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Herbert Marcuse: Liberation, Domination and the Great Refusal

by

Patrick O'Brien

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

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HERBERT MARCUSE: LIBERATION, DOMINATION AND THE GREAT REFUSAL

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ABSTRACT

In works such as *Eros and Civilization* and *One Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse provided both a forceful critique of modern industrial society and a path to collective liberation. His work was largely influenced by Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud, and was adopted by parts of the New Left and the 1960s Counterculture, who felt, by and large, that he articulated what they perceived. Marcuse's popularity may have declined after the "Sixties," but that does not diminish the relevance of his thoughts, nor the contribution of his philosophical project. Marcuse insisted that a philosophy of liberation founded in dialectical thinking and critical theory must change with the existing conditions. As such, this paper will be an exegesis of the Marcusean concepts of liberation, domination, and *The Great Refusal*, and also attempt to elucidate some of the Marcusean concepts that have maintained their relevance, but can fall victim to misinterpretation.

INTRODUCTION:

It seems to be that wherever these radicals and the so-called New Left appear, Marcuse's somewhere's [sic] in the background. We are convinced that he has to convey some of his ideas and thoughts directly to the students and this lies [sic] the danger of Marcuse.

American Legionnaire Harry Foster, *Herbert's Hippopotamus*, 1968

On January 15, 1969, on the grounds of the San Diego City Hall, some locals, presumably opposed to the impending renewal of Herbert Marcuse's teaching contract with the University of California at San Diego, hanged him in effigy atop the flagpole.¹ By that time, Marcuse had found himself, somewhat reluctantly, in a position of notoriety as the "father of the New Left." Naturally, local conservative groups in and around San Diego vehemently challenged his presence, most famously the American Legion, who offered to pay the remainder of Marcuse's contract if he would leave.² The backlash against Marcuse, often exceedingly venomous, speaks to the influence, real and imagined, that Marcuse had in the 1960s, and the threat to capitalist hegemony his ideas represented.

This is a somewhat strange phenomenon. How did Herbert Marcuse, a relatively obscure German-born critical philosopher become such a media celebrity? Why did he

¹ Marcuse, Harold. *Herbert's Hippopotamus: A Story about Revolution in Paradise*. June 10, 2005. <http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/soundvideo/herbhippo.htm> (accessed April 1, 2013) -- from The Official Herbert Marcuse Website: <http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/soundvideo/herbhippo.htm>. On the chest of the effigy was a sign labeled "Marxist Marcuse." The website is run by members of the Marcuse family, and contains several links to the video cited. The video is a documentary video made by University of California at San Diego film student Paul Alexander Juutilainen in 1996. It examines Herbert at the university mainly from 1968 to 1969. The only textual reference I could find containing a reference to those responsible for the effigy was Perlstein, Rick (2009). *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*. New York: Simon and Schuster, p. 383.

² Interestingly, the tactics of the American Legion, who had appointed themselves the moral arbiter for the region, were successful elsewhere (e.g. San Diego State University), but it appears Marcuse was fortunate to have a supportive Chancellor...and tenure.

become the most controversial and talked about intellectual of the decade? Even though Marcuse regularly dismissed the suggestion that he was some sort of intellectual guru of New Left ideas -- often being critical of their tactics and rejecting the suggestion that the movements of the 1960s needed a leader -- his arguments did resonate with the cultural and political milieu of the time.³

According to Douglas Kellner, Marcuse's "uncompromising critique of advanced industrial society articulated the anger and disgust felt by a generation of young people outraged by the continued existence of poverty alongside the wealth of the consumer society."⁴ Marcuse's analysis provided intellectual vindication for the New Left and counterculture, and their feelings of alienation and disillusionment. It penetrated to the roots of their discontent, and provided a sense of respectability for their refusal. Marcuse helped explain (and justify), to many, why they were so discontent. It must be remembered that these folks were living through the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, the conformity of suburbia and consumerism, the women's movement, and the emergent belief that growing up and getting a job (i.e. entrance into the affluent society) meant becoming a meaningless cog in the corporate machine. Marcuse explored the easily missed causes of this intuited sadness and provided an alternative to the impersonal and irrational technocratic society. As Kellner states, "the New Left found a sharp critique of capitalism and an uncompromising defense of a type of democratic and libertarian socialism quite congenial to their radicalism. Marcuse thus legitimated

³ See Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston, Beacon Press), 1969 and *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* (Boston, Beacon Press), 1972.

⁴ Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984), 2.

liberation and revolutionary struggles.”⁵ Finally, unlike most other scholars, who were unwilling to cross the boundary between academic and activist, Marcuse actively embraced both New Left and youth revolts, a relationship which suggests that the “rebellion-caused-by generation-gap” trope was largely a media fabrication.

The spotlight left Marcuse as the “Sixties” was ending – and the New Left had split into factions -- but not before it left a legacy of polemics, simplifications, and misinterpretations of his works. It is our task to look past the media figure, and re-examine his project in order to assess and better understand his contribution to philosophy, society, and human liberation -- and to offer some thoughts on what he might argue today.

1.1 - A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF THE EARLY HERBERT MARCUSE

What is true of the classics of socialism is true also of the great artists. They break through the class limitations of their family background, environment. Marxist theory is not family research.

Hebert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, 1977

Herbert Marcuse was born in 1898, into a middle class merchant family in Berlin, Germany.⁶ In the *Lebenslauf* (i.e. vita, biography) section of his doctoral dissertation on the artist-novel, Marcuse described himself as follows:

I was born on July 19, 1898 in Berlin, the son of the businessman Carl Marcuse and his wife Gertrud, born Kreslawsky. I attended the Mommsen Gymnasium

⁵ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 3.

⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *The Essential Marcuse*, ed. Andrew Feenberg and William Leiss. (Boston, Beacon Press, 2007), vii.

and from 1911 the Kaiserin-Augusta Gymnasium in Charlottenburg until my summons to military service in 1916. After completing my final examination (*Reifeprüfung*), I entered Reserve Division 18 but remained in the homeland on account of my poor eye-sight and was transferred to the Zeppelin Reserves where I received permission and the opportunity to visit lectures. After my release in the winter of 1918, I studied regularly for four semesters in Berlin and four semesters in Freiburg, first Germanistik, and then Modern German literary history as my main subject (*Hauptfach*) and philosophy and political economy as subsidiaries (*Nebenfach*).⁷

Marcuse was Jewish, but his family was not devout. In an interview with Douglas Kellner, he claimed his upbringing was typical for a German middle-class family, and his Jewish heritage never caused any sense of alienation from German society.⁸ Indeed, Marcuse claims that his *Lebenslauf* is a poor place to search for the taproot of his later works (see above epigraph from *Aesthetic Dimension*.)⁹ His adolescence may not provide clues, but his entrance into the military and the onset of World War I had a profound effect on him.

Marcuse never saw combat during the war, but was not spared the disillusionment felt by many following the war. Marcuse witnessed humans beings used as cannon fodder by military leaders seemingly incapable of handling the greater ability to destroy

⁷ Herbert Marcuse, '*Lebenslauf*', as appended to his doctoral dissertation, *Der deutsche Künstlerroman* (The German Artist Novel) (Freiburg and Berlin, 1922), quoted in Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 13.

⁸ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 13.

⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston, Beacon Press 1978), 18-19. The quote is part of a larger argument in which Herbert was defending bourgeoisie art.

that was granted to them by modern technology. After the dust settled, the war had taken the lives of approximately nine million, and injured another twenty-one million in total. To Marcuse, the war was inexplicable, and he was greatly troubled because the nations involved claimed to be the pinnacle of civilization and enlightenment.¹⁰ Additionally, prior to the war, the pre-war German economy was prospering, and the predictions of Karl Marx seemed to be developing – i.e. the proletariat was expanding in tandem with the wealth gap. As such, like many in Germany at that time, Marcuse was radicalized by the war. He was drawn to socialism when stationed in Berlin, but viewed the support of the war by many of the socialist opposition in Germany to be an utter betrayal of that for which socialism stood.¹¹

He joined the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1917 as a protest against the war. At that time, the party (SPD) was, by some accounts, the most important socialist party in the world, relying on the large working class in Germany. By 1914, the party was dominated by a more Lenin-style Marxism (which advocated strong central institutions), but had a very visible minority advocating a more libertarian Marxism with Rosa Luxemburg being, perhaps, the most well-known of this group.¹²

Marcuse's decision to join the party was interesting considering that many in the party began using Marxist arguments to justify the war, and in 1917, it expelled most party members who were against the war (including Rosa Luxemburg). In Marcuse's defense, he was an eighteen year old just beginning his political education, his beliefs

¹⁰ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, viii.

¹¹ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, viii.

¹² Dauvé, Gilles, and Denis Authier, Marxist Internet Archive, last modified in 1976, <http://marxists.org/subject/Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, t/germany-1918-23/dauve-authier/ch.02.htm>. The site was accessed on April 4, 2013. Also, Rosa Luxemburg called Lenin and the majority of the SPD “organizational fetishists.”

were in their infancy, and he very likely did not fully understand the political options open to him.¹³ Marcuse remained in the Socialist Democratic Party, and never joined Luxemburg's *Spartacus League* (formed as an anti-war alternative to the SPD), but was sympathetic to their project during the general strike in Germany in 1918.¹⁴ In that same year, there was a (not unrelated) military revolt throughout Germany known as the "November Revolution," and Marcuse, after the military command lost control, was elected to the revolutionary soldiers' council in Berlin. His hopes were dashed as he witnessed the council quickly re-elect their once-jettisoned officers to lead them. Not only were the soldiers lacking in administrative experience and confidence, but also, according to Marcuse, were rapt with a desire to return home as soon as possible.¹⁵ He then came to the conclusion that not even Luxemburg's radical *Spartacus League* was ready for revolution – a theme that is to be found in his later arguments, to be known as "the return of the repressed."

Throughout the November Revolution, Marcuse found himself increasingly drawn to the positions of the *Spartacus League*, and eventually concluded that the Socialist Democratic Party (SDP) was too conciliatory and was moving towards a closer alliance with the ruling powers of the German bourgeoisie. Unsurprisingly, he quit the Socialist Democratic Party after his discharge from the army in 1918, and became a vocal opponent of the party. After the "arrest" and murder of Luxemburg and her fellow

¹³ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 14- 15.

¹⁴ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 380 n8. The general strike was instigated in Berlin by revolutionary show stewards of the metal workers' union, in alliance with the *Spartacus League*. The strike advocated workers' control and revolutionary struggle. See Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 15.

Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, viii, and Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 15 and 380 n7, n9, n14.

travelers, in which the SPD government was thought to be instrumental, Marcuse delivered the following words to a crowd of students in Berlin in 1967:

Let me say something personal. If you mean by revisionism the German Social Democratic Party, I can only say to you that from the time of my own political education, that is since 1919, I have opposed this party. In 1917 to 1918 I was a member of the Social Democratic Party, I resigned from it after the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, and from then on I have criticized this party's politics. Not because I believed that it could work within the framework of the established order – for we all do this, we all make use of even the most minute possibilities in order to transform the established order from inside it – that is not why I fought the SPD. The reason was rather that it worked in alliance with reactionary, destructive, and repressive forces. Since 1918 I have always been hearing of left forces within the Social-Democratic Party, and I have continually seen these left forces move more and more to the right until nothing left was left in them.¹⁶

Marcuse was maturing intellectually, fostering a greater level of independent thought. He thought himself too young and inexperienced to be a professional revolutionary, so it is at this time (1918) that he immersed himself in the writings of Karl Marx in an attempt to better understand the symbiotic relationship between capitalism and imperialism. He was also nagged by an inability to completely identify with the left parties in Germany –

¹⁶ Marcuse, *Five Lectures*, 102-3, and Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 17, 380 n16 and n18.

i.e. the Social Democrats and Communists, so he returned to the texts of Marx to learn firsthand his socialist theories of revolution.¹⁷ To Marcuse, the conditions necessitating a revolution in Germany were present and his desire to understand why it failed -- and why people do not revolt in the face of oppressive conditions -- is a paradox that would haunt him his entire professional life.

As Marcuse mentioned in his *Lebenslauf*, he returned to formal studies in Berlin from 1919-1920, and eventually transferred to Freiburg where he studied German literature, with an emphasis in philosophy and political economy. It is here that Marcuse was a student of Edmund Husserl, the founder of the phenomenological school of philosophy (i.e. the study of “phenomena,” or rather, our immediate experience, the way external objects appear, and are experienced and understood by our consciousness) and, in 1922, wrote and defended his doctoral dissertation on *Der deutsche Künstlerroman* (*The German Artist-Novel*).¹⁸

¹⁷ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 16 for an account of Marcuse’s decision to leave the SPD, and see Marcuse, *Five Lectures*, 102-103

¹⁸ Husserl proposed a philosophy of immediate experience. This involved a rejection of the over-emphasis on science (positivism), an appropriate reaction to the carnage of WWI. Husserl provided the method that would be used by Martin Heidegger, an early, and arguably lasting, influence on Marcuse. Husserl’s method – called “phenomenology” -- focused on the “phenomena” of existence. In other words, when we perceive something – for example, a table – we naturally assume that even though we may have different perceptions of that table (when viewed from different angles), our perceptions are held together by the “fact” that they are all attached to a real, t (i.e. the table) out there to be experienced. Husserl did not necessarily disagree with that, but he also argued that to stop there is to fail to appreciate the actual process of organizing perspectives and holding them together in our consciousness. Husserl was interested in the structure of experience. What appears to the subject as an act of “knowing,” is bound up with an object, the known, remembering, and the remembered. From the perspective of phenomenology, acts of consciousness create meaning in experience. Husserl argued that experience is more than an interaction between a subject and object (which is our natural assumption). In other words, we naturally think of consciousness as in-the-mind and our encounters with external objects as an interaction between two things-in-the-world. This account, according to Husserl, does not accurately describe experience. To put it another way, there is a difference between a robot sensing a table and avoiding it, and a human sensing a table. To describe experience as merely an interaction between two things-in-the-world is to describe humans as simple creatures of reflex. As such, Husserl argued that, on this level, experience is a realm independent of the brain – a realm of being called “pure consciousness.”

1.2 - THE GERMAN ARTIST-NOVEL

Joy appears to me as the end of life and the only thing useful in the world. God too wanted it: he made women, perfumes, light, beautiful flowers, good wines, curly hair, lips, and angora cats; he did not say to his angels: Have Virtue, but: Make Love.

Théophile Gautier, quoted by Marcuse in *Der deutsche Künstlerroman*

The extent to which *Der deutsche Künstlerroman* hints at later Marcusean ideas is staggering. Marcuse's approach in his dissertation was strongly influenced by György Lukács' theory of the novel, Wilhelm Dilthey's method of empathy, and Friedrich Hegel's aesthetics and dialectical thinking.¹⁹ Indeed, the very structure of and flow of *The German-Artist Novel* -- in which Marcuse examines novels which situate the artist as the protagonist, only to then discuss the tensions, contradictions and competing positions inherent in the novel -- is similar to Hegel's dialectic. Not only was Marcuse learning to think and write dialectically, he first introduces his thoughts on the emancipatory power of art and the tension between the "is" and "ought," that would become fully articulated in his later work.

An "artist-novel" is a novel centered around a protagonist-as-artist that is struggling to find reconciliation between the artistic calling and the external reality. Like Lukács', Marcuse emphasizes conflicts between the demands of the ideal (artistic calling, or "ought") and the real (the "is", or the demands of everyday life). In Marcuse's estimation, the artist-novel demonstrates the alienation of the artist from social life, thereby expressing the protagonist's yearning for a more authentic and harmonious existence. The protagonist-as-artist does not find fulfillment in the "as is," and needs some sort of resolution. This lack of harmony, as Marcuse sees it, fosters an "eruption of

¹⁹ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 18-32, and Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, vii and ix.

self-conscious activity,” in which the artist either attempts to shape reality according to his artistic ideals, or to seek refuge in the world of artistic illusion. This aesthetic argument prefigures later works where Marcuse provides a more mature theory of art as revealing utopian images of harmony (an “ought”), thereby evoking a sense of rejection of the alienating world (the “as is”). In demonstrating a quest for harmony between the “as is” and the “ought,” the protagonist-as-artist demonstrates the desire for liberation, as well as a “Refusal” to accept an alienated existence – both which would in time become major Marcusean themes.²⁰

As Kellner argues, every chapter of Marcuse’s dissertation contains previews of his later ideas. Not only does the word “*befreiung*” (liberation) appear throughout Marcuse’s dissertation, he demonstrates great sympathy for liberation movements and praises the “experience of love” in his chapter on the *Sturm und Drang* (i.e. Storm and Drive) movement.²¹ Moreover, Marcuse’s sympathy for the *Sturm und Drang* writers and his demand for a “Kingdom of Beauty and Love” anticipate both his later emphasis on the importance of the aesthetic-erotic and his analysis of the shortcomings of the Enlightenment and its concomitant positivism.²² Finally, Marcuse’s empathy with each novelist (i.e. the protagonist-as-artist) presents the novel as a way of life, or a life lesson. In other words, the novel-as-art reflects what *ought* to exist – i.e. the human subject *ought* to (and indeed, does) struggle in much the same fashion as the artist-as-protagonist.²³

Marcuse was suggesting that this struggle needs to be a conscious effort – a line of

²⁰ Herbert Marcuse’s dissertation as cited in Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 20-21.

²¹ The *Sturm und Drang* movement was a late eighteenth century German literary movement that emphasized nature, feeling, and authenticity, while rejecting the Enlightenment and, as they saw it, over-emphasis on Rationalism. Citation: Roy Pascal, *The Modern Language Review* Vol. 47, No. 2 (April 1952) 129-151, published by Modern Humanities Research Association.

²² Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 27.

²³ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 27.

argument he would later tackle in *One Dimensional Man*. Ultimately, *Der deutsche Künstlerroman* is a treasure trove of proto-Marcusean ideas.

1.3 - WHY A RETURN TO MARCUSE?

There are no visible alternatives to this form of life. What else is left for us then, but at least to search out practical improvements within this form of life?

Jürgen Habermas, *The Past as Future*, 1994

As mentioned above, Marcuse's popularity, both in the media and among leftist crowds, was winding down with the "Sixties." The "first generation" of Frankfurt School philosophers (i.e. Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Leo Lowenthal, Herbert Marcuse, and Walter Benjamin) was being replaced by a new generation led by Jürgen Habermas.²⁴ The second generation of critical theorists, writing in the last few decades, is, by many accounts, less critical of society.²⁵ In view of this allegation, it should be unsurprising that there has been a recent surge of interest in Marcuse and his liberation philosophy,

²⁴ Benjamin, who opted not to flee Germany with his Frankfurt School colleagues, was killed during WWII.

²⁵ For example, in his seminal work, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1985), Habermas attempts to create a communicative approach – called a "discourse ethics" -- that would liberate humans from systematically distorted communication wherein one or more persons attempts to control or dominate another. In other words, the dominated person has an interest in liberation from the condition of distorted communication. (See Arnold Farr's *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 140). As Habermas sees it, the knowledge needed to release the rational capabilities of humans is to be attained through a social, historical, and inter-subjective self-formative process. (See Arnold Farr's *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 147). The Habermasian approach, inasmuch as it aims to create a more democratic mode of communication that will overcome the presuppositions of the speakers and listeners, thereby creating a more egalitarian and just world, strives to construct an emancipatory dialogue -- but in adding praxis to theory, Habermas loses his critical edge. This is not to diminish the contributions of a philosophical giant, but his "discourse-ethics" approach fails to be sufficiently critical and cannot escape a tendency towards positivism. Indeed, Iris Marion Young, lamenting the less than critical turn of the second generation theorists (and calling for a return to Marcuse) delivered a lecture in 1996 entitled, "What's Critical about Critical Theory?" (See Martin Beck Matustik, foreword to *New Critical Theory: Essays on Liberation*. Ed. by William W. Wilkerson and Jeffrey Paris (New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.: 2001) viii.

largely in response to scholarly dissatisfaction with not just Habermas, but also to poststructuralist and postmodern frameworks.²⁶ But that does not specify why scholars, having several first generation critical theorists from which to choose, have turned to Marcuse. It is difficult to deny that the flattened world of *One Dimensional Man* described by Marcuse in 1964 has not increased its tendency to erase the negative. That alone is enough to pay attention to his work. Moreover, we have had time to read and absorb his arguments in a less politically charged atmosphere, and thereby have a clearer understanding of his oeuvre than readers in the “Sixties.” Marcuse’s project is dialectical, that is, firmly rooted in the historical and material world. As such, his insights can serve as an excellent point of departure in any analysis of the current organization of society. Finally, Marcuse provides us with hope, which in turn rests on the capacities of human imagination and our need for a non-oppressive society. It is notable that he ended his most pessimistic work, *One Dimensional Man*, with a quote from Walter Benjamin: “It is only for the sake of those without hope that hope is given to us.”²⁷ Marcuse steadfastly argued that the seeds of hope for a liberated society are to be found in the current state of affairs, and within all of us.²⁸

In works such as *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964), Herbert Marcuse provided both a forceful critique of modern industrial society and a path to collective liberation. His

²⁶ See Wilkerson and Paris, *New Critical Theory* and Farr, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*. To describe poststructuralism and postmodernism is beyond the purview of this essay, but it’s enough to know that critical theorists (Habermas included) rightly argue that, in its insistence on micro-analysis of events, they are ultimately positivist and incapable of changing the status quo.

²⁷ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston, Beacon Press: 1964) 25.

²⁸ It should be noted that while Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Marcuse’s colleagues at the Frankfurt School (which will be discussed in greater detail later) often held ideas similar to Marcuse and all had an influence on each other, Adorno and Horkheimer are decidedly more pessimistic in their critique of modern society, and leave little room for liberation.

project was largely influenced by Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud, and was adopted by parts of the New Left and the Counterculture of 1960s America, who felt, by and large, that he articulated what they perceived -- even if many did not fully grasp his ideas.

Marcuse's popularity may have waned after that tumultuous decade (or so) but his thoughts are as germane now, if not more so, than when originally written. His works, when read in sequence of publication, demonstrate that Marcuse lived up to his belief that a philosophy of liberation founded in dialectical thinking and critical theory must change with external and internal conditions. This essay will attempt to elucidate some of the Marcusean concepts that have maintained their relevance, but can fall victim to misinterpretation. To that end, the second and third parts of my essay are exegeses of Marcuse at different stages of his thought. Part two will focus on the evolution of Marcuse from his early days as a quasi-Orthodox Marxist heavily influenced by Martin Heidegger. This section will also describe Marcuse's turn toward Hegel, and eventual return, of sorts, to Marx during the interwar period. Finally, I will introduce Marcuse's appropriation of Freud after World War II. The third section takes place entirely after World War II, but will be more thematic, that is, focus on some key Marcusean ideas. Appropriately, there will be a special focus on concepts such as "The Great Refusal," the distinction between true and false needs, the "irrationality of the whole," one-dimensionality and Marcuse's thoughts on the absorption of the working class -- that is, the exploited -- into the capitalist class.

In 1922, after completing his studies in Freiburg, Marcuse went to work for several years in a book-dealer and publishing firm in Berlin, which was not unusual for

the sons of Jewish businessmen.²⁹ In 1924, he married a woman named Sophie (whom he had met in Freiburg), and was able to buy a partnership in the book firm through the financial help of his father, who had survived the economic crisis of 1923 intact.³⁰ After preparing a lightly annotated bibliography of the various editions of the works of Friedrich Schiller (1925), Marcuse read the very influential book by Husserl's former assistant and eventual successor, Martin Heidegger. In Marcuse's (somewhat curt) words:

Here are the basic facts – I read *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time) when it came out in 1927 and after having read it I decided to go back to Freiburg (where I had received my Ph.D. in 1922) in order to work with Heidegger until December 1932, when I left Germany a few days before Hitler's ascent to power, and that ended the personal relationship.³¹

Martin Heidegger was at the time a very prominent German philosopher, and his *Being and Time* attempted to synthesize Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and a new mode of thought called "existentialism."³² To Marcuse, this book seemed to promise an alternative to traditional Marxism (i.e. Orthodox, Scientific) and helped explain the failed German revolutions that haunted Marcuse's thoughts. Appropriately, in 1928 he returned to Freiburg to return to his studies, this time as a professional philosopher.

²⁹ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, x.

³⁰ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 32-33

³¹ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 116.

³² See my earlier note explaining Husserl, and also see Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, p. 385 n56.

PART II – EVOLUTION OF THE MARCUSEAN PROJECT

Indeed, I believe that it is impossible to correctly understand the Marcuse of today without reference to this earlier Marcuse. Whoever fails to detect the persistence of categories from Being and Time in the concepts of Freudian drive theory out of which Marcuse develops a Marxian historical construct runs the risk of serious misunderstandings.

Jürgen Habermas, 1968

Many of Herbert Marcuse's early writings have been brought to light since Habermas first warned us against overlooking this period in Marcuse's professional life. These early works can help us correct some of the confusions and misperceptions borne out of Marcuse's relatively late (he was in his sixties in "the Sixties") and very rapid rise to notoriety. These texts can provide us with answers and foster important discussions, which, in turn, will help improve our understanding of his later writings. Indeed, this is a fascinating period in Marcuse's personal and academic life. How is it that a leftist Jewish revolutionary thinker in Germany in the 1930s moved to Freiburg to study under a man who would very publicly go on to become a member of the right-wing Nazi Party, effectively serving as a symbol of its intellectual justification? In fact, Marcuse closes the introduction to his 1932 book *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* by stating, "Any contribution this work may make to the development and clarification of problems is indebted to the philosophical work of Martin Heidegger."³³ Did Heidegger's project contain any tendencies that make his acceptance of Nazism less surprising? In other words, should Marcuse, and Heidegger's other Jewish students, have been so

³³ Herbert Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* trans. by Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1987) 5.

shocked at this development? Were they blinded by adulation for their teacher, or was his philosophy substantively altered, in a sense, to align with the Nazi Party?

In 1977, Marcuse was interviewed by Heideggerian scholar Frederick Olafson, and responded to that question as follows:

...discussing the famous question of whether Heidegger's Nazism was already noticeable in his philosophy prior to 1933...from personal experience I can tell you that neither in his lectures, nor in his seminars, nor personal, was there any hint of his sympathies for Nazism. In fact, politics were never discussed – and to the very end he spoke very highly of the two Jews to whom he dedicated his books, Edmund Husserl and Max Scheler. So his openly declared Nazism came as a complete surprise to us. From that point on, of course, we asked ourselves the question; did we overlook indications and anticipations in *Being and Time* and the related writings? And we made one interesting observation, *ex-post*: If you look at his view of human existence, of being-in-the-world, you will find a highly repressive, highly oppressive interpretation.³⁴

To be sure, Marcuse, prior to 1933, expressed meaningful skepticism regarding the concreteness of Heidegger's project whilst attempting to fuse the latter with Marxism, but it is notable that Marcuse did not drop Heidegger as a primary interlocutor until the latter affiliated himself with Nazism.

³⁴ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 120-121.

Marcuse expressed concern that Heidegger's existentialism was not explicitly applicable to any specific state of affairs. For one thing, Marcuse was concerned that Heidegger's project seemed to argue that the alienation of the individual was universal and inevitable, thereby making it difficult, or slippery, to apply to any particular historical era. It's that philosophical looseness allowed by Heidegger's project that ultimately convinced Marcuse it was too risky, and thus fruitless, to continue his attempt to fuse Heidegger with Marx. To put it another way, while Marcuse was attempting concretize Heidegger in a way that would move the latter's project towards radical action and liberation, Heidegger, in using his own project to intellectually legitimize Nazism, moved in the opposite direction, thereby demonstrating the potential perils inherent in his own system.³⁵ To Marcuse, the ability of Heidegger to use his own project to justify an oppressive social reality indicated that Heidegger's system was, at least directly, not where liberation was to be found.³⁶

As mentioned above, it is notable that Marcuse did not clearly see the oppressive tendencies in Heidegger's project, and did not expressly abort his attempted fusion of Heidegger and Marx until the former accepted Nazism. Speaking of Heidegger's categories in *Being and Time* Marcuse, in 1977, stated:

... "idle talk, curiosity, ambiguity, falling and being thrown-into, concern, being toward death, anxiety, dread, boredom" and so on. Now this gives a picture which plays well on the fears and frustrations of men and women in a repressive

³⁵ Indeed, Marcuse was attempting to push Heidegger's project [by fusing it with Marx] towards concretion and praxis, much the same way Marx reconstructed Hegel.

³⁶ Marcuse was nicer to Hegel, b/c he argued that the Nazis were misinterpreting Hegel and it was not Hegel himself applying his project to Nazism.

society -- a joyless existence: overshadowed by death and anxiety; human material for the authentic personality. It is for example highly characteristic that love is absent from *Being and Time* -- the only place where it appears is in a footnote in a theological context together with faith, sin, and remorse. I see now in this philosophy, ex-post, a very powerful devaluation of life, a derogation of joy, of sensuousness, fulfillment. And we may have had the feeling of it at that that time, but it became clear only after Heidegger's association to Nazism became known.³⁷

Indeed, to Marcuse, the ability of Heidegger to employ his own categories to legitimize Nazism, while maintaining a correct (but, perhaps, not the only) interpretation of those concepts, revealed, to Marcuse, the danger in engaging so directly with a project that was predominantly existential.

Discussing his only postwar encounter with Heidegger, Marcuse stated:

... [Heidegger] admitted it was an "error"; he misjudged Hitler and Nazism -- to which I want to add...that is one of the errors a philosopher is not allowed to commit. He certainly can and does commit many, many mistakes but this is not an error and this is not a mistake, this is actually the betrayal of philosophy as such, and of everything philosophy stands for...In my view, it is irrelevant when and why he withdrew his enthusiastic support of the Nazi regime -- decisive and relevant is the brute fact that he ...idolized Hitler... [Thus] the only philosophy that remains is the philosophy of abdication, surrender.

³⁷ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 121.

Marcuse proceeds to argue that Heidegger's rejection of the pre-Hitler democracy of the Weimar Republic should be unsurprising considering it did not conform to the latter's existential categories, thereby implying the state of affairs under Nazism did as much.³⁸ To Marcuse, Heidegger's association and legitimization of Nazism was nothing less than a surrender of his own project. When viewed from this angle, the timing of Marcuse's abandoning of Heidegger makes more sense. The lack of concreteness and the ambiguities within Heidegger's project always concerned Marcuse -- but it was not until Heidegger himself demonstrated the perils of such a project, thereby abdicating all philosophical repute, that Marcuse dropped him as a primary interlocutor. Even with Marcuse's adamant rejection of Heidegger, there is a question that still needs to be addressed -- to what extent did the existentialism of Heidegger remain a lasting influence on Marcuse's project after they had parted ways?

In that same 1977 interview, Olafson's line of questioning and the tone of the interview suggest an over-eagerness to lead Marcuse into a discussion of Heidegger's continuing influence on his thought. Attempting to explain his initial interest in Heidegger, Marcuse states:

Let's say from 1928 to 1932...[I] saw in Heidegger what ...[I] had first seen in Husserl, a new beginning, the first radical attempt to put philosophy on really

³⁸ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 122.

concrete foundations – philosophy concerned with the human existence, the human condition, and not with merely abstract ideas and principles.”³⁹

At a later point, Marcuse provided the following assessment:

I...believed there could be some combination between existentialism and Marxism, precisely because of their insistence on concrete analysis of the actual human existence, human beings and their world. But I soon realized that Heidegger’s concreteness was to a great extent a phony, a false concreteness, and that in fact his philosophy was just as abstract and just as removed from reality, as the philosophies which at the time had dominated German universities, namely a rather dry brand of neo-Kantianism, neo-Hegelianism, neo-Idealism, but also positivism.”⁴⁰

Putting aside the consideration that Olafson may have prodded Marcuse into an overly negative analysis of Heidegger, and an overemphasis of the antagonism between existentialism and Marxism, Marcuse does concede that Heidegger did provide him with “a kind of thinking” that continued to influence his later writings.⁴¹ Even with Marcuse’s insistence that Heidegger’s existential categories were quite insignificant to his later work, a careful reader will nevertheless find traces of them throughout his later project.

After these early “Heideggerian” years, Marcuse turned to Hegel’s dialectic, and then to Freud’s drive theory -- viewing both as correctives to Heidegger. Appropriately, I

³⁹ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 116.

⁴⁰ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 117.

⁴¹ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 115, 127.

will endeavor to discuss the components of Heidegger's *phenomenological existentialism* Marcuse eventually determined to be in need of correction. Such a task will provide us with valuable insights that will enrich our understanding of the oeuvre of Marcuse. To that end, the remainder of this section will be split into three segments. The first will discuss the first five years of Marcuse's professional career, a time period that is often labeled as his "Orthodox Marxist" years. As mentioned above, Marcuse began these years heavily influenced by Heidegger and ended them by turning to Hegel as a corrective to what he concluded were the shortcomings of Heidegger's project. The second segment will focus on the years (1933-1942) Marcuse spent with the Institute for Social Research (i.e. the Frankfurt School) and will discuss Marcuse's return to Marx upon his examination of Marx's landmark *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (not published until 1932). It is during these years Marcuse found to be explicit in Marx what he had been searching for in Heidegger. His project was also heavily influenced by colleagues at the Frankfurt School, and took on a visible "Frankfurt Style." The final portion of this section picks up Marcuse after his years working for the United States Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and eventually the State Department during and after World War II.⁴² After a period of relative professional inactivity, Marcuse returned after the war to use Freud's theories to locate potential liberation in the human drives. It is during these years that Marcuse began to take on a more "Marcusean" cast. Even though Marcuse's project seems to appear "inconsistent and unstable"⁴³ at times, this essay will, in part, attempt to demonstrate that despite the many fluctuations in the

⁴² The Office of Strategic Services (OSS) was a United States intelligence agency formed during World War II. It was the wartime intelligence agency, and it was a predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

⁴³ Farr, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 15.

Marcusean oeuvre, his theories remained consistent. To that end, it is necessary and appropriate that Marcuse be viewed dialectically -- that is, every so-called “turn” in his thought be analyzed in light of the context in which it arose, and the available and visible modes of liberation within that social setting. Indeed, Marcuse insisted that a dialectical analysis must adapt to the current state of affairs, and as such, we must appreciate that every apparent detour in his project necessarily contained elements from his earlier thoughts. Thus, Marcuse must be dissected in the same manner in which he thought. One would hope he would not have it any other way.

2.1 – MARCUSE IN DIALECTICAL TENSION WITH ORTHODOX MARXISM AND HEIDEGGER – 1928-1933

To be radical is to seize something by the roots. The root of man, however, is man himself.

Karl Marx, *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, 1843

In 1928, Herbert Marcuse began his attempt to lay the groundwork for the synthesis of Martin Heidegger’s *phenomenological existentialism* and Marxism. It must be noted that Marcuse was attempting to rescue *individuality* from the tendency towards conformity he found Western society demanded. Moreover, Marcuse was attempting to revitalize a scientific and dogmatic Marxism that was prevalent at that time. To put it another way, Marcuse was responding to what he observed as crises of Marxism and of individual authenticity. To him, they were not unrelated. It is necessary to understand this context when discussing the developments of Herbert Marcuse’s early critical theory

if we are to attempt to apply them to current circumstances, and if we are to claim that his project remained consistent from beginning to end. To that end, we will explore the social and intellectual environment in which the early Marcuse thought, and the key ingredients of the young Marcuse that hold his whole project together and help explain its fluctuations.⁴⁴

To Marcuse, the Marxism prevalent at the time he returned to his studies in 1928 was riddled with three fatal flaws, all of which were founded in reductionist arguments. The Orthodox Marxism of the Second International (1889-1914) had a strong tendency toward a positivist and scientific orthodoxy. To be sure, the Second International was diverse, but there were certain tendencies that seemed to represent a dominant trend toward a scientific world view, characterized by strict determinism -- that is, a dogmatic belief in the strict Marxian notions of revolution by the proletariat as inevitable and borne out of economic necessity due to the economic alienation of the working class. This is Orthodox Marxism *par excellence*. To Marcuse, this rejected the dialectical vein of Marx's theory, ignored the role of human subjectivity, and was overly optimistic and simplistic.⁴⁵

Arnold Farr refers to the two flaws of the Second International as "*scientific reductionism*" and "*economic reductionism*." As Farr describes it, "scientific reductionism entails a naïve view toward science to the extent that it reduces all phenomena (even social, political, and moral) to the goals, methodology, expectations,

⁴⁴ Regarding the last claim (i.e. Marcuse's lifelong philosophical consistency), this essay will, in a sense, be in conversation with 3G CT who, I will argue, overstate the totality of HM's move away from MH.

⁴⁵ Farr, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 16-17.

and rules of the natural sciences.”⁴⁶ As a result, this brand of Marxism “subordinates human agency to the laws of nature” while also creating a tendency to equate technical progress with moral progress. As such, there is a propensity to think of people as instruments in the domination of nature, and, considering this Marxist framework views the socialist revolution as inevitable, there is less need to worry about the class or self-consciousness (i.e. their awareness of the “ought”) of the proletariat. The Second International, in an attempt to create a socialism that was more approachable, attempted to merge the “is” of science with the “ought” of morality, but in the process ignored the antagonism between the two.⁴⁷

The Second International was also guilty of economic reductionism, which Farr describes as “the reduction of all human struggle to economic struggle.”⁴⁸ In other words, it ignored other areas of contestation, such as culture, politics, race, ethnicity and gender. Additionally, it failed to recognize the ability of capitalism to adapt and absorb any possible threat to its hegemony, a trope that would become ever-present in Marcuse’s later project.⁴⁹

Moving on to the Third International (1919-1934), Marcuse witnessed a socialist movement mired in *political reductionism*. Bruce Brown characterizes this brand of Marxism as placing an over-emphasis on the political resistance needed for a socialist revolution. Brown argues that in viewing the opposition as nothing but a physical force to be defeated in the political realm, the Third International failed to recognize capitalism

⁴⁶ Farr, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 17.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Farr, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 18.

⁴⁹ Farr, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 18. Marcuse’s project and the major works therein will be discussed throughout, but for modern critical theorists attempting to find possible areas of liberation within the realms of culture, politics, race, and gender see the works of Arnold Farr, Martin Beck Matustik, and Wilkerson and Paris (ed.) and their edited volume *New Critical Theory*.

as the hegemonic and ideological force it is. In focusing solely on the material and political levels of resistance, the Third International ignored the qualitative change needed in the consciousness of the proletariat as a prerequisite for any revolution.⁵⁰ This is another trope that would become central to the project of the later Marcuse.

To be sure, the boundaries between these three flaws are blurry, and this was but a cursory explanation, but it is enough to know that this is the context in which Marcuse attempted to reconstruct Marxism. Indeed, it is in Marcuse's response to these conditions that we can see the early formations of what will mature into his critique of positivism, and science-as-positivism in *Eros and Civilization* and *One-Dimensional Man*, as well as his usage of the phrase "advanced industrial system," (as opposed to merely using the term "capitalism") a term intended to include Soviet-style bureaucratic Marxism.

