UTOPIA and HISTORY

"During all the War-years I was ... always thinking it MUST come to an end, not understanding, not understanding,"

Rilke

"A psychologist today shows his good taste (others may say his integrity) in this, if in anything, that he resists the shamefully moralized manner of speaking which makes all modern judgments about men and things slimy."

Nietzsche, cited by Philip Rieff

HERBERT MARCUSE occupies a singular position as theoretician of the radical left. He has produced recognized classics on Hegel and Freud, relating the thought of both to that of Marx. In One-Dimensional Man, he has written what is probably the most incisive Marxist analysis of our own society. More, he has given us in his 1957 Soviet Marxism a rara avis, a Western exposition of that subject which is at once sympathetic and critical. One of the few viable radical thinkers around, Marcuse moves into a conceptual vacuum for the growing numbers of people who find liberal ideology increasingly bankrupt.

To these people, and in particular to students, Marcuse offers a passionate

humanism, a penetrating analysis, and a political program. Marcuse, like Camus, is a moralist in the grand sense of the word. At the same time, he eschews the rhetoric to which the Left is so prone. Nietzsche would have applauded him, for Marcuse shuns, indeed abhors, moralizing, condemning as 'false consciousness' moral exhortations which fail to recognize the structural determinants of "unfreedom' in Western society, Marcuse's fundamental premise is that no man can achieve freedom and personal fulfillment individually, apart from the larger social context. Rather, there are objective historical factors which have formed the situation in which man must realize himself. The form which has shaped contemporary society, he contends, is one of totalitarian unfreedom.

ALIENATION AND BEVOLUTIONARY CONSCIOUSNESS

Marcuse finds man in our society both alienated and at the same time so inured to his alienation that he fails even to perceive the nature of his condition. Against this, Marcuse brings to bear the critical spirit, the negative element of thought which is at once "critique, contradiction, and transcendence." Hegel pointed to the integral re-

marcuse and the logic of revolution

This study of Marcuse is also appearing in the Union Seminary Quarterly Review, Volume XXIV. Number 2, and is copyrighted 1969 by Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York.

lation between critical thought and human alienation:

Dialectical thought starts with the experience that the world is unfree, that is to say, man and nature exist in conditions of alienation, exist as 'other than they are.' Any mode of thought which excludes this contradiction from its logic is a faulty logic. Thought 'corresponds' to reality only as it transforms reality by comprehending its contradictory structure.¹

For Hegel, however, alienation is basically a philosophical concept, the loss of the capacity to realize oneself. Marx transformed it into an economic category so that in classic Marxist thought, alienation becomes the symptom of social exploitation. Marcuse follows Marx.

Eros and Civilzation, written in 1955, works out this theme in a new context. Here, in a brilliant tour de force synthesis of Freud and Marx, Marcuse takes over the Freudian argument that civilization is built on the repression of man's instinctual drives. Where Freud accepted this repression as a precondition for civilized society, Marcuse instead calls for liberation and the creation of a non-repressive civilization. For him repression is the psychoanalytic analogue of alienation, the sign of man's imposed unfreedom. Drawing from these different starting points - Hegel, Marx, and Freud - Marcuse makes a single conclusion: society has become an arena in which man is systematically stripped of his freedom. As such, it must be relentlessly opposed.

In his 1964 One-Dimensional Man, however, Marcuse observes that alienation has become objectified, that western society has apparently reached a point where it is "capable of containing social change. . . . This is perhaps the most singular achievement of advanced

industrial society." We have made possible through technological proficiency an effective control of all areas of life and society. Such control, if non-terroristic, is totalitarian — an "economictechnical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests." Yet it is a totalitarianism benevolent in appearance, a system where domination takes on the guise of liberty and becomes administration.²

Marx expected the inherent dynamics of the capitalist system to lead to the proletarian. Marcuse perceives that advanced industrial society has aborted this revolution by its incorporation of the proletariat into society, by its reconciliation of all opposition. The enveloping political consequence of advanced industrial society is the effective elimination of alternatives. Lulled by affluence, the whole society accepts unprotestingly the irrationality of a system which utilizes technological advances, not to open "new dimensions for human realization," but to reconcile the populaces to its moronizing unfreedom. The irrational appears rational, the society benevolent. The interest of the individual has become so ostensibly identical with the interests of the whole that opposition collapses. The subjective consciousness of alienation is dissipated at the same time that alienated functions are intensified.

