

Against Orthodoxy
Social Theory and Its Discontents

Stanley Aronowitz

palgrave
macmillan

Contents

Preface	vii
1 The Unknown Herbert Marcuse	1
2 Between Criticism and Ethnography: Raymond Williams and the Invention of Cultural Studies	21
3 A Critique of Methodological Reason <i>Stanley Aronowitz and Robert Auch</i>	35
4 Georg Lukács's Destruction of Reason	59
5 Henri Lefebvre: The Ignored Philosopher and Social Theorist	73
6 Gramsci's Theory of Political Organization	93
7 Max Horkheimer's Critical Theory	105
8 Paulo Freire's Radical Democratic Humanism	113
9 Herbert Marcuse's Concept of Eros	129
10 Marx, Braverman, and the Logic of Capital	143
Notes	181

CHAPTER 1

The Unknown Herbert Marcuse

The year 1998 is the hundredth anniversary of Herbert Marcuse's birth. After decades of teaching and writing for relatively limited, mostly academic audiences, in the 1960s he became a figure of international renown, and some of his books became bestsellers. But it seems that he had just fifteen minutes of fame; his work is now out of fashion and virtually unread by students, activists, and academics, save for the narrow circle of those who work and teach in the tradition of the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. Nevertheless, due to one of those mysterious conjunctions of history and thought, Marcuse was one of the figures from which Russell Jacoby derived his model of the "public" intellectual. A philosopher who never ceased to remind his readers that he was an "orthodox Marxist," he borrowed freely from the phenomenological tradition, especially its Heideggerian spin; from sociology, mainly Max Weber's; and, most famously, from the metatheories of Sigmund Freud regarding the relation of the individual to society.¹

His conception of theoretical and political "orthodoxy" was in the direct line from Marx to Rosa Luxemburg and, except for a brief period immediately after World War II, did not extend to the Leninist tradition. His political position was consonant with the small anti-Leninist communist movement that broke from the German and Dutch Communist Parties in the 1920s known as "councilists," so named because their conception of the new society was based on workers' councils.² In this respect, Marcuse once remarked that the best critique of his work came from one of the movement's anti-Leninist founders, Paul Mattick, whose virtually unknown book *Critique of Marcuse* (1971) takes Marcuse to task for failing to pay sufficient attention to the contradictions of the processes of capital accumulation, and for ignoring the implications of capitalism's crisis tendencies. Marcuse was always opposed to the revolutionary goal of seizing "state power" and, in this respect, was closer to his critic Mattick than to many of his admirers. His conception of a new society was one in which the producers controlled production and popular organs such as councils exercised power over public life. And he scorned notions of revolutionary "dictatorship" even as a transitional measure.

Even as many complained that Marcuse's prose was difficult to read, his writing and his political interventions animated the generation of 1968 like no other social theorist's. He was celebrated and widely read by New Left activists throughout the advanced capitalist world, but also in countries like Mexico and Brazil where student movements challenged the status quo. Vilified by communists and social democrats alike for the libertarianism of his Marxism and its lack of programmatic specifications, students and others in the once massive independent Left somehow knew that he meant for them to flesh out the solutions for which he could only suggest problems. Perhaps more importantly, together with Henri Lefebvre and the Situationists in France, and C. Wright Mills and Paul Goodman in the United States, he held up a mirror to their lives by articulating the banality and boredom endemic to late capitalist everyday life. While he was closely identified with Critical Theory—the version of Marxism associated with the so-called Frankfurt School—unlike the two other prominent figures in the movement, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the object of his investigation and reflection was praxis, a perspective eventually renounced on empirical/historical grounds by the others.

Marcuse was a student of Soviet ideology and a severe critic of Stalinism—indeed, his *Soviet Marxism* (1953) may be the most insightful study of the subject—but he never took the road chosen by some of his contemporaries, whose anti-Stalinism often led them to veer rightward toward liberalism and beyond. Both Marcuse and the group of Americans known as the New York Intellectuals began from political premises informed by their judgment of the Soviet Union as the leader of an authoritarian power bloc within the system of world domination. There the similarity ends. He wrote in some of the leading journals of anti-Stalinist liberalism, including *Partisan Review*, the most influential among them, but he never associated with those ex-radicals who, after World War II, traveled together to the center, at different paces. For unlike Daniel Bell and others whose anti-Stalinism ended in despair and, eventually, in the ambivalence of neoconservatism (an ambivalence that led Bell, for example, to disdain the chance that, in a period of unparalleled capitalist prosperity, anything was possible save more of the present), Marcuse exemplified Gramsci's dictum: pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the spirit. More to the point, while his hopes were utopian, unlike the party Marxists and those whose radicalism gave way to a grudging or blinkered reconciliation with the liberal democratic capitalist order, his specification of the conditions of advanced capitalist societies was brutally concrete and his commitment to ending capitalist domination unwavering.

Marcuse's remains a "name," but one that is distinctly of the past. To the extent that the Frankfurt School still enjoys some cachet, attention focuses on Adorno for reasons that are entirely understandable. Adorno's work on literature and on aesthetic theory remains compelling, and he is, arguably, the best theorist of twentieth-century music. And the plain fact is that the term Gramsci applied to Marxism in a period of political terror, "the philosophy of praxis," has fallen on bad times, even disrepute, since the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the

consequential political disasters for state socialist regimes that ruled “under the banner of Marxism.”³

A second factor that has produced indifference is the ascendancy, in academic circles, of diverse post-Marxist discourses, roughly corresponding to the crack-up of the ideological hegemony of the communist movement. On the one side, some, including a number of erstwhile Marcuse admirers, have seized on Jürgen Habermas to provide permission to abandon what C. Wright Mills once called the “labor metaphysic”⁴ in favor of a much less precise search for the possibility of perfect communication in a mythic “civil society.” For class struggle they have substituted communicative action. On the other side, there remain the *mélange* of literary critics and philosophers who followed Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-François Lyotard into the territory characterized as poststructuralism, which, among other moves, renounced all possible master discourses, especially Marxism, and marked the project of emancipation as hopelessly essentialist.