Marcuse writes:

Since its first usage ... the term "positivism" has encompassed (1) the validation of cognitive thought by experience and facts; (2) the orientation of cognitive thought to the physical sciences as a model of certainty and exactness; (3) the belief that progress in knowledge depends on this orientation. Consequently, positivism is a struggle against all metaphysics, transcendentalisms, and idealisms as obscurantist and regressive modes of thought. To the degree to which the given reality is scientifically comprehended and transformed, to the degree to which society becomes industrial and technological, positivism finds in the society the medium for the realization (and validation) of its concepts -- harmony

⁵⁰ Farr, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 18.

between theory and practice, truth and facts. Philosophic thought turns into affirmative thought; the philosophic critique criticizes *within* the societal framework and stigmatizes non-positive notions as mere speculation, dreams of fantasies.⁵¹

To Marcuse, this is devastating precisely because any “harmony between theory and practice, truth and facts” is illusory. In this case, the individual fails to conceive the object (external reality, phenomena) as antagonistic -- or rather, the individual fails to distinguish between what an object appears to be (*appearance*, its immediate qualities) and what it really is (*essence*, its essential qualities). In Marcuse’s words, to see clearly is to experience an “object of thought ... as that which it really is (in its essential qualities), and in antagonistic relation to its contingent, immediate situation.”⁵² Marcuse refers to this as “intuition,” but is describing what it means to perceive something dialectically. It is also what we will see Marcuse refer to as “multi-dimensional” thinking. At any rate, the positivistic individual winds up dependent on a system (the advanced industrial system) that appears to create a harmony between our internal and external, truth and facts, thought and practice. Thus, in Marcuse’s view, the positivistic individual will tend to lose sight of what is true and untrue, and thus all genuinely critical thought is lost because the individual “criticizes from within the societal framework” -- does not perceive anything other than the “is.” To Marcuse, positivism, in the final analysis, creates the illusion of an impossible harmony, which he refers to as a “terrifying

⁵¹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 172.

⁵² Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 125-126.

harmony of freedom and oppression, productivity and destruction, grown and regression.”⁵³

According to Farr, embedded within the crisis of Marxism was also the issue of the revolutionary subject – that is, where is the person predisposed to radical action to be found? This is a question that was to preoccupy Marcuse for the rest of his life, and the conflicting answers provided by Marcuse during this five year period help explain the level of debate surrounding the issue of his Orthodox Marxism. If we were to subject Marcuse to the same type of positivist analysis that he spent his life refusing, then we would conclude that he was, indeed, an Orthodox Marxist from 1928 to 1933. Thus, his “appearance” in those years can be described as that of an Orthodox Marxist because he had not yet fully rejected the notions that the proletariat is *the* revolutionary agent, and their rebellion is inevitable due to the contradictions found within capitalism. Marcuse seemingly demonstrates his commitment to the Orthodox Marxist theory of class struggle in his 1928 essay “Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism” when he writes:

In the historical situation that we have been addressing, class is the decisive historical unity and the knowledge of the unique, historical-social necessity is the achievement of “class consciousness.” In class consciousness, the chosen class arises to become the bearer of the historical act. Should the revolutionary situation

⁵³ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 124. To be sure, Marcuse does believe that the “is” can be made more rational -- but not entirely -- dialectical thought demands that the negative always be present -- thus complete harmony between opposites is impossible. It should be remembered, that Marcuse will argue that we can, and should, be moving towards greater freedom, not less. It is to that extent Marcuse argues society can become harmonious.

be at hand, it can only be seized by that class that is conscious of its historical situation.⁵⁴

Here we find tension between Marcuse's existential argument that revolutionary consciousness begins in the individual's quest for authenticity, and his reluctance to fully reject the notion that the proletariat is *the* authentic subject of radical action. To be sure, Marcuse is very skeptical that the proletariat will fulfill its revolutionary purpose, which is unsurprising considering Marcuse's first-hand experience of the failed November Revolution in Germany,⁵⁵ and his attempt to utilize Heidegger (instead of say, György Lukács, whose framework was centered around the idea of class consciousness) suggests additional uncertainty. This apparent contradiction seems to make Marcuse guilty of being non-committal and inconsistent.⁵⁶

To scrutinize Marcuse in the manner in which he would prefer -- that is, dialectically -- would bring us to more complex and nuanced conclusions. The evolution of a seed into that of a plant will help us understand this type of analysis. It is very tough to deny that the seed "appears" as nothing but a seed. Eventually, if placed in proper circumstances, the seed will develop into a plant. Thus, its "appearance" can now be described as that of a plant. That is a positivist analysis. Dialectically speaking, the seed, having the potential, through the destruction of its "appearance" as a seed, to become a plant, was in its "essence," both a seed, a plant, and appropriately, the soil into which it

⁵⁴ Herbert Marcuse, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism" in *Heideggerian Marxism*, ed. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005) 9.

⁵⁵ See p. 6-8 for a discussion of Marcuse's experiences in the November Revolution.

⁵⁶ We must remember that Marcuse was still young and in the beginning stages of his project, hence still figuring things out.

will eventually decompose.⁵⁷ Additionally, every new “appearance” contains elements of the old. That, in a nutshell, is how progress is conceptualized dialectically, and that is how Marcuse should be conceptualized.⁵⁸ On this level, Marcuse’s reluctance to fully jettison Orthodox Marxist notions becomes less relevant, for he was already destroying the seed of the “early Marcuse,” in order to become, for lack of a better phrase, his later self -- one able to articulate his unique brand of Marxism. Even though Marcuse still held on to some of the primary ideas of an Orthodox Marxist, his “movement” was away from orthodoxy.⁵⁹ Indeed, his very attempt to utilize Heidegger (and eventually Hegel) and his search for the revolutionary subject – a project begun during these years -- suggests a healthy skepticism of Orthodox Marxism. Thus, his “essence” had already rejected orthodoxy, and to argue otherwise is to render oneself vulnerable to accusations of reductionism. More pressing is the issue of Heidegger’s influence after Marcuse’s aborted attempt to fuse Heidegger and Marx.

In Marcuse’s essay ‘Contributions’ he attempted to produce a “concrete philosophy” that would grapple with the philosophical and Marxist issues at that time. It situates him within the historical vein of “critical Marxists” that attempted to provide an alternative to the reductionist Marxism mentioned above and the abstract philosophies found in academia that Marcuse believed were inapplicable to concrete life.

⁵⁷ It is important to note that I am not referring to a fixed (human) essence, but rather a dynamic conception of the term whereby the plant must at all times be present in the seed, and thus, the idea of the seed cannot be reduced to simply that of seed or plant.

⁵⁸ To be sure, the movement of a seed to a plant is not identical to that of a human being (for human’s have consciousness), but this does not invalidate the example used.

⁵⁹ It must be remembered that, dialectically speaking, when the current state of affairs is destroyed (i.e. the “is” – in this case, Marcuse’s Orthodox Marxism), it remains present in the new state of things (i.e. the “ought”). A dialectician, Marcuse necessarily conceives of progress in this manner, for change must be visible (and thus, possible) though the lens of the current state of affairs. In other words, if the “is” did not remain as part of the “ought”, then the “ought” would not be possible, and hope would be lost. Thus, a dialectician does not conceive of progress (or history) as a linear sequence of events, but rather, as a spiral - a constant unfolding.

‘Contributions’ marks the professional point of departure for Marcuse in his life-long project to create a philosophy and social theory that would move society toward necessary and radical social change. Consequently, this and subsequent early essays anticipate his entire theoretical project and contain many elements that would be significant in his later works.⁶⁰ It is also where we will find a Marcuse in constant tension with both Orthodox Marxism and Martin Heidegger.

Marcuse opens ‘Contributions’ with the following passage:

The object of the investigation must first be provisionally determined according to its givenness. Marxism, in whose epistemological context historical materialism enters into history, does not appear in the form of a scientific theory -- as a system of truths whose meaning rests wholly in its accuracy as knowledge [*Erkenntnisse*] -- but rather in the form of a theory of social action, of the historical act [*Tat*]. Marxism is both the theory of the proletarian revolution and a revolutionary critique of bourgeois society; it is a science insofar as the revolutionary action that it wishes to set free and to stabilize requires insight into its own historical necessity -- into the truth of its being. It lives in the inseparable unity of theory and praxis, of science and action...⁶¹

In the above passage, Marcuse, influenced by his readings of György Lukács and Karl Korsch, indicates that he views Marxism as more than a positivist analysis of the “is,” (i.e. a scientific socialism focused primarily on formulating objective scientific laws

⁶⁰ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 38-39.

⁶¹ Marcuse, *Contributions*, 1.

rooted in the economy) but, rather, a theory of revolutionary practice grounded in historical knowledge and historical necessity.⁶² We also see that Marcuse has not yet begun his scathing critique of science-as-positivism that becomes a distinctive feature of his analysis in the 1950s, but it must be remembered that he encountered a much different (and he would argue, much more “one-dimensional) social order in the postwar “Affluent Society” of the United States.⁶³ Nevertheless, this line of argument represents, at least in part, a rejection of the Orthodox Marxism of the day.

Additionally, Marcuse does not advocate a voluntaristic concept of radical action, arguing that it becomes an historical necessity. Building off of the above argument, Marcuse writes:

The question of radical action can only meaningfully be posed at the moment when the act is grasped as the decisive realization of the human essence and yet when, at the same time, precisely this realization appears to be a factual [*factual*] impossibility—that is, in a revolutionary situation.⁶⁴

To put it another way, Marcuse is arguing that capitalism robs humans, called *Daesein* in Heideggerian terms, of an authentic existence. He continues:

All of these activities seem to be detached from the human actors who, in turn,

⁶² Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 39.

⁶³ To put it another way, a dialectical analysis demands that one’s premises’ and conclusions must change as the conditions under analysis change. Appropriately, the “as is” that Marcuse encountered in post-World War II United States – that is, the flattening world of advanced industrial capitalism, mass consumption, mass media, mass advertising, and increasing loss of privacy – demonstrated, to Marcuse, a greater tendency toward positivism and a loss of negative, or dialectical thinking.

⁶⁴ Marcuse, *Contributions*, 4.

do not seem to live in them, but merely to be occupied with them; or -- the ultimate absurdity -- one sees actors carrying out actions not to live, but for the sake of mere survival! Here one sees the “transformation of personal powers into thingly ones,” and what is left behind is an “abstracted individual [...], robbed of all life-content,” whose “own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him.”⁶⁵

Marcuse is arguing that capitalist society suppresses the real content of human activity and calls for radical action in the face of this alienated existence. He clearly argues that this radical act is necessary because of the tension between the inhuman capitalist system that dominates and reifies *Daesin*, and the human need for free life-affirming activities. It is here we find similarities between the early Marcuse and his later usage of Freud in *Eros and Civilization*. In Marcuse’s words, “the erotic energy of the Life Instincts cannot be freed under the dehumanizing conditions of profitable affluence.”⁶⁶

For the early Marcuse, the radical act is an historical act demanded by being in a specific historical situation, that is, an insufferable social reality. Marcuse was positing that this need for revolution is to be found in human consciousness, injecting a subjective element into Marxist revolutionary theory.⁶⁷ For the later Marcuse, Freud infused this abstract line of reasoning with concreteness, placing this inauthenticity squarely on the instinctual or biological level. As Jürgen Habermas explained to Marcuse in a 1979 interview, “Freudian metapsychology later assumed the role of Heidegger’s existential

⁶⁵ Marcuse, *Contributions*, 4. (Note: quotes are of Karl Marx in *German Ideology*, and can be found on p. 197, 295, and 251 respectively).

⁶⁶ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xxiii.

⁶⁷ Remember, this is prior to the discovery of Marx’s 1844 Manuscripts, the influence of which will be discussed later.

ontology.”⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the early Marcuse is rejecting the dominant Marxist ideologies that posited the revolutionary subject as an inevitable creation of capitalist economics, and is attempting to draw attention to the need for a substantive change in consciousness needed within the individual. Moreover, he is anticipating his later, and more explicit, move away from the Orthodox view of the proletariat as the primary agent of revolution. Thus, this represents a pushback, in a sense, against the notion that a socialist revolution is inevitable (albeit not as forcefully as Marcuse will do so later), for it relies on the historical knowledge and consciousness of the individual in the face of intolerable circumstances, as opposed to a predictable human response to economic conditions.

Heidegger’s project was important to the early Marcuse because it demonstrated that to live a meaningful life is to be *authentic*. In Marcuse’s view, inauthenticity (i.e. a meaningless existence) is akin to *alienation* – that is, the separation from one self and from other human beings.⁶⁹ This is an important categorical link between Heidegger, Marx, Freud, and Hegel, which suggests an ideational continuity throughout Marcuse’s project. That is to say, Heidegger’s category of *inauthentic* can be seen as analogous to Marx’s concept of *alienation*, and Freud’s discussion of the discontented and repressed “self.” Moreover, Heidegger’s distinction between *authentic* and *inauthentic* can be seen as analogous to Hegel’s distinction between *essence* and *appearance* (which demands a dialectical analysis of phenomena resulting in a full view of potentialities), as well as

⁶⁸ Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, Heinz Lubasz, and Tilman Spengler, “*Theory and Politics: A Discussion*,” trans. Leslie Adelson, *Telos* 38 (Winter 1978–79): 132. Habermas was literally speaking to Marcuse about Marcuse.

⁶⁹ One can discern a Marxist element to Heidegger’s argument. This is interesting considering Heidegger never cited Marx. Indeed, Marcuse believed that Heidegger never read, or was interested in Marx. Marcuse was explicitly attempting to fuse Heidegger’s concept of “inauthentic” with Marx’s concept of “alienation.”

Freud's call for humans to *sublimate* (i.e. locate socially acceptable activities that compensate for the necessary oppression imposed on the human drives by the requirements of civilization). In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse, turning to Freud, will refer to the demands of modern society as the *performance principle*, and will refer to those demands placed on the human being that are greater than what is necessary to maintain civilization as *surplus repression*. Those terms will be discussed in greater detail later. For now, it is enough to be aware of the categorical continuity. Thus, it is important to realize that *surplus repression* necessarily creates an *alienated* or *inauthentic* existence. A discussion of Heidegger's categories of *thrownness* and *fallenness* will help us see the persistence of this line of thought in Marcuse's project. Our discussion of these categories will lead us to the concept of *historicity*, another category that Marcuse adopted from Heidegger and, although eventually found only in the background, remained significant to his later project.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger attempts to create a method of "existential phenomenology" -- i.e. the analysis of the Being of human beings. As mentioned above, Heidegger calls human beings *Dasein*, which means "being-there." Heidegger writes:

This characteristic of *Dasein*'s Being -- this "that it is" -- is veiled in its "whence" and "whither," yet disclosed in itself all the more unveiledly; we call it the "thrownness" of this entity into its "there"; indeed, it is thrown in such a way that,

as Being-in-the-world, it is the “there.” The expression “thrownness” is meant to suggest the *facticity of its being delivered over*.⁷⁰

For Heidegger, *Dasein* comes to be in the world through *thrownness*. In other words, at birth *Dasein* is simply thrown into existence. To be sure, for Heidegger, this is a pre-existing world of meanings, but *Daesin* is eventually expected to provide self-direction. In clear dialectical fashion, the thrown is expected to also become, as much as possible, the thrower. Arnold Farr helps clarify the concept of *thrownness* with the following analogy:

[B]eings or individuals find themselves thrown into the unfolding, happening, or movement of Being. It is as if one awakes to find oneself inserted into a chapter of a story that is already being written. One must find one’s bearings in this story as one travels from one chapter to the next. One is thrown into a chapter that one did not choose, yet one is expected to make a contribution to the development and completion of this chapter and perhaps the entire book.⁷¹

It must be noted that, for Heidegger, this “thrownness” necessarily implies that *Dasein* shares the world with others, thus becoming a being-with-others-in-the-world.⁷²

Accordingly, the existence of *Dasein* in the world with others means that the thrown

⁷⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978) 74.

⁷¹ Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 25

⁷² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 157.

necessarily exists with the “they” (*das Man*) or the anonymous anyone.⁷³ The beginnings of a theory of intersubjectivity within Marcuse are discussed elsewhere.⁷⁴ Our purpose is to understand that, in the Heideggerian project, it is in *Dasein*’s relation to other human beings and society at large, where the thrown can find room to provide direction (i.e. in Farr’s analogy, to contribute to the writing of one’s own book). It is this realm of personal autonomy -- or in Marcusean terms, of dialectical or negative thinking -- that Marcuse, in his seminal work *One Dimensional Man* (1965), warned was largely missing from our individual and collective consciousness. Appropriately, it now becomes necessary to discuss the categories of *fallenness* and *historicity*.

Implicit in the Heideggerian idea of being-in-the-world-with-others are the categories of *authentic* and *inauthentic* existence. For Heidegger, *Dasein* will fall into the “they,” thereby becoming inauthentic. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes:

“Fallenness” into the “world” means an absorption in Being-with-one-another, in so far as the latter is guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity. Through the Interpretation of falling...we have (now what we) called the inauthenticity of *Dasein* ...⁷⁵

Put another way, the individual tends toward domination by social forces, conformity to standard modes of behavior and interests, thereby failing to develop individuality or to assert genuine personal autonomy, thus falling into an *inauthentic* (or meaningless)

⁷³ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 123 and Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 157.

⁷⁴ Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, chapter 4.

⁷⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 220.

existence. An *inauthentic* existence, for Heidegger, tends toward an instrumental existence -- that is, one's relation to self and others is increasingly dominated by external factors such as one's connection to material objects.⁷⁶ Increasingly, we interact with our self and each other as if we are objects, thereby losing a desire and capacity for genuine love, caring, and mutual understanding.⁷⁷ For Heidegger, *Dasein* is not aware that its Being is, to an alarming degree, controlled, and taken away, by *das Man* (i.e. the "they," or anonymous anyone). Thus, if one is to become authentic, one must be aware of what it means to be a self in interaction and tension with others and objects in the world. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse will argue that advanced industrial society, through various methods, tends to homogenize and to strip humans of the ability to think of any alternative (and presumably better) realities (i.e. the "can be," or a "second dimension" of thought). In describing individuals increasingly incapable of genuine personal autonomy and moving rapidly towards a state of affairs that regards people as instruments, while being unaware (or even desirous) of this reality, Marcuse is presenting us with a reformulated, concretized, and more nuanced dialectical version of Heidegger's categories of *thrownness* and *fallenness*. For Marcuse, this helped explain the failed revolution in Germany in 1918, and it also brings us to the concept of *historicity*.

If *inauthenticity* is understood as *Dasein*'s getting lost in the "they," and *authenticity* requires an awareness of one's place in the (past, present, and future) world, then this implies a realization of possibilities (or potentialities). As John Abromeit states, this suggests an "awareness of one's own-most possibilities and the firm resolve to

⁷⁶ Farr, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 23.

⁷⁷ Heidegger was not arguing that each individual *Dasein* – i.e. anonymous anyone – loses *all* capacity to love all other individuals. Heidegger is simply generalizing a tendency among each individual to so, much of the time.

realize them in the future.”⁷⁸ This necessarily points to one’s potentiality, and to future modes of Being. It also reveals the temporal axis of Heidegger’s existential analysis, that is, *Dasein* is connected to the past, present, and future, and must be aware of its own connection if it is to be *authentic*. This notion of historicity is central to Heidegger and Marcuse, for it refers to “the way in which individuals proceed to self-awareness of the way they live in history.”⁷⁹ This concept provided, for Marcuse, a bridge between Hegel and Heidegger.⁸⁰ Heidegger and Hegel posited similar notions of historicity, yet it was Hegel’s explicit employment of the dialectical method that compelled Marcuse to view Hegel as corrective to Heidegger.

In the early 1930s Marcuse began to engage with the philosophic categories of Friedrich Hegel. He wrote a series of articles on dialectics while preparing a second dissertation under Heidegger, eventually called *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*. This makes sense when one considers that Hegel was an important source for Marx and was an interest of Heidegger.⁸¹

The concept of historicity is a major trope of *Hegel’s Ontology* (published by Marcuse in 1932) and Marcuse’s 1928 essay *Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism*.⁸² In the introduction to *Hegel’s Ontology* Marcuse writes:

⁷⁸ John Abromeit. “Herbert Marcuse’s Critical Encounter with Martin Heidegger 1927-1933” in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, ed. John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb (New York and London: Routledge, 2004) 135.

⁷⁹ Barry Katz. *Herbert Marcuse and the Art of Liberation: An Intellectual Biography*. (London: Verso, 1982) 70.

⁸⁰ To be sure, Heidegger and Hegel had subtle, but important differences between their conceptions of historicity, but Marcuse glossed over the differences.

⁸¹ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 69

⁸² See Marcuse, *Hegel’s Ontology* and “Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism” in *Heideggerian Marxism* (ed. by Richard Wolin and John Abromeit).

Historicity is what defines history and thus distinguishes it from “nature” or from “economy.” Historicity signifies the meaning we intend when we say of something that it is “historical.” Historicity signifies the meaning of this “is,” namely the meaning of the Being of the historical.⁸³

For Marcuse, historicity is the historical in all of its moments -- past, present, and future. It is a dialectical view of history, and even injects traces of an “ought to be.” In this framework, the historical is intended to counter the positivist view of history, which conceives of historical movement as a chain of events -- as artifacts of the past. Historicity argues that past eras continue to infiltrate the present and future, and effect the continual movement of history.

Marcuse’s definition of historicity does not provide us with a very good clarification of the concept, thus it is now necessary to introduce two definitions that can help us to better understand. In his essay “Inhabiting Hope: Contributions to a New Materialist Phenomenology” William Wilkerson writes:

Historicity captures how individuals find themselves thrown into a world that is not their own making, a world that presents them with ready-made projects, values, and ideals contained in a culturally specific heritage. Furthermore, individuals come to terms with themselves and their social milieu by finding their place within it and by taking a stand on it. Human existence exhibits its

⁸³ Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 24, and Marcuse, *Hegel’s Ontology*, 1.

historicity in that it takes its projects and self-understandings from a historically specific form of life.⁸⁴

Wilkerson contrasts historicity with what he calls “historicality,” or the “empirically discoverable, material, and social conditions of a society, based in the mode of production, and manifested in part through the division of labor.”⁸⁵ He goes on to describe “historicality” as an analysis of the “macrodevelopment of societies,” and the role that material conditions and structures play in the tasks, projects, and ideals of particular individuals in their daily human existence. In other words, historicity can be conceived as an individual concern that is directly related to *authenticity*, while “historicality” refers to a more concrete historical endeavor. As we will see, Marcuse thought the two concepts are relational. Offering additional clarification Robert Pippin argues:

In its broadest sense, the notion of historicity just means that the historical past has a continuing effect on the present (is, as Heidegger claims, “stretched along into” the present) and that that effect cannot be treated as a causal effect. That is, historicity cannot be understood as a “scientific” theory about the relation between events, and certainly not a causal theory, because the historicity thesis is

⁸⁴ Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 24-5, and William S. Wilkerson, “Inhabiting Hope: Contributions to a New Materialist Phenomenology,” in *New Critical Theory: Essays on Liberation*. (New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.: 2001) 66.

⁸⁵ Wilkerson, *Inhabiting Hope*, 66.

that there *are* not “separate” events “in” history affecting each other. One of the events is what it is only in relation to its past.⁸⁶

For Marcuse, the notions of *historicity* and *authenticity* create a space for *Dasein* to act radically, that is, react to oppressive conditions that do not allow for an *authentic* existence by attempting to change the “is” in a manner that is conceivable within one’s own potentialities. Marcuse was using the notion of *historicity* and *authenticity* to rescue human subjectivity from the positivism and reductionism of Orthodox Marxism. Nevertheless, by the early 1930s, Marcuse was moving past Heidegger (at least as a direct interlocutor), much the same way he was moving away from Orthodox Marxism.

As stated above, Marcuse was concerned that Heidegger’s’ ontological analysis, by itself, could not provide an ontic concretion. For this reason, Marcuse was aware that Heidegger’s existential analysis needed to turn to the “decisive facts of today in their historical concretion.”⁸⁷ Whereas Heidegger is concerned with universal ways of Being and explores what is authentic existence and how it is possible, examining the ontological conditions requisite for possible authenticity, Marcuse wants to move past that, thus asking “what is authentic existence concretely?”⁸⁸ This line of critique would move Marcuse beyond Heidegger’s ontological analysis of authenticity and look towards Hegel in an attempt to show what is blocking authenticity in the current state of affairs. It is here we find the “ought” in Marcuse’s view of *historicity* and *authenticity*.

⁸⁶ Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 25 and Robert Pippen, “Marcuse on Hegel and Historicity.” *The Philosophical Forum* XVI, no. 3 (Spring 1985): 184.

⁸⁷ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 47. He works off of his own translation of a German version of *Contributions*.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

For Marcuse, a major point of concern with Heidegger's abstract existentialism is that it seems to argue that his categories are universal, that is, applicable to all humans in every historical situation. William Wilkerson writes:

Analyses of historicity do not simply enumerate various things that people in fact believe and do, but instead present the structure in which any particular thing that someone believes is found ... the analysis given by the existential phenomenologists describe formal structures into which the content of a particular social existence can be placed. Thus, Heidegger's analysis of the resolute human existence supposedly holds for any social existence. Individuals in all social and historical situations would fit in his descriptive account ...⁸⁹

According to Heidegger's ontology, all societies in all historical time periods demonstrate the characteristics of *fallenness* and *inauthenticity*. Thus, it was clear to Marcuse that Heidegger's project could not adequately conceive of historical movement. According to Wilkerson, a Heideggerian analysis of historicity can

explain how the human relation to history is fundamental to our everyday existence (we find ourselves in the historical world and take on its tasks as our own), but ... [does] this at the cost of placing human existence outside history.

⁸⁹ Wilkerson, *Inhabiting Hope*, 67.

The historicity that enables our relation to history is itself the same for all humans across history.⁹⁰

Moreover, in positing *fallenness* as universal and inevitable, Heidegger's *Dasein*, who can achieve *authenticity* through what he called "*resoluteness*," or a turn inward to make authentic choices, is rendered asocial and apolitical. In fact, this notion of an individualistic self-transformative turn falls short of Marcuse's notion of a radical act. To Marcuse, a radical act must demonstrate a change in the individual *and* society. Heidegger's category of *authenticity* remains primarily conformist precisely because it fails to require any action aimed towards the social order. Thus, in the final analysis, the potential for radical action in Heidegger's framework becomes flattened. This explains Marcuse's turn towards Hegel, for Hegel's concrete dialectics fills this gap.

Marcuse saw Hegel's dialectics as more applicable to concrete life. To Marcuse, Hegel's ontology is strongest at the exact point in which Heidegger's is weak. It is necessary to go back to Heidegger's *Being and Time* to clarify my point. In his 1928 book, Heidegger attempts to analyze the structures of Being through the use of *phenomenological ontology*. Ontology, to Heidegger, refers to the philosophical search for the meanings of Being, or existence. Phenomenology, as Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*, means "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself."⁹¹ Thus, phenomenology must be understood as an unconcealment of Being, and *Dasein*'s acting upon that which is unconcealed.

⁹⁰ Wilkerson, *Inhabiting Hope*, 67.

⁹¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 58.

The concepts of ontology and phenomenology are not assigned equal weight in Heidegger's project. It is notable that greater emphasis is placed on phenomenology than the concept of ontology, for it is only through the phenomenological method that *Daesin* "can have access to what is be the theme of ontology."⁹² As Heidegger sees it, "only as phenomenology, is ontology possible."⁹³ To Heidegger, that which presents itself in the phenomenological conception of phenomena (or *objects-in-the-world*) is the Being of *Daesin*. Inasmuch as ontology is only possible as phenomenology, and that human beings are the subject of philosophical inquiry, it becomes evident that ontology is only possible as a phenomenology of human existence. Thus, it is clear that Heidegger's phenomenological ontology is existential -- that is, the analysis of Being of human beings. Although there is a dialectical presence in Heidegger's framework, namely between that of *Daesin* (the individual) and *Das Man* (the "they", or society) -- it is Heidegger's focus on the phenomenological method that moves Marcuse towards Hegel.

For Marcuse, dialectics is the method used by some Marxists to conceptualize the movement of history. In his 1928 essay "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism" Marcuse argues that the dialectical method sees "every developing form in the river of movement" and perceives phenomena (that is, the object) as historical.⁹⁴

Marcuse cites Engels in an effort to explicate his understanding of dialectics --

The great fundamental thought that the world is not to be conceived as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes, in which the seemingly

⁹² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 60.

⁹³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 60.

⁹⁴ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 52.

stable things, not less than their images in our heads, the concepts, pass through an uninterrupted transformation of becoming and passing away.⁹⁵

He then cites Lenin in a lengthier passage:

Dialectical logic demands that we go further. In order to really know an object, one must grasp and investigate all sides of the object, all its relations and “mediations”...Second, dialectical logic requires that the object be taken in its development, in its “self-movement”...in its transformation. Third, the whole of human praxis must enter into the “definition” of the object, as well as the critique of its truth, since as practical determination the object is bound together with what is necessary to man. Fourth, dialectical logic teaches that “there is no abstract truth”, truth is always concrete.⁹⁶

For Marcuse, dialectical thought is capable of grasping historical movement precisely because it requires attention be paid to how later forms of development are found in the earlier situation, and by showing how destruction, that is, a negation of the current social order, creates progress, or continued movement. It also demonstrates, for Marxists, the features of any state of affairs that should be negated, and conversely, those that should remain -- thus, the dialectical method preserves the unity of theory and praxis.⁹⁷ This line of argument is clearly found in the following passage from *Contributions*:

⁹⁵ Marcuse, *Contributions*, 18.

⁹⁶ Marcuse, *Contributions*, 18.

⁹⁷ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 52-3.

Perhaps already in Hegel, but certainly in Marx's work, the specific form of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis indicates in its very method the need to be true to the immanent necessity of historical movement. Rooted in the fundamental character of historicity, this immanent necessity of history finds its clearest expression in the fact that the causes of historical movement from the status quo to that which is to come [*vom Bestehenden zum Kommenden*] are already fully present in the world as it exists in the present and that they develop only out of it. It is only by this principle that transcendent, metahistorical, or ahistorical impulses or interventions are excluded. However, insofar as this development is realized only through the (historical) action of man, that which is to come will always take the form of a "negation of the status quo."⁹⁸

To be sure, by presenting a "necessity of history" expressed in "that which is to come" Marcuse is again injecting an "ought" into the constant unfolding -- into *historicity*.

Marcuse then argues for a fusion of phenomenology and the dialectical method, arguing that phenomenology must become dialectical if it wants to adequately understand historical change. In *Contributions* Marcuse writes:

Phenomenology means: allowing questions and approaches to be guided by the objects themselves, bringing the objects fully into view. In being grasped, however, the objects always already stand in historicity. This sphere of historicity

⁹⁸ Marcuse, *Contributions*, 18.

already begins, as a concrete historical situation, in the development of the question as it seeks the object; it includes the unique individuality of the questioner, the direction of his question and the way in which the object first appears.⁹⁹

Phenomenology arrives at its questions and attempts to gain access to the object (i.e. the subject matter of investigation, the phenomena) and bring it completely-in-view only through the things themselves. A phenomenological analysis correctly perceives the equipment in a woodworking shop as greater than physical objects, that is, as tools, each with a purpose, that contribute to the overall project of creating and maintaining a vibrant carpentry workshop. A phenomenological analysis, however, can not explain, for example, why the more elaborate and expensive tools of the more modern era are preferable (or not) to the simpler hand tools of previous carpenters. These types of questions and answers demand we move past a phenomenological analysis. Marcuse demanded that any analysis of historicity reach down to include “historicality,” that is, become dialectical.¹⁰⁰ In *Contributions*, Marcuse makes explicit his argument that Heidegger’s phenomenology cannot, by itself, grasp the entire object:

A failure to situate a given historicity within a phenomenological analysis signifies that the investigation has failed to bring its object fully into view. But there is more. Phenomenology should never let its investigation end simply with the exhibition of the historicity of its object, only subsequently to return it to the

⁹⁹ Marcuse, *Contributions*, 18.

¹⁰⁰ Wilkerson, *Inhabiting Hope*, 68.

sphere of abstraction. Phenomenology must constantly maintain its object in the most rigorous concretion. This means that as an examination of a historical object -- as an examination grounded in historicity -- phenomenology must allow the concrete historical situation, its concrete “material content,” to work its way into the analysis. Thus a phenomenology of human *Dasein* would be lacking in necessary richness and clarity if it were to pass over the material content of historical *Dasein*. This... is the case with Heidegger. If *Dasein* is historical in its very being, then it stands at every moment in a concrete, historical situation -- a situation that must first be destroyed before its basic structure can be exhibited.¹⁰¹

The “material content of historical *Dasein*” is precisely its “historicality.” In other words, Marcuse is rejection the phenomenological notion that the web of meaning into which *Dasein* is thrown exists prior to the material conditions. To Marcuse, they are relational, prompting him to argue that all phenomena stands in history, thus requiring phenomenology be historicized. As Kellner argues, this is a radical turn from the Husserlian phenomenology utilized by Heidegger, which strives, “through the intuition of essences at grasping the atemporal, eternal, unchanging essence.”¹⁰² This is *not* a rejection of Heidegger, but it provides a concretized supplement to Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology, which conceived of only universal and essential structures of Being.

Marcuse believes it is necessary for phenomenology to become historicized through dialectics, precisely because Heidegger’s framework never leaves the *a priori*

¹⁰¹ Marcuse, *Contributions*, 19.

¹⁰² Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 53.

(transcendental) level, thereby rendering it unable to concretely grapple with the past (i.e. historical movement) and present (i.e. the concrete state of affairs). Marcuse fleshes out this point in *Contributions*:

The achievement of the dialectical method is precisely this last concretion. For this is exactly what is at stake in the dialectical method: doing justice at every moment to the specific, concrete-historical situation of its object. The petrified and free-floating *abstracta* become concrete again for the dialectical method once they are seen reunited with the human existence “that belongs to them.” Moreover, the true dialectic can only then fulfill the demand for ultimate concretion and (thus) become true to the type of being of human existence when, on the basis of knowledge of the concrete historical situation, it also draws correct conclusions for the decisive sphere of human existence: the sphere of praxis. At the same time, the dialectic extends the line of concretion along one axis to its utmost extreme; it does so by forcing the specific human *Dasein* that it addresses in its analyses to take up, with the whole of its existence, a practical position and to act in accordance with its historical situation. The significance of the dialectical method consists precisely in the fact that it culminates in a method of action in accordance with knowledge.¹⁰³

Marcuse concludes this line of argument by reaffirming his claim for the fusion of dialectics and phenomenology:

¹⁰³ Marcuse, *Contributions*, 20.

If we therefore demand, on the one hand, that the phenomenology of human *Dasein* initiated by Heidegger forge onward, coming to completion in a phenomenology of concrete *Dasein* and the concrete historical action demanded by history in each historical situation, we must, on the other hand, demand that the dialectical method of knowing become phenomenological, that it push itself in the opposite direction and thereby learn to incorporate concretion in the full comprehension of the object... Only with the unification of both methods -- a dialectical phenomenology that represents a method of constant, extreme concretion -- is it possible to do justice to the historicity of human *Dasein*. With what has been said above, the domain of validity of dialectical phenomenology has already been broadly charted. It extends, first, to a human existence that is historical in its very being -- in its essential structure as well as in its concrete forms and configurations.¹⁰⁴

Marcuse argues that a dialectical phenomenology is able to grasp *Dasein* in its “essential structure” and in its concrete situation, arguing that such an investigation can grasp human beings on both an existential and concrete level.¹⁰⁵ This line of argument posited by Marcuse has earned him the label of “phenomenological Marxist,” or “Heideggerian Marxist.”¹⁰⁶ The implication is that while phenomenology is unable to grasp historical

¹⁰⁴ Marcuse, *Contributions*, 20-21.

¹⁰⁵ For a good comparison of a phenomenological analysis versus a dialectical analysis, see Kellner’s *Crisis of Marxism*, p. 54-55.

¹⁰⁶ See Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, for a discussion of Marcuse as a phenomenological Marxist. See Richard Wolin’s *Heideggerian Marxism* for a discussion of Marcuse as a Heideggerian Marxist.

movement, dialectics, by itself, fails to adequately comprehend the universal aspects of Being, or human existence.¹⁰⁷

Now that we have a more complete understanding of Marcuse's interlocution with Heidegger (and its complement by Hegel), it is now possible to discuss some final Heideggerian influences that remained veiled within the later writings of Marcuse. As discussed above, Marcuse believed Heidegger's existentialist ontology to represent a bulwark against a dogmatic Marxism, an atomizing bourgeoisie philosophy within academia, and an inverted social world that, in Marx's terms, tended towards the reduction of human interaction to that of "a relation between things."¹⁰⁸ Marcuse considered Heidegger to be an "ontologically veiled *critique of reification*."¹⁰⁹ This is a category that would resurface in various forms throughout Marcuse's oeuvre.

To Marcuse, Heidegger delivered a powerful critique of *inauthentic* being-in-the-world -- utilizing the concepts mentioned above -- that represented a necessary complement to the discussions of *alienation* and *reification* by Marx in *Capital* and Lukacs in *History and Class Consciousness*.¹¹⁰ A passage from Marcuse's 1929 essay entitled "On Concrete Philosophy" expresses that line of reasoning well, while encapsulating much of the Marcusean framework:

¹⁰⁷ Kellner argues that this line of argument seems to push back against the Marxist theory of historical materialism (which argues much the same thing -- that is, claims to be a science of the concrete and an adequate theory of historical analysis), but, according to Kellner, it must be remembered that Marcuse was writing during what he perceived to be a crisis of Marxism, thereby attempting to resurrect a static, dogmatic, positivist brand of Marxism and historical materialism. Indeed, Marcuse continued this argument in his 1929 essay "On Concrete Philosophy." See Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 58-68.

¹⁰⁸ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978) 32.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Wolin, preface to *Heideggerian Marxism*, by Herbert Marcuse (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005) xv.

¹¹⁰ Wolin, preface to *Heideggerian Marxism*, xv.

The world in which this *Dasein* lives is also evolving to an ever greater degree into “business” [*Betrieb*]. The things encountered in it are viewed from the outset as “goods,” as things that one must use, but not in the sense of using them to meet the needs of *Dasein*. Instead, they are used to occupy or to fill an otherwise aimless existence, until they actually do become “necessities.” In this way more and more existences are consumed simply in order to keep the “business” operational. The form of existence of all classes had to hollow itself out in such a way that it has become necessary to place existence itself on a new foundation.¹¹¹

The above passage contains much anticipation of later Marcusean themes. First, in Marcuse’s description of things-becoming-necessities, one can find anticipation of the Marcusean categories of true and false needs in *Eros and Civilization*. Second, an *inauthentic* existence, for Heidegger, tends toward an administered existence, that is, one’s relation to self and others is increasingly dominated by external factors, and we interact with our self and each other as if we are objects.¹¹² All this suggests an existential level to the Freudian argument that Marcuse posits, as well as the thrust of the argument Marcuse poses in *One-Dimensional Man*. To elaborate, the desire to claim one’s self in the movement of history, that is, to reject *false needs* and to maintain genuine human relationships and interactions, demands an interior to the self that remains after socialization.¹¹³ Without this realm, all hope would be futile, for there would be no

¹¹¹ Herbert Marcuse, “On Concrete Philosophy” in *Heideggerian Marxism*, ed. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005) 42.

¹¹² Farr, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 23. I mentioned this line of thought earlier, but I am expanding on that earlier thought.

