

**David Marr**

**Interviewed by Eirik Steinhoff**

**The Evergreen State College Oral History Project**

**Interview 2, August 31, 2016**

**Steinhoff:** I've hit record again. So today's date is August 31, 2016. Once again, we're in David Marr's dining room, in a house that he moved into in 1973. And yesterday in our first chapter of the oral history we got to 1963.

**Marr:** *[laughing]*

**Steinhoff:** So, we might need to step on the gas, or we might need to let it unfold. I'm going to let you take us from where we were. If there's things that came to mind after our conversation yesterday that you feel like adding, as you wish.

**Marr:** Good. Well, nothing came to mind that I recall right now having to do with the period up to 1963. But I thought of a number of things in filling out this sheet. I think it is a good idea to try to pick up the pace a little bit.

So, where we left it when we were speaking to each other was the question of what have I been, or something like that. And it occurred to me that just speaking as a professional academic, if that's not too pretentious a way of putting it, I realized two or three years ago something that may seem strange as a realization to come so late in life, and that is that if I had to choose a meaningful label to attach to myself it would be intellectual historian because it goes so far back, I was one from about the age of 21 on. I never thought of that in that way before. The graduate programs, and actually the undergraduate work I did also, were what people who later are called intellectual historians in history departments do, those are the courses of study they [under]take and so on. Anyway, I like that title, more or less. And it's true that all my official degrees were in English [undergraduate] or sponsored

[jointly in graduate school] by the English [and history] departments. [The sources I've worked with have all been texts in philosophy, social thought, literature and criticism.] My dissertation advisor was an intellectual historian teaching in an English department, her name is Mary G. Land and she was a student of Henry Nash Smith who was a very influential American [intellectual] historian in the '50s and '60s. So, I have—and then of course my professors were, the ones that I learned the most from in this field were intellectual historians. Stow Persons, first of all. William Aydelotte, the one I mentioned to you yesterday, the European intellectual historian. Christopher Lasch, when he was at Iowa. And in so far as the philosophers who taught the history of ideas survey that I took were thinking historically, to some extent they were [intellectual historians], but I count them too. The kind of philosophy that was dominant at the time was deeply influenced by logical positivism, [then] by analytic[al] philosophy as such, and so there wasn't much attention in the way they thought about things to the historical development of ideas and [historical] patterns of thought. So, what they would do is treat a text by Locke or Hobbes or anyone else thoroughly but in isolation from the one that came before in the syllabus and the one that came after in the syllabus [and in isolation from the social and cultural life in which it appeared], which was itself organized chronologically, we came to Aquinas before we went to Locke and so on.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah.

**Marr:** And in a way that was kind of interesting in hindsight because you had to figure out what the connections might have been because it's as if they couldn't care less what [historical connections] there might be. But when, for instance, you come across Aquinas' political writings, the idea of the "just price" for a thing and then you read something in Locke about his understanding of [property coming from mixing human] labor [with nature.] You know, unless you're a dimwit you'll think of something interesting along those lines even though it doesn't come up in class.

So, anyway, as an undergraduate and a graduate student I came to, I suppose one of the biggest turning points in my life in the '60s was in 1969. Let's see, how can I explain this? At the time I was in Pullman, Washington and I was trying to figure out a dissertation topic, and I had much latitude, no one cared [what topic I chose], there weren't any barriers. Whatever you come up with is fine. Well, not in my mind. So my first topic was to write a history of the *Partisan Review*. And so I immersed myself in the magazine and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century history of Marxism and the kind of critical methods that [PR's founders and editors] Phillip Rahv and William Phillips and their contributors used. Not that they were all the same. I was really, deeply influenced by Rahv. I still think he's an underrated critic. But it was a courageous move when the Nazi-Soviet pact and the purge trials occurred in the late-'30s for them to break with the International Communist Party and to develop their own independent way of going. I think they produced some very good stuff—Rahv's work on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and Henry James for instance.

I didn't write my dissertation on that but by the time it was all over I had had enough research done for two or three dissertations by the standards of the time. And so that didn't hurt me, it just hindered me in terms of getting things done. And so 1969 was the turning point for me because that December the MLA conference in Chicago, I think it was, gave out some very dismal news. And the news was that the market, the academic market for professors had collapsed. And it just so happened that I was [also] reading the work of R.P. Blackmur at the time. And he said in a 1954 essay that there is a crisis in Western intellectual life coming and it will be here by 1970 or earlier if there is a depression. He described the crisis simply: in the Western world many more educated people are being turned out than there are meaningful jobs for them to take, whether they're professors—he was thinking mostly of that even though he didn't go to college himself, but he was a full professor of poetry at Princeton. [laughs] And, you know, just in terms of, you know, how that affected me personally. I was knocked off my chair

[by Blackmur's prescience] because I was married with kids, no money and no money coming. I needed a job. And this just hit me between the eyes.

And so what happened was I wrote my dissertation, I decided to write my dissertation on Blackmur whereupon I immersed myself in all his work.

**Steinhoff:** Mmmhhh

**Marr:** And learned about, became a kind of I suppose an authority on the history of the New Criticism. In [that] movement he was somewhat anomalous both because he was a northerner and because he took a turn into [the criticism of] prose fiction that none of the other two or three most prominent New Critics did. The possible exception if you want to include Robert Penn Warren, he certainly went that way. But not Ransom, not Brooks and so on, certainly not Tate and not a lot of the other really astute critics of poetry that are closely associated with them even if they're not technically or conventionally referred to as New Critics.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah.

**Marr:** So, Blackmur was my guy. That didn't work out because I simply couldn't do it. I didn't know what to do with him. I got a command of him but I didn't know what to do with it.

**Steinhoff:** Mmmhhh.

**Marr:** And so I ended up writing a dissertation on, the structure of it was a collection of essays and so Blackmur got one essay and my other essays were on Emerson, Whitman, William James. I think I have another one, I can't remember, I thought I had another one. In my book I have more than that.

**Steinhoff:** That's right, Joseph Heller.

**Marr:** Joseph Heller.

**Steinhoff:** Ralph Ellison comes in.

**Marr:** Ralph Ellison, yeah, but not in my dissertation. Because I didn't know at the time that there was this kind of interesting intellectual line of descent from Emerson to Ellison.