The concept of alienation is itself thrown into question. Marcuse notes the difficulties of the new situation:

> the concept of alienation seems to become questionable when the individuals identify themselves with the existence which is imposed upon them and have in it their own development and satisfaction. This identification is not illusion but reality. However, the reality constitutes a more progressive stage of alienation. The latter has become

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entirely objective: the subject which is alienated is swallowed up in its alienated existence. There is only one dimension.³

Alienation holds for Marcuse a twofold function. It is negative, a condition
to be overcome. At the same time, it
serves the positive function of witnessing to the present estrangement of man.
In a society constructed upon contradiction, it would be a false reconciliation
if alienation were to disappear prematurely. Or, as Kierkegaard summarized
it for another age, the worst form of
sickness is no longer to know that one is
ill. Fearful of society's success in dulling
awareness of sickness, Marcuse conceives his task to be the reawakening of
consciousness.

Marcuse therefore stands in relation to Marx as Kierkegaard stands to Luther. To a world held in sin and guilt, Luther proclaimed the possibility of free justification. To a world aware of exploitation and alienation, Marx announced the possibility of revolutionary liberation. Kierkegaard had a different task: he had to warn of a too-comfortable reconciliation, of "cheap grace." He had to speak dialectically, creating the consciousness of sin even while he offered saving grace. So must Marcuse speak dialectically, reviving consciousness in a comfortably anesthetized world even while his real concern is the end of this alienation.

THE LOGIC OF DOMINATION

A major part of his task is the exposure of those elements in society which, ostensibly neutral in character, actually function to hold man fast in his condition of unfreedom. A primary target for Marcuse is the myth that modern science is an objective and suprahistorical pursuit of timeless truths. Unmasking this myth, he offers instead a harsh indictment of science as an his-

torical project of domination. His argument is that "Science took man out of nature, separated values and fact, destroved a nature conceivable in terms of 'final causes,' dissolved matter into abstract equations."4 Here he is speaking not merely of "applied" science, or modern technology, but of "pure" science and the scientific method itself, which, underneath its claims to neutrality and objectivity, maintains an approach to the world which is inherently aggressive. Thus for Marcuse, "pure" science is manipulative; its character essentially 'instrumentalistic,' its logic the logic of domination. Traced to its psychological, the scientific method proves in fact to be an expression of the Death Instinct.5

Science "has become in itself technological" — part of a "technologos." This technological character of science is inextricably political in its implications and consequences: the "technological a priori is a political a priori inasmuch as the transformation of nature involves that of man." In other words, science has been integrally shaped by and incorporated into the historical project of "the ever-effective domination of man through the domination of nature."

At first glance, Marcuse's analysis would find science opposed to those forces in society whose commitment has been to the liberation of man. Yet Marcuse's war is not with science per se but with its logic, and therefore with all the forces in society which partake of this logic. Sweepingly, he argues that domination is the logic of the whole society so that even forces ostensibly benevolent participate unperceived in the process of domination.

GUILT, POWER AND REVOLUTION

The totality of Marcuse's indictment exposes a basic ambiguity in his

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analysis. Marcuse's description of man's predicament is clear and unambiguous: man is alienated, dominated and unfree. Yet the situation becomes murky at best when we ask *why* man has fallen prey to domination. In most of Marcuse's work, the answer is a standard Marxist explanation. Man is the victim of exploitation by external forces. Yet the contention that all the component forces within society participate in the domination logically undermines a theory of external aggression, and indeed, in One-Dimensional Man, the argument of external aggression has become blurred. It is no longer clear whether Marcuse believes that there are identifiable vested interests that control and benefit from the general domination, or whether the system has become autonomous, uncontrolled and uncontrollable, engulfing everything. Marcuse seems to shift back and forth between these two alternatives, speaking at times of vested interest, at other times of a "web of domination" in which both ruled and rulers are caught.

Questions about the origin of man's unfreedom underline a further ambiguity of even greater importance in Marcuse's writings. In Eros and Civilization, Marcuse adopts Freud's myth of the primal horde as a means of explaining man's fall into his present condition. Because of scarcity, the father dominates the horde; in jealousy the horde kills the father and is liberated; in guilt over their crime and in the interest of their common protection, the horde reintroduces ("introjects") the subjugation of the father: this dialectic becomes the pattern for all social institutions, as the father's authority is projected onto these institutions.