¹¹³ Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 27.

part of the *self* that is capable of thinking negatively. The existence of this inner realm untouchable by external stimuli suggests an existential level of the *self* that is not within the reach of the external state of affairs. This not only implies an existential presence in the arguments in Marcuse, Freud, and Hegel, but also in philosophy as such. In fact, an interaction between the concrete and existential can be found in Heidegger. Embedded within his categories of *authenticity*, *thrownness*, and *historicity*, one can detect the argument that *inauthenticity* did not refer to *Dasein*'s rejection of any fixed human essence, but rather, a reluctance to assert genuine agency in the project of one's life.¹¹⁴ Indeed, in *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse describes the *original tension* between the "is" and "ought," and *appearance* and *essence* as "an ontological condition, pertaining to the structure of Being itself."¹¹⁵ Marcuse posits that this "two-dimensional style of thought is the inner form not only of dialectical logic but of all philosophy which comes to grips with reality."¹¹⁶ To be sure, Marcuse goes on to argue that this ontological concern must transform into a historically grounded dialectic -- and suggests Critical Theory as the proper vehicle with which to accomplish this -- but the tension between the "is" and "ought" can be conceptualized as an interaction between existential and concrete concerns.¹¹⁷

We must maintain a dialectical analysis on every level, which requires us to acknowledge that there is an interaction between the existential and concrete, and view Marcuse's fluctuations as dialectical *movement* -- that is, the new inevitably contains

¹¹⁴ Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 74.

¹¹⁵ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 133

¹¹⁶ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 132

¹¹⁷ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 141. Coincidentally, Marcuse exemplified that precise transformation!

elements of the old. Marcuse used Heidegger to begin with an analysis of the abstract state of *reification* and *meaninglessness*, only to concretize and historicize those categories, transforming them into his own categories of *surplus repression* and *basic repression, one-dimensionality, and repressive desublimation*.¹¹⁸ It should be remembered that Marx's critique of Hegel -- where the next segment will bring us, is based on an ontological investigation of Hegel.¹¹⁹

In the final analysis, Heidegger was important to Marcuse because the former attempted to demonstrate how "*inauthenticity* discloses some of the obstacles to radical action by suggesting how society comes to dominate the individual -- an issue that would later lead [Marcuse] to appropriate Freud."¹²⁰ Heidegger calls for a transformative turn inward (called *resoluteness*) whereby one can make authentic choices. Arnold Farr provides clarification of this point:

The notion that self-transformation is possible through choosing authentic possibilities from our heritage is a key ingredient in Marcuse's thinking, and is the key to the relationship between Heidegger, Hegel, Marx, and Freud in Marcuse's critical theory. That is, although our present social order may be oppressive and repressive (inauthentic if you will) the possibilities for a new and non-repressive social order are embedded in the past. Our heritage contains within itself a

¹¹⁸ These categories will be discussed later in the essay. Additionally, Marx reminded us that we are the product of material relations (historical materialism) and the existential (species being).

¹¹⁹ Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 22.

¹²⁰ Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 23.

multiplicity of possibilities waiting to be actualized. In Hegelian terms, the present social reality contains within itself its own negation.¹²¹

Ultimately, whether the subject is *Dasein* searching for *authenticity*, Marx's laborer seeking to overcome *alienation*, Hegel's individual subject acting within the universal, or Freud's *self* yearning for libidinal satisfaction, Marcuse's concerns remained the same throughout -- locating possibilities for individual and collective liberation amidst an oppressive and repressive state of affairs.

2.2 – ON TO FRANKFURT SCHOOL – 1932-1941

What Heidegger had done essentially was to replace Husserl's transcendental categories with his own; such apparently concrete concepts as existence and anxiety, he evaporated into bad abstract concepts... Then the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 appeared [in 1932]. That was probably the turning point. This was, in a certain sense, a new ... practical and theoretical Marxism. After that, Heidegger versus Marx was no longer a problem for me."

Herbert Marcuse, *Theory and Politics: A Discussion*, Fall 1979

We pick up in 1932, one of the most significant years in the professional and personal life of Herbert Marcuse. Simply put, during this year Marcuse broke with Heidegger, fled Germany in anticipation of Nazism, and by the following year, just before his former teacher embraced the Nazi Party, began work with the Institute for Social Research, known more commonly as the "Frankfurt School." For those reasons alone, 1932 seems like an obvious point of departure in our exploration of Marcuse; however, we must remain dialectical in our analysis, thereby requiring an explanation

¹²¹ Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 23.

more substantive -- that is, of greater significance than a mere sequence of events. In 1932, Marcuse published a review of Karl Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Many scholarly discussions of Marcuse have placed this essay within Marcuse's "Heideggerian phase," for it is still quite existential.¹²² To be sure, Marcuse still demonstrated an explicit Heideggerian influence in this essay, but to insist it belongs in Marcuse's Heideggerian phase is more appropriate for a positivist analysis rather than a dialectical one.

On a dialectical level, Marcuse's review of Marx's *Manuscripts* represents his break, so to speak, with Martin Heidegger: it liberated him from his attempted fusion of Heidegger and Marx.¹²³ Marcuse no longer needed to synthesize the two, for Marx, in his *Manuscripts*, had already added an ontological element to Marxism, thereby, in Marcuse's eyes, potentially rescuing Marxism from the crises in which it found itself. In other words, this is ultimately what enabled Marcuse, on a philosophical level, to *move* past Heidegger. Marcuse's interaction with the Manuscripts (his review was published in 1932 as *New Sources on the Foundation of Historical Materialism*) is a proper point of departure for it is such a watershed moment in the intellectual *movement* of Marcuse's project (and Marxism as such). Heidegger, and then Marx, helped Marcuse explore how humans become *inauthentic* or *alienated* on a spiritual and existential level.¹²⁴ This is a necessary prolegomena to Marcuse's later, more concrete, application of those categories, for it demonstrates that this can (and likely will) be a tendency among humans living in

¹²² Marcuse's review of the manuscripts will be discussed in greater detail later. For examples of the types of scholarly discussions mentioned, see Kellner's *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (p. 77-91), and Richard Wolin and John Abromeit's *Heideggerian Marxism* (p. xxii-xxv).

¹²³ Habermas, *Theory and Politics* 125-126.

¹²⁴ Although, it should be noted -- and will be discussed in greater detail later -- that Marx's *Manuscripts* were both existential *and* concrete.

society. It must be also be remembered, as discussed earlier, Marcuse never really rejected the existentialism of Heidegger (and now Marx) -- that is, it remained throughout Marcuse's later works, albeit on a more tacit level -- and, consequently, this early phase of the Marcusean corpus should be viewed as a necessary stage in the formation of the Marcusean project. Thus, it is better to think of Marcuse's project as just that -- a *project* that was in constant evolution. In the final analysis, since Marcuse did not really "drop" Heidegger, it is not necessary to consider the explicit presence of ontological arguments a definitive sign that any particular essay belongs in Marcuse's "Heideggerian Phase." Indeed, in a 1979 discussion with Jürgen Habermas, Marcuse was questioned about the apparent ontological framework evident in his review of the *1844 Manuscripts* and responded, "Yes, but that wasn't Heidegger any more. That was an ontology which I believed I could locate in Marx himself."¹²⁵

As mentioned previously, Marcuse was not uncritical of Heidegger's existentialism, and was openly concerned that Heidegger's ontological framework cannot, in the end, be reconciled with the historical concerns of Marxism (i.e. reach the ontic level). Marcuse was troubled by the timeless or universal state of *alienation* or *inauthenticity* that Heidegger seemed to posit. In his 1928 essay, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism," Marcuse states:

¹²⁵ Habermas, *Theory and Politics*, 126. Marcuse did write one final heavily ontological essay ("On the Philosophical Concept of Labor") prior to joining the Institute for Social Research, in which he attempted to create an ontology of labor. Marcuse, attempting to overcome the shortcomings of Orthodox Marxism, argues that labor is not just an economic activity, but also an ontological concept. He develops, in his own way, the Marxist notion that labor is the fundamental activity whereby one develops (or fails to develop) one's own potentialities. Labor, as Marcuse sees it, is central the human experience, and the human's being. Marcuse's reading, and attempt to re-center labor, was directly influenced by his reading of Karl Marx's *1844 Manuscripts*. Even though the essay is heavily ontological, it is not a continuation of his attempt to fuse Heidegger and Marx, but rather, to locate the ontological Marx. Interestingly, Marcuse argues that labor (i.e. the realm of necessity) is necessarily a burden, thereby incompatible with play (i.e. the realm of freedom). This is a theme he will return to in later writings about the advanced industrial system, in which, he comes close to reversing this position.

[W]e therefore demand...that the phenomenology of human *Dasein* initiated by Heidegger forge onward, coming to completion in a phenomenology of concrete *Dasein* and the concrete historical action demanded by history in each historical situation.¹²⁶

This concern is understandable, as Marcuse's early essays clearly argue that capitalism was the social organization (i.e. the "is") responsible for creating the human tendency towards *inauthenticity*. Any project that begins in the abstract ontological world must necessarily become concrete. As Arnold Farr aptly puts it, "A philosophy that deals with pure, abstract concepts must return to earth (at some point) if it is to be worth our time."¹²⁷ It is precisely the publication of Karl Marx's *Manuscripts* which enabled Marcuse to "forge onward," or in Farr's language, to "return to earth."

The publishing of Marx's *Okonomisch-philosophische Manuscripte vom Jahre* (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844) was a seminal moment in the intellectual movement of Marxism and Marcuse. He wrote a long review essay that appeared in the intellectual Social Democratic journal, *Die Gesellschaft* (the Society, or the Organization), in which he hailed the manuscripts' discovery as a "crucial event in the history of Marxist studies."¹²⁸ As stated above, the Manuscripts are what enabled Marcuse to move past Heidegger, but more than that, they also vindicated many of Marcuse's suspicions about Marx and the Marxism of the day. Indeed, Marcuse most

¹²⁶ Marcuse, *Contributions*, 2.

¹²⁷ Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 15

¹²⁸ Wolin, preface to *Heideggerian Marxism*, xxiv.

likely felt a kinship with the ideas expressed by Marx in his Paris Manuscripts because they provided support for his own project, and provided criticism of Orthodox Marxism as a distortion. Indeed, Marcuse's interpretation of Hegel and Marx had astonishing similarities to what Marcuse discovered in the Paris Manuscripts. Marcuse's interpretation of the Manuscripts also marks the beginning of a tendency among many Marxists to re-center Marx's early humanistic-philosophical years.¹²⁹

For Marcuse, the Manuscripts invalidated the argument standard among Orthodox Marxists that the early works of Marx, which are more philosophical than economic, are in tension with his later "scientific" work (this is known as the "cleavage thesis"). A close reading of the Paris Manuscripts made it clear to Marcuse that a correct interpretation of Marx's project should stress the continuity of his categories, via the "interconnection of philosophy, political economy and revolutionary practice throughout Marx's writings."¹³⁰ Marcuse is thus calling for a re-interpretation of Marx on the basis of his early writings, and thereby openly declaring Marxism to be in crisis.

Marcuse, embedded within his rejection of the "cleavage thesis," portrays the Paris Manuscripts as a philosophical critique of the political economy under capitalism. In Marcuse's own words:

We are dealing with a philosophical critique of political economy, for the basic categories of Marx's theory here arise out of his emphatic confrontation with the philosophy of Hegel (e.g., labor, objectification, alienation, sublation, property).

This does not mean that Hegel's "method" is transformed and taken over, put into

¹²⁹ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 77.

¹³⁰ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 79.

a new context, and brought to life. Rather, Marx goes back to the problems at the root of Hegel's philosophy (which originally determined his method), independently appropriates their real content, and thinks the philosophy through to a further stage. The great importance of the new manuscripts further lies in the fact that they contain the first explicit documentary evidence of Marx's critical reception of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "the true point of origin and the secret of the Hegelian philosophy."¹³¹

In other words, Marx's dialectical method was developed by thinking through the root problems of Hegel's dialectic, and thus, was not merely an abstraction of Hegel's dialectic. As Marcuse sees it, Marx's theory of alienation and its radical abolition is also founded on a philosophical notion of a dynamic of human nature, and is a basis for the argument that human beings are alienated by a capitalist structure. Thus:

The very complicated relationship between philosophical and economic theory and between this theory and revolutionary praxis, which can only be clarified by an analysis of the entire situation in which historical materialism developed, may become clear after a full interpretation (which I only want to introduce in this essay) of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. A rough formula that could be used as a starting point would be that the revolutionary critique of

¹³¹ Herbert Marcuse, "New Sources on the Foundation of Historical Materialism" in *Heideggerian Marxism*, ed. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005) 87.

political economy itself has a philosophical foundation, just as, conversely, the philosophy underlying it already contains revolutionary praxis.¹³²

In the end, Marcuse is arguing that these philosophical and dialectical categories are present even in Marx's later, more strictly scientific and economic writings. Marcuse is also claiming that Marx did not conceive of alienation and devaluation of human life in purely economic or quantitative terms, but argues that it involves the human being in its entirety -- that is, its essence. To put it differently, the early Marx is arguing that capitalism is not simply an economic system; more than that, it is a hegemonic and totalizing system that alienates workers from their essential need to construct an external reality (through their labor) that is responsible to their needs and powers. Under capitalism, the human being is alienated from this possibility; moreover, the world of possibilities is arrogated by the capitalist and thus, the external reality is turned against the human being, distorting its whole existence into an unwinnable struggle. Not only does this provide a powerful rebuke of the Orthodox Marxism present in the Soviet Union (Marcuse called it "crude and thoughtless Communism," with "universal private property"¹³³) for it posits that alienation would (and did) still exist in the Soviet example, but it is also injects Marxism -- a theory firmly historical and concrete -- with an ontological element.

In his Paris Manuscripts, Marx was concerned with taking the philosophical concept of alienation (as developed by Hegel) and giving it a concretion by placing it in the existing capitalist society. Marx demonstrated that this alienation contains a political,

¹³² Marcuse, *New Sources on the Foundation of Historical Materialism*, 87.

¹³³ Marcuse, *New Sources on the Foundation of Historical Materialism*, 91.

economic, *and* an historical-anthropological dimension, for “if we look more closely at the description of alienated labor we make a remarkable discovery: what is here described is not merely an economic matter. It is the alienation of man, the devaluation of life, the inversion and loss of human reality.”¹³⁴ Marcuse adds:

Bourgeois political economy has to be basically transformed in the critique for this very reason: it fails to recognize man who is its real subject. It disregards the essence of man and his history and is thus in the profoundest sense not a “science of man” [*Wissenschaft vom Menschen*] but of inhuman beings [*Unmenschen*] and of an inhuman world of objects and commodities.¹³⁵

Marx is criticizing bourgeois political economy for failing to grasp the human being, who is the subject of labor and the foundation of economic activity. Marcuse thus argues that Marx provides both a theory of human nature (or essence) and describes what capitalism does to human beings; this alienation transforms humans and society into a world dominated by quantitative (economic) categories. While this does inject Marx with existential concerns -- for in Marcuse’s interpretation, the primary fact that justifies revolution is the contradiction between one’s essential human needs and the historical condition of alienated labor under capitalism -- he is not arguing that alienation is a timeless metaphysical condition. This deflects any accusations of economic reductionism or excessive existentialism (as was the case with Heidegger). In the final analysis, Marcuse discovered that the “existential” concerns which had attracted him to Heidegger

¹³⁴ Marcuse, *New Sources on the Foundation of Historical Materialism*, 90.

¹³⁵ Marcuse, *New Sources on the Foundation of Historical Materialism*, 91.

were shared by Marx, who had also overcome the shortcomings Marcuse noticed in Heidegger by bridging the ontological and ontic. Marcuse's review of the Paris Manuscripts signaled a major movement in the Marcusean project. To be sure, Marcuse would eventually remind us to not overemphasize the early Marx (especially after attaining a more mature understanding of the later Marx), but the ideas developed by Marcuse via his interpretation of the early more humanistic Marx were to remain a significant element of Marcuse's thinking throughout the rest of his life. It is now time we turned our attention to another significant event in 1932 (and shortly after) -- the publishing of Marcuse's second dissertation.

While working under Heidegger, Marcuse completed his *habilitationsschrift* (i.e. his habilitation, or second dissertation) in 1930. It was published two years later as *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, and Marcuse intended it to grant him the *venia legendi*, which would qualify him for a full teaching professorship in a German university.¹³⁶ The circumstances surrounding Marcuse's failure to habilitate under Heidegger are unclear. Before we delve into the possible scenarios, it is necessary to better understand the context.

In 1932, the situation in Freiburg (and Germany) was becoming increasingly threatening for Marcuse. Socialists and Communists were deeply divided, and the right was coalescing around Hitler. Moreover, Marcuse had abandoned his hopes of becoming a university professor in Germany. As he recalled, "At the end of 1932 it was perfectly

¹³⁶ Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, ix. Technically, the term "habilitation" refers to the *process*, found most often in European universities, whereby one spends several post-doctoral years researching, independent of any doctoral advisor, culminating in a second thesis of greater quantity and quality than the first.

clear that I would never be able to qualify for a professorship under the Nazi regime.”¹³⁷ Marcuse then appealed to his old teacher Edmund Husserl, who sent the curator of Frankfurt University, Kurt Riezler, a letter of recommendation.¹³⁸ Via the mediation of Husserl and Riezler, Marcuse established contact with the Institute for Social Research -- i.e. the Frankfurt School¹³⁹ -- and was subsequently interviewed.¹⁴⁰ This led to the Institute’s petitioning of the University to accept Marcuse’s second dissertation, which was already published as a book, so that he could be appointed a university professor. As Leo Löwenthal, a senior research associate with the Frankfurt School, recounts in a 1964 letter, the Institute then appointed him to a professor position in 1932.¹⁴¹ Marcuse, however, never actually worked with the Institute in Frankfurt, since Max Horkheimer (head of the Institute), anticipating Nazi suppression, had already made plans to transfer the Institute’s money and operations to Geneva, to which Marcuse was assigned.¹⁴² Marcuse states “I stayed in Freiburg and worked with Heidegger in 1932, when I left

¹³⁷ Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, Heinz Lubasz, and Tilman Spengler, “*Theory and Politics: A Discussion*,” trans. Leslie Adelson, *Telos* 38 (Winter 1978–79): 126. For detailed documentation of the story of Marcuse’s attempt to use his first Hegel book as a Habilitations-dissertation with Heidegger, see Peter-Erwin Jansen, “*Marcuse’s Habilitationsverfahren – eine Odyssee*,” in Peter-Erwin Jansen, editor, *Befreiung denken – Ein politischer Imperativ*: 2000 Verlag, 1990.

¹³⁸ Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*, trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994), 104.

¹³⁹ Narrowly speaking, the term “Frankfurt School” refers to the work of the Institute for Social Research upon their return to Germany following World War II, when once again they were active in the Johann Goethe University in Frankfurt. The term stuck and has been applied to those active with the Institute both in exile in the United States (which is the case with Marcuse), and upon their return to Germany.

¹⁴⁰ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, xix. It is unclear who conducted the interview. In *Theory and Politics: A Discussion* (1919) Marcuse states that he never met Max Horkheimer (the head of the Institute) prior to his employment. It is possible that the interview was conducted by Leo Löwenthal, identified by Marcuse as the “arbiter between me and Horkheimer.” See p. 126.

¹⁴¹ Herbert Marcuse, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, ed. Douglas Kellner, vol. 2 of 6 (London and New York, Routledge) 210. The source is a letter from “Leo Lowenthal to Richard Popkin” dated March 31, 1964. Interestingly, Leo incorrectly indicates that Marcuse joined the Institute in 1931.

¹⁴² Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, xix. The other members of the Frankfurt School joined him in Switzerland in 1933.

Germany a few days before Hitler's ascent to power, and that ended the personal relationship."¹⁴³

Horkheimer's fears proved prescient, as the Nazi party emerged with over a third of the vote in the elections of 1933, and consequently, Hitler was named Chancellor on January 30, 1933. The Reichstag building was set ablaze in February of that year, and in early March, the Nazi *Gestapo* seized the Institute's facilities in Frankfurt, confiscating its library. On March 23, 1933, Hitler, who had blamed the Reichstag fire on Communist arson, was granted emergency powers (known as "The Enabling Act of 1933") by Reichstag legislators, thereby facilitating dictatorial powers by enabling Hitler to enact decrees without consulting the legislative body. On April 7, 1933, the Nazis implemented the anti-Semitic *Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service*, which effectively banned Jews from German academia. It was shortly after, on May 1, 1933, that Martin Heidegger, the new rector of Freiburg University (which had already been purged of Jews and other political undesirables) officially joined the Nazi Party, and began making speeches in his new capacity as intellectual legitimizer of Nazi rule.¹⁴⁴ This was quite a shock to Heidegger's students. Their former teacher publicly "idolized" Hitler, and was openly characterizing *der Fuhrer* as "German reality and its law."¹⁴⁵ It should be unsurprising that Marcuse, having recently joined the Institute (a group, even prior to Heidegger's affiliation with Nazism, was extremely critical of Heideggerian thought), had begun distancing himself from his former teacher.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 116.

¹⁴⁴ Wolin, preface to *Heideggerian Marxism*, xxv and Kellner, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, 4.

¹⁴⁵ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 122.

¹⁴⁶ Wolin, preface to *Heideggerian Marxism*, xxvi.

As mentioned above, the circumstances surrounding Marcuse's failure to complete his habilitation under the tutelage of Heidegger are unclear. There appear to be two versions of this story, both of which are discussed by Seyla Benhabib in her Translator's Introduction to Marcuse's *Habilitationsschrift*:

According to the *Philosophical Lexicon*...Heidegger rejected the work on the basis of political differences...According to a second version, which is the one more commonly followed by the Anglo-American scholars of Marcuse's work, Marcuse...had seen the writing on the wall by the end of 1932...and thus possibly never formally submitted the work to the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Freiburg. Barry Katz cites Marcuse as stating that to the best of his knowledge Martin Heidegger had never read the work.¹⁴⁷

In the end, the events surrounding *Hegel's Ontology*, minus any new evidence, will remain murky. Benhabib argues the latter scenario seems more likely because the former projects political differences backwards to characterize earlier attitudes. Indeed, Marcuse himself disputes the notion that Heidegger's Nazi sympathies were present prior to his affiliation. Clouding the issue, Marcuse seems to have told Habermas that Heidegger rejected his dissertation,¹⁴⁸ and in a 1932 letter from Edmund Husserl to University of Frankfurt Rector Kurt Riezler (mentioned above), Husserl wrote that Heidegger "blocked" Marcuse's attempt to habilitate.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, x.

¹⁴⁸ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 406, n. 1

¹⁴⁹ Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*,

We are certain Marcuse never *formally* submitted the habilitation to Heidegger. Given the evidence, we may conclude that Marcuse, two years after completing *Hegel's Ontology*, somehow knew that it would not be accepted, thereby refraining from submitting it to avoid the professional shame of having it formally rejected.¹⁵⁰ Before we dismiss the first version, we must ask ourselves why there was “writing on the wall” to be seen. Or rather, if Heidegger had not shown signs of sympathy with Nazism, what, precisely, was the “writing on the wall?”¹⁵¹ Robert Sheehan, writing for the New York Times in 1988, argues that there is documentary evidence Heidegger began to support Hitler and the Nazis, at the latest by the spring of 1932.¹⁵² This may provide us with an explanation of Marcuse’s loss of hope it would be accepted, as well as Marcuse’s characterization of Heidegger as never *formally* reading his habilitation, but *informally* rejecting it. In the end, absent new documentary evidence, we will not be certain.

In 1933, Marcuse moved to Switzerland to oversee the operations of the Geneva branch of the Institute for Social Research. The Institute, made up of Jews and Marxists, had escaped the Nazi takeover by depositing their endowment in Holland and by establishing a branch office in Geneva, and joining Marcuse later in 1933, shortly after Hitler rose to power.¹⁵³ In the ensuing years, the Institute experienced the uncertainties of exile, trying to set up centers in Paris, London and then New York. Marcuse went first

trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1994) 104.

¹⁵⁰ Wolin, preface to *Heideggerian Marxism*, xxii.

¹⁵¹ It is highly doubtful for the reasons to be legitimate (i.e. academic/professional) for several reasons. First, it is an excellent book with significant scholarly value. Second, Heidegger would not need to read very far into the habilitation to find his influence. Third, Hegel was an important philosopher in the eyes of Heidegger.

¹⁵² Thomas Sheehan, “Heidegger and the Nazis” (Book Review of). June 16, 1988.

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1988/jun/16/heidegger-and-the-nazis/?pagination=false#fn34-337841573> (accessed July 6, 2013).

¹⁵³ Kellner, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, 210. The sequence seems odd, but in fact, the Institute did send Marcuse to Switzerland prior to the arrival of the remaining members of the Institute.

to Geneva in 1933, then to Paris, and finally arrived in New York in July 1934, where he remained for several years in the Institute's branch located at Columbia University.

Henceforward, Marcuse, despite significant philosophical, political and geographical¹⁵⁴ differences, would be linked with the "Frankfurt School."¹⁵⁵

The Institute was founded at the University of Frankfurt in 1924 as the first Marxist research institute in Germany. In 1930, Max Horkheimer became director and under his leadership the Institute became well-known for its interdisciplinary approach, and its project of developing a critical theory of contemporary society.¹⁵⁶ Horkheimer assembled a remarkably diverse group of theorists including Theodor W. Adorno, Erich Fromm, Leo Löwenthal, Franz Neumann, Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, Frederick Pollock, and others who grappled with the new forms of monopoly state capitalism, advancing industrialization, culture formation within the milieu of mass production (i.e. the culture industries), and modes of social control that emerged in the era of fascism, communism, and state capitalism (i.e. the advanced industrial system).¹⁵⁷ Marcuse's attempted fusion of Heidegger and Marx was replaced by a version of Hegelian Marxism the Institute was in the process of creating. For the next decade, Marcuse was heavily involved in the Institute's work, so becoming one of its more important members.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Marcuse would make the United States his home for the remainder of his life, even after the Institute moved its operations back to Europe following World War II. It should also be noted, the Institute very consciously chose an interdisciplinary approach, believing that to be vastly superior to the individual social sciences or philosophy (by itself).

¹⁵⁵ Kellner, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, 4-7. Also see Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, xix-xx, and Wolin, preface to *Heideggerian Marxism*, xxiii.

¹⁵⁶ According to Marcuse, the Institute was rather hierarchic, authoritarian, bifurcated, and strictly forbade political activity, but also stated that Horkheimer made suggestions but did not determine (or assign) the focus of any individual theorist. He did concede that Horkheimer's "suggestions" may have carried the weight of something approaching assignments. See *Habermas, Theory and Politics*, 128-9.

¹⁵⁷ Kellner, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, 1

¹⁵⁸ Kellner, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, 1

Marcuse's previous analysis of Hegel and Marx prepared him for his time with the Institute, which was concerned with developing a dialectical social theory. Marcuse, accepting the Frankfurt School's thesis that Marxian critique of political economy is the foundation for a critical theory of society, moves away from his previous ontological analysis to that of developing a radical social theory aimed at diagnosing current social problems. Marcuse also began to tone down his revolutionary language during his Frankfurt period for two reasons. First, the Institute made the decision to euphemize their politics (i.e. "critical theory," more or less, equals Marxism). Second, in view of Stalinist Totalitarianism and the failure of any Western proletariat to rise as a revolutionary agent, Marcuse and the other member of the Institute began to question principal features of Marxian theory.¹⁵⁹

The Frankfurt School was on the forefront of a mid-twentieth-century trend called "Western Marxism," a term referring to a group of Marxist thinkers whose interpretation of Marx differed greatly from the version found in the Soviet Union. The Frankfurt School molded its own style of Western Marxism in the 1930s, and called it, as mentioned above, "the critical theory of society." In a 1937 essay for the Institute's house journal *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (Journal for Social Research) entitled "Philosophy and Critical Theory," Marcuse outlined critical theory as such:

1. "There are two basic elements linking materialism to correct social theory: concern with human happiness, and the conviction that it can be attained

¹⁵⁹ It should be noted that was always Marcuse's intention, and, as argued above, his interaction with Marx's *Manuscripts* enabled him to focus more intently on concrete affairs. He was to return to the ontological more explicitly in *Eros and Civilization*.

only through a transformation of the material conditions of existence. The actual course of the transformation and the fundamental measures to be taken in order to arrive at a rational organization of society are prescribed by analysis of economic and political conditions in the given historical situation. The subsequent construction of the new society cannot be the object of theory, for it is to occur as the free creation of the liberated individuals”; (p. 100)

2. “[Critical thought] compels theory anew to a sharper emphasis on its concern with the potentialities of man and with the individual’s freedom, happiness, and rights... For the [critical] theory, these are exclusively potentialities of the concrete social situation... [H]uman freedom is no phantom or arbitrary inwardness that leaves everything in the external world as it was. Rather, freedom here means a real potentiality, a social relationship on whose realization human destiny depends”; (p. 105)
3. “From the beginning it [i.e. critical theory] did more than simply register and systematize facts. Its impulse came from the force with which it spoke against the facts and confronted bad facticity with its better potentialities. Like philosophy, it opposes making reality into a criterion in the manner of complacent positivism. But unlike philosophy, it always derives its goals only from present tendencies of the social process. Therefore it has no fear of the utopia that the new order is denounced as being. When truth cannot be realized within the established social order, it always appears to the latter as mere utopia. (pp. 105-106)

4. “It only makes explicit what was always the foundation of its categories: the demand that through the abolition of previously existing material conditions of existence the totality of human relations be liberated,” (p. 107)¹⁶⁰

The above passage demonstrates Marcuse’s commitment to the humanistic values that critical theory gained from Marx¹⁶¹, to the dialectical nature of critical theory, to the human and radical need for liberation, and his demand that critical theory must be driven by a “utopian spirit.” This is a term worthy of our attention because it is easily misunderstood and the explication of this category will help us understand both Marcuse and Critical Theory.

The Oxford dictionary defines utopia as “an imagined place or state of things in which everything is perfect. The word was first used in the book *Utopia* (1516) by Thomas More.”¹⁶² It is one of the oldest traditions in Western thought, and, for the next three hundred years, a plethora of similarly themed books have appeared. The nature of utopian thought changed in the nineteenth century with the rise of industrialization. Prior to then, utopian societies were depicted, more or less, as communal agricultural and ethically inspired societies. These societies were not depicted as what we would label as “rich,” but through collective effort, there was no privation. These societies were simply more just, more egalitarian, more humane, and more enlightened. Industrialization changed this in terms of expectations. For the first time it appeared that society could

¹⁶⁰Herbert Marcuse, “Philosophy and Critical Theory” trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro, in *Herbert Marcuse Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (London: Mayfly Books, 2009), pp. 100, 105, 105-6, 107.

¹⁶¹ Specifically Marx’s early writings -- i.e. his *1844 Manuscripts*.

¹⁶² Accessed 7/9/13 - oxforddictionaries.com/American_english_Utopia

create all the positive aspects mentioned above, and could provide material gain, while also liberating the masses from endless back-breaking labor. Marx was skeptical of these utopian visions, arguing for a more precise understanding of the current society, which would enable us to better understand and act upon the need to transcend the current state of affairs. In true dialectical fashion Marx insisted that a clear understanding of how the capitalist-industrial system changed its predecessor, how it is organized, and an exact understanding of how it interacts with humans, would make it possible to locate the possible seeds of liberation within the prevailing society. Even though Marx was skeptical of “ethically inspired” utopian visions, he accepted that a more perfect society was entirely possible -- and the potentialities for it were to be found in the current state of things. It is this vision to which the Institute was referencing in their essays on critical theory.¹⁶³

Marcuse linked this utopian theme to the human capacity for *fantasy*. In the 1937 essay “Philosophy and Critical Theory” Marcuse writes:

What critical theory is engaged in is not the depiction of a future world, although the response of phantasy to such a challenge would not perhaps be quite as absurd as we are led to believe. If phantasy were set free to answer, with precise reference to already existing technical material, the fundamental philosophical

¹⁶³ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, xxiv. In the Introduction to *The Essential Marcuse* (p. xxiv-xxv), Andrew Feinberg and William Leiss list those changes as “free market relations and the commodity form of production, and their impact on human labor; the factory system, sweeping together diverse populations into larger collectivities; the collapse of older social class formations into just two polarized classes, capitalist and proletariat; and finally, the existential foundations of the revolutionary character of the proletariat, the class that would abolish itself in the process of unseating the capitalists from power, the class that -- unlike all its predecessors -- would not reestablish political domination to serve its own interests but would instead bring to an end all class relations in human history.”

questions asked by Kant¹⁶⁴, all of sociology would be terrified at the utopian character of its answers. And yet the answers that phantasy could provide would be very close to the truth... [f]or it would determine what man is on the basis of what he really can be tomorrow.¹⁶⁵

It is vital to remember that Marcuse is not referring to some impossibly perfect future, but rather, to several notions. First, it is a reference to how any vision of genuine liberation will be perceived as impossibly utopian in the context of the state of affairs that is to be transcended. Hence, it will necessarily *seem* utopian, but as Marcuse sees it, any vision must be dialectical -- that is, grounded plausibly in tendencies found in the current societal organization. Second, in the words of Horkheimer, “there can be no corresponding concrete perception of this new reality until it comes about.”¹⁶⁶ In other words, critical theory is not to craft an explicit outline for the future, but to search for the possible agents and modes of liberation within the current society -- with the belief that in doing so, living *unfree* in the current state of affairs will become so untenable, liberation becomes a necessity. The key is that the agents of revolution will not (and cannot) know precisely what it will look like until it is happening. The vision of a more perfect society cannot be force-fed to the masses. As Marcuse sees it, the *liberated individual* -- armed with an *a priori* need to transcend the current societal organization -- will necessarily act

¹⁶⁴ Kant’s famous questions, which were posed at the end of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, are: What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope? A digital copy (.pdf) can be viewed at <http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/kant/critique-pure-reason6x9.pdf>.

¹⁶⁵ Marcuse, *Negations* 114.

¹⁶⁶ Max Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory,” tr. Matthew J. O’Connell, in *Max Horkheimer, Critical Theory* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 220.

in concert with others, to organize a society in the image of liberation. In “Philosophy and Critical Theory” Marcuse wrote:

In replying to the question, ‘What may I hope?,’ it would point less to eternal bliss and inner freedom than to the already possible unfolding and fulfillment of needs and wants. In a situation where such a future is a real possibility, phantasy is an important instrument in the task of continually holding the goal up to view. Phantasy does not relate to the other cognitive faculties as illusion to truth (which in fact, when it plumes itself on being the only truth, can perceive the truth of the future only as illusion). Without phantasy, all philosophical knowledge remains in the grip of the present or the past and severed from the future, which is the only link between philosophy and the real history of mankind.¹⁶⁷

Again, Marcuse is using the term fantasy in a dialectical sense. Not only does Marcuse demand that fantasy (or utopian visions) remain within the realm of historical plausibility, but also suggests that the current state of affairs militates against our ability to grasp our potentialities. To suggest that we should think more utopian, is merely to suggest that, when gauging our potentialities, we need to transcend the context in which we find ourselves, otherwise we will remain *unfree*.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Marcuse, *Negations* 114.

¹⁶⁸ Marcuse will eventually refer to the inability to see human potentialities as being “one-dimensional.” It should also be noted that in this essay (Philosophy and Critical Theory), Marcuse also announces his critique of science as positivism when he writes: Science never seriously called use-value into question,” and uses the phrase “scientific fetishism.”

Marcuse never abandoned this standpoint. This is something that clearly sets him apart from other principal figures of the Frankfurt School (especially Adorno and Horkheimer, both of whom became much more pessimistic after World War II). Indeed, the capacity for utopian thinking or for fantasy is found in *Eros and Civilization* (1955):

As a fundamental, independent mental process, fantasy has a truth value of its own, which corresponds to an experience of its own -- namely, the surmounting of the antagonistic human reality. Imagination envisions the reconciliation of the individual with the whole, of desire with realization, of happiness with reason. While this harmony has been removed into utopia by the established reality principle, fantasy insists that it must and can become real, that behind the illusion lies knowledge.¹⁶⁹

Clearly, to Marcuse, the repressed individual needs to *imagine* potential liberation, which in the current context *seems* utopian. To Marcuse, utopian thinking is precisely what will enable us to imagine a reality other than the current *reality principle* (i.e. the “is,” or demands placed on us by the external world). These themes will be discussed in greater depth later, but for now it is enough to realize that in evaluating the rationality or irrationality of the present societal organization, the existing society is to be compared with its higher and better potentialities; this requires utopian thinking, and is critical theory par excellence.. In Marcuse’s words:

¹⁶⁹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 143.

The abyss between rational and present reality cannot be bridged by conceptual thought. In order to retain what is not yet present as a goal in the present, phantasy is required. The essential connection of phantasy with philosophy is evident from the function attributed to it by philosophers, especially Aristotle and Kant, under the title of ‘imagination’. Owing to its unique capacity to ‘intuit’ an object though the latter be not present and to create something new out of given material of cognition, imagination denotes a considerable degree of independence from the given, of freedom amid a world of unfreedom. In surpassing what is present, it can anticipate the future.¹⁷⁰

Before we begin exploring Marcuse’s other major publication during his Frankfurt period (the 1941 publication of *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*) we should briefly examine other essays Marcuse published while working directly with the Institute. Marcuse and his Frankfurt colleagues focused a great deal on the causes of Fascism, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, and the complex role played by liberalism. In his 1934 essay “The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State,” Marcuse (reacting to a speech given by Hitler) argued that the totalitarian state (and the ideology behind it) was reacting within a new and advanced era of monopoly capitalism. Marcuse argued that the totalitarian (or rather, fascist) state provided a defense of capitalism and was a bulwark against opposition to the capitalist system. In other words, Nazi Germany and Italian Fascism represent a reaction to the failure of laissez-faire market style capitalism by the 1930s, with the state serving to

¹⁷⁰ Marcuse, *Negations* 113.

protect it from its own weaknesses (e.g. over-permissiveness of the working class parties). To Marcuse then, totalitarianism was not a horrific break with the liberal past; rather, Marcuse establishes the continuities between liberalism and fascism. He argues that the liberalism born out of the Enlightenment and its absolute fidelity to the capitalist economic system paved the way for the fascist-totalitarian adjustment, and to the abolition of liberalism.¹⁷¹ To Marcuse, liberalism struggles to maintain the capitalist mode of production once political and economic authority flows away from the individual entrepreneur and into the hands of a small corporate-political elite.¹⁷² In this interpretation, not just capitalism, but Western Tradition (i.e. devotion to science and empirical reason) had failed, for in the Marxist viewpoint, the Enlightenment spawned capitalism and its concomitant scientific fetishism and unquestioned devotion to empirical reason -- all factors which helped facilitate totalitarianism.¹⁷³ This is consistent with the Institute's critical stance towards the Enlightenment, and their common view, at this time, that it was an unfinished project.

¹⁷¹ Marcuse, *Negations* 1-31.

¹⁷² Historically speaking, this process began with an unplanned economy dominated by artisans, merchants, and independent farmers changing very gradually during the "Market Revolution" of the nineteenth century, culminating with the rise of big business and monopoly capitalism that began towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and reaches full maturity in the period after the Second World War. Monopoly capitalism is marked not by a competitive economy, but a monopolistic economy dominated by large corporations and often subject to government intervention and planning (i.e. the end of laissez faire market theory). As Marcuse sees it, this tends to move autonomy away from the masses and into the hands of a political-economic oligarchy.

