

Acknowledgments

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MARCUSE AND THE QUEST FOR RADICAL SUBJECTIVITY

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Abstract

In this paper, I maintain that the Marcuse anticipates the post-structuralist critique of the subject, that these critiques suggest that the concept of the subject contains too much philosophical and political baggage, and that we need a reconstructed notion of subjectivity that Marcuse and the Frankfurt School initiated and enable us to further develop. In drawing on Nietzsche, Freud, and aesthetic modernism, Marcuse posits a bodily, erotic, gendered, social, and aestheticized subjectivity that overcomes mind-body dualism, avoids idealist and rationalist essentialism, and is constructed in a specific social milieu and is challenged to reconstruct itself and emancipate itself from limited and oppressive forms. In following Marcuse's reconstruction of subjectivity, I'll accordingly, first, offer a re-reading of Eros and Civilization to demonstrate how it anticipates the poststructuralist critique of the subject and offers an alternative conception of subjectivity. Then I pursue some of the contributions to rethinking subjectivity in Marcuse's later writings, focusing on his notion of radical subjectivity. At stake is developing a reconstructed Marcusean theory of subjectivity which emphasizes the need for a transformation of the affective dimension, the sensibility, and our very conception of the subject to help create a reconstructed conception of subjectivity for contemporary theory and to provide conceptions of the subjective conditions for radical social change and of agency in order to promote individual and social transformation.

The past two decades have witnessed a relentless philosophical assault on the concept of the subject, once the alpha and omega of modern philosophy. Materialists have decried the idealist and essentialist dimensions of the traditional concept of the subject

in its various Cartesian, Kantian, and other philosophical forms. More recently, poststructuralist and postmodern theorists have attacked the universalizing pretensions of subject discourse, its positing of a (false) unity, its assuming a centered and grounded status as a linchpin for philosophical systems or knowledge-claims, and its transparent self-certainty from Descartes' cogito to Husserl's phenomenology. Following Nietzsche, post-structuralists have seen the subject as an effect of language, constructed in accord with the forms of grammar (i.e. subject/predicate) and existing linguistic systems, or, with Deleuze, have privileged the flux and flow of bodily experience over more idealist conceptions of consciousness and the self.

For traditional philosophy, the subject was unitary, ideal, universal, self-grounded, asexual and the center of the human being and foundation of knowledge and philosophy, while for the poststructuralist and postmodern critique the human being is corporeal, gendered, social, fractured, and historical with the subject radically decentered as an effect of language, society, culture, and history. Yet if the construction of the subject in language, the social, and nature is the key mark of a poststructuralist or postmodern conception of the subject, then the Frankfurt School analyses are not that antithetical to such conceptions. The entire tradition of critical theory — which draws on Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Weber — posits the social construction of the individual, and Hegel, Nietzsche, and Freud can be read as providing aspects of theorizing the social construction of the subject in language. Habermas in particular has followed this motif and has attacked the philosophy of the subject while proposing replacing its subject/object model with an ego-alter model that is based upon the ideal of communicative reason.¹

In this paper, however, I want to pursue Marcuse's sharp critiques of the rationalist subject of modern philosophy which he counterposes to notions of libidinal rationality, eros, and the aesthetic-erotic dimensions of an embodied subjectivity. Marcuse

is part of a historicist tradition of critical theory which rejects essentialism and sees subjectivity developing in history, evolving and mutating, in interaction with specific socio-political conditions. Following Adorno and Horkheimer and the earlier Frankfurt School tradition, Marcuse also sees dominant forms of subjectivity as oppressive and constraining while challenging us to reconstruct subjectivity and to develop a new sensibility, qualitatively different than the normalized subjectivity of contemporary advanced industrial societies. In particular, Marcuse was engaged in a life-long search for a revolutionary subjectivity, for a sensibility that would revolt against the existing society and attempt to create a new one.

Hence, I will argue that Marcuse and the Frankfurt School contribute important perspectives for criticizing the traditional concept of the subject and for rethinking and reconceptualizing subjectivity to develop conceptions potent enough to meet poststructuralist, postmodern, materialist, feminist, and other forms of critique. Crucially, the assault on the subject has had serious consequences, for without a robust notion of subjectivity and agency there is no refuge for individual freedom and liberation, no locus of struggle and opposition, and no agency for progressive political transformation. For these reasons, theorists from diverse camps, including feminists, multiculturalists, and poststructuralists who have had second thoughts about the all-too-hasty dissolution of the subject, have attempted to rehabilitate the subject, to reconstruct the discourse of subjectivity and agency, in the light of contemporary critique.