The liberation of man would appear to consist in the overthrow of the existing institutions and the reestablishment of lost freedom. But when Marcuse looks

at the history of the revolutions of the oppressed, he is struck by the case of their consistent defeat, for they had the possibility of victory. An element of self-defeat appears to be involved. "Every revolution has also been a betrayed revolution." We see the strange spectacle of the "persistent approval and participation of the victims." Further, the more the dominant institutions in history provide for the welfare of the people, the more the guilt rebellion grows. Revolt comes to be a crime against "the wise order which secures the goods and services for the progressive satisfaction of human needs." In short, before the revolution will ever succeed, we must deal with the problem of quilt.

Freud thought that guilt was intractible, the most important problem in the evolution of culture. Marcuse follows Freud here, agreeing that guilt has been structurally incorporated into the organization of society. The "decisive psychological event which separates the brother clan (i.e. emergent civilization) from the primal horde is the development of guilt feeling." The problem for both Freud and Marcuse is that progress in history brings with it the increase of guilt.

How, then, in the face of this deepening syndrome, is liberation possible? Marcuse does not realy answer this question. He quotes Nietzsche: "liberation depends on the reversal of the sense of guilt; mankind must come to associate the bad conscience not with the affirmation but with the denial of the life instincts . . . "8 But this is merely an admonition, a form of the very moralizing Marcuse decries. Guilt, he writes, needs to increase only in a society which is oppressively organized. But how do we break the cycle of guilt that, in Marcuse's analysis, keeps the present oppressive organization going? Marcuse

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speaks only of the "catastrophe" that such a transformation would involve. He touches upon the problem of selfcreated guilt and bondage, but then leaves it unanswered, returning to his call for the overthrow of external repression.

A more incisive analysis of the problem is given by Norman O. Brown in *Life Against Death*. The problem of whether the guilt and the bondage of man are externally imposed or self-created is, he observes, "one of the ultimate crossroads in social theory." Freud and Marx (and Marcuse) are "in the last resort compelled to postulate external domination and its assertion by force in order to explain repression." Instead, Brown contends that repression originates internally.

We have argued that to take this line (external domination) is to renounce psychological explanation and to miss the whole point of the riddle: How can there be an animal which represses itself? . . . If the cause of the trouble were force, to "expropriate the expropriators" would be enough. But if force did not establish the domination of the master, then perhaps the slave is somehow in love with his own chains. If there is such a deeper psychological malady, then a deeper psychological regeneration is needed.

That the repression originates internally and is not imposed by the society is most clearly seen in primitive societies. There the drive behind economic labor is not the rational desire to multiply wealth, but a ceremonial pattern of work motivated by the desire to give. The patterns of giving are part of a ritual of expiation; the sharing of guilt. In modern culture, with the passage of time, guilt increases, and the psychological problem of guilt is resolved not by giving, but by taking, by the

accumulation of economic surplus. Guilt is transformed into aggression. The victims participate in this process because they too share in the sense of an original guilt. Whether in primitive or modern societies, however, the point is that guilt is not externally imposed, not the product of man's movement into society, but pre-existing, "created out of nothing by the infantile ego in order to sequester by repression its own unmanaged vitality." If Brown is correct, the Marxist analysis misplaces the locus of man's Fall. "If the emergence of social privilege marks the Fall of man, the Fall took place not in the transition from 'primitive communism' to 'private property' but in the transition from ape to man.10

THE ONE-DIMENSIONAL LOGOS

Marcuse's difficulty with the relation of guilt to human bondage stems from an over-concern with systemic social maladies which leads him to slight questions of human psychology. His approach to a solution for society partakes of a similar imbalance. Intent upon his diagnosis of society's illnesses, he seems, to have confused his methodological, too-analytic, reason with the desired cure. Marcuse calls for the abolition of contradictions and irrationality within society — he ends in clear danger of subsuming all dimensions of life under a looming principle of rationality.

There is a pan-logism in Marcuse's work which must cause difficulties in any Christian appreciation of him. Life is, for him fundamentally, rational, and it is by reason that we are saved. Speaking of the Greeks, Marcuse notes with implicit approval, that for them the struggle for truth was the "struggle for the salvation of being."