¹⁷³ In other words, the Enlightenment provided the pseudo-historical and philosophical foundation Hitler needed to desire and to rationalize his murderous campaign. The scientific fetishism and zeal for rationality borne out of the Enlightenment helped many come to terms with and to justify the perceived necessity of fascism and genocide. For a discussion of the feelings of sociohistorical superiority of "the West" see *Race and Manifest Destiny* by Reginald Horsman. For an excellent discussion of the trend among Westerners to fetishize rationality (i.e. Enlightenment) and to detach it from any substantive human connection (thus creating the intellectual and mental preconditions to justify fascism, war, and genocide) see Marc Crispin Miller's essay "Big Brother is You, Watching" from his book *Boxed In*. He calls it an "Enlightenment impulse." Finally, for a discussion of the failure of the Enlightenment see Adorno and Horkheimers's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

In other essays from his Frankfurt years, Marcuse examined how and why individuals would submit to totalitarian domination. In his 1936 essay “The Affirmative Character of Culture” Marcuse argued that bourgeois culture, in exchange for instinctual renunciation, does provide a sphere of individuality where one could find some degree of liberation.¹⁷⁴ In true dialectical fashion, he also posits that bourgeois culture helped pave the way for fascism by teaching submission-as-sacrifice.¹⁷⁵ In Marcuse’s words: “That individuals freed for over four hundred years march with so little trouble in the communal columns of the authoritarian state is due in no small part to affirmative culture.”¹⁷⁶ In the end, many of Marcuse’s 1930s essays were focused on the complex relations between fascism and liberalism, and to preserve what he believes to be the liberating components of bourgeois culture, while criticizing those tendencies within bourgeois culture which serve the interests of domination.¹⁷⁷

One final essay deserving attention is “On Hedonism,” published in 1938. It is here we first encounter Marcuse’s thoughts on human needs and sensibility.¹⁷⁸ Marcuse rejects any type of ascetic moral code that would repress needs and passion (i.e. what, in the United States, may be called “Victorian Era sensibility”), but also rejects any hedonist who would claim that pleasure is solely an individual affair and devoid of any criteria of higher and lower, true and false pleasures. Marcuse also ties happiness to social conditions, arguing that under capitalism, happiness is limited to members of certain

¹⁷⁴ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 106. As Marcuse sees it, this potential individual liberation is precisely the reason the fascist could not tolerate it, for it was a realm of potential subversion.

¹⁷⁵ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 107.

¹⁷⁶ Marcuse, *Negations* 93.

¹⁷⁷ It is in the essays we see the Frankfurt method of “immanent critique” which confronts ideology (in this case, liberalism) with the concrete social reality, and criticizes it according to its own professed values and ideals. It is extremely dialectical in its analysis, and highlights severe contradictions within any ideology.

¹⁷⁸ Marcuse, *Negations*, 119-150.

classes, and is limited to the sphere of consumption. We also see mention of the stultifying quantity and quality of labor that exists under capitalism, which in Marcuse's eyes, serves to not only foster happiness-as-consumption (i.e. the worker is too tired for anything else), but also devalues pleasure, so as to make true happiness impossible.¹⁷⁹ It is here we encounter one of the foundational assumptions throughout Marcuse's entire project -- the human body is not meant to be a vessel of alienated work.

As mentioned above, Marcuse's "Frankfurt Period" was marked by a devotion to a version of Hegelian-Marxism, with 1941's *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* representing its zenith. Marcuse provides a scholarly analysis of the Hegelian and Marxian philosophies, and delivers an historical-theoretical argument for the origins of critical theory as deriving from Hegel and Marx. Marcuse emphasizes the critical (or rather, in Marcusean argot -- "negative") aspects of Hegel that were appropriated by Marx, arguing that the Marx is the authentic continuation of Hegel's project, spending the latter portion of the book eviscerating what he calls the philosophy of "positivism." Moreover, by positioning Hegel's theory as "negative," Marcuse attempts to demonstrate that Hegel's philosophy is erroneously associated with fascism and authoritarian theories. There are striking differences between Marcuse's first book on Hegel (*Hegel's Ontology*) and *Reason and Revolution*; this shift provides insights into the ways in which his thought changed during the Frankfurt years.¹⁸⁰

Hegel's Ontology focuses on explicating the central categories of Hegel's ontology. It is a "phenomenological description of society" attempting to explain the

¹⁷⁹ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 2, 12, 13.

¹⁸⁰ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 130.

“ground of social alienation and change.”¹⁸¹ In *Reason and Revolution*, Marcuse is focused on the “struggle to change an oppressive society and the reactions to the emancipatory transformation of society.”¹⁸² Douglass Kellner argues that this continues Marcuse’s shift from an existential/ontological approach to a more concrete search for a critical theory of society.¹⁸³ To be sure, we should not lose sight of an important common element. According to Arnold Farr:

What remains prominently featured in both works is the idea of *negation*. In *Hegel’s Ontology* we get a description of how negation works in the historical development or movement of society. In *Reason and Revolution* we get an analysis of the way in which negation should work in the transformation of society if it were freed from the social forces of domination.¹⁸⁴

Indeed, this is expressed in the title of the book. ‘Reason’ distinguishes between *existence* (the appearance, or “as is”) and *essence* (the deeper reality, or the “could be”) through envisaging latent potentialities embedded within the societal organization, and within social practice. If the “as is” prevents the realization of these potentialities, then ‘reason’ calls for radical social change (i.e. ‘Revolution’).¹⁸⁵ It is precisely Hegel’s dialectical approach that leads Marcuse to locate the origins of critical theory in him. The key to understanding how this fits into Marcuse’s corpus, is to realize that Marcuse never abandons the Hegelian notion that reason should cut through the knowledge of immediate

¹⁸¹ Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 31.

¹⁸² Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 31.

¹⁸³ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism* 93.

¹⁸⁴ Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 31.

¹⁸⁵ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 131.

experience (the appearance, or “as is”) and negate it (realize the potentialities) so that its potential can become actual. That is to say, it can approach its essence. To Marcuse, this is the antithesis of positivism (which is conservative to the extent that it analyzes and accepts the immediate experience) and is the true function of philosophy.¹⁸⁶ In this view, critical reason and its concomitant dialectical view of reality as movement is a vehicle for liberation.¹⁸⁷ A scholar of Marcuse would find it very difficult to locate an academic writing penned by Marcuse that was not informed by this line of thought. Indeed, it would not be much of an exaggeration to claim this Hegelian-Marxian dialectic can be interpreted as a philosophical point of departure for *all* of Marcuse’s subsequent writings. To be sure, Marcuse provided a very friendly interpretation of Hegel. He chose to emphasize only those elements appropriated by Marx and conducive to radical action and liberation. While a sound argument can be made that Marcuse was too uncritical in his explication of Hegel, it is undeniable that *Reason and Revolution* is a seminal study of Hegel, and is vital to understanding Marcuse.¹⁸⁸

Returning our attention to matters of a somewhat biographical nature, Marcuse’s professional work was interrupted for nearly a decade upon the entry of the United States into the Second World War. Marcuse, having published *Reason and Revolution* in 1941 with the hopes of getting an academic position, reluctantly abandoned the Institute for Social Research in that same year, and along with several Institute colleagues, began

¹⁸⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1999) 100. In *Eros and Civilization*, this line of thought appears in the argument that reason should transcend the present *reality principle* -- or as Marcuse specifically calls it, the *performance principle*. That will be discussed in greater detail later.

¹⁸⁷ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 100, 131.

¹⁸⁸ For an excellent discussion of the weakness of Marcuse’s study of Hegel, see Douglass Kellner’s *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* p. 144-148.

work for the U.S. intelligence and information service.¹⁸⁹ At first glance it may seem surprising to learn that Marcuse worked for U.S. intelligence during the war, but it must be remembered that, for Marcuse, the fight against fascism was his top priority. Indeed, in Marcuse's own words in a 1972 interview: "I went to Washington so I could work during the war -- that is, speaking plainly, to do everything that was in my power to help defeat the Nazi regime."¹⁹⁰ Marcuse first worked for the Office of War Information (OWI -- a sort of government propaganda agency) with the goal of helping to formulate "suggestions on 'how to present the enemy to the American people', in the press, movies, propaganda, etc."¹⁹¹ The OWI was a tributary of the Office of the Coordination of Information (COI), a peace-time agency created by President Roosevelt in 1941 that was to set up an intelligence service that could counter the fascist threat and deal with espionage, foreign anti-American propaganda, and domestic isolationist sentiment.¹⁹² Subsequently, America's entry into World War II that same December resulted in the formation of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the government's first intelligence agency, in June 1942.

In March 1943, Marcuse joined the Research and Analysis Branch (R&A) of the OSS as a senior analyst.¹⁹³ The R&A, broadly speaking, was responsible to assemble, organize, interpret, and filter the immense flow of intelligence towards Washington D.C. In the words of founder Colonel William "Wild Bill" Donovan, as the "Brain Trust" of

¹⁸⁹ Laudani, Raffaelli, trans., *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany: The Frankfurt School Contribution to the War Effort* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013) p. 3. (Foreword by Raymond Guess).

¹⁹⁰ Marcuse, in *Revolution or Reform?* ed. by A.T. Ferguson (Chicago: New University Press, 1976) p. 58.

¹⁹¹ Laudani. *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany*, p. 3

¹⁹² Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 148.

¹⁹³ Laudani. *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany*, p. 3

America's war machine, it was to function as a "final clearinghouse" of intelligence flow.¹⁹⁴ In Marcuse's own words (to Habermas):

MARCUSE : My main task was to identify groups in Germany with which one could work towards reconstruction after the war; and to identify groups which were to be taken to task as Nazis. There was a major de-Nazification programme at the time. Based on exact research, reports, newspaper reading and whatever, lists were made up of those Nazis who were supposed to assume responsibility for their activity. Later it was said that I was a CIA agent.¹⁹⁵

HABERMAS: Yes, Yes.

MARCUSE: Which is ridiculous, since the OSS wasn't even allowed near the CIA. They fought each other like enemies.

HABERMAS: My question is aimed, not only at disposing of this absurdity, but also at clarifying, politically, what actually came of your suggestions. Are you of the impression that what you did was of any consequence?

MARCUSE: On the contrary. Those whom we had listed first as 'economic war criminals' were very quickly back in the decisive positions of responsibility in the German economy. It would be very easy to name names here.¹⁹⁶

Indeed, the OSS was quite different in "origin, composition, purpose, and function" from that of the CIA.¹⁹⁷ Not only does the information provided suggest that it is absurd to

¹⁹⁴ Laudani. *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany*, p. 2

¹⁹⁵ The CIA was created, in part, on the basis of the OSS.

¹⁹⁶ Habermas, *Theory and Politics*, 131.

label Marcuse a “sell out,” but he, and his other Frankfurt colleagues are rather proud of their OSS activities.

Marcuse’s OSS years coincided with a turning point within the Institute for Social Research. The departure of several of the scholars who had helped the Institute become well known represent, on one level, the end of the Institute as a theoretically unified movement.¹⁹⁸ The Institute was fearful for its very existence within the milieu of an “expanding fascist trend,”¹⁹⁹ and was experiencing financial difficulty. Thus, Marcuse reasoned that the economic security that accompanies government employment would be justified if his contributions to the OSS were consistent with what the Institute was attempting to provide.²⁰⁰ Indeed, Marcuse, through his involvement in both historical and political research and concrete activity in the struggle against fascism, points to these years as an attempt to make the Institute’s Critical Theory a practical tool in the fight against fascism.²⁰¹ Marcuse was producing complex and insightful analyses of Nazi Germany and articulating reconstruction possibilities that can be interpreted to represent a concrete application of Frankfurt School beliefs.²⁰² Meanwhile, it was during this time that Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer re-located to California, co-authored *Dialectic of Enlightenment*²⁰³ and were distancing themselves from Marxism and

¹⁹⁷ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, p. 422, n35.

¹⁹⁸ Laudani. *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany*, p. 3.

¹⁹⁹ Habermas, *Theory and Politics*, 130.

²⁰⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *Technology, War, and Fascism*. ed.by Douglas Kellner. Vol. 1.of 5 vols. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 237.

²⁰¹ Kellner, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, p. 19.

²⁰² Laudani. *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany*, p. 1 and rest of book!

²⁰³ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California 2002). This book is an invaluable analysis of what has become of the Enlightenment, but it also represents a very cynical turn for Adorno and Horkheimer. To them, *everything* seemed to be a positivist analysis! In relation to Marcuse, I cited his refusal to give up as a primary reason for his continued importance.

concrete politics.²⁰⁴ It should be of no surprise that Marcuse remembers his World War II activities as an authentic continuation of the Institute's Critical Theory.

2.3 – A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF MARCUSE'S TURN TO FREUD – 1942-1955

The program for becoming happy which the pleasure principle presses upon us cannot be fulfilled.

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 1929

By the end of the Second World War, Marcuse's branch of the OSS was transferred to the State Department, and after the war, was finally disbanded. Marcuse, still employed by the State Department, remained in Washington, serving as an analyst of Communist societies.²⁰⁵ It is interesting that Marcuse was a State Department employee during the early stages of the Cold War and the McCarthy Era (and drafted numerous post-war plans for Germany that permitted democratic socialism²⁰⁶), yet has indicated that he was never directly subject to a witch-hunt.²⁰⁷ This time period was difficult for Marcuse. He did not enjoy being a government bureaucrat (especially after fascism had been defeated) but remained in Washington primarily because his wife was suffering from cancer, was feeling pressure from the anti-Communist hysteria, was unable to get a

²⁰⁴ Kellner, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, 19.

²⁰⁵ It must be remembered that Marcuse had been studying Marxism since approximately 1918 and, albeit with different motivations, was open to criticizing Soviet Communism. The OSS and then the State Department considered him a valuable specialist in Soviet Communism, and after the war, he was the chief political analyst for the Central European section of the State Department. Additionally, part of the reason Marcuse stayed in Washington D.C., was the illness of his wife, Sophie. Another interesting note -- at one point after the war, Marcuse returned to Germany as an officer of the U.S. army. It was in that capacity he had his only post-Nazism encounter with Heidegger.

²⁰⁶ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 149.

²⁰⁷ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 200, p. 436, n10. He also returned to teaching. It is also noteworthy that the FBI did keep an extensive file on Marcuse. See <http://ucsd-phil-dept-history.blogspot.com/2010/09/fbi-book-reports-on-marcuse.html> (accessed 7/27/13) 12:58 AM.

suitable university post, and some of his Institute colleagues had returned to Germany to re-establish the Institute. Thus, Marcuse, perhaps tired of being a government bureaucrat, or fearful that his name would eventually be tarred, finally left Washington after the death of his wife, Sophie (in 1951), fortunate that a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation enabled him to work at the Russia Institute of Columbia University (1952-4) and Russian Research Center at Harvard University (1954-5) on a project that would eventually be published as *Soviet Marxism*.²⁰⁸

The German version of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written by Frankfurt colleagues Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, was published in Amsterdam in 1947. Marcuse participated in the discussion in New York and California in support of the book, and described it as “one of the most authentic expressions of critical theory.”²⁰⁹ The book is an account of their view of the failure of Enlightenment, which to them, has degenerated into positivism, science and technology as domination, manufactured culture, and the loss of genuine personal autonomy in the face of what they call the “administered society.”²¹⁰ As they see it, the ultimate tragedy is that the Enlightenment promised to demystify knowledge, yet “instead of entering into a truly human condition, [modern civilization] is sinking into a new kind of barbarism.”²¹¹ In other words, the Enlightenment created a new mysticism -- that is, a fetishism of science and technology. Embedded within their argument, is the claim that Marxism too is part of the ‘Dialectic of Enlightenment’ and serves as an instrument of domination. Many critics view Adorno

²⁰⁸ Marcuse, in the acknowledgement portion of this book, credits these years as enabling him to write *Soviet Marxism*. This book cemented Marcuse’s position as an unorthodox Marxist, arguing that the Soviet Union grossly distorted Marxism. It is also noteworthy, that Marcuse never hid his Marxism while with Columbia and Harvard, both centers of Cold war anti-Communism. See Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, p. 200.

²⁰⁹ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 423 n47.

²¹⁰ See Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

²¹¹ Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xi.

and Horkheimer's book, which left little to no room for authenticity in the modern era, as an abandonment of Marxism and surrender to extreme pessimism.²¹² This essay is not the place to discuss such matters, but it is difficult to deny the pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer. Marcuse, by contrast, never reached this level of despair. Indeed, his darkest work, *One-Dimensional Man*, has a very subtle optimism throughout, and even ends with a well-known quote from Walter Benjamin about keeping hope alive.²¹³ To be sure, Marcuse would develop very similar themes, but he refused to capitulate to hopelessness.

In 1954, Marcuse's personal life took a turn for the better, as he married Inge Werner Neumann, the widow of Franz Neumann (a fellow OSS and Frankfurt colleague, who had died in a car accident). That same year, Marcuse accepted a teaching position at Brandeis, where he was a very popular and respected teacher (and earned tenure by 1958).²¹⁴ In the 1950s, Marcuse began seeking new ways to further reconstruct Marxism, and found a new foundation for his critical theory in the works of Sigmund Freud. It was in 1955, that Marcuse published his seminal *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*.

This portion of the essay will be quite brief, for many of the themes and categories expressed in *Eros and Civilization* are to be discussed later. Prior to moving on though, it is important to be aware of the turn taken by Marcuse. He returns to concepts such as art, play, beauty, aesthetics -- that is, ideas he had not expressly written about since joining the Institute. Marcuse does remain concerned with the idea of human

²¹² Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 151.

²¹³ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 257.

²¹⁴ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 152.

liberation. For example, in his review of Marx's Paris Manuscripts, the concept of freedom is approached through the lens of the labor process. In *Eros and Civilization*, the point of departure is biological -- that is, the theory of human drives. Broadly speaking, Marcuse accepts Freud's claim that civilization has been built upon the renunciation of the individual's drive for pleasure and immediate satisfaction (i.e. libidinal gratification). Freud calls this the "reality principle," namely, the external universe restricting our sensual satisfaction in order to maintain a modicum of order and for the individual to survive. Marcuse, however, then ups the ante. He claims that modern society demands greater instinctual restraint than is necessary. The precise terms used by Marcuse will be elucidated later, but it is important to realize what Marcuse is doing here. To put it plainly, he asks several far-reaching questions: How long must this repression continue? Why do we never seem to reach the stage at which we can sit back and enjoy what previous generations have sacrificed to build? Do we still need to sacrifice genuine happiness to maintain civilization? These questions may serve as a springboard, of sorts, for the postwar Marcuse, and his answers are at once surprising, frustratingly complex, provocative, and satisfying.

PART III – THINKING LIKE MARCUSE

I am an absolutely incurable and sentimental romantic.

Herbert Marcuse, *The End of Utopia*, lecture delivered in 1967

The only major publication by Herbert Marcuse in the time period between *Reason and Revolution* (1941) and *Eros and Civilization* (1955) was a lengthy review of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1948).²¹⁵ Marcuse begins his review by positioning Albert Camus' existentialist interpretation of *Le Mythe di Sisphe* (or *The Myth of Sisyphus*) as somewhat of a point of departure for Sartre's existentialism, and for his own project.²¹⁶ As the myth goes, Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to an eternity spent rolling a stone up a mountain, only to have it roll back down once he reached the top. Camus is attempting to demonstrate a fundamental conflict between what we desire from the external reality and what we find. As Camus sees it, Sisyphus is the embodiment of the "absurd" life -- i.e. his punishment is representative of the human condition. Sisyphus must travel down the mountain and retrieve the stone each time it descends, in a perpetual loop with no hope of success.²¹⁷ According to existentialists, this is the contradiction we must all face, to find meaning in a universe that offers none. Consequently, we are faced with the choice between making a leap of faith (i.e. religion), suicide, or -- the option that interested Camus -- acceptance. To Camus, living with the

²¹⁵ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 128-158.

²¹⁶ To be sure, Camus is technically not part of the existentialist school, but his brand of literature dramatized existentialist themes. It should be noted that most "existential" thinkers denied being existentialist (Sartre being a notable exception).

²¹⁷ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays* (New York: Vintage; Reissue edition 1991).

“absurd” means to face this fundamental contradiction, having become aware of it, and to choose to *accept* it and still live life to its fullest. After all, Camus depicts Sisyphus as happy the moment he turns to retrieve the rock. Faced with the realization that life, in the final analysis, is futile, Camus argues that our only hope is to acknowledge that there is no ultimate hope.²¹⁸ To clarify, as long as Sisyphus accepts that there is nothing more to life than this “absurd” struggle, than he can find contentment. Sisyphus has made a conscious decision to rise above his fate, attain authenticity, and in the process, realize his potential in this life. It is precisely at this moment -- i.e. the smile -- that Camus’ seemingly pessimistic existentialism demonstrates a deep, if limited hope.²¹⁹

The ability to find hope against such overwhelming odds is a characteristic Camus shares with Marcuse, but it is not the only one. Throughout his project Marcuse insisted that we remain mindful of the negative. In Marcuse’s view, we must always compare what is to what could be. To focus on the negative simply means to critique the current state of affairs, and search for plausible ways to reach a greater potential. For Marcuse, dialectical thought could foster this type of “critical” thinking. A dialectical analysis involves seeking out contradictions and tendencies within a given society that may indicate possibilities of greater freedom and happiness. It also presupposes the ability to differentiate “existence from essence, fact and potentiality, and appearance and reality.”²²⁰ For Marcuse, the grasping of potentialities within society enables us to “negate” the conditions blocking our full development; that is to say, it empowers us to break with the status quo. Implicit is the realization that society can never achieve

²¹⁸ Thomas R. Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006) 35.

²¹⁹ Flynn, *Existentialism*, 36.

²²⁰ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, xiv. This is part of Douglas Kellner’s introduction.

absolute perfection, thus the negation is always present -- it is a process without a *telos*. In Hegelian terms, this would be to say that there is no *Absolute Idea*. Indeed, one can argue that the negation, or rather, the inherent possibilities already existing within a given society, was the intended meaning of Hegel's concept of the *Absolute Idea*. All societies and individuals can demonstrate perfectibility (the ability to improve), but it is impossible to fully reconcile "what is" with what "could be." Yet we must act as if it *is* possible. It is important to understand an irreconcilable difference between Marcuse and Camus (and Sartre). For Camus, life is absurd, which is to conclude that life can never be made rational -- i.e. there is no *telos*, or rational purpose, other than what we impose on the situation. As we will see, Marcuse will posit that there is a dialectical movement -- a constant unfolding, or becoming -- toward greater rationality, and thus will provide "purpose" to pushing the rock. That is no small feat, and it is perhaps the greatest accomplishment of Marcuse's philosophical project. Camus and Marcuse both argue that we must keep pushing the rock up the hill, and to do otherwise is to fail those who sacrificed before us and, perhaps worse, to abdicate our responsibility to those who will follow. We must keep pushing the rock up the mountain, even though we know we can never reach the top. It is the ambition of this essay to explain why Marcuse believed as such, and to explain why Marcuse's Sisyphus was smiling. Kant once described beauty as something that, through its *form*, appears to have been designed with a purpose, even though, in the final analysis, it does not have any apparent final cause. He called this "purposive without purpose."²²¹ To act on the unmutilated knowledge of our

²²¹ See the website <http://www.iep.utm.edu/kantaest/#H2> (accessed 9/18, 2013). Kant used this phrase in his discussion of beauty and art -- namely the idea that art must appear to have a purpose, yet has none.

potentialities, in the face of a perpetual “struggle for existence,” is nothing less than to expand the meaning of Kant’s phrase beyond the realm of aesthetics.

In his review of Sartre’s book, Marcuse rejects Sartre’s existentialist individualism on much the same grounds that prompted him to move past Martin Heidegger. To Marcuse, Sartre was attempting to develop a philosophy that could explain “being in an absurd world.” Marcuse seemed to prefer Camus, whose art rejected any systematic philosophy (in favor of accepting and simply living the “absurd” life). To Marcuse, Sartre is attempting to “explain the inexplicable,” and Marcuse is critical of Sartre’s sole reliance on philosophy.²²² He writes:

Sartre’s existential analysis is a strictly philosophical one in the sense that it abstracts from the historical factors which constitute the empirical concreteness: the latter merely illustrates Sartre’s metaphysical and meta-historical conceptions. In so far as Existentialism is a philosophical doctrine, it remains an idealistic doctrine: it hypostatizes specific historical conditions of human existence into ontological and metaphysical characteristics. [Sartre’s] Existentialism thus becomes part of the very ideology which it attacks, and its radicalism is illusory. Sartre’s *L’Être et le Néant* [*Being and Nothingness*], the philosophical foundation of Existentialism, is an ontological-phenomenological treatise on human freedom and could as such come out of under the German occupation (1943). The essential freedom of man, as Sartre sees it, remains the same before, during, and after the totalitarian enslavement of man. For freedom [in Sartre’s existentialism]

²²² Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential* Marcuse, 130.

is the very structure of human being and cannot be annihilated even by the most adverse condition: man is free even in the hands of the executioner.²²³

Marcuse was rejecting Sartre's overly abstract notion of freedom and his narrow focus on *individual* authenticity and liberation. To Marcuse, that is requisite for liberation, but in the Marcusean framework freedom is only possible in solidarity with others. Sartre did attempt to address such a line of criticism in an oft-cited public lecture delivered on October 29, 1945.²²⁴ In front of an overflowing crowd, Sartre argued that one cannot be free in any concrete sense unless all are free. A well-known statement from the lecture is "In choosing, I choose for all people." Sartre, moving outside the realm of individual authenticity, argued that we have a moral responsibility to each other and to society. Finally, he posited that in every moral choice we create an image of the kind of being we want to become, and of what others should be. Sartre stated: "For in effect, there is not one of our acts that, in creating the man we wish to be, does not at the same time create an image of man such as we judge ought to be."²²⁵ These principles may be relevant in any moral action guide, but did not seem to follow from the philosophy Sartre had posited up to that point. The inconsistencies of this lecture were ultimately a source of embarrassment for Sartre; in fact, this is the only piece he ever openly regretted.²²⁶ Interestingly, this speech would have greatly appealed to Marcuse, for what attracted him to Camus and Sartre was their insistence on authenticity, freedom, and revolt, and was

²²³ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 131.

²²⁴ Obviously, considering this lecture occurred three years prior to the publication of Marcuse's review, Sartre was not responding directly to Marcuse's critique, but rather to the general objections of his critics who argued that his radical existentialism was nothing more than a transfiguration of bourgeois individualism and insensitive to the demands of social justice. See *Existentialism*, p. 35.

²²⁵ Flynn, *Existentialism*, p. 35.

²²⁶ Flynn, *Existentialism*, p. 35.

critical of, in the situation of Sartre, its narrow individualism -- precisely what those remarks refuted. If the pre-World War II Marcuse was writing in the context of a positivist Marxism (which, to be sure, had not gone away), he was writing in the shadow of academic pessimism after the war.

The other major philosophical work of the decade, at least to Marcuse, was *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (fellow Frankfurt colleagues). The book focuses on the failure of the Enlightenment. The authors argue that the Western tradition has descended into inescapable positivism, manufactured and administered culture, and technology as domination. The account of our evolution from primitive magic to modern-science-as-new-barbarism is perhaps more melancholy than Sartre's work. To be sure, this work deeply influenced Marcuse, but he never succumbed to hopelessness. In fact, he can be viewed as a negation of the pessimistic postwar intellectual context in which he wrote.²²⁷

Upon leaving his work with the United States State Department (during and after World War II), Marcuse, now fifty six years old, reluctantly accepted a faculty position at Brandeis University in 1954. Marcuse was hoping to be re-employed with the Institute of Social Research, but his colleague and head of the Frankfurt School Max Horkheimer re-established the Institute at Frankfurt, Germany in 1951, and a firm offer of employment never came.²²⁸ Marcuse had grown apart from his Frankfurt colleagues in more than a geographical sense. They seemed to want nothing to do with his thoughts on the absorption and neutering of the working class and his burgeoning ideas for laying out a

²²⁷ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 153-4.

²²⁸ Marcuse's Frankfurt colleagues had begun returning in 1948. The Institute was not formally re-established until 1951.

dialectical theory of liberation and domination. Marcuse eventually accepted a faculty position at the University of California, San Diego, in 1965, where he would spend the rest of his academic career.²²⁹

Marcuse's postwar turn can be characterized as an attempt lift the veil of surface prosperity (for some), especially within the United States.²³⁰ His version of critical theory is thus defined by both radical critique of tendencies towards domination and the search for possibilities of opposition and liberation. As such, his postwar works should be read in conjunction with each other. This will, for example, help us avoid characterizing *Eros and Civilization* as too optimistic (or the dreaded label of "utopian") and *One Dimensional Man* (1964) as overly pessimistic. To be sure, an exegesis of major Marcusean categories becomes a difficult task precisely because Marcuse insisted on using the dialectical method. As such, his analysis changed as the political, social, and economic conditions changed. For example, he wrote *One Dimensional Man* at a time he perceived capitalism to be in a golden age of "affluence" and stability. Conversely, he wrote *An Essay on Liberation* (1969) and *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* (1972) when the advanced industrial system was showing signs of distress (albeit very limited). Accordingly, the tendencies he articulated in *One Dimensional Man* -- largely the result of affluence and stability -- were *perhaps* not as totalizing in the context of his later works. Ultimately, an understanding of the concepts *and* the context in which he wrote will help us apply these categories to any societal organization. In the end, that was

²²⁹ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, xxvii.

²³⁰ To be sure, his usage of the term "advanced industrial system" indicates that his critique was assuredly aimed at the wider system of capitalism, and the unfreedom present in the Soviet Bloc nations.

Marcuse's goal -- a union of theory and practice and to make critical theory an instrument of liberation.²³¹

Much of Marcuse's critique of Marxism stemmed from the reality that the advanced industrial system did not behave in the way Marx had predicted. Namely, the proletariat was no longer the living negation of the capitalist system.²³² To Marcuse, they were effectively absorbed by and introjected the values of the advanced industrial system. Capitalism had "reorganized itself" to avoid its inevitable destruction as predicted by Marx. This was accomplished in several ways. First, capital allowed the standard of living to rise among the workers, thereby easing tension and providing a market for their wares.²³³ In brief, capital emphasized a consumption-as-happiness ethos, and coupled it with an ability to "deliver the goods" at an affordable price. Capitalism also became more structurally complex than the original Marxist model. Public ownership of corporations via the stock market and the rise of a new class, the technician (brought about by an explosion in manufacturing technology), blurred the lines of societal stratification. To further complicate matters, liberal democracies began to manage national economies (corporate capitalism), thereby stabilizing the marketplace and apparently ending, or softening, the old bust-or-boom business cycle. Thus, the overtly oppressive nature of industrial capitalism seemed to be giving way before a more egalitarian consumer society, fueled by an ever rising standard of living. It appeared that global capitalism was giving the people what they wanted. Or was it? What interested

²³¹ Kellner, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, p. 24.

²³² It must be remembered that the term "advanced industrial system" was also aimed at Soviet-style communism, which Marcuse posited also instrumentalized humans, largely through its bureaucratic unfreedoms.

²³³ This was aided by such things as the Wagner Act, the broader New Deal, welfare capitalism, proliferation of suburbs, post-war affluence, the so-called truce between capital and labor, the G.I. Bill, and the Federal Housing Authority.

Marcuse was the new ways in which the advanced industrial system created the seeds of its own destruction. Marcuse's "theory of social change" would require him to combine philosophy, social theory, Freudian drive theory, and political economy, in an attempt to fill gaps he perceived in traditional Marxism, and in critical theory.²³⁴ We will thus begin with a focus on Marcuse's theory of *liberation*. It is then necessary, if we want to have an idea of what is prohibiting our liberation, and if we want to gain a precise understanding of our unfreedom, to explore Marcuse's concept of *domination*. The final segment will focus on how Marcuse thought we could break the chains of repression -- namely the "*Great Refusal*."

²³⁴ Kellner, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, 19.

3.1 – LIBERATION

To compare potential freedom with existing freedom, to see the latter in the light of the former, presupposes that at the present stage of civilization much of the toil, renunciation, and regulation imposed upon men is no longer justified by scarcity, the struggle for existence, poverty, and weakness. Society could afford a high degree of instinctual liberation without losing what it has accomplished or putting a stop to its progress.

Herbert Marcuse, *Freedom and Freud's Theory of Instincts*, 1956

Eros redefines reason in his own terms. Reasonable is what sustains the order of gratification ... Reason and happiness converge.

Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 1955

More than before, breaking through the administered consciousness is a precondition of liberation. Thought in contradiction must be capable of comprehending and expressing the new potentialities of a qualitatively different existence. It must be capable of surpassing the force of technological repression and of incorporating into its concepts the elements of gratification that are suppressed and perverted in this repression. In other words, thought in contradiction must become more negative and more utopian in opposition to the status quo.

Herbert Marcuse, Foreword to *Negations*, 1968

Slovenian dissident-philosopher Slavoj Žižek often uses witty anecdotes to help him explain difficult concepts, or to demonstrate, sometimes, how simple some things really are. He seems to have a dizzyingly vast array of these stories, and does not discriminate as to the source; he is comfortable citing a classical artist or a cartoon. There is an old Communist-era joke that is a favorite of his that will help us understand Marcuse. Žižek tells it perfectly:

Let me tell you a wonderful, old joke from Communist times. A guy was sent from East Germany to work in Siberia. He knew his mail would be read by

censors, so he told his friends: “Let’s establish a code. If a letter you get from me is written in blue ink, it is true what I say. If it is written in red ink, it is false.” After a month, his friends get the first letter. Everything is in blue. It says, this letter: “Everything is wonderful here. Stores are full of good food. Movie theaters show good films from the west. Apartments are large and luxurious. The only thing you cannot buy is red ink.” This is how we live. We have all the freedoms we want. But what we are missing is the red ink: the language to articulate our non-freedom.²³⁵

The red ink is precisely what Marcuse was attempting to provide. His postwar project, which focused on a liberation-domination dialectic, may have been written within a world of academic pessimism, but his warnings about our lack of freedom came at a time of seeming social and economic stability and prosperity. To Marcuse, it was this mass prosperity that played a major role in creating this unfreedom!²³⁶ In the end, Marcuse was attempting to outline what he called “qualitative socialism” -- an egalitarian organization of society that would move past the stale and, according to Marcuse, positivist Marxism of the postwar era.

Marcuse’s theory of liberation required him to turn to Freud’s instinct theory, and to investigate the relation between radicalism and change with that of art, fantasy and sensibility (i.e. the totality of how our senses perceive phenomena). Thus, his project

²³⁵ Sarahana, *Slavoj Zizek Speaks at Occupy Wall Street: Transcript*. September 17, 2013. <http://www.imposemagazine.com/bytes/slavoj-zizek-at-occupy-wall-street-transcript> (accessed October 9, 2013). It is also in Zizek’s 2002 book *Welcome to the Desert of the Real p. 1-2*.

²³⁶ Thus, it is both easy to imagine the shocked reaction to his early warnings, and impressive that he perceived these tendencies towards unfreedom in their incipency.

resurrects Freudian and Marxian theory to develop a critical theory of society. He also attempts to demonstrate what a non-repressive society would look like. By the 1950s, Marcuse perceived that the advanced industrial society (i.e. with its consumerism, planning, and management) had produced new forms of domination and unfreedom.²³⁷ This is the immediate context in which he wrote, and his response would result in the creation of his own unique version of critical theory.

Before we begin our discussion of Marcuse's theory of *liberation*, it is necessary to understand exactly why, according to Marcuse, we are in need of liberation. That is to say, we need to explore our unfreedom. This is especially necessary because, as we will see later, modern society tends to be "flattened," that is, we most often choose not to notice our shackles.²³⁸ To Marcuse, there are three primary ways in which we are unfree. First, the creation of *false needs* "makes for the perpetuation of the struggle for existence, for the increasing necessity to produce and consume the non-necessary."²³⁹ To use a colloquialism, our penchant to treat luxuries as needs, keeps us "on the hamster wheel." Second, the advanced industrial society, often through advertising, the media, and its concomitant instinctual manipulation, promises a level of gratification and creates needs that it ultimately can never fulfill. Third, and perhaps most importantly, modern society demands greater instinctual repression than is necessary to maintain progress and civilization. As we will soon see, Marcuse calls this *surplus repression*.

²³⁷ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, DKs intro p. xxv.

²³⁸ To be sure, there *is* a choice, but it often is not a conscious decision (i.e. many are unaware of being unfree) and/or there is no perceived alternative. It is a fully conscious choice only when we are aware of our unfreedom *and* can see the potentialities already in existence.

²³⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1969) 50.

It seems counterintuitive to argue that we are essentially unfree during a time of unheralded prosperity, and within the context of a functioning representative democracy. It is easy to make this claim for “the wretched of the earth,” but Marcuse was arguing that *all* of us are, to varying degrees, unfree. It must be remembered, when Marcuse was referring to “the more educated and privileged human objects of control and oppression,” he was not referring to a lack of access to material goods.²⁴⁰ Indeed, Marcuse describes it as “a comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic, unfreedom.”²⁴¹ He writes:

Capital now produces, for the majority of the population ...not so much material privation as steered satisfaction of material needs, while making the entire human being -- intelligence and senses -- into an object of administration, geared to produce and to reproduce not only the goals but also the values and promises of the system, its ideological heaven. Behind the technological veil, behind the political veil of democracy, appears the reality, the universal servitude, the loss of human dignity in a prefabricated freedom of choice.²⁴²

Marcuse is arguing that the advanced industrial system manipulates our needs (into *false needs*), and as a result, our values increasingly tend to match that of the advanced industrial system. Thus, we tend to not *feel* unfree because we have introjected the values and desires of the administered system in which we exist. Moreover, our interactions with each other and the external world become increasingly defined and

²⁴⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *Counter- Revolution and Revolt* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1972) 14.

²⁴¹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 1.

²⁴² Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 14.

judged on the basis of their market value.²⁴³ By arguing that our “intelligence and senses” are being made into an “object of administration,” Marcuse is concretizing this unfreedom by placing it on the instinctual (i.e. biological) and neurological level. We become, in Marcusean argot, instrumentalized -- that is, we tend towards being a quantifiable cog in a seemingly rational system.²⁴⁴ Marcuse summed it up well:

It converts the *entire* individual -- body and mind -- into an instrument, or even part of an instrument: active or passive, productive or receptive, in working time and free time, he serves the system... True and false, good and bad, openly become categories of the political economy; they define the market value of men and things. The commodity form becomes universal...²⁴⁵

As our values tend to mirror those of the advanced industrial system, we tend to lose sight of the difference between true and false needs (i.e. wants/luxuries become needs on an instinctual level). This alters our instincts, as the “ego” (i.e. the mostly conscious “self”) is what “strives for ‘what is useful’...to ‘test’ the reality, to distinguish between good and bad, true and false, useful and harmful. Man [in doing so]...becomes a

²⁴³ Marcuse argues that ironically, as human interactions tend to be wrapped around their market value, actual merchandise tends to do quite the opposite. Marcuse writes: “The disappearance of free competition, the “inherent” quality of the merchandise ceases to be a decisive factor in its marketability.” What tends to matter, as Marcuse sees it, is a things “profit margin.” As a result, we wind up with cars made with “shiny but bad material.” See Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 15.

²⁴⁴ Other terms this may apply: reified, thing-ified, inauthentic, unfree.

