



IN MEMORIAM

Mark Poster
Professor of History and Film & Media Studies
UC Irvine
1941 – 2012

Mark Poster was a vital member of the School of Humanities, and for decades one of its most widely read and cited researchers. He made crucial contributions to two different departments, History and Film & Media Studies, and played a central role in UCI's emergence as a leading center for work in Critical Theory.

In the first part of his career, when his focus was on modern European intellectual history, his path-breaking publications included the influential book **Existential Marxism in Postwar France** (Princeton University Press 1975), a study of the intellectual world around Jean- Paul Sartre. When the theory boom hit the U.S., thanks in part to this book, he became a widely sought- after authority on French critical thought, especially the writing of Michel Foucault, whose work he helped introduce to American audiences. He played a crucial role in setting the History Department on its current course, as one of the first departments-- if not the first department-- in the discipline with a required graduate sequence in theory. In that sequence Mark taught a Foucault seminar that became legendary.

His investments in French intellectual history also positioned Mark Poster for crucial contributions to the Critical Theory Institute at UC Irvine, which he helped start as an informal reading group; by 1987 it was established as a campus research institute. The distinction of Irvine, reflected in the CTI, the graduate emphasis, the Critical Theory Archive, and departmental strengths, still defines the special character of the School, and contributes to its international reputation for scholarly innovation. Hosting internationally known scholars, the Critical Theory Institute with its public seminars and Wellek lecture series soon became one of the global hotspots in the humanities.

In the second part of his career, Mark became a seminal theorist of media and technology. He was the founding chair of the Department of Film & Media Studies at UC Irvine. Together with Franco Tonelli and Eric Rentschler, he had helped shepherd the Film Emphasis of the early 1980s to Program status by the end of that decade, and then to departmentalization by 2002. In the process he was pivotal in hiring and mentoring faculty who now serve the School's second largest major.

Mark Poster was a major figure in the rapid development of media studies and theory in the USA and internationally. While as an intellectual historian he could draw on Frankfurt School thought as well as on cybernetics, he was particularly interested in the potential of poststructuralism for media studies. From his translations of Baudrillard to his dissemination of Foucault, Poster played a highly influential role in the study of media culture, including television, databases, computing, and the Internet; he continued to offer crucial commentary on the relevance to technology and media of cultural theory, and his numerous articles and books have been translated into a number of different languages. Reflective of the breadth of his interests and expertise, Poster held courtesy appointments in the Department of Information and Computer Science and in

the Department of Comparative Literature. First hired at UCI in 1968, Poster had recently retired after 40 years of service to the School and the Campus.

Jon Wiener
Professor of History

Peter Krapp
Professor of Film & Media Studies