharton School, but rather in Houston Hall—the first student union in the U.S.A.—founded in a moment of resistance in 1896.)

This conference is an affirmation of critical intellectual inquiry and an affirmation that austerity must be refused, that oppression – in all of its forms – must be resisted with radical questions, liberatory ideas, and emancipatory movements for an alternative economy and better ways of living together. Join with us **on the 40th anniversary of Marcuse's speech here at Penn in 1971** — to move forward with critical visions of qualitative change.



"The Great Refusal takes a variety of forms."

Herbert Marcuse, "Preface," *An Essay on Liberation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, p. vii.

2 *Confirmed speakers include: Angela Davis, Stanley Aronowitz, Richard Bernstein, Wendy Brown, Alex Callinicos, Enrique Dussel, Andrew Feenberg, Michelle Fine, Axel Honneth, Peter-Erwin Jansen, Douglas Kellner, Heather Love, Peter Marcuse, Charles Mills, Leo Panitch, Nina Power, Adolph Reed, and David Roediger.*

3 By arrangement with the Radical Philosophy Association, a special issue of the *Radical Philosophy Review* (to be published in Fall 2012) will feature papers and other contributions from this conference. The peer review process will be led by an editorial collective (John Abromeit, Arnold Farr, Douglas Kellner, Charles Reitz and other critical scholars worldwide).

Radical
Philosophy
Review

Journal of the Radical Philosophy Association

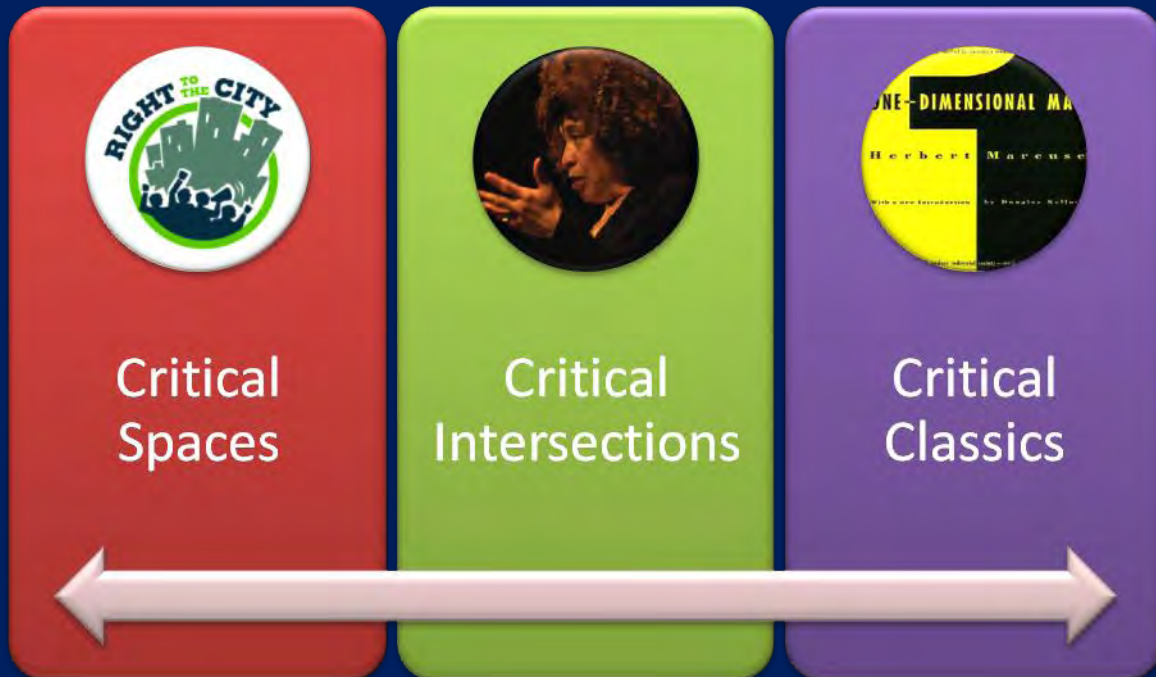
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The 2011 conference

Critical Refusal(s)

seeks papers, panels, workshops, art, and other forms of presentation related to the following *three themes* and *four arenas*:

Conference Themes



Special Arenas



5

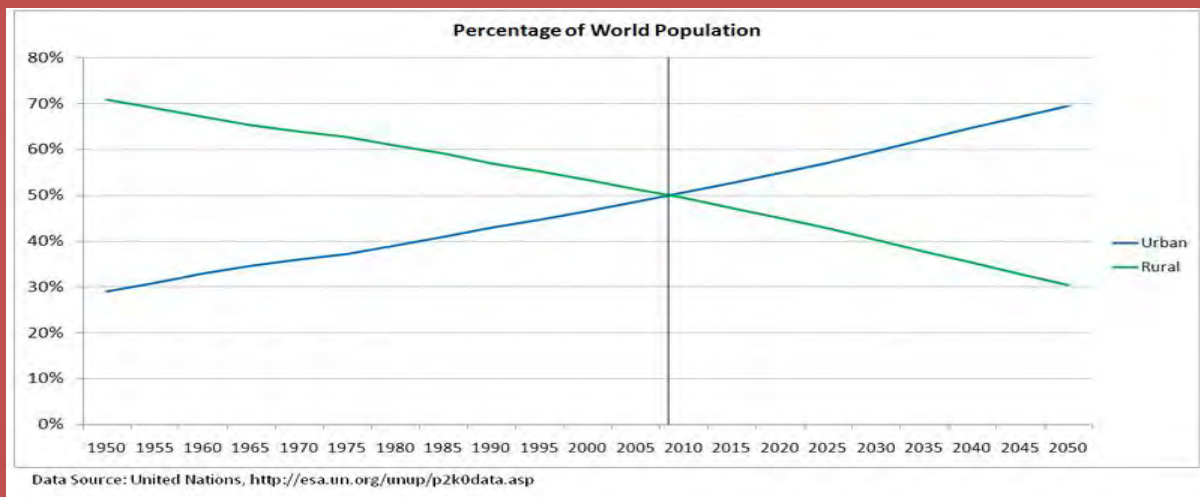
Theme One:

Critical Spaces

Critical Theory meets Critical Theories of Urban Space, Struggle, and Overcoming

- **New Social Fact**

As of 2007, the majority of the world's population now lives – most precariously – in urban areas.



"The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights."

-- David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *New Left Review* 53, September-October 2008.



"I've suggested the slogan: "Expose, Propose, Politicize" as an appropriate guide in day- to-day practice. Exposing means showing the roots of a given problem, for mortgage foreclosures or lack of affordable housing, key issues today in the U.S., it means addressing the provision of housing for profit and not for use, rather than the greed of bankers or dishonesty of developers. Critical theory is the best underpinning for such analyses. And it should illuminate proposing and politicizing, too. Proposing means developing concrete plans for doing what can be accomplished immediately, although with a view to the roots, so that planning is not only criticizing but also proposing, for instance community land trusts, mutual housing associations, ways of getting housing out of the private market that can be accomplished today. Politicizing means understanding that such proposals require political action, political organization, to be implemented; planning involves proposals for action as well as for policy."

-- Peter Marcuse, Interview, "Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City," *polis*, 29 September 2010.

6

Theme Two:

Critical Intersections

Class, Race, Gender, Queer, Disability, Ethnicity, Postcolonial, Africana, Indigenous, Caste, Animal, Nature

Critical Theory / CRITICAL THEORIES / Liberation Theories

Intersecting, rubbing up against, and in dialogue and desire, searching together for sources of powerful resistance / for better ways forward—in thought and practice

"One of the striking paradoxes of the bourgeois ideological tradition resides in an enduring philosophical emphasis on the idea of freedom alongside an equally pervasive failure to acknowledge the denial of freedom to entire categories of real, social human beings."

-- Angela Y. Davis

Philosophy Born of Struggle

"The subject [is] not privileged but simply the site where the collective experience finds articulation." – Aimé Césaire • "virtually any aspect of modern Western culture, must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition." – Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick • "the world and subjectivity in all its forms have developed with the life processes of society" – Max Horkheimer • "is it not precisely the task of the intellectual, the scholar, the student, to confront complications? To sort out insistent issues in such a way as to open them up for the work of reason—and so for action at strategic points of intervention? " / "Imagination is often successfully invited by putting together hitherto isolated items, by finding unsuspected connections.... The sociological imagination, I remind you, in considerable part consists of the capacity to shift from one perspective to another, and in the process to build up an adequate view of a total society and of its components.... You try to think in terms of a variety of viewpoints and in this way to let your mind become a moving prism catching light from as many angles as possible." – C. Wright Mills • "For first, every philosophy that deserves the name always embodies the Idea: and secondly, every system represents one particular factor or particular stage in the evolution of the Idea. The refutation of a philosophy, therefore, only means that its barriers are crossed, and its special principle reduced to a factor in the completer principle that follows." – Hegel • "the self-clarification (critical philosophy) of the struggles and wishes of the age. This is a task for the world and for us. It can succeed only as the product of united efforts." – Marx • "They try to say it's a communist plot / All I want is equality / for my sister my brother my people and me"

- Nina Simone

7

Theme Three:

Critical Theories

The Frankfurt School and Its Contemporary Heirs – Legacies, Debates, Possibilities

- documenting the global reception of and engagement with Marcuse in the 20th and 21st centuries
- analyzing the critical discourses that have yielded theoretical contributions, framed debates, and signaled turns of significance during the history of the Frankfurt School and its subsequent generations
- posing new questions and investigative strategies at the present moment of widespread systemic changes & crises – financial, social, political, technological, cultural, economic, educational, ecological....
- screening the World Premiere (Villon Films) of Peter Davis' documentary of the full version of Marcuse's speech , "**Liberation from the Affluent Society**" (and the subsequent Q&A session) at the 1967 Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation (for the Demystification of Violence) in London, England, which was organized by R.D.Laing, with Allen Ginsberg, Paul Sweezy, Paul Goodman, Herbert Marcuse, Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X...
- **thinking forward critically**



Iris Marion Young on Critical Theory and Marcuse

Justice and the Politics of Difference

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 5-6.

As I understand it, critical theory is a normative reflection that is historically and socially contextualized. Critical theory rejects as illusory the effort to construct a universal normative system insulated from a particular society. Normative reflection must begin from historically specific circumstances because there is but what is, the given, the situated interest in justice, from which to start. Reflecting from within a particular social context, good normative theorizing cannot avoid social and political description and explanation. Without social theory, normative reflection is abstract, empty, and unable to guide criticism with a practical interest in emancipation. Unlike positivist social theory, however, which separates social facts from values, and claims to be value-neutral, critical theory denies that social theory must accede to the given. Social description and explanation must be critical, that is, aim to evaluate the given in normative terms. Without such a critical stance, many questions about what occurs in a society and why, who benefits and who is harmed, will not be asked, and social theory is liable to reaffirm and reify the given social reality.

Critical theory presumes that the normative ideals used to criticize a society are rooted in experience of and reflection on that very society, and that norms can come from nowhere else. But what does this mean, and how is it possible for norms to be both socially based and measures of society? Normative reflection

arises from hearing a cry of suffering or distress, or feeling distress oneself. The philosopher is always socially situated, and if the society is divided by oppressions, she either reinforces or struggles against them. With an emancipatory interest, the philosopher apprehends given social circumstances not merely in contemplation but with passion: the given is experienced in relation to desire. Desire, the desire to be happy, creates the distance, the negation, that opens the space for criticism of what is. This critical distance does not occur on the basis of some previously discovered rational ideas of the good and the just. On the contrary, the ideas of the good and the just arise from the desiring negation that action brings to what is given.

Critical theory is a mode of discourse which projects normative possibilities unrealized but felt in a particular given social reality. Each social reality presents its own unrealized possibilities, experienced as lacks and desires. Norms and ideals arise from the yearning that is an expression of freedom: it does not have to be this way, it could be otherwise. Imagination is the faculty of transforming the experience of what is into a projection of what could be, the faculty that frees thought to form ideals and norms.

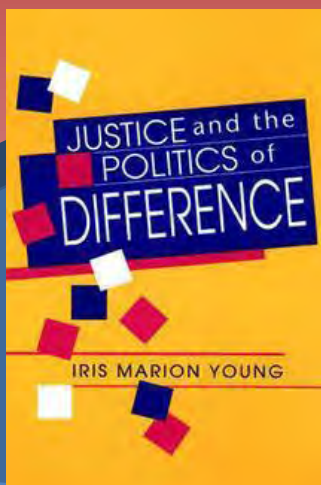
Herbert Marcuse describes this genesis of ideals from an experience of the possibilities desired but unrealized in the given:

Now, there is a large class of concepts—we dare say, the philosophically relevant concepts—where the quantitative relation between the universal and the particular assumes a qualitative aspect, where the abstract, universal seems to designate potentialities in a concrete, historical sense. However "man," "nature," "justice," "beauty," or "freedom" may be defined, they synthesize experiential contents into ideas which transcend their particular realizations as something to be surpassed, overcome. Thus the concept of beauty comprehends all the beauty not yet realized; the conception of freedom all the liberty not yet attained.

...

Such universals thus appear as conceptual instruments for understanding the particular conditions of things in light of their potentialities. They are historical and supra-historical; they conceptualize the stuff of which the experienced world consists, and they conceptualize it with a view of its possibilities, in the light of their actual limitation, suppression, and denial. Neither the experience nor the judgment is private. The philosophic concepts are formed and developed in the consciousness of a general condition in a historical continuum; they are elaborated from an individual position within a specific society. The stuff of thought is historical stuff—no matter how abstract, general, or pure, it may become in philosophic or scientific theory.

{Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Society*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964, pp. 214-215.}



"Dialectical thought starts with the experience that the world is unfree; that is to say, man and nature exist in conditions of alienation, exist 'other than they are.' Any mode of thought which excludes this contradiction from its logic is [therefore] a faulty logic. Thought 'corresponds' to reality only as it transforms reality by comprehending its contradictory structure."

-- Herbert Marcuse, "Preface: A Note on Dialectic,"
Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory
Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1960, p. ix.

8

Four Arenas:

Critical Pedagogies

- teaching/learning: developing questions & strategies for understanding/transforming the world
- education for knowledge, analysis, relation, health, pleasure, solidarity, power, resistance & change
- exploring the relationships between liberation praxis and critical pedagogies in the present moment
- theories, models, practices, reflections / workshops & exchanges for faculty & students

Liberation: Philosophies & Theologies

- acknowledging that the criticality required for anti-oppression struggles and for freedom dreams is manifest in many discourses and epistemological communities
- overcoming problems & exploring possibilities for alliances across critical theories -- philosophical and religious
- planning for a future, global conference on this topic

Critical Political Economy

- Herbert Marcuse's engagement with Marxian economics
- Angela Davis' contributions to critical political economy (through her work on prisons, racial/sexual violence, militarization, capital accumulation, and other issues)
- problems and possibilities of democratic socialist, anarchist, and other alternative economic theories, models, and practices

Critical Praxis Now

- Critiques of liberal politics
- Rethinking Left responses to reactionary politics
- Affirming principles, envisioning possibilities, supporting struggles

"We have to talk about liberating minds as well as liberating society."

--Angela Davis

9 The **CALL for PAPERS and PARTICIPATION**

seeks contributions that relate to any of the conference's themes or arenas, *broadly interpreted*. All manner of presentation is welcome – by faculty, independent scholars, students, activists, artists, and others. Many participants will present scholarly papers, but we also encourage other kinds of contributions, *e.g.*, a debate about Marcuse's legacy, a panel discussion on academic life today, a roundtable on future directions for Critical Theory scholarship, an open-mic forum for former students of Marcuse and Angela Davis, a late-night discussion on future directions for the Left, workshops on critical pedagogy, author-meets-critics sessions, as well as videos, music, poetry, performance art, and other alternative – *even experimental* – formats that provoke critical awareness and imagination, that assess the potential for critical engagements in a variety of spheres, and that enable conference participants to get to know each other better.

Abstracts of papers and proposals for panels, workshops, and other proposed presentations are due by **23 April 2011**; however, earlier submissions would be especially appreciated. All abstracts and proposals will be reviewed, with notice of decision provided within one month of receipt. **Please send to: ATLamas@sas.upenn.edu**

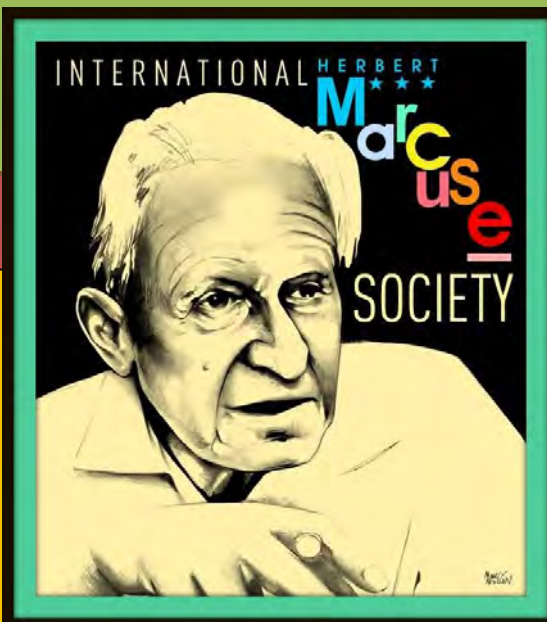
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"To create the subjective conditions for a free society . . . [we must] . . . educate men and women who are incapable of tolerating what is going on, who have really learned what *is* going on, has always been going on, and why, and who are educated to resist and to fight for a new way of life."

-- Herbert Marcuse
Lecture on Education
Brooklyn College, 1968



For conference registration and other information: www.MarcuseSociety.org