²⁴⁵ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 14. The word “universal” simply means that it the trend towards instrumentalization, while not total, is so powerful that it becomes a norm of human existence.

conscious, thinking, subject, geared to a rationality which is imposed upon him from outside.”²⁴⁶ Marcuse continues:

False needs are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice... The result is then euphoria in happiness. Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, belong to this category of false needs. Such needs have a societal content and function which are determined by external powers over which the individual has no control; the development and satisfaction of these needs is heteronomous. No matter how much such needs may have become the individual’s own, reproduced and fortified by the conditions of existence; no matter how much he identifies himself with them and finds himself in their satisfaction, they continue to be what they were from the beginning -- products whose dominant interest demands repression.²⁴⁷

Thus, Marcuse injects issues of *authenticity* into the equation -- that is, by losing sight of what is truly a need, we relinquish our *authenticity*. Marcuse provides a two prong definition of *false needs*. First, *false needs* are those that are above necessities and tend to perpetuate our repression, primarily by keep us willing to continue the daily “performance” and forego genuine life fulfillment. It must be remembered that this is done, more or less, “behind our backs.” Consequently, we recognize these needs as our own; the individual in the advanced industrial society tends to introject these needs,

²⁴⁶ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 14.

²⁴⁷ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 5.

ultimately living “his repression ‘freely’ as his own life: he desires what he is supposed to desire; his gratifications are profitable to him and to others; he is reasonable and often even exuberantly happy.”²⁴⁸ Marcuse writes:

This same trend of production and consumption, which makes for the affluence and attraction of advanced capitalism, makes for the perpetuation of the struggle for existence, for the increasing necessity to produce and consume the non-necessary: the growth of the so-called “discretionary income” in the United States indicates the extent to which income earned is spend on other than “basic needs.” Former luxuries become basic needs, a normal development which, under corporate capitalism, extends the competitive business of living to newly created needs and satisfactions. The fantastic output of all sorts of things and services defies the imagination, while restricting and distorting it in the commodity form, through which capitalist production enlarges its hold over human existence.²⁴⁹

Marcuse thus, radically, calls into question how genuine (or authentic) happiness is in an advanced industrial system. Marcuse sees our “false” needs as the chains that bind us to the system. He argues that our apparent freedom is illusory, that we are so blinded by “introjected” needs and so busy struggling to attain those needs that we have forgotten what it really means to be human. As Marcuse states:

²⁴⁸ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 46.

²⁴⁹ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 50. The ability of the “commodity form” to mutilate “our imagination” is notable, because as we will see later on, our imagination is vital to our ability to see our potentialities.

The high standard of living in the domain of the great corporations is *restrictive* in a concrete sociological sense: the goods and services that the individuals buy control their needs and petrify their faculties. In exchange for the commodities that enrich their life, the individuals sell not only their labor but also their free time. The better living is offset by the all-pervasive control over living. People dwell in apartment concentrations -- and have private automobiles with which they can no longer escape into a different world. They have huge refrigerators filled with frozen foods. They have dozens of newspapers and magazines that espouse the same ideals. They have innumerable choices, innumerable gadgets which are all of the same sort and keep them occupied and divert their attention from the real issue -- which is the awareness that they could both work less and determine their own needs and satisfactions.²⁵⁰

It is precisely the “comfortable” living provided by the advanced industrial system that, to Marcuse, serves as compensation for the daily “performance.” As Marcuse states,

[T]heir benefits are real. The repressiveness of the whole lies to a high degree in its efficacy: it enhances the scope of the material culture, facilitates the procurement of the necessities of life, makes comfort and luxury cheaper, draws ever-larger areas into the orbit of industry -- while at the same time sustaining toil and destruction. The individual pays by sacrificing his time, his consciousness,

²⁵⁰ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 100.

his dreams; civilization pays by sacrificing its own promises of liberty, justice, and peace for all.²⁵¹

It is notable that Marcuse argued that this appears as completely rational. As stated above, we do not feel our unfreedom, for “the depth of the preconditioning which shapes the instinctual drives and aspirations of the individuals...obscures the difference between true and false consciousness.”²⁵² Marcuse asserts:

This is the pure form of servitude: to exist as an instrument, as a thing. And this mode of existence is not abrogated if the thing is animated and chooses its material and intellectual food, if it does not feel its being-a-thing, if it is a pretty, clean, mobile, thing.²⁵³

So “pure” is this servitude, Marcuse described it as “totalitarian.” Marcuse concludes:

By virtue of the way it has organized its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For “totalitarian” is not only a terroristic political coordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs...²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 100.

²⁵² Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 32.

²⁵³ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 33.

²⁵⁴ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 3. To be sure, Marcuse was not equating actual totalitarianism (for example, Fascism) with what he was describing. His other writings attest to his appreciation of the terrors of Hitler, Stalin, and others. The term was a reference to the tendency of the advanced industrial system towards to utilize softer methods to achieve something approaching the same totalizing tendencies.

A second level of unfreedom exists because these needs (which it must be remembered, are not true needs) cannot, in the final analysis, be provided by the advanced industrial system. In dialectical fashion, to Marcuse, this is a point of unfreedom, but also opens up a possible negation. As mentioned above, the commodification of human interaction tends to become universal. Indeed, Marcuse argues that the ability of the advanced industrial system to foster a consumption-as-happiness ethos and to deliver a high standard of living for many “is the reality behind the façade of the consumer society; this reality is the unifying force which integrates, behind the back of individuals, the widely different and conflicting classes of the underlying population.”²⁵⁵ Marcuse was not referring to any specific “underlying” class of peoples, for in his framework, we are all exploited. Indeed, it is our insatiable desire for the wares of the advanced industrial system that serves to mask class conflict. Marcuse argues that “capitalism cannot satisfy the needs which it creates. The rising standard of living itself...enforce[s] the constant creation of needs that could be satisfied on the market; [but] it is now fostering *transcending* needs which cannot be satisfied.”²⁵⁶ The world of advertising promises happiness through the consumption of its products, but the needs themselves become a source of intensifying frustration as the growing expectations of a commodified paradise are inevitably unfulfilled for the underling majority. In other words, the market delivers (for many) the basic needs, but also promises satisfaction beyond that of material gratification -- that is, spiritual and existential happiness. To Marcuse, the more advanced we become the more libidinal

²⁵⁵ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 16.

²⁵⁶ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 16.

energy we invest in the lure of the market that ultimately remains unfulfilled. Marcuse concludes,

The misery of unfulfilled vital needs is abolished for the majority of the population; outright poverty is “contained” among a minority of the population. Technical progress and the vast output of “luxuries” create and re-create ... the images of a world of ease, enjoyment, fulfillment, and comfort which no longer appears as the exclusive privilege of an elite but rather within the reaches of the masses. The technical achievements of capitalism break into the world of frustration, unhappiness, repression.²⁵⁷

Marcuse describes this as “the living space of capitalism and its negation. The production of goods and services on an enlarged scale reduces the basis for further capitalist development.”²⁵⁸ In the final analysis, it is impossible to attain genuine happiness in the scenario described by Marcuse precisely because of the price we pay (instinctually) for this material satisfaction. This leads us to a discussion of a third realm of unfreedom within the advanced industrial system.

Marcuse argues that the notion of “progress” within our civilization rests upon an unnecessary level of repression of the individual’s instinctual striving for fulfillment. In an essay entitled “Freedom and Freud’s Theory of Instincts” (1956) Marcuse describes domination, or unfreedom as “whenever the individual’s goals and purposes and the means of striving for and attaining them are prescribed to him and performed by him as

²⁵⁷ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 19.

²⁵⁸ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 19.

something prescribed.”²⁵⁹ To Marcuse, this domination can be “exercised by men, by nature, by things -- it can also be internal, exercised by the individual on himself, and appear in the form of autonomy.”²⁶⁰ The latter form of unfreedom, according to Freudian drive theory occurs when “the superego absorbs the authoritarian models” of the external reality. In this way, the superego becomes the internal manifestation of the restrictions put in place by society. It appears autonomous precisely because the “mastery of drives becomes the individual’s own accomplishment.”²⁶¹

If we were to stop here, and Marcuse seems to think Freud did, freedom becomes impossible to attain, for there would be nothing that is not prescribed for the individual. In the Freudian conception, civilization becomes possible only by repressing our instincts. This will be explored in greater depth later, for now it is enough to know that Freud posited that civilization would cease to exist if humans were free to gratify their instinctual needs because, simply put, we would, more or less, do nothing but that. Put differently, society demands we divert our instinctual energy into socially productive work instead of immediately and directly satisfying our instinctual needs. Freud argues that unimpeded and immediate gratification is incompatible with the discipline needed for civilized society to function and for the individual to develop into a human being, and thus, renunciation and delay of gratification of instinctual desires becomes a necessity. Marcuse writes of the Freudian conception, “Happiness must be subordinated to the discipline of work as full-time occupation, to the discipline of monogamic reproduction,

²⁵⁹ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 160.

²⁶⁰ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 160.

²⁶¹ Leiss and Feinberg, *The Essential Marcuse*, 160.

to the established system of law and order.”²⁶² Freud refers to this as the *reality principle*.

To Marcuse, this was an historical concept, and he thus rejects Freud’s notion that a non-repressive society is impossible. To counter Freud (who argued that the conflict between the individual and the external world is eternal -- i.e. ahistorical), Marcuse argued that the *reality principle*, and thus repression, is an historical product of a given society. In Marcuse’s view, every society has its own *reality principle* and thus needs to practice a level of repression of instinctual energy, but it is the specific society historically given (with its own set of institutions, societal norms, and possible gratifications) that plays the decisive role in determining the level of repression that exists within that particular society. It is the notion that repression is historically conditioned that led Marcuse to introduce the concepts of *basic repression*, *surplus repression* and *performance principle*.

In dialectical fashion, Marcuse argues that because the ahistorical “character of Freudian concepts...contains the elements of its opposite...their historical substance must be recaptured, not by adding some sociological factors, but by unfolding their own content.”²⁶³ Thus, Marcuse argues that Freud’s own project suggests that repression is historically conditioned, and therefore subject to transformation. Marcuse then argues that this “hidden trend in psychoanalysis” suggests that a non-repressive civilization is possible. It must be remembered, according to Freud, it is the existence of *scarcity* (often referred to as *Ananke*) that necessitates we devote our energy to hard labor to ensure

²⁶² Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 3.

²⁶³ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 35.

survival -- that is, which necessitates what Marcuse calls *basic repression*. Marcuse characterized Freud's argument as follows:

Behind the *reality principle* lies the fundamental fact of *Ananke* or scarcity, which means that the struggle for existence takes place in a world too poor for the satisfaction of human needs without constant restraint, renunciation, delay. In other words, whatever satisfaction is possible necessitates *work*, more or less painful arrangements and undertakings for the procurement of the means for satisfying needs. For the duration of work, which occupies practically the entire existence of the mature individual, pleasure is suspended and pain prevails.²⁶⁴

Marcuse argues that this is "fallacious in so far as it applies to the brute fact of scarcity what actually is the consequence of a specific organization of scarcity, and of a specific existential attitude enforced by this organization."²⁶⁵ Marcuse is arguing that scarcity is not inevitable, but rather a result of a specific societal organization. Marcuse believes that enough wealth and resources are available to enable scarcity to be overcome. He posits that when one takes into account the technical potential of the current society, scarcity becomes a man-made phenomenon -- that is, it no longer *must* exist. Marcuse referred to this as the "conquest of scarcity."²⁶⁶ Suddenly it becomes purposeful to gauge the level of repression in our society.

²⁶⁴ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 35.

²⁶⁵ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 36.

²⁶⁶ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 36.

Marcuse adheres to the Freudian idea that some level of repression is needed to maintain civilization. Marcuse referred to this as *basic repression*. As Gad Horowitz states, this argument “amounts to nothing more than the observation that co-operation among human beings requires self-control, a limitation of desires and gratifications and the endurance of some pain, for the common good.”²⁶⁷ Put simply, in Freudian terms, becoming a civilized adult human being requires a basic repression of the drives. According to Horowitz, Freud argued that relative to primitive society, modern society demands an ever greater level of instinctual renunciation.²⁶⁸ As Marcuse states:

[W]hile any form of the reality principle demands a considerable degree and scope of repressive control over the instincts, the specific historical institutions of the reality principle and the specific interests of domination introduce *additional* controls over and above those indispensable for civilized human association. These additional controls arising from the specific institutions of domination are what we denote as *surplus-repression*.²⁶⁹

Marcuse goes on to provide examples of surplus repression: “the modifications and deflections of instinctual energy necessitated by the perpetuation of the monogamic-patriarchal family, or by a hierarchal division of labor, or by public control over the

²⁶⁷ Gad Horowitz, *Basic and Surplus Repression in psychoanalytic theory: Freud, Reich, and Marcuse* (Toronto and Buffalo, University of Toronto Press, 1977) 154.

²⁶⁸ Horowitz, *Basic and Surplus Repression*, 154 This will be discussed later, but for now it is enough to know that this is consistent with Marcuse’s argument that a greater proportion of the workforce is engaged in alienated labor, and additionally, he will argue that we are losing our autonomous space (i.e. the private sphere, leisure time, sexuality) to the controlling administration of the advanced industrial society.

²⁶⁹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 37.

individual's private existence."²⁷⁰ Marcuse also suggests that the *reality principle* (society) ensures conformity to the demands of the labor system by "desexualizing" the erotic zones of the body. In essence, society demands we work, and thus limits our pleasure zone to the genitalia, and subsequently, our body becomes a medium of toil instead of a receptacle of pleasure (i.e. erotic, life affirming). Marcuse historicizes the current *reality principle* by calling it the *performance principle* -- that is, "the prevailing historical form of the *reality principle*."²⁷¹ Indeed, Marcuse argued that under the *performance principle* "society is stratified according to the competitive economic performances of its members."²⁷² Marcuse argues that the "unrepressed development [*of the erotogenic zones of the body*] would counteract the desexualization of the organism required by its social utilization as an instrument of labor."²⁷³ In doing so, Marcuse provides a preview of what will become his theory of liberation.

The thesis that there is an additional and unnecessary level of instinctual renunciation demanded by the *performance principle* implies the existence of "objective criteria for gauging the degree of instinctual repression at a given stage of civilization."²⁷⁴ To Marcuse, the difference between basic repression and *surplus-repression* equals the amount of instinctual repression that is unnecessary. The difficulty arises when we consider that the "repression is largely unconscious and automatic" -- we do not necessarily feel it.²⁷⁵ The problem of objectively judging the difference between basic and surplus repression remains, and Marcuse initially provides a vague, somewhat

²⁷⁰ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 38.

²⁷¹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 35.

²⁷² Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 44.

²⁷³ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 39.

²⁷⁴ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 87.

²⁷⁵ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 87.

circular statement: “*surplus-repression* is that portion which is the result of specific societal conditions sustained in the specific interests of domination.”²⁷⁶ This statement may provide a clarification between the categories of *unfreedom* and *domination* (i.e. somewhat analogous to basic and surplus repression, respectively), but does not address the problem of calculating (or rather, approximating) the amount of unnecessary repression. calcu

Marcuse cites the three Freudian “sources of human suffering” as “the superior force of nature, the disposition to decay of our bodies, and the inadequacy of our methods of regulating human relations in the family, the community and the state.”²⁷⁷ To Marcuse, it is vital to remember that the first and last sources are historical, and thus:

[T]he necessity of repression, and of the suffering derived from it, varies with the maturity of civilization, with the extent of the achieved rational mastery of nature and of society. Objectively, the need for instinctual inhibition and restraint depends on the need for toil and delayed satisfaction...Scope and intensity of instinctual repression obtain their full significance only in relation to the historically possible extent of freedom.”²⁷⁸

Marcuse insists we view the current society with a view towards finding a greater potential of freedom (i.e. negatively). As such, Marcuse argues that the advanced industrial system has created its own negation by conquering nature (the first source of

²⁷⁶ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 87-88.

²⁷⁷ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 88.

²⁷⁸ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 88.

suffering) and, at least potentially, by conquering scarcity, and by approaching the subjugation of the realm of necessity through advancements in technology and automation (the third source of suffering). Suddenly, the demand for instinctual repression can and should decrease. To be sure, Marcuse's argument has been criticized for being too vague to calculate, but it does seem possible to determine the amount of socially necessary labor time and to subtract that from actual time laboring, and hence to provide an estimate of the current level of *surplus repression*.²⁷⁹ It is also important to be able to conceptualize repression -- i.e. to gauge external phenomena in terms of a loss or gain or repression. It seems a little "non-Marcusean" to get "lost" in quantifying something that, in the end, is a qualitative judgment. In the final analysis, Marcuse conceived of life (and history) as a constant unfolding -- a becoming -- and as such, it was vital for society to be moving towards greater freedom rather than increased repression. This is what Marcuse meant by claiming life can be made rational.²⁸⁰

Now that we have a better understanding of our unfreedom, we can delve into Marcuse's theory of *liberation*. Marcuse's framework is grounded in Freud's theory of the instincts; it thus becomes necessary to briefly discuss Freud's drive theory. To Freud, the human psyche or "self" is divided into three parts -- the id (or "it"), the ego (or I, me"), and the superego (or "above I").²⁸¹ According to Freud, the id comprises the

²⁷⁹ Also, see DK 428 n. 31 for a brief discussion of the criticism targeted at Marcuse. Also, see Gad Horowitz, *Repression*, for a convincing argument that even Freud distinguished between a basic and surplus repression. Additionally as Douglass Kellner argues, it is important to acknowledge the Marxian undertone of this argument. Namely, the concept of *surplus repression* is, more or less, analogous to Marx's conception of *surplus value*, and the *performance principle* is similar to Marx's critique of capitalism and its alienation of the working class. See Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, p. 164.

²⁸⁰ We shall return to this line of thought in the final paragraph of this essay.

²⁸¹ For simplicity I will use the traditional American terminology of ego, id, and superego. Bruno Bettelheim provides a convincing argument for the superiority of the parenthetical terms. See his article in

unorganized part of our personality structure and is wholly unconscious. It consists of our basic drives, namely *Eros* (the life drive) and *Thanatos* (the death drive). To Freud, the mind of a newborn child is regarded as completely "id-ridden," in the sense that it is a mass of instinctive drives and impulses, and needs immediate satisfaction. The id is guided by what Freud called the *pleasure principle*. The child must learn that the world will not and can not immediately gratify every need, for a newborn makes no distinction between the "self" and the outside world. The first recognition of the outside world is when instant gratification is withheld but appears periodically. At some point in the process of development the newborn begins to realize that, for example, the breast (or the bottle) will appear every so often (i.e. not instantaneously), there begins to be a distinction made between the internal world and the external world. This is our first encounter with the *reality principle*, and we then begin to develop the ego.

The ego is mostly conscious, and is not present at birth, but rather develops out of the "self" once there is a realization made that an outside world exists. This distinction between inside and outside world is a crucial part of the process of psychological development, allowing the ego to recognize a "reality" separate from itself. As the child realizes there are external demands placed on the "self," the ego becomes necessary inasmuch as it attempts to please the id's desires in realistic and socially acceptable ways that will benefit in the long term rather than bringing grief. As such, Freud posited that the ego acts as a mediator between the *reality principle* (i.e. the outside world) and the *pleasure principle* (i.e. the id).

The superego eventually develops out of the ego, is only partly conscious, and harbors the conscience and, beyond that, unconscious feelings of guilt. The superego is self-created out of inner needs and outer pressures, and thus, represents the internalization, or introjection, of the demands of society -- and it can be very punishing. As young children, our guardians serve as our conscience. Thus, if we think of doing something inappropriate and do not actually act on those feelings or if we do it without getting caught, we escape the external authority and all feelings of guilt. Unfortunately, we are unable to escape the prying eyes of a developed superego. The superego knows we had the inappropriate thought, and even if we do not commit the act, the mere thought is punished by the superego in the form of, often unconscious, feelings of guilt and shame. In an internal conflict, the superego (the internalization of the *reality principle*) is often pitted against the id (acts according to the *pleasure principle*) with the ego serving as the mediator between the two. By way of summary, the ego, in its role as mediator between the *pleasure principle* and *reality principle*, is thus utilized in our conflicts with the outside world, and in our internal conflicts to try and help us achieve happiness (which, in one of Freud's definitions, is the absence of pain).

Freud also hypothesized that "the organism develops through the activity of two original basic instincts: the *life* instinct (sexuality, which Freud for the most part calls *Eros*) and the *death* instinct -- the destructive instinct."²⁸² The death instinct is often referred to as *Thanatos*. Marcuse writes:

²⁸² Marcuse, *Five Lectures*, 6.

While the former strives for the binding of living substance into ever larger and more permanent units, the death instinct desires regression to the condition before birth, without needs and thus without pain. It strives for the annihilation of life, for reversion to inorganic matter. The organism equipped with such an antagonistic instinctual structure finds itself in an environment which is too poor and too hostile for the immediate gratification of the life instincts. Eros desires life under the pleasure principle, but the environment stands in the way of this goal. Thus as soon as the life instinct has subjected the death instinct to itself the environment compels a decisive modification of the instincts.”²⁸³

A deconstruction of that paragraph will provide us with a better understanding of several Freudian categories. *Eros* strives for life affirming activities and is largely responsible for the advent of group relations among humans. It is important to remember that Freud eventually conceived of *Eros* as, more or less, our drive for sexuality (i.e. obtaining pleasure from the body), self-preservation, and life-affirming gratification (that is, happiness and pleasure).²⁸⁴ Freud described Eros-as-self-preservation as functioning “to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death, and to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself.”²⁸⁵ Put another way, our instinct for self-preservation is charged with ensuring that we take the “long detour” to death -- that is, to die of natural causes in old age. The death drive can be conceived as the antithesis, but it is important to realize that

²⁸³ Marcuse, *Five Lectures*, 6.

²⁸⁴ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 23.

²⁸⁵ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 23, quote from Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 51.

Thanatos cannot simply be conceived as an inexplicable wish for the “annihilation of life.” Marcuse states “the death instinct is destructiveness not for its own sake, but for the relief of tension.”²⁸⁶ Marcuse points out that “the death instinct presses for the annihilation of life because life is the predominance of displeasure.”²⁸⁷ Freud called this a “universal attribute of the instincts” -- that is, the desire to “restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obligated to abandon under the pressure of external distributing forces.”²⁸⁸ Indeed, since we find ourselves “in an environment which is too poor and too hostile for the immediate gratification of the life instincts,” and we desire a “freedom from excitation,” we yearn to return to a state of equilibrium or lack of internal tension -- that is, prior to birth. For Marcuse, the instincts are now “drawn into the orbit of death.”²⁸⁹ Freud calls this the *Nirvana Principle*.

We now understand why, to Freud and Marcuse, the boundaries between *Eros* and *Thanatos* are blurry. Marcuse referred to this as the “terrifying convergence of pleasure and death.”²⁹⁰ The *Nirvana Principle*, which strives for the annihilation of life, “would be a form of the *pleasure principle*, and the death instinct would be dangerously close to *Eros*.”²⁹¹ This is true inasmuch as “the *pleasure principle* stands for the unlimited unfolding of the life instinct, and the *Nirvana principle* for regression into the painless condition before birth.”²⁹² To make matters more complicated, *Eros* seems to approach *Thanatos* in two ways. First, in ensuring the “long detour” to death, *Eros* is helping us exist in an external world that is “hostile to life,” in which we perpetually forego “a

²⁸⁶ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 29.

²⁸⁷ Marcuse, *Five Lectures*, 7.

²⁸⁸ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 24.

²⁸⁹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 25.

²⁹⁰ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 25.

²⁹¹ Marcuse, *Five Lectures*, 7.

²⁹² Marcuse, *Five Lectures*, 7.

pleasurable equilibrium.” Moreover, an unfettered *Eros* would ultimately lead to our individual and collective demise. A terrified Freud rejected this thought, maintaining the duality between the two drives, ultimately arguing that the death instinct is forced into the service of the life instinct, inasmuch as aggression, as Marcuse states, is “diverted from the organism itself and directed toward the outside world in the form of socially useful aggression -- toward nature and sanctioned enemies -- or, in the form of conscience, of morality, it is used by the superego for the socially useful mastery of one’s own drives.”²⁹³

Finally, in describing the instincts as capable of “a decisive modification” as demanded by the *reality principle*, Marcuse is introducing us to two important ideas. First, the instincts now become alterable, and this becomes vital because Marcuse’s theory of *liberation* (which talks of a liberation of *Eros* through a transformation of the instincts) is impossible without a “plasticity” of the instincts. Moreover, we are introduced to the idea of *sublimation* -- a delayed gratification of the instincts through an activity deemed socially acceptable. In short, it is the channeling of primal energy (original instincts) into other physical or psychological activities that is allowed by our external reality and provides a less intense instinctual gratification, but pleasure nonetheless. This will become important in our discussion of Marcuse’s theory of *liberation and domination*.

A final category with which we need to become familiar and another realm in which humans are subject to *surplus repression* is *alienated labor*. This is the realm in which Marcuse argues the *performance principle* inflicts its greatest damage. Marcuse ties the

²⁹³ Marcuse, *Five Lectures*, 8.

performance principle to that of an increasingly rationalized unfreedom, primarily through the way in which social labor is organized. To be sure, Marcuse does concede that the advanced industrial system goes “a long way” toward fulfilling “the needs and faculties of the individuals.”²⁹⁴ Marcuse continues:

For the vast majority of the population, the scope and mode of satisfaction are determined by their own labor; but their labor is work for an apparatus which they do not control, which operates as an independent power to which individuals must submit if they want to live...Men do not live their own lives but perform pre-established functions. While they work they do not fulfill their own needs and faculties but work in *alienation*... [L]abor time, which [under the *performance principle*] is the largest part of the individual’s life time, is painful time, for alienated labor is absence of gratification, negation of the pleasure principle. Libido is diverted for socially useful performances in which the individual works for himself only in so far as he works for the apparatus, engaged in activities that mostly do not coincide with his own faculties and desires.²⁹⁵

It is important to note that Marcuse was not arguing that labor -- that is, the realm of necessity -- can be transformed entirely into the realm of freedom. This will be discussed in greater depth later, but for now it is enough to know that, to Marcuse, our labor is alienated inasmuch as it is prescribed to us, is instinctually unsatisfying, and is such an

²⁹⁴ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 45. This was even more so prior to the “conquest of scarcity.”

²⁹⁵ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 45.

overwhelming portion of our lives that it affects our lives outside of our labor -- i.e. the realm of freedom, or leisure. Marcuse describes *alienated labor* in Marxian and Freudian terms. On the one hand, he stresses the inhumanity and exploitation to be found in the realm of labor, but also stresses its restrictions on erotic (life-affirming) energies and the absence of instinctual gratification. This becomes important inasmuch as Marcuse will argue that a liberated ego will refuse to spend its life performing alienated labor, and it demonstrates that *alienated labor*, demanded by the *performance principle* is an important component of *surplus repression*.²⁹⁶ To Marcuse, this “work ethic” becomes a personal duty willingly performed, since the individual has introjected external demands that require this labor be performed and gratifications be renounced, thus subjecting the individual to pressures internal and external. The labor ethos is so quantitatively and qualitatively dominant, and it must, for the sake of the *performance principle*, be stronger than the *pleasure principle* (which desires gratification) that it even manipulates one’s free time. As Douglass Kellner states, “if the individuals are allowed to experience too much pleasure outside work, or have too much time to question their alienated existence, they might perhaps revolt and cause trouble, or drop out of the system.”²⁹⁷ To help prevent such a circumstance, the superego is extremely willing to punish any individual who does not perform according to the cultural norms of behavior.

Now that we have an understanding of some important Freudian and Marcusean categories we can dig deeper into Marcuse’s theory of *liberation*. He was especially interested in the expansion of the subversive and liberating potential of sexual desire. As we will see, Marcuse was referring to more than what we commonly conceptualize as

²⁹⁶ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 169.

²⁹⁷ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 170.

sexuality. In Marcuse's framework, freedom is conceived as a "liberation of *Eros*," which includes an *expansion of life affirming activities and the expansion of the pleasure zones of the body*. Put simply, it is an expansion of the life instinct; the awakening of a biological need for one's body to be a receptacle of pleasure rather than labor. To be sure, the expansion of *Eros* involves the expansion of sexuality itself, and while Marcuse argued that "*Eros* signifies a quantitative and qualitative aggrandizement of sexuality," it is important to understand that Marcuse was not advocating some type of hedonistic society.²⁹⁸ Indeed, he argued that our current perversions and taboos and their concomitant sublimations exist largely because they are operating under a repressive *reality principle*. Marcuse posited that a liberation of *Eros*, and therefore sexuality itself, would create a "self-sublimation" of sexuality.

The preceding pages discussed Marcuse's argument that the level of repression needed within any given society is historical. We can now focus on Marcuse's argument that our socialization is also historically specific. To Marcuse, considering that our instincts can change, so can the need for society to require coercive laws and harsh social taboos that are intended to keep our destructive and aggressive tendencies in line. We have already focused on the process by which society represses the individual (and why Marcuse considers it to now be unnecessary), and to be sure, Freud characterized this as the price we must pay for civilization, but also asked if it was worth it -- and his answer was in the affirmative. Marcuse simply changed the question -- Do we need to give up so much to live in a civilized society? His response was very different, and the subsequent paragraphs will outline his vision for a *non-surplus-repressive society*.

²⁹⁸ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 205.

Marcuse argued that the “hidden trend in psychoanalysis” also revealed that there is a nature among humans to oppose the domination of our lives and bodies by that of alienated labor and instinctual renunciation. Marcuse calls this the desire for “absence of want and repression,” a reconciliation of sorts, between the external and internal, between happiness and freedom.²⁹⁹ Marcuse points to *memory* as containing cognitive traces of our past freedom. In Freudian psychoanalysis, *memory* is something that the patient attempts to overcome, for it is usually a recollection of something traumatic or unpleasant. Marcuse, on the other hand, stresses the liberating potentialities of *memory*, specifically a recollection of pleasurable and life affirming experiences. Marcuse writes:

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 his dim past and which are never entirely forgotten. The reality principle restrains the cognitive function of memory... [But] as cognition gives way to re-cognition, the forbidden images and impulses of childhood begin to tell the truth...Regression assumes a progressive function. The rediscovered past yields critical standards which are tabooed by the present.³⁰⁰

Marcuse thus reconstructs Freud to suggest that remembrance of past experiences of freedom (as in childhood, or earlier stages of infancy) could put the painful performances of adulthood into question. As Marcuse sees it, the *reality principle* militates, or

²⁹⁹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 18.

³⁰⁰ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 19.

“restrains” our ability to remember those emancipatory experiences, primarily through devaluing experiences largely guided by the pleasure principle. To Marcuse, this memory is intimately connected with *fantasy*. Marcuse writes, “the restoration of memory is accompanied by the restoration of the cognitive content of *fantasy*.”³⁰¹

To Marcuse, *fantasy* is vital because it is untouched by the *reality principle* and argues that it links our unconscious and conscious self, while communicating ungratified wishes of the *pleasure principle*. Marcuse stated “*fantasy*...links the deepest layers of the unconscious with the highest products of consciousness (art), the dream with the reality; it preserves...the perpetual but repressed ideas of the collective and individual memory the tabooed images of freedom.”³⁰² To Marcuse, *fantasy* preserves the memory, or image of “the immediate unity between the universal and the particular under the rule of the pleasure principle.”³⁰³ Conversely, the organization of man by the *reality principle* is characterized by the destruction of this original unity (i.e. a reconciliation, or harmonious relationship, between the self and the external world). It is under these demands that we become socially atomized.³⁰⁴ It is in our fantasies that we hope for a better life and embody our instinctual and unconscious desires of increased freedom and gratification. This is significant to Marcuse precisely because he accepts Freud’s argument that our unconscious contains the memory of peak experiences of gratification - that is, in the womb, during childhood, or the archaic memories of a historical past without *surplus repression*.³⁰⁵ In the Marcusean framework, *fantasy* and *imagination* are

³⁰¹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 19.

³⁰² Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 140-141.

³⁰³ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 142.

³⁰⁴ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 142-3.

³⁰⁵ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 160.

synonymous. Marcuse laments that the *reality principle* has relegated *fantasy* and *imagination* to the realm of utopia (i.e. deemed useless, impossible). Marcuse argues for its restoration:

Freud's metapsychology here restores *imagination* to its rights. As a fundamental, independent mental process, *fantasy* has a truth value of its own -- namely, the surmounting of the antagonistic human reality. *Imagination* envisions the reconciliation of the individual with the whole, of desire with realization, of happiness with reason. While this harmony has been removed into utopia by the established reality principle, *fantasy* insists that it must and can become the real, that behind the illusion lies knowledge.³⁰⁶

To be sure, Marcuse is not suggesting we become a society of pipe dreamers. It must be remembered, dialectical thought demands that the possibilities we imagine retain plausibility within the context of the current state of affairs. Marcuse is simply arguing that the "universe of perception" created by fantasy and imagination will lead to what Marcuse calls multi-dimensional thinking. We will discuss this concept in greater depth during our discussion of domination, but for now it is enough to know that Marcuse is arguing that imagination and fantasy will enable us to recognize our potentialities for greater freedom and happiness that already exist within our current society. Inasmuch as we are able to envision greater potentialities, *fantasy* and *imagination* will also help us in

³⁰⁶ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 143.

our quest for a reconciliation with our external world (nature, and each other), and our internal world (our “self”).

To help us preserve (or awaken) the *memory* and *fantasy* of emancipation, Marcuse suggests the imaginative potential of great art. Marcuse stresses the liberating features of art precisely because it embodies the emancipatory contents of fantasy by producing images, sounds, and thoughts of happiness. To be sure, Marcuse stressed that the freedom expressed in great art is “symbolic,” but it nevertheless taps into the memory of a freer existence. Moreover, Marcuse is using the term “art” quite broadly. He is not referring to only a wide range of what is commonly conceived as the “fine arts” (for example: music, literature, poetry, painting, or writing plays), but also to anything whose *form* is beautiful enough to move the subject (i.e. the person experiencing the aesthetic) to “an unreal world other than the established one.”³⁰⁷ Marcuse elaborates:

Talking of a beautiful girl, a beautiful landscape, a beautiful picture, I certainly have very different things in mind. What is common to all of them -- “beauty” -- is neither a mysterious entity, nor a mysterious world. On the contrary, nothing is perhaps more directly and clearly experienced than the appearance of “beauty” in various beautiful objects. The boy friend and the philosopher, the artist and the mortician may “define” it in very different ways, but they all define the same specific state or condition -- some quality or qualities which make the beautiful *contrast* with other objects. In this vagueness and directness, beauty is experienced *in* the beautiful -- that is, it is seen, heard, smelled, touched, felt,

³⁰⁷ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 87.

comprehended. It is experienced almost as a shock, perhaps due to the contrast-character of beauty, which breaks the circle of everyday experience and opens (for a short moment) another reality.

Indeed, an experienced object that achieves such perfect *form* and hence, *beauty*, Marcuse argues, can move us to the “music of another reality.”³⁰⁸ Marcuse suggests that music, specifically because there is a few seconds of silence immediately prior to the eruption of *form* and *beauty*, clearly demonstrates the ability to transfigure the subject to another reality. To Marcuse, it’s quite literally the silence before the perfect storm. At any rate, it is important to remain mindful that this type of aesthetic experience can be the result of interaction with a beautiful landscape (in reality, or on canvas, or in photograph) a Bob Dylan song, or a beautiful over the shoulder catch by a center fielder in the World Series.³⁰⁹ To be sure, we must be careful not to interpret Marcuse’s aesthetic theory too loosely; most things, especially in the advanced industrial society, do not contain the aesthetic *form* (and hence, the *beauty*) requisite to qualify as art in Marcuse’s estimation. In the Marcusean project, something *must* contradict the given reality if it is to be considered art. Indeed, Marcuse once wrote, “Permanent aesthetic subversion -- this is the way of art.”³¹⁰

The contradiction of the given reality achieved by great art -- *form-as-beauty* -- Marcuse argues, must appeal to us on the instinctual level. That is to say, our experience with art is not an intellectual endeavor. Marcuse posits that beauty symbolizes the realm

³⁰⁸ That term has been borrowed from Rick Matthews.

³⁰⁹ This is a reference to the famous Willie Mays catch in Game 1 of the 1954 World Series. If you care to experience “The Catch,” it can be viewed at <http://youtu.be/7dK6zPbkFnE>.

³¹⁰ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 107.

of freedom “in so far as it demonstrates intuitively the reality of freedom... The basic experience in this dimension is sensuous rather than conceptual; the aesthetic perception is essentially intuition, not notion.”³¹¹ To use a colloquialism, we must “feel it.” To Marcuse, “the nature of sensuousness is ‘receptivity,’ cognition through being affected by given objects.”³¹² To be sure, Marcuse is not arguing that the aesthetic experience is devoid of intellect, but rather that it is not primarily a cognitive experience. Indeed, Marcuse often argues that we must merge our sensuousness (that is, through the senses, the conduit through which we can achieve instinctual gratification) and our intellect.³¹³ It should not be surprising that Marcuse placed such an emphasis on art and its ability to appeal to our senses, for the struggle for existence, Marcuse argued, is fought on the instinctual level. Thus, our discussion of the emancipatory potential of art will continue, but will be within the immediate context of Marcuse’s theory of *liberation*.³¹⁴

Marcuse builds his project around the conclusion that our instincts -- our very nature - - contain the potential for revolutionary possibility. To Marcuse, we must return to Freud’s theory of human nature precisely because it demonstrates that there is an innate mechanism within humans that strives for happiness and liberation. As such, Marcuse believes that Freud’s drive theory reveals the emancipatory power of the instinctual energy of human beings. This is what Marcuse is referring to as *Eros*, that is, the component of our self which strives for life-affirming and social activities. This “liberation of *Eros*” enables Marcuse’s project to move past the individualism of his

³¹¹ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 174, 176.

³¹² Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 176.

³¹³ To Marcuse, it is the senses that need to be liberated, not our intellect. He believes this for two reasons: First, in the context of the advanced industrial system and its concomitant positivism (especially science-as-positivism), the demands of our cognitive abilities are already vast. Second, Marcuse believes that our intellect will follow our senses.

³¹⁴ We will also return to aesthetics in our discussion of the *Great Refusal*.

earlier project (in which he attempted to utilize the project of Heidegger). Marcuse argued a freed *Eros* would release energies that would produce a *new sensibility* among humans, which would in turn lead to a new *reality principle*, and in the process would expand the quantity and quality of human relations and creativity.³¹⁵ A released *Eros* would desire a more erotic (i.e. life affirming) and aesthetic (i.e. beautiful) environment that would require a restructuring of our social, political, and economic world. As Marcuse sees it, only by confronting our unfreedom without self-deception does liberation become necessary, and subsequently, collective action becomes possible. Freud demonstrated for us the price we paid upon becoming civilized, and it is in the seeming abyss of this suffering that Marcuse finds new hope. Indeed, Marcuse's project was a bulwark against the pessimism and conformity rampant in intellectual circles following World War II, for he finds hope of in the very things argued to be enslaving us -- nature and technology.³¹⁶

Marcuse begins sketching his theory of liberation by describing the subject in the current *reality principle* of Western civilization. In Marcuse's view, the *performance principle* presumes a tension between the universal (society) and the particular (individual), and between reason (intellect) and the passions (instincts).³¹⁷ This is what we call the "struggle for existence," or the realization that there is an external world (*reality principle*), and it is not in harmony with our internal self (*pleasure principle*).