It is true that some in this camp attempted a radical renewal from within a Nietzschean/Derridian framework and based their hopes on the vitality of the “new” social movements of sex, gender, and ecology. But notions of structured social relations were jettisoned or collapsed into discourse or, following Foucault, discursive formations. While some gave lip service to the mantra of “class, race, and gender,” class was, for practical purposes, left by the wayside along with historical materialism, which in turn was condemned as an *a priori* and metaphysical ideology. Imagine their surprise when Derrida wrote of the “specter” of Marx, and when Gilles Deleuze, who although anti-Hegelian was neither post-structuralist nor post-Marxist, was found to have almost finished a book about Marx before his death in 1997. One wonders whether Derrida’s book on Marx will, in academic literary circles, receive the attention lavished on the rest of his work or whether it will provoke the embarrassed silence that has attended the political writings of Deleuze and Guattari. Nor have Foucault’s numerous acolytes explored the implications of his comment of 1983: “If I had known about the Frankfurt School in time, I would have saved a great deal of work. I would not have said a certain amount of nonsense and would not have taken so many false trails trying not to get lost, when the Frankfurt School cleared the way.”⁵

Another reason for Marcuse’s declining influence is that the post-communist era has witnessed not merely the virtual disappearance of movements and ideologies that, despite their reformist practice, declared systemic opposition to capitalism, but also the catastrophic decline of trade unions, the feminist movement, and the integration of environmentalism into social democracy as its loyal “left wing,” especially in Germany, Italy, and France. Witness, too, the political diminution of the great Italian Communist Party, which, shortly following the collapse of the Soviet Union, not only changed its name to the Democratic Party of the Left but also watered down its program to get votes. The party gets more votes but has less intellectual and spiritual influence in Italian society. No longer committed to socialist transformation, it has abandoned the traditional distinction between immediate demands and the socialist goal and has, instead, merged with

democratic republicanism. Following the pattern of European social democracy, it became a “party of government,” a term that signals the Left is prepared to manage the capitalist state and to respect liberal democracy as a permanent and irrevocable achievement. First proposed by Eduard Bernstein in 1899, the parties of the European communists have universally followed this example. Lacking the framework once provided by Soviet state socialism and by revolutionary Leninism, let alone the Luxemburgist conception of workers’ self-management, their long-term practical resemblance to postwar social democracy has now been inscribed in their doctrines as well.

In sum, it may have turned out that Marcuse’s political philosophy was ensconced in conditions that are now surpassed, especially the regulation era of world capitalism and its companions, consumer society and the welfare state. Whereas Marcuse announced that capitalism had solved most material needs for those he called “the underlying populations” of advanced capitalist societies, the reappearance of manufactured scarcity, with a vengeance, has resuscitated not only free market ideology but also the nostalgia for a return to what cannot be resuscitated, the welfare state. Hence the resurgence of social democratic parties, which, paradoxically, seem to have lost their reformist voice. In a period of rapid disaggregation of nation-states and the emergence of three major global economic power blocs to partially replace them, is Critical Theory obsolete?

What Marcuse himself had posited—the disappearance of the political dialectic, if not systemic contradictions in advanced capitalist societies—may be the chief reason his philosophy no longer resonates with the Left and its intellectual minions, which mainly have disdained any politics save those of reform. (Today this politics generally takes the form of rearguard actions in defense of past gains. Or, in its degraded manifestation, for many, this politics consists of the internecine warfare of academic departments and disciplines.) For the question he posed at the end of World War II and reiterated with searing force in the early 1960s is whether we may still speak of a viable movement of political opposition. Or, as Paul Piccone once asked, is what passes for oppositional politics merely so many forms of “artificial” negativity?⁶

Some of the American generation of 1968 have rediscovered liberal democracy, the virtues of incremental reform, as a political ideal. They have urged those still loyal to the “new” social movements, especially those fighting for freedom, sexual and otherwise, to abandon their frivolity and return to the fold of plain white middle-class justice. Between the second demise of intellectual radicalism (the first, embodied in the New York Intellectuals, followed World War II) and the disappearance of the rhetoric, if not the practice, of the opposition, what Marcuse has to say may be viewed as irrelevant by those who have reconciled themselves to the “given” and who only seek to improve or fine-tune it. If his words sound strange to a new generation trained to adapt to the prevailing social order and its technological apparatus, those who have not surrendered might still find his work compelling.

There is, of course, one more reason for his relative obscurity: the tendency by what remains of radical politics to focus on single issues, identity domains,

and intra-institutional combat. This observation should not be interpreted as an attack on the inevitable, and generally healthy, dictum that all politics is local. The sites are not in question, nor is the imperative to, as one writer has urged, “dig where you stand.”⁷ But the distance many activists and intellectuals alike have taken from “theory”—to find the categories that enable us to grasp the dynamic of the world system, the links between the contradictions of capital accumulation, culture, and politics—vitiates radical possibility. Sometimes this refusal takes the form of blatant anti-intellectualism. Since Marcuse was a consummate intellectual, he is readily identified with the enemy. This is a factor but not the main response to the project of which he was a most eloquent tribune. Instead, I suspect that some who choose to remain politically engaged, but only at the level of immediacy, have abandoned hope that the intention of theory, to find the basis for global solidarity, is possible. But if we are condemned to work in our backyards without forging ideological and political links with others, and if we have foregone the search for solidarity and for historical alternatives, is this not a backhanded version of the social-democratic compromise of the postwar era? Does this not expose the newer movements to nationalist incorporation, just as the trade unions were brought to heel in the 1940s?