In this paper, I maintain that the Marcuse anticipates the post-structuralist critique of the subject, that these critiques suggest that the concept of the subject contains too much philosophical and political baggage, and that we need a reconstructed notion of subjectivity that Marcuse and the Frankfurt School initiated and enable us to further develop. In drawing on Nietzsche, Freud, and aesthetic modernism, Marcuse posits a bodily, erotic,

gendered, social, and aestheticized subjectivity that overcomes mind-body dualism, avoids idealist and rationalist essentialism, and is constructed in a specific social milieu and is challenged to reconstruct itself and emancipate itself from limited and oppressive forms. In following Marcuse's reconstruction of subjectivity, I'll accordingly, first, offer a re-reading of *Eros and Civilization* to demonstrate how it anticipates the poststructuralist critique of the subject and offers an alternative conception of subjectivity. Then I pursue some of the contributions to rethinking subjectivity in Marcuse's later writings, focusing on his notion of radical subjectivity. At stake is developing a reconstructed Marcusean theory of subjectivity which emphasizes the need for a transformation of the affective dimension, the sensibility, and our very conception of the subject to help create a reconstructed conception of subjectivity for contemporary theory and to provide conceptions of the subjective conditions for radical social change and of agency in order to promote individual and social transformation.

Re-Reading Eros and Civilization

In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse draws on Freud to depict the social construction of the subject in the dramatic clash between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. For Freud, the instincts are originally governed by the pleasure principle: they aim solely at "gaining pleasure; from any operation which might arouse unpleasantness ("pain") mental activity draws back" (*E&C* 13). From early on, however, the pleasure principle comes into conflict with a harsh environment and after a series of disciplinary experiences, "the individual comes to the traumatic realization that full and painless gratification of his needs is impossible" (*E&C* 13). Under the tutelage of the reality principle, the person learns what is useful and approved behavior, and what is harmful and forbidden. In this way, one develops one's rational faculties, becoming "a conscious, thinking *subject*, geared to a rationality which is imposed on him from outside" (*E&C* 14).

For Marcuse, then, rationality is a social construct and the subject is a product of social experience. Thus, like Foucault, Marcuse sees the subject not as a natural and metaphysical substance, pre-existing its social gestation, but as a product of societal normalization whereby the individual is subjected to social domination. According to Marcuse's conception, the reality principle enforces the totality of society's requirements, norms and prohibitions which are imposed upon the individual from "outside." This process constitutes for him a thoroughgoing domination of the individual by society which shapes thought and behavior, desires and needs, language and consciousness. In Marcuse's words: "neither his desires nor his alteration of reality are henceforth his own: they are now 'organized' by his society. And this 'organization' represses and transsubstantiates his original instinctual needs" (*E&C* 14-15).

Marcuse employs Freud's theory to produce an account of how society comes to dominate the individual, how social control is internalized, and how conformity ensues. He concludes that "Freud's individual psychology is in its very essence social psychology" (*E&C* 16) and repeatedly emphasizes that Freud's psychological categories are historical and political in nature. Hence, Marcuse boldly fleshes out the "political and sociological substance of Freud's theory" to develop what I call a *critical theory of socialization*. Whereas most theories of socialization stress its humanizing aspects by claiming that socialization makes individuals more "human"—and thus legitimate dominant social institutions and practices—Freud exposes the repressive content of Western civilization and the heavy price paid for its "progress." Although industrialization has resulted in material progress, Freud's analysis of the instinctual renunciations and unhappiness it has produced raises the question of whether our form of civilization is worth the suffering and misery (*E&C* 3ff). In Marcuse's view, Freud's account of civilization and its discontents puts in question the whole ideology of progress, productivity and the work ethic, as well as religion and morality, by "show-

ing up the repressive content of the highest values and achievements of culture" (E&C 17).

Thus, Marcuse, like Foucault, stresses the social construction of the subject and the ways that subjectification is involved in a process of domination. But whereas Foucault, at one period of his work, and many poststructuralists, call for resistance to domination, they often have no theoretical resources to construct a notion of agency that would efficaciously resist repression and domination.² For Marcuse, however, there is a "hidden trend in psychoanalysis" which discloses those aspects of human nature that oppose the dominant ethic of labor and renunciation, while upholding "the tabooed aspirations of humanity": the demands of the pleasure principle for gratification and absence of restraint (E&C 18). He argues that Freud's instinct theory contains a "depth dimension" which suggests that our instincts strive for a condition in which freedom and happiness converge, in which we fulfill all our needs, in which the subject strives to overcome repression and domination. For Marcuse, *memory* contains images of gratification and can play a cognitive and therapeutic role in mental life: "Its' truth value lies in the specific function of memory to preserve promises and potentialities which are betrayed and even outlawed by the mature, civilized individual, but which had once been fulfilled in the dim past and which are never entirely forgotten" (E&C 18-19).

Marcuse subtly reformulates the therapeutic role of memory stressed in psychoanalysis. In Freud's theory, the suppression of memory takes place through the repression of unpleasant or traumatic experiences, which are usually concerned with sexuality or aggression; the task of psychoanalysis is to free the patient from the burden or repressed, traumatic memories — whose repression often produces neurosis — by providing understanding and insight that would dissolve neurotic behavior. Although Marcuse preserves the psychoanalytic linkage between forgetting and repression, he stresses the liberating potentialities of

memory and recollection of pleasurable or euphoric experiences rather than the unpleasant or traumatic experiences stressed by Freud. In his reconstruction of Freud, Marcuse suggests that remembrance of past experiences of freedom and happiness could put into question the painful performances of alienated labor and manifold oppressions of everyday life.