³¹⁵ It is important to note the order in which Marcuse described liberation -- that is, he argued that the individual consciousness has to change prior to societal liberation. Put another way, the individual needs to desire freedom before it will arrive. As such, Marcuse often argued that liberation needed to be *a priori* -- that is, must become a biological need of the individual before it can become collective.

³¹⁶ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 171. Douglass Kellner described it as a "climate of cultural despair" among leftist scholars (and conformity among mainstream scholars), with many declaring an end to utopian-revolutionary projects of social reconstruction.

³¹⁷ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 172.

This, according to Marcuse, is how we now experience nature, that is, as something to be dominated or overpowered. Marcuse writes, “Nature (its own as well as the external world) were “given” to the ego as something that had to be fought, conquered, and even violated.”³¹⁸ Marcuse uses the word “nature” to refer to our internal “self,” and the external world. Thus, the ego, or the individual “self” is positioned as an “aggressive, offensive subject” struggling to conquer the resistant internal and external world. As such, our *raison d’etre* becomes one of domination over one’s self, and the external world. This logic of domination appears as what has been referred to as the *performance principle*, which Marcuse argued, is antagonistic to the senses, and thus militates against instinctual gratification. Put another way, the domination over our external nature perpetuates, or is simultaneous with, domination over our internal nature. Moreover, in this scenario, there is a significant tension between our self and the external world because external nature is viewed as an irrational force in need of rationalization. The Enlightenment, and the idea of a rational ego, was supposed to be able to rationalize nature to conform to the needs of humans. Marcuse is arguing that promise has not been fulfilled.³¹⁹ Indeed, to Marcuse, there is no short cut option available with which to achieve a non-surplus-repressive society; we must, if we are to attain liberation, challenge the hegemony of the *performance principle*, and make the “long march” to that of a new reality principle.

Marcuse believes that a new *reality principle* would combine, or reconcile, the antagonistic realms of human existence. This means that it would overcome the conflict between the *pleasure principle* and *reality principle* by creating a harmonious relation

³¹⁸ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 109-110 -- the “its own” referred to is the individual, or subject.

³¹⁹ Marcuse, *Critical Theory and Democratic Vision*, 46.

between the instincts and reason, between the external nature and man, and within the very nature of man -- i.e. the instincts. To Marcuse, the gratification that would be attainable under a new *reality principle* and its logic of gratification would reduce our internal conflicts.³²⁰ To be sure, to Marcuse, the “irreconcilable conflict is not between work (*reality principle*) and Eros (*pleasure principle*), but between *alienated* labor (*performance principle*) and Eros.”³²¹ Thus, the new *reality principle* will not eliminate, but will reduce non-libidinal work to a minimum. As Marcuse sees it, these antagonisms are the controllable causes of human suffering and misery that can be eliminated by a society organized around a logic of gratification; the new *reality principle* would serve the interests of individual gratification and sensuous fulfillment, rather than *surplus repression* and domination.³²² This is precisely why fantasy, art, and imagination play such an important role in the Marcusean framework, because, as mentioned above, they “speak the language of the pleasure principle.” To Marcuse, they all contain “the negation of the unfreedom,” and thus articulate a demand for liberation. To Marcuse, they cannot provide us with red ink, but can move us to realize we are in need of a red pen.³²³ The potential of fantasy, art, and imagination to evoke past memories of freedom and happiness, while also moving us to realize the potentialities of the future thus makes these human endeavors into conduits of the *Great Refusal*. This concept will be discussed in greater detail later; until then we shall be introduced to it by Marcuse: “This

³²⁰ It is important to be mindful that our internal conflicts cannot be eliminated altogether. To Freud, the “economics of the libido,” that is, our tripartite psyche (ego, id, superego) will not allow it.

³²¹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, n. 45, p. 47.

³²² Domination can be conceived as a particularly intense unfreedom, existing when surplus repression is present, and the values, needs, and desires of individuals tend to be prescribed rather than being authentic.

³²³ That is a reference to the Slavoj Žižek anecdote referenced in the beginning of this section.

Great Refusal is the protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom -- to live without anxiety.”³²⁴

Embedded within the new *reality principle* is the creation of a societal structure organized around the demand for instinctual gratification. Thus, society would demonstrate what Marcuse describes as a merger of technology and art (sensuous beauty), creating an *aesthetic ethos*, or an aestheticized environment. In Marcuse’s view, the societal emphasis of Eros (life affirming, gratifying activities) would create a reduction of Thanatos (aggression). Marcuse defends his “utopian” argument that a non-surplus-repressive society is possible by reminding us that the reasons for our *surplus repression* are become increasingly obsolete. Marcuse elucidates this argument as follows:

The relegation of real possibilities to the no-man’s land of utopia is itself an essential element of the ideology of the performance principle. If the construction of a non-repressive instinctual development is oriented, not on the subhistorical past, but on the historical present and mature civilization, the very notion of utopia loses its meaning. The negation of the performance principle emerges not against but *with* the progress of conscious rationality; it presupposes the highest maturity of civilization. The very achievements of the performance principle have intensified the discrepancy between the archaic unconscious and conscious processes of man, on the one hand, and his actual potentialities, on the other. The history of mankind seems to tend toward another turning point in the

³²⁴ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 149-150.

vicissitudes of the instincts... [and this] turning point would be located at the highest attained level of civilization.

To Marcuse, a “turning point” is upon us, in which the accomplishments of the past make it possible for the modern human species to, for the first time, overcome scarcity, reduce repression and minimize alienated labor. Thus, the scenario described above, which Marcuse argues is the state of things, suggests that the advanced industrial system has created the potential for its own obsolescence.

Marcuse reminds us of the oft-used argument that no society can possibly provide for all: “there is some validity in the argument that, despite all progress, scarcity and immaturity remain great enough to prevent the realization of the principle ‘to each according to his needs.’”³²⁵ He responds by reminding us that the conquest of scarcity requires us to maintain, or even augment, our levels of production, but simultaneously will require some to sacrifice a level of material comfort. Marcuse writes:

The reconciliation between pleasure and reality principle does not depend on the existence of abundance for all. The *only* pertinent question is whether a state of civilization can be reasonably envisaged in which human needs are fulfilled in such a manner and to such an extent that surplus repression can be eliminated.³²⁶

As we will see, for a new *reality principle* to emerge, a radical change must occur *a priori* in the consciousness of the individual. That is to say, one must want the freedom

³²⁵ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 151.

³²⁶ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 151.

prior to being capable, or willing, to act to gain it. In this scenario, the human species, having become conscious of the full effect of *false needs*, is no longer libidinally tied to an irrational consumption-as-happiness ethos, and thus will not perceive this as a reduction in happiness.

Marcuse posits that such a non-surplus-repressive society can be achieved with a “rational organization of fully developed industrial society after the conquest of scarcity.”³²⁷ This society would:

reflect the prevalent satisfaction of the basic human needs, sexual as well as social: food, housing, clothing, leisure. This satisfaction would be (and this is the important point) *without toil* -- that is, without the rule of alienated labor over the human existence. Under primitive conditions, alienation has not yet arisen because of the primitive character of the needs themselves, the rudimentary character of the division of labor, and the absence of an institutionalized hierarchical specialization of functions. Under the “ideal” conditions of mature industrial civilization, alienation would be completed by general automatization of labor, reduction of labor time to a minimum, and exchangeability of functions.³²⁸

³²⁷ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 152. Additionally, Marcuse argued that the advanced industrial system was irrational not only because human happiness was only a by-product of its wares, but because it was a system that, in the final analysis, is unsustainable. Put another way, the advanced industrial system demands an irrational level of destruction (e.g. environment, beauty, production of wasteful products, overuse of resources) for the sake of progress. Marcuse argued that “irrationality of the whole” would eventually cause the system to destroy itself.

³²⁸ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 152.

Marcuse is arguing that the primitive human was free to the extent that primitive needs were met. To be sure, this happiness was limited by nature -- that is, primitive man was limited by a lack of mastery over the external world. That is what Marcuse means when he describes the conditions existing within the advanced industrial society as "ideal." Indeed, to Marcuse, scarcity and nature have been mastered to the extent that it is now possible to organize a society around gratifying our instinctual needs. Technology, and specifically automation, is what will enable society to reduce the amount of time spent laboring in non-libidinal work. Marcuse thus concludes that the very technological-industrial conditions that helped create alienated work have developed, in its advanced state, the forces of production which could potentially enable the human species to overcome *alienated labor* and *surplus repression*.³²⁹ This is dialectical thinking *par excellence*.

This process begins when the length of the work day is reduced. The realization of this Marxian notion would technically mean the reduction of standard of living for some, but it must be remembered that the criteria for living well would have become other than what it was under the *performance principle*. Indeed, Marcuse writes:

But the regression to a lower standard of living, which the collapse of the performance principle would bring about, does not militate against progress in freedom. The argument that makes liberation conditional upon an ever higher standard of living all too easily serves to justify the perpetuation of the repression. The definition of the standard of living in terms of automobiles,

³²⁹ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 177.

television sets, airplanes, and tractors is that of the performance principle itself. Beyond the rule of this principle, the level of living would be measured by other criteria: the universal gratification of the basic human needs, and the freedom from guilt and fear -- internalized as well as external, instinctual as well as “rational.”

Put simply, we would incorporate a different conception of freedom and happiness. No longer would we gauge our liberty in terms of the material wealth we can accumulate, but we would reject that very conception because it prohibits us from creating a society based on the free play of human faculties. We would, instead, define happiness in terms of the level of instinctual gratification possible within that society. As mentioned above, this also demands, to a much greater extent, the external reality (*reality principle*) be in harmony with our internal self (*pleasure principle*).³³⁰ Marcuse argues that in a society that is rationally organized around a logic of gratification, a minimum of time and energy would be spent performing necessary but unsatisfying labor, and the quantity of free time would be expanded, enabling more time and libidinal energy to be devoted to human needs: *Eros*. Marcuse writes:

In this case, the quantum of instinctual energy still to be diverted into necessary labor (in turn completely mechanized and rationalized) would be so small that a

³³⁰ It is important to be mindful that Marcuse may *seem* to be arguing that a *complete* harmony between the internal and external is possible, but he knows that is impossible considering our internal make-up. The very nature of dialectical thinking militates against the idea the any society can be perfect -- there is always a negation present. Thus, even in a society in which the external and internal is in much greater harmony than the society Marcuse is analyzing, some conflict between reason (reality principle) and instinct (pleasure principle) will remain.

large area of repressive constraints and modifications, no longer sustained by external forces, would collapse. Consequently, the antagonistic relation between pleasure principle and reality principle would be altered in favor of the former. Eros, the life instincts, would be released to an unprecedented degree.

Marcuse is making a Hegelian argument, inasmuch as he is claiming that a quantitative change (reduction of painful labor) will lead to a qualitative change (liberation of *Eros*).

Marcuse is conceding that non-libidinal labor is inevitable, but argues that it can be minimized to the extent that it enables the unused libidinal energy to be diverted to life affirming activities. Marcuse quotes Charles Baudelaire: “True civilization does not lie in gas, nor in steam, nor in turntables. It lies in the reduction of the traces of original sin.”³³¹ Marcuse is attempting to make the point that “True civilization,” that is, a society guided by the logic of gratification, lies in the reduction of guilt brought about by a harsh superego, which we must remember, is the internal manifestation of the external world. In the current state of affairs, the superego represents the demands of the *performance principle* and thereby requires an unnecessary level of instinctual renunciation (i.e. *surplus repression*). In Marcuse’s framework, the superego -- a “powerful, but tolerant father”³³² -- punishes the individual with guilt when the performance principle is transgressed.³³³ Under a new *reality principle*, in a society structured around a logic of gratification, the superego will not need to punish precisely because our *pleasure*

³³¹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 153. The “original sin” is referring to our harsh superego and feelings of guilt if we do not comply with the *performance principle*.

³³² Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 9.

³³³ To be sure, Marcuse also argued that the “relaxation of taboos” of modern society provides an alleviation of the sense of guilt, and “binds the ‘free’ individuals libidinally to the institutionalized fathers.

principle is, to a great extent, in harmony with the *reality principle*. This would reduce the feelings of guilt and anxiety and divert instinctual energy back to life affirming activities because the superego would not require such performance in the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom. To put it colloquially, we could get off “the hamster wheel.” Thus, Marcuse concludes that in a non-surplus-repressive society humans would be capable of harmonious relations with others, be more willing to defer gratification in the interests of more intense pleasure later on, and because the liberated Eros would have found its way into the realm of necessity, alienated labor would not be so stultifying.³³⁴ At any rate, it has been mentioned above that Marcuse’s new *reality principle* depends on the elimination of surplus-repression. As stated above, this would not eliminate labor, but rather:

the organization of labor of the human existence into an instrument of labor. If this is true, the emergence of a non-repressive reality principle would alter rather than destroy the social organization of labor: the liberation of Eros could create new and durable work relations.³³⁵

In the final analysis, the human body would no longer be primarily a receptacle of labor, but would be dominated by the play of our faculties. In brief, we would have the time and energy to finally do those things that make us happy.³³⁶

³³⁴This would result from the combination of the reduction of quantity of hours spent performing labor, but also because our labor would no longer be spent making unnecessary wares. We would find it more satisfying because it would not dominate our existence, and we would know it was necessary and useful.

³³⁵ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 155.

³³⁶ A very curious phenomenon is the realization that alienation and automation paradoxically increases the potential for freedom. That seems counterintuitive, for machines robbed workers (artisans) of their skill,

Concomitant with these new “work relations” is a new erotic reality, inasmuch as the needs of the external world (i.e. societal structure) tend to no longer militate against the *pleasure principle*. It must be remembered, the way in which we have organized our labor (i.e. division of labor, rationalization of production) has been for the utility of “the established productive apparatus rather than for the individuals.”³³⁷ In Marcuse’s view, this tended to contradict the *pleasure principle* to the extent that the social need (rapid production, production of useless wares) deviated from the individual need (instinctual gratification, life affirming activities). In this scenario, labor and productivity tend to become an end-in-itself, which, to Marcuse, is the “taming of the instincts by exploitative reason. Efficiency and repression converge...”³³⁸ In the Marcusean framework, under the new *reality principle*, the tension between the external world and internally within our tripartite psyche would be drastically alleviated because society would be organized around a logic of gratification of our individual (instinctual) needs rather than that of the advanced industrial system.

To be sure, it is not simply a matter of reorganizing of social labor -- to Marcuse, that would be quantitative rather than a qualitative. Put differently,

thereby removing gratification from the labor process. To Marcuse, “the more external to the individual the necessary labor becomes, the less does it involve him in the realm of necessity.” The implication is that automation relieves us of the requirements of domination, our libidinal investment in the process is minimal (thereby so is the libidinal energy spent), and we thus experience a quantitative reduction in labor time which leads to a qualitative change in human existence; “free” time, rather than “labor” time, determines the content of our “life.” This expanding realm of freedom liberates the various faculties: “Thus liberated, they will in turn generate new forms of realization and of discovering the world, which in turn will reshape the realm of necessity, the struggle for existence.” (*Marcuse, Eros and Civilization*, 223).

³³⁷ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 155.

³³⁸ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 155.

No matter how justly and rationally the material production may be organized, it can never be a realm of freedom and gratification; but it can release time and energy for the free play of human faculties outside the realm of alienated labor ... It is the sphere outside labor which defines freedom and fulfillment, and it is the definition of the human existence in terms of this sphere which constitutes the negation of the performance principle.³³⁹

Marcuse is arguing that the human species subjected to the *performance principle* has organized their internal and external world in reverse. We have organized our lives around the realm of necessity (labor) and we have increasingly allowed our realm of freedom (leisure) to be violated by this domination. Today's *reality principle* demands such rapid productivity, hard work, efficiency, rationality and competitive performances that the working day dominates both our life and leisure. Ultimately, we are so mentally and/or physically fatigued by the daily performance that we have no libidinal energy left for genuine fulfillment -- thus we defer to whatever particular vapid entertainments provided by the advanced industrial system. This dynamic helps us appreciate the significance Marcuse places on the reduction of the realm of necessity and to understand how he can claim that a quantitative change can become qualitative. To be sure, Marcuse argued that this is not a simple matter of subtraction equals addition.

Marcuse argues that this can only take place in a society whose members experience a transformation of values and consciousness. Put another way, for any political, social,

³³⁹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 156-157. To be sure, Marcuse was not arguing that labor can never be gratifying. He was simply making the non-controversial statement that non-libidinal labor cannot be eliminated.

and economic revolution to be authentic, it must be happen *after* a change in the consciousness of its subjects. To be sure, any revolution that would simultaneously alter work and social relations, would involve a new and gratifying experience of the external world based on a new *reality principle*, but there needs to be a change in the consciousness of the individual that moves one into praxis -- that is, revolutionary action. Marcuse makes this argument, with help from Marx, in the following passage:

To be sure, Marx held that the organization and direction of the productive apparatus by the “immediate producer” would introduce a *qualitative* change in the technical continuity: namely, production toward the satisfaction of freely developing individual needs. However, to the degree to which the established technical apparatus engulfs the public and private existence in all spheres of society -- that is, becomes the medium of control and cohesion in a political universe which incorporates the laboring classes -- to that degree would the qualitative change involve a change in *the technological structure itself*. And such change would *presuppose* that the laboring classes are alienated from this universe in their very existence, that their consciousness is that of the total impossibility to continue to exist in this universe, so that the need for qualitative change is a matter of life and death. Thus, the negation exists *prior* to the change itself...³⁴⁰

Marcuse is borrowing from Hegel’s master-slave dialectic. He continues:

³⁴⁰ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 23.

The dialectical logic insists, against the language of brute facts and ideology, that the slaves must be *free for* their liberation before they can become free, and that the end must be operative in the means to attain it. Marx's proposition that the liberation of the working class must be the action of the working class itself states this *a priori*. Socialism must become reality with the first act of the revolution because it must already be in the consciousness and action of those who carried the revolution.³⁴¹

Marcuse is arguing that the very first revolutionary act presupposes a radical consciousness -- that is, the individual unable to exist under the status quo.³⁴²

³⁴¹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 41.

³⁴²There are two points that need to be made. First, Marcuse is directly referring to a working class consciousness in the quote, but it must be remembered that Marcuse did not think the working class has any consciousness of liberation. Indeed, this is an impetus behind his entire project -- namely, to find possible revolutionary actors in the absence of a radical working class. My purpose in using the quote was simply to demonstrate Marcuse's argument that consciousness precedes praxis. Second, there is some ambivalence as to Marcuse's argument. Marcuse seems to muddy the waters in the following passages: "[T]he rupture with the self-propelling conservative continuum of needs must precede the revolution which is to usher in a free society, but such rupture itself can be envisaged only in a revolution -- a revolution which would be driven by the vital need to be freed from the administered comforts and the destructive productivity of the exploitative society."

Elsewhere he argues: "The social agents of revolution ... are formed only in the process of transformation itself, and one cannot count on a situation in which the revolutionary forces are there ready-made, so to speak, when the revolutionary moment begins" (Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 64).

I do not find these lines of thought to be arguing that the revolutionary act produces the revolutionary agent simply because if that were the case, Marcuse *seems* to be arguing that revolutionary action is impossible -- but that is antithetical to his entire project. He was making reference to the near totalizing effect of *false needs*, and thus, our inability, or unwillingness, to desire our own liberation. It is also a reference to our inability to see the potentialities in our own society. Marcuse referred to this as a "vicious circle" that must be broken. To be sure, this is to argue that any revolutionary movement must begin with a group of people who are moved to action by a radical consciousness. The first act may inspire others to join, but it still requires a change in consciousness prior to any act. Put another way, some individuals may not be willing to break dependence on *false needs* until they witness others do so. Marcuse is also arguing that a change in consciousness needs to *accompany* any change in societal structure for it to be a qualitative change

We must now return to the idea that the new *reality principle* is derived from the reduction of the realm of necessity, thus allowing the release of “time and energy for the free play of human faculties outside the realm of alienated labor.”

The preceding paragraphs have discussed Marcuse’s argument that a shortening of the work day and a drastic reduction of alienated labor would release erotic (life affirming) energies. This liberation of Eros would result in the obsolescence of the social and internal restrictions on sexuality. Since the body would no longer be a receptacle of toil, it could be “resexualized.” Marcuse argues that under the *performance principle*:

The full force of civilized morality was mobilized against the use of the body as mere object, means, instrument of pleasure; such reification was tabooed and remained the ill-reputed privilege of whores, degenerates, and perverts.

Precisely in his gratification, and especially in his sexual gratification, man was to be a higher being, committed to higher values; sexuality was to be dignified by love. With the emergence of a non-repressive reality principle, with the abolition of the surplus-repression necessitated by the performance principle, this process would be reversed.

The *performance principle* demands that the human body be de-eroticized to the extent that we can use that energy to perform labor, thereby utilizing our body as vessels of labor rather than pleasure. That is to say, society, as we have organized it, demands our sexuality be reduced to monogamous relationships and makes the additional demand that

(rather than merely quantitative). Indeed, soon after the above passage is the following statement: “radical change in consciousness is the beginning, the first step in changing social existence.”

our pleasure zones be reduced to our genitalia (that is, actual acts of coitus). There is also a societal demand that sexuality is most appropriate when in the service of reproduction. Marcuse is also arguing that the social taboo on sexuality is a holdover from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in which the bourgeoisie positioned the private sphere in opposition -- that is, as a safe haven -- from the heartless and commodified world (the capitalist public sphere). As such, one's private life was viewed as a realm in which interactions were not to be structured around market exchange values and men and women were not to be reified -- hence the restriction of using the "body as mere object." At any rate, Marcuse argues that this process would be reversed if Eros was to be liberated.

Marcuse points to the infant to help make this argument. In Freud's view, prior to socialization (that is, learning society's demands of sexual restriction) the infant progresses through a series of psychosexual stages in which different parts of the body provide erotic (life affirming) satisfaction.³⁴³ Freud referred to this as "pre-genital" sexuality, while Marcuse used the term "polymorphous sexuality." It is vital to remember that this is not "sexual" in the same way that the adult within the *performance principle* is "sexual." In this context, it simply means that different parts of the body are providing the infant with instinctual gratification. Put simply, the body of the infant, which we must remember is id driven (pleasure principle), is a receptacle of pleasure. To Freud and Marcuse, it is the process of socialization that de-eroticizes, or de-sexualizes the body. Marcuse is calling for this process to be reversed; that is, for the human *body*

³⁴³ Examples would be an anal stage (e.g. defecation), oral stage (e.g. breast feeding, putting things in mouth), and phallic stage (e.g. touching oneself).

(i.e. not just the genitals) to once again become a vessel of pleasure. This line of thought needs to be clarified because it has led to much misunderstanding.

In Marcuse's view, a liberation of Eros would:

first manifest itself in a reactivation of all erotogenic zones and, consequently, in a resurgence of pregenital polymorphous supremacy and in a decline in genital supremacy. The body in its entirety would become an object of cathexis [libidinal, or instinctual, investment of energy], a thing to be enjoyed -- an instrument of pleasure.³⁴⁴

Marcuse argues that such an "instinctual liberation" would not lead to "a society of sex maniacs," but to "a transformation of the libido: from sexuality under genital supremacy to erotization of the entire personality."³⁴⁵ A common misconception, to put it colloquially, is that Marcuse is advocating a society replete with orgies and bestiality, in which we spend all day fondling ourselves and each other. Indeed, that is hedonistic narcissism (among other things), and very far from what Marcuse is arguing. He stresses that this transformation of sexuality would be a result of radical social change and would lead to a self-sublimation of sexuality rather than an explosion of acts of coitus, precisely because we would get erotic pleasure elsewhere. Marcuse argues that in a non-surplus repressive society, sexuality would take forms other than sexual intercourse. In Marcuse's view, under the *performance principle* sublimation (instinctual deflection, and delayed gratification) deflects sexual energy into non-sexual ends (i.e. inhibits its aim),

³⁴⁴ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 201.

³⁴⁵ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 201.

but in a liberated society, sublimation could be a non-repressive activity that could eroticize one's social interactions and work relations.³⁴⁶ Indeed, Marcuse argued "Spiritual 'procreation' is just as much the work of Eros as is corporeal procreation."³⁴⁷ Within the sexual repression of the *pleasure principle*, a sudden release of suppressed sexuality might lead to some sort of sex mania. Marcuse counters this by arguing that in a non-surplus-repressive society, in which a transformed consciousness is presupposed, sexual energy could be channeled into creating "eroticized personalities." In such a scenario, men and women who view their body -- that is, their "self" (physical and mental) -- as instruments of pleasure would reject the instrumentalization of the body. Sexuality is now interpreted as instinctual energy that seeks life affirming pleasure -- it is transformed into *Eros*.

To be sure, Marcuse argues that this can only truly happen in a transformed society and must be "supraindividual," that is, not merely an isolated individual act. Indeed, to Marcuse, *polymorphic sexuality*, if done for simply individualistic pleasure serves to strengthen the existing repressive society. Thus, Marcuse proposes liberating Eros only in a non-repressive society in which Eros (or erotic energy) would exist within a non-antagonistic "continuum of sexual gratification, affectionate interpersonal relationships, play and creative work."³⁴⁸

In a non-surplus-repressive civilization, the tension between the intellect (reason, *reality principle*) and the senses (instincts, *pleasure principle*) that has existed in the Western tradition since the Enlightenment would be overcome. Marcuse refers to this as a

³⁴⁶ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 183.

³⁴⁷ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 211.

³⁴⁸ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 184.

“*libidinal rationality*.” It is a sensualization of reason, so that work and social relations become eroticized and man can become *polymorphous* again. This presupposes a *new sensibility* among humans, and it is precisely this new mode of sensuousness that would make the refusal to continue living an alienated existence into a biological need.

In Marcuse’s view, a non-surplus-repressive culture “aims at a new relation between instincts and the reason.”³⁴⁹ Marcuse proposes a new concept of reason that is not repressive of the senses but acts in harmony with them. This is possible because under a *new reality principle*, the external world would not militate against our internal self because society would be guided by a logic of gratification. In Marcuse’s view, in any society that is organized on the basis of satisfying *our* needs (rather than its own demands of profit, rapid production, consumption), reason and happiness would converge, creating their own new divisions of labor, their own priorities, their own hierarchy, all within an aestheticized environment. Marcuse suggests the connection between many of the concepts discussed above:

The altered relation between ... [the realm of necessity and realm of freedom] alters the relation between what is desirable and what is reasonable, between instinct and reason. With the transformation from sexuality into Eros, the life instincts evolve their sensuous order, while reason becomes sensuous to the degree to which it comprehends and organizes necessity in terms of protecting and enriching the life instincts. The roots of the aesthetic experience re-emerge -

³⁴⁹ *Eros and Civilization*, 197.

- not merely in an artistic culture but in the struggle for existence itself. It assumes a new rationality.³⁵⁰

To Marcuse, men and women operating with and under this new rationality will alter progress -- i.e. division and quantity of labor, the purpose of science, the utilization of technology -- to serve the interests of human gratification.³⁵¹

Marcuse suggests that the “new human” within a new *reality principle*, would exhibit a *new sensibility*, that is, humans have the potential to adopt an aesthetic interpretation of reality that will resonate so strongly within the “self” to generate a “biological” need for freedom.³⁵² In Marcuse’s view, it is important to develop this “radical nonconformist sensibility” because the advanced industrial system reaches into the instinctual level of humans; thus, this must be where resistance and rebellion operates. This “radical sensibility” stresses the active role of the senses in shaping reason -- that is, in shaping one’s worldview and the logical organization of that worldview. We must remember that the senses are not passive; that is, they synthesize the data of experience and are guided by empiricism (i.e. our material and historical experience). Thus, our world emerges not only in the pure forms of time and space, but also, and simultaneously, as a totality of

³⁵⁰ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 223.

³⁵¹ It’s important to note two things: First, we can not forget that society needs our aggression to hold itself together and to protect against the enemy. Our collective and individual guilt is turned inward but also directed outward toward an “other.” This “other,” or enemy, seems to always exist -- i.e. Soviet Union, terrorism, Black nationalists). The point is that liberation of Eros implies a concomitant liberation of our aggression as well. Second, Marcuse is not arguing that technology is a bad thing. In fact, as we have seen, it contains the seeds of our liberation. To Marcuse, what matters is how we apply technology (and science).

³⁵² Marcuse wrote about the “new sensibility” in the context of the New Left and counterculture movements of the late 1960s, and thus may have been a little “giddy” while writing (*An Essay on Liberation*, 1969). To be sure, he never did argue that those groups were revolutionary, only that they may be a “catalyst” towards a revolutionary movement. On the other, he did argue that they were a manifestation of a “new sensibility.” At any rate, the term “new sensibility” is an attempt to provide temporality (historical concretion) to his argument.

sensuous qualities -- objects not only of the eye but of all the senses (gearing, smelling, touching, tasting). Marcuse would refer to this as “polymorphous.” In Marcuse’s view, it is this sensuous experience of the world that must change if social change is to be radical and qualitative -- that is, authentic.

Our discussion of the *new sensibility* will require us to preview some of Marcuse’s thoughts on *domination*. In short, Marcuse argues that the advanced industrial system gives people what it wants them to want, thereby generating needs supportive of mass consumption rather than stimulating creative human development.³⁵³ In arguing this, Marcuse avoids the criticism that his argument is teleological. It is important to be mindful that Marcuse was not arguing that this was something done *to* us, but rather it was something done *by* us. As such, he was not making a teleological argument, inasmuch as he was not claiming that things like technology, advertising, and entertainment were autonomous entities imposing their will on a duped society. Marcuse writes:

Not the automobile is repressive, not the television set is repressive, but the household gadgets which, produced in accordance with the requirements of profitable exchange, have become part and parcel of the people’s own existence, own “actualization.” Thus they have to buy part of their own existence on the market; this existence is the realization of capital. The naked class interest builds

³⁵³ It is important to be mindful that Marcuse was not arguing that this was something done *to* us, but rather it was something done *by* us. Put another way, he was not making a teleological argument, inasmuch as he was not claiming that things like technology, advertising, and entertainment were imposing their will on a duped society. Indeed, Marcuse argues that we created and applied these systems, and we are doing it to ourselves. To be sure, he recognized that there is an elite who, to an extent, exercise their will on the masses [hence, have more input than do the masses], but he also argues that even they have rules to follow.

the unsafe and obsolescent automobiles, and through them promotes destructive energy; the class interest employs the mass media for the advertising of violence and stupidity, for the creation of captive audiences. In doing so, the masters only obey the demand of the public, of the masses; the famous law of supply and demand establishes the harmony between the rulers and the ruled ... Self-determination, the autonomy of the individual, asserts itself in the right to race his automobile, to handle his power tools, to buy a gun, to communicate to mass audiences his opinion, no matter how ignorant, how aggressive, it may be.³⁵⁴

Indeed, Marcuse argues that we are responsible for the creation and application of the advanced industrial system and thus, we are doing it to ourselves. To be sure, he recognized that there is an elite who, to an extent, exercise their will on the masses [hence, have more input], but he also argues that even they have rules to follow.

As Marcuse sees it, the advanced industrial system is irrational, in part, because it is based upon a degree of production that can only be maintained through enormous mass consumption and a terrific degree of waste. It must therefore train its citizens to “need” the things it produces. We are inured to want the newest models and the latest innovations in an endless stream of widgetry. It’s not sufficient that we buy smartphones; we are conditioned to want (or need) a new generation of smartphone every one to two years.³⁵⁵ To Marcuse, we thus begin to conflate our personal worth, our self-esteem, with the quality and the quantity of the material objects we consume. This conditioning is achieved through an incessant barrage of instinctually manipulative

³⁵⁴ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 12-13.

³⁵⁵ --or when our wireless plan allows.

advertising and the creation of the social trope that consumption is synonymous with a meaningful, joyful existence. Finally, we must remember two things: First, under the *performance principle*, this is what we want. Put another way, we instinctually need material items to achieve some level of gratification of our socially conditioned needs³⁵⁶. Additionally, it is in this way that *false needs* are created, which, to Marcuse, are the chains that bind us to the system.³⁵⁷

To combat this, Marcuse describes the development of a “new sensibility” -- of an aesthetic sense of taste for freedom that, once refined, creates what he calls a “biological” (instinctual) need for freedom. Marcuse constantly reminded us that we are libidinally tied to the advanced industrial system, and argued that this new sensibility suggests a reaffirmation of what it means to be human. Marcuse writes: “the masters have created the public which asks for their wares, and asks for them more insistently if it can release, in and through the wares, its frustration and the aggressiveness resulting from this frustration.”³⁵⁸ So, paradoxically, the sublimated frustration channeled into consumption sustains the need for productive work. We need to perform labor in order to afford the wares that allow us to release the frustration caused by our work. To Marcuse, it’s a vicious cycle of domination. We even feel guilty in the event we feel too much pleasure (or too much rest); that is, after a weekend of release we return compliantly to our work stations. In this scenario, we “sin” for pleasure and work for redemption, all within the parameters of what is considered acceptable, and what our energy will allow. If we

³⁵⁶ Remember, this gratification is repressive inasmuch as they are not our own, and it demands we remain “on the hamster wheel.” Put another way, the gratification is vapid, and comes with strings attached.

³⁵⁷ This raises the question of just who it is that knows what our “real” needs are. In Marcuse’s case, he does not try to tell us what our “real” needs are; in fact, he says it is impossible to know with any certainty what those needs are until we develop the “new sensibility” that will allow us to begin constructing a truly free society.

³⁵⁸ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 12.

violate the boundaries of what is acceptable, our “father” (i.e. superego) weighs us down with guilt; but as mentioned above, the relaxation of taboos alleviates our sense of guilt and further binds the “free” individuals libidinally to the advanced industrial system. It is quite a pickle -- it is easy to see how many view Marcuse as very pessimistic.

In articulating this psychoanalytic paradigm of consumer society, Marcuse borrows heavily from Freud. He utilizes the Freudian concept of the “internalization of authority” to explain how our instinctual erotic (life affirming) drives are transformed until the work ethic and current *reality principle* (i.e. *performance principle*) have become second nature: “biological.” It is on this same instinctual level that the “new sensibility” must originate if we are to foster, or rather, to maintain, a qualitative change.

The *new sensibility*, which expresses the ascent of Eros over Thanatos, is what Marcuse describes existing among those who living within a new *reality principle*.

Marcuse writes:

The new sensibility, which expresses the ascent of the life instincts over aggressiveness and guilt, would foster, on a social scale, the vital need for the abolition of injustice and misery and would shape the further evolution of the “standard of living.” The life instincts would find rational expression (sublimation) in planning the distribution of the social necessary labor time within and among the various branches of production, thus setting priorities of goals and choices: not only what to produce but also the “form” of the product. The liberated consciousness would promote the development of a science and technology free to discover and realize the possibilities of things and men in the

protection and gratification of life, playing with the potentialities of form and matter for the attainment of this goal. Technique would then tend to become art, and art tend to form reality: the opposition between imagination and reason, higher and lower faculties, poetic and scientific thought, would be invalidated. Emergence of a new Reality Principle; under which a new sensibility and a desublimated scientific intelligence would combine in the creation of an *aesthetic ethos*.³⁵⁹

In this scenario, the “liberated consciousness” is presupposed, which may, in the event the quantity of those “liberated” begins to swell, foster a liberation of Eros, which would indicate the ascension of the life instincts over aggressiveness and guilt, thereby signaling the presence of a *new sensibility* -- or mode of perception that militates against *surplus repression*. The “desublimation of scientific intelligence” and “the development of a science and technology free to discover the possibilities of things and men” indicates that our application of science and technology would have been repurposed to serve the interests of human gratification. This would be accomplished through the societal imperative that science and technology become sensuous.

The awareness, or liberation, articulated by Marcuse, is to come not through the rational interpretation of history but through the aesthetic. Marcuse believes that the repressive nature of modern consumer society has driven any aesthetic quest for freedom into the avant-garde artistic movement. Liberation occurs when aesthetic sensibilities

³⁵⁹ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 24.

escape the insulated world of the artist and find expression in popular movements.³⁶⁰

Marcuse's ideal is a society in which art becomes so fully integrated into the productive and administrative modes of existence that it is impossible to determine where one begins and the other ends.

Marcuse's notion that man has the potential to adopt an aesthetic interpretation of reality that will resonate so strongly within him as to generate a "biological" need for freedom is utterly optimistic, but an important question remains. If unfreedom is part and parcel of our mental ecology, can civilization freely generate freedom — and how? Moreover, who can establish, and who is entitled to enforce "objective" standards? Marcuse suggests that from Plato to Rousseau, an educational dictatorship has been advanced as the only honest answer. The dictatorship is to be exercised by those supposed to have acquired knowledge of true Good. In Marcuse's view, this answer, for better or for worse, has become obsolete: "knowledge of the available means for creating a human existence for all is no longer confined to a privileged elite." The facts, argues Marcuse, are in fact all too open: "individual consciousness would safely arrive at them only if it were not methodically arrested and diverted." We have here an important political principle which Marcuse wishes to adhere to: that people can (learn to) tell the difference between "normal" and "excessive" repression. While they cannot make these sorts of judgments now, it does not mean they cannot do so once given the opportunity. This is a somewhat condescending argument, but is not unfounded. "Utopias" are built

³⁶⁰ At the time of the writing of *Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse saw the aesthetic, sexual, and playful lifestyle of the counterculture and the Black Power movement as thriving subcultures. In Marcuse's view, both of these movements had developed a culture of their own (music, language, values, etc.) that acted as a barrier between them and the mass culture of consumer society. This creates a space for the free play of the creative imagination, and it is there that Marcuse is hoping for the birth of a new aesthetically oriented society.

from unrealistic blueprints -- the conditions for a free society are not, but are in fact a matter of reason.

Throughout much of Marcuse's professional life, he maintained that the potential negation, or revolutionary agency, existed primarily in non-integrated outsiders (by virtue of their being non-beneficiaries of the advanced industrial system) and, to a somewhat lesser extent, by radical students and intellectuals (i.e. the New Left, Counterculture). Some scholars have argued that Marcuse does not adequately present a dialectical negation of the advanced industrial system because his forces of negation are located *outside* the system.³⁶¹ To be sure, prior to the "Sixties" radicalism and the "crisis tendencies" emerging in the advanced industrial system in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Marcuse emphasized the stabilizing and totalizing tendency of the advanced industrial system to swallow up virtually all dissent (i.e. negation). That is to say, he argued that potential negation *within* the system was nearly impossible. This argument was contingent on the ability of the advanced industrial system to "deliver the goods" and to appear inviolable while doing so. The various movements of the Sixties (feminist, Native American, Black Power, environmental...to name a few) coupled with the worsening economic performance of the 1970s prompted Marcuse to alter his analysis of possible social transformation. He eventually perceived a greatly expanded base for possible revolutionary agency that was to be found *within* the advanced industrial system (thus, rendering the above mentioned criticisms obsolete).³⁶² It was during the early 1970s in

³⁶¹ Remember, dialectical thinking demands one to search for possible negations already existing within the system.

³⁶² There were many vicissitudes in Marcuse's project. I present his argument in the subsequent paragraphs as the "current" Marcusean argument because the advanced industrial system is still in crisis (perhaps more so, than at the time of Marcuse's writings -- early 1970s).

which Marcuse began to more forcefully argue that the ranks of the exploited and the font of dissatisfaction was expanding to include the majority of the underlying population.