Truth commits . . . If a man has learned to see and know what really

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is, he will act in accordance with truth. Epistemology is in itself ethics, and ethics is epistemology.¹¹

We find ourselves back once again with the classical Greek conception that knowledge is virtue. Yet there has been a long struggle against this position in the Christian tradition. Soren Kierkegaard gave the classic Christian critique in his struggle against Hegel, from whom Marcuse derives so much of the structure of his own philosophy.

Marcuse's relation to Hegel in fact helps to illustrate this tendency in his thought. Hegel was himself deeply grounded in Christian theology: the Hegelian dialectic is really trinitarian in form. Marcuse, however, has adapted Hegel via Marx, who sought to eliminate the transcedent element in Hegel. Hegel's Spirit working itself out in history becomes in Marx a materialism in which history is unfolding itself. But more is involved here than a simple inversion. One dimension is completely abandoned: God the Father has disappeared. Marx has kept only God the Son — the Logos, God Incarnate in history. Marcuse, following Marx, reduces the trinitarian structure to the one-dimensional Logos, the principle of Rationality. For Marcuse, the element of mystery is abandoned, and we are left with unbound Reason. Indeed, Marcuse's definition of reason is a substantive one: it calls for the abolition of contradictions. Both Marx and Marcuse in fact criticize Hegel on precisely these grounds, maintaining that he undercuts his own insight by reconciling us to the contradictory nature of the world even as he diagnoses it.

Marxism then does not simply "fulfill" Hegel: there is an important discontinuity between the two. As Karl Löwith states the contrast, Marx insists on abolishing the contradictions by which Hegel's philosophy is a dialectical process. While Hegel allows a place for contradictions as reasonable and essential, Marx stands implacably opposed to the persistence of unreasonable contradictions.¹²

This parting of the ways is allimportant. Marcuse is wiling to countenance violence and "catastrophe" to declare his Grand Refusal, and to call for revolution, because he believes that contradictions can be overcome, that the irrational can be purged. His radical confrontation with society rests on the possibility of the full realization of the Rational in history. If then he is mistaken at this point, his program is not one of catastrophe for the sake of liberation, but of mere catastrophe. Kolakowski has warned, the absence of humor is a danger sign of a false faith in an absolute.

Marcuse might well be understood as something of a secular Karl Barth. Barth too wants to give a trinitarian exposition, but ends up by collapsing everything into the second person of the Trinity. His Christocentric (or Jesucentric) method works much the same as Marcuse's Logos-Reason. The result for both men is that, contrary to their intentions, they end in a methodological positivism. The motivation of both stems from a desire to protect the integrity and reality of freedom - for Barth, the freedom of God, for Marcuse, the freedom of man. But the ironic result is that a strangely non-historical quality pervades the thought of both men, each of whom has gone to great lengths to reject non-historical thinking.

THE LOSS OF HISTORY

Something of this anomaly is evident in Marcuse's refusal of *time*. Marcuse repeatedly admits that his revolutionary program calls for the negation of time. It is the "fatal enemy." We must "struggle against time," for time

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partakes of the logic of domination and the tyranny of death. But Marcuse's negation of time in fact gives the show away; the passionate demand for a radically historical understanding of man ends in the cul-de-sac of a non-historical concept of redemption.

The clearest evidence that this is the nature of Marcuse's dilemma is found in the content of his "program." It is true that Marcuse himself does not actually present any formal revolutionary program; he insists that critical thought in the present time must be abstract and ideological. The established system has abrogated alternatives so that the negation which dialectical thought pronounces must take the "politically impotent form of the "absolute refusal." "Dialectical theory is not refuted, but it cannot offer the remedy." "

There are, nonetheless, scattered suggestions throughout his work which, drawn together, give us at least a rough impression of the type of program which Marcuse envisions. In bringing together these ideas, I am intentionally choosing the more "outrageous" of his proposals. Nonetheless, it is useful to throw these ideas into conjunction with one another, in part because they rise integrally out of his analysis of the present situation, in part because Marcuse's abstracted style tends to obscure the very radical sense in which his ideas demand the reversal of history.

Sex and Family Structure: In Eros and Civilization, Marcuse projects a non-repressive civilization whose sexual expression would be "polymorphous perverse." "This change . . . would lead to a disintegration of . . . the monogamic and patriarchal family." There would follow a reversal of "the organization of sexuality toward pre-civilized stages. Such regression . . . would undo the channeling of sexuality into monogamic

reproduction and the taboo on perversions."15

Elitist Social Organization: Though Marcuse has conceded that the American university may be the one institution in the society whose reform would not require a top-to-bottom dismantling, he has also called for the organization of separate "elitist universities." There must occur a "willful isolation" of intellectual elitism to preserve the possibility of alternatives to the present totalitarian one-dimensional society. 16

Intolerance: In his essay "Repressive Tolerance" Marcuse spells out a specific proposal for the denial of civil liberties. There he argues that "pure" tolerance is in fact a spurious freedom which, because it does not take sides, is in effect a "passive tolerance" of evil serving to reinforce the repressive status quo. For example, the purportedly neutral television reporting of the Vietnam war is delusory; the game is "rigged" to begin with. Marcuse therefore advocates a "partisan tolerance"; that is, the withdrawal of tolerance of speech in certain areas such as armament and discrimination. The liberal democratic conception of tolerance and free speech has proved inadequate: our society is now in a "clear and present danger" which would justify (indeed dean intolerance toward the mand) Right.17

Denial of Democracy: Indeed, Marcuse goes further, rejecting not only selected democratic concepts, but the existing "democracy" as well. The essential pre-condition for any democratic government, he points out, is that the people must be free. But in Western society, there exists instead "A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom . . ." This unfreedom negates the rationale behind democratic forms of government. "As long as they [men] are kept incapable of being autonomous,

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as long as they are indoctrinated and manipulated [down to their very instincts], their answer to this question [of what their true needs are] cannot be taken as their own." For Marcuse, a meaningful political freedom would be the "liberation of the individuals from politics over which they have no effective control."

While Marcuse argues against the theory of the "educational dictatorship," his evaluation of the prevailing unfreedom of pre-conditioned man leads him to propose a "democratic educational dictatorship of free men." To the traditional question raised against dictatorship — "Who is qualified to rule?" — Marcuse has his own answer: free rational men are qualified. But, he adds, "this would be a small number indeed."

HISTORY AND THE BEVOLUTION

All of Marcuse's proposals, of course, amount to a lucid spelling out of the meaning of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," however much it appears that the proletariat here turns out to be an enlightened band of intellectuals. To oppose his arguments on grounds of traditional liberal humanism would be in Marcuse's view to miss the point. Our society has reached a stage where "social humanism can no longer be defined in terms of the individual, the all-around personality, and self-determination."19 Liberalism is itself an ideology, which connives in the whole unperceived pattern of repression, destructiveness, and irrationality.

There is indeed an internal logic to Marcuse's position. Yet it is at the same time a logic which stands in stark opposition to the developments of modern history. Putting aside judgments of value, it remains true that the *physical* movement of history in advanced industrial societies has been toward the

strengthening and the intensification of those very institutions which Marcuse finds repressive. Socially, marriage and the nuculear family have become increasingly important loci for the institutionalized quest after fulfillment and emotional gratification in our society. Politically, western society has worked toward an increasing and extension of what it sees as the component elements of democracy: enfranchisement of disenfranchised groups, extension of civil liberties, protection for the exercise of free speech and the exchange of ideas. To Marcuse, of course, these efforts are spurious and delusive. Nonetheless, he is placed in the position of repudiating historical trends of impressive vitality and duration.

That Marcuse himself perceives the enormous difficulties inherent in his own historical position is suggested by his refusal to present a blueprint for practical change, and even more, perhaps, by his increasing pessimism. Where the central theme in Eros and Civilization is the possibility of liberation, in One Dimensional Man it is the consolation of domination. Where the tone of the earlier work was hopeful, optimistic, expectant, the more recent is bleak, defiant, depressing. Marcuse qualifies his own previous optimism in a new Preface to Eros and Civilization: "I have sufficiently (and perhaps unduly) stressed the progressive and promising aspects of this development in order to be entitled to accentuate the negative: the events of the last years refute all optimism."

The final chapter in *One-Dimensional Man* captures Marcuse's present mood: he titles it "Negative Thinking: The Defeated Logic of Protest." In theological terms, he has moved from eschatology to apocalypse, although

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the apocalypse brings no accompanying messiah — the proletariat can no longer be expected to redeem. On "theoretical as well as empirical grounds, the dialectical concept pronounces its own hopelessness."²⁰

THE STUDENT LEFT: REVOLUTIONARY OPTIMISM

Marcuse may well feel himself pessimistic before a logic which demands total disapproval of long-standing and deep-rooted social trends, but the students do not. Marcuse's analysis leads to two possible alternatives. One is to pronounce our own impotence before the self-perpetuating strength of the establishment, Marcuse's own present stance. Yet as one critic has noted, Marcuse's analysis is so pessimistic that the very act of writing it entails a contradiction. The student left has siezed upon the contradiction, taking as challenge rather than construction Marcuse's dictum that nothing less than castrophe can alter the society. Enthusiastically, the radically aliented left has committed itself to castrophe.

These students have accurately perceived the implications of Marcuse's across-the-board indictment of the institutions of western society. Their object is to destroy the institutions and to bring the whole repressive structure of society down. The first step is to abandon the rules of a stacked game. Thus the New York Times Magazine quotes one student revolutionary: "Our movement wasn't organized democratically. We kicked the Dow people off the campus though they had every right to be there. It was our unrepressed intolerance and thorough antipermissiveness that brought our actions success. But who gave us the intellectual courage to be intolerant and unpermissive? I think Herbert Marcuse more than anyone."21

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The totality of the opposition to society which the left envisions hints at an ill-fated revolution. Historically, successful revolutions have tended to pick up and push forward elements in the society which were already working themselves out, sometimes against stiff opposition. Such revolutions are thus the history of the development and the infusion into society of new sensibilities, which in turn institutionalize themselves. The revolutions which have prevailed then are those which confirmed and legitimated previous social ferment; they have not reversed the historical developments in the society, nor unwound the whole previous fabric of social institutions.

A DANGEROUS GAME

Marcuse and the radical Left are playing a dangerous game. Revolutions of the sort they advocate, involving radical, disjunctive change (catastrophe), have seldom been victorious. Where they have achieved apparent success, the victory has been temporary and pyrrhic.²²

Here is the danger of Marcuse's game. Not only have revolutions seldom achieved complete alteration of the social and political situation, but in the aftermath of the initial revolutionary fervor, the most radical of the parcipatory groups have ben regularly suppressed. In short, one step forward, and three giants backward.

Marcuse is a utopian and proudly so. He argues, rightly, that only against a utopian vision of man and his potential can we see clearly the contradictions and the irrationality of the present society. He has not, however, resolved the eternal dilemma of the utopian: a great gulf separates the perception of man's folly and the elimination of it. The intolerance of man as he is for the sake of man as he ought

to be has repeatedly led not to utopian society but to shackles.

Marcuse is really one of a rare band of severe men - like Jesus and Kierkegaard — whose temperament unrelentingly calls us to pursue a vision of life, heedless of the consequences. To meliorate the uncomprising demands of these men inevitably seems a sacrifice of the vision. Yet revolutions do not realize themselves according to the intentions of their original protagonists. The original conception is eroded, diluted, contaminated. The Christian Church, the United States, the Soviet Union, each bear pained witness to this.

What then?

Winters, though! That mysterious hibernation of earth! Where around the dead, in the sap's pure recession, boldness accumulates, boldness of future springs. Where under rigidity cogitation goes on. Where green, worn-out by the big summers, turns into new idea and mirror of intimation.

Rilke

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- 18. ODM, pp. 1, 4, 7; CT, pp. 95, 106.
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- 21. The revolutions at Columbia and San Francisco State display the same logic, Liberals objected to the students' refusal to acquiesce to penalties for the take-over of campus buildings. But they misunderstood the radical nature of the revolution. Radicals saw the demand for amnesty as a key provision which would demonstrate their refusal to abide by the rules of an institution that had lost its legitimation. Alternative structures of freedom could be established, they insisted, only through the downfall of the present structures.
- 22. For example, Sol Stein, writing in Ramparts last spring, hailed Marcuse and argued that students around the world were finding him validated in practice. However, shortly upon Stern's celebration of the accomplishments of the Sorbonne, DeGaulle overwhelmingly won the French election. The conservative reaction swamped the initial advances.

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