

CONFRONTING UNITY, UTOPIA, TOTALITY, AND ALIENATION

Seth Adler

CONFRONTING UNITY, UTOPIA, TOTALITY, AND ALIENATION IN THE POLITICS OF BUILDING A NEW LEFT FORMATION

Stanley Aronowitz has called for the formation of a broad-based U.S. left party for a number of decades, and his recent book, *Left Turn: Forging a New Political Future* marks a culmination of years of study, activism and critical analysis of these matters (Aronowitz, 2006). The book provides a rich historical and comparative analysis about how to build a broad based left party in the United States, and is also an incisive analysis of the difficulty of building a Left political party in the U.S. with the type of longevity and power which some left, labor, socialist and communist parties and social movements have attained in other countries. The *Manifesto for a Left Turn*, discussed in this issue of Situations, contains many of the ideas developed in the book (Aronowitz, et. al. 2008).

Why —despite the decades that Aronowitz has called for a political party and as of late, a pre-party or Left formation (e.g., on radio interviews, at conferences, in articles), and despite the persuasive evidence and arguments that Aronowitz has long presented for why one should exist —hasn't this proposal inspired widespread debate? I will attempt to address this question in an approach that begins from the inside and concentrates less on a view that explains the difficulty all leftist party building proposals would encounter in the U.S. today and will examine key dimensions of Aronowitz's proposal, specifically its utopian thrust, concept of totality, its generative and comprehensive force, strategic dimensions and inspirational elements, along with alienating and project-undermining dynamics. I will also work through a constructive critique of revolutionary left and World Social Forum totality and utopian oriented theory and politics in relation to Aronowitz's proposal. Overall, I will examine Aronowitz's compelling strategy to challenge leftists to debate what could build left wing power —in relation to something that provokes a debate about the first steps of party building, while indicating how leftists might take a closer look at the personal, interpersonal and group dynamics of the alienating politics of organization while involved in the organization of left politics.

ARONOWITZ'S PARTY BUILDING PROPOSAL

I will briefly review the more *explicit* utopian and totality oriented dimensions of Aronowitz's proposal as a means to frame an extended examination of the *less acknowledged* utopian, totality and unity-generating dimensions.

Aronowitz discusses the importance of the role of intellectuals as activists in building a new left formation. He asserts that before a party or left political formation can become a mass organization, some number of people must come together to create a basis to bring others into a single organizational form. Aronowitz's main appeal is to people in the "new" social movements, the global justice, anti-war, environmental, as well as the labor/workers movements (Aronowitz, 2006: 106, 195-197).

Part of the processes through which others in addition to Aronowitz could conceptualize this type of organization —and develop creative theoretical and strategic thinking about it —entails forms of utopian-inflected and totality-oriented thinking. (A totality-oriented analytic is synchronic; it focuses on envisioning a whole and its vast/infinite interconnections in any given "conceptually frozen" moment —whether that whole is society, capitalism, or racial formation for example. Comparatively speaking the analytic orientation of utopian thinking uses totality oriented analytics, but is more diachronic, i.e., oriented to conceptualizing a whole/e.g., an ideal society, and its vast/infinite interconnections by conceiving it in relation to linking past, present, and future. Aronowitz often integrates these standpoints in his work (see, e.g., Aronowitz, 2006: 188).

Aronowitz's proposal entails forms of utopian and totality-oriented thought that might be called pragmatic. He argues for example, that a guiding standpoint for the formation of this party is one that holds, "that the present is the time to consider the 'not-yet' of an egalitarian democratic society, and that the movement in its internal life must be prefigurative of the new society" (op. cit, 2006:177).

As per Aronowitz, this perspective would inspire people to think and act politically in relation to developing a holistic understanding of the world. He links this understanding, by example, to multiple utopian-inflected traditions, including anarchism, socialism, and communism. Hence one would develop not only holistic ways of perceiving capitalism and problems of capitalism, but would also see alternatives, in the present, to capitalism. Such thinking involves a totality standpoint in the conception of capitalism

as an embedded, e.g., overdetermined, contradictory whole. In the context of party building, this type of holistic thought would, according to Aronowitz, also embrace existing left utopian projects and alternatives. As examples in this regard, he examines the “feasible” social-economic utopian-inflected models of Michael Albert, Seymour Mellman and Gar Alperavitz (op. cit. 177; 199-219). These “incrementalist” projects detail political economic alternatives to capitalism that do not transform capitalism (or demonize it) in one fell swoop.