Marcuse's analysis implies that society trains the individual for the systematic repression of those emancipatory memories, and devalues experiences guided solely by the pleasure principle. Following Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morals*, Marcuse criticizes "the one-sidedness of memory-training in civilization: the faculty was chiefly directed towards remembering duties rather than pleasures; memory was linked with bad conscience, guilt and sin. Unhappiness and the threat of punishment, not happiness and the promise of freedom, linger in the memory" (E&C 232).

Along with memory, Marcuse suggests that *fantasy* generates images of a better life by speaking the language of the pleasure principle and its demands for gratification. He stresses the importance of great art for liberation because it embodies the emancipatory contents of phantasy and the imagination through producing images of happiness and a life without anxiety. In Marcuse's view, the phantasies in our daydreams and hopes anticipate a better life and embody the eruption of desires for increased freedom and gratification. The unconscious on this account contains the memory of integral gratification experienced in the womb, in childhood, and in peak experiences during one's life. Marcuse holds that the "psychoanalytic liberation of memory" and "restoration of phantasy" provide access to experiences of happiness and freedom which are subversive of the present life. He suggests that Freud's theory of human nature, far from refuting the possibility of a non-repressive civilization, indicates that there are aspects of human nature that are striving for happiness and freedom.

In defending the claims of the pleasure principle, Marcuse believes that he is remaining true to a materialism which takes seriously material needs and their satisfaction, and the biological “depth-dimension” of human nature. In his view, defence of the validity of the claims of the pleasure principle has critical-revolutionary import in that Freud’s analysis implies that the human being can only tolerate so much repression and unhappiness, and when this point is passed the individual will rebel against the conditions of repression. Freud’s theory thus contains elements of an *anthropology of liberation* which analyses those aspects of human nature that furnish the potential for radical opposition to the prevailing society.

Marcuse concludes that Freud’s theory contains radical implications that have been covered over, or neglected, and which he wishes to restore in their most provocative form. He argues that this requires a restoration of Freud’s instinct theory, preserving his claims for the importance of sexuality and acknowledgment of its vital and explosive claims. Neo-Freudians who deny the primacy of sexuality have, in Marcuse’s view, repressed Freud’s deep insights into human sexual being by relegating sexual instincts to a secondary place in their theory (*E&C* 238ff). Marcuse believes that Freud’s theory discloses the depth and power of instinctual energies which contain untapped emancipatory potential. He describes these instinctual energies which seek pleasure and gratification as “Eros.” A liberated Eros, Marcuse claims, would release energies that would not only seek sexual gratification, but would flow over into expanded human relations and more abundant creativity. The released Eros would desire, he suggests, a pleasurable aesthetic-erotic environment requiring a total restructuring of human life and the material conditions of existence.

Now Marcuse also accepts Freud’s concept of Thanatos, the death instinct, Freud’s notion of the political economy of the instincts,

in which strengthening the life instincts enable Eros to control and master Thanatos, thus increasing freedom and happiness and diminishing aggression and destruction. Thus, surprisingly, Marcuse adopts a rather mechanistic concept of the instincts, building on Freud’s biologicistic energy-instinct model — which has been sharply criticized and rejected both within various circles of psychoanalytic theory, as well as within critical theory (Habermas and his students) and poststructuralism. I believe, however, that one can construct a Marcusean theory of the subject without deploying the problematic aspects of Freud’s instinct theory.

The key to this reconstruction of Marcuse’s conception of subjectivity is the “Philosophical Interlude” in *E&C* in which he develops a critical analysis of the presuppositions of Western rationality and its concept of the philosophical subject. Marcuse claims that the prevalent reality principle of Western civilization presupposes an antagonism between subject and object, mind and body, reason and the passions, and the individual and society. Nature is experienced on this basis as raw material to be mastered, as an object of domination, as provocation or resistance to be overpowered (*E&C* 110). The ego in Western thought is thus conceptualized as an aggressive, offensive subject, fighting and striving to conquer the resistant world. Through labor, the subject seeks continually to extend its power and control over nature. The Logos of this reality principle is, Marcuse argues, a logic of domination that finds its culmination in the reality principle of advanced industrial society, the performance principle. The performance principle is hostile to the senses and receptive faculties that strive for gratification and fulfillment. It contains a concept of repressive reason which seeks to tame instinctual drives for pleasure and enjoyment. Its values, which are the governing norms of modern societies, include:

profitable productivity, assertiveness, efficiency, competitiveness; in other words, the Performance Principle, the rule of functional rationality discriminating against emotions, a

dual morality, the 'work ethic,' which means for the vast majority of the population condemnation to alienated and inhuman labor, and the will to power, the display of strength, virility (M&F 282).