**Steinhoff:** Mmmhhh.

**Marr:** And it's more than just, I mean I would argue, or did argue in my book that it amounts to more than just what you might think of when you understand that he was named Ralph Waldo Ellison on account of the fact that his father was so taken with Emerson's works that he honored him by naming his son that way. It was more than that, at least I thought there was [more].

So that gets us to, well let's just jump to February of 1971. I'm teaching at the University of Idaho in the English department, not enjoying it of course. I was an instructor and had the usual class load of English composition and survey of American literature. I don't think I was very good at it at all. But, my officemate at WSU [1968-70], Rudy Martin, he had landed a job at the new college [in Olympia] as a member of the planning faculty. And so during the year, of course that was 1970-71, the planning year, and he was one of 18 people hired as planning faculty members. So then as it happened everybody hired their friends, I mean Merv Cadwallader hired Byron Youtz, Larry Eickstaedt and Bob Sluss, all three of whom he had worked with at Old Westbury.<sup>1</sup>

**Steinhoff:** Mmmhhh.

**Marr:** Okay. So it went like that. Rudy got me hired, at least he got me an interview is how I like to think of it. I think what happened, I can't attest to this, but I think what happened [was] there was a kind of informal understanding amongst the planning faculty and the early deans that each planning faculty member would get a few hires. Not exactly the same [number] in every case, so if you know somebody, and you think he'd be right for this new place, let's take a look. And that's how it went. So then in February of '71, which is about I guess strictly speaking six or seven months into the planning year because they started in the summer, you know, the previous summer. I got an interview here and was hired, I got a job offer right away.

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<sup>1</sup> From Oregon State University came Beryl Crowe and Sid White, (presumably) trailing Don Humphrey, one of the three founding deans.

**Steinhoff:** Do you remember the interview?

**Marr:** Oh yes, quite a bit of it anyway. The most rigorous part of it was at the hands of one of the librarians, I'm blocking her name<sup>2</sup> but she didn't stay here that long. She was quite interested in interdisciplinary work: "why do you think you can do this, what do you have to offer?" Very friendly but very perceptive and very dogged. And she really took an interest in me as a future teacher and colleague. There was a kind of, I didn't know it at the time but I quickly found out, there was a kind of real ethos of equality and egalitarianism amongst staff and faculty. And no one, for instance, thought twice about the fact that I would get an hour interview with her as opposed to another hour interview with, say, a dean, or a faculty member or something.

And I remember walking into Charlie McCann's trailer office, I think it was [in] a trailer because there weren't any buildings [yet] that could be used for much.

**Steinhoff:** Mmmhhh.

**Marr:** And telling him, it's so laughable at this point for me, I said, well, sort of in the spirit of Be Warned, I see myself as a Marxist. And I see him now kind of suppressing a laugh because, come on, you're about as much of a Marxist as my cat is.

**Steinhoff:** But, it's what, it's 1971, so you're 27, 28?

**Marr:** 27, will turn 28 later in the year.

**Steinhoff:** And how many kids do you have at this point?

**Marr:** Three.

**Steinhoff:** Three? Wow. So there's actually quite a lot on the line. And yet it felt like the kind of space in which it was appropriate, or possible or at least feasible to make that speech act, that declaration.

**Marr:** That's right. I mean, what's laughable about it to me is that, I mean, did I think he was going to feel threatened? Come on, let's get serious. And the truth is I knew very little about Marxism, socialism,

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<sup>2</sup> Her name was Monica Caulfield.

the history thereof, radical movements, or anything. I simply had sort of gotten a good taste of it and was interested in it and a lot of it went back to my work on the *Partisan Review*. So I wasn't a complete idiot but there was so much yet to know and to get rigorously introduced to, if not further than just introduced. But that's hindsight talking, you know. So I remember that from the interview.

I know that the deal was to assign escorts [to interviewees]. My guy was Willi Unsoeld. He bagged out for whatever reason I don't know. So I can't remember who squired me around actually. There wasn't that much to it, but it wasn't Rudy and it wasn't Beryl Crowe.

**Steinhoff:** What did Evergreen seem like as a place to arrive at—as a potential place to live, to move your family to?

**Marr:** I was absolutely thrilled for the opportunity. I was head over heels enthusiastic about the very idea of interdisciplinary study. I said under accomplishments [on the sheet I was asked to fill out], "I stayed as true as I could to the founding vision of Evergreen as a place for serious learning and teaching. A vision, at the center of which, is Charles McCann's watchword, 'No chicken shit.'" That means, amongst other things [such as keeping the college administration lean], at least how I took it, it means no repeating of past performances. Just because you have a lecture in the can doesn't mean much. Everything has to be renewed and refreshed all the time. Obviously no rote learning [for students], everything is going to be dialogic, you know all the interactions [with colleagues] around serious matters of teaching and learning, but it's going to be dialogical and cooperative.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> But why? What is there to be said for interdisciplinary teaching and learning? Advocates of interdisciplinarity in the 1960s treated the question theoretically. Evergreen promised to treat it practically by having teachers from different academic disciplines teach together in teams. Team-teaching would contribute, we thought, to a better educational experience for students. Myself, I found this to be true in the main. Much more important to me was the opportunity afforded teachers from different disciplines teaching together to overcome their own trained incapacity. In modern times, Blackmur wrote, knowledge has become so specialized that the production, so to speak, of knowledge yields a surprising new form of ignorance. It is this ignorance, highly specialized knowledge, this New Illiteracy, to use Blackmur's term, that I believed team teaching could effectively challenge, to the personal and professional benefit of the curious teacher and students. The teacher would not unlearn, or throw over, his or her specialty but relearn it. Bob Sluss, an entomologist and member of the planning faculty, once told me that teaching in teams with colleagues from across the curriculum made him a better entomologist. He had never heard of R. P. Blackmur.