The second part of the quote above indicates how one can conceive of the organization in relation to a utopian-inflected outlook, to wit: “the movement in its internal life must be prefigurative of the new society”. Thus this utopian-inflected, totality-oriented vision compels leftists to create in their pragmatic politics and organizational relationships, processes that embody the desired qualities of the society they want to create (democratic, struggling against/free of —racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, xenophobia, denigration of nature, supportive of non-capitalist political economic alternatives to mention but a few aspects).

A key question for Aronowitz is what does this utopian-inflected proposal offer regarding an applicable theory/practice making character of the organization that would differentiate it from more single-issue (or single sector) focused left traditions and from the Democratic Party? On a practical-strategic level what this radical view involves is an abiding praxis-oriented standpoint and analytic (as well as a “radically intransigent” anti-capitalist/alternatives to capitalism stance [op. cit. 167-168, 171]. That analytical standpoint is of a mobilized powerful U.S. left —and the imagining of such (which is a key orientation at present, since there is no such movement today) —as a basis to understand how even apparently non-radical reforms can become effectively radical and enduring, i.e., when understood as part of a powerful left party and social movement “in motion”.

Finally, as per Aronowitz, if the party became powerful this utopian-inflected and totality-oriented standpoint could provide a more coherent sense (than now exists) to party activists, leftists, and masses of people as to what it would mean to be a leftist (see, e.g., op. cit. 106, 110).

This indicates some of the explicit utopian, totality, unity-generating and radically imaginative dimensions of his party/Left formation project. What then are some of the less explicit or implied utopian and totality-oriented qualities, and what might be alienating about them?

FRAMING PARTY BUILDING PROCESSES IN THE IRONIES OF UTOPIAN THOUGHT

The utopian dimensions of Aronowitz's proposal have at least one thing in common with other utopias (e.g., Robert Owen's Utopian Socialist New Lamark community, or at present, Chris Spannos's Real Utopia [2008], and to a lesser extent, More's ironic "nowheresville" Utopia [2001]). Like these and other utopian projects, Aronowitz's proposal would create something of an exclusive community or communities in the present. That is what is hinted at in the second part of the above quote, to the effect that, "the movement in its internal life must be prefigurative of the new society". On the other hand, I would quickly note that unlike these other projects, his project's utopian dimensions (e.g., the exclusive community-defining/exclusionary dimensions) are more opaque – ie, more implicit than explicit.

One reason why people might produce these utopian dynamics ways in more opaque ways via the actualization of the political party model is that the political party form that these dynamics would be pre-figured in does not fit the well known models of utopia. One question is what is this opaque utopianism about?

I will frame the analysis in the first part of this essay in relation to my thoughts about what constitutes one of the salient *contradictions* of utopian theory.

Stated broadly, any notion of utopia as an ideal or perfect community/society would be absent of any sense of what a utopia is, if there were no sense of *what is imperfect*, or of what this community is "ideal" or "utopic" in relation to —what it excludes from its "vision". In other words, a utopian community necessitates its constitutive "negative" conditions of existence. This is to say, it necessitates myriad relational (psychologically and actively produced) mutual exclusions.

In terms of Aronowitz's proposal, this means that to *try to expunge* negative or excluded meanings that would render this broad-based party organization imperfect or undermine the purity of its utopic ideal (say asserting that the party needn't be anti-capitalist) is, as per this logic, *impossible*. It is not that such elements that might corrupt the utopian drive towards its ideals (e.g., if actively embraced) cannot be excluded from party members conscious awareness —e.g., via comprehensive conscious exclusionary activity or moral suasion vis-à-vis exhorting the evils that such conditions repre-

sent. Indeed, they can. But because they can be *consciously* excluded or marginalized doesn't mean they can be as easily excluded in *less consciously* understood and less explicitly articulated ways indicated by words like the following: unconscious, unintentional, liminal, semi-conscious, repressed, sublimated/repressively sublimated, emotional, implicated, insinuated, via non-verbal gestures and activity, ideologically, and so on.