This hegemonic version of the reality principle has been challenged, Marcuse argues, from the beginning of Western philosophy. Against the antagonistic struggle between subject and object, an opposing ideal of reconciliation and harmony has been formulated, in which the individual strives for fulfillment and gratification. This 'Logos of gratification,' Marcuse suggests, is found in Aristotle's notion of the *nous theos* and Hegel's ideal of spirit coming to rest and fruition in absolute knowledge (E&C 112ff). In these philosophical conceptions, the human being is to attain a condition of reconciliation after a process of struggle, suffering and labor, in which alienation and oppression are finally overcome. Schopenhauer advocates a similar idea of the restless, ever-striving "will" seeking peaceful Nirvana. In addition, Marcuse finds a logic of gratification and different conception of subjectivity in Nietzsche's emphasis on the body, the passions, joy and liberation from time and guilt (E&C 119f). The values affirmed in this reality principle would be the antithesis of the repressive performance principle and its dominating subject and would affirm

receptivity, sensitivity, non-violence, tenderness, and so on. These characteristic appear indeed as opposites of domination and exploitation. On the primary psychological level, they would pertain to the domain of Eros, they would express the energy of the life instincts against the death instinct and destructive energy (M&F 284)

This alternative reality principle and conception of subjectivity also finds expression in Freud's notion of the Nirvana principle, which holds that all instincts aim at rest, quiescence and the absence of pain (E&C 5ff and 124ff). In addition, Marcuse draws on Schiller's conception of aesthetic education and play, arguing that in aesthetic and erotic experience, play, and fantasy, the conflict between reason and the senses would be overcome so that "rea-

son is sensuous and sensuousness rational" (E&C 180). Operating through the play impulse

the aesthetic function would 'abolish compulsion, and place man, both morally and physically in freedom.' It would harmonize the feelings and affections with the ideas of reason, deprive the 'laws of reason of their moral compulsion' and 'reconciles them with the interest of the senses' (E&C 182).

In the language of poststructuralism, Marcuse thus envisages an embodied subjectivity in which the opposition between reason and the senses, central to the modern philosophical concept of the subject, is deconstructed. For Schiller and Marcuse, the play impulse is connected with the aesthetic function which would mediate between the passive, receptive "sensuous impulse" and the active creative "form impulse," thus reconciling reason and the senses. The play impulse aspires to a condition of freedom from restraint and anxiety, involving "freedom from the established reality: man is free when the 'reality loses its seriousness' and when its necessity 'becomes light'" (E&C 187). This "freedom to play" and to create an "aesthetic reality" requires liberation of the senses and, as both Schiller and Marcuse called for, "a total revolution in the mode of perception and feeling" (E&C 189).

The resultant conception of an aestheticized and eroticized subjectivity preserves the connotation of *Sinnlichkeit* as pertaining to sensuality, receptiveness, art and eros, thus redeeming the body and the senses against the tyranny of repressive reason and affirming the importance of aesthetics, play, and erotic activity in human life. Hence, against the rational and domineering subject of mastery, Marcuse advances a notion of subjectivity as mediating reason and the senses, as seeking harmony and gratification. Thus the intersubjective ideal of a libidinal subjectivity is harmonious and gratifying relations with others and, one might add, with nature itself. Instead of controlling and dominating objects, Marcusean subjectivity seeks libidinal and peaceful relations with others and with the external world.

Moreover, Marcuse proposes a new concept of reason which he describes as “libidinal rationality” (E&C 223ff). In this conception reason is not repressive of the senses but acts in harmony with them, helping to find objects of gratification and to cultivate and enhance sensuality. Marcuse rejects the dominant philosophical paradigm, which sees reason as the distinctly human faculty and the senses as disorderly, animalic, and inferior. The concept of reason operative in this model, Marcuse suggests, is repressive and totalitarian and does not adequately allow for aesthetic-erotic gratification and development (E&C 119ff), due to its embrace of the mind-body split. Marcuse’s ideal is a form of human life in which reason becomes sensuous, protecting and enriching the life instincts, and whereby the senses help create a “sensuous order” (E&C 223ff). He assumes that as more restrictions are taken away from the instincts and as they freely evolve, they will seek “lasting gratification” and will structure social relations that will make continual gratification possible. In this way, “Eros redefines reason in its own terms. Reasonable is what sustains the order of gratification” (E&C 224). This could make possible freer, more fulfilling human relations and could create a social order and community based on freedom, gratification, cooperation and rational authority. Then, “repressive reason gives way to a new *rationality of gratification* in which reason and happiness converge” (E&C 224).

The New Sensibility, Emancipation, and Revolution: The Late Marcuse

Hence, against the notion of the rational, domineering subject of modern theory, Marcuse posits a subjectivity that is evolving, developing, striving for happiness, gratification, and harmony. Such subjectivity is always in process, is never fixed or static, and is thus a creation, an achievement, and a goal and not an absolute metaphysical entity. Marcusean subjectivity is also embodied, gendered, oppositional, and struggles against domination, repression, and oppression, and for freedom and happiness. There is

thus nothing essentialist, idealist, or metaphysical, here. Instead, Marcuse’s conception of subjectivity is corporeal, cultivates the aesthetic and erotic dimensions of experience, and strives for gratification and harmonious relations with others and nature. Marcuse’s radical subjectivity is also political, refusing domination and oppression, struggling against conditions which block freedom and happiness.

