

Herbert Marcuse

Art and Liberation

ART AND  
LIBERATION

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COLLECTED PAPERS OF HERBERT MARCUSE  
EDITED BY DOUGLAS KELLNER

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Volume One

TECHNOLOGY, WAR AND FASCISM

Volume Two

TOWARDS A CRITICAL THEORY OF SOCIETY

Volume Three

THE NEW LEFT AND THE 1960s

Volume Four

ART AND LIBERATION

Volume Five

PHILOSOPHY, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND EMANCIPATION

Volume Six

MARXISM, REVOLUTION AND UTOPIA

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HERBERT MARCUSE (1898–1979) is an internationally renowned philosopher, social activist and theorist, and member of the Frankfurt School. He has been remembered as one of the most influential social critical theorists inspiring the radical political movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Author of numerous books including *One-Dimensional Man*, *Eros and Civilization*, and *Reason and Revolution*, Marcuse taught at Columbia, Harvard, Brandeis University and the University of California before his death in 1979.

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# ART AND LIBERATION

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Volume Four

*Edited by*  
*Douglas Kellner*

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# INTRODUCTION

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## *Marcuse, Art, and Liberation*

*Douglas Kellner*

Herbert Marcuse produced a unique combination of critical social theory, radical aesthetics, psychoanalysis, and a philosophy of liberation and revolution during his long and distinguished career.<sup>1</sup> In his dialectical vision, critical theory was to delineate both forms of domination and oppression and possibilities of hope and liberation. For Marcuse, culture and art played an important role in shaping forces of domination, as well as generating possibilities of liberation. Hence, at key junctures in his work, art, the aesthetic dimension, and the relation between culture and politics became a central focus of his writings.

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1 See my book *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (London and Berkeley: Macmillan Press and University of California Press, 1984) for an overview of Marcuse's life and thought. In my Introduction to the first volume of the *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse: Technology, War and Fascism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), I discuss Marcuse's previously unknown 1940s texts written during his U.S. government service in World War II, and elaborate his views of technology, war, and fascism. In the second volume of the *Collected Papers*, my introduction to *Towards a Critical Theory of Society* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) engages the project of developing a critical theory of society, while in *The New Left and the 1960s*, Volume Three (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), my Introduction provides an overview of Marcuse's involvement with the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s. In this Introduction, I elaborate on Marcuse's analyses of art and aesthetic theory, drawing on much new material from the Marcuse archive and his personal collection.



Much secondary literature on Marcuse has downplayed the importance of art and aesthetics in his work, and those that have focused on it, or highlighted it, have often exaggerated, negatively interpreted, or misinterpreted its significance. For instance, in the first comprehensive book to be published after Marcuse's death in 1979, Barry Katz argued in *Herbert Marcuse. Art of Liberation* that "the primacy of aesthetics in the evolution of his thought will prove to be central to this interpretation" (1982: 12).<sup>2</sup> Katz interpreted Marcuse's aesthetics as the quest "for an external, critical standpoint that could cancel the totality of existence without being cancelled by it" (p. 124) and interpreted his aesthetics as a transcendental ontology, an interpretation that I will contest in this Introduction.

Timothy J. Lukes in his book *The Flight into Inwardness* (1985) also affirms "the central role of aesthetics in Marcuse's work," agreeing with Katz concerning the primacy of aesthetics in Marcuse. Lukes claims that Marcuse's work leads into a withdrawal and escape from politics and society in an aesthetic "flight into inwardness." In addition, he mistrusts Marcuse's attempts to mediate art and politics, believing that such a project leads to a dangerous "aestheticizing of politics," failing to note Marcuse's sustained attempts to both mediate art and politics and preserve an autonomous aesthetic dimension.<sup>3</sup> Berthold Langerbein in *Roman und Revolte* (1985) argues that aesthetic theory in Marcuse "is the authentic fulcrum and pivotal point (*eigentliche Dreh- und Angelpunkt*) of his entire thought" (p. 10; emphasis in the original).<sup>4</sup> While Langerbein correctly stresses the mediation between aesthetics and politics in Marcuse's work, he ignores the equally important mediation with philosophy and critical theory in Marcuse's mature work, a synthesis that I will argue characterizes his project as a whole and provides the proper locus in which to read his aesthetics.

Charles Reitz in his ground-breaking study *Art, Alienation, and the Humanities* (2000) argues that Marcuse's work divides into texts that advocate "art-against-alienation" in which art is mobilized as a force of emancipatory political transformation, contrasted to texts that affirm "art-

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2 Barry Katz, *Herbert Marcuse. Art of Liberation* (London and New York: Verso, 1982); see my review of Katz's work in *Telos* 56 (Summer 1983), pp. 223–9.

3 Timothy J. Lukes, *The Flight into Inwardness* (London and Toronto: Susquehanna University Press, 1985).

4 Berthold Langerbein, *Roman und Revolte. Zur Grundlegung der ästhetischen Theorie Herbert Marcuses und ihrer Stellung in seinem politisch-anthropologischen Denken* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1985). Another German scholar appraises Marcuse's work for an aesthetics of everyday life. See Ulrich Gmünder, *Ästhetik-Wunsch-Alltäglichkeit. Das Alltagsästhetische als Fluchtpunkt der Ästhetik Herbert Marcuses* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1984). While his study is interesting, Gmünder opens by claiming: "Only aesthetics and art serve Marcuse as a model of critique and negation" (p. 7; my translation). I shall argue in this and subsequent volumes that critical philosophy and social theory also provide standpoints of critique and resistance.

as-alienation” in which art becomes a refuge and escape from the exigencies of social theory and political struggle.<sup>5</sup> Reitz’s work is extremely useful in stressing the importance of Marcuse’s work for education; he is correct that there is an aestheticist tendency in Marcuse that can lead to inwardness and quietism. One could indeed read Marcuse’s last published book *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978) in this optic.<sup>6</sup> But Marcuse never withdrew completely into art and aesthetics, as his last works in the late 1970s include lectures on politics and the New Left, Marxist theory, and philosophy, as well as lectures on art, politics, and liberation. Hence, up until the end of his life, Marcuse’s project was to develop perspectives and practices of liberation that combined critical social theory, philosophy, radical politics, and reflections on art and cultural transformation. Sometimes these components stood in tension with each other. Often he would stress one component to the neglect of others, but in his most accomplished and comprehensive texts they were brought together and mediated, and in his work as a whole these components generate a critique of domination accompanied by a vision of liberation and a project of radical social transformation.

Consequently, I want to argue that aesthetics is not the key, primary, or central element in his thought, although concern with art and aesthetic theory is an important part of Marcuse’s project that has not yet been properly appraised and situated within his work as a whole. I hope that the texts and the interpretative material provided in this volume can help with this task. I also suggest that Marcuse’s work is part of a historical and dialectical tradition of critical theory that is to be appropriated, worked through, developed, and taken up in new directions and with new positions and ideas in evolving historical situations – as was the case with Marcuse’s own work. As I will argue, Marcuse provides material for aesthetic theory and critique today, producing original insights into art and aesthetics, a sustained attempt to reflect on the connection of art and politics, and studies of many specific aesthetic and cultural phenomena that continue to resonate and pertain to issues of importance and relevance today.

As the careful reader will soon discover, many of Marcuse’s best writings on art and aesthetics were unpublished and generally unknown during his lifetime. The Marcuse archive in Frankfurt and his private collection from San Diego contained a wealth of material on art and aesthetics that we will draw on here, much of it published in English for the first time. In my introductory essay, I will provide contextualization of Marcuse’s encounter with art and issues of aesthetics and its relation to politics and society from the beginning of his graduate student work until his death. In a concluding

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5 Charles Reitz, *Art, Alienation, and the Humanities* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2000).

6 See Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978); I discuss this text below on pp. 59ff.

afterword, Gerhard Schweppenhäuser provides a more analytical dissection of key themes of Marcuse's aesthetics, its importance and relationship to other critical theorists, and some of its limitations.<sup>7</sup>

In sum, Marcuse's engagement with art and aesthetic theory was a major concern of his work that generated many important contributions to aesthetics, cultural studies, and critical social theory. In order to provide context for the interpretation of the texts collected in this volume, the following sections offer historical analysis of the genesis of Marcuse's perspectives on art and liberation that stress both continuities and discontinuities in his work, and that seek to avoid one-sided or reductive interpretations.