What this focus on the intimate relation between the negative and positive means in regard to any utopian proposal or community and its possible alienating dimensions is that one would want to see how the protean negative and positive (good and bad) dimensions are handled.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE TOTALITY: CONSTRUCTING AND CONSTRICTING PARTY BUILDING

Generally speaking, these opaque and potentially alienating dimensions are about the unexpected ways that the comprehensiveness, persuasiveness, and exclusiveness of the model would frame the organizational life and emotional engagements of party members.

These opaquely produced organization-framing qualities are constituted in multiple ways. Aronowitz constitutes them via his use of the concept of *totality* for example. And, he constructs these dynamics *more broadly* in the ways that he judges and argues what organizational form could generate a successful left party and an emancipatory politics.

Starting first with the issue of totality, how is it then that Aronowitz's use of the term could be subtly utopian and how might this be alienating towards the left activists that he would like to see participate in building this party? I take as a conceptual entry point the following sense of alienation: it can be said to connote an analytical play of desires, repression, stress making (which can be a fruitful dynamic), and estrangement (wherein renders, e.g., an object of desire, both strange and strangely familiar). As I will expand upon below, this social and psychological play of desires is constituted moreover, by an ironic polarization of what one desires—from the object of desire.

To explain a link between totality and alienation, I would offer and analyze the following quotes from Aronowitz's book:

With the exception of the countries of Latin America, where the left is engaged in a struggle for economic as well as political power, they [“the worldwide oppositional forces”] are stuck, in great measure, with the tactics of protest and resistance, and are burdened by a postmodern politics that is structurally unable to engage these ideological issues [e.g., of the power of capital in relation to left political and economic power] *at the level of the totality* because they don’t believe in *the totality* (Aronowitz, 2006: 110; italics added).

A left political organization may or may not be a “mass” party of hundreds of thousands, but from the standpoint of *the totality* it would articulate the demands of millions (op. cit. 106; italics added).

These passages indicate, without openly asserting, that there is only one totality that is vital for leftists, that is, “the” totality, repeatedly referred to in the quotes. The use of the word “the” in front of the word “totality” marks it off, for example, as more exclusive than if it were cast as being *one of many totalities* that would be supported in this party organization. Similarly, it marks it off as more exclusive, than if it were cast in a more pluralistic spirit with the use of the prefacing term “a”, or if it was articulated as World Social Forum theorist, Boaventura de Sousa Santos does, vis-à-vis his notion of an inexhaustible totality (2004: 123). What’s more, Aronowitz brings into relief the vital nature of this totality through negative characterizations of people who believe in no totality (or are anti-totality). Not only do they fail to do the vital things that an understanding of the “totality” could empower them to do —articulate the demands of millions, help to “save the planet” and build a political party form to do it—but they fail to do it because of their belief system —postmodernism, which doesn’t believe in “totality” (Aronowitz, 2006: 106, 197).

More than this, Aronowitz’s framing of the argument implies the benefits of this analytic would arise not in its general use among these worldwide oppositional forces. Rather the benefits would be realized when it is operative—in politically dynamic solidarity-generating processes—of the political party. It is in this setting—or community—in other words, that it would serve to articulate mass demands, in a context moreover, of an organization (as Aronowitz says) that could “save the planet”. (2006: 197) The riff that is going on in these comparisons is positive-negative: positive (the party’s perspective of the totality), negative (the oppositional forces’ lack of any such perspective), positive (the party’s ability to move beyond tactics of protest and resistance), negative (being stuck in such tactics), and so on.

This then, provides an indication of how the party would constitute itself not just through its explicit political positions for example, but also through less noticeable *implied* (and comparatively characterized) utopian aspirations *towards its ideal*. These aspirations include the implied negative conditions of the utopian dynamics, i.e., that render the positive dimensions all the more tractable, and hence, often felt emotionally as good. Here they also serve many unconscious comparative totality and utopian community-constructing functions. Because what is implicitly necessary for the entire left to do is rendered possible in the confines of a party what is set out here is *an exclusive place or community where this can indeed happen* (for only this grouping will be an adequate counterforce to the Democratic Party, has the far-sighted analytic of the totality, and so on). Simultaneously, it sets out *the negative places where this cannot happen* (i.e., among all worldwide oppositional forces except in Latin America).

