

# COMMUNICATIONS

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## THE GROWING RELEVANCE OF MARCUSE'S DIALECTIC OF INDIVIDUAL AND CLASS

Ben Agger

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### I. INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF RADICAL SUBJECTIVITY

I shall here examine aspects of Herbert Marcuse's recent work in the context of a more general examination and critique of contemporary western Marxism. In this sense, I propose to treat Marcuse as the harbinger of a new perspective in the Marxist tradition, as well as one of the most articulate expositors of the "old" western Marxism, buried once and for all in the decade of the 1960s. My argument is that Marcuse, in spite of his recent descent into aesthetic resignation before an apparently inflexible capitalist totality of domination (paralleling Adorno's own critique in this regard) [1], illuminates in, for example, his *An Essay on Liberation* certain current dilemmas of western Marxism, and points the way toward their solution. Most notably, I believe that Marcuse understands the dialectic between individual and class levels of socialist struggle; and that he guides us beyond a monadic, inner-directed socialist aestheticism (in spite of his own personal inability to creatively reappropriate his own late-1960s insights in this respect).

Marcuse also understands the requirements of a non-authoritarian socialist movement which arises from the foundation of the struggling individual – the "new sensibility". I intend to read Marcuse in this sense as still-a-Marxist, as a theorist who does not treat the liberatory praxis of the singular individual as the end-point of socialist praxis but only as the beginning. This interpretation of Marcuse violates, of course, certain received canons of analysis. However, I would argue that the act of reading a theoretical text is as much an act of creation as of "objective" comprehension. I shall, then, use Marcuse *against* himself in plumbing his work for clues to the transcendence of what can be termed aesthetic Marxism. Marcuse, I believe, outlines an important theory of the objectification of subjectivity (defined below) which has been almost universally ignored both by sympathetic and unsympathetic commentators in their rush to stylize him *merely* as an exemplar of the Freudian-inspired new sensibility. Indeed the left-wing misreading of Marcuse largely stems from an inability to appreciate the significance of his 1955 work on the psychoanalytic grounds of critical theory (*Eros and Civilization*), and notably the distinction which he draws between basic repression and sublimation (required for all

mature culture creation), on the one hand, and surplus repression on the other.

Elsewhere [2], I have argued that Marcuse has left himself open to being read as endorsing “total liberation” from the civilizing, binding restraints of basic repression. This misinterpretation has allowed many of his readers to concentrate on the aesthetic and sexual dimensions of Marcuse’s theory (broached first in the *Essay of Liberation* [3]) where he called for “new and durable work relations” springing from the life-activity and self-externalization of the new sensibility. I want to project the nature of Marcuse’s Marxism against caricatures from the left and the right which paint him (critically or enthusiastically) as a person who has moved “beyond” Marxism.

To move “beyond” Marxism implies that one abandons class struggle as the motive-force of historical transformation. It also implies that one abandons Marx’s aim of the disalienation of labor and its transformation into creative praxis. I do not believe that Marcuse does any of these things, although he is hazy enough in his attitude towards Marx to have opened the way for such readings. But Marcuse can be more fruitfully read as a Marxist who argues that class struggle – and this is genuinely beyond Marx – *must spring today from individuated foundations*. The argument of *An Essay on Liberation* is that fundamental liberation must not be postponed until “after” the revolution; that there is no clear-cut “before” and “after” but only an extended process through which transformed human beings transform society. Marcuse, in this sense, agrees with Korsch and Lukacs when they argued in the early 1920s that the socialist revolution would not be a leap so much as a process, a gradual metamorphosis of capitalism into socialism – which in its very gradualness would maintain the possibility of a qualitative transformation. Marcuse also rejects the notion of a leap into socialism because he argues that such metaphors connote a “dictatorship of the proletariat” phase which

merely licenses the socialist domination of labor as an alleged precondition of the full and democratic maturation of the new society. Marcuse in this sense understands that Leninism went wrong at the very moment that Lenin excused “idiotic peasants” and backward workers from the necessary travail of self-transformation in the context of their need and value assumptions.