There is widespread agreement today that we need the discourse of subjectivity and agency for ethics, for politics, and for advancing the project of human liberation, and I have tried to suggest that Marcuse’s perspectives on subjectivity stand up to at least aspects of the contemporary poststructuralist and other critiques of the subject, as well as providing resources for reconstructing the concept of subjectivity in the contemporary era. It is important to note that for Marcuse the reconstruction of subjectivity, the creation of eroticized rationality, and the development of a free creative self, can only take place through practice and the transformation of social relations and activity. Moreover, Marcuse is perfectly aware that the existing society is organized precisely to prevent such a reconstruction of subjectivity and new social relations, prescribing instead a regime of domination, authority, repression, manipulated desublimation and submission. Especially in ODM, but throughout his work, Marcuse presents a critique of hegemonic forms of subjectivity and domination and a challenge to overcome the one-dimensional, conformist and normalized subject of advanced industrial society.

Throughout his later writings, Marcuse was vitally concerned to discover and theorize a “new sensibility,” with needs, values, and aspirations that would be qualitatively different from subjectivity in one-dimensional society. To create a new subjectivity, there must be “the emergence and education of a new type of human being free from the aggressive and repressive needs and aspirations and attitudes of class society, human beings created, in solidarity and on their own initiative, their own environment, their

own *Lebenswelt*, their own 'property.'" Such a revolution in needs and values would help overcome a central dilemma in Marcuse's theory — sharply formulated in *One-Dimensional Man* (hereafter *ODM*) — that continued to haunt him: "How can the administered individuals — who have made their mutilation into their own liberties and satisfactions... liberate themselves from themselves as well as from their masters? How is it even thinkable that the vicious circle be broken?" (*ODM* 250-251).

In order to break through this vicious circle, individuals must transform their present needs, sensibility, consciousness, values, and behavior while developing a new radical subjectivity, so as to create the necessary conditions for social transformation (*SL* 67). Radical subjectivity for Marcuse practices the "great refusal" valorized in both *E&C* and *ODM*. In *E&C* (149f), the "Great Refusal is the protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom — 'to live without anxiety.'" In *ODM* (256f), however, the Great Refusal is fundamentally political, a refusal of repression and injustice, a saying no, an elemental oppositional to a system of oppression, a noncompliance with the rules of a rigged game, a form of radical resistance and struggle. In both cases, the Great Refusal is based on a subjectivity that is not able to tolerate injustice and that engages in resistance and opposition to all forms of domination, instinctual and political.

In the late 1960s, Marcuse argued that emancipatory needs and a "new sensibility" were developing within contemporary society. He believed that in the New Left and counterculture there was the beginnings of "a political practice of methodical disengagement and the refusal of the Establishment aiming at a radical transvaluation of values" (*EL* 6) that was generating a new type of human being and subject. The new sensibility "expresses the ascent of the life instincts over aggressiveness and guilt" (*EL* 23) and contains a "negation of the needs that sustain the present system of domination and the negation of the values on which they are based" (*SL* 67). Underlying the theory of the new sensi-

bility is a concept of the active role of the senses in the constitution of experience which rejects the Kantian and other philosophical devaluation of the senses as passive, merely receptive. For Marcuse, our senses are shaped and molded by society, yet constitute in turn our primary experience of the world and provide both imagination and reason with its material. He believes that the senses are currently socially constrained and mutilated and argues that only an emancipation of the senses and a new sensibility can produce liberating social change (*EL* 24ff and *CR&R* 62ff).⁴

Instead of the need for repressive performance and competition, the new sensibility posits the need for meaningful work, gratification and community; instead of the need for aggression and destructive productivity, it affirms love and the preservation of the environment; and against the demands of industrialization, it affirms the need for beauty, sensuousness, and play, affirming the aesthetic and erotic components of experience. The "new sensibility" translates these values and needs into "a practice that involves a break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding things so that the organism may become receptive to the potential forms of a non-aggressive, non-exploitative world" (*EL* 6). This total refusal of the dominant societal needs, values and institutions represents a radical break with the entirety of the society's institutions, culture and lifestyle, and supplies prefigurations of a new culture and society.

Of course, Marcuse was disappointed that the new sensibility did not become the agent of revolution that he sought to replace the proletariat; he was also dismayed that the New Left and counterculture fell prey to the seductions of the consumer society or were repressed and disintegrated. In the 1970s, however, he sought precisely the same values and subjectivity in new social movements, in particular feminism, the environmental movement, peace movement, and various forms of grass-roots activism which were eventually described as "new social movements." In the 1974

lecture on "Marxism and Feminism," Marcuse notes for the first time the constitutive role of gender, theorizes the differences between men and women in terms of his categories in *Eros and Civilization* in which the conception of the feminine is associated with the traits he ascribes to the new sensibility while the masculine is associated with the traits of the Western ego and rationality of domination which Marcuse long criticized, thus anticipating "difference feminism" which would also valorize the feminine and maternal against the masculine.⁵

In this article, which generated significant debate, Marcuse argues that "feminine" values and qualities represent a determinate negation of the values of capitalism, patriarchy, and the performance principle. In his view, "socialism, as a qualitatively different society, must embody the antithesis, the definite negation of aggressive and repressive needs and values of capitalism as a form of male-dominated culture" (M&F 285). Furthermore:

Formulated as the antithesis of the dominating masculine qualities, such feminine qualities would be receptivity, sensitivity, non-violence, tenderness and so on. These characteristics appear indeed as opposite of domination and exploitation. On the primary psychological level, they would pertain to the domain of Eros, they would express the energy of the life instincts, against the death instinct and destructive energy (M&F 285-286).