In order to explain how this comparative relationship might be alienating of rather than just inspiring to leftists I would move from the explanation of the *exclusivity* and hence separateness of the party formation from the worldwide forces (as embodied in, e.g., the negative-positive dynamics), to an explanation of the *mutual exclusivity* that Aronowitz imputes to this relationship. The notion of exclusiveness used in the above analysis indicates that the party is *just separate from* and, e.g., more politically vital than the oppositional forces. The notion of *mutual exclusivity* by comparison, indicates something enduringly alienating about the way Aronowitz characterizes the relationships between party and forces. It sets up more antagonistically contradictory relationships. This concerns relationships where he frames each force, party and oppositional, as desiring each other to be what the other cannot. Aronowitz thus poses each force more antagonistically, as needing each other in supporting and undermining ways.

This is to say that because the worldwide oppositional forces are both *a source of people to build this left party and a basis of determining what this party will not be* (e.g., totality-less and “stuck, in... protest and resistance”), *these passages construct these forces in an ironic, potentially alienating way*. The irony is politically consequential because the meaning of his generalization of “worldwide oppositional forces” involved in “protest and resistance” is all but unconditionally sweeping. Supporting this interpretation is the fact that this grouping is not only “worldwide” and associated with notions of the left, but it is never delimited, beyond indicating that is, that the only group that is not included in this phrase —are left forces in Latin America. Hence, Aronowitz must consider this grouping as no small part of where party-building activists would come from (op. cit. 109-110).

Essentially, Aronowitz construes these folks in the rhetoric of the above quotes in such a way as to render them necessary and undermining at the same time. What is potentially undermining (and repressive) of the desire to build the party inclusive of these activists for example, is that his polemical and rhetorically forceful appeal to this huge group of people is focused on their (alleged) negative qualities, rather than their positive qualities. This would be alienating of these desired folks, desired as party building activists that is, because it ubiquitously appeals to them on the basis of how much worse they have been and will continue to be if they remain outside of this party. Thus one must ask, how successful and what type of appeal would this be, when an array of articulated positive and inspiring points of recruitment (regarding who holds this planet-saving standpoint, and where they hold it, i.e., in the party) *simultaneously* seem denigrating/antagonizing, and hence alienating, of these worldwide oppositional forces.

The alienation moreover might well be mutual and ironic as such (wherein the implication is also that Aronowitz would see these forces as alienated, e.g., from totality oriented thinking). Hence, with this sense of alienation developing both ways, what is ostensibly set out to inspire and attract broad based forces might end up doing the very opposite, and undermining the basic task of the left formation to appeal to the very people it desires in the organization in order to become broad-based.

TOWARDS A HEGEMONIC TOTALITY?

There is also a subtle hegemony-seeking process implied in these two passages. It concerns an unannounced attempt to assert one totality as hegemonic. This is done for example, via Aronowitz's generalization that this vast grouping of people in the worldwide resistance have no totality-oriented analytic.

Because these oppositional forces are substantial (rather than say in just one locale and a handful of people), it strains the imagination to think that there are no totality-oriented forms of political thinking and practice amongst them. Even if one omits from consideration as Aronowitz implies, oppositional forces in the countries of Latin America (filled with activists who have Marxian inflected totality standpoints), and if one omits post-left/post-modern inflected totalities, one of which I will present later, at the very least there are many in the oppositional forces of the global South who have Marxian inflected totality standpoints. And these are standpoints that

often embody strong totality oriented analytics (e.g., influenced by Che, Mao, Trotsky, Ho Chi Minh, Fanon, and Samir Amin). Could one also categorically reject the point that say, anti-imperialist discourses of the global South (e.g., anti-neoliberalism discourses in Africa and Asia), or liberation theology-inflected political thinking (outside of Latin America), even if they have no Marxian references, have no activists within or influencing the ranks of the oppositional forces that utilize forms of totality-oriented political standpoints?

Thinking liberally along these same lines, what about Native American and indigenous people's political/resistance thinking, vis-à-vis totality standpoints —the Inuit in Canada, the anti-nuclear testing resistance groups in the South Pacific Islands, the Maori in New Zealand, and aboriginal groups in Australia? Would we say that these groups and people have no standpoint of a totality-oriented analytic, as embodied for example, in notions of the interconnectedness of all living and material things (or potential to develop that analytic further)? Then there are the assorted totality analytics associated with deep ecology and certain strands of anarchism (e.g., utopian inflected), and religious social movements (e.g., Buddhist, Hindi) not all of them in Latin American or the global North.