Marcuse’s Collected Essays

The publication of the first of a projected six-volume collection of Marcuse’s mostly uncollected essays is an opportunity for a new generation of readers, and some of his older interlocutors as well, to make acquaintance with his writings.⁸ These pieces, written in the decade between the late 1930s and 1949, are almost all “occasional.” They were composed for specific purposes, some of which had to do with Marcuse’s role as an analyst for the Office of Strategic Services during the war, concerning the nature of the Nazi economic and political system and its mentality, and for the State Department in the immediate postwar years where he began his studies of the Cold War. The volume also contains, among other articles, “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology,” the precursor to *One-Dimensional Man*, and a remarkable summa of his aesthetic theory, “Some Remarks on Aragon,” where the theme of the subversive nature of romantic love is evoked, later to be expanded in his *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and his final book, *The Aesthetic Dimension*. In addition, the reader will find two essays, coauthored with Franz Neumann, on theories of social change, which may be the most cogent and concise history of modern political theory available.

Also reproduced here are letters to Max Horkheimer where Marcuse, futilely, as it turns out, seeks a permanent position in the relocated Institute for Social Research, and a brief correspondence with his former teacher Martin Heidegger, in which Marcuse reflects on Heidegger’s refusal to renounce his association and complicity with the Nazi regime. To Marcuse’s reminder that “you never renounced any of the actions or ideologies of the regime,” wondering how his mentor could be silent in the wake of a regime that murdered millions of Jews, Heidegger replies that after 1934 he “recognized his error” in regarding Nazism

as a means to “spiritual renewal” but admittedly refrained from taking issue with the regime. Then there is this astounding comment on Nazi murders:

[T]o the charge of “dubious validity” that you express about a regime that “murdered millions of Jews, that made terror into an everyday phenomenon, and that turned everything that pertains to the ideas of spirit, freedom and truth into its bloody opposite” I can merely add that if instead of “Jews” you had written “East Germans” [i.e., Germans of Eastern territories] then the same holds true for one of the allies. (266)

Of course, the “ally” in question was the Soviet Union.

Two points: Heidegger’s statement of the “dubious validity” of Marcuse’s remark concerning Nazi terror has been a refrain of the European Right since the war and is a fairly solid indication of his enduring sympathies. And here is Heidegger’s equation of some Soviet atrocities against Germans, which undoubtedly occurred in conquered territories, with the Holocaust. Moreover, in the same paragraph, Heidegger repeats the well-known contention that the “bloody terror of the Nazis in point of fact had been kept secret from the German people.” This was a major bone of contention among postwar intellectuals, especially between those who would hold the whole of the German people responsible for the terror and those, like Dwight Macdonald, who argued that the terror was an aspect of a war spirit for which human life had become expendable and of a new system of technological and bureaucratic power that routinely hides information from the people and deprives them of sovereignty, but also of responsibility. Chances are, according to this point of view, most did not know of the Holocaust, and the rank-and-file perpetrators of the Nazi crimes, down to the technicians who operated the ovens, could, with some justice, claim they were merely following orders. Hannah Arendt was to call this outcome the “banality of evil.” However, in their silence, those capable of escaping banality, especially the intellectuals, bear some responsibility for what transpired. In a letter dated May 12, 1948, using Heidegger’s own categories—*Logos*, *Dasein*, and so forth—Marcuse decisively convicts him of betraying his own philosophy and remaining ensconced in the zeitgeist of 1933, and he ends their correspondence.

From Scholarship to Critical Theory

He began as a scholar, a designation Marcuse never ceased to mock because, in his eyes, scholarship without a *telos*, lacking what I shall call an ontohistorical purpose, became, in his words, “scholarshit.” In contrast to Adorno and Horkheimer, Marcuse was a philosopher of praxis; he was forever searching for the openings for revolution and believed that theory was intimately linked to action. Having written his doctoral thesis on aesthetics in 1922, three years after participating in the ill-fated Spartacus revolt of 1919 against the social democratic retreat from the German revolution, he went on to study with Martin Heidegger in Freiburg. His habilitation, an advanced degree required of all who seek

permanent university positions, was a Heideggerian reading of Hegel's ontology; it was submitted in 1933 to Heidegger, already on his way to joining forces with the Nazis. Despite interventions by others of his committee, it was not accepted and remained unpublished until well after the war.

Shortly following Hitler's rise to power, the Institute for Social Research, the academic embodiment of Critical Theory with which he was affiliated, temporarily removed to Paris on its way to New York. After a brief stay in the institute's Geneva branch in 1934, Marcuse left for the United States and helped set up its new center at Columbia University. Until the war, he was the institute's philosophy specialist, and during the 1930s he wrote a brilliant study of authority, which was published in 1936 as part of the celebrated sociological work directed by Horkheimer and Erich Fromm, *Studies in Authority and the Family*. His first major work in English, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, appeared in 1941. In the 1960 preface, Marcuse writes,

This book was written in the hope that it would make a small contribution to the revival, not of Hegel, but of a mental faculty which is in danger of being obliterated: the power of negative thinking. As Hegel defines it: "Thinking is, indeed, essentially the negation of what is immediately before us." . . . Today, the dialectical mode of thought is alien to the whole established universe of discourse and action. It seems to belong to the past and to be rebutted by the achievements of technological civilization. (vii)

Four years later he was to publish his most famous book, *One-Dimensional Man*, which resumes the themes that had occupied his thinking since the early 1930s.

From World War II, when he served various U.S. government bodies, especially the newly formed Office of Strategic Services (OSS), as an analyst, to his last years ending with his death in 1979, his writings, teaching, and public expressions were directed to achieving human emancipation, first from the Nazi terror and then from one-dimensional society and thought, which he believed had permeated advanced capitalist societies as a consequence of the inversion of reason from its critical function.⁹ Several of the essays included in the present collection were written as reports to the directors of the OSS. They deal with the cultural and ideological aspects of Nazism, but they also forge a highly original theory of fascism that differs rather sharply from some aspects of Horkheimer's, especially the idea that fascism is chiefly an authoritarian state form in which the state takes the role of capitalist. And Marcuse disputes the prevailing communist view that, in the words of George Dimitrov, general secretary of the Communist International, it is "the open terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary sections of finance capital."¹⁰ Nor does he hold that fascism is chiefly a form of racist ideology and terrorist political practice in which the state occupies the central position. Rather, he argues, convincingly I think, that it is a new structural relationship between economic and social power and the individual, in which the state has lost its autonomy and thus its mediating role.