To be sure, Marcuse was *always* arguing that we are *all* unfree (thus, exploited to varying degrees) in the advanced industrial system, but he was now arguing that the contradictions were, at least potentially, becoming more noticeable.³⁶³

The greatly expanded base for possible negation, which existed at least in theory, allowed Marcuse to argue for what he called a “united front” strategy. This represents a mild attempt by Marcuse to suggest something approaching a concrete roadmap to achieving liberation. He posits that if the entire society is oppressed and the people are ready for change (and that’s the vital ingredient), there is a potential base for a “united front” to strategize and organize. In this scenario, there is an emphasis on political education and activist organization within the milieu of increasing tendencies towards disintegration within advanced capitalist society. To be sure, Marcuse was not suggesting that liberation was likely or that society was even moving in a revolutionary direction. He was merely arguing that the advanced industrial system of the early 1970s was not as stable as it once was, and thus there now existed some space for opposition.

³⁶³ There were several factors for Marcuse’s analysis. First, as mentioned earlier, the advanced industrial system made promises of gratification (self-worth) that it could not deliver. Second, Marcuse began to argue that mental exploitation (e.g. the stultifying experience of working in a cubicle) was a source of unhappiness much the same as Marx had argued for physical exploitation of the proletariat. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of the population were subjected to the rule of capital, thus losing control over their labor and the means of production -- that is exploitation *par excellence*. Third, the advanced industrial system demanded an “intellectualization of labor” which ‘accumulates an increasing quantity of general ability, skills, knowledge.’ (See Marcuse, “*Reification of the Proletariat*”, p. 21). Put simply, Marcuse argued that a consciousness other than that demanded by the performance principle may emerge inasmuch as the masses realize the obsolescence of their own toil. This analysis was greatly influenced by East German dissident Rudolf Bahro. Both called it “surplus consciousness” and argued it was the product of expanded education, scientific and technical development, and improvements of the labor process. Put another way, the advanced industrial system was demanding higher levels of intelligence to produce an increasing amount of waste, and that is quite noticeable. At one point, Marcuse called it “intelligence in opposition.” See Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 307-313.

We must remember that this was in the context of the spectacular struggles of the Sixties that had realized, by the early 1970s that it was going to be a protracted and arduous struggle to renovate the existing society. This is precisely what Marcuse meant by the term “long march.” Certainly, Marcuse was rejecting the notion, common among orthodox Marxists and many revolutionaries, that revolution would be a quick “catastrophic upheaval.”

3.2 – DOMINATION

The people that once bestowed commands, consulships, legions, and all else, now concerns itself no more, and longs eagerly for just two things: bread and circuses!"

Juvenal, *Satires (10)*, ca. AD 100

The freedom of men is not achieved by the complacency of its ideological recognition, but by knowledge of the laws of their slavery.

Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, 1971

We know that the economic evolution of the contemporary world refutes a certain number of the postulates of Marx. If the revolution is to occur at the end of two parallel movements, the unlimited shrinking of capital and the unlimited expansion of the proletariat, it will not occur or ought not to have occurred. Capital and proletariat have both been equally unfaithful to Marx.

Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, 1956

The capabilities (intellectual and material) of contemporary society are immeasurably greater than ever before -- which means that the scope of society's domination over the individual is immeasurably greater than ever before. Our society distinguishes itself by conquering the centrifugal forces with Technology rather than Terror, on the dual basis of an overwhelming efficiency and an increasing standard of living.

Herbert Marcuse, *Introduction to the First Edition of One Dimensional Man*, 1964

Throughout Marcuse's project he insisted that there was still hope for the Enlightenment and its promise of liberation. To that end, much of Marcuse's writings are spent searching for a revolutionary subject, and thus he continuously searched for contradictions and weaknesses within the advanced industrial system -- disintegrating tendencies -- out of which revolutionary action may arise. To Marcuse, our unfreedom was rooted at the instinctual level, but it was to be a political and social struggle. Hegel's master-slave dialectic -- in which the slave realizes he is the freer individual in that relationship because the master is dependent on his labor -- provided Marcuse the

philosophical rationalization for his insistence that the individual can become a revolutionary agent. Marcuse was also very aware that the slave who realizes that it is he who is truly free, in a concrete sense, is still a slave. We must remember, to Hegel, the enslavement is also psychological; i.e. the master needs the slave to think the master *should* be master. Hence, to be free, the slave (like the master originally) needs to be willing to risk death rather than remain enslaved. Thus, individuals still would need to act on their conscious desire for freedom. The subsequent pages will discuss the factors within the current state of affairs that simultaneously prohibit our realization that we are in need of liberation, while also blocking any notions we may entertain, whether conscious or not, that we desire freedom.

Marcuse was ultimately concerned with how we can arrive at what he called “qualitative socialism,” -- a sort of humanistic and gratifying society (largely described in the preceding section) organized around a cooperative ethos, in which *surplus repression* is not necessary. He was also convinced that the advanced industrial system was, in the final analysis, utterly unsustainable. To be sure, it had fostered significant enhancements, but its irrationality -- its “construction through destruction” -- would lead to its own demise. In Marcus’s view, the advanced industrial system has its own internal conflict between Eros and Thanatos, and in the end, the latter will win. To Marcuse, the destruction of the advanced industrial system will not necessarily lead to “qualitative socialism” (and Marcuse sometimes suggested that the societal pendulum may swing the other way - fascism), thus necessitating a revolutionary agent. Moreover, not only has the proletariat been “unfaithful to Marx,” (as mentioned above) but the homogenizing capabilities of the advanced industrial system, the ability of capital to integrate the

working class into its sphere and adapt to its own disintegrating tendencies, serves to threaten even the existence of revolutionary ideas.

Historically speaking, Marcuse was referring to major adjustments and responses by the advanced industrial system to its own emergencies. These adaptations were efforts to either “soften” the rough edges of modern industry, or to save it from downright collapse. An example of the former would be the reformist response of the Progressive Era to both the “human waste” produced by the rise of big business, and the Progressives’ self-anointed role as mediator between capital and labor.³⁶⁴ In this way, the Progressives, by and large, served to stabilize the system. Put another way, to save it from its own rough edges. A second example would be the New Deal, which more or less was a rebirth of the Progressives following World War I, in which the advanced industrial system was saved from collapse, in part, by creating a safety net for the masses. A third example -- and this was the direct context in which Marcuse began his career in the United States -- would be the augmentation of production and consumption (coupled with the mainstreaming of unions) following World War II.³⁶⁵ Put simply, the postwar advanced

³⁶⁴ See Shelton Stromquist, *Re-inventing ‘The People’ The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). To be sure, the Progressives were quite far from being a monolith -- that is, they were a very diverse group, and some Progressive reformers were more radical (e.g. Upton Sinclair, Frank Walsh). Indeed, Frank Walsh was a lawyer from Kansas City who was responsible for drafting a report (known as the “Walsh Report”) for the Commission on Industrial Relations. This “Walsh Commission” was created by the United States Congress in 192 to report on the labor conditions throughout the nation, the relationship between labor and capital, and the causes of conflict between workers and employers. Needless to say, it was a “Progressive” brainchild, only to be rejected by its very creators as too radical (read: too labor friendly). Walsh concluded that the tension between labor and capital can only be mitigated by moving toward greater democracy for the working class -- i.e. granting workers genuine control over their shop floor conditions. His report reveals the tensions between democracy and capitalism, and the outright rejection of the finding of the report by its very creators demonstrates the mildly “reformist” agenda of most (or, at the very least, most powerful) Progressives. See Shelton Stromquist’s *Re-inventing the People* for an excellent discussion of this topic.

³⁶⁵ The stabilization of the advanced industrial system due to this consumerist ethos is the context in which much of Marcuse’s thoughts on domination were written.

industrial system fostered a symbiotic relationship between our insatiable desire for the wares it produces, while also creating the ability to “deliver the goods.” Finally, the ability of the advanced industrial system to absorb the dissent and dissatisfaction of the Sixties Era, to incorporate it into its own marketing and consumption ethos, and to alter its own demands to appear to match that of the counterculture and New Left, signify a remarkable response to perhaps the greatest qualitative challenge it has ever faced.³⁶⁶

In the shadow of these adaptations, Marcuse saw that the advanced industrial society, by the postwar era, had developed the ability to effectively dissolve the negations present within its structure and reduce individuals into acquiescence or complicity. The result is an inauthentic and conformist society dominated by its own social system. In such a situation, the subject cannot see past what “is” (i.e. the status quo). That is to say, the individual cannot, or will not, perceive the potentialities (i.e. the “could be”) or potential negations within society. This is what Marcuse means by the “one-dimensionality” of society. Dialectical thinking presupposes that no society can reach a state of perfection, thus every society must necessarily be a “multi-dimensional” society” -- a society in which the “is” and the “could be” stand in conflict with each other. It is that conflict, in Marcuse's view, which fosters change, or progress (in a good sense). But in a “one-dimensional” society such as the advanced industrial society, Marcuse argues, that

³⁶⁶ I argue it may be the greatest challenge faced by the advanced industrial system because it was, at least to many, a moral and philosophical refusal to participate in the system by those who stood to materially gain from not refusing. A post-Marcuse example would be the recent governmental rescue of the banking and automobile industries.

See the works of Thomas Frank for a discussion of how the advanced industrial system has bent its demand of IBM style conformity (i.e. white shirt, blue tie) and strict adherence to rules to adopt the revolutionary zeitgeist of the counterculture and the New Left. In particular, see an essay called “Why Johnny Can’t Dissent” from an anthology called *Commodify Your Dissent* (1997) and also a book called *The Conquest of Cool* (1998). For a synthesis of these ideas see Ted Morgan’s *What Really Happened to the 1960s*.

second dimension -- the utopian dimension, or the potentialities -- is increasingly unimaginable. Thus, a “one-dimensional” society is one in which a state of affairs tends greatly to conform to existing modes of thought and behavior, and there is a lack of critical thought capable of comprehending any alternatives and potentialities that could transcend the given society. To be sure, Marcuse does not argue that this “one-dimensionality” is totalizing -- that is, one that eliminates *all* contradictions, negations, opposition and individuality. He tends to use the term “one-dimensionality,” applying the term as an adjective to describe deficient conditions within the current state of affairs.³⁶⁷ In short, “one-dimensional” describes a society where the subject (individual) is assimilated into the object (society) and thus tends to follow the dictates of the external world, thus losing ability to discern more liberating possibilities. Conversely, a “multi-dimensional” society presupposes antagonism between the subject and object, thus enabling the subject to perceive possibilities in the world that do not yet exist but can be achieved through human endeavor. It is important to remember that, to Marcuse, one-dimensionality was a tendency that was certainly intensifying, but it was not totalizing.

Before we can begin our discussion of the different categories of domination articulated by Marcuse, we need a general sense of how he used the concept. Marcuse defines the term:

Domination is in effect whenever the individual’s goals and purposes and the means of striving for and attaining them are prescribed. Domination can be exercised by men, by nature, by things -- it can also be internal, exercised by the

³⁶⁷ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 234.

individual on himself, and appear in the form of autonomy ... the superego absorbs the authoritarian models ... and makes their commands and prohibitions its own laws, the individual's conscience. Mastery of drives becomes the individual's own accomplishment -- autonomy.³⁶⁸

This is consistent with Marcuse's argument that the second dimension (i.e. the potentialities) is increasingly hidden from view. In this scenario, the individual has little to no recognition that his self-imposed prohibitions and renunciations are not internal in origin, but rather, an introjection of the external demands (i.e. the *performance principle*, *surplus repression*). Domination, in this sense, is a society which comes to control and establish the individual on its own terms, taking both internal and external forms. In Marcuse's view, domination is a new and improved mode of social control, in which the individuals carry out prescribed patterns of thought and behavior.³⁶⁹ Thus, domination is present when human beings assimilate prescribed thoughts, values, and modes of behavior in which they conduct themselves mentally and physically in ways demanded by external powers and institutions. In a very general sense, the category of *surplus repression* is synonymous with domination, but that does not help us understand how we come to be dominated. To that end, the discussion will focus on several different types of domination.

One way of understanding domination as articulated by Marcuse is as a *loss of authenticity*. We find ourselves returning to the idea of introjection of external demands and assimilation of prescribed thoughts and behavior. Marcuse's concept of *authenticity*

³⁶⁸ Marcuse, *Five Lectures*, 1-2.

³⁶⁹ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 165.

is rooted in Hegel's concept of subject and object. In Hegel's framework, the subject has the power of reflection, freedom, knowledge, transcendence, and action. The individual subject contains the power to objectify nature, that is, to appropriate it to meet a need. Hegel calls this "being-for-itself," and it is a state of being conscious, or authentic -- that is, the subject can also form ideas, choose behavior, and create its own institutions. Essential to the idea of freedom and authenticity is the awareness of one's own independence from the object. That is to say, the individual maintains awareness that there is a tension between the subject and object - they are not one. A "free" and "authentic" subject dominates the object, but if the object controls the subject, a condition of unfreedom exists.³⁷⁰ In Marcuse's view, this is precisely the situation in a "one-dimensional" society in which the object (society and the wares it produces) exercise a concerning level of control and domination over the subject (individual). The tension between the subject and object, which would remain in a "multi-dimensional" society, appears to dissolve. The subject assimilates into the object (e.g. car, television, computer brand), forfeits its powers of self-determination and ability to determine self-development. In Marcuse's project, "one-dimensional" man is losing individuality and the ability to genuinely control one's own purpose. In such a scenario, "one-dimensional" man relinquishes freedom inasmuch as it does not know its true needs because they are not its own, but are heteronomous. The individual is thus unable to resist domination, nor to act autonomously because it quite literally identifies with normative behaviors and values. The subject has become an object of domination.

³⁷⁰ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 236.

A second way of understanding domination as articulated by Marcuse is *domination-as-technological-rationality*. It is important to note that Marcuse recognizes technology both as a contrivance used to mass produce goods, and as a social process which accelerates control and domination by the existing society over the individual. In “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology,” Marcuse defines technology as:

a mode of production, as the totality of instruments, devices and contrivances which characterize the machine age and is thus at the same time a mode of organizing and perpetuating (or changing) social relationships, a manifestation of prevalent thought and behavior patterns, an instrument for control and domination.³⁷¹

Technology-as-contrivance appears as merely a means of material production enabling society to obtain basic needs, and (at least theoretically) in the promotion of a convenient and pleasurable existence. Technology-as-social-process refers to the organization and utilization of the technological apparatus (which includes the social organization of our labor), as well as to the ways in which it influences our modes of knowledge, skills, behaviors, and values. To be sure, the boundary between the two concepts of technology is blurry, but we can say that the latter was of much greater concern to Marcuse. The concept of technology-as-social-process refers to the ways in which we have introjected the demands and values of our technological apparatus. Marcuse refers to this as a

³⁷¹ Marcuse, Herbert, “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology,” in *Technology, War and Fascism, Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse Vol I*, ed. By Douglass Kellner (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 41.

“technological rationality.” In this way, Marcuse views technology under the advanced industrial system as a tool for social control and domination, for it tends to demand near total submission to the prevailing social order and which reduces the subject into corporeal machines that respond to the technical processes in life. Life, more or less, becomes about the quantity of things, rather than the quality -- and we conflate the two.

Marcuse argues that technology is “value-neutral,” that is, neither good nor bad. This “neutral” technology has a tendency to become either good or bad (liberating or dominating) in the way in which we apply it. Marcuse writes:

In the face of the totalitarian features of this society, the traditional notion of the “neutrality” of technology can no longer be maintained. Technology as such cannot be isolated from the use to which it is put; the technological society is a system of domination which operates already in the concept and construction of techniques.³⁷²

So the value of technology in the Marcusean framework is dependent upon, but cannot be separated from, the motive of the user, which in this scenario would be all of us. To be sure, Marcuse argued that technology is dominating, in part, because it is organized by the administrators of this society to serve their own interests. In that sense, technological rationality becomes a political rationality. On the other hand, we must remember that Marcuse argued that even our “institutional fathers” have rules. Marcuse writes:

³⁷² Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, xlviii.

The way in which a society organizes the life of its members involves an initial *choice* between historical alternatives which are determined by the inherited level of the material and intellectual culture. The choice itself results from the play of the dominant interests. It anticipates specific modes of transforming and utilizing man and nature and rejects other modes. It is one “project” of realization among others.³⁷³

Marcuse is maintaining a dialectical view of historical change inasmuch as he claims that any society organizes itself by choosing among plausible alternatives. He is also avoiding vulnerability to the criticism that he is an historical determinist, for the term “project” implies freedom of choice among historically determined options. The vital point here is that *we* choose our societal framework. Marcuse continues:

As early as the pre-school level, gangs, radio, and television set the pattern for conformity and rebellion; deviations from the pattern are punished not so much within the family as outside the family. The experts of the mass media transmit the required values; they offer the perfect training in efficiency, toughness, personality, dream, and romance. With this education, the family can no longer compete. In the struggle between the generations, the sides seem to be shifted: the son knows better; he represents the mature reality principle against its obsolescent paternal forms. The father ... [now] appears as a rather inappropriate target of aggression. His authority as transmitter of wealth, skills,

³⁷³ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, xlviii.

experiences is greatly reduced; he has less to offer, and therefore less to prohibit ... Still, the prohibitions continue to prevail, the repressive control of the instincts persists, and so does the aggressive impulse. Who are the father-substitutes against which it is primarily directed? ... [The father has] disappeared behind the institutions. With the rationalization of the productive apparatus, with the multiplication of functions, all domination assumes the form of administration.³⁷⁴

Marcuse is suggesting that the way in which we have currently organized our society (i.e. the advanced industrial system) has, by invading the private sphere, deflated the authority and role of the family in the socialization process of children. As such, the aggression that children formerly directed against their parental authority is now focused outside the family structure. Unfortunately, to Marcuse we do now know who to hold responsible -- for a "world [that] tends to become the stuff of administration ... [even] absorbs the administrators."³⁷⁵ Indeed, Marcuse argues that "the masters, like the servants, submit to limitations on their instinctual gratification, on pleasure."³⁷⁶ Alas, we perceive the current state of affairs as inevitable, thus we redirect those feelings of anger inwards, only to manifest as inexplicable feeling of guilt, shame, and anxiety.

The mode of production (i.e. technology) within the advanced industrial system has thus been successfully introjected by its subjects, creating what Marcuse called "technological rationality." For Marcuse, this concept refers primarily to the assigning of

³⁷⁴ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 97-98.

³⁷⁵ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 169

³⁷⁶ Marcuse, *Five Lectures*, 21.

intellectual and instinctual energy to the apparatus that tends to demand unconditional compliance.³⁷⁷ Marcuse writes:

Everything cooperates to turn human instincts, desires and thoughts into channels that feed the apparatus. Dominant economic and social organizations “do not maintain their power by force... They do it by identifying themselves with the faiths and loyalties of the people,” and the people have been trained to identify their faiths and loyalties with them. The relationships among men are increasingly mediated by the machine process. But the mechanical contrivances which facilitate intercourse among individuals also intercept and absorb their libido, thereby diverting it from the all too dangerous realm in which the individual is free of society. The average man hardly cares for any living being with the intensity and persistence he shows for his automobile. The machine that is adored is no longer dead matter but becomes something like a human being. And it gives back to man what it possesses: the life of the social apparatus to which it belongs. Human behavior is outfitted with the rationality of the machine process, and this rationality has a definite social content. The machine process operates according to the laws of physical science, but it likewise operates according to the laws of mass production. Expediency in terms of technological reason is, at the same time, expediency in terms of profitable efficiency, and rationalization is, at the same time, monopolistic standardization and concentration. The more rationally the individual behaves and the more lovingly

³⁷⁷ Jeffrey V. O'Casey. “Technology, Technological Domination, and the Great Refusal: Marcuse’s Critique of the Advanced Industrial Society” *Kritike Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (June 2010): 58

he attends to his rationalized work, the more he succumbs to the frustrating aspects of this rationality ... The machine process requires a “consistent training in the mechanical apprehension of things, and this training, in turn, promotes “conformity to the schedule of living,” a “degree of trained insight and a facile strategy in all manner of quantitative adjustments and adaptations...” The “mechanics of conformity” spread from the technological to the social order; they govern performance not only in the factories and shops, but also in the offices, schools, assemblies and, finally, in the realm of relaxation and entertainment.³⁷⁸

Put simply, technological rationality refers to the subordination of thoughts and behaviors to the “machine process” so that the individual no longer directs the machine, but rather is tending to be controlled *by* the machine. In this scenario of introjection of the demands of technological rationality, reason has lost its true function because the thoughts, behaviors, and feeling are shaped by the technical requirements of the apparatus. Thus, the “self” (psyche) has become a bundle of biological impulses, effectively transformed into one of mostly compliant adjustment to the process of production. Marcuse writes:

The idea of compliant efficiency perfectly illustrates the structure of technological rationality. Rationality is being transformed from a critical force into one of adjustment and compliance. Autonomy of reason loses its meaning in the same measure as the thoughts, feelings and actions of men are shaped by the

³⁷⁸ Herbert Marcuse, “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology” in *Technology, War, and Fascism*. ed. by Douglas Kellner. Vol. 1. 5 vols. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 47.

technical requirements of the apparatus which they have themselves created. Reason has found its resting place in the system of standardized control, production and consumption. There it reigns through the laws and mechanisms which insure the efficiency, expediency and coherence of this system.³⁷⁹

Under this technological rationality, there is no longer any mental or physical place for genuine thought -- and this is vital to Marcuse because the private realm of reflection is the source of critical thinking -- since the individual is only given (and is willing to receive) tasks to perform in synchronization with the dictates of the technological apparatus. To Marcuse, this is largely done through the creation of *false needs*, and is linked to our insatiable consumer appetite. It transforms social needs into those of the individual, thus fostering compliance, for there no longer seems to be any tension between subject and object. In the end, we willingly comply because our needs match the needs of the technological apparatus.

Domination-as-technological-reality fosters another kind of social control, and it may be called *domination-as-consumption*. As mentioned above, it is born out of our seemingly unending desire to consume (what the technological apparatus, more or less, wants us to want), which is thus born out of our *false needs*. In Marcuse's view, through the application of technology and its concomitant mass consumption, individual subjects find exactly what is desired, that is, the prescribed need imposed on them by the technological apparatus (which appears, in this scenario, as the consumerist culture it creates). To be sure, we choose which particular products to purchase (albeit from a

³⁷⁹ Marcuse, *Some Social Implications*, 49. Marcuse provides Taylorism as an excellent example of the demands of the "machine process" on the individual.

limited menu of options), thereby providing the sense of freedom, but we very often wind up purchasing things we do not need (and did not want).³⁸⁰ How does this happen? To Marcuse, the system of mass production, mass dissemination, and mass consumption to suit the needs, or desires, of the multitudes (both those who can afford, and those who cannot) is completed through an aggressive onslaught of advertising. Put another way, advertising persuades the masses to desire things they do not really need, thereby creating a harmonious relationship between mass production and mass consumption. Scholars in various fields have suggested that advertising is persuasive precisely because it creates a void in one's "self" -- a feeling of lack of fulfillment -- and promises that happiness will arrive with the purchase of the product. This may be correct, but Marcuse drills down deeper into our psyche.

Particularly concerning to Marcuse is the reality that we know that our appetite for consumption is largely manipulated, yet we continue to comply with the demands. Any thinking person may have taken note of the advice of President Bush following the attacks of September 11, 2001 that we continue shopping lest the terrorists win; or the way in which many advertisements now satirize their own manipulative ways; yet we, for example, continue to measure the success of the holiday season in terms of sales numbers. Thanksgiving provides us with an illuminating example. It is during this holiday in which we are literally to gather as a family and be thankful for what we *already* have, that we are barraged with advertisements for "Black Friday."³⁸¹ Many

³⁸⁰ And we must remember, we continue to remain "on the hamster wheel" to procure these items we do not need.

³⁸¹ Indeed, the quantitative indicators of the wellbeing of the nation, the holiday season, and our "self" begin to arrive on that very day. In the Marcusean framework, our happiness tends to coincide with how much we can consume (purchase, give, receive) during the holidays.

complain how the “shopping season” is invading Thanksgiving and indeed, many individuals who work in retail are forced to prematurely leave their families for the sanitized world of malls and big-box stores.³⁸² Yet, many of us voluntarily follow our Thanksgiving dinner with hours of rushing from store to store. We know we can live otherwise, but we want the best deals -- and the advanced industrial system delivers. This invasion of our private sphere -- to Marcuse, the realm of reflection and critical thought -- means our privacy no longer exists. To be sure, Marcuse would be concerned with the eavesdropping of the United States National Security Agency, but would be horrified by the uber-expansion of the consumptive ethos into the private sphere -- that is, the expansion of the mall -- that is unique to our society in the internet age. One does not need to leave the comfort of home to purchase a piece of pie or a peep show. We can literally consume while in our boxers and attain a quality of life that is contingent on the (literal and existential) delivery capabilities of the advanced industrial system. In this scenario, the qualitative has been dissolved into the quantitative. From our point of view, the distinction no longer exists. This brings us another form of domination: *domination-as-manipulation-of-instincts*.

Perhaps the primary way in which the advanced industrial system procures acceptance of *surplus repression* and compliance to its *performance principle* is through the manipulation of instincts. That is to say, individuals eventually arrive to feel libidinally tied to the wares they consume. Marcuse refers to this as *repressive desublimation*. In this scenario, the *polymorphous sexuality* that was enjoyed as infants but is tabooed for adults is, via *repressive desublimation*, allowed to achieve a level of

³⁸² To be sure, those individuals have an obvious reason to push back against the demands of the acquisitive ethos.

gratification. Thus, the demands of Eros appear to meet fewer taboos and “liberated” instincts wind up redirected toward socially permissible goals and activities. This gratification, because it is towards productive goals rather than gratification for its own sake, does not truly benefit the individual. This “liberation,” which appears to the individual as a libidinal gratification, in fact fosters greater subservience to the prevailing order. In this scenario, we begin to find affirmations of life (i.e. eroticization) in inanimate objects such as cars, clothing, cell phones, and other items we consume. Domination exists within apparent liberation.

Gad Horowitz defines *repressive desublimation* as: “Marcuse’s formulation of the idea that erotic strivings which threaten to explode the structure of surplus repressive civilization are afforded partial satisfaction in distorted forms in order to sustain that very structure.”³⁸³ Horowitz argues that *repressive desublimation* allows sexual release but denounces as repressive:

the “liberation” of a truncated sexual pleasure under the aegis of the authoritative media into a commodity for conspicuous consumption by atomized individuals. Repressive desublimation “liberates” sexuality on condition that psyche and body, love and sensuality, are separated, a separation inconceivable apart from surplus repression, the de-erotization of the body, reduction to *mere* body rather than the sensuous aspect of the psychosomatic person, the *I*. Love as pure spirit,

³⁸³ Horowitz, *Basic and Surplus Repression*, 78.

sex as pure body, are opposite and complementary expressions of the same surplus-repressive reality principle.³⁸⁴

In this scenario, Eros is reduced to a physical act. *Repressive desublimation* reverses the process of sublimation described by Freud, and offers the immediate gratification of instinctual desires rather than their mediated or deferred gratification. Whereas sublimation produces, for example, true works of art, *repressive desublimation* generates the pornography that offer only a hollow semblance of freedom and liberation. Horowitz refers to this as “palliatives for normal and neurotic discontent, mechanisms of escape from anxiety and guilt which persists in the unconscious.”³⁸⁵ Freud refers to them as “cheap enjoyments.” In this way, the *pleasure principle* dissolves into the *reality principle*, and sexuality, for example, is ‘liberated’ through forms of atomized sexual activity that promote social cohesion and conformity. Put another way, once again the subject perceives less tension between the internal (subject) and external (object). We form a libidinal attachment to the wares produced by the advanced industrial system that appear to liberate, but actually serve to make us subservient to the apparatus precisely because it is delivering the goods. For Marcuse, this is terrifying because forms of sexuality which should have a liberating dimension are actually transformed into a new form of social conformism. Adorno and Horkheimer articulated the paradox as such:

³⁸⁴ Horowitz, *Basic and Surplus Repression*, 79.

³⁸⁵ Horowitz, *Basic and Surplus Repression*, 80.

“Everyone can be happy if only he will capitulate fully and sacrifice his claim happiness.”³⁸⁶

Another way of understanding this concept is to realize that we give over our personal sovereignty to the advanced industrial system in favor of vulgar material and physically sensual gratifications. Marcuse reverses the usual usage of the term desublimation. In the Freudian framework, desublimation refers to the absence of repression; that is, a free and unfettered gratification of desire. It can be conceptualized as the pure and immediate satisfaction of an instinctual desire, and it is what our *id* demands. Thus, to Freud, desublimation is a good thing inasmuch as it indicates pure satisfaction. Unfortunately, for the sake of civilization, we need to forego this freedom and renounce our pure satisfactions in favor of socially acceptable and delayed gratifications. By attaching the modifier “repressive” to it Marcuse challenges us to come to terms with the potentially oppressive effects of desublimation. In his view, when the immediate material and physically sensual needs become the dominant concern of individuals, then the ideals of freedom and liberation have no chance.”³⁸⁷

We must remember that Marcuse first wrote of this term in *One-Dimensional Man*, and in the midst of what appeared to be the most democratic and wealthiest society in the world. Where is the repression in a society in which the works of “Plato and Hegel, Shelley and Baudelaire, Marx and Freud in the drugstore?”³⁸⁸ Marcuse responds:

³⁸⁶ Horowitz, *Basic and Surplus Repression*, 80. Horowitz cites Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

³⁸⁷ Pedersen, Christopher. “Theory-Frankfurt School” October 23, 1998. <http://archives.econ.utah.edu/archives/theory-frankfurt-school/1998m10/msg00016.html> (accessed October 11, 2013). Accessed 10/11/2013.

³⁸⁸ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 64.

True, but coming to life as classics, they come to life as other than themselves; they are deprived of their antagonistic force, of the estrangement which was the very dimension of their truth. The intent and function of these works have thus fundamentally changed. If they once stood in contradiction to the status quo, this contradiction is now flattened out.³⁸⁹

The subversive qualities of Plato, Marx, or Shelly are ignored because they appear to our intellect and consciousness to be from another age, and thus inapplicable to our current state of affairs. Marcuse argues that we must not presume that the presence of rational texts coupled with a lack of rational opposition suggests that there is mass contentment and therefore no reason to think we are dominated. To Marcuse, this confuses happiness with freedom. By allowing, or even encouraging, certain forms of desublimation the advanced industrial system distracts our attention from the repressive character of the current state of affairs. More alarming to Marcuse is the realization that we are less liable to respond to our domination precisely *because* Plato is in the drugstore. The ubiquity of “Plato in the drugstore” actually serves to undermine taking a critical stand against the state of affairs because the fact of our “immediate contentment” precludes the possibility of taking Plato, or Marx, or Shelley seriously. Christopher Pedersen uses the fictional character Babbit as an example:

Consider, Babbit, on some strange whim, picks up and actually reads a copy of Plato's *Republic* - or better still, of the new anniversary edition of Marx's

³⁸⁹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 64.

Communist Manifesto. What does he conclude upon reading it? Does he run off and join the local chapter of the communist Party? Not a bit of it, for he is fat and happy. On the whole, the logic of his wallet overcomes his rational judgment. Maybe he even said to himself, at some moment or other, while reading, "yes, I see that: it's true," giving rational assent to the analysis there before him; or "yes, that would be nice," investing the image of an ideal society with the affirmation of his own desire. But as he closes the book and returns fully to the comfortable envelope of his own world, these minor revelations vanish like a puff of smoke. The immediate reality of his satisfaction and contentment (courtesy of bread and circuses) overwhelms his own capacity for rational judgment. "These are pretty pipe dreams," he concludes; "but this is the best of all the worlds that are; so it must be the best of all possible worlds."³⁹⁰

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of Marcuse's concept of domination is that "one knows one can live otherwise," yet we continue the performance. Marcuse writes:

If the worker and his boss enjoy the same television program and visit the same resort places, if the typist is as attractively made up as the daughter of her employer, if the Negro owns a Cadillac, if they all read the same newspaper, then this assimilation indicates not the disappearance of classes, but the extent to

³⁹⁰ Pedersen, "Theory-Frankfurt School," accessed 10/11/2013.

which the needs and satisfactions that serve the preservation of the Establishment are shared by the underlying population.³⁹¹

To Marcuse, our collective acquiescence has enabled our language, thoughts, science, politics, and philosophy to be reduced to an uncritical positivism. To put it another way, the terms we use indicate the extent to which we cannot think critically.³⁹² Thus, it is not surprising that our application of the term “critical thinking” is not really critical.³⁹³ Our philosophy tends to be a logic concerned with the “is,” rather than the “ought.” Marcuse provides us with the hypothetical situation of purchasing an automobile that may serve as a summary of our domination:

I ride in a new automobile. I experience its beauty, shininess, power, convenience -- but then I become aware of the fact that in a relatively short time it will deteriorate and need repair; that its beauty and surface are cheap, its power unnecessary, its size idiotic; and that I will not find a parking place. I come to think of my car as a product of one of the Big Three automobile corporations. The latter determine the appearance of my car and make its beauty as well as its cheapness, its power as well as its shakiness, its working as well as its obsolescence. In a way, I feel cheated. I believe that the car is not what it could be, that better cars could be made for less money. But the other guy has to live,

³⁹¹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 8.

³⁹² For example, terms such as “smart bombs” or “dinner meeting” suggest we no longer distinguish between pleasurable and performance.

³⁹³ One only needs to look at the “Common Core Standards” for public school teachers being adopted by the Boards of Education of most states, in which “critical thinking” is purported to be a primary emphasis, yet the standards were largely written and will be largely tested by corporations that represent the status quo, and are largely the result of the “free market reform” of public schools.

too. Wages and taxes are too high; turnover is necessary; we have it much better that before. The tension between appearance and reality melts away and both merge in one rather pleasant feeling.³⁹⁴

The individual winds up thinking, “Oh well, I suppose it has to be.” After all, we need the wares produced by the advanced industrial system -- to Marcuse, it is compensation for our performance.

By way of summary, the culture industry and its acquisitive ethos has replaced brute force as the instrument of social control. Marcuse argues that culture once existed within a potentially subversive aesthetic-erotic realm (i.e. by containing the desires and truths not realized in the existing society), but now is being dissolved into the *one-dimensional* society -- that is, culture has become a “culture industry” and is now “a cog in the culture machine.” To Marcuse, it has become mass produced and commodified background music. We are inundated with cheap reproductions that are intended to be consumed rather than experienced, thus a “flattening out of the antagonisms between cultural and social reality through the obliteration of the oppositional, alien, and transcendent elements in the higher culture by virtue of which it constitutes *another dimension of reality.*”³⁹⁵ Marcuse refers to this as the “conquest of the unhappy consciousness.” He borrowed the term from Hegel, who argued that the “unhappy consciousness” of the individual is torn between “what could be” and its dissatisfaction with “what is.”³⁹⁶ In a flattened society, the “unhappy consciousness” finds its gratifications in consumption of

³⁹⁴ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 226.

³⁹⁵ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 57.

³⁹⁶ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 257.

mass culture and a loosening of the sexual taboos. Indeed, Marcuse pointed to the ability of the advanced industrial system to use sexuality to make us libidinally dependent on the wares it produces as a devastating victory for social control because it effectively flattened what Marcuse believed to be the most explosive and subversive contradiction -- that is, our aesthetic-erotic impulses.³⁹⁷ In the end, we are content to accept our domination, even though we may know we can live otherwise. In the words of Marcuse:

Just as people know or feel that advertisements and political platforms must not be necessarily true of right, and yet hear and read them and even let themselves be guided by them, so they accept the traditional values and make them part of their mental equipment. In mass communications blend together harmoniously, and often unnoticeably, art, politics, religion, and philosophy with commercials, they bring these realms of culture to their common denominator -- the commodity form. The music of the soul is also the music of salesmanship. Exchange value, not truth value counts.³⁹⁸

It is difficult to overstate the terrifying nature of Marcuse's description of domination. In a society in which one-dimensional thought is so ubiquitous, domination -- which will eventually lead to our destruction -- appears to be entirely rational and inevitable. Marcuse called this the "irrationality of the whole," and often described the destructive tendencies of the advanced industrial system as "construction through destruction," which is a catch-all phrase that refers to such things as the overuse of the natural environment,

³⁹⁷ See section of *Liberation* for a discussion on the importance of sexuality (i.e. Eros) in Marcuse's project.

³⁹⁸ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 57.

global military buildup and its concomitant threat of nuclear holocaust and perpetual warfare, and an unnecessary level of demanded renunciation of human gratification within a society organized around the profit motive (which considers human happiness a by-product as opposed to a central component). On the whole, Marcuse was referring to the tendency of society to increase repression rather than moving towards greater freedom. To Marcuse, this tendency towards ever-increasing repression is irrational in the face of the “conquest of scarcity,” and will probably lead to the eventual destruction of our society. In Marcuse’s view, inasmuch as the advanced industrial system contains the seeds of its own eventual demise, it is saddled with the same conflict as humans -- i.e. between *Eros* and *Thanatos*. This suggests modern advanced industrial society has its own death drive, and, to Marcuse, it was winning. Even in the face of these odds, Marcuse dedicated his life to the proposition that things can change. This sentiment can be encapsulated by a single statement that he borrowed from Ernst Bloch -- “that which is cannot be true.”³⁹⁹

Marcuse thought Bloch’s words were powerful enough to close a chapter (and begin the next) in his seminal work *One-Dimensional Man*. Marcuse paired this quote with the Hegelian phrase “what is real is rational,”⁴⁰⁰ which together are intended to argue that society *ought* to move toward greater freedom (what is rational), even though ultimate freedom can never be achieved. To elaborate, even though dialectical theory insists that the negation is always present, and thus, no society can ever be perfect, we must attempt to move in a rational direction.⁴⁰¹ Marcuse described rational movement as follows:

³⁹⁹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 120.

⁴⁰⁰ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 123.

⁴⁰¹ For the implications of this line of thought, see the final paragraph of this essay.

- (1) The transcendent project must be in accordance with the real possibilities open at the attained level of the material and intellectual culture.
- (2) The transcendent project, in order to falsify the established totality, must demonstrate its own *higher* rationality in the threefold sense that
 - (a) it offers the prospect of preserving and improving the productive achievements of civilization;
 - (b) it defines the established totality in its very structure, basic tendencies, and relations;
 - (c) its realization offers a greater chance for the pacification of existence, within the framework of institutions which offer a greater chance for the free development of human needs and faculties.⁴⁰²

To Marcuse, this “greater chance for the pacification of existence” is precisely where we find his claim that we *ought* to move towards greater freedom (and thus, rationality). Marcuse was aware that this involved a value judgment, and embraced this notion. In Marcuse’s words: “I believe that the very concept of Reason originates in this value judgment, and that the concept of truth cannot be divorced from the value of Reason.”⁴⁰³ There is, or *ought* to be, a dialectical movement towards greater rationality, and thus we *ought* to refuse to continue to exist and to be moved in the opposite direction.

⁴⁰² Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 220.

⁴⁰³ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 220.

3.3 – *THE GREAT REFUSAL*

Believe me, for certain men at least, not taking what one doesn't desire is the hardest thing in the world.

Albert Camus, *The Fall*, 1956

A living man can be enslaved and reduced to the historic condition of an object. But if he dies in refusing to be enslaved, he reaffirms the existence of another kind of human nature which refuses to be classified as an object.