**Steinhoff:** Mmmhhh

**Marr:** And open ended. The old model of teaching was the teacher has a certain amount of knowledge and he has to pour it into these empty vessels called students. That was not my experience when I was a student at Iowa, and once it got described that way I could see the wrongness of it [for those whose experience in college could be accurately described that way]. But I could also see everywhere the results of it, people for whom that had been their educational experience, they said so, and it was true and it [sounded] awful [to me]. We have to do better than that. We have to give them [students] something that we are in a position to give them, if we're talking about *giving* them anything, and that is an opportunity to throw themselves into the great tradition. And it was only much later that the great tradition got debunked somewhat, but nonetheless it's, I felt something that each generation owes to the next. What did I know about Plato, or Aristotle, or Locke or Marx when I was young? I found out about that later. That's what education was for me, Shakespeare and all the rest. What did I know about the past, or how to think historically? Nothing. The new generation deserves the opportunity to learn these things. We owe that to them, and we need to guide them into it, and through it and see what they can do with it. That's basically how I thought about it. And it just seemed to me that's *exactly* what Evergreen styled itself as making possible for people.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah. And you'd been in Idaho.

**Marr:** Yes.

**Steinhoff:** Struggling in the position that was, it sounds like, much more on the normal schedule.

**Marr:** Very much so, yeah.

**Steinhoff:** In your application letter or your application essay you identify [yourself] as a student of two intellectual historians: Christopher Lasch and Mary G. Land.<sup>4</sup> And specifically with Mary G. Land you

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<sup>4</sup> I regret not having mentioned Stow Persons in my application essay, but today, some fifty-five years since I was introduced to American intellectual history in his classes, I see how fundamental he was in my education.



identify her vision of a reunification of knowledge. So I can only imagine what's it's like to have had that insight in working with her, having struggled to figure out your dissertation topic and then settling on something—finding your way through it and then getting a job at Idaho and realizing that you're just going to have to hammer this row of nails henceforth, unless something changes.

**Marr:** Right. Unless something changes, that's right. The Evergreen job was a great opportunity for me because before the market collapsed in the academic world, I mean when I got my first job at Bradley University in the summer of '67. The future couldn't have looked brighter for aspiring teachers, I mean many people got their masters degrees, went off to teach a few years and then they would come back and do their Ph.D. And you could get a decent job with a master's degree, you were just going to be an instructor of course, but by the standards of the time it wasn't bad.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah.

**Marr:** But what a cruel thing the market is because if you didn't time it right, and of course you're always advised not to time the market, you could be there in your one or two or three years working as an instructor, and buying a house and paying the bills. And during that period everything could collapse, and your whole plan of going back for the Ph.D., if you're going to implement that plan, you'd have to do it under *very* severe constraints, unless you've got money from home, or something.

**Steinhoff:** Exactly, some kind of backup.

**Marr:** You've got to have something.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah, a parachute in your briefcase.

**Marr:** You've got it. And it happened.

**Steinhoff:** I'm sure. This is the classic bubble.

**Marr:** The classic bubble, yeah.

**Steinhoff:** Okay, so, Evergreen *sounds* like an ideal place. You're offered the job, you get the job, you take the job, you move here, but the school hasn't actually really started yet. It's telling a story about

itself, and you've told a story as well about how, yeah, this is the place to go. So what happens once you get here? The doors open up and actually those vessels, according to the prior educational model, now actually are collaborators. I'm just curious, once the students, the customers, the clients, the people with whom you're going to work, what happens when they walk in? And all the other faculty who get hired.

**Marr:** Well, there was a plan for the first year. The whole curriculum consisted of team-taught programs.

**Steinhoff:** Mmmhhh

**Marr:** With a teeny little segment of individual study, I mean like one faculty member [Peter Robinson] was assigned to that. He sponsored some individual study. Everyone else taught in teams, and I taught in a team of five—I don't know if we want to talk about that in any detail. But it was called "The Individual, the Citizen and the State." And it was basically a theme-based program that took us through some of the basic texts of western civilization without much of an historical framework. But the guy from the planning faculty who was in charge of it—not in charge because that wouldn't be the right word.

**Steinhoff:** The coordinator.

**Marr:** The coordinator. David Hitchens, he was an American historian. And the other four of us were new that year. Betty Estes, who was an historian of science and mathematics, Kirk Thompson, who was a political theorist, and Paul Marsh who was a political scientist who had done his work on political cartoons, and me. And the students were very interesting because the college had drawn—its reputation was nationwide, curiously enough. You know the word had gotten out that there was this place. And we had transfer students from Ivy League schools, we had people who had just completed their two years at a community college in Washington, we had freshmen who had just been in high school—quite a range. And the few Ivy League refugees were not by any means the stars of the show, but they brought an interesting bunch of experiences. Some of which had to do with the alienating

experience that they'd had as students at some of these places in the east. I [also] had two certified schizophrenics in my first class.

**Steinhoff:** Mmmhhh

**Marr:** Michael and I can't remember the other one right off.<sup>5</sup> But they were like tag team wrestlers, when one was crazy the other one was silent, and then they'd flip it and it was very difficult to handle the group.

**Steinhoff:** This would have been in your seminar?

**Marr:** In my seminar. The seminars were [held in] seminar offices.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah.

**Marr:** So my office was in my [seminar]room.

**Steinhoff:** I see.

**Marr:** That whole structure [seminar-offices] went by the board not very many years later. So now you just have classrooms and you have your own [office]. Everybody smoked.

**Steinhoff:** Mmmhhh

**Marr:** The few who didn't, I just in hindsight pity them because, you know, the [air in the] room was thick.

**Steinhoff:** They were fumigated.

**Marr:** They were fumigated. One little guy by the name of John Foster, turned out to be one of my best students. He was asthmatic, [a] brilliant kid, sat in the corner, tried to get a purchase on a part of the atmosphere that he could handle. [*laughing*] I had another student who later became a trustee of the college, she was one of Ted Bundy's first girlfriends. In hindsight, since we're looking at it this way, I'm sure she thought, "I dodged a bullet."

**Steinhoff:** Mmmhhh

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<sup>5</sup> Jon

**Marr:** And then about halfway through the first quarter, a number of students and I started talking about having a different seminar, an additional, off-the-books kind of seminar. And it was going to be on one book, Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*. So we put together the Marcuse Seminar, and it met once a week at night [for the rest of the academic year] with its own little reading list and music because, for instance, we obviously had to listen to some German music since it was Marcuse who said, "We must revoke the 9<sup>th</sup> *Symphony*." So we had to listen to [Beethoven's] 9<sup>th</sup> *Symphony* to see what all the talk was about. But we read some Hegel and some Marx. We were also reading Marx in the regular class, we were reading the early manuscripts and some of the sociological writings. You may be aware of the Bottomore Collection, it's a two volume [edition], *very* well edited.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah.