In *An Essay on Liberation* he states that the revolution will not be sudden in a collective and structural sense; but will have to be sudden in a personal sense, as human beings choose decisively to reject capitalist everyday life, that is, values and needs inculcated by capitalist ideology. But his position is not incrementalist precisely because he argues that there can be massive and sudden changes on the level of sensibility which can, in turn, create new types of class struggle. Thus Marcuse breaks with most orthodox Marxists, since they ignore the dialectic of individual and class, believing, optimistically, that class struggle is *sui generis*, and demands no subjective self-transformation. Marcuse operates on a different level, because he is convinced that capitalist alienation has penetrated deep into the substratum of the individual, making him, even against his conscious will, an agent of capitalist social control and ideological conformity. Thus, to Marcuse, the first level of socialist praxis is the struggle to transform the need and value patterns of the individual as a prelude – but only as a prelude – to new class formations.

## II. THE CONTINUUM OF DOMINATION

Marcuse’s contribution to western Marxism is, above all, this notion that human beings must come to terms with their “false needs” and thus rupture the “continuum of domination”. Against Adorno and other Frankfurt School theorists Marcuse argues, then, that the capitalist continuum of domination can be shattered and new needs created. The *Essay on Liberation* is an eloquent brief on behalf

of this possibility; Marcuse suggests that human beings can and must begin to live in different ways, becoming agents of what he terms instinctual and environmental “pacification”.

The notion of “false needs” had first been introduced systematically in 1964 in *One-Dimensional Man* [4], which, unfortunately, remains the best known of Marcuse’s works and thus provides all sorts of ammunition for a caricature of his position on the impossibility of class struggle today. But even in that book Marcuse clearly stated that the situation of the working class (and its revolutionary possibilities) was “ambiguous” [5] and that “one-dimensionality” was neither eternal nor total. He also suggested that false needs are human needs imposed on pliant and ideologically obedient consumers. Marcuse did not mean to say that certain needs are false because he, a presumably well-informed theorist, did not “like” them but simply because they are not freely arrived at through rational reflection. Human beings become habituated to a range of commodities the consumption of which is perceived by them as compensation for enduring alienated labor [6].

That is to say, needs are false, according to Marcuse, because they are designed to compensate the worker for injustices suffered in the work place. A true need, by implication, would bridge the activities of consumption and production, so that the person could no longer separate his “free” leisure-time existence (given over primarily to consumption) from his “unfree” work existence, controlled and managed by capitalists. Marcuse here is not only attacking the capitalist split between labor and leisure, but the very notion of “labor” which is generated in the breach between productivity and creativity. Human needs are often false because they do not unite productivity and creativity – or, put differently, because human beings under capitalism do not find their work to be creative and non-alienated.

Marcuse is often criticized for postulating

a definitive set of true needs, based, presumably, on his own idiosyncratic preferences. This is a serious mis-reading because he simply suggests societal conditions under which human beings could spontaneously *determine their own needs*, whatever they might be. He argues that one-dimensionality is a function of the collapse of the universe of reflection and discourse within which people can make informed choices about commodity-consumption and in which they can seek the pursuit of existential satisfaction in work as well as in leisure. In this sense, then, Marcuse is merely reiterating Marx’s 1844 strictures on the nature of alienated labor under capitalism. Foremost for Marx was the conception that capitalism fractures human existence into work and non-work components, with the result that alienated labor is seen as the “cost” of material enrichment. Marcuse is here repeating “young” Marx’s theory of alienated labor, which cannot, of course, be identified only with the young Marx but informs the entire corpus of Marx’s work, including *Capital* [7]. The very foundation of Marxism is in the understanding that alienated labor destroys creativity and individuality because human beings approach labor, as it is constituted under capitalism, as an odious obligation to be escaped in a consumption oriented “leisure”. Correlatively, Marcuse argues that in a society of unprecedented material abundance the realm of consumption is no more emancipated than the realm of labor. Human beings endlessly consume commodities which have little intrinsic value or meaning apart from their ephemeral appearances mediated through advertising and popular culture. One-dimensionality, in short, is the penetration of alienation into the realm of leisure-time existence and consumption.