Albert Camus, *The Failing of Prophecy*, 1966

There is only one difference between a madman and me. I am not mad. And adds: "There is more to the nightmarish world than people think."

Salvador Dali, *The American Magazine*, 1956

[The] alternative is not so much a different road to socialism as an emergence of different goals and values, different aspirations in the men and women who resist and deny the massive exploitative power of corporate capitalism even in its most comfortable and liberal realizations. The Great Refusal takes a variety of forms.

Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 1969

Marcuse believed that there was a “hidden trend in psychoanalysis” which reveals aspects of human nature that oppose, or refuse, the dominance of labor and instinctual renunciation. In the context of Marcuse’s project, that would be a natural refusal of the *performance principle*. To be sure, Marcuse conceived of this as part of *Eros* (our life affirming drive), and as a biological opposition to *surplus repression* -- that is, repression above the level necessary for civilization to exist. He argued that Freud’s drive theory discloses that we, in part, instinctually strive for a condition in which freedom and

happiness converge -- a society in which we may achieve libidinal gratification. To Marcuse, Freud's drive theory "upholds the tabooed aspirations of humanity: the claim for a state where freedom and necessity coincide."⁴⁰⁴ In such a society, the conflict between the individual and external world would be reduced precisely because both wanted the same thing -- human gratification. Marcuse called this the "pacification of existence." This type of society would necessarily be structured around a logic of gratification inasmuch as it allows the "free play of human faculties."⁴⁰⁵ Marcuse referred to this mostly untapped characteristic of *Eros* as *The Great Refusal*.

As Marcuse stated in the epigraph, the *Great Refusal* manifests itself in a variety of ways, and we will discuss those realms of opposition below, but, at least initially, needs to be described in a general sense. Marcuse initially defined it as a "refusal to play the game of the affluents," but we find that description lacking because even the "affluents" are not really free. Marcuse elaborates by describing the *Great Refusal* as a "defense of life," that is "the refusal to speak the dead language of affluence, to wear the clean clothes, to enjoy gadgets of affluence, to go through the education for affluence."⁴⁰⁶ By moving from a concrete noun ("affluents") to an abstract noun ("affluence") Marcuse broadens the notion of refusal to target not just individuals, but the entire advanced industrial system. To be sure, Marcuse argues that our current state affairs appear as inevitable and completely rational, "to the point where even individual protest is affected at its roots. The intellectual and emotional refusal 'to go along' appears neurotic and

⁴⁰⁴ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 18.

⁴⁰⁵ This is described in detail in section 3.2.

⁴⁰⁶ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xx-xxi.

impotent.”⁴⁰⁷ Indeed, we must remember that Marcuse, being a dialectical thinker, demands that we differentiate between existence (appearance, the “is”) and essence (reality, the “can be”). That is to say, we must become mindful of the potentialities. But can we refuse? Marcuse writes:

Today, in the prosperous warfare and welfare state, the human qualities of a pacified existence seem asocial and unpatriotic -- qualities such as the refusal of all toughness, togetherness, and brutality; disobedience to the tyranny of the majority; profession of fear and weakness (the most rational reaction to this society!); a sensitive intelligence sickened by that which is being perpetrated; the commitment to the feeble and ridiculed actions of protest and refusal. These expressions of humanity, too, will be marred by necessary compromise -- by the need to cover oneself, to be capable of cheating the cheaters, and to live and think in spite of them.⁴⁰⁸

Indeed, Marcuse described it as “only a chance,” and the odds are not good.

In Marcuse’s view, the existence of any type of individual and collective *Great Refusal* presupposes a radical change in consciousness that would mean a refusal of the *false needs* that keep us bound to the advanced industrial system. Put simply, this would mean different ways of perceiving and experiencing the world (internal and external).

Marcuse referred to this as a *New Sensibility* -- a fusion of intellect and reason. Marcuse borrows heavily from Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, which Marcuse

⁴⁰⁷ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 9.

⁴⁰⁸ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 242-3.

perceives to be among the most radically socialist of Marx's writings. As Marx argued, it is in the "emancipation of all human senses" we can transcend private property. Marcuse points out that this implies the emergence of a new type of subject, different from the capitalist subject, giving rise to improved relations between man and man, man and things, and man and nature.⁴⁰⁹ Consequently, a new sensibility would provide not only a perception of the given, but simultaneously through its own "practice" the means for discovering "new (more gratifying) possibilities and capabilities."⁴¹⁰ The emancipated senses would repel the rationality of the destructive logic of capitalism while preserving and developing themselves and nature. This would be achieved in two ways: (1) *negatively* – the Ego, the other, and the object world would no longer be experienced in the context of acquisition, competition, and defensive possession; and (2) *positively* – through the transformation of nature into an environment for the human being as "species being"; free to develop their creative and aesthetic abilities -- to consistently behave in a life affirming way.⁴¹¹ This emancipation of the senses would make freedom "a sensuous need, an objective of the Life Instincts."⁴¹² Indeed, Marcuse argued that our true interests are:

not hard to identify, and the war against them does not require missiles, bombs, and napalm. But it does require something that is much harder to produce -- the spread of uncensored and unmanipulated knowledge, consciousness, and above

⁴⁰⁹ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 63-64.

⁴¹⁰ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 71.

⁴¹¹ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 64. This implies a rejection of the *false needs* offered by the advanced industrial system.

⁴¹² Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 1.

all, the organized refusal to continue to work on the material and intellectual instruments which are now being used against man.⁴¹³

The “organized refusal” evokes a level of collective action and praxis (action), and notions of “the Long March,” which Marcuse used to refer to the long, painstaking process of refusal. On a similar note, Marcuse argued:

Critical analysis must dissociate itself from that which it strives to comprehend; the philosophic terms must be other than the ordinary ones in order to elucidate the full meaning of the latter. For the established universe of discourse bears throughout the marks of the specific modes of domination, organization, and manipulation to which the members of a society are subjected. People depend for their living on bosses and politicians and jobs and neighbors who make them speak and mean as they do; they are compelled, by societal necessity, to identify the “thing” with its functions.⁴¹⁴

Marcuse is arguing that we cannot negate the existing society using the same mutilated thoughts and language that serve to hide its contradictions.⁴¹⁵ Marcuse writes:

In contrast, a philosophy that does not work as the handmaiden of repression responds to the fact of death with the Great Refusal ... death can become a token

⁴¹³Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xxiv.

⁴¹⁴ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 193.

⁴¹⁵ For Marcuse’s discussion of mutilated or “functional” and “operational” language see Ch. 4 of *One Dimensional Man*.

of freedom. The necessity of death does not refute the possibility of final liberation. Like the other necessities, it can be made rational -- painless. Men can die without anxiety if they know that what they love is protected from misery and oblivion. After a fulfilled life, they may take it upon themselves to die -- at a moment of their own choosing.⁴¹⁶

Put simply, to live and die in happiness presupposes a refusal “*to be classified as an object.*”

Marcuse’s search for a revolutionary agent changed with the historical circumstances, but, on the whole, he argued that any revolution -- that is, genuine collective refusal -- needs to begin with a coalition of three groups. First, a radical intelligentsia needed to emerge from within the ranks of privilege. To be sure, this helps us understand Marcuse’s affinity for the New Left and counterculture. Moreover, he viewed such a group as vital precisely because it was a potential negation from *within* the system, and this helps us comprehend the reasons Marcuse was (constructively) critical of the various movements of the Sixties. This group had (and has) the potential to provide a devastating critique of the advanced industrial society precisely because they have access to privilege, and are choosing to reject it on purely qualitative grounds.⁴¹⁷ Marcuse also never dropped his belief that the working class was a necessary component to any radical movement. Indeed, Marcuse expanded his notion of the exploited class to include white

⁴¹⁶ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 236-7.

⁴¹⁷ In discussions of Marcuse, others have labeled the New Left and counterculture as a negation from *outside* the system. Put another way, since they were rejecting the system and operating from outside the system, they are not evidence of a contradiction, or possible negation *within* the system. I, on the other hand, categorize the New Left and counterculture as a negation from *within* the system precisely because they have access to privilege and are rejecting that privilege. Put another way, they are rejecting the wares and comforts offered because of the contradictions perceived *within* the system.

collar workers (a sort of mental exploitation) and perceived them as perhaps the key factor in any contemporary revolutionary movement. At the same time, in Marcuse's view, this group was perhaps the most *one-dimensional*. Finally, the struggles of the "wretched of the Earth" -- that is, those who are not among the privileged -- are a third realm of possible negation. These types of movements, to be found among various Third World nations and the Civil Rights and Black Nationalism movements, were radical by virtue of their very status as "others," that is, as individuals not integrated into the advanced industrial society. Marcuse argued that a radical coalition among these three types of groups may lead to qualitative social change: "The chance is that, in this period, the historical extremes may meet again: the most advanced consciousness of humanity and its most exploited force. It is nothing but a chance."⁴¹⁸ Putting aside the pessimism of such a statement, the implication is that, for the first two groups, this will require a radical change in consciousness that occurs initially on the individual level.⁴¹⁹

In Marcuse's view, the *Great Refusal* begins within the individual. Douglass Kellner argues that behind the *Great Refusal* is the notion of radical individualism. He describes it as an "individualistic revolt," or as a "stoical and defiant individualism." Kellner writes:

It is the notion of individualistic refusal and revolt that characterizes Marcuse's political conception in *One-Dimensional Man* rather than ... concepts of mutual aid, revolutionary mass upheaval or collective self-government ... in my view

⁴¹⁸ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 257.

⁴¹⁹ The "others" are a living negation of the existing society (i.e. they have "the most immediate and the most real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions. Thus, their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not." Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 256.

his emphasis on an individual revolt and self-transformation constitute a vital component of his revolutionary theory which maintains that there can be no meaningful talk about social change unless the individuals themselves are liberated from capitalist needs and consciousness and possess “radical needs” for thoroughgoing social change.

Kellner correctly argues that liberation must become a need in the consciousness of the individual (and *false needs* must be rejected) prior to any movement to attain liberation, but stops short of elucidating the entire concept. To be sure, Marcuse was pushing back against the orthodox (and positivistic) Marxian notion of proletarian revolution in an era when only bureaucratic socialism (i.e. Soviet Style -- which was also *one-dimensional*) was opposing capitalism.⁴²⁰ Yet still, Kellner’s description, perhaps inadvertently, seems to render the notion of the *Great Refusal* vulnerable to criticisms that it is highbrow narcissism.⁴²¹ We must remember Marcuse’s notion of a “radical act” as both a change in consciousness within the individual *and* a desire to change the status quo. Indeed, Marcuse was aware of this vulnerability and responded:

The striking paradox that narcissism, usually understood as egotistic withdrawal from reality, here is connected with oneness with the universe, reveals the new depth of the conception: beyond all immature autoeroticism, narcissism denotes

⁴²⁰ Kellner, *Crisis of Marxism*, 280. He was exploring the reasons why genuine qualitative revolutions had failed, or not been attempted in situations in which objective conditions existed that made revolution quite possible and/or necessary.

⁴²¹ I am not arguing that Kellner misunderstood Marcuse’s notion of the Great Refusal, only that his description did not go far enough.

a fundamental relatedness to reality which may generate a comprehensive existential order. In other words, narcissism may contain the germ of a different reality principle: the libidinal cathexis of the ego (one's own body) may become the source and reservoir for a new libidinal cathexis of the objective world -- transforming this world into a new mode of being.⁴²²

To Marcuse, there is no radical act without concern for the external world, and to desire liberation for one self, is to realize that it is contingent on the liberation of others.⁴²³

Indeed, Marcuse argues that "Narcissistic images are those of the Great Refusal" inasmuch as the ego is extended to the object (i.e. external world, society) and thus, the self aims at a harmonious relationship between the internal and external. Marcuse refers to this as a "non-repressive mode of sublimation" that begins as narcissism and "somehow overflows and extends to its objects."⁴²⁴ Marcuse concludes that the *Great Refusal* is not simply to refuse social performance or:

by dropping out and living one's own style of life. To be sure, no revolution without individual liberation, but also no individual liberation without the liberation of society ... The tension between the personal and social reality persists ... This means that, from the beginning, the personal and particular liberation, refusal, withdrawal, must proceed within the political context, defined

⁴²²Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 169.

⁴²³ There is a definite existential element to this line of thought, and it is unsurprising that these words seem similar to those of Sartre mentioned in the beginning of this section.

⁴²⁴ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 169-170. In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse uses the tale of Orpheus and Narcissus as literary metaphors for this effect.

by the situation in which the radical opposition finds itself, and must continue, in theory and practice, the radical critique of the Establishment; in other words, the individual liberation (refusal) must incorporate the universal in the particular protest, and the images and values of a future free society must appear in the personal relationships within the unfree society.⁴²⁵

In other words, our individual liberation is illusory if it does not create a social reality in which that freedom can exist. In Marcuse's view, the advanced industrial society has invaded every sphere of our existence. Thus, it is virtually impossible to live within our own bubble of individual liberation without a "return to the forest" and risking the same limitations on our happiness as that of the primitive man. Individual liberation is contingent on the creation of a society structured around a logic of gratification, making the liberation of others a necessary component. Marcuse has provided concreteness to Sartre's abstract statement: "In choosing, I choose for all people."⁴²⁶ Moreover, this line of thought reveals another layer of the *Great Refusal* -- that is, to create the necessary conditions requires one (and others) to refuse in the political realm.

Marcuse argued that only through radical political refusal can society hope to achieve a qualitative social change. The *Great Refusal* would necessitate an ability to see past the violent and exploitative status quo, and would require a demand for new political structures that would enable individuals to realize their freedom. Marcuse referred to this as a *determinate negation*, that is, an alteration of the status quo that remains dialectical

⁴²⁵ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 48-49.

⁴²⁶ See introduction to Part III.

(i.e. contains elements of the old) but is radical enough to be considered a “break” with the existing society. Marcuse writes:

For the world of human freedom cannot be built by the established societies, no matter how much they may streamline and rationalize their dominion. Their class structure, and the perfected controls required to sustain it, generate needs, satisfactions, and values which reproduce the servitude of the human existence. This “voluntary” servitude (voluntary inasmuch as it is introjected into the individuals), which justifies the benevolent masters, can be broken through a political practice which reaches the roots of containment and contentment in the infrastructure of man, a political practice of methodical disengagement from and refusal of the Establishment, aiming at a radical transvaluation of values. Such a practice involves a break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, feeling, understanding things so that the organism may become receptive to the potential forms of a nonaggressive, nonexploitative world.⁴²⁷

Marcuse is describing the political arena as the concrete manifestation of the liberated consciousness. It is in the political realm where theory becomes praxis -- that is, the abstract becomes concrete. Put another way, the political arena is the space in which the liberated individual, working with others, can work to create a society around a logic of gratification. To work toward this goal presupposes a liberated consciousness that would refuse both the introjected values and *false needs* of the advanced industrial system and

⁴²⁷ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 6.

refuse to be appeased by surface reforms. To be sure, Marcuse is not arguing that we “drop out” of the political arena, but rather is advocating a more active state of radical political opposition. It is in that sense Marcuse is advocating a “methodical disengagement” from the political status quo. Marcuse often argued that those who are in opposition to the existing society must present some sort of vision for future development, and the realm of politics is precisely where liberated individuals can begin to imagine and create new societal institutions. Indeed, Marcuse argued that the *Great Refusal*, in the final analysis, “is not a matter of psychology or ethics but of politics ... the practice in which the basic societal institutions are developed, defined, sustained, and changed.”⁴²⁸

Marcuse used a broad conception of the political realm, often arguing that “intellectual skills and capabilities [have] become political factors.”⁴²⁹ He is arguing that our intellect and skills have been co-opted by the advanced industrial system to such an extent that to assert personal autonomy (via intelligence and skill) would be a political act. Consequently, Marcuse conceives of an intellectual refusal as a component of the political refusal (and thus, the *Great Refusal*). Broadly speaking, an intellectual refusal would mean an unwillingness to continue viewing the external world through the prism of positivism. For example, Marcuse calls for scholars and professionals of various types (e.g. scientists, mathematicians, engineers) to reject their façade of scientific neutrality. Marcuse writes:

⁴²⁸ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 250.

⁴²⁹ MARCUSE, Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xxv.

the scientific approach to the vexing problem of mutual annihilation -- the mathematicians and calculations of kill and over-kill, the measurement of spreading or not-quite-so spreading fallout, the experiments of endurance in abnormal situations -- is mystifying to the extent to which it promotes (and even demands) behavior which accepts the insanity. It thus counteracts a truly rational behavior -- namely, the refusal to go along, and the effort to do away with the conditions which produce the insanity.⁴³⁰

In Marcuse's view, scholars within the advanced industrial system, in their empirical zeal to understand the "is," tend to obfuscate the perception of the possible alternatives (i.e. the "could be," or the "ought), thereby perpetuating *one-dimensionality*. For example, planning a war using mathematical probabilities and quantitative analysis (as in the Vietnam War), tends to create a false dichotomy in which the only options seem to be to accept greater or lesser death.⁴³¹ Moreover, this tends to make a rejection of the "insanity" to appear as the irrational act. Marcuse continues:

Against this new mystification, which turns rationality into its opposite, the distinction must be upheld. The rational is *not* irrational, and the difference between an exact recognition and analysis of the facts, and a vague and emotional speculation is as essential as before. The trouble is that the statistics,

⁴³⁰ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 190.

⁴³¹ Indeed, Marcuse often characterized it as a trade-off; that is, we subconsciously and consciously accept the "bad" behaviors of our nation (e.g. wars, harmful economic policies, global hegemony), in exchange for relaxed taboos that can attain empty gratifications on the free market. See my discussion of domination in the previous section, specifically *repressive desublimation*.

measurements, and field studies of empirical sociology and political science are not rational enough. They become mystifying to the extent to which they are isolated from the truly concrete context which makes the facts and determines the function.⁴³²

Marcuse refers to this “truly concrete context” as the “meta-context” of society. This is to point out that the context of any scholarly analysis (or, for that matter, any observation of the existing society) is more than the immediate conditions being studied (e.g. a factory being analyzed). In Marcuse’s view, one cannot separate the immediate conditions from the wider societal and historical context that determine their function. To Marcuse, this “meta-analysis” must be “capable of identifying the structure that holds together the parts and processes of society that determines their interrelation.”⁴³³ Put simply, this wider context *is the reality*, and the “analysis can overcome it only by recognizing it and by comprehending its scope and its causes.”⁴³⁴

In Marcuse’s view, an intellectual refusal would mean a “refusal to cooperate ... [among] the scientists, mathematicians, technicians, industrial psychologists and public opinion pollsters.”⁴³⁵ He argued that advancements in science and technology make it possible for technicians to begin assigning a purpose to their intellectual endeavors. Marcuse referred to this as “final causes.” In Marcuse’s view, the flip side of dropping the façade of neutrality is to realize that scientific and technical knowledge can be guided by a goal -- that of organizing a society around a logic of gratification rather than a

⁴³² Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 190.

⁴³³ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 190.

⁴³⁴ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 191.

⁴³⁵ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, xxv.

twisted logic of mutually assured destruction. Marcuse is arguing that formerly “neutral” scholars need to refuse to be bound by the intellectual norms of positivism, and must become political. He writes:

Industrial civilization has reached the point where, with respect to the aspirations of man for a human existence, the scientific abstraction from final causes becomes obsolete in science’s own terms. Science itself has rendered it possible to make final causes the proper domain of science.⁴³⁶

To be sure, Marcuse conceives of “science” as an intellectual endeavor that utilizes the scientific method and thus remains mired in the faux neutrality of positivism.

Conversely, he advocates a “metaphysical” conception of science in which a purpose is assigned to both practitioner and the process. Marcuse continues:

“neutral” scientific method and technology become the science and technology of a historical phase which is being surpassed by its own achievements -- which has reached its determinate negation. Instead of being separated from science and scientific method ...formerly metaphysical ideas of liberation may become the proper object of science. But this development confronts science with the unpleasant task of becoming *political* -- of recognizing scientific consciousness as political consciousness, and the scientific enterprise as political enterprise.

For the transformation of values into needs, of final causes into technical

⁴³⁶ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 232.

possibilities is a new stage in the conquest of oppressive, unmastered forces in society as well as in nature. It is an act of liberation.⁴³⁷

In this way, to take control over the purpose of science and technology is an act of the *Great Refusal*. Indeed, Marcuse argued that the rebellion “will have become a political force only when it is accompanied by the rebellion of reason: the absolute refusal of the intellect (and the intelligentsia) to lend their support to the Establishment, and the mobilization of the power of ... reason for the work of change.”⁴³⁸

Marcuse then asks several vital questions: “how can the administered individuals -- who have made their mutilation into their own liberties and satisfactions, and thus reproduce it on an enlarged scale -- liberate themselves from themselves as well as from their masters? How is it even thinkable that the vicious cycle be broken?”⁴³⁹ Marcuse is not optimistic, but provides a possible answer by asking additional questions. He writes:

What is now at stake are the needs themselves. At this stage, the question is no longer: how can the individual satisfy his own needs without hurting others, but rather: how can he satisfy his needs without hurting himself, without reproducing, through his aspirations and satisfactions, his dependence on an exploitative apparatus which, in satisfying his needs, perpetuates his servitude?⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁷ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 233.

⁴³⁸ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 131.

⁴³⁹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 250-251.

⁴⁴⁰ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* 4.

The desire to refuse, or break “the vicious cycle” involves a rejection of the *false needs* created by and for the individual, and by framing the question in terms of a refusal to continue hurting one self, Marcuse places the desire to refuse squarely on the instinctual, or biological level. Marcuse writes:

Such a change would constitute the instinctual basis for freedom which the long history of class society has blocked. Freedom would become the environment of an organism which is no longer capable of adapting to the competitive performances required for well-being under domination, no longer capable of tolerating the aggressiveness, brutality, and ugliness of the established way of life. The rebellion would then have taken root in the very nature, the “biology” of the individual; and on these new grounds, the rebels would redefine the objectives and the strategy of the political struggle, in which along the concrete goals of liberation can be determined.⁴⁴¹

Once again Marcuse argues that such a change is made *possible* by the technical progress of the advanced industrial system that “has reached a stage in which reality no longer need be defined by the debilitating competition for social survival and advancement.”⁴⁴² Marcuse refers to this instinctual refusal of unfreedom as a “second nature” that would reject aggressiveness, violence, and the painful performance required by the advanced industrial system. Additionally, this instinctual opposition to the *performance principle* would foster solidarity among individuals (formerly atomized by the demands of the

⁴⁴¹ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 4-5.

⁴⁴² Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 5.

existing society) that may lead to praxis. In brief, the individual would introject a new set of values that run counter to those expected by the existing state of affairs. In Marcuse's view, in this scenario:

The organism receives and reacts to certain stimuli and "ignores" and repels others in accord with the introjected morality ... In this way, a society constantly re-creates, this side of consciousness and ideology, patterns of behavior and aspiration as part of the "nature" of its people, and unless the revolt reaches into this "second" nature, into these ingrown patterns, social change will remain "incomplete," even self-defeating.

Marcuse is suggesting that any particular society introjects its values and norms into its subjects, thus reaching into their "second nature," that is, their instincts. As such, in Marcuse's view, any meaningful opposition to the status quo must be accompanied by an instinctual refusal of the demands (and *false needs*) of the advanced industrial system.

Marcuse continues:

The so-called consumer economy and the politics of corporate capitalism have created a second nature of man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form. The need for possessing, consuming, handling, and constantly renewing the gadgets, devices, instruments, engines, offered to and imposed upon the people, for using these wares even at the danger of one's own destruction, has become a "biological" need in the sense just defined. The

second nature of man thus militates against any change that would disrupt and perhaps even abolish this dependence of man on a market ever more densely filled with merchandise -- abolish his existence as a consumer consuming himself in buying and selling.⁴⁴³

Marcuse argued that the *Great Refusal* needs to reach into our “second nature” precisely because it is where we have introjected the values and norms of the advanced industrial system to the extent that they have become organic, biological needs. To be sure, Marcuse positioned his argument as a corrective to orthodox Marxism. He continues:

It follows that the radical change which is to transform the existing society into a free society must reach into a dimension of the human existence hardly considered in Marxian theory -- the “biological” dimension in which the vital, imperative needs and satisfactions of man assert themselves. Inasmuch as these needs and satisfactions reproduce a life in servitude, liberation presupposes changes in this biological dimension, that is to say, different instinctual needs, different reactions of the body as well as the mind.⁴⁴⁴

It is in this way that the need to refuse becomes a biological need. Marcuse describes the *Great Refusal* of the rebels as a political, moral, and instinctual rebellion and attempts to give us some insight of the refusal through the eyes of the rebels:

⁴⁴³ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 11.

⁴⁴⁴ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 16-17.

the entire sphere and atmosphere [*of the existing society*], with all its power, is invalidated; nothing that any of these politicians, representatives, or candidates declares is of any relevance to the rebels; they cannot take it seriously although they know very well that it may mean to them getting beaten, going to jail, losing a job. They are not professional martyrs: they prefer not to be beaten, not to go to jail, not to lose their job. But for them, this is not a question of choice; the protest and refusal are parts of their metabolism.⁴⁴⁵

In short, if our “second nature” -- our instincts -- desire liberation, the *Great Refusal* is not a matter of choice, but of necessity.

Marcuse also argued that the *Great Refusal* can be found in the aesthetic dimension. In Marcuse’s view, the perception (or experience) of beauty is “sensuous rather than conceptual.”⁴⁴⁶ In Marcuse’s words, “the aesthetic perception is essentially intuition, not notion.”⁴⁴⁷ He also asserts that beauty evokes memories of “the realm of freedom.”⁴⁴⁸ Beauty, at least potentially, arouses our individual memories of happiness (i.e. infancy, childhood), which can be sensual, and our collective memory of our archaic past in which there was a greater instinctual freedom (i.e. our primitive and ancient past). Marcuse concedes that the claim that beauty symbolizes freedom is a “strange analogy.” Thus, to enhance our understanding of this concept, we need discuss the process by which Marcuse believed one should experience art.

⁴⁴⁵ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 63.

⁴⁴⁶ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 176.

⁴⁴⁷ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 176.

⁴⁴⁸ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 174.

Marcuse posits that authentic art depicts “the reconciliation of man and nature ... where order is beauty and work is play.”⁴⁴⁹ It is important to remember that is how Marcuse described a society organized around a logic of gratification -- that is, one in which the individual is in harmony with the external reality (reality principle). Put another way, beauty is a symbolic representation of liberation that is capable of reaching into our “second nature” via our intellect and our senses -- that is, our intuition.

The individual experience of the aesthetic is accompanied by feelings of pleasure. This pleasure derives from the perception of the aesthetic *form* (e.g. a beautiful song, perfectly painted bowl of fruit). To be sure, Marcuse argues that art is only authentic if the *form* is such that the beauty of the object is perceived by “*any* perceiving subject.” Marcuse writes:

An object represented in its pure form is “beautiful.” Such representation is the work (or rather the play) of *imagination*. As imagination, the aesthetic perception is both sensuousness and at the same time more than sensuousness: it gives pleasure and is therefore essentially subjective; but in so far as this pleasure is constituted by the pure form of the object itself, it accompanies the aesthetic perception universally and necessarily.⁴⁵⁰

Marcuse uses Kant’s theory of aesthetics inasmuch as he argues that an object is authentic art to the extent that the *form* is beautiful, and the object exhibits

⁴⁴⁹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 176.

⁴⁵⁰ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 177.

“purposiveness without purpose.” Marcuse writes (and this is how he believes one should experience art):

Whatever the object may be (thing or flower, animal or man), it is represented and judged not in terms of its usefulness, not according to any purpose it may possible serve, and also not in view of its “internal” finality and completeness. In the aesthetic imagination, the object is rather represented as free from all such relations and properties, as freely being itself. The experience in which the object is thus “given” is totally different from the every-day as well as scientific experience ... This experience, which releases the object into its “free” being, is the work of the free play of imagination ... Its “pure form” suggests ... an accord of movements and relations which operates under its own laws -- the pure manifestation of its “being-there,” its existence.⁴⁵¹

A work of authentic art, to Marcuse, is a perfect snapshot of the here and now -- of being, and yet, still of becoming. In authentic art, there is no tension between what something is and what it can be in the object being experienced; and yet, this artistic experience needs to cause the human subject to question why the rest of reality can not be this way *and* attempt to change reality so that increasing amounts of it become what *ought* to be. Imagine a painting of a flower -- there is no purpose for the painting (i.e. it is not real, thus not in the process of, or movement towards dying) other than for visual pleasure. To Marcuse, the pleasure is intended to be felt -- perceived by a third realm located between

⁴⁵¹ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 178.

intellect and sensuousness. We may remember Marcuse arguing that the fusion of these two seeming opposites is requisite for a new and radical sensibility. In Marcuse's view, authentic art is not only the aesthetic manifestation of fantasy and imagination (both of which make a demand for liberation), but also of a harmonious relationship between man and nature, and thus, of another reality. Put simply, to witness beauty in an aesthetically pleasing *form* is to be reminded that there is another reality that *is* possible. The subject experiencing the aesthetic is transported to the "music of another reality." That is another "strange" claim and is thus in need of explanation.

To Marcuse, authentic art refuses to submit to the "limitations imposed upon freedom and unhappiness by the [current] reality principle," that is, the current state of affairs.⁴⁵² True art is, in the final analysis, classless and timeless precisely because its sublime depiction of the particular (e.g. a song, an image) reveals a universal truth -- that is, it imagines a "reconciliation of the individual with the whole, of desire with realization, of happiness with reason."⁴⁵³ It also preserves images of freedom and happiness denied in the existing society. Art can bring us to experience the "music of another reality" by transmitting a universal message or truth -- even when depicting the particular. Because art transforms the specific historical universe (Marcuse provides the example of the Greek tragedy) art opens the established reality to another dimension -- that of possible liberation. The class content of higher art (which is usually considered as bourgeoisie) is thus negated and consequently becomes a receptacle of a universal truth beyond that of any particular class (or for that matter, time period).⁴⁵⁴ For Marcuse art is a realm

⁴⁵² Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 149.

⁴⁵³ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 143.

⁴⁵⁴ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 88.

permanently antagonistic to reality, a refuge for those possibilities not present in everyday life. The most liberating art dissociates itself from the alienated society and creates an unreal “illusory” universe -- this is where art conveys the greatest of universal truths.⁴⁵⁵ It is precisely here that art can become a force for liberation, and thus is the aesthetic manifestation of *The Great Refusal*. Marcuse writes that art:

relates not only to the past but also to the future: the forms of freedom and happiness which it invokes claim to deliver to the historical *reality*. In its refusal to accept as final limitations imposed upon freedom and happiness by the reality principle, in its refusal to forget what *can be*, lies the critical function of fantasy.⁴⁵⁶

Marcuse concludes that, in the end, “art contains the rationality of negation. In its advanced positions, it is the Great Refusal -- the protest against that which is.”⁴⁵⁷

Marcuse consistently argued that the advanced industrial system adapts and absorbs dissent quite efficiently, and even creates the situation in which those who should be in opposition wind up protecting the very system that prohibits their freedom. Marcuse writes:

To be sure, revolutionary consciousness has always expressed itself only in revolutionary situations; the difference is that, now, the condition of the working

⁴⁵⁵ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 97.

⁴⁵⁶ Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 148-149.

⁴⁵⁷ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 63.

class in the society at large militates against the development of such a consciousness. The integration of the largest part of the working class into the capitalist society is not a surface phenomenon; it has its roots in the infrastructure itself, in the political economy of monopoly capitalism: benefits accorded to the metropolitan working class thanks to surplus profits, neocolonial exploitation, the military budget, and gigantic government subventions. To say that this class has much more to lose than its chains may be a vulgar statement but it is also correct.⁴⁵⁸

We must remember, in Marcuse's view, individual existence for many in the advanced industrial system is a comfortable, smooth unfreedom. Marcuse also argues that the flattened opposition of the working class serves to mask the reality behind the façade of instant gratification. He insists we differentiate between appearance (i.e. an absorbed *one-dimensional* society) and essence (there are disintegrating tendencies). Marcuse continues:

the integration of organized labor *is* a surface phenomenon in a different sense: it hides the *disintegrating*, centrifugal tendencies of which it is itself an expression. And these centrifugal tendencies do not operate *outside* the integrated domain; in this very domain the monopolistic economy creates conditions and generates needs which threaten to explode the capitalist framework. Anticipating the subsequent discussion, I recall the classical statement: it is the overwhelming

⁴⁵⁸ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 6.

wealth of capitalism which will bring about its collapse. Will the *consumer society* be its last stage, its gravedigger?⁴⁵⁹

Marcuse maintains the Marxist argument that the advanced industrial system will eventually collapse, but argues a primary cause will be the needs that are created by consumer society (transcendental, self-affirming) that it cannot possibly satisfy. To be sure, Marcuse does not assume that qualitative socialism will be its successor -- often mentioning fascism as a possible scenario. He writes:

At the present stage of development of the advanced industrial societies, the material as well as the cultural system denies this exigency. The power and efficiency of this system, the thorough assimilation of mind with fact, of thought with required behavior, of aspirations with reality, militate against the emergence of a new Subject. They also militate against the notion that the replacement of the prevailing control over the productive process by "control from below" would mean the advent of qualitative change.⁴⁶⁰

In Marcuse's view, the *one-dimensionality* of the current subject militates against the possibility of qualitative change, even in the face of "the increasing irrationality of the whole; waste and restriction of productivity; the need for aggressive expansion; the constant threat of war; intensified exploitation; dehumanization."⁴⁶¹ The presence of

⁴⁵⁹ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 6-7.

⁴⁶⁰ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 252.

⁴⁶¹ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 252.

disintegrating tendencies within the advanced industrial system and the objective conditions that indicate that qualitative change is needed does not indicate that it will happen. For reasons mentioned above, “the facts and the alternatives are there like fragments which do not connect, or like a world of mute objects without a subject, without the practice which would move these objects in the new direction.”⁴⁶² Thus, Marcuse was aware that he was advocating a *Great Refusal* that would seem hopelessly utopian.

To be sure, Marcuse argues that critical theory can reveal these objective conditions for revolution, but it cannot force us to respond -- as Marcuse argued, “contradictions do not explode by themselves.”⁴⁶³ Individuals will likely continue under the conditions of unfreedom as long as the contradictions do not “become blatant beyond any possible denial,” that is, as long as they are sufferable. Marcuse fully comprehended the unlikelihood that humans would act for their own liberation, but insisted that critical theory not abdicate its role of exposing the contradictions within society. Marcuse was quick to point out that the reification -- the loss of personal autonomy -- within the advanced industrial system is only an illusion, and often reminded us that the contradictions and disintegrating tendencies are there, thus opening up the door for the *Great Refusal*.

Alas, it is a very small opening. As Marcuse argued:

Nothing indicates that it will be a good end. The economic and technical capabilities of the established societies are sufficiently vast to allow for

⁴⁶² Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 253.

⁴⁶³ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 253.

adjustments and concessions to the underdog, and their armed forces sufficiently trained and equipped to take care of emergency situations. However, the spectre is there again, inside and outside the frontiers of the advance societies ... But the chance is that, in this period, the historical extremes may meet again: the most advanced consciousness of humanity, and its most exploited force. It is nothing but a chance. The critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and future; holding no promise and showing no success, it remains negative. Thus it wants to remain loyal to those who, without hope, have given and give their life to the Great Refusal.⁴⁶⁴

Marcuse is imploring us to ignore the odds because what is at stake is nothing less than the “qualitative leap” to a better life. Marcuse describes it as follows:

The revolution involves a radical transformation of the needs and aspirations themselves, cultural as well as material; of consciousness and sensibility; of the work process as well as leisure. This transformation appears in the fight against the fragmentation of work, the necessity and productivity of stupid performances and stupid merchandise, against the acquisitive bourgeois individual, against servitude in the guise of technology, deprivation in the guise of the good life, against pollution as a way of life. Moral and aesthetic needs become basic, vital needs and drive toward new relationships between the sexes, between the generations, between men and women and nature. Freedom is understood as

⁴⁶⁴ Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 257.

rooted in the fulfillment of these needs, which are sensuous, ethical, and rational in one.⁴⁶⁵

It is within this society structured around a logic of gratification that significantly reduces the conflict between our nature and the external world that “for the first time in our life, we shall be free to think about what we are going to do.”⁴⁶⁶

This segment opened with a discussion of Camus’ *Sisyphus* pushing a rock up a hill for eternity, and smiling because he has risen above his fate and has consciously opted for personal agency in the face of the “absurdity” of life. Camus held that there is no *telos*, which argues that life can not be made rational and, in the end, there is no higher purpose. It is important to remember that, for Camus, the only purpose in life is what we impose on it. To Camus, there is nothing beyond humanity to validate any type of universal rules or logical plan. On that point, Marcuse does not disagree -- but there is an important distinction to be made. For one thing, life becomes absurd, for Camus, when we try to apply reason to a world that is irrational and impossible to really understand. Even with that argument, Camus was not arguing that we should reject reason, for humans and reason are intrinsically connected, as are humans and emotion. That is precisely the point in which Marcuse enters the equation. The Marcusean project rejects reason that perpetuates our unfreedom, while advocating a sensibility or intuition -- a sort of third faculty found somewhere between our intellect (reason) and senses (emotions, senses, “feeling it”) that would move us to action. It is exactly at this point Marcuse obliterates the notion of our absurdity. While Camus’ *Sisyphus* is smiling for individualistic

⁴⁶⁵ Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 16-17.

⁴⁶⁶ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 91.

reasons, Marcuse's Sisyphus is smiling because he knows we are (or should) be moving toward greater rationality (or freedom). To be sure, Marcuse was not arguing that life can be made *completely* rational. Such a scenario, to Marcuse, can not happen because it militates against dialectical theory in two ways: first, it presupposes the absence of a negation (implying that society is perfect), and second, it implies a complete harmony between the subject (individual) and object (society). Marcuse was arguing that the *movement* of life (and history) can be rational inasmuch as we are moving toward greater freedom (rather than less).⁴⁶⁷ In Marcuse's view, there is no *telos* other than that dialectical movement towards the pre-existing potentialities of greater freedom. Sisyphus, by pushing the rock towards greater freedom and thus, greater rationality, is refusing to accept the totality of his own absurdity; suddenly there is purpose to his action. We must be careful to realize that Marcuse is not falling into a teleological argument, but is asserting that the movement of life and history *ought* to be towards greater freedom rather than less, and is thus purposeful. From a positivist standpoint, in viewing life as a movement towards greater rationality, it is the dialectical movement of *becoming*, rather than the existentialist concern of *being*, that has become rational in the Marcusean project. Conversely, to view this dialectically is to reject the notion that it is an either/or proposition. In other words, the individual and society, by moving in a rational direction, is authentic in its *being* (is authentic-in-the-world) and its *movement* (becoming more real and more authentic). In this scenario, life is not an end but a constant unfolding that ought to move in a rational direction. Marcuse's Sisyphus smiles

⁴⁶⁷ For the precursor to this discussion, see the end of section 3.2 in this essay.

even though he knows he will never reach the top, for he is a multi-dimensional thinker and knows there is no top -- but that was never why the rock was being pushed.

In the fall of 2011 Slovenian dissident philosopher Slavoj Žižek stated the following:

They tell you we are dreamers. The true dreamers are those who think things can go on indefinitely the way they are. We are not dreamers. We are the awakening from a dream that is turning into a nightmare.

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