### MARCUSE'S DOCTORAL DISSERTATION: ENGAGING THE GERMAN ARTIST NOVEL

*When the artist, who had demanded that the private self had a right to a life of its own, then steps out into the surrounding world, he endures the curse of a culture in which Idea and reality, art and life, subject and object, stand in stark opposition to one another. He finds no fulfillment in the surrounding world's forms of life with all their limitations; his authentic self (Wesen) and his desires find no resonance there; in solitude he stands over against reality.*

(Marcuse, *The German Artist Novel*,  
see below pp. 78)

Herbert Marcuse was born in Berlin, Germany, on July 19, 1898, the son of Carl Marcuse, a prosperous Jewish businessman, and Gertrud Kreslawsky, the daughter of a wealthy German factory owner. At the age of six, Marcuse entered an exclusive Berlin *Vorschule*, or preparatory school; he moved to the prominent Mommsen Gymnasium in Berlin at the age of nine, transferring to the Kaiserin Augusta Gymnasium in the fashionable Charlottenburg suburb at the age of 11. Marcuse thus received a privileged bourgeois education and biographical accounts indicate that he was a voracious reader from an early age of classics of German and world literature, and also became deeply

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7 The Afterword by Gerhard Schweppenhäuser provides a revised and updated version of his text "Kunst als Erkenntnis und Erinnerung. Herbert Marcuses Ästhetik der 'großen Weigerung'" that served as the Introduction to *Kunst und Befreiung*, ed. Peter-Erwin Jansen (Lüneburg: zu Klampen, 2000), pp. 13–40. For discussion of German-language studies of Marcuse's aesthetics, see Schweppenhäuser's Afterword in this volume, pp. 237ff., and his earlier Introduction to *Kunst und Befreiung*. The translation of the text produced for the Afterword by Matthew Isom was financed by the Free University of Bolzano, Italy. Early studies of Marcuse's aesthetics include Fredric Jameson's sympathetic presentation in *Marxism and Form* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971); Stephen Eric Bronner, "Art and Utopia," *Politics and Society* (Winter 1973), pp. 129–61; and Heinz Paetzold's discussion in *NeoMarxistische Ästhetik* (Düsseldorf: Swann, 1974).

involved with modernism in the arts and a wide range of literature and poetry.<sup>8</sup>

Marcuse was a young student of 16 when World War I broke out in 1914, and he at first received a deferment because of poor eyesight. He noted in his “Lebenslauf” that:

After completing my final examination (*Reifeprüfung*), I entered Reserve Division 18 (*Train-Ers.-Abtg. 18*), but remained in the homeland on account of my poor eyesight and was transferred to the Zeppelin Reserves where I received permission and the opportunity to visit lectures. After my release in the Winter of 1918, I studied regularly for four semesters in Berlin and four semesters in Freiburg, first *Germanistik*, and then modern German literary history as my main subject (*Hauptfach*) and philosophy and political economy as subsidiaries (*Nebenfach*).<sup>9</sup>

Marcuse was transferred to Berlin early in 1918 where he observed and sympathized with the German revolution that drove Kaiser Wilhelm II out of Germany and established a Social Democratic government. By 1919 Marcuse’s brief period of political activity was over. He decided to return to his studies, interrupted by the war, and entered Humboldt University in Berlin where he took courses for the next four semesters in 1919–20. Marcuse was too young and inexperienced to pursue the career of a professional revolutionary, and gravitated naturally toward his former interests. After two years of study of traditional curricula in Berlin, he transferred to Freiburg, where he concentrated on German literature, and took courses in philosophy and political economy, his two minor fields. Here he carried out a systematic study of German literature, and wrote and defended his doctoral dissertation on *Der deutsche Künstlerroman* (*The German Artist Novel*), which was accepted in 1922.<sup>10</sup>

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8 On the basic facts of Marcuse’s youth see the “Lebenslauf” (biography) included in his doctoral dissertation reproduced in Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse*, p. 13.

9 Herbert Marcuse, “Lebenslauf,” cited in Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse*, p. 13.

10 Herbert Marcuse, *Der deutsche Künstlerroman*, in *Schriften Band I* (Springer: zu Klampen Verlag, 2004; reprint of the Suhrkamp Verlag edition, 1978–89). Before the Suhrkamp publication of his dissertation in *Schriften 1*, the only original copy of the text was in the library at the University of Freiburg. Leo Lowenthal told me that as far as he knew, Marcuse’s associates in the Institute for Social Research had never seen it and that Marcuse never really discussed it with them (conversation with Lowenthal, March 22, 1978, Berkeley, California). None of Marcuse’s friends in San Diego whom I interviewed in March 1978 knew anything about it. Hence, Marcuse’s dissertation, *Der deutsche Künstlerroman*, was a relatively unknown source of many of his later positions, although since its publication there have been several interpretations of it, somewhat conflicting. See Katz, *Herbert Marcuse*; Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse*; Reitz, *Art, Alienation, and the Humanities*; and Berthold Langerbein, *Roman und Revolte*.

Marcuse wrote his dissertation under the direction of Philip Witkop (1880–1942), a literature professor who had published articles on a wide range of German poetry and who himself was attracted to neo-romanticism and the aesthetic modernism of the Stefan George circle.<sup>11</sup> The method, structure, and themes of Marcuse's dissertation are heavily influenced by Hegel's aesthetics and the theory of hermeneutics developed by Wilhelm Dilthey.<sup>12</sup> Following the method of the cultural sciences dominant at the time, Marcuse situated German literature in the context of German history and, like Hegel, delineated a progression and development of literary forms emerging out of interaction and sometimes conflict with each other. Like Dilthey and the hermeneuticists, he attempted through "empathy" (*Einfühlung*) to identify with the artist or novel under investigation and to bring back to life the position and views therein.

*The German Artist Novel* contains a Hegelian structure and rhythm that prefigure Marcuse's later appropriation of Hegel's dialectical method: in each chapter, after sympathetically examining and portraying a type of artist novel and artistic life, Marcuse discloses the contradictions and deficiencies in the novels or writers under consideration. He then shows how the problems with various forms and types of the novel give rise to competing positions – which in turn contain their own contradictions and deficiencies and give rise to further developments. Marcuse especially valorizes the syntheses of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Gottfried Keller, and Thomas Mann for their ability to overcome the tensions and contradictions within the problematic of the German artist novel. Thus Marcuse's procedure is similar to Hegel's dialectic in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, even though there is no textual evidence in his dissertation that he had actually studied the *Phenomenology*.<sup>13</sup> In any case, Marcuse learned to think and write dialectically in his doctoral dissertation before he had fully appropriated materialist dialectics and an approach to culture that would situate it within the

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11 Marcuse cites Witkop's works throughout his dissertation. Henry Pachter remembers Witkop as a somewhat bohemian type, but rather academic, who loved neo-romantic literature (conversation in New York, December 30, 1979). Pachter also remembers that Witkop advised Jewish students not to seek academic careers because of anti-Semitism. This might explain, in part, why Marcuse did not seek an academic career immediately after receiving his Ph.D.

12 Marcuse's dissertation was part of the revival of Hegel in Germany, whose philosophy was used to criticize and provide an alternative to the neo-Kantian and other academic philosophies dominant in Germany at the time. The "cultural sciences" (*Geisteswissenschaften*) approach was developed by Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg Simmel, the early Lukács, and others (see note 32). On the Hegel revival of the 1920s, see Heinrich Levy, *Die Hegel-Renaissance in der deutschen Philosophie* (Charlottenburg: Heise, 1927).

13 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). On Hegel's dialectic in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, see Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980).

vicissitudes of the socioeconomic development and political struggles of the day.

Many of the themes and categories used in *The German Artist Novel*, as well as its Hegelian methodology, were influenced by Georg Lukács's *The Theory of the Novel* and his earlier work, *Soul and Form*.<sup>14</sup> Like Lukács in *Soul and Form*, Marcuse thematizes conflicts between demands of the ideal and the real, and between art and life. Following Lukács in *The Theory of the Novel*, Marcuse assumes an earlier state of harmony and reconciliation of artists and the surrounding world which, when sundered, produces an alienation of the individual that Lukács calls "transcendental homelessness."<sup>15</sup> He also follows Lukács in providing an historicized typology of the artist novel, utilizing many of Lukács's distinctions and categories while adopting his philosophico-historical approach.<sup>16</sup>

Marcuse begins his study by situating the artist novel within broader literary categories (see the translation of the "Introduction" in this volume, pp. 71ff.). Like Lukács, and following Hegel, Marcuse distinguishes between the novel and epic poetry, arguing that the epic "expresses the collective life of an entire people, while the novel expresses the alienation of the individual artist from social life" (*S1*, pp. 9ff.).<sup>17</sup> The novel articulates individual longing and striving for a higher, more authentic mode of existence.<sup>18</sup> The

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14 Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974) and *The Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971). Lukács's importance for Marcuse and other radicalized intellectuals of his generation can hardly be exaggerated. Leo Lowenthal told me in a conversation during March 1978 how he had memorized passages of *The Theory of the Novel*, stressing its importance for himself and the "inner circle" of the Frankfurt School. On Lukács's significance for critical Marxism, see the articles in *Telos* 10 (Winter 1971) and *Telos* 11 (Spring 1972), as well as the studies by Andrew Arato and Paul Breines, *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism* (New York: Seabury, 1979) and Andrew Feenberg, *Lukács, Marx, and the Sources of Critical Theory* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1981).

15 Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, pp. 41, *passim*. This experience of alienation and the need for its overcoming was a shared theme of existentialism and Western Marxism that was central to the work of Lukács, Heidegger, Marcuse, Sartre, and others.

16 Compare Marcuse, *S1*, pp. 9ff., and Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, pp. 29–69. Both are indebted to Part III of Hegel's aesthetics. In the text and notes, I abbreviate references to *The German Artist Novel* by referring to pagination in the 1978 volume of Herbert Marcuse, *Schriften*, as *S1*. Translations will be mine, although I will draw upon Charles Reitz's translation of the Introduction to the text in this volume.

17 Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, and G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (New York: Oxford, 1975).