In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse only hints at the possibility of overcoming the condition he describes. It is, on balance, a very bleak book. But in *An Essay On Liberation*, published only five years later during the politically volatile late-1960s, he is much more hope-

ful about the possibilities of emancipatory praxis. While he does not retract his earlier analysis of the cooptation of dissent and the homogenization of critical thought, he appears to be hopeful about new types of socialist transformation, which he characterizes as the potential of the “new sensibility”. By new sensibility he refers to the human being who begins to transform his or her existence and everyday life in a non-alienating direction. At the same time, this new sensibility refuses to oppress others in the name of distant future liberation. Marcuse’s new sensibility implicitly opposes Lenin’s concept of the vanguardist, who postpones fundamental personal and interpersonal liberation until that magic moment of revolutionary victory, after the so-called dictatorship of the proletariat has fulfilled its mission and eradicated the vestiges of capitalist economics and culture. As noble as the Leninist aim may have been, Marcuse (following Lukacs, Korsch, Adorno and Horkheimer) believes that it is wrong on two counts [8].

In the first place, Lenin’s vanguard model issues in enormous sacrifices of liberty, relative autonomy and perhaps life itself on the part of the vanguardist. Lenin’s image of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat – so-called “democratic centralism” – becomes a euphemistic reflection of total control by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, directed by a few bold revolutionary tacticians. The longer it survives, the more deeply it seeks to entrench itself and Marcuse concludes that this is perhaps in the very nature of Leninism (the elaboration of the central power and the withering of democracy).

In the second place, Leninism assumes the persisting, inevitable, existence of false needs among peasants and workers, and thus does not even attempt to involve them in their own liberation. Lenin’s famous analysis of working-class stupidity was used by him to justify theoretical and ideological hegemony by the Communist Party vanguard. Not only is this

ultimately fatal in the sense that it undercuts socialist democracy; in the short-term it renders workers and peasants incapable of becoming what Marx called “new men”. These workers and peasants remain captives of the old system which the Soviets were/are presumably trying to replace.

Marcuse believes that by ignoring the short-term requirements of personal self-transformation Lenin and his allies, doomed the socialist experiment before it could be effectively launched. By refusing seriously to contribute to the re-education of workers and peasants, and to promote the conditions for self-development and critical independence required in any system of democratic socialist workers’ control, the Bolsheviks guaranteed that the gap between the revolutionary vanguard and the recalcitrant mass would widen. Marcuse is alarmed by this because he contends that short-term organizational democracy in the socialist movement is indispensable if the workers’ government is not to become a bureaucratized carbon-copy of the capitalist system it is trying to replace.

Thus Marcuse argues for a short-term rupture in the continuum of domination so that human beings can begin to think through for themselves the meaning of socialist praxis. He believes that the socialist *process* is as important as the socialist *product*, indeed, that to artificially separate process and product, as Lenin did, is to invite disaster. Marcuse nowhere implies, however, that process and product are identical. The difference between them, it might be said, is dialectical and not absolute. Marcuse does not suggest (in classic socialist utopian or anarchist fashion) that personal liberation is equivalent to collective liberation. He merely points out the dialectic between these two moments, a dialectic effaced by most orthodox Marxists and Leninists who ignore the subjective moment of consciousness-formation and self-transformation of needs.

Marcuse contends, then, that subjective

liberation is an episode in a longer-term movement to achieve structural transformation; it is the beginning of collective liberation. In this way, he implicitly calls for the realization and organization of radical subjectivity as a means for broadening the new sensibility in its initial attempts to break through the continuum of domination. The new sensibility brings to this class-praxis a non-authoritarian spirit which ultimately emerges in a non-Leninist type of socialism; that is the thrust of the theory.

### III. "NEW AND DURABLE WORK RELATIONS"

The new sensibility emerges and is organized largely in terms of the work that must be done. Marcuse in the *Essay on Liberation* offers several suggestive hints about the character of the objectification and organization of radical subjectivity; these hints will serve me here as the basis for a more formal discussion. I interpret Marcuse as implying that the subject is never without a latent objectivity, in the ways it relates to other subjects and in its instinctual-erotic core. Marcuse in *An Essay on Liberation* sets before us the challenge of creating a newly energized working class capable of structurally realizing the aims and ideals of the new sensibility.