Marcuse was, however, criticized by women within the feminist movement and others for essentializing gender difference, although he insisted the distinction was a historical product of Western society and not an essential gender difference. Women, he argued, possess a "feminine" nature qualitatively different from men because they have been frequently freed from repression in the work place, brutality in the military, and competition in the public sphere. Hence, they developed characteristics which for Marcuse are the marks of an emancipated humanity. He summarizes the difference between aggressive masculine and capitalist values as against feminist values as the contrast between "repres-

sive productivity" and "creative receptivity," suggesting that increased emancipation of feminine qualities in the established society" will subvert the dominant masculine values and the capitalist performance principle.

During the same decade, Marcuse also worked with Rudolf Bahro's conception of "surplus consciousness" arguing that just as Bahro argued that in the socialist countries a new consciousness was developing which could see the discrepancy between "what is" and "what could be" and was not satisfied with its way of life, so too was such oppositional consciousness developing in the advanced capitalist countries. The argument is that

through the increasing mechanization and intellectualization of labor, [there] accumulates an increasing quantity of general ability, skills, knowledge, a human potential which cannot be developed within the established apparatus of production, because it would conflict with the need for full-time de-humanized labor. A large part of it is channelled into unnecessary work, unnecessary in that it is not required for the construction and preservation of a better society but is necessitated only by the requirements of a capitalist production.

Under these circumstances, a 'counter-consciousness' emerges among the dependent population (today about 90% of the total?), an awareness of the ever more blatant obsolescence of the established social division and organization of work. Rudolf Bahro, the militant East German dissident (he was immediately jailed after the publication, in West Germany, of his book *The Alternative*) uses the term *surplus-consciousness* to designate this (still largely vague and diffused) awareness. He defines it as "the growing quantity of free mental energy which is no longer tied up in necessary labor and hierarchical knowledge."⁶

"Surplus consciousness" in the Bahro-Marcuse conception is a product of expanding education, scientific and technical development, and refinement of the forces of production and labor process that at once produce a higher form of consciousness and yet do not satisfy in the labor process or everyday life the needs

and ideals produced by contemporary society itself. In effect, Bahro and Marcuse are arguing that critical consciousness is produced by the very social processes of the technological society and that this subjectivity comes into conflict with existing hierarchy, waste, repression, and domination, generating the need for social change. This position maintains that existing social processes themselves are helping produce a subjectivity that demands participation and fulfillment in the labor process and sociopolitical life, as well as increased freedom, equality, opportunities for advancement and development. If these needs are not satisfied, Bahro and Marcuse suggest, rebellion and social transformation will be generated.

I will offer some criticisms of Marcuse's concept of the revolutionary subject in the concluding section, but want to note here that counter to his caricature as an idealist utopian, Marcuse attempted to ground his conception of radical subjectivity in existing struggles, movements, and tendencies. Hence, subjectivity for Marcuse, whether the dominated subject of advanced capitalism or oppositional subjectivity which he sought in first the New Left and counterculture and then new social movements, was historical, evolving and developing, and was always full of contradictions and ambiguities. Marcuse was more aware than most in the Marxian tradition of the need for a robust theory of subjectivity to generate the subjective conditions for change and he was deeply interested in theory, culture, and social experience which would help create a new subjectivity. Hence, his attempts to reconstruct subjectivity are grounded in his political desire for radical social change and preservation of the individual.

Some Concluding Comments

In retrospect, the critique of the subject launched by the Frankfurt School, feminism, poststructuralism, postmodern theory, and others have enriched our thinking on subjectivity by challenging us to rethink the problematics of the subject and agency, and

have helped us think through and conceptualize various dimensions of experience and action neglected in traditional accounts, as well as to envisage alternative possibilities for thought, action, and everyday life. While traditional and modern conceptions of the subject were excessively rationalist, essentialist, idealist, and metaphysical, I have argued that the contemporary critiques of the subject provide the impetus and occasion to develop more critical and creative conceptions of post-metaphysical subjectivity.

Hence, in conclusion, I would like to make some comments contrasting Habermasian perspectives on subjectivity with Marcusean ones to indicate the specific contributions and strengths, and limitations, of Marcuse's position. I have suggested that Marcuse offers a notion of a corporeal subjectivity with an emphasis on its aesthetic and erotic dimensions, while Habermas's communicative reason lacks a body, grounding in nature and materiality, and the aesthetic and erotic components. That is, while Habermas's conception of subjectivity contains a grounding in sociality and ego-alter relations, he does not offer a notion of aesthetic, erotic, and embodied and sensual subjectivity as in Marcuse's conception. There is also not as strong a critique of the tendencies toward conformity and normalization as in Marcuse's conception, nor is there as forceful a notion of transformation and emancipation. Nor does Habermas offer a notion of revolutionary subjectivity.

There are, on the other hand, problems with Marcuse's conceptions of subjectivity. I have downplayed the extent of Marcuse's dependence on questionable aspects of Freud's instinct theory because I believe that a Marcusean conception of subjectivity can be produced without dependence on Freud's conception of the political economy of the instincts, the death instinct, and the somewhat biologicistic notion of Eros that Marcuse draws from Freud. Yet while Marcuse's focus on the corporeal, aesthetic, erotic, and political dimensions of subjectivity constitutes a posi-

tive legacy, there are omissions and deficiencies in his account. Crucially, he underemphasizes the ethical and arguably, concerning the political, does not adequately develop notions of justice and democracy. Since notions of ethical, just, and democratic subjectivity are not cultivated in Marcuse's writings, Habermas's analyses provide a necessary complement. Habermas's primary focus on the ego-alter relation and his subsequent treatises on morals and moral development, democracy and law, and the social obligations and constraints on subjectivity offer an important correction to Marcuse's analyses. Hence, both perspectives on subjectivity by themselves are one-sided and require supplementation by the other.

While I have been primarily concerned in this paper to interrogate Marcuse's resources for the rethinking and reconstruction of subjectivity, I would argue that no one thinker has *the* answer to the question and that we would thus be well advised to draw upon a wealth of thinkers to rehabilitate and reconstruct subjectivity in the contemporary moment. Within the Frankfurt School, Adorno, Benjamin, Fromm, Habermas, Marcuse, and others make important contributions and outside of the tradition many feminist theorists, poststructuralists, and others also advance the project.⁷ Moreover, there are also difficulties with Marcuse's theory of the revolutionary subject that we must confront in concluding our remarks.

Despite his sharp critique and modification of orthodox Marxism, Marcuse's theory is still too tied up with the Hegelian-Marxian problematic of the "revolutionary subject" which presupposes a unitary revolutionary class as the subject of revolution.⁸ In this concept, the features explicated by Marx in his early analysis of the proletariat are ascribed to whatever group, class or tendency which the revolutionary theorist believes is the key to the revolution. This concept reached its logical conclusion — and *reductio ad absurdum* — in Lukàcs' notion of the proletariat as the identical subject-object of history.⁹ Lukàcs' contrived construc-

tion and the subsequent critique that it elicited should have shown the dangers of a Hegelian-Marxian concept of the revolutionary subject and the need for another approach to revolutionary theory.

Further reflection on the history and sociology of revolution puts into question whether revolutionary transformation comes from a "revolutionary subject" or rather, as I would argue, from classes (or sectors of a class), groups, organizations, and individuals in struggle. It seems idealist and obtuse to ascribe revolutionary change to *a* (or to *the*) revolutionary subject since social change comes from complex conjunctures and alliances between different social groups and forces. Consequently, it is wrong to identify in advance the "revolutionary subject" with any particular social class, group, or tendency. Indeed, it is extremely difficult to specify in advance, especially in advanced capitalist societies, "revolutionary forces." As Marcuse puts it: "The social agents of revolution — and this is orthodox Marx — are formed only in the process of the transformation itself, and one cannot count on a situation in which the revolutionary forces are there ready-made, so to speak, when the revolutionary movements begins" (5L 64).

In this conception, the role of revolutionary theory is to analyze existing social forces and groups in struggle in specific historical conditions and situations, and to indicate which groups are bearers of emancipatory interests, values, and sensibility and motivated to generate radical social change. Hence, while I question whether there is a "revolutionary subject" defined as a universal revolutionary class, I do think it is important to specify the nature and conditions of revolutionary *subjectivity*, defined as a subjectivity which demands revolutionary change and which prefigures alternative institutions, values and practices which will create a better life for all. The strength of Marcuse's type of critical Marxism is its stress on the subjective conditions of (and obstacles to) revolutionary change and formulations of alternatives

to the given society. This subjective and speculative perspective is a necessary component of the revolutionary project that structuralist Marxism and poststructuralism — both of which reject notions of revolutionary subjectivity — lack. Radical social change requires taking seriously existing consciousness, criticizing mystifications and distortions, and formulating needs, values and ideals which will aid in the process of human liberation.

Although Marcuse sharply polemicizes against identification of the revolutionary subject with Marx's proletariat, he does not question the concept of the "revolutionary subject" itself. Indeed, his protracted search for a revolutionary subject was the source of his pessimism in *One-Dimensional Man* and then his excessive reliance on students, intellectuals, the new sensibility, women, and finally "surplus consciousness" as revolutionary agents. Further, the concept of the revolutionary subject is responsible for his tendency to dismiss working class struggles as "non-revolutionary" because they do not meet the exalted criterion of the "revolutionary subject." Thus, I conclude that the concept of the "revolutionary subject" is a specter that has haunted Marcuse's project from the beginning and that it should be exorcised in the interests of developing new concepts to describe the conditions, prospects and goals of emancipatory social change.

Still Marcuse is to be lauded for his many provocative critiques of the Marxian theory of revolution and for his sustained attempts to develop new revolutionary perspectives adequate to the social conditions of advanced capitalism. Of all the Marxists of his generation, Marcuse perhaps went furthest in trying to discover and theorize the subjective conditions of revolution and to develop a theory of radical subjectivity. In so doing, he developed a powerful critique of the philosophical concept of the subject and an alternative conception of subjectivity. While some of his formulations were too imbricated in Freud's instinct theory and the Marxian problematic of the revolutionary subject, I have argued that there are other aspects of Marcuse's thought that

avoid such formulations and that he provides many important contributions to our understanding of subjectivity and agency while challenging us to further rethink the problematics of subjectivity in relation to the socio-economic developments and political struggles of our own turbulent period. In this way, the contemporary critiques of the subject challenge us to come up with better conceptions and to develop new resources for critical theory and practice.

References

- R&R= Marcuse, Herbert: *Reason and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941; reprinted Boston: Beacon Press, 1960).
- E&C= Marcuse, Herbert: *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955; new edition, Routledge, 1997).
- ODM= Marcuse, Herbert: *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964; second edition, 1991).
- EL= Marcuse, Herbert: *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).
- 5L= Marcuse, Herbert: *Five Lectures* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970)P.
- CR&R= Marcuse, Herbert: *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972).
- M&F= Marcuse, Herbert, "Marxism and Feminism," *Women's Studies* 2, 3 (Old Westbury, 1974): 279-288.

Notes

1. See, in particular, Jurgen Habermas, (1984 and 1987) *Theory of Communicative Action*, vols. 1 and 2. Boston: Beacon Press.
2. I am aware that the late Foucault was also engaged in a search for a stronger conception of agency in his later writings and want to argue here that Marcuse offers a more robust account of resistance and agency than Foucault. On Foucault's later quests to develop a theory of subjectivity and resistance and its limitations, see Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*. London and New York: MacMillan and Guilford Press, 1991

and Couze Venn, "Beyond Enlightenment? After the Subject of Foucault, Who Comes?," *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 14, Nr. 3 (August 1997): 1-28.

3. Herbert Marcuse, "The Realm of Freedom and the Realm of Necessity: A Reconsideration," *Praxis* 5, 1 (Zagreb: 1969): 24.

4. In *CR&R* 63ff., Marcuse connects his notion of the new sensibility with the analysis of the early Marx on the liberation of the senses; his conception is also influenced by Schiller's conception of aesthetic education.

5. For an argument parallel to mine developed through an engagement with French feminism and poststructuralism, see Kelly Oliver, *Subjectivity without Subjects* (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998). Oliver provides an extended argument that we can talk about subjectivity (and agency) without presupposing or needing a subject, claiming that subjectivity does not necessarily imply a "subject" and that we are better off without such a concept. She develops notions of subjectivity as relational and intersubjective at its "center" and contrasts varying discourses and forms of masculine and feminine subjectivity. This project is parallel, I suggest, to Marcuse and the Frankfurt School, disclosing a surprising affinity between Critical Theory, French feminism, and poststructuralism.

6. Herbert Marcuse, "The Reification of the Proletariat," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy and Social Theory*, 3, 1 (Winter 1979): 21. See also Marcuse's reflections on Bahro in "Protosocialism and Late Capitalism: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis Based on Bahro's Analysis," in *Rudolf Bahro: Critical Responses*, ed. Ulf Wolter (Whit Plains, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1980): 24-28.

7. This paper was first presented in a panel at SPEP (Denver, 1998) in which my colleagues David Sherman and Pierre Lamarche presented the contributions of Adorno and Benjamin in rethinking subjectivity. See, in addition, Oliver's account of the contributions to refiguring subjectivity in poststructuralism and feminism, op. cit..

8. See, for example, *R&R* 261ff.; "Revolutionary Subject and Self-Government,"; and "Proto-Socialism," 32ff. Yet there are also places in the later Marcuse where he speaks of radical or revolutionary subjectivity, the new sensibility, and new modes of experience, and I am arguing here that while such notions of transfigured subjectivity are still useful, the notion of a "revolutionary subject" should be discarded.

9. See Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*. Cambridge: MIT, 1971.

Helmut Schelsky's "German" Hobbes Interpretation

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Abstract

Helmut Schelsky (1912-1984) is certainly one of the most important and influential German sociologists of the postwar-period. He held professorial chairs in sociology in the Federal Republic for thirty years (1948-1978): in Hamburg, Münster, Bielefeld and, again, Münster. Owing to the lack of translations Schelsky is, however, not very well known in the English-speaking world. It's also difficult to point out one or two principal writings from his hand; rather we have to do with a continuous stream of publications on a wide range of topics.¹ In this article, however, I'll focus on Schelsky's controversial postdoctoral thesis on Thomas Hobbes, which he presented on the eve of the Second World War. My discussion is furthermore intended as a contribution to the much wider theme: German intellectuals and National Socialism.

I.

In February 1939 Schelsky defended his postdoctoral thesis in philosophy and sociology on Hobbes at the University of Königsberg. It was planned and prepared to appear as a book in 1942, but due to war circumstances it never did. Not until a few years before his death did Schelsky decide to publish the manuscript in an unchanged form. It appeared in 1981 under the title *Thomas Hobbes. Eine politische Lehre*.²

In a new preface Schelsky quite openly states that at the time of writing and rewriting his thesis (1938-1940) he was in no way an