In the years immediately following the war, Marcuse occupies a singular political and intellectual position. His anti-Stalinism pervades the pages of his articles and his study of Soviet ideology of this period, *Soviet Marxism* (1953). Yet despite the fact that he worked for the State Department until 1951, he remains loyal to the premises of Critical Theory and to orthodox Marxism: there is no question of joining in the celebration. In fact, however pessimistic is his assessment of the practical chance that the working class may shake its torpor and act as a catalyst for revolution, in this period he sharpens his critique of capitalist politics and culture and of the Cold War. However, in contrast to the anti-Stalinist Trotskyists, Marcuse remains, throughout this period, an unrelenting critic of both state socialism and voluntarism, expressed in Lenin's declaration that "politics takes precedence over economics."

Marcuse's most salient contribution to Critical Theory was to have shown the subsumption of reason under advanced capitalism to what he describes as "technological rationality," and to have demonstrated its profound implications for praxis. The project of developing the theory of technological rationality may be traced to his essay "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology" (1941), about which I shall have more to say below. From his early study "The Foundations of Historical Materialism" (1932), a pioneering commentary on Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, which had recently been published as volume 3 of the *Collected Works*, his thinking never wavered from the task of discerning the agents of historical transformation, which, in his view, were always located in social groups standing in a definite relation to the social structure. As we shall see, Marcuse found it increasingly difficult to maintain the standard Marxist hope in working-class agency, its trade unions, and its political parties.

Yet he constantly reiterated that human liberation, of which the abolition of capitalism was the first step, was unthinkable unless theory could specify material conditions for its realization, including those of culture, and identify and assess social forces capable of making change. He was keenly interested in the labor movement, not in the spirit of romantic nostalgia but because, in his thought, its fate was a barometer of political prospects. So, in the light of what Critical Theory believed to be the fateful "incorporation" of the proletariat by the apparatuses of advanced capitalism, Marcuse acknowledged that liberation was, for the time being, relegated to utopian hope, but he declared that his was a "concrete" utopia whose chance of realization was contingent on whether it was rooted in the very apparatus that constrained it.

It is relatively easy, in retrospect, to account for the unforeseen civil rights, student, antiwar, and feminist movements of the 1960s. We can now discern that the 1950s were years of seething discontent. In the first place, blacks took seriously Roosevelt's wartime promises to mediate the blatant inequalities of the post-Reconstruction era. When succeeding governments failed to deliver, the black church, returning veterans, and other organized forces began to mobilize, producing in time a mass insurgency that assumed the face of a movement of mainly southern black students. We trace other sources of discontent

to middle-class discomfort with the American celebration that accompanied U.S. postwar hegemony. We discern an “existential crisis” of a relatively affluent, middle-class, young generation that recognized, despite the surfeit of goods and artificial pleasures, that everyday life in late capitalism remains empty, even boring. Students rebelled against the technicalization of their own education and demanded a voice in university curriculum and pedagogy. Little of this was apparent at the time. The Beats and other literary movements notwithstanding, radical thought seemed cranky and hopelessly out of sync with the times. Yet even as ex-radical Daniel Bell was confidently pronouncing the death of radicalism, the writings of the few intellectual radicals were eagerly read and assimilated by a new generation poised to rebel against the consensus, the peace movement had amassed a broad cross section of the liberal middle class, and reform movements were rearing their heads in the universities and urban neighborhoods.

Perhaps the most influential books in the late 1950s and early 1960s among dissident students, intellectuals, and political activists were C. Wright Mills’s *Power Elite* and Paul Goodman’s *Growing Up Absurd*. Published in 1956 as the deep freeze of the postwar era was melting around the edges, Mills’s study of the commanding heights of U.S. society provided for a largely inchoate new radicalism the terms with which to carry on a critique. Departing from the conventional Marxist category of a “ruling” class of industrial and commercial capital, Mills argued that social power comprised the elites of three institutional orders: the corporations, the military, and the political directorate. In turn, drawing from earlier Depression-era studies of trusts and monopolies, Mills found that they were interlocked; except for the military, which flowed outward but did not accept civilian leadership, members of one order routinely served in one or both of the other two. Thus, for example, Dwight Eisenhower, a solid member of the military high command, became, as a civilian, a member of innumerable corporate boards and president of the United States. Similarly, the leading corporate lawyer John Foster Dulles was Eisenhower’s secretary of state. And a succession of secretaries of the treasury, from Roosevelt’s Henry Morgenthau and Eisenhower’s C. Douglas Dillon to Clinton’s Robert Rubin, and various secretaries of state and defense have traditionally moved back and forth between financial and industrial corporations and the government. Mills made the ineffable visible. He codified and verified what every critic of liberal democracy suspected but could not articulate in concrete terms: that the notion of “one man, one vote” was only *a*, not *the*, political reality. The more salient reality was that a mostly unaccountable small group of rich and powerful men from corporations, the military, and the political elite made most of the decisions that affected the lives of ordinary people.

Published in 1959, Goodman’s rant was directed against images of the 1950s as a decade in which people were, in the words of satirist Ira Wallach, “deliriously happy.” While Mills focused on the system of economic and political power, Goodman examined two of the crucial institutions of social reproduction, family and schools. Goodman’s ideas, some of which recall themes of John Dewey’s educational philosophy, others derived from the anarchist school experiments

of the earlier years of the twentieth century, and still others from that peculiar combination of Reichian and conventional Freudian concepts that underlay his own psychology, remain controversial and salient to a new radical movement. He confirmed the feelings of many children that, notwithstanding the postwar prosperity, theirs were lives of nearly unrelieved psychological and social bondage. Whereas Marcuse argued that the authoritarian father was the condition for youthful rebellion, for Goodman as for Wilhelm Reich, patriarchal authority stifled children's creativity and individuality.¹¹ And schools were mostly a continuation of this authority. Indeed, schools were not only a waste of their intellectual energies, but in addition to being places of intellectual conformity, they were constituted to impose conventional morality, sexual and otherwise. Goodman's cry for freedom, that schools should be places where students could explore their own needs and inclinations, tried to shift the center of the educational ground from curriculum and teachers to the kids.

Before politicians and school authorities openly proclaimed it as official policy, the identification of education with training remained an unacknowledged practice. Goodman labeled such conflation "miseducation." *Growing Up Absurd* might have been dismissed by many educators as utopian loony tunes and attacked by conservatives as dangerous to the prevailing order, but kids, especially young adults, found it a justification for dissent and for hope that a different future could be forged in the present. In the 1960s and 1970s, every educational reformer invoked the slogans derived from the libertarian program of Goodman and educator A. S. Neill of "child-centered" education, of individual development and choice. Needless to say, in the Anglo-American context, the anarchist content was watered down in translation. For Goodman argued that state education was inherently authoritarian. Nor was Goodman's sexual libertarianism taken up by educational reformers. On the contrary, mindful of the puritanical zeitgeist, even progressives were cautious. In the first place, most of them favored the concept of a progressive public bureaucracy to foster the interests of those traditionally excluded from educational opportunity. In the service of widening access to working-class and minority students, they put aside their own critique of state institutions such as schools. And as for sexuality, the farthest they were willing to travel was to undertake timid programs of sex "education," in which sexuality was made procedural and, more egregiously, framed as the discourse of a social problem to be overcome by the judicious use of contraceptives or, worse, by abstinence.

In this most open of all advanced industrial societies, notwithstanding the sexualized emanations of popular culture, sex still lives an underground existence. In a rebuke to the judgment, promulgated most recently by Foucault, that sex is no longer subversive because it has been co-opted by the dominant culture, after a period of what Marcuse termed "repressive desublimation," teenagers are again punished for practicing it. The view of children as sexual beings is no longer vilified as the ravings of psychoanalytic pornographers, but the fact has now become the occasion for a new repressive era in schooling. Schools now admit that their object is to foster the child's adaptation to conventional morality, and they are prepared

to expel or severely discipline those who refuse to toe the line. In some parts of the United States, a regime of expulsion and other severe punishments for what is termed “inappropriate behavior” (read “sex and fighting”) have become accepted routines of school life. For their indiscretions, young single mothers are pressed into forced labor if they stay on public assistance. Once protected by the press and now routinely exposed as adulterers, politicians may fall, and a whole new category of law enforcement, the sex police, has been brought into being, counting among its cadre parents, teachers, politicians, administrators, cops, and judges.

For the intellectual Left and many activists, Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* was the defining treatise of the late 1960s. Whether they read it or not, those who identified with the “movement” took its descriptions of the flattening of everyday existence as a personal testament. Even as millions took to the streets protesting the war, racial, sex, and gender discrimination, and the destruction of the physical and social environment by commercial and military interests, Marcuse’s pitiless analysis and gloomy prognostication of the possibility for radical social change became a material force because, in Lenin’s words, it “gripped the masses,” at least of intellectuals and activists. The irony was lost on neither Marcuse nor his readers. Composed from materials culled from contemporary journalism, from Mills’s descriptions of how corporate and military power is wielded in the United States and in the world, and from Marcuse’s own earlier work on technology and ideology reprinted in Kellner’s collection, the book became a reference for precisely those whom Marcuse had proclaimed hopelessly integrated by consumerism and by liberalism into the prevailing order.

Marcuse’s orthodoxy consisted in this: he said he “presupposed” Marx’s critique of political economy, especially capital’s immanent critique of categories such as the free market, the theory according to which, in a free market, supply, demand, and profits were generally in equilibrium, the bourgeois supposition that profit inhered in the risk of investment, and so forth. The task of Critical Theory was to “extend” the Marxist analysis to crucial spheres that arose in the twentieth century as a consequence of the passage of capitalism from its competitive phase to that of what he describes, following the denotation of his day, as the “monopoly” stage. Concretely, with the Frankfurt School, following Georg Lukács, Marcuse located the source of bourgeois ideological hegemony in commodity fetishism but, through his critique of rationality, concluded that if “commodification” is the necessary condition of domination in advanced capitalism, it is no longer sufficient. Marcuse radicalizes Heidegger’s critique of technology; for him it becomes the sufficient condition for domination.¹²

In time Marcuse came to terms with the social movements of the 1960s and took pride in his own role, even if unintended, in fostering them. But the burden of his thesis was not only that the revolutionary opposition had been defeated in the interwar period and by the domination by the two great power blocs of world politics, society and its components, but that human beings had been unalterably transformed by advanced capitalism. His metaphor that technological society produced a somatic change that ultimately affected the genes underlined the gravity of his judgment. The explosive thesis of *One-Dimensional Man* was to

have freed ideology-critique from the mental realm and to have endowed it with onto-historical status. Technological rationality, which is inherent in nineteenth-century utilitarianism but also in twentieth-century natural science and social theory, has penetrated every fiber of social being; not only has negation become literally unthinkable, but liberal capitalism, no less than fascism, fixes limits so that alternatives that are not instrumental to systemic reproduction are silenced, not merely relegated to the paranoid margins.

