

Newly Discovered Draft of Marcuse Book Reveals Turn Toward Pessimism

By MARC PARRY

HERBERT MARCUSE was one of the most famous philosophers of the 1960s, a counterculture guru to students who spray-painted his words across the United States and Europe. Now, amid a revival of interest in the German-born theorist, a newly discovered document may change how scholars see his best-known book.

This year, in a box marked “miscellaneous manuscripts,” a librarian at Brandeis University discovered a long-forgotten early draft of Marcuse’s 1964 classic, *One-Dimensional Man*.

The book, a product of the conformist 1950s and early 1960s, criticized blind acceptance of the status

quo—“one-dimensional thinking.” It exhorted citizens of capitalist and communist states alike to affirm their individuality and liberty against oppression.

The rediscovered draft adds a twist: a different ending. *One-Dimensional Man* is often seen as pessimistic about the prospects for society. But this version, believed to be the first completed draft, concludes on what could be seen as a less-despondent note. “It’s important,” says Arnold L. Farr, an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Kentucky and president of the International Herbert Marcuse Society. Mr. Farr, who is writing a biography of Marcuse, says the draft provides a sense of the philosopher’s “struggle” and “oscilla-

tion” as he composed this key text.

Brandeis hopes to hold a symposium on the book’s 50th anniversary next year and build an online exhibit around the recently found draft.

SURGE OF INTEREST

The Brandeis discovery comes as scholarly interest in Marcuse has surged. Like the counterculture he inspired, his popularity waned in the 1970s, and he attracted little interest in the 1980s and 90s. But that has changed markedly over the past decade, Mr. Farr says. Scholars have discovered unknown papers and lectures, and produced a flurry of new publications about Marcuse.

Mr. Farr founded the Marcuse Society in 2005. Its biennial meet-



AP PHOTO/KURT STRUMPF

Herbert Marcuse was more optimistic about prospects for society in an early draft of his key book than he was in the published version.

ings attract hundreds of presenters from around the United States and other parts of the world.

As the Occupy Wall Street movement emerged, in 2011, an essay in *The Chronicle Review* by Carlin Romano, a professor of philosophy and humanities at Ursinus College, described a possible Marcuse “comeback.” The essay speculated that Marcuse, with his calls to resist and overthrow capitalism, might “remain a relevant source for social action and philosophical uplift.”

Marcuse, born in Berlin in 1898, was associated with the Frankfurt School, the group of social and political philosophers who developed “critical theory,” rejecting both capitalism and Soviet-style socialism. A Marxist, he left Germany in 1932, worked for the forerunner of the CIA, and published his key books while teaching at Brandeis from 1954 to 1965.

He was concerned with the rise of “a system of totalitarian social control and domination,” wrote Douglas Kellner, a leading Marcuse scholar, in an introduction to *One-Dimensional Man*. Marcuse extolled “critical reason” as the source of personal liberation and societal progress. But individual reason, as he saw it, was enfeebled by modern trends.

“As capitalism and technology developed, advanced industrial society demanded increasing accommodation to the economic and social apparatus and submission to increasing domination and administration,” Mr. Kellner wrote in his summary of Marcuse’s ideas. “Hence, a ‘mechanics of conformity’ spread throughout the society.”

Marcuse analyzed why people who might benefit most from radical social change oppose it. He explored how working-class people mimic their oppressors’ values. In *One-Dimensional Man*, he argued that the oppressive system adapts to threats by delivering just enough to make people feel they’re happy and making progress. If an employee goes to the same vacation spot as his employer, for example, he feels equal.

In the 1960s, Marcuse’s analysis resonated with disaffected students and helped them frame their radical politics.

The social change that Marcuse hoped for amounted to “some form of socialism,” says Mr. Farr. He wanted to see a world free of racism, sexism, and homophobia, with less repression, greater social and economic justice, and more sexual freedom.

The newly found draft of *One-Dimensional Man* came to light when a Brandeis librarian named Patrick Gamsby, steeped in the

Frankfurt School, began exploring the university’s Marcuse holdings in anticipation of the book’s 50th anniversary.

Mr. Gamsby had recently taken a job as academic-outreach librarian in the humanities, drawn to Brandeis in large part because of its Marcuse connection. Initially, he says, it wasn’t clear what Marcuse papers the university had. But a colleague, seeing his excitement, conducted a deep database search. That turned up a note for a Marcuse manuscript held off-site, at Harvard University. When Mr. Gamsby opened the box, he found the typewritten draft in a black folder. A bookplate said it had been a gift from Marcuse.

“Whoever was dealing with it in the past didn’t know what it was,” Mr. Gamsby says. “They didn’t know that there would be a great deal of excitement about it.”

HOPE IN THE REALM OF ART

Although the draft shows a variety of differences in structure, phrasing, and clarity, much of the excitement concerns its conclusion.

In the published version of *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse holds out a small hope that social change might emerge through a union of intellectuals and disadvantaged outsiders. He concludes with a quotation from one of the leading exponents of the Frankfurt School, Walter Benjamin. It’s a passage that Mr. Gamsby says is generally held up as an example of Marcuse’s pessimism about the prospects for society: “It is only for the sake of those without hope that hope is given to us.”

In contrast, the early draft ends with a reference to the “aesthetic dimension.” That dimension—the realm of art—was important to Marcuse because art criticizes and rejects established society. Art forces people to grapple with possibilities and opens the door to “two-dimensional thinking,” says Mr. Farr.

The draft “doesn’t seem to be quite as pessimistic as the published text,” Mr. Farr says. In the last few pages, he says, Marcuse is “focused more on the potential for liberation in the aesthetic dimension. And then, in the published version, that gets abandoned altogether.”

Mr. Farr adds: “Marcuse always referred to himself as a historical thinker. And as he’s writing this text, things are happening around him historically. What may have changed from one draft to the other that gives us this different kind of ending?” ■