PROS AND CONS OF ASSERTING A HEGEMONIC TOTALITY

This begs the question that if in contradiction to Aronowitz's de facto exclusion of other totalities —which also serves as an implied claim that there is nothing for the party to seek hegemony over —and if instead this claim seeks hegemony against the grain of many alternative totality standpoints, why does Aronowitz seek such a potentially alienating stance? This is puzzling because his proposal for party building is supportive of the imperative for any new party to focus on mediating practice with theory, engaging in open debate, education, and the like.

One possible answer is that the scope of what is at stake may be so unsettling for leftists and/or hard to reconcile, that as long as an attempt to avoid potential disruptions succeeds, it is best to keep the issue suppressed, hegemony or no. The argument against this view is that the very attempt to assert the hegemony of one totality standpoint (e.g., by offering inspiring solidarity-posing rhetoric and utopian inflected outcomes) will generate more, rather than less, potentially alienating and corrosive political-organizational processes.

First, what seems to be swept aside in Aronowitz's unannounced hegemony-seeking dismissal of alternative standpoints concerns one of the most critical and thorny matters that unites and divides no small number of leftists (see Sanbonmatsu, 2004: 9-20). No small amount of people who consider themselves revolutionary leftists, for example, feel they put their lives on the line in relation to their collective and individual sense of a particular utopian-inflected totality analytic (regarding particular revolutionary socialist/communist utopian inflected totality standpoints, see Elbaum, 2006).

These are standpoint orientations moreover, that in one way or another compel some revolutionary activists (e.g., as party members) to see themselves as categorically different from non-revolutionary leftists. That is, these particular activists, especially as they come together in party formations, project themselves in their writing, for example, as preparing for what few other radicals are willing to face. What they project for themselves – even if they do not necessarily parse it —includes an expectation-oriented stance of organizing for militant action as part of a “disciplined” preparation for, and eventual expected engagement of, violent, and/or military confrontations in the overthrow of capitalism and capitalist states. (See quotes and examples in the beginning of section II below.)

The point is that it is matters like these that indicate levels of resistance to marginalizing arrays of standpoints that Aronowitz has not adequately taken into account, *vis-à-vis* how hard it would be to build a party that marginalized all but his advocated standpoint. More than this, even if Aronowitz's tacit hegemony of one standpoint appeared to be successful among those who joined the party he proposes, this party's attempt to sweep aside all other utopian-inflected totality standpoints would find those standpoints (i.e., their advocates) functioning more covertly in his (proposed) broad based left formation.

To put this in terms of alienation among leftists, Aronowitz's standpoint stance —in the context of a call for one party that could save the planet — would alienate something of the political-emotional spirit —e.g., the life on the line commitment —of many disparate left-identified and revolutionary-oriented folks.

For particular revolutionary activists it would ironically polarize what they desire, e.g., to live, if not die, a life worth living, from their object of desire, i.e., unity, a mass organization, a new society, etc and vice versa, i.e., where the psycho-somatic object of desire, i.e., the end to the means so to speak,

is a life worth living. This is in no small part because they would know that it would not be “their” totality analytic that informed and inspired activists’ understandings of the world and of this party in particular. Ironically, it would, as per their standpoint and as to what it projects for their future — be a totality and utopian standpoint that might feel like it was leading them to reformism sans revolution, which could feel tantamount to engaging in a life-diminishing pursuit, i.e., stripped of what is needed for the realization of socialism. It would not be their totality analytics moreover, that insinuated the dominant discourse, gate-keeping words, and means to assert influence and power in this party organization. Conversely, it could indeed be their standpoint, say a revolutionary socialist standpoint that if marginalized in this party organization, could lead them to set themselves off as ironically different from, i.e., alienated from, yet desiring of building power —and making it into a “real” revolutionary life within the larger political formation. This could well foment all manner of clandestine sectarian dialogues, power grabs, lack of trust, reduced sense of security in, or abandonment of this organization entirely.

Nor do revolutionary parties have an exclusive purchase on passionate commitments to totality standpoints. As I briefly indicated above many others would also be de-spirited by Aronowitz’s hegemonic move.