However, in some ways “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology” (1941), reprinted in the present volume, is the most succinct and illuminating introduction to Marcuse’s thought on technology. For him the question concerning technology is not entirely answered, as Heidegger claims, by making the distinction between the Greek meaning of the term *techne* as the activity of “uncovering” or disclosing nature, and holding nature in “reserve” for human ends. Marcuse distinguishes between technology and technics. According to Marcuse, “technology is a social process” whereas technics is a “partial factor” that can “promote totalitarianism as well as liberty” (44). In the name of efficiency and progress, technology’s imperatives subsume individuals and other social processes:

Under the impact of the apparatus, individualistic rationality has been transformed into technological rationality. It is by no means confined to the subjects and objects of large-scale enterprises but characterizes the pervasive modes of thought and even the manifold forms of protest and rebellion. This rationality establishes standards of judgment and fosters attitudes, which make men ready to accept and even intercept the dictates of the apparatus. (44)

The leading theme of the essay, one that is reiterated throughout the rest of his work for the next twenty-five years, is that technology, indeed, as Heidegger claimed, “enframes” social relations but leaves little, if any, room for difference. As Lewis Mumford argued in his earlier study, *Technics and Civilization* (1936), intelligence has been transferred to the machine process, which, in turn, sets its limits. Technology’s criterion of efficiency, as defined by capital’s requirements, enframes human activity through the mechanism of introjection, which here appears as “introcept(ion).” In short, it becomes increasingly difficult for us to separate ourselves from the machine, since we have identified with it, a theme reiterated within a different framework by, among others, Donna Haraway. Marcuse alters the well-known formulation that social reproduction requires the individual to adapt, and to internalize, the normative order. Technology is not introjected by means of the mechanisms by which beliefs and values are assimilated. Reproduction no longer requires “ideology” in the traditional sense if rationality itself is identical to technology and the imperative of efficiency, which demands only that our activity be subject to ratio, to measurement.

Technology as Social Domination

Critical Theory is unified by its appropriation of Weber’s concept of instrumental rationality as domination, and Marcuse’s early paper on technology

provided one of the key texts. What Horkheimer called the “end” or “eclipse” of reason and its transformation into an instrument of capital’s domination over labor became, during the interwar period, Critical Theory’s sufficient explanation of how the leading capitalist powers have, against all predictions, managed to stave off collapse in the wake of wars, economic crises, and revolutions in the periphery as well as the center of the world system. For Critical Theory, domination entails the social and psychological subordination of the underlying population to class power by the reconfiguration of art into the culture industry; the emergence of consumer society, at least in the most developed capitalist countries; the suppression of any conception of the rational, except the “given” reality; and the replacement of religion by science. Whereas science initially conceived itself as a critique of religion’s domination over human knowledge, as it is integrated into production and becomes the central productive force, the scientific establishment is seen and sees itself as identical with the system of power. As science extends its purview, the domination of nature leads to the domination of human nature. This human domination is exemplified in the distortions capitalism has effected in the universal quest for happiness.

The dawn and youth of capitalism were marked by the ruthless exploitation of labor. It was also a period of mass workers’ movements, which, beyond seeking ameliorative measures to relieve suffering, recognized the need to fight for a new society in which the producers would have decisive power over social life. But in the shadow of the rise of workers’ movements, especially the socialist revolutions of the post-World War I period, capital revealed its capacity to “learn” from history. Technology, once regarded as merely a tool of industrial production, became a crucial cultural, as well as economic, weapon of capital’s systemic reproduction. In time, science and scientifically based technology took on all the trappings of a new religion and became one of the crucial instruments of domination. Now we are admonished to “believe” in science as the moral equivalent of salvation. Medicine, for example, promises, and sometimes delivers, a “magic bullet” to cure diseases, whether in the form of developing vaccines and other medications or, in recent years, by means of genetic alteration. Equipped with new biotechnology, science brings back the once despised doctrine of eugenics and envisions human perfection, but it also guarantees a world of mass surveillance. In this sense, science is the vehicle for the obliteration of the boundaries between private and public, thereby depriving the individual of the last vestiges of protection.

At the practical level, capital mobilizes scientifically based technology and is able to deliver many of the “goods” revolutionaries always believed must await a communist future. The conflation of one of the main elements of happiness—freedom from want—with technology in advanced societies limits the horizon of possibility by “abolishing” material scarcity or, more accurately, marginalizing it and exporting it to the developing world. At the same time, as Marcuse points out, individuality no longer means self-development but instead the relentless pursuit of personal interests. As we shall see, this for him becomes vital for understanding the nature of fascism.

What divides Marcuse from the Frankfurt School is their different perspectives on the possibilities for politics. For Adorno, praxis, that Greek term for a reflective political practice, was all but foreclosed not only by the integration of the putative agents of historical transformation, the working classes of the most advanced industrial societies, into the system of power, but also by the intellectual hegemony of its most persuasive ideology, positivism. Capitalism had, in his view, secured its domination not by terror alone, although state repression was one of its time-honored tools. It had completely subsumed any possibility of critical thought so that the great category of emancipation, negation, had been driven from the vocabulary, thereby depriving us of the means by which to think behind the “given” social and political reality. The capacity of the capitalist order to close the gap between representation and reality, to find the means to heal the rift between consciousness and society, left only avant-garde art and the homeless mind to oppose it. Thus Horkheimer and Adorno stopped at critique because for them, genuine opposition existed only in theory; the empirical/historical opposition had effectively disappeared.

Of course, Marcuse recognized this loss and its consequences. But his intellectual pessimism was tempered by what the philosopher Ernst Bloch termed the “principle” of hope, a principle because it is the a priori condition for intervention into the social world; without hope, intellectual pessimism degenerates into quietism and thereby becomes an agent for the naturalization of the given society. In the words French Marxist sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre used to describe the May 1968 events in Paris, Marcuse believed that “events belie forecasts.”¹³ As Adorno and Horkheimer carefully distanced themselves from the student movement, suspecting it was little more than a return to barbarism in revolutionary garb, or worse, grist for strengthening the social machine, during the years of protest Marcuse, already seventy years old, rarely refused an invitation to speak at a demonstration or lend his name to a petition or an appeal. His activism helped convince the UC-San Diego administration to force him to retire in 1975. But Marcuse only ceased to teach classes for credit; throughout the 1970s he participated in study groups, engaged in informal discussions with students and colleagues, and continued to write and speak to large audiences. One study group, conducted in the late 1970s with a few graduate students in literature, was on the writings of Walter Benjamin. Marcuse found himself at odds with Benjamin’s “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” but also with his fellow students. For him the idea that the mechanical reproduction and dissemination of “great” art could lead to its democratization was ludicrous. He also never came to terms with film and other forms of popular, especially visual, culture, regarding them as instances of the anti-aesthetic. But, influenced by his wife Erica Sherover and other women who were close to him, toward the end of his life he came to understand the radical implications of contemporary feminism and also the salience of new social movements. Subject to adulation but also to rebuke, he opened himself to criticism because, despite his intellectual gloom, he believed in the redemptive power of love.

Fascism and the Individual

Marcuse's theory of fascism entails a theory of the modern state. In this view, at its best, the liberal capitalist state is a "mediator" between the individual and the enormous economic power accumulated by the modern corporation. Through the judicial system, legislation, political parties that are broadly representative of social groups, and, in some countries, formal constitutional rights, the state provides individuals with the means to vindicate their grievances. "The rule of law has, to an ever increasing extent, become the medium through which the state operated as a system of national administration" (71). But, far from agreeing that national socialism is characterized by the emergence of a totalitarian state that, against the will of corporations as much as society as a whole, plays the decisive role in capital accumulation and rules, exclusively, by terror, Marcuse argues the absolutely original thesis that under national socialism the state loses its autonomy and, therefore, its ability to mediate through its political and juridical functions:

National Socialism has done away with the essential features which characterized the modern state. It tends to abolish any separation between state and society by transferring political functions to the social groups actually in power. In other words, National Socialism tends toward direct and immediate self-government by the prevailing social groups over the rest of the population. (67)

In a remarkably parallel thesis to that of Mills, but written a decade earlier and published nowhere, he claims that society is ruled by a triumvirate of big capital, the army, and the party whose collective will is mediated by, and concentrated in, the leader who symbolized the drive toward homogeneity and harmony among the various elements of society. Yet, contrary to the usual views, Marcuse argues that however much the individual is deprived of the mediating role of a now totally instrumentalized and subordinated public bureaucracy, individualism is not, thereby, destroyed. Fascism "manipulates the masses by unleashing the most brutal and selfish instincts of the individual. The National Socialist state is not the reversal but the consummation of competitive individualism. The regime releases all those forces of brutal self-interest which the democratic countries have tried to curb and tried to combine with the interest of freedom" (80). The crowd replaces social groups. Here Marcuse draws a striking parallel to the early days of capitalism when the ideology and, to some extent, the practices of the free market reduced the state to what Adam Smith termed a "Night Watchman." But even as private corporate power grows by geometric proportions, the "social division of labor and the technological process had equalized individuals and their liberation seemed to call for a union of men acting in solidarity of a common interest which superseded the interest of individual self-preservation. Such a union is the opposite of the National Socialist mass" (81). In opposition to this tradition, the Nazis organize the masses guided by the "principle of atomization" within production as much as within civil society. Like advanced capitalist societies today, fascism is guided by

what one Nazi edict terms “that mental and physical condition that enables him the highest efficiency and thus guarantees the greatest advance for the racial community” (82).

It is not difficult to observe the same tendencies in the United States today. Capital has spared no effort to configure technology so that production units are smaller and spatially divided from each other, and the individual worker more isolated. On the threat of discharge or capital flight, the individual worker is pressured to be more efficient and to work longer hours. Moreover, the weakened labor movement, the promotion of fierce competitive individualism, and the “unleashing” of an ethos of self-preservation over solidarity have together produced conditions in which the mediations between the individual and capital have disappeared in most workplaces. The more labor becomes temporary and contingent, the more the individual seeks “security” through identification with the company. In these times, the state has retreated from its mediating role. Any employer wishing to break a union organizing drive need only fire a few activists to show the rest the price of resistance. The union can file unfair labor practices charges with the Labor Relations Board, but the employer has many avenues of delay. Meanwhile, the campaign peters out and workers learn that raising their voices leads only to retribution. As every organizer knows, the rule of law has given way to the almost unfettered rule of capital.

Now, I don’t wish to be interpreted as saying that America has entered a fascist era. In recent U.S. history, even as legislatures have become less responsive to the popular will and have revealed their own subordination to corporate interests, it is still possible, through the judicial system, for individuals, let alone state governments, to sue tobacco companies and other manufacturers of unhealthy goods, to enter small claims against recalcitrant merchants, and to obtain cash settlements in cases of race and sex discrimination. And, although seriously weakened, health, labor, and other laws and institutions such as labor unions dedicated to ensuring their enforcement still afford some redress. But these protections depend on maintaining the separation between the state and society, where a public bureaucracy retains sufficient autonomy to act against the most wanton impulses of capital, the reckless and irresponsible use of police power, and hate crimes perpetrated by citizens against each other.

Since the 1990s we have witnessed growing public heteronomy: the state and its institutions are pressed into the direct service of capital when, for instance, the American president becomes little more than a trade representative. In a period of intensifying international economic instability, when capital massively withdraws from Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, the president and his treasury secretary are dispatched to conferences with the world’s financial leaders to deliver a single message: Don’t try to interfere with the free flow of capital by introducing measures to regulate currencies, restrain large-scale capital flight, and so forth. At the same time, at home, antitrust enforcement, one of the more contentious features of the regulation era, is assiduously ignored by the administration, even though it is still legally charged with responsibility. As a result, during the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, mergers and

acquisitions reached a new historical high. Hundreds of thousands of production workers, technical and professional employees, and middle managers are laid off, and many have little or no severance pay, find themselves without health insurance, and, if over fifty, often retire without pension from their careers.

While it is still possible for a victim of police brutality to get his day in court, elected officials such as the New York City mayors flagrantly defend, in the name of public safety, the right of the police to terrorize blacks and other minorities. And many cities have become exemplars of the garrison state. In public schools, kids are forcibly restrained from leaving the building during school hours, even if they have free periods. Armed police roam the halls to make sure kids are in class and, on occasion, administer corporal punishment to offenders, even when the law prohibits such behavior.

In February 1947, five years after he published “State and Individual under National Socialism,” Marcuse wrote what Kellner has called “33 Theses.” When I mentioned to Peter Marcuse, the literary executor of his father’s papers, that I was writing this essay and would address these theses, he replied that they were a bit “dated.” It is not difficult to come to this conclusion if statements such as this one are taken at face value:

After military defeat of Hitler—Fascism (which was a premature and isolated form of capitalist reorganization), the world is dividing into a neo-fascist and a Soviet camp. What still remains of democratic-liberal forms will be crushed between the two camps or absorbed by them. The states in which the old ruling class survived the war economically and politically, will become fascized in the foreseeable future, while the others will enter the Soviet camp. (217)

On the surface, this prediction appears to have turned out to be wrong on two counts: liberal democracy remains the state form in all advanced capitalist societies and, within severe limits, has extended to the ex-communist states such as Russia, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic and to developing countries that were formerly military or one-party dictatorships such as Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil. Moreover, although China and Vietnam experienced communist-led nationalist revolutions and Cuba underwent a parallel revolutionary process, to this day liberal-democratic forms have not been instituted, but their social systems are not forged in the Soviet model, except insofar as they are party dictatorships. However, state ownership of key production and distribution industries is disintegrating in favor of massive private ownership and capital investment. And with this shift, the working class experiences an unprecedented level of exploitation.

But consider how Marcuse’s conception differs from the accepted views of fascism. Of course, U.S. society is not marked by a program of systematic terror against racialized minorities, although, as we have seen, the number of incidents of police violations of the rights of black men has escalated in proportion as poverty and unemployment deepens in the cities. But in other respects—such as the intensification of individualism, the decline of the labor movement and other social groups, and the emergence of a cultural environment of puritanical

anti-sexuality—U.S. society has all the earmarks of a growing authoritarianism. At the same time, as it observes the rituals of parliamentary democratic processes, have not the mediating functions of the state gradually receded? Are not the imperatives of global and regional capital taken as priorities by public bureaucracies, to the detriment of the social wage? Does the “general welfare” regulate state functions, or is the state systematically constrained to cut back education, to cut income supports to the poor and the aged, and to reduce health care to the aged and to the poor to bare minimum levels? And, finally, to what extent does the individual have recourse to institutions of justice? To what extent are social groups disintegrating and being replaced by atomized individuals who fiercely assert their own competitive interests?

The second theme of the theses is by now familiar: “[O]utside the Soviet camp there is no workers’ movement ‘capable of revolution’” (218). Assessing the communist movement, he finds the Trotskyists too weak and, in any case, hopelessly divided. And as for the communist parties, while they are capable of revolution, their subordination to a Soviet politics that is committed to detente on the basis of a balance of terror with the capitalist powers makes them hostile to revolution (thesis five, 218). Besides, he argues, “The societal tendency of state socialism is anti-revolutionary. The direct producers do not control production (and with it their destiny) any more than they do in the system of liberal-democratic capitalism” (219). Prefiguring what became painfully apparent in the 1960s, he writes that “the communist parties are becoming more social democratic themselves,” signaling that social democracy has “monopolized” the workers’ movement after the war.

Finally, fighting defeat with hope, Marcuse outlines a revolutionary socialist program: the socialization of the means of production and their administration by the immediate producers; the abolition of wage labor; and, after taking control, shorter working hours. Nearly thirty years after the decisive suppression of the soviets (workers’ councils) in Germany and Hungary by the counterrevolution and in the newly created Soviet Union in the period of “war communism” by the revolution itself, Marcuse insists on the councilist program. But he does not end there. The last four theses are a critique of the Soviet experience as a prelude to what he argues is the imperative of fleshing out a new revolutionary theory. In these paragraphs, Marcuse focuses on the “problem of preventing a state-socialist bureaucracy” (226) where workers exchange one set of masters for another. Marcuse argues that bureaucracy is “an economic” problem rooted in “the technological structure of the production apparatus” (226). It took another twenty years before labor process theorists caught on to this issue. Alfred Sohn-Rethel formulated the question in terms of the division of intellectual and manual labor; the bureaucracy as a managerial class monopolizes technical and organizational knowledge and, as Harry Braverman argues, relentlessly “deskills” manual labor, rendering the possibility of workers’ control less likely.¹⁴

So whereas under capitalism the disaggregation of the public bureaucracy is an authoritarian measure because it leaves the individual helpless before the superior forces of corporations and of the market, the industrial bureaucracy is inimical

to workers' interests under socialism as much as under capitalism. For Marcuse, the trade unions are the best workers' defensive organization under capitalism; but they are hostile to socialism. Thus he argues that "the political workers party remains the subject of revolution," in contrast to Marx's view that as soon as conditions are present, the workers' "knowledge of [their] own interests" is sufficient for revolutionary action. But, according to Marcuse, the Leninist vanguard is made necessary because monopoly capital has found the means to "level" the proletariat and deprive it of the collective knowledge by which to lead itself. Despite his critique of the communist parties, they remained the only possible source of revolutionary theory and practice. Needless to say, in his moment of despair, Marcuse was driven to an uncharacteristic endorsement, one that he lived to renounce.

In these essays, one can view the dialectic at work as both method of analysis and description of social reality. For this reason alone they have more than purely historical interest. If some of his political judgments are, indeed, of their time and, in the post-Soviet era, surpassed, what remains is a highly provocative and creative Marxism in which the simplicities of inherited views are constantly challenged. Marcuse's acute understanding of the relative autonomy of technological domination, his insistence on the salience of theory as both a tool of practice and a site of opposition in a time of conformity, and his unsurpassed explorations into the culture and politics of authoritarianism and of its outcome, fascism, are as fresh today as they were a half-century ago.