18 The theme of an authentic existence would be one of the features of Heidegger's philosophy that would attract Marcuse. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), and my Ph.D. Dissertation *Heidegger's Concept of Authenticity*, Columbia University, 1973.

artist novel centers on characters who are torn between the artistic calling and the demands of everyday life. It presupposes a “prosaic reality” (Hegel) and a world lacking in meaning and harmony (*S1*, p. 10). The genre arises when the artist becomes possible as a distinct social type and when the life forms of the artist (*Künstlertum*) do not correspond with those of humanity (*Menschentum*). The artist hero

does not find fulfillment in the life-forms of his environment with all its limitations. His essence and longing cannot be contained in them and he stands alone against everyday reality . . . He somehow seeks a solution, a new unity, for his opposition is so powerful that he cannot stand it for very long without destroying his artistic being and his humanity.

(*S1*, p. 16)

The problem underlying the genre is therefore the alienation of the individual, and especially the artist, from bourgeois society, and the subsequent fragmentation of life and lack of a harmonious community. In Marcuse’s dramatic formulation, the artist novel constitutes “the struggle of the German people for a new society” (*S1*, p. 333).

Following standard interpretations, Marcuse assumes that Greek culture in the “age of epic poetry” (prior to the appearance of Socrates) was a harmonious totality “where life was itself art and mythology life, the public property of the people” (*S1*, p. 10).<sup>19</sup> Marcuse also postulates an heroic epoch at the origins of Germanic culture, where, in the integrated society of Norse warriors, “the perfect unity of art and life” spoke through the ancient bards (*S1*, p. 11).<sup>20</sup> The original unity is torn asunder with the collapse of feudal culture, the foundation of the bourgeois city, and the Thirty Years War. At this time, a historical epoch of division and conflict emerges in which the individual confronts a world “utterly devalued, impoverished, brutal and hostile which offers no fulfillment” (*S1*, p. 14).<sup>21</sup> Such an alienated world makes possible, however, “the eruption of self-conscious subjectivity” (*S1*, p. 13) and the yearning for the overcoming of alienation. The artist objectifies his feelings and strivings, and desires their realization in the world. This leads the artist to try to shape reality according to his ideals and to overcome artistic alienation (*S1*, p. 16) – or to seek refuge in a world of beautiful illusion (*S1*, p. 17).

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19 Compare Hegel, *Aesthetics*; Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967); and Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*.

20 Curiously, whereas Lukács, following Hegel, posits medieval Christendom as an integrated culture (*The Theory of the Novel*, pp. 37ff.), Marcuse chooses instead the Norse Viking culture, whose heroic deeds and ballads he praises in almost Nietzschean terms; see the translation in this volume, pp. 72ff.

21 Compare Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, pp. 40ff.

This notion of art previews later works such as *Eros and Civilization* and *The Aesthetic Dimension*, where Marcuse develops a theory of art as a revelation of utopian images of fulfillment and happiness that rejects an oppressive and alienated world. His dissertation also centers on analysis of the sources of alienation and ways of overcoming it through the quest for liberation and a harmonious community – themes that would later become central to Marcuse’s thought. There is anticipation too of his position in which alienated outsiders and the “Great Refusal” are important forces of opposition (see below). Marcuse writes that at the dawn of bourgeois society

traveling bands of theater folk and mimes, especially the young clerics and students, broke free from the “strict discipline of the cloister school and cell and charged out into a life of laughter, from one region to another . . .”(Winterfeld . . .). But this overconfident new wave got dashed on the permanence of chivalric and churchly obligations. It is true that the vagabond poets were welcomed here and there at courts and festivals, and some of them even enjoyed the protection of princes . . . but all in all they were exiles and outsiders, for whom there was no space in the surrounding world’s form of life. Too proud, too wild in their frenzy for freedom to ever seek compromise or stability, their lives evaporated into austere begging and continual wandering.

(see below, p. 75)

Here Marcuse reveals sympathy for non-integrated outsiders as harbingers of emancipation.<sup>22</sup> In his words:

From these wandering minstrels arose the first European artist types, who, in opposition to their society, cultivated their aesthetic sensibilities, while producing perhaps the first self-conscious artist whose vagrancy and opposition to the social environment was often seized and stressed as artistic necessity.

(S1, p. 13)

After setting out this critical-historical framework, Marcuse offers a series of detailed, often fascinating, interpretations of the historical development of the German artist novel.<sup>23</sup> He classifies the artist novels in terms of a distinction between the poles of the “realistic-objective” and the “subjective-romantic,” which in turn are related to the two main cultural tendencies of

22 The word “Befreiung” (liberation) appears throughout *The German Artist Novel* and is one of its main themes. Marcuse expresses great sympathy for “liberation movements” such as *Sturm und Drang*, literary Bohemia, romanticism, and other literary subcultures, previewing his later sympathy for the “new sensibility” (see below).

23 For those interested in German literature, I might note that Marcuse’s study contains chapters covering: “The Beginnings of the Artist Novel” in Moritz and Heine; Goethe; the early romantic artist novel (Brentano, E.T.A. Hoffmann and Eichendorff); the offspring of the romantic artist novel; the transformation of the artist novel into the social tendency novel; Gottfried Keller’s *Der grüne Heinrich*;



the time, a rationalistic Enlightenment and a subjectivistic pietism (*S1*, pp. 15ff.). His own writing style follows these two tendencies, moving from sober, objective discussion of the novels to poetic flights of romantic lyricism. The subjective-romantic current tends to submit empirical existence to aesthetic ideals that generally cannot be realized, and thus often leads to a rejection of everyday life for art. This position was initiated by *Sturm und Drang* writers like J.W. Heinse, and to some extent by Karl Philipp Moritz.<sup>24</sup> It was the position also of the romantics, French symbolism, and aesthetes of the “art for art’s sake” tendency (*l’art pour l’art*). The subjective-romantic orientation creates a “poeticized reality, a dreamlike world” in which there is perfect harmony, unity and beauty denied in everyday life.<sup>25</sup> The more objective-realistic tendency corresponds to later romantics like Brentano, E.T.A. Hoffman and Joseph von Eichendorff, as well as to the politicized writers of the Young Germany movement and social novel schools.<sup>26</sup> The “objective-realist” novel, at least in its politicized versions, contains a “demand for the radical restructuring of life-forms, which came to be formulated in practical terms as demands for social and political reform” (*S1*, pp. 174ff.).

Contrary to some interpretations, Marcuse’s *The German Artist Novel* should not be read as an affirmation of romanticism.<sup>27</sup> Throughout the book, there are critiques of romanticism, and Marcuse praises in particular

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the recent turning away from historical time in the artist novel; contemporary artist novels analyzed from the standpoint of the problem of art and life; and, in conclusion, a study of the artist novels of Thomas Mann.

- 24 On the *Sturm und Drang* movement and the cultural-historical background to the period, see Hans Kohn, *The Mind of Germany* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), and Jost Hermand, *Von Mainz nach Weimar* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1969).
- 25 Marcuse, *S1*, pp. 85ff. On romanticism, compare Lukács, “The Romantic Philosophy of Life,” *Soul and Form*, pp. 42ff.; Kohn, *The Mind of Germany*; and Hermand, *Von Mainz nach Weimar*.
- 26 Marcuse, *S1*, pp. 174ff. On the “Young Germany” movement, see Kohn, *The Mind of Germany*, and Hermand, *Von Mainz nach Weimar*.
- 27 Michael Lowy, for instance, suggests that Marcuse and Benjamin root their respective doctoral dissertations in German romanticism; see “Marcuse and Benjamin: The Romantic Dimension,” *Telos* 44 (Summer 1980), pp. 25–34. Lowy claims that what Benjamin and Marcuse have in common “is not so much Jewish messianism as German romanticism, with its nostalgia for pre-capitalist communities and its counter-posing of artistic *Kultur* to prosaic bourgeois society” (p. 25). Not only is there little nostalgia for pre-capitalist communities in Marcuse’s dissertation, but he does not counterpose “artistic *Kultur*” to “prosaic bourgeois society”; rather, as will be shown, he valorizes the integration of art and society. Moreover, Marcuse tends to be quite critical of romanticism and is more affirmative toward German “classicist” realist literature in his dissertation, singling out for praise Goethe, Keller, and Mann. Later, a synthesis between “romanticism” and “critical Marxism” will constitute a distinctive feature of Marcuse’s post-1955 work and he includes both “realist” and “romantic” works of art in his aesthetic pantheon of “authentic art” in his discussions of the aesthetic dimension from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Goethe, Gottfried Keller, and Thomas Mann for overcoming their early romanticism and reaching an accommodation with their respective societies while attaining an epic, objective-realist prose style. After describing the early work of Goethe, such as *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which was so typical of *Sturm und Drang* and so beloved by the romantics, Marcuse turns to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Theatralische Sendung* and *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, claiming that "the decisive progress over *Werther* is clear" (*S1*, p. 69). He then criticizes excessive romantic subjectivism and idealism:

Werther was trapped in his extreme subjectivism and absolute inwardness and could not transcend the split between idea and reality, self and world, and his only return to unity was through death, the extinction of empirical being. The Wilhelm Meister of the *Theatralische Sendung* has so far overcome the artistic subjectivism that he grasps full development in reality, in the environment, as necessary for the artist: from the bourgeois confines of his home city, from the inwardness of his youth, he travels with the theatre group from place to place, becomes acquainted with people and things, workers and nobility, factory and castle, village and city; in opposition to Jarno, he programmatically emphasizes his resolution to plunge into the rich life and to create out of its fullness.