Finally, and as to what it might do (preemptively) to those who do not yet have a totality standpoint but which the party Aronowitz’s proposes would help them realize, one can consider the following point. Aronowitz’s hegemony seeking approach could, in effect, enlist totality-less party activists from the worldwide resistance forces (who took up or accepted the one totality standpoint upon joining the party) to suppress their totality-holding comrades’ standpoints (regarding others from the global left who joined this party, for example). More than this, they could also become proxies in the process of their own alienation (e.g., from learning about let alone considering what it means to debate and consider alternative totality standpoints, their history, etc.).

EXHAUSTIVENESS, EXCLUSIVENESS, AND PERSUASIVENESS IN ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONS

A most exhaustive insinuation of potentially alienating practices in Aronowitz’s proposal concerns the ubiquitous ways that Aronowitz frames the organization-building and controlling processes in relation to how

he asserts what it is that constitutes a successful rather than a failed political party.

As one reads through chapter after chapter of his book's arguments about the successes and failures of left organizations and parties, past and present, one finds a preponderance of attention given to the barriers to party building and mistakes made by left organizations and parties. One finds more of this that is, than one finds attention given to the successes of the U.S. left.

There is a utopian inflected, (ideal) community-generating conclusion implicated in his critique-oriented analysis as much as there is a conclusion as to what type of control relationships such an organization would need. That conclusion is that what is needed in the world today and on the left in the U.S. has not yet been built, while the means to build it are nonetheless present. The thrust of this conclusion and critique of U.S. left politics is manifest in no small part that is, because the implicated *criteria* —or *paradigm* —by which Aronowitz judges failure and success is something to the effect of *a radical U.S. left party that knows it's doing well if it has more activist clout, if not more power than the Democratic party*. Aronowitz conveys this judgment-making and political practice-generating standpoint in mostly implicit ways throughout the book; one can emotionally sense it for instance, by sensing or feeling the impact/weight of the plethora of negative examples. Nevertheless, some of the quotes by Aronowitz are rather explicit about this issue, e.g., “what is at stake in the formation of a new radical party that reaches across national borders is the future of human kind, even the planet” (2006: 197). This view is also affirmed in the ample amount of writing he devotes not just to castigating the Democratic Party for a putative “left-liberal” politics that are insidiously pro-capitalist and Right-inflected, but also to persuading leftists to de-emphasize their allegiance to this party and organize a Left alternative.

To explain this *party-judging standpoint* and its implications for organizational control, I would suggest that Aronowitz's macro-conceptual framework for building and sustaining this party could be conceived of as being, in no small way, about the following organization and emotion-framing perspective: how *the extensive broad societal problems* he identifies and potentially solves in his book via the party that can start to solve them, and the other level of *leftist's extensive organizational problems*, that he poses and potentially solves via his party form —would *impinge* in total and in its parts —upon the intimate nature of organization and people's life in the political party.

On the one hand, it is just this type of imagined, comprehensive and powerful radical party, that is key for understanding a praxis-oriented viewpoint for guiding left politics. (As mentioned earlier this is a view that can provide a way out of the interminably unsolvable dilemmas of leftist's searches for the authentic revolutionary reforms, in the reform versus revolution debates.)

On the other hand, these same utopian-creating, comprehensive dimensions could be exhausting when applied to the production of the human relationships of the organization. They would likely be manifest in such imposing (yet also inspiring) ways in organizational power relationships because of how *exclusively* and *comprehensively* the massive amount of problems solved, are connected by Aronowitz to what this and by implication *only* this new left party can do. Each problem potentially solved in other words, and the implicit imperative that no one problem can easily if at all be solved outside of the solution for other problems compels the creation of a web of exclusive organizational building and control processes (e.g., via what only this party can do, such as, force through a New Deal).

Furthermore, the opaque-utopian and totality-realizing dimensions and control-relations would be manifest in the specification of organization-controlling relationships because of how *persuasively* he poses his model as solving these many problems of the left and the world. The emotional weight of what can be done by this party that could save the world is felt all the more exhaustively in other words, because of the intricate structures of persuasion employed by Aronowitz (e.g., in his detailed arguments as to how not one, or a few, but no left parties have ever done this before in the U.S.).

A MORALLY EXHAUSTING OR EXHILARATING PARTY STRUCTURE?

There is thus a palpable tendency towards an exhaustive perfectionism/utopia (and related to this, meticulousness) in the very way the organization is framed and set up. Aronowitz insinuates that tendency moreover, into the stuff of what people in the party would do, think, feel, theorize, etc. This is reflected for example, in the issue of what Aronowitz implies would be needed to produce the actual organizational relationships of the party. What would be needed to produce this party and its actual organizational relationships would be so apart from what leftists now experience organizationally —so *comprehensive* and interconnected, in a word so “new” —that it would literally be something akin to a new society.

These imputed control tendencies towards perfection – and their ubiquitous negative conditions of existence (e.g., mistakes of all past parties) would be felt by party builders for example. They would be felt in stressful ways (where stress can be inspiring, productive and fatiguing). They would be felt as such not only because it would be challenging if not over-whelming to build and sustain the massive networks of organizational relations that have not been so comprehensive and meticulously produced, by the U.S. left before. It would also be felt in its potentially exhausting dimensions, in no small part because the *high stakes* of what is set up – and their negative conditions of existence would manifest not only due to what is at stake is the survival of humanity. This is also because this party would be a *one of a kind* structure that could pull this off. (Whereas if there were a multiplicity of largely autonomous powerful party organizations on the left that could solve these problems there would not be such high stakes insinuated and understood at some level, for example, in determining what are the right or wrong practices to take within the organization and in political action.)

Hence, there is an ironic polarization of what Aronowitz desires (to build the most exhaustively complete political force that could “get the job done”) from the object of desire (saving the planet). In this case, the object of desire also concerns the people of the worldwide resistance forces. Some if not many of these folks would indeed take the exhaustiveness of the proposal as morally, emotionally, and intellectually exhilarating (e.g., as to how almost all left history can point to this). Yet, these same folks would put themselves into a hothouse process that could wear down and morally exhaust their ability to sustain this level of engagement.

Finally, Aronowitz implies a potentially alienating, disciplinary experience here, but *not because activists would have to take up every part of his comprehensive plan* and utopian system. Indeed Aronowitz never says this. It is also potentially alienating because of the less conscious ways Aronowitz excludes the possibility of other alternatives (excluded by hegemony-seeking practices and his negative/positive riffs vis-à-vis his mutually exclusive “totality”).

CONCLUSION OF FIRST PART

In this first part of my critical engagement with Aronowitz's call for a new political formation I have examined the key dimensions of his party building proposal and argued that these dimensions have vital, strategic, and inspirational elements alongside alienating and project-undermining dynamics. These elements are crucial and cannot be separated from group dynamics if a left formation is to have a decent chance of succeeding. In the second part of this article (forthcoming in Volume IV, no.2 of *Situations*), I will work through a constructive analysis of the revolutionary left and the World Social Forum totality and utopian oriented theory and politics in relation to Aronowitz's proposal. I will do this in order to examine his strategy to challenge leftists to debate what could build left power and within this analysis, I will offer a provocation about the first steps of party building.

REFERENCES

1. Aronowitz, Stanley. 2006. *Left Turn: Forging a new political future*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
2. Aronowitz, Stanley, William DiFazio, Harriet Fraad, Michael Pelias, and Rick Wolff (The Fifteenth Street Manifesto Group) 2008. *Manifesto for a Left Turn: An Open Letter to U.S. Radicals*. New York City: Ragged Edge Press.
3. Elbaum, Max. 2006. *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che*. London: Verso books.
4. More, Thomas. 2001. *Utopia*. Translated by Clarence H. Miller. New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press
5. Sambonmatsu, John. 2004. *The Postmodern Prince: Left Strategy and the Making of a New Political Subject*. New York: Monthly Review Press
6. Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. 2004. *The World Social Forum: A User's Manual*. http://www.ces.uc.pt/bss/documentos/fsm_eng.pdf. (accessed on June 20 2007).
7. Siegel, Peter, Nancy Stohl, Laura Ingram, David Roche, and Jean Taylor. 1987. Leninism as Cult: The Democratic Workers Party. *Socialist Review* 17 November-December: 58-85.
8. Spannos, Chris, editor. 2008. *Real Utopia: Participatory Society for the 21st Century*. AK Press.