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UK Social Theory and the Shaping of an Academic Career

Arnold L. Farr

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I began my graduate studies in philosophy at the University of Kentucky in August of 1996. As soon as I began my work in the philosophy department, I discovered UK's Interdisciplinary Committee on Social Theory. As a person who always had an interest in interdisciplinary work I was quite excited. I took my first Social Theory course in my second semester and attended all of the lectures during my six years in graduate school. After my first Social Theory class I enrolled for the ST certificate. I had the pleasure to serve on the first *disClosure* editorial collective and had the pleasure of publishing my first book reviews in the early editions of this journal. If I remember correctly, I wrote two book reviews and participated in two interviews.

I have always believed that ST was one of the best things to happen to me in my entire academic career. In fact, because of ST, graduate school was one of the most exciting and fulfilling times of my life. The combination of Social Theory and the UK philosophy program made it rather easy for me to get my first job. The kind of training I got in philosophy and ST made me attractive to several of the universities that I applied to. My training in philosophy prepared me to teach a wide range of courses in the philosophy department in which I was hired. My training in ST made it easy for me to be conversant across disciplinary boundaries. In my first job at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia, I was able to teach a wide range of philosophy courses as well as courses that were outside of philosophy. For example, I co-taught a course on violence and reconciliation in Northern Ireland with a colleague from the English department in 2005 and 2007. This course culminated in a two week visit to Northern Ireland. My experience in ST also made it possible for me to teach a course entitled "Philosophy and the Social Sciences," as well as other courses that I developed. One of the last courses I taught at SJU was a course I developed called "Philosophy and the Democratic Body." In that course I used texts from thinkers whom I was exposed to as a ST student at UK. We read works by former ST speakers such as Iris Young, Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler, and others. One of the most important long-term professional relationships that I have begun when I met Professor Douglas Kellner through Social Theory. Professor Kellner was one of our ST speakers in the early 1990s when I was a graduate student. After becoming a fulltime professor myself I would encounter Professor Kellner at various conferences. We would talk about the ST program at UK. In 2005 I organized a conference on the work of Herbert Marcuse. Professor Kellner, one of the most recognized Marcuse scholars in the world, was one of our speakers. At this conference we established the International Herbert Marcuse Society which meets every two years. At present I am the president and Professor Kellner is the vice president of the IHMS. We have been on panels together and edited

journals, as well co-authored essays on Marcuse. Professor Kellner and I have led what has been referred to as a Marcuse revival. I am proud to say that my professional relationship with Professor Kellner began in the UK Social Theory program.

During my twelve years at St. Joseph's University I was called on to lecture in the Urban Studies department at the University of Pennsylvania on a regular basis. Throughout my academic career I've been able to engage colleagues from a wide range of disciplines. I attribute this ability to my education in philosophy and Social Theory at UK.

While working as a professor in Philadelphia I tried to remain connected to the Social Theory program. I came back in 1998 to present a paper at the Nation Theory conference sponsored by Social Theory. I also began participating in the International Social Theory Consortium which was organized by founding members of UK's ST program. These conferences gave me an opportunity to reunite with UK social theorists while I taught in Philadelphia. I still attend and present at these conferences to this day.

So, one of the most exciting things about coming back to UK as a faculty member in 2008 was reconnecting with UK social theory as a faculty member. It is exciting to get to teach the courses that I once took. Just as ST was one of my most important experiences as a graduate student, it is now one of my most important experiences as a faculty member. Being able to engage faculty and graduate students from a wide range of disciplines about issues that matter is just as thrilling as it was 25 years ago. As I travel around the country to give talks the one thing that most people know about UK outside of basketball is the Social Theory program. I am convinced that the ST program has put UK on the map as a quality academic institution. I will always be proud to be a part of such an awesome program.