I have already noted that Marcuse's first important contribution to western Marxism is his notion of the rupture in the continuum of domination and the self-transcendence of false needs. The second major contribution is the notion that human beings could begin to merge work and play, or productive and non-productive/creative work, in their own daily lives. The second important theme of his 1969 book on liberation is the possibility of creating "new and durable work relations", anchored in the new sensibility which has already effected a rupture in its own need and value structures.

New and durable work relations, in Marcuse's sense, flow from what in *Eros and Civilization* he termed the "erotization of labor" [9]. By

erotization of labor he means that a type of work can be brought into being which is the creative and productive self-externalization of the "polymorphous erotic" individual who has been freed from surplus repression. Marcuse's Freudianization of Marxism takes the following direction: he argues that Freud was deeply insightful about the psycho-libidinal character of mature adulthood. But Freud paid insufficient attention to the historical variation in the quantity and intensity of the "basic repression" required to let the human individual grow away from his infantile past and to assume a non-neurotic role in adult culture creation. In other words, Freud understood the character of culture creation and of work insofar as they depend on a successful mastery and channeling of the erotic-libidinal impulses. Marcuse, following Freud, believes that all human beings have this erotic core which they must master if they are to function effectively as bearers of culture and as workers.

Marcuse valorises psychoanalysis precisely where he suggests that this basic mastery of the erotic impulses will be enhanced by the liberation of human beings from surplus repression. Freud did not understand surplus repression because he believed that domination was an ineluctable part of every successful civilization. Hence, Freud, as is well known, was deeply pessimistic; he argued that the burden of repression and of sublimation would eventually become too heavy for the human individual as society required increasingly diligent work performances, and stricter ideological obedience. Marcuse suggests that Freud, captive of his own times, did not and could not conceive of the possibility of a non-alienated civilization which rests firmly on the individuated ground of successful basic repression and sublimation of the instinctual energies. He historicizes Freud without jettisoning his instinct-theory and all of it implies. This historicization of Freud takes the form of an analysis of the historical variation of the quantity of repression foisted upon (as well as

self-generated by) the individual. Marcuse argues that surplus repression is a product of a peculiarly advanced technological order which has no other way of exacting strict work discipline and ideological obedience. Alienation is deepened and internalized by the individual in such a way that the potentially vast technological creation of abundance is ignored — technological abundance which, under a non-alienated social order, could liberate people from the regime of alienated labor.

Thus Marcuse argues for the end of alienated labor based on the rational mastery of the existing technology; he suggests that surplus repression is historically specific to societies rooted in alienated labor. Once surplus repression is lifted, the objective consequence of alienated labor will disappear and human beings can regain contact with their own erotic-creative cores. Marcuse, with Freud, believes that there is an umbilical relationship between work and Eros. Work is a sublimated, repressed form of the erotic instincts; it is culture-building activity in which free human beings freely engage. Marcuse does not suggest, in spite of certain tory misinterpretations and caricatures of his position, that human beings in a non-alienated social order would engage in unbridled expressions of individualism. Rather they would engage in praxis, the externalization of what Marx termed social freedom, uniting productive and creative work and eventually obliterating the distinction between labor and play generic to capitalist civilization.

This blurring of the distinctions between productivity and creativity and between work and play is what Marcuse is aiming at in his notion of “new and durable work relations”, grounded in the polymorphous eroticism of the new sensibility. He suggests that by breaking through the continuum of surplus repressive (false) needs, the human being is freed not for endless narcissistic self-indulgence but for creative/productive praxis, in early Marx’s sense. Marcuse, then, is primarily moved by the inspiration of 1844 Marx in

projecting, first in *Eros and Civilization* and later in *An Essay on Liberation*, the possibility of non-alienated labor. But he grounds “early” Marx’s notion of creative praxis in psycho-analytic terms. He shows that the abolition of surplus repression will not necessarily spell the abolition of basic repression. To this extent, human beings, when freed from alienation, might then, via basic repression and sublimation of Eros (the life-instincts, the id-energies), throw themselves into productive/creative praxis of precisely the kind Marx envisaged.

Marcuse requires this particular psycho-analytic grounding of critical theory for two reasons. In the first place, he needs to show how alienation has sunk ever-deeper into the libidinal and emotional substratum of the human individual in late capitalism. He must explain false needs (although, parenthetically, the concept of false needs was not to take explicit form until nearly a decade later; it existed in embryonic form in the 1955 book on Freud); he needed to explain how human beings did not come-to-consciousness about the potential world-historical mission of the urban proletariat, in the straightforward way that Marx and Engels had prophesied and expected. Thus Marcuse posed the question, dealt with by all of the Frankfurt theorists: why did the working class *not* revolt against a system in which the contradictions were sharpening inexorably? He did not explain this lack of class consciousness in crude terms by suggesting that capitalism has somehow “overcome” its internal contradictions, but tried to show how domination/alienation had been internalized by human beings who began to depend libidinally on a surplus repressive “reality principle”, which, in turn, kept them in productive and ideological tow.

Thus, the first function of Marcuse’s psycho-analytic grounding of critical theory was to explain why surplus repression existed and how it reinforced prevailing structures of advanced capitalist alienation. In the second place,

Marcuse wanted to show how the psychoanalytic reconstruction of Marxism could demonstrate that alienation was never total but that there always exists a buried (though inaccessible) libidinal substratum which orients the human being towards potential freedom. This implies that ten years before he wrote the book on one-dimensionality, Marcuse was *already* convinced that one-dimensionality is never total. The work on Freud anticipates his later argument in *An Essay on Liberation* to the effect that the one-dimensionality thesis, in its pure form, is undialectical because it ignores the subjective potential for revolt (via the “new sensibility”). The psychoanalytic grounding of critical theory, in Marcuse’s hands, had the purpose of demonstrating that a buried libidinal-erotic core drives the human being to desire his/her own liberation. In this sense, erotic desire is a directly political moment in the constellation of false needs, capitalist alienation and emancipatory praxis. Desire, in the Freudian sense of the gratification of past (repressed) desires, could conceivably push the advanced capitalist human being towards a rupture in the continuum of domination.

Marcuse thus makes his double use of psychoanalytic theory, on the one hand, to show the libidinal depths to which capitalist alienation has penetrated, and on the other to demonstrate the potential for revolt arising from that same libidinal core; and his critical theory in general is consistently double-edged in this way. He moves between the nearly complete manipulation of the human subject by the ideological imperatives of late capitalism, and the growing objective and subjective potential for liberation. But what concerns me here is the possibility of the irruption of this libidinal-erotic core, in transcendence of false needs, towards new work relations, new forms of creative praxis. These forms, as noted, are rooted fundamentally in the Marx of 1844 and in his vision of creative praxis; they also go beyond Marx, as I will argue shortly.

The psychoanalytic grounding of critical theory [11] allows Marcuse to make the case for a bonding of desire and work. He takes Freud’s concept of the pleasure principle and suggests that it can also become a new reality principle. The conjunction and blending of these two principles – thought by Freud, in his undialectical fashion, to be dualistically divided (as they indeed were under the capitalism of his time) – is the source of Marcuse’s optimism about creating new forms of work which are both creative and recreative, both libidinally satisfying and socially responsible [10]. For Marcuse, the irruption of the id in everyday life is only threatening if the id-impulses are improperly repressed and sublimated. Such impulses, when channelled constructively via successful basic repression and sublimation, can result in the fruitful joining of libidinal and intellectual or purposive rationality. Marcuse’s innovations in critical theory rest precisely on this notion of the possible merger of creativity and productivity, leisure and work. All this is still drawn from the inspiration of Marx.

But Marcuse goes beyond Marx in a certain respect. While Marx suggested that creativity and productivity could begin to merge under a non-alienated social order, he did not believe that human beings, here and now, could actually effect that merger. Marx believed rather that a fully mature socialism, taking generations to create once capitalism had been overthrown, would slowly evolve in such a way that the gap between work and creativity could be narrowed. But Marx did not believe that men and women, in the revolutionary short-run, could begin to create the institutional infrastructure of future (and present) socialism.

In *An Essay on Liberation* Marcuse suggests that Marx (sometimes despite his conscious understanding, I would add) was too much a creature of the mainstream western philosophical tradition that separates freedom and necessity, leisure and work; and he argues for

the immediate, short-term possibility of new synthetic fusions of these antitheses. He suggests that human beings, in the present, can create alternative forms and organizations of work through direct workers' control of the productive apparatus and through direct democracy in other nonproductive spheres of life. For Marcuse, much of this short-term instinctual re-creation falls under the heading of "cooperation".

New types of non-authoritarian cooperation can be forged as a way of mediating between present capitalism and future "mature" socialism. These short-run alternative institutions are "counter-hegemonic" in Gramsci's sense of the term. That is, they both serve to undermine capitalism and to create a future socialism.

The problem with Marcuse's deepening of Marx's theory of creative praxis is simply that he does not become concrete enough in his modelling of the "new and durable work relations" of his "new sensibility". Of course, his project is not merely revolutionary blue-printing. It is, more significantly, a critique of Marxian ideology rooted in the assumption that Marxism is *not radical enough* in its anticipation of the transition to socialism. Marcuse states clearly that human beings must not oppress each other in the short-run in order to enjoy distant future liberation. Similarly, they must not let "old" patterns of false needs persist into the socialist future but must, instead, attempt to overcome and replace those patterns in the present. As a critique of conventional Marxian ideology, Marcuse's psycho-analytically-informed Marxism points the way towards important new insights into the dialectic between subjective and objective liberation. His "new sensibility" is a bridge between individual and collective modes of revolt and struggle.

#### IV. DIALECTIC OF INDIVIDUAL AND CLASS: THE OBJECTIFICATION OF SUBJECTIVITY

The "new and durable work relations" are,

then, engaged in by the "new sensibilities", human beings who have managed to effect a rupture in the continuum of domination. As noted, new sensibility is a vital link between the suffering, struggling individual on the one hand and a more fully-fleshed type of class struggle on the other. This new sensibility is a crucial category for the further analysis of the pitfalls of orthodox ideological Marxism.

Marcuse avers that human beings can begin to live different, democratic and socialist lives in the present – that they can develop non-alienated needs and begin to merge work and play. His "new sensibility" is the libidinal and intellectual repository of this emancipatory intention. Specifically, the new sensibility in the late 1960s for Marcuse was expressed in the archetype of the counter-culture member who engaged in revolt both against dominant bourgeois culture and against the political foibles of the American advanced capitalist state. The hippie notion of a new dimension of transcendent experience is harnessed by Marcuse to his own, more explicitly socialist and rationalistic, notion of a rupture in the continuum of domination. Marcuse mines the hippie episode for further phenomenological evidence about the possibility of a socialist new sensibility.

This is not to say that Marcuse fully vindicates the American New Left and the counter-culture. Indeed, his (1973) *Counterrevolution and Revolt* [12] suggests that the New Left and counter-culture (the political and cultural-ideological moments of 1960s new sensibility, respectively) unnecessarily jettisoned aspects of traditional Marxian rationality in their rush to create an anti-culture and anti-system. Marcuse retreats from the excesses of the 1960s such as the drug culture precisely at that point where he believed that these impulses lost their critical and dialectical thrusts – their counter-hegemonic potential. He treated the new sensibility as a regulative idea, in the Kantian sense, and not as a finished socialist product. Marcuse never hypostatized aspects of the 1960s sensibility for he feared that the



essence of “true”, non-alienated needs is precisely their authentic responsiveness to the material, cultural and symbolic universe which surrounds us. As this universe may change, so will true needs change. Thus Marcuse does not suggest that marijuana will be a universal form of relaxing transcendence nor does he eternalize the communal forms of the late 1960s. He merely treats the new sensibility as an archetype which is formal and not substantive, pointing the way towards new dialectical syntheses.

As indicated, the essence of the new sensibility, in a political and strategic sense, is its interposition between the struggling, rebellious individual and larger issues of class struggle. Thus Marcuse revitalizes Marxism by adding a radical subjectivism to an otherwise overly structural theory of dialectical change; but he does not go far enough in outlining the concrete mediations which will allow the new sensibility to blossom into a full-blown socialist movement, located in an ideologically self-conscious class.

Marcuse suggests in *An Essay Liberation* that new types of socialist struggle might spring from the lifeworlds of new sensibilities. These forms of struggle will be unorthodox in the sense that they will spontaneously arise from the particular “generative themes” (in Paulo Freire’s sense [13]) which make life meaningful for human beings. In this way, Marcuse suggests that one-dimensionality is never total, that there is always “space” in which emancipatory projects can be undertaken and class praxis initiated.

This linkage between microscopic and macroscopic praxis, between rebellion and strategic action, is at the heart of Marcuse’s revision of orthodox Marxism. He believes that he can predict the non-authoritarian character of the socialist movement if that movement preserves the spontaneity of the new sensibility’s attempts to forge a new world in the immediate present — no matter how difficult that world-making may ultimately be.

By preserving the new sensibility’s attempt to overcome the continuum of domination and to forge the tentative merger of work and play Marcuse believes that the socialist *movement* will be both non-authoritarian (infrastructureally democratic) and also deeply utopian, refusing to accept short-term vanguard dictatorship as the price to pay for “future” collective liberation.

Therefore, he is one of the few Marxists who is unwilling to accept the Leninist sacrifice of short-term liberty and spontaneity to longer-term goals such as capital accumulation. In this advanced industrial society, implies Marcuse, we need not postpone liberation on grounds of material insufficiency. We can instead master the technological apparatus in such a way that human beings today and tomorrow can be freed from the regime of alienated labor and surplus repression. Thus his dialectic between individual spontaneity and strategic class action is rooted in this appreciation of the potential technological abundance wrought by advanced capitalism.

In this sense, Marcuse takes Marx very seriously where Marx suggested that new social forms only emerge when old forms have been fully developed. It is not a question for Marcuse of returning to a Luddite past, or to primitive society, but rather of reintegrating the primitive and the romantic into a future order which does not negate the primitive but makes it objectively possible. Marcuse’s romantic utopianism is objective utopianism. He is mistakenly interpreted by critics, both Marxist and conservative, as endorsing regression to a “primal” (psychic and civilizational) past. But his argument is rather that what is essential to the pre-industrial past, the non-antagonistic reapproachment between humanity and nature, for example, can be re-created in a super-technological order in which technology is mastered by human beings, rather than vice-versa.

The present social order is intrinsically post-one-dimensional, in Marcusean terms. *One-*

*Dimensional Man* was not a book about the future but a summary of the maturation of monopoly capitalism during the post-World War II period and extending through the Eisenhower years into the early 1960s. This was a period of consolidation of the advanced capitalist system, in which strict work discipline and civic-ideological obedience had to be exacted at all costs. One-dimensionality is the eradication of all subjective “otherness”. But in the later 1960s, and certainly today, subjective otherness has not disappeared. Indeed the system now cultivates this otherness, this artificial dissidence, because monopoly capitalism will grind to a halt without a certain degree of disharmony between subjectivity and objectivity. In the words of Paul Piccone [14], “artificial negativity” is generated by the system in order to provide that very system with sources of individual, idiosyncratic creativity without which it (both economic and cultural) would simply stagnate.

This artificial negativity is one step beyond one-dimensionality for it re-opens the universe of spontaneous (or pseudo-spontaneous) subjectivity. This re-opening, it seems to me, can be either coopted by dominant ideologies, or authentically radicalized with the result that the new sensibility could re-appear in the coming decade. There is, of course, a tendency to see the *Essay on Liberation* and its vindication of subjective radicalism as a period-piece of the late 1960s. But I would argue that the double-edged character of artificial negativity today resurrects the possibility of new types of sensibility as the point of departure for socialist class struggle. Artificial negativity might take the form of politically harmless attempts at “self-help”, expressive of the vaunted “narcissism” of the decade. Or it might take the form of a deepened socialist radicalism sharpened by the blatant economic, ecological and political crises which surround us. If, as Piccone suggests, one-dimensionality has outlived its functional utility in the 1970s, then the “space” for radical subjectivity (as

well as for cloying, politically irrelevant narcissism) again becomes enlarged.

The issue here becomes then, the objectification and organization of radical subjectivity. In his 1969 manifesto on subjective liberation, Marcuse was never very concrete about the emancipatory forms that struggling subjectivity would take. It is useless to read back to his 1969 book for hints about present mediations between the individual and class. What we have to do instead is to preserve insights into the dialectic between individual and class, in support of a non-authoritarian socialism, and to build on these insights by suggesting alternative counter-hegemonic forms of work and leisure which break through the Chinese wall of advanced capitalism.

The organization and objectification of radical subjectivity requires concrete mediations between individual and class praxis. In a Gramscian sense, these counter-hegemonic mediations bridge the capitalist present and the socialist future. They create both continuity and rupture between these two poles. Marcuse believes that this rupture will be a process, emerging out of the choices and actions people undertake in their daily lives (springing from their transformation of sensibility). It is useless to attempt to specify what comes first, change of consciousness and sensibility, on the one hand, or the adoption of certain potentially counter-hegemonic forms, on the other. There might be all sorts of potentially counter-hegemonic forms which, on the surface, seen in terms of the dominant ideology of advanced capitalism, appear to be merely reformist and not revolutionary. It is precisely the project for radical theory to create non-authoritarian socialist ideologies which allow these counter-hegemonic forms to be broadened, both materially and in consciousness, into a real socialist alternative. This is the kind of work that Gramsci was engaged in during his political struggles in Italy during the early part of this century, and to which Marcuse implicitly gives license

in his 1969 book on liberation.

Marcuse does not ignore the moment of subjectivity precisely because he believes that subjectivity is the wellspring of a future objectivity — a class in and for itself, working to create a human socialism. Marcuse sketches the mediations between the spontaneous new sensibility, responding in its struggle to the generative themes of advanced capitalist everyday life, and larger forms of collective praxis. He is none too clear about these mediations simply because they change with the times. The counter-culture-new left sensibility of the 1960s was a Dionysian response to the end of one-dimensionality. The new sensibility of the present may be a different kind of sensibility, less oriented to overcoming the repressive one-dimensionality of the early and middle 1960s and more oriented to the economic and ecological crises of the present. In this sense, one might hope that the new sensibility of the late 20th century will be incarnated as a sober, hard-headed theoretical radical who is closer to the imperatives of socialist struggle than were the spaced-out (but not for that reason culturally or ideologically irrelevant) children of the 1960s.

## NOTES

- 1 See, for example, Theodore W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Seabury, 1973).
- 2 For example, see Ben Agger, "On Happiness and the Damaged Life," in John O'Neill (ed.), *On Critical Theory* (New York: Seabury, 1976), pp. 12–33. Also see Ben Agger, "Work and Authority in Marcuse and Habermas," *Human Studies*, forthcoming; and Ben Agger, *Western Marxism* (Santa Monica: Goodyear, 1979), forthcoming, and especially chapter 6 on Marcuse's "Individualist Marxism."

- 3 Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1969).
- 4 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), especially pp. 4–5.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. xiv–xv.
- 6 This discussion of false needs has been amplified in the context of Alkis Kontos' review of William Leiss' *The Limits to Satisfaction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) in the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*. See Kontos' review, pp. 127–132, in *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Winter 1977), and Leiss' response in vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 103–106.  
Leiss argues against the notion of false needs on the grounds that it is presumptuous to specify a definitive set of such needs. Kontos responds by saying that critical theory cannot do without an ontological-metaphysical concept of true needs, against which to orient its emancipatory praxis today.
- 7 This debate has been treated systematically in Jean Hyppolite, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, trans. John O'Neill (New York: Basic Books, 1970).
- 8 Marcuse's *Soviet Marxism* (New York: Vintage, 1958) sets the stage for his later critique of the principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat.
- 9 See pp. 196–202 of Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Vintage, 1955).
- 10 This issue is systematically examined in Ben Agger, "Dialectical Sensibility I: Critical Theory, Scientism and Empiricism", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Winter 1977), pp. 3–34.
- 11 Much of my discussion of this psychoanalytic grounding of critical theory is indebted to Gad Horowitz, *Repression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), notably the final chapter on psychoanalysis and dialectical materialism.
- 12 Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon, 1973).
- 13 See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury, 1970), for the development of his concept of "generative themes."
- 14 This discussion is indebted to Paul Piccone's provocative essay, "Artificial Negativity," *Telos*, no. 35 (Spring 1978), pp. 43–54.  
Piccone earlier argued that critical theory in its Frankfurt formulation was archaic in the late 1960s and 1970s, having been formulated as a response to the earliest, integrative and repressive period of monopoly Capitalism following World War II. See Piccone, "Beyond Identity Theory", in John O'Neill (ed.), *op. cit.*