**Marr:** So that if you wanted to know what he meant by "labor," you got enough there to get it, and it wasn't just a smattering.

**Steinhoff:** Right.

**Marr:** If you want to know about "alienation" you got enough on that, too [enough to get started].

**Steinhoff:** Yeah.

**Marr:** And so forth.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah, you could actually see the shape of the thought as opposed to just this one paragraph.

**Marr:** Yes. Very well done. And the introduction was good. So off we went with the Marcuse Seminar. And it was very successful in so far as the discussions [were concerned], everybody was absolutely dedicated to it, they read and poured over and banged their heads against the wall of *One-Dimensional Man*. They came ready and eager every week. That became the core group of something I taught by myself the second year, called "Studies in History and Culture," which was the same kind of thing, basically, history and literature and philosophy.

**Steinhoff:** Right, but a one-seater as opposed to a five-seater.

**Marr:** Yeah. And that was somewhat heretical because what about team teaching? Indeed. It wasn't simply a given, it was a problem, team-teaching. ["How do we do it?"] So we talked all kinds of nice stuff before the college began with students, but once it did begin, [some of us asked,] "What have we done here! What is this?" There's no "how-to" about it. [We worried,]"Are we doing it right?" "I don't know, are we?"

**Steinhoff:** Right, what are the criteria?

**Marr:** Yeah, I mean, really. You can say there were none or you can say, whoa, serious intellectual work. Well that's just backs up the question a step. What's *that*? So... But that became, we actually put together a little publication of the final papers that the students did.

**Steinhoff:** This is in the second program?

**Marr:** This is in the second program, yes. And that should be in the archives somewhere too, the book itself.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah.

**Marr:** But, you know, a couple of the kids were really something. I mean, John Foster, the little asthmatic guy I was telling you about, he and Greg Renault, who later changed the pronunciation of his name to the French pronunciation, went off to graduate school more or less at the same time at York [University], in Canada, to study, basically to study Marx and neo-Marxism. That was the home base of *Telos*, York. John got his Ph.D. there and went on to become, he's still at the University of Oregon.

**Steinhoff:** He's got a middle name that he uses, Bellamy.

**Marr:** John Bellamy Foster, yes.

**Steinhoff:** I was going to ask, but I was going to let it emerge.

**Marr:** No, that's true.

**Steinhoff:** He's got a very provocative analysis of Marx. It's not even an analysis, it's more a description, but it's an analytical description in which he works on Marx's understanding of the relationship between

the productivity of land and the productivity of factories. And what happens when you move populations off the land into factories but you still have to feed them. Does research looking up whoever it is, Justus von Liebig, who was doing analysis of how to put phosphorous and nitrogen into the soil. And as a consequence Foster has, I mean you're probably familiar with this, but an analysis of a metabolic rift that he derives from Marx's analysis here. Which actually is really useful when thinking about climate change.

**Marr:** Yes.

**Steinhoff:** That discussion shows up in all kinds of provocative, rich places.

**Marr:** Yeah.

**Steinhoff:** To this day. And is critiqued in various ways. And I think appropriately so, but it's a major contribution in terms of responding to the challenge of the question, "Well, Marx wasn't really thinking about the natural world."

**Marr:** Right.

**Steinhoff:** And the idea of labor as, I think Marx's definition of labor as the means by which the human animal controls the metabolism with nature. I think it's that definition that's crucial for Foster.

**Marr:** Yes.

**Steinhoff:** The metabolic component.

**Marr:** That's the core idea I think of his *Marx's Ecology*. He told me recently, last 10 years ago I guess, about how he was helped along his way in his thinking by a colleague there. I think it was at Oregon, it might have been somewhere else, but in any case it was a woman who was more in the biological sciences than he was. Of course he wasn't there at all except in so far as he got there through this idea of metabolism.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah, yeah, and so was he a transfer student? Do you remember?

**Marr:** No, he was a freshman.

**Steinhoff:** He was a freshman?

**Marr:** Yeah, his father [owned] a bookstore [in Olympia], Orca Books, his sister now runs Orca Books

**Steinhoff:** That's right, a townie.

**Marr:** Yeah, he's a townie, that's right. Just the nicest kid. He wrote his piece for me, not for me, but in the second year program I was talking about, on [Max] Weber. And he never really, I mean he became the editor of *Monthly Review*, he was kind of the heir to the famous editors there<sup>6</sup>. But he's not anything but a very nimble Marxist thinker. There's nothing, that I know of anyway, no trace of the kind of cast iron dogmatism, in the politics of course, or even in the intellectual substance in his thinking. He's quite nimble.

**Steinhoff:** So maybe when you were saying "I'm a Marxist" to the college's president as your sort of parting shot, you were actually saying, "Not only am I a Marxist, but I might make some."

**Marr:** [ *laughing* ] Little did I know.

**Steinhoff:** If we were to put some pieces together, "I'm going to make some in the model of, the sort of non-doctrinaire *Partisan Review*, that kind of capacious, intellectual, critical, reflective, non-doctrinaire analytical approach."

**Marr:** That would be a very charitable interpretation. But, I'll buy it. And actually by '73 or '74 something clicked with me about the neo-Marxist project at *Telos*. And it was not a good click, and I threw it over. I thought this is formulaic and question-begging in the worst sense and I'm not going to have anything to do with it. It's more and more theoreticism for its own sake and completely removed from human experience, as far as I could tell. And then of course I realized 15 years later that was being repeated in literary theory. But, that's in the future. So I got rid of that and I took up, I had been under the influence of Hannah Arendt for a long time through my associations with [my Evergreen colleague] Beryl Crowe and a political theorist at Berkeley by the name of Norman Jacobsen. He came up here for a

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Sweezy and Harry Magdoff.

summer of teaching and he and I taught together in a program on immigrants in America, European immigrants. Through Norman and Beryl I became interested in Arendt. All throughout the '70s I gradually got my way through all of her work, all of her published work in English anyway.

**Steinhoff:** Interesting.

**Marr:** Made a big difference. I didn't realize until much later just how Heideggerian it was, but nonetheless it was a massive influence on me, her political theory, her political science.

**Steinhoff:** And that was something that emerged out of collaboration with faculty.

**Marr:** Yeah. I didn't know anything about her before I got here.

**Steinhoff:** Right.

**Marr:** Almost nothing even in the first year, it started in I guess it would have been the third year. So that was a big deal for me.

**Steinhoff:** And that came into your own teaching then as well.

**Marr:** Well, in the sense that I taught her work, two or three times, not much really.

**Steinhoff:** Okay.

**Marr:** Arendt influenced how I thought about political things. What is freedom? What is authority? What is a political act? I found her analysis of such questions provocative and useful. I dove more deeply into her work during my first paid leave of absence during fall and winter, 1980-81. [Evergreen had just recently put together a paid leave policy.] During this leave I wrote an essay that I called "What is Living and What is Dead in the Political Thought of Hannah Arendt," parts of which I used in my book *American Worlds Since Emerson* (1988). It was also during this leave that I discovered the work of J. L. Austin and so-called ordinary language philosophy, or Oxford philosophy of language. I studied all of Austin's work and much of the standard commentary on it. I also discovered Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.

**Steinhoff:** Ok.



**Marr:** And so that was yet another turn for me. And [these thinkers have] never left me.

**Steinhoff:** And was there a stimulus into their work?

**Marr:** I suppose, but I don't know if I'm right about this. I was also interested in what was going on in literary theory because the thing about the '70s at Evergreen is that the humanities faculty were living in an academic bubble of isolation. They had no idea, not a single one of us had any idea, what had happened at John Hopkins in 1968 when Derrida [made his debut in the US].<sup>7</sup> They just didn't know [the significance of the Hopkins conference on structuralism], just like they didn't know about a whole bunch of other stuff. Like for instance that the case law regarding tenure was being developed [during Evergreen's first decade and a half] and the day would come, we were told by the assistant attorney general that our policy on [faculty] hiring and renewal lay outside the law, period, and we needed to figure that out. There was a bubble. We were so busy like beavers, running around trying to get this place to survive, trying to figure out what the heck we were doing that we didn't know [any of] this. By the middle '70s, maybe '76 or '77, slightly later than the middle, my dissertation advisor said something to me which stumped me. She said, "Dave, I just got back from a conference where I heard yet *another* paper on deconstruction." As if I'm supposed to know what she's talking about.

**Steinhoff:** Right.

**Marr:** I said, "What?" And she had sounded so world-weary, "Not another one on *this stuff*." Well it was new to me, [if I can modify Miranda's marveling at "the brave new world" in *The Tempest*]. So I got into it. I got into it mainly through, I suppose, I mean got into the ordinary language stuff mashed all up with this literary [theory] stuff by going through topics that I thought interesting, like what is the logical

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<sup>7</sup> Evergreen's institutional memory has always been fragmentary at best, as befits a radically forward-looking educational reform project. But "institutional memory" is one of those hoary abstractions that needs to be dissolved to be of use. It has identifiable parts. One of them is the profound differences in graduate education of faculty members who came up before, and those who came up during, the Theory Boom of the late 1970s and after. Possibly the spectacular molecular biology revolution in the late 1980s led to comparable differences in the graduate education of biologists and chemists. This oral history project promises to discover some of the consequences for Evergreen and its future of these upheavals in the Higher Learning.

status of the work of art? What does it mean for a poem to mean something? What is representation and what is its philosophical history? I suspect in the end it was the semiotic theme that kept me going. When Austin talks about meaning you better listen because he's got a precision and an acuity that you weren't going to find in the standard journal articles published by professors teaching in English departments. Notwithstanding their own legitimate claim to precision in writing and thinking.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah.

**Marr:** So, I was kind of doing both at once. Both getting my feet on the ground in what was going on in literary theory and working on Austin and Wittgenstein, mostly Austin.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah, but it's that philosophical model that's got a slightly different focus. And for Austin the poem, a speech act in a poem, however he put it using beautiful language, it's etiolated.

**Marr:** Yeah.

**Steinhoff:** "Go and fetch a falling star." It's for him not the focal point.

**Marr:** True.

**Steinhoff:** Okay, so this is great that we've got, in terms of your own intellectual development, we've been able to sketch in some key transition points. I also am grateful for the description of a bubble. I guess I have a couple of different questions, maybe we can hold the bubble thought for a moment and come back to it. I mean the question there would be, how did you learn about stuff while you were out here in this mossy place? But, maybe the first question would be what was going on in the mossy place? Let's hear more about that beaver activity and the day to day, the full-fledged all hands on deck operation.

**Marr:** Well, exactly. I think that's the right thing to do next. From 1971 until [around]1976, it was a free for all. [The curriculum and faculty teams were new every year.] Programs got designed by faculty members, it was definitely a ground-up operation. Nobody from the dean's office said, "Here's the program you're going to teach." No, the faculty said to the deans, "Here's the program we're going to

teach.” So they put together programs. [A few were turned down, including one of mine, called “Darwin, Marx and Freud”]. In the humanities and social sciences there were several explosions, programs that just blew up. There was one called “Freud and Jung” and it was put together with great enthusiasm, I think it was four if not five faculty members. One was a self-styled Jungian, had studied at the Jung Institute in Switzerland, this is Kirk Thompson, a political theorist. Another one was a self-styled Marxist. Then there were two or three others who were keenly interested in all of that but not self-styled in [either] of those ways. It simply blew up. I mean it was close to being physical violence in the seminar room because of arguments [between the Marxist and Jungian “wings”]. So that blew up, the dean had to come in, make peace. He ended up saying to one faculty member who was one of the most inflexible ideologues, “You have to go find something else to do. Now.”

**Steinhoff:** Fulfill your contract in some other way.

**Marr:** Yeah. Now I don’t want to leave you with the impression that programs are blowing up left and right.

**Steinhoff:** No, but that they did is significant.

**Marr:** Yeah. There were three or four [other exploding programs during the earliest years], and it was all quite exciting in some ways. Other programs were just humming right along. The program I was in at the time of the [“Freud and Jung” blow-up in 1973-74] was right down the hall [in the Library Building]— [it was] called “Power and Personal Vulnerability,” in which I taught with Beryl Crowe, a political sociologist, Sandra Simon who was in English, and Fred Young who was a mathematician. And we read, it was a reading [list] that mostly was the handiwork of Beryl, he was one of the most influential faculty members in my life, in the ’70s anyway. You know, he was a student of [John Schaar, Sheldon Wolin and] Norman Jacobsen’s at Berkeley<sup>8</sup> so he brought in Hannah Arendt [and Adorno’s] studies of the

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<sup>8</sup> The so-called Berkeley School of Wolin, Schaar and Jacobson, in the political science department. Arendt taught at Berkeley for one year when Beryl was in the political science doctoral program there.

authoritarian personality, all of that kind of interesting—he would give these absolutely incomprehensible lectures on Talcott Parsons’ pattern variables. I [once] said, “Beryl, I don’t think the students understand what you’re talking about and I don’t think it’s their fault.” It didn’t matter to him. [Someday they’ll understand, he’d say.]

**Steinhoff:** Right.

**Marr:** I gave a lecture that was just an appalling mess once, I don’t even know what it was about— it was just atrocious. And I said to him, “Beryl, I really let everybody down.” He didn’t say, “there, there,” he just said, to all the students in the program he said, “You’ll do better next time. You made a couple mistakes, so what?” Kind of like that, he didn’t say those words, he wasn’t censorious but he was not also coddling and maudlin. Nothing at all.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah. How old was he, roughly?

**Marr:** Well, Beryl was—that’s an interesting question by the way, the thing about age. Beryl in 1973 would have been in his middle 40s.

**Steinhoff:** Okay. And you were in your early 30s.

**Marr:** I was just 30.

**Steinhoff:** You were just 30 in ’73, okay.

**Marr:** But that’s a very important point you were just asking about because everybody was young.

**Steinhoff:** Yes.

**Marr:** The oldest, I mean everybody, the president was in his middle 40s. There were a couple of other administrators who maybe were 50, but not more than two. The deans were in their middle 30s [to middle 40s]. So we were all, I was probably the youngest if not—I was *the* youngest or one of the two youngest faculty members then. But as the hiring went on in the ’70s there were changes in the pattern of ages because a lot of refugees would come here, people who had been fired.

**Steinhoff:** Sure.

**Marr:** And who were looking for a home. Some were enthusiastic about interdisciplinary studies, some just said they were enthusiastic because they wanted a job. Because of the collapse in the market that had occurred and there was no recovery from it. And the atmosphere at the college from about the middle point of the first year on, certainly by the second year, was one of desperation in a lot of ways because is the legislature going to shut us down? I mean the first day of class when people who were living in Olympia got in their cars and went off to campus, I remember this distinctly, there were many businesses downtown that were boarded up because they thought the hippies had come to town. But the economic [recession] in the state of Washington hadn't occurred yet, it was [just] about to. And so once it did, every year there was a resolution in the legislature to close the place down. And as these resolutions became more serious in the sense that they were more fleshed out and they weren't just [politicians] popping off, playing to their base, but as they became more serious they became more detailed. "Well, you know, could be a good little police academy. There are other things we could do with this because the buildings are all done now and they're building more buildings. We could do something with that property." And then also connected to that threat of closure was the problem of enrollment.

**Steinhoff:** Yes, exactly, so if a program implodes that's 4 or 5 faculty, but it's also a hundred students.

**Marr:** That's right. And yes we could absorb that but not in the sense of writing it off. They did do other things so the students, you know just looking at it as a bean counter would look at it, they did get served. But there was almost always low enrollment at the college, just like right now, it's been every year there's been—let me put it the other way around. There have been periods of two, or three or four years when it was not that big of a deal. But the fear that we're going to be under-enrolled, the budget is going to be cut, people are going to be laid off, that's built into the fabric of the college.

**Steinhoff:** It's chronic.

**Marr:** It's just chronic.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah, and things do stabilize once a new president rolls in, in terms of this front. And I guess was that '76 when Dan Evans?

**Marr:** Oh, you've got me there.

**Steinhoff:** Somewhere in that period.

**Marr:** It's a little later than that, I believe, but not much.

**Steinhoff:** I want to go back to the generations thing to see if I can draw you out a little bit more because I think I agree with you that it's very important that this was a faculty that was predominately in their 30s and 40s. Some of who would have taught elsewhere so I'm presuming that Beryl Crowe would have started his career elsewhere and then came to Evergreen. So there's this element of people who had been fired elsewhere or who were recruited and attracted. I'm curious to know more about that dynamic, the youthfulness of your colleagues.

**Marr:** Yes. How to get at that. You're quite right, a large number of people, maybe most, had college teaching experience when they started here. There's some exceptions because they came from other walks of life, but by and large. I mean, Byron Youtz, for instance, [had been] the provost [or bull dean] at Old Westbury, before that he was the acting president at Reed, and before that he was, you know, teaching physics at Reed.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah.

**Marr:** And Bob Sluss and Larry Eickstaedt, I mean, Larry didn't [I think] have much in the way of experience with teaching because he [had] just finished his degree [when he] went to Old Westbury and [then he] came here right away. But by and large you had, like Rudy had six or seven years of teaching at a community college in California<sup>9</sup>, and David Hitchens had taught in Florida<sup>10</sup>, Betty Estes had taught in

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<sup>9</sup> Modesto Junior College.

<sup>10</sup> New College, where Will Humphries (philosophy), a planning faculty member, and Peter Robinson (political science), hired in 1971, also taught.

New Jersey<sup>11</sup>. Um, I know there's a question here that has to do with something important, I'm not sure what it is. Maybe this will get at it by a back door route. Because we didn't know what we were doing but we thought we did. And as the years rolled by in the '70s there [emerged an unforeseen] problem of generational continuity from one year to the next amongst faculty. And this problem was tinged by a kind of envy. The best expression of it came many years later [probably around 1985] when someone said [a little defensively and enviously], "Well, I wasn't present at creation, I got hired here in the '80s." So the planning faculty kind of got elevated in the minds [of faculty members hired after the year I was hired] as some sort of group of wise old heads. And then there's the first year faculty, and they weren't maybe quite as wise, but they had students to work with. And then the people who got hired the second year, the third year, the fourth year, the fifth year, they would come into a college that was going, it was a going enterprise but they'd say, "Well, how do you do it here? How do you teach here?" And answer came there none. You just can't answer that question in the way that the question wants to be answered. It's not the right question. And so the problem with generational continuity rears its head. And even the absurd expression "the Evergreen tradition" pops up in the '70s The Evergreen tradition of what? It's an empty phrase. Maybe it keeps the noises that go bump in the night from scaring you but it doesn't mean anything. So, I didn't find that any of the people who had more years on them than I did, and more experience, lorded anything over me. Really was up to me to find my way in conjunction with the people I wanted to teach with and wanted to teach with me. I think that was pretty widespread.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah.

**Marr:** I did have one encounter with Willi Unsoeld, which I thought was very unfortunate. I gave a lecture, there was a lecture duel that was put together between, it was a duel between Pete Sinclair and myself in the first year because all of these midget Marxists running around with me as their leader put me up as the standard bearer for our side and Pete emerged as the standard bearer of rugged

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<sup>11</sup> Fairleigh Dickinson University.

individualism. And remember *The Con Ill Controversy*, remember that one? This was a [popular] book by a Yale Law professor. It was about [three levels of consciousness, 1,2, and 3, with 3 being the most socially and politically enlightened]. So we gave lectures [more or less related to the themes in this book to our two programs, “The Individual, the Citizen and the State”(mine, with about 100 students) and “The Individual in America” (Pete’s, with about 160 students)], I didn’t understand a word that Pete Sinclair said, I don’t think anybody understood a word I said, I don’t even know what we were talking about. Probably the rough idea was [the familiar late-1960s theme of] what comes first, you have to get your head straight and then you take [political] action? Or you have to take action and then you get your head straight [through having taken action]? Weighty questions.<sup>12</sup> And afterwards Willi Unsoeld, who was the windbag of windbags, in my opinion, he took me aside and presumed to tell me what I did wrong in the lecture. That did not sit well with me.

**Steinhoff:** Mmmhhh And that was your first year?

**Marr:** That was my first year, yeah.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah, and he was older.

**Marr:** He was older. He [had] climbed Mt. Everest, he was on the first American team [to reach the top of] Mt. Everest.

**Steinhoff:** Right. And you’re like, “I read the whole *Partisan Review*, what are you talking about? I also read all of R. P. Blackmur.”

**Marr:** That’s right! And he would [have said], “What?” Because he was all about experiential education and that was one of the cleavages, if you want to put it that way in the early years, experiential education versus book learning.

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<sup>12</sup> Beneath the “dueling” lectures event lay a rarely acknowledged but important tension within Evergreen’s faculty in the first years, succinctly formulated by Kirk Thompson: Are we organizers or liberators? Organizers, said Kirk. I agreed, mostly.



**Steinhoff:** Yeah. When you were mentioning the Evergreen tradition I was hearing maybe an inkling of something like this. And then also wondering about the name or the category of experiment, which is kind of close to experiential but also there's all the other sort of infrastructural elements that could also answer to the name of an experiment, teaching, etc. But I'm curious to hear more of this cleavage then.

**Marr:** Well, just that it was kind of an ideological struggle between those who fervently believe that [first] you have to take action in the world, political reform, social action, [revolution]. And [as a consequence] your consciousness will change. And those of us who said the opposite. Both sides were wrong because we didn't understand the question in any kind of subtle way at all.

[ *short break* ]

**Steinhoff:** There's another medium or channel that we could consider which would be correspondence.

**Marr:** Yes.

**Steinhoff:** Where I could poke you with a question. I don't know what your time is like, but if you felt like tapping away. I mean, I know you're a writer, that's one thing I know for sure having looked at some, not all, of your portfolios. The first one in particular was quite daunting, all four volumes.

**Marr:** [ *laughs* ] Oh, god.

**Steinhoff:** But it's filled with material that demonstrates that you're taking considerable time and care with language to articulate and try to make sense of what at that time, 1973, was a completely novel experience.

**Marr:** Yes.

**Steinhoff:** And so in so far as I'm recognizing that quality of your character, I just pose it as a possibility that something happened in correspondence as well, as you see fit.

**Marr:** I think all of that is fine with me. You're going to be teaching, and I'm in my twilight years so—I won't say I have nothing to do because I have a lot to do, but if you're up for let's say a couple more of say this length, or one of the longer ones, plus some writing by way of email, that's just fine with me.

**Steinhoff:** Cool. Because I think one thing that could happen in email would be, I'm just hypothesizing right now, but plucking out quotes from some of this historical material and saying, "Can you say more about that?" Or, because included in this historical material are lots of interesting, provocative claims.

**Marr:** Yeah.

**Steinhoff:** And, so, "Where did that come from" "How did that land?"

**Marr:** No, that's great. Because I'm very mindful of the constraints that you're under as a faculty member, you have claims on your time.

[ *discussion about continuing interviews* ]

**Marr:** You envision then a continuing interest in this beyond what you're doing in this first step of the process?

**Steinhoff:** Oh, absolutely. I mean I think, we were saying this a little bit yesterday, but the college suffers from a deficit of historical reflection. There's a lot of mythography.

**Marr:** Yes.

**Steinhoff:** And I celebrate a myth, but I think there's a need for some empirical leavening, or maybe leavening is the opposite, but a different perspective on the school's identity historically. And as it's turning 50 years old, as there's a new president who is actually, I think, making consequential decisions in terms of the placement of priorities. Which I think are for the good, but the more information the faculty has, the more information the school has about what it was, what it is, helps us better determine what it could be. It seems like the school is in this constant process of encountering its potential.

**Marr:** Yeah, that's a good way of putting it.

**Steinhoff:** So this historical bit, sort of the feedback of what has been done, how might that inform what could be done?

**Marr:** Yes, right. That sounds great to me.

One final thought about the '70s, at least today's work on the '70s, I said 1976 maybe '77—that was the beginning of what were then called “specialty areas.” The faculty and the curriculum were regularized in these quasi-departments. Because [a] DTF had [been] formed, and had been formed I think in '75 or so, big DTF. And the result of that work was adopted as official. Now you had, I think it was nine specialty areas [along with what were called Basic Programs]. And the faculty would affiliate with them [the specialty areas], you could affiliate with more than one if you wanted to. Had it not been for almost—to put it differently, it was just by happenstance as a matter of fact that the humanities were included [as a specialty area] in the end. They were almost an afterthought because the structure was devised by [faculty members mainly in] the sciences, and the social sciences and the arts. And it was at that point that it became unmistakably clear to anybody that the two opposite wings of the curriculum, the arts on the one end and the hard sciences on the other, were now quasi-departmentally organized and conceived with the sequencing and repeating programs and so on. And everything between those two wings was, how can I put it, not as much that way. But the corral had been developed. The faculty and the curriculum were gradually being more corralled. And before that happened, from '71 to '75, I guess you could say '76, it was fruit basket upset.

**Steinhoff:** Yes. And that structure emerges out of a DTF whose job had been, whose task was figure this stuff out.

**Marr:** Figure this stuff out, we've had enough of the “chaos.” A new dean came in from the outside, no experience teaching here, [not much] experience teaching anywhere to speak of except maybe as a T.A. And she became the new sheriff in town.

**Steinhoff:** What was her name, do you recall?

**Marr:** Barbara Smith.

**Steinhoff:** Okay.

**Marr:** And she was dean from then until, well, [for at least] 15 years.

**Steinhoff:** And she became a provost too.

**Marr:** Became a provost too. And so her job was to keep us in line. And she was [both] resented and appreciated. She was clearly a fan of computers and business, she was kind of tone deaf to the humanities. But she was dogged and she was strong. I was a dean with her for a while, we weren't enemies exactly but we went to different churches [, had different visions of Evergreen]. [*laughs*] But, I do admire what she accomplished because it was important to do something, and the leadership for doing whatever something might be appropriate was not coming from within the faculty and social sciences themselves, something had to give. [*thumping the table*]

**Steinhoff:** Yeah.

**Marr:** Or the place was simply going to be—

**Steinhoff:** So in terms of this chapter as we formed it today, there were these early years in which the college emerges and it sounds like a lot of great stuff was happening. However, in terms of it being a sustainable model, as you're describing it there was a need for some kind of transformation, a transformation was made. And in your analysis, if I'm following you, this was appropriate, good enough, something to that effect?

**Marr:** Yeah, I'd say so, yeah. Yeah. We couldn't go on as we [had been] forever, something had to happen. It's just departments have their advantages. They hire, they fire, they're regular, they're dependable, and they're not [only] oppressive. That's just simplistic to say so. But, at the same time if you're trying to do something that gets away from the academic department as a fiefdom, as it had become, and do something that's more structurally conducive to the kind of serious teaching and

learning [to which we committed ourselves at Evergreen] then you've got to figure out what that new way of doing it is.

**Steinhoff:** Exactly.

**Marr:** You got to do that. And you just don't know!

**Steinhoff:** Yeah, you can't just keep referring to the other bad old way and say, "We're doing it this new way," without actually articulating what some of the criteria are.

**Marr:** Yeah.

**Steinhoff:** And this would go to a bit of the, you mentioned Thomas Kuhn yesterday and reading him at Iowa, the Copernican Revolution. And then the structure of scientific revolution, the beautiful relationship he poses between a paradigm on the one hand and an anomaly on the other. And everybody remembers paradigm and paradigm shifts, nobody remembers anomaly.

**Marr:** Yeah.

**Steinhoff:** But the beautiful relationship there is that the anomaly is visible as such *only* in relationship to a grid, a paradigm.

**Marr:** That's right.

**Steinhoff:** According to which that anomaly swerves and just can't be computed. So, there's a liability if the school or institution, a social entity, insists on defining itself purely as an anomaly because then it's actually parasitical on the previous paradigm.

**Marr:** Exactly right. And it has no chance in hell at becoming the new paradigm.

**Steinhoff:** Precisely.

**Marr:** Yeah, that's a very good way of putting it.

**Steinhoff:** Was there much Kuhn in the air at all in those days in terms of conversations among faculty?

**Marr:** A little. I mean Betty Estes who I taught with the first year said, "You really have to read the *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*." I said, "Okay, I'll get around to it." Never did at the time. Some.

**Steinhoff:** Some, but not much. Were there particular names that rang out as guiding lights?

**Marr:** Well, I mean there were the pedagogues [and famous educational thinkers], Meiklejohn, you know, Dewey. Theorists I should say. I'd almost want to say no. I'm not sure about it but the bubble was real. We brought ourselves to this place and we inhabited a bubble that we didn't know was a bubble.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah.

**Marr:** In some sense.

**Steinhoff:** And so the Jones' book, *Experiment at Evergreen*, he's trying to supply a genealogy. And I think I'm sure for that founding crew they were, obviously, very aware of the Meiklejohn model and thinking with Dewey and so forth. But it is interesting that that was not, from your experience, carried through other than it being somehow baked in structurally. We're going to do the team-teaching and the seminars and all that infrastructure, but in terms of an actual, I don't know, sort of doctrinal relationship, it was pragmatic rather than doctrinal.

**Marr:** It was and there were arguments about great books versus democracy for education, that's what [education] is for—democracy. There were arguments about that but they never really had great formative influence. I mean, they were certainly there, they just weren't tossed off and then forgotten, but we didn't really know how to reconcile them or even if it was the right thing to try to do that.<sup>13</sup> I mean it [the daily life of Evergreen] was way too amorphous for [these thinkers' ideas] to be treated the way [they deserved]. It eventually did, you eventually had I think this silly thing of the five foci and the seven whatever the hell it is.

**Steinhoff:** Six expectations.

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<sup>13</sup> The most formative curricular move came from the science faculty, for whom the coordinated studies model as defined by Merv Cadwallader and promoted by Richard Jones, was regarded as Procrustean. As early as the mid-70s the then-new provost, Ed Kormondy, a biologist from the faculty, remarked in a public meeting that the faculty seminar, pillar of the model, was a "waste of time." This skepticism about the first versions of team-teaching was grounded in experience that was far removed from the theoretical clashes concerning the role of the great books in liberal education.

**Marr:** That's just nonsense in that it doesn't help. But now you've got this reigning ideology of social justice. If one isn't careful one might think, "Well, it's always been here." No it hasn't. Not in the way you're thinking anyway. It is certainly a product, that idea of academia being the sponsor, one of the sponsors of social justice in the world, is a product of the '80s and '90s.

**Steinhoff:** Yeah, it's not as old as the hills, it's not as old as these trees.

**Marr:** No, it isn't.

**Steinhoff:** It's some moss that's grown on more recently.

**Marr:** Yeah, that's right.

**Steinhoff:** Cool, maybe we can hit pause. I like, "the bubble was real." That's the name of that chapter.

**Marr:** That's the name of that chapter.

**End of Interview**