(*S1*, pp. 69ff.)

Marcuse then discusses Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, where his hero progresses further toward overcoming artistic subjectivism and alienation through integrating himself into society and nature. Goethe's artist-hero experiences the "unity of art and nature" (*S1*, p. 71) and manages to overcome his artistic alienation through integrating himself into society and common humanity. For Wilhelm Meister, "the highest affirmation of life conditions the deepest personal resignation. In the ideal of 'Humanity' it finds its proper form: the world's limitations and inner laws are freely recognized. Henceforth, education (*Bildung*) enters in place of subjectivism (*Selbstigkeit*)" (*S1*, p. 72). Goethe affirms the classical concept of *Humanitas*, of shaping one's personality according to an ideal of humanity. This requires his artist-hero to integrate himself within society and everyday life to create a "harmonious personality" (*ibid.*), and demands "sacrifice and renunciation": the artist must renounce his one-sided obsession with art and overcome the opposition between artistic life and everyday life (*ibid.*).

Marcuse presents sympathetically Goethe's ideal of the integrated artist who attains a respectable profession within society and transcends all the conflicts between art and life by serving humanity (see *S1*, pp. 74–84). In this way Goethe resolves the problems of the artist novel and passes beyond its problematic to the *Bildungsroman* (the novel of education).<sup>28</sup> Throughout

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<sup>28</sup> Katz is mistaken to claim that for Marcuse the artist novel is a "sub-type of the German *Bildungsroman*, the novel of 'education' or 'inner development,' wherein a central character passes from innocence to mature self-consciousness as the story

the next chapters, Marcuse uses Goethe to criticize romanticism (*S1*, pp. 104, 111, 119, *passim*) and tendencies that returned to the problematic of the artist novel and championed art over life, the artist over common humanity. Throughout the study, Marcuse criticizes romantic idealist fantasies, ineffectual strivings, and the various failures of romantic artists. He criticizes the romantic tendency to withdraw from everyday reality and to create ideal fantasy worlds, as well as the romantic belief that the artist is the highest form of human reality. He praises the efforts of late romantics to return to history and everyday life:

Brentano, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Eichendorff and Arnim share the knowledge that the artist can find no fulfillment through pure devotion to an ideal world. Besides the yearning for the ideal, there enters a yearning for life, for reality . . . real life has again become a value: in it the artist again sees meaning and goals.

(*S1*, p. 122)

Whereas Brentano and E.T.A. Hoffmann were not able to overcome their artistic alienation and find a home in the world, Marcuse believes that Eichendorff and Arnim did find reconciliation with everyday life, which made possible an “overflowing affirmation of life” and the full development of their personalities (*S1*, p. 144).

In Marcuse’s view, “the brightest affirmation of life, the restoration and recovery of reality, the rooting of the artist in an immediate and present this-sidedness (*Diesseitigkeit*) . . . finds its fulfillment in Gottfried Keller” (*S1*, p. 210), whose novel *Der grüne Heinrich* Marcuse believes is the greatest German artist novel.<sup>29</sup>

*Der grüne Heinrich* emerges as the genuine antipode to the subjective and romantic artist novel: in opposition to the great symbol of romanticism he posits a new realism closely connected with the philosophy of Feuerbach who opposes romanticism and German idealism . . . A clear sunshine and the brilliance of a warm summer day radiates over the people in the novel.

(*S1*, p. 210)

Keller’s “sensuous pantheism” obtains a unity of art and life and integrates the artist into “a common and ordered form of life” (*S1*, p. 211). Marcuse traces Keller’s development toward a peaceful and happy accommodation

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unfolds.” See “New Sources of Marcuse’s Aesthetics” in *New German Critique* 17 (Spring 1979), p. 177. In fact, Marcuse contrasts the *Künstlerroman* and *Bildungsroman* throughout his dissertation, arguing that the *Bildungsroman* represents an overcoming of the problematic of the *Künstlerroman* and is thus a distinctive type of novel different than the *Bildungsroman*. See *S1*, pp. 12, 50, 75–8, 83–4, 217 and 230–1. On the *Bildungsroman*, see Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*.

29 Marcuse told me in an interview in March 1978 that Keller’s *Der grüne Heinrich* was his favorite artist novel.

with his environment and the development of an epic-realist prose style that celebrates life in its totality. He defends Keller against charges that he ends up with a conservative celebration of bourgeois forms of life: "The bourgeois life of Heinrich is only a symbol for the epic renunciation and integration and in no way is the unconditional recognition that the behavior and values of a single social group (*eines Standes*) be accorded normative validity" (*S1*, p. 230). In fact, the peace, harmony, affirmation, and celebration of life in Keller's novel anticipates Marcuse's later defense of hedonism and the social ideal of reconciliation and harmony.

Although Marcuse enthusiastically projects an ideal of the merging of art and life and overcoming alienation through integration into a harmonious community, he is aware that the development of bourgeois society created new forms of alienation which were reflected in the artist novel. In his dissertation, he often discusses artistic revolts as conscious rejections of bourgeois society and capitalism that were destroying previous forms of life and were generating new obstacles to overcoming artistic alienation. For example, he writes:

The revolution of 1830, in which the romantics proclaim the complete liberation of the artistic subjectivity, the capturing of beautiful reality, was followed very soon after by an absolute disenchantment. The bourgeoisie had taken over social leadership and a narrow, business-oriented, money-grubbing bourgeois society, totally concerned with practical interests, became entangled in a dry materialism. A rapid technification and industrialization of the spiritual and economic life begins; in this period, there was a powerful rise of the press . . . and the penetration of the business-principle in literature.

(*S1*, p. 248)

Marcuse sees social change prefigured in artistic subcultures and in the productions of artists and intellectuals. For example, in a section discussing the effects of the French revolutions of 1830 and 1848 on literature, Marcuse points to the anticipation of these revolutions in the French "bohemian" subculture and utopian socialism (*S1*, pp. 174ff.). He describes the French bohemian literary circle as "the first attempt to carry through an authentic artistic form-of-life" and praises Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Enfantin for creating "great systems for a new social order" (*S1*, p. 179). In a passage prefiguring his own later political position, Marcuse writes: "Far beyond the economic meaning of these systems, one saw in them a way to total revolutionizing of the fragmented forms of life, a revolutionizing that was a burning longing, a so bitter necessity for groups" (*S1*, pp. 179–80). Marcuse then describes the effects of the July 1830 revolution:

The French upheaval was the decisive experience for the young German artistic generation: the first great attempt was made to transform the forms-of-life. There arose an incandescent longing of the oppressed youth to carry through this transformation in practice, directly on the grounds of the current reality; yes, to fight with weapons in their hands.

(*S1*, p. 180)

In this situation, “art was placed in the service of life, admitted to the tendencies of the day; the artist became a man of practice, a political and social fighter” (S1, p. 181).

Marcuse describes enthusiastically the writers in the Young Germany movement who hoped to serve as “the arouzers of the people,” with “a call to struggle for necessary social transformation” (S1, p. 183). For them, “art itself became a weapon, it would be a service to the revolutionary tendencies” (S1, p. 183). The revolution of 1830 soon gave way to reaction on a European scale and a new “technical age” began: “The powerful boom of commerce, of industry and technology, the conquests of natural science and economics led to an almost undisputed triumph of practical-material interests, which soon dominated the entirety of life” (S1, p. 193). But industrial society also gave birth to the proletariat and socialism, and to a new wave of revolutions in 1848 that “appeared to open a new way” (S1, p. 195). Now

the people were awake, they had arisen – from them it appeared that something new should originate. Now the artists believed that they had found cohorts of struggle and attained union: they entered the side of the revolutionary people, accompanied their striving and suffering, participated in their attacks on the old forms of life.

(S1, p. 195)

These struggles too went down in defeat, and the artistic avant-garde suffered disappointment and new alienation.

Artistic responses to the triumph of capitalist industrialization and the bourgeoisie included the development of the doctrine of “art for art’s sake” (*l’art pour l’art*) and artistic subcultures that again championed art over life, the artist over the bourgeois. The young Marcuse presents with great penetration literary bohemia, Flaubert, Zola, and the French religion of art. He examines a series of novels in which artists renounce everything for the pursuit of their artistic calling and emphasizes the suffering, misery, and frequent collapse of these would-be artists. In so doing, he presents a strong critique of the “aesthete” as a social type and the “art-for-art’s-sake” ideology. He claims that in the “dandyism” of Oscar Wilde, in the pursuit of sensual pleasures in Huysmans’s *Against Nature*, and in the aestheticism of various other French and Italian writers, “something always remains unfulfilled: their humanity” (S1, p. 294). Marcuse comments:

those who seek only aesthetic charms . . . who are forced to become constantly conscious spectators of their own life can never step out of their own egocentricity (“I can only talk of myself” says Stelio Effrena in *Fire!*). For them, every human activity and togetherness is prohibited. They can only live as “artist,” as “creators of beautiful things” (Oscar Wilde). . . . Life only has meaning and value when it is seen through the medium of art, is transformed into art.

(S1, p. 294)

Marcuse portrays critically the “hysterical amorality” that emerges in this aesthetic ideal and highlights the tragedies of the artists in Flaubert, Zola, Ibsen, and others who try to live out such ideals. Thus, contrary to some who accuse him of aestheticism, he is critical of aesthetic escapism from his first major work. Indeed, it is striking that in every chapter of his doctoral dissertation one finds previews of his later ideas. His writing on *Sturm und Drang* and Goethe praises the emancipatory aspects of “the feeling for nature” and “experience of love” (*S1*, pp. 42ff.). In his discussion of the French bohemian culture he quotes Gautier in an interesting anticipation of his later philosophical hedonism:

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

(*S1*, p. 179)

While Marcuse is sympathetic toward the aesthetics of German idealism, he also indicates attachments to the classics of realism and the materialism of Feuerbach (*S1*, pp. 210, 214).<sup>30</sup> His colorful portrayals of the artist’s quest for community prefigure his later concept of a nonrepressive civilization in *Eros and Civilization* and his defense of utopian socialism in the 1960s. His presentation of the demand that ideas should shape reality previews his later appropriation of Hegel’s idealism and dialectics in his book *Reason and Revolution*.<sup>31</sup> The romantic demand for a “Kingdom of Beauty and Love” (*S1*, pp. 87ff.) anticipates his emphasis on the importance of the aesthetic-erotic dimension for an emancipated existence.

Marcuse’s illuminating portrayal of the variety of artistic tendencies, types of novels and writers is in part a result of his use of the method of “empathy” (*Einfühlung*) practiced by Wilhelm Dilthey and others in the German

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30 Marcuse cites Feuerbach’s influence on Gottfried Keller, claiming that Feuerbach’s materialism liberated Keller from his previous religious views and that, thanks in part to Feuerbach, henceforth Keller possessed a “glowing and powerful earthiness (*Diesseitigkeit*) which saw in the living reality the singular, the highest and the most beautiful, recognizing irreplaceable value in every single being . . . seizing everything past and present in its wonder-full (*wundervollen*) necessity” (*S1*, p. 214). Later Marcuse would stress Feuerbach’s importance for Marx.

31 Compare *S1*, pp. 87ff. with Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941). In both texts, Marcuse describes attempts to restructure reality according to higher ideals and to transform into reality the ideals of the Enlightenment and progressive philosophy. In his dissertation Marcuse notes elements in the philosophies of Kant and Fichte that emphasize the ability to constitute the world and praises the French Revolution as an attempt to realize the ideals of progressive philosophies. In *Reason and Revolution*, Marcuse discusses the philosophy of Hegel and German idealism as philosophical expression of the ideals of the French Revolution.

hermeneutical and “cultural history” traditions.<sup>32</sup> Through empathy with each novelist, type of novel, and the novel itself, the hermeneutical cultural historian presents the artist novels, for instance, not merely as a typology of artistic forms but also as forms-of-life, ways of living. Marcuse seems to identify with each artistic form or way of life in turn, almost as if he himself were debating which course of life he should follow. Should he escape from mundane everyday life for a life of cultivated pleasures, as did certain *Sturm und Drang* and romantic writers whom he discusses? Or should he turn from illusory aesthetic concerns to practical everyday affairs and come to terms with everyday life? Should he devote himself to the vocation of revolution? Or should he try to attain a balance between art, everyday life, and politics, as did Goethe, Keller, and Mann? I suspect that Marcuse was himself debating these options, which helps explain the remarkable sympathy that he seemed to have for every artistic type examined. In fact, to various degrees, Marcuse would himself live out these different, and conflicting, options in the 1920s and later decades. Hence, I would suggest that the most interesting aspects of Marcuse’s dissertation result both from his having mastered the *Einfühlung* method of the German cultural sciences and from his personal involvement in the project.

The final chapter on Thomas Mann ends his study on a note of ambiguity that I think reveals some of the contradictions in Marcuse’s own situation and his attitude toward his class and bourgeois society. Although Marcuse seems to sympathize both with the alienated artists who oppose a cold, heartless world and with those artists who are able to find sustenance and support in their environment, he concludes by acknowledging the possibility of reconciliation of the artistic life with bourgeois society, as was accomplished by some of the characters in Thomas Mann’s novels – and as Mann himself seemed to achieve and advocate during the period in which Marcuse was writing his dissertation. Accommodation with the bourgeois world is possible, Mann suggests, through pursuing writing as a bourgeois profession, exemplifying the values of conscientiousness, professionalism, and creativity (*S1*, pp. 322ff.).<sup>33</sup> If the writer can become an educator and ethical force within bourgeois society, he has overcome his alienation and is once more an integrated member of society. Then he can quell his “demonic Eros” and “Dionysian powers” and can fit into everyday life (*S1*, pp. 3, 26ff.).

32 See Wilhelm Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*; the enlarged second edition (Leipzig, 1907) is cited by Marcuse. On Dilthey and his method, see Rudolf A. Makkreel, *Dilthey, Philosopher of the Human Studies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), and the discussion in Reitz, *Art, Alienation, and the Humanities*. See also Lukács’s discussion of the “cultural sciences” methodology in his 1962 preface to *Theory of the Novel*, pp. 11ff.

33 Marcuse draws on Lukács’s discussion of “The Bourgeois Way of Life and Art for Art’s Sake,” in *Soul and Form*, pp. 58ff., as well as on Thomas Mann’s *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, Berlin 1918, and other sociopolitical writings.

Hence, it appears that Mann has solved the essential problem of the artist novel and has brought it to conclusion: “the artistic existence and bourgeois society are no longer two life-forms, two essentially opposed unities, but the artist is integrated into the bourgeois world, art and life are united, with the result that the problematic of the artist novel is no longer acute” (S1, p. 329).

Marcuse’s discussion of Mann’s *Death in Venice* foreshadows his later attraction to the Freudian instinct theory and shows the precariousness of Thomas Mann’s solution to the problems of the artist novel. In the beginning of *Death in Venice*, Mann’s artist hero Gustav von Aschenbach is exemplary of the ideal of the artist who is both integrated in bourgeois society as a professional writer and educator, and who overcomes romantic, subjectivist, and anti-bourgeois tendencies to become an “objective, bourgeois artist” (S1, p. 325). Von Aschenbach’s achievement is a result of moral rigor, a constant struggle to overcome romanticism, lyricism, cynicism, irony, and other traits of the conscious artistic personality. Von Aschenbach struggles for objective form in his work and for stability and order in his life. He succeeds in his quest and is a well-integrated member of bourgeois society who is officially recognized as a great artist and educator. Von Aschenbach, however, succumbs to demonic drives from within which force him to flee his quiet artistic residence and to travel, eventually to Venice. There he succumbs further to “Dionysian powers” and temptations, and pursuing an overpowering attraction for a beautiful young Polish boy, he collapses.

Following Mann’s novel, Marcuse describes how von Aschenbach falls prey to destructive erotic forces that break through his bourgeois exterior and throw him into a whirlpool of passion that shatters his carefully constructed persona and morality. Marcuse’s description of these “dark primordial powers” anticipates his appropriation of Freud’s instinct theory: “incorrigible, innate, nature – they designate a sphere that is beyond the resolution of the will” and that is both creative and destructive (S1, pp. 327ff.). While von Aschenbach’s inability to master these instinctual forces seems to put in question the viability of Mann’s ideal of the integration of the artist in bourgeois society, Marcuse seems to think that *Death in Venice* represents a catharsis for Mann: he was able thereby to free himself from the demonic powers and artistic alienation so often portrayed in his early work and was able to attain in *Death in Venice* “objective epic” style that achieved a “Homeric mania and beauty” (S1, pp. 328–9). In Marcuse’s reading,

*Death in Venice* is the as yet final exorcism (*Beschwörung*) of the darkness, the discord, the abyss: what now follows is completely the product of the new integration and rootedness. From the feeling of ethical and social responsibility and posture, Mann wrote *Friedrich and the Great Coalition* (1914) and *Reflections of an Unpolitical Person* (1918), as well as the idylls “Man and Dog” and “Kindchen’s Song” (1917) which are the purest emanation of the “reborn spontaneity” (“*wiedergeborene Unbefangenheit*”): a thankful,



conscious, self-immersion in the simplest appearances of the newly won life, in the happiness and peace of community. The artist has returned to bourgeois life, is connected to life anew. The struggle that the artist novel has fought since the *l'art pour l'art* period is once again brought together in Thomas Mann's work: the sacrificial artistry of *l'art pour l'art*, the artistic life of knowledge and striving, aestheticism – and at the end stands a victory, an overcoming.

(S1, p. 329)

Just as it appears that Thomas Mann emerges as the hero of his long study, Marcuse raises some perplexing questions: “The question must be posed: is this victory, this overcoming, rooted in that pure epic world-feeling which alone can reveal in the artist novel the totality and unity of things? Can it bring about the inner resolution of oppositions?” (S1, p. 329). Marcuse comments:

The epical basic-experience of the harmony and beauty of the world, of the necessity and appropriateness of everything, even the smallest appearances, of the supra-individual interconnectedness of all that is essential, the loving affirmation and grasp of Being: that is an eternal fundamental experience (*ewiges Urerlebnis*) that transcends all temporal and spatial conditions, that is bound to no determinate form-of-life, that is given as a possibility to all and everyone. But the living and artistic working out of this experience – the epical life and shaping of art – demands always and everywhere a presupposition: the presence of an organic and meaningful (*sinnhaltig*) form-of-life, unified and carrying its own values – a “community” (*Gemeinschaft*) in the most extreme and deepest sense. It alone is the solid and fruitful ground out of which the great epics arose, in which the resigned (*entsagend*) artist can perform a proper and fulfilling adjustment (*Einordnung*).

(S1, pp. 329–30)

Goethe found such a community in the rococo society of Weimar, and Keller found it in the Swiss democratic city-state, but what about Mann? Marcuse suggests that the bourgeois society of Mann's novels is too individualistic, egotistical, and limited (S1, pp. 330–1). Hence, although he ends his chapter on Mann with renewed praise, he concludes the study by remarking: “for the German artist novel, the community is not something given, but given up and something to strive for (*etwas Aufgegebenes*). Beyond the literary historical problem, a piece of human history is visible: the struggle of the German people for a new community” (S1, p. 333).

Since the term *etwas Aufgegebenes* signifies both “something given up” and “something to strive for,” the implication is that a community does not yet exist to which artistic individuals can freely give themselves, but remains something to be striven for, a task yet to be accomplished. Thus, it seems that Marcuse does not acquiesce in Mann's resignation and acceptance of bourgeois society. However, his sympathetic portrayal of Mann presents ambivalences in his own situation, and suggests that he was attracted to Mann's solution. It also shows that his ideal society – later sketched out in *Eros and Civilization* and subsequent writings and anticipated in his doctoral

dissertation – was something still to be fought for and won. Such a utopian ideal would make accommodation with bourgeois society impossible and indeed, in his first published essays, Marcuse would call for its overthrow and would turn toward Marxism and support socialist revolution.<sup>34</sup>

Lukács's self-criticism in his 1962 preface to *The Theory of the Novel* can be applied to Marcuse's *The German Artist Novel*.<sup>35</sup> Their overly literary histories were both too far removed from the socioeconomic context. Although, as I have noted, Marcuse often provides discussions of social history and its effect on literature, his analysis is sketchy, and does not provide sufficient mediation of the literature, society, and politics of the period. Hence, he provides no systematic social history of the German artist novel and no detailed account of the rise of capitalism and its impact on society and culture beyond the brief sketch cited. In sum, Marcuse has yet to appropriate Marxian historical materialism and ideology critique, or to develop his specific mode of critical social theory in his work with the Institute for Social Research. Thus his early studies of literature in his doctoral dissertation do not transcend the bounds of the German cultural school.

### THE 1930S: TOWARD A CRITICAL THEORY OF CULTURE

*It is not the primitive, materialistic element of the idea of fools' paradise that is false, but its perpetuation. As long as the world is mutable there will be enough conflict, sorrow, and suffering to destroy the idyllic picture. As long as there is a realm of necessity, there will be enough need. Even a nonaffirmative culture will be burdened with mutability and necessity: dancing on the volcano, laughter in sorrow, flirtation with death. As long as this is true, the reproduction of life will still involve the reproduction of culture: the molding of unfilled longings and the purification of unfulfilled instincts.*

(Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture," see below p. 112)

In 1922 Marcuse returned to Berlin and worked for several years in an antiquarian book-dealer and publishing firm. He lived at the time in an apartment in Charlottenburg with his wife Sophie, a former student of mathematics and statistics whom he met in Freiburg and married in 1924. His father had survived the economic crisis of 1923 through good

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34 See Marcuse's first published essay, "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism," retranslated and collected in Herbert Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism*, ed. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), pp. 1–33.

35 See Lukács, "Preface," *The Theory of the Novel*, pp. 12ff.

property investments and helped Marcuse buy a partnership in the firm of the book dealer and publisher, S. Martin Fraenkel, where he worked primarily as a catalogue researcher and bibliographer. Here he prepared his first publication, a Schiller bibliography which appeared in 1925 and which Marcuse insists was “just a job” and “unimportant” for his intellectual development.<sup>36</sup> In it, he updated the standard Schiller bibliographies with sparsely annotated factual notes on the various Schiller texts and editions. Marcuse later claimed that it was not until he was working on *Eros and Civilization* that Schiller took on a crucial importance for him, but I suspect that his early literary studies influenced him deeply and returned to play a decisive role in his later work. Then, in Marcuse’s words,

I read *Sein und Zeit* when it came out in 1927 and after having read it, I decided to go back to Freiburg (where I had received my Ph.D. in 1922) in order to work with Heidegger. I stayed in Freiburg and worked with Heidegger until December 1932, when I left Germany a few days before Hitler’s ascent to power.<sup>37</sup>

For the next several years Marcuse studied philosophy in Freiburg and published his first essays that attempted to mediate the type of phenomenological existentialism associated with the early Heidegger with Marx’s historical materialism, the *Lebensphilosophie* and cultural sciences associated with Dilthey and other philosophical currents of the day.<sup>38</sup> As the National Socialist Party in Germany relentlessly rose to power, Heidegger affiliated himself with Nazism, and Marcuse’s possibilities of an academic career in Germany started to diminish. Marcuse then joined the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (Institute for Social Research) in Frankfurt, just as this group, largely German Jews and radicals, resolved to leave Germany.<sup>39</sup>

Marcuse, his wife Sophie, and son Peter left Germany in the summer of 1934 and he began work with the Institute for Social Research which had just become affiliated with Columbia University in New York. Marcuse soon was deeply involved in their interdisciplinary projects which included working out a model for radical philosophy and social theory, developing a

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36 Herbert Marcuse, *Schiller-Bibliographie unter Benutzung der Trämelschen Schiller-Bibliothek* (Berlin: S. Martin Fraenkel, 1925). Marcuse expressed his evaluation of the Schiller bibliography to me as “just a job” in an interview on March 26, 1978 in San Francisco, California.

37 “Heidegger’s Politics: An Interview with Herbert Marcuse by Frederick Olafson,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 6, 1 (Winter 1977), p. 28.

38 See Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse*, Chapters 1 and 2, on Marcuse’s work in philosophy during this period. In Volume Five of the *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation*, we will engage systematically Marcuse’s philosophical studies with Heidegger and the development of his philosophy.

39 See Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse*, Chapter 3, and Kellner, Introduction, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*.

theory of the new stage of state and monopoly capitalism, and providing a systematic analysis and critique of German fascism. Marcuse identified with the “Critical Theory” of the Institute and throughout his life maintained close but sometimes conflicted ties to Max Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, Leo Lowenthal, and others in the Institute’s inner circle.

Marcuse worked intensely during the 1930s and early 1940s on Institute projects. Engaged with the Institute in developing a critical theory of contemporary society, and focusing on culture and ideology, Marcuse undertook to develop a critical theory of art and aesthetics, a project that he would continue to pursue in different historical contexts. The critique of ideology was an important component of the Institute’s work and they began in the 1930s to examine how bourgeois culture helped to reproduce, legitimate, and cover over the social relations of capitalism.<sup>40</sup> Critical theory contextualizes phenomena in terms of a specific historical situation and at the time the Institute was developing a critical theory of bourgeois-capitalist society in its transition to fascism. Accordingly, Marcuse set out to develop a theory of bourgeois culture that would reveal how it helped serve ideological mystifying functions for the bourgeoisie by reproducing the social relations of industrial capitalism. Further, he set out to show how aspects of bourgeois culture helped prepare the way for fascism and had certain continuities with fascist culture, as well as differences.

Thus one aspect of a critical theory of art is to delineate how it serves to advance oppression and domination. But for Marcuse, a critical theory also depicts the positive emancipatory and utopian features of cultural phenomena that can advance the cause of human liberation, helping to create a freer and happier life. Accordingly, Marcuse also explicated the utopian and emancipatory features of bourgeois culture that could help create a better society and thus serve the interests of emancipation and radical social transformation – a project that Marcuse would be committed to for decades to come.

A critical theory of art is thus a dialectical one, criticizing negative features and articulating positive ones. It analyzes art within specific social formations and develops utopian notions of art and liberation that show art can have emancipatory potential and effects within specific social conjunctures. Accordingly, Marcuse’s key analyses of art articulate defining and constitutive contradictions, ambiguities, and ambivalences of art; thus it is a mistake to read him as an idealist aestheticist or reductive ontologist of art for he always

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40 On the Institute for Social Research’s analysis of fascism and program of social research, see *Technology, War and Fascism*; on their project of developing a critical theory of society, see *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*; for an overview of the theoretical position of the Institute for Social Research, sometimes referred to as the Frankfurt School, see Douglas Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity* (Cambridge, UK and Baltimore, Md.: Polity Press and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

historicizes his analyses and stresses contradictions and ambivalences. For example, Marcuse's 1937 study "The Affirmative Character of Culture" focused on the dialectics of Western art in particular during the era of German fascism; later he would reflect on the potentials of art and the aesthetic dimension, first in the context of a repressive conformist society in the U.S. in the 1950s and early 1960s, and then in the context of world revolution in the later 1960s and 1970s followed by a global counterrevolution and a retreat of the Left. "The Affirmative Character of Culture" first appeared in German as "Über den affirmativen charakter der kultur," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 6, 1 (Paris: 1937), pp. 54–94 and the essay is in this volume, pp. 82ff.

Marcuse's reflections on art, however utopian, are grounded in very specific historical environments and are part of a critical theory of society, providing analysis of a given society and aiming at radical social transformation. Thus, Marcuse's reflections on art are grounded in critical social theory and politics, and while art is a quasi-autonomous dimension for him, it is deeply involved in the vicissitudes of society and history. Consequently, I disagree with Katz, Lukes, Reitz, and others who claim that Marcuse has a transcendental ontology of art, since reflections on art and aesthetics for Marcuse from the time of his work with the Institute for Social Research in the 1930s are always bound up with a specific historical conjuncture and imbricated in critical social theory and radical politics.<sup>41</sup>

Katz goes wrong in reading the moment of transcendental ontology in Marcuse's texts in his work with Heidegger (1927–33) into, first, his earlier doctoral dissertation and, then, his later aesthetics.<sup>42</sup> Lukes goes wrong by failing to situate Marcuse's work as a whole within the problematic of Marxism and critical theory, while Reitz correctly grounds much of Marcuse's work in his Marxism and critical theory, but argues that there are moments of an idealist aesthetics and ontology of art in contradiction to Marcuse's more sociological and political takes on art.<sup>43</sup> It is true that particularly Marcuse's later aesthetic argues for the universality and permanence of art, and ontological reflections are often part of Marcuse's theorizing, encompassing some of his reflections on art. But properly contextualized and

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41 In a late interview with Larry Hartwick, included in this volume (pp. 218ff.), Marcuse explicitly denies that his analysis is transcendental, claiming his analysis of art is transhistorical:

Transhistorical means transcending every and any *particular* stage of the historical process, but not transcending the historical process as a whole. That should be evident, because we cannot think of anything under the sun that could transcend the historical process as a whole. Everything is in history, even nature.

(p. 219)

42 Katz, *Herbert Marcuse: Art of Liberation*.

43 Lukes, *The Flight into Inwardness*; Reitz, *Art, Alienation, and the Humanities*.

interpreted, one sees that even his more apparently idealistic and ontological positions emerge in the context of his critical theory of society and project of revolutionary social transformation and thus should be read and interpreted in this context.

The idealist, utopian, and ontological moments of Marcuse's analysis should thus be read in the framework of the critical theory of society that informed his work from the 1930s until his death. Interestingly, in his first major publication on art and culture in his work with Institute for Social Research, Marcuse focuses on the ideological and mystifying aspects of art in the contemporary era, although he also pointed to its utopian potential. "The Affirmative Character of Culture" is one of Marcuse's enduring theoretical masterpieces and is of immense importance for what would emerge as his dialectical cultural theory. Densely written and tightly argued, it radiates with illuminating ideas and is a paradigm of dialectical thought, moving deftly from disclosing ideological aspects of culture to their emancipatory dimensions, and then articulating fundamental aspects of culture during the bourgeois and emerging fascist era. Divided into three sections, the first moves from the continuities in the concept of culture between the Greeks and modern Europeans, and then explicates the negative and positive features of bourgeois culture. The concluding section deals with the transition from bourgeois culture to fascism and continuities in the function of culture between the two social orders, despite fundamental cultural differences and values.

Although Marcuse conceived his critique of European culture in a period when he focused on doing a critique of ideology and was in particular centering on the continuities between bourgeois culture and politics and German fascism, nonetheless this seminal essay articulates the dual character of art as containing both affirmative and ideological dimensions as well as oppositional and utopian possibilities, a position to which he would steadily adhere.

"The Affirmative Character of Culture" opens with a detailed examination of how classical Greek culture developed a hierarchical dualism between mind and body, reality and appearance, and the beautiful and the useful. In this optic, beauty and reality were located in a higher realm separated from everyday life and open only to a privileged elite. Bourgeois culture, Marcuse suggests, maintains a separation from everyday life, but opens the realm of higher values to all, so that anyone can potentially transcend the material realm for the values affirmed as superior and transcendent.

The concept of "affirmative culture" for Marcuse refers to the culture of the bourgeois epoch. Affirmative culture projected its spiritual realm as a higher, more sublime, and valuable realm than the everyday world and claimed its values were crucial to the individual's well-being. The bourgeois era thus follows the Greeks in separating "culture" from the everyday world and in affirming a superior realm of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, where one could find the most stable and lasting happiness. But for Marcuse, in the bourgeois

era, affirmative culture became an ideology whereby the values of culture became allegedly accessible to each individual, offering a "realm of apparent unity and apparent freedom in which the antagonistic relations of existence were supposed to be stabilized and pacified. Culture affirms and conceals the new conditions of social life" (p. 88 below).

For Marcuse, affirmative culture thus helps stabilize and preserve bourgeois society and its system of production. The affirmative culture serves an escapist function by allowing the individual to transcend the toil and tribulations of the everyday world and attain a higher spiritual realm that provides a refuge from the suffering and uncertainty of everyday life. Moreover, affirmative culture provides a veil that covers social antagonisms and contradictions. It has a mystifying function that transfigures existence by overcoming suffering through entry into a sublime world of art. This mystification of social conditions and misery is systematically carried out in bourgeois society through "cultural education." By participating in the world of art, the individual is to assimilate ideal values and to create an inner harmony undisturbed by the turmoil of existence. Bourgeois culture thus demands a new type of personality, the "beautiful soul," as opposed to the universal man of the Renaissance who sought happiness in worldly action, in gaining power, and in achieving worldly success and sensual experience. In contrast, the spiritualized personality of bourgeois culture seeks ideal values in an ethical personality (Kant), aesthetic sensibility (German idealism), and the higher spiritual salvation that renounces worldly happiness by seeking solace in a more refined spiritual world.

Marcuse thus claims that bourgeois society's affirmative culture contains both repressive and compensatory functions. Escape into a world of ideal beauty represses both the individual's claim for happiness and the instinctual need for sensual gratification. Affirmative culture contains a hierarchical ordering of body and soul in which the body is held to be the inferior part of the human being and to be dominated by the soul. Since release of sensuality would be subversive of the demands of the capitalist economy for a disciplined, hard-working labor force, bourgeois society condemns sensuality, either subjecting it to the domination of reason, or directing the soul to sublimate sensuality into bourgeois love, which is to be refined, exclusive, and monogamous. Bourgeois society offers some compensation for instinctual renunciation and toil through the tranquilizing balm of its culture, which idealizes love and provides escape into a higher spiritual world. But this spiritualized culture "uses the soul as a protest against reification only to succumb to it in the end." For bourgeois culture isolates individuals in their cultivated subjectivity, and it submits them to the domination of the repressive powers that rule the existing society.

Although bourgeois culture mystifies social reality and induces the individual to escape from the problems of social existence into the space of subjectivity, it nonetheless preserves a sphere of individuality and freedom where the individual could find some degree of liberation. Longings for

a happier life – “for humanity, goodness, joy, truth, and solidarity” (p. 100 below) – were preserved in the realm of culture. For Marcuse, “only in art has bourgeois society tolerated its own ideals and taken them seriously as a general demand. What counts as utopia, phantasy, and rebellion in the world of fact is allowed in art” (ibid.). In fascinating anticipations of his later aesthetic theory, Marcuse claims that in the medium of beauty, possibilities of sensual happiness are expressed, although bodily pleasure is sublimated into aesthetic contemplation. Yet certain social strata, pushed to the margins of society, in which the “artistry of the beautiful body, its effortless agility and relaxation, which can be displayed today only in the circus, vaudeville, and burlesque” are able to exhibit the body as an object of pleasure, anticipating “the joy to which humans will attain in being liberated from the ideal, once humanity, having become a true subject, succeeds in the mastery of matter” (p. 101 below). Anticipating key positions articulated in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse cites Schiller’s notion of aesthetic education and his position that the “‘political problem’ of a better organization of society ‘must take the path through the aesthetic realm, because it is through beauty that one arrives at freedom’” (p. 102 below).

Yet in affirmative culture, freedom and happiness were to be achieved in an ideal world of culture separated from the deprivations and suffering of everyday life. Furthermore, Marcuse claimed that the new situation of monopoly capitalism and its product, the fascist state, could not even tolerate this sphere of private life that was a source of potential opposition and subversion. The labor process demanded increased discipline and regimentation, and required “‘total mobilization,’ through which the individual must be subjected in all spheres of existence to the discipline of the authoritarian state” (p. 107 below). Further, the fascist ideology had its own “ideal values” of heroism, self-sacrifice, poverty, and submission, as well as its notion of the people (*das Volk*), race, blood, and soil, and militarist-heroic values that could not tolerate any competition from the idealist-humanist bourgeois culture.

Thus the requirements of the capitalist labor system and the totalitarian state demanded an abolition of the individualistic, humanistic elements in bourgeois culture that were potentially oppositional. Although some elements of bourgeois culture are sacrificed, culture is still “to provide a new defense for old forms of existence. The basic function of culture remains the same” (p. 107 below); i.e. bourgeois culture and fascist culture both serve to preserve capitalist social relations and the existing class order. Both make the same demand on the individual: “renunciation and subjection to the status quo, made bearable by the real appearance of gratification” (p. 107 below). Bourgeois culture offers, Marcuse claims, the pleasures of its internal, spiritual values, while fascist culture offers the gratification of its external values of participation in “folk-culture,” sacrifice for the nation, heroic duty, parades, youth camps, and mobilizations. Moreover, Marcuse believes that bourgeois culture helped prepare the way for its own abolition



in fascist society by teaching submission and deflecting individuals from demanding material well-being and social change: "That individuals freed for over four hundred years march with so little trouble in the communal columns of the authoritarian state is due in no small measure to affirmative culture" (ibid.).

In his critique of bourgeois and fascist culture, Marcuse defends mind and reason over romantic "soul culture," arguing that "idealist inwardness" and fascist "heroic outwardness" present a "united front against the mind" which "serves the interests of preserving the status quo" (p. 108 below). Marcuse claims that the bourgeoisie, for the most part, manifested a "deep contempt for the mind," distrusting intellectual activity (ibid.). For the bourgeoisie,

the mind was always somewhat suspect. It is more tangible, more demanding and nearer to reality than the soul. Its critical lucidity and rationality and its contradiction of irrational facticity are difficult to hide and to silence. Hegel goes poorly with an authoritarian state: he was for the mind, while the moderns are for the soul and for feeling . . . An individual full of soul is more compliant, acquiesces more humbly to fate, and is better at obeying authority. (ibid.)

Consequently, in the fascist state, "the intensive education to inner freedom that has been in progress since Luther is now, when inner freedom abolishes itself by turning into outer unfreedom, bearing its choicest fruit" (ibid.).

Affirmative culture thus affirms the dominant cultural values of the bourgeoisie and ends up being affirmative toward the existing social order, quelling rebellious impulses and tranquilizing critical consciousness. Yet affirmative culture "preserved those human wants which surpassed the material reproduction of existence" (p. 104 below) and contained images of happiness and a better world that provided alternatives to existing miserable reality:

There is an element of earthly delight in the works of great bourgeois art, even when they portray heaven. The individual enjoys beauty, goodness, splendor, peace, and victorious joy. One even enjoys pain and suffering, cruelty and crime. One experiences liberation. And one understands and encounters understanding for and in response to, his instincts and demands. Reification is transpierced in private. In art one does not have to be "realistic," for humanity is at stake, not one's occupation or status. Suffering is suffering and joy is joy. The world appears as what it is behind the commodity form: a landscape is really a landscape, a human is really a human, a thing really a thing. (p. 104 below)

While Marcuse believed that bourgeois art had a progressive function during its earlier phases and still contains the potential to animate individuals to seek a better life, he argued that it had "entered increasingly into the service of the suppression of the discontented masses" (p. 189 below). Hence,

the real gratification of individuals can only be realized *against* idealist culture, and only *against* this culture is it propagated as a general demand: the demand for the real transformation of the material conditions of existence, for a new life, for a new form of labor and enjoyment.

(p. 90 below)

Against affirmative culture and conformist theory, Marcuse seeks forms of culture and modes of thought that are negative, critical, and transformative. He finds critical and non-conformist modes of culture in the critical modernist traditions, as we shall see in the next sections, and finds such forms of critical thought in Hegel and Marx, in which negation is a key impulse of dialectical thinking. But critical dialectical thought for Marcuse and his colleagues at the Institute also seeks normative perspectives to critique contemporary society and culture and in Marcuse's case sought to valorize moments of culture that had emancipatory possibilities.

Thus Marcuse's essay "On Affirmative Culture" anticipated both his utopian project of emancipation in *Eros and Civilization* and later writings, as well as the powerful systematic social critique of *One-Dimensional Man*. To be sure, his essays of the 1930s, written in conjunction with the projects of the Institute for Social Research, only contained hints and anticipations of his later philosophical-aesthetic-political synthesis. Yet in the 1930s, the components of Marcuse's mature aesthetic theory and philosophy were present: critical reason, imagination, refined senses, and utopian vision of a better life would be deployed to transform social reality to produce a world with more freedom, creativity, justice, and happiness. The ends of the Enlightenment and romanticism would be mediated and synthesized, and liberated, more fully realized human beings would emerge in an aesthetically transformed culture and society. In his vision, art would be a component of emancipatory social transformation in which a new sensibility and aesthetic values would be part of the construction of emancipated individuals in a nonrepressive society. Yet it would be many years before Marcuse was able to develop his vision of liberation and a new culture, reality principle, and forms of life.

### ART AND LOVE IN THE 1940S: MARCUSE'S EMERGING AESTHETIC

*Art does not and cannot present the fascist reality (nor any other form of the totality of monopolistic oppression). But any human activity which does not contain the terror of this era is by this very token inhuman, irrelevant, incidental, untrue. In art, however, the untruth may become the life element of the truth. The incompatibility of the artistic form with the real form of life may be used as a lever for throwing upon the reality the light that the latter cannot absorb, the light which may eventually dissolve this reality (although such dissolution is no longer the function of art). The untruth of art may*

*become the precondition for the artistic contradiction and negation. Art may promote the alienation, the total estrangement of man from his world. And this alienation may provide the artificial basis for the remembrance of freedom in the totality of oppression.*

(Marcuse, "Some Remarks on Aragon: Art in Politics in the Totalitarian Era")<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, the positions adumbrated in the 1930s would not be fully spelled out and articulated until the mid-1950s with the publication of *Eros and Civilization* in 1955. For the next two decades, Marcuse, first, brought to fruition his studies of Hegel, Marx, and social theory in his magisterial book *Reason and Revolution*, his first published book in English.<sup>45</sup> Marcuse would also continue to work on Frankfurt School projects such as their critique of fascism and authoritarianism. Moreover, as the U.S. entered World War II and as the Institute for Social Research income continued to shrink, Marcuse sought employment with the U.S. government in the fight against fascism.<sup>46</sup>

During the long periods in which Marcuse toiled in government bureaucracies, there was little evidence of what would later emerge as his aesthetic theory and vision of the potential role of the aesthetic dimension in the process of social transformation. Yet one article found in his archives and never published during his life indicated that he continued to be interested in art and aesthetics. A manuscript dated September 1945 and titled "Some Remarks on Aragon: Art and Politics in the Totalitarian Era" (hereafter SRA) contained a study of Louis Aragon and French resistance literature.<sup>47</sup>

The text opens with the challenge of how to create art as a vehicle of liberation in a totalitarian world. Marcuse argues that the French avant-gardist solution of the 1920s was not radical enough, as the most formalist attempts were experienced as another content that did not threaten the existing totalitarian order. For Marcuse, "the political must rather remain outside the content: as the artistic a priori which cannot be absorbed by the content . . . The political will then appear only in the way in which the content is shaped and formed" (SRA, pp. 202–3).

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44 See Herbert Marcuse, "Some Remarks on Aragon: Art in Politics in the Totalitarian Era" (hereafter SRA), published in *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse: Technology, War and Fascism*, Volume One.

45 Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*; see my commentary on the text in Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse*, Chapter 5.

46 See Douglas Kellner, "Introduction," in *Technology, War and Fascism*.

47 Louis Aragon (1897–1982) was a French poet, novelist, and essayist, a founder of surrealism with Apollinaire, Paul Éluard, André Breton, and Luis Buñuel among others. Aragon was also a political activist and spokesman for communism, as well as an acclaimed and influential writer who considerably influenced French theories of the novel and poetic theory. The 1945 text exhibits the first evidence of Marcuse's serious engagement with French writers, which would continue his entire life.

In Marcuse's view, certain forms of surrealist art and revolutionary practice are dedicated to the destruction of the world in its totality and in a totalitarian world the negation of the whole repressive system is the goal of truly radical art. Ironically, then, in the totalitarian world, art and love are among the most radical oppositional forces since they produce an alternative reality completely at odds with an oppressive reality; this difference can help reveal the horror of the totalitarian life and the need to make a break with it. In an eloquent formulation, Marcuse writes that truly oppositional art

must be shaped in such a manner that it reveals the negative system in its totality and, at the same time, the absolute necessity of liberation. The work of art must, at its breaking point, expose the ultimate nakedness of man's (and nature's) existence, stripped of all the paraphernalia of monopolistic mass culture, completely and utterly alone, in the abyss of destruction, despair and freedom. The most revolutionary work of art will be, at the same time, the most esoteric, the most anti-collectivist one, for the goal of the revolution is the free individual.

(SRA, p. 203)

For Marcuse, truly revolutionary art transcends everyday life by virtue of its form, by its ability to produce another world which projects images of a better life and reveals the deficiencies and horrors of existing reality. Noting the attempts of avant-garde French writers to create alternative worlds through art, he claims that their revolt was easily absorbed as aesthetic fashion and the terror in surrealist art "was surpassed by the real terror." Extreme formalist art that negated all content attempted to carry the aesthetic revolution further, but it too was absorbed by the market. The challenge, then, for emancipatory art is to combine the aesthetic and the political, to produce aesthetic forms that also engage sociopolitical reality and can have progressive political effects. Marcuse believes that French resistance writers represent "a new stage of the solution." The political reality in their work is not directly represented, but intrudes to destroy a world of potential love, beauty, and harmony. It presents totalitarian society shattering the ideal world projected in great poetry and art, and thus appears as that which must be negated and itself destroyed, as that which stands in the way of freedom and happiness.

Authentic art thus represents for Marcuse a negation of existing oppressive reality and the postulating of another world. Authentic art preserves visions of emancipation and is thus part of the radical project. In the French resistance writing which he discusses, love and beauty are negated by the forces of totalitarianism that themselves appear as negations of human life and aspirations which must in turn be negated. But Aragon and the poetry of his radical comrades utilizes a classically severe form to present the emancipatory content, thus providing an anticipation of Marcuse's later position – namely, that it is the aesthetic form that inscribes the aesthetic dimension and accounts for the emancipatory power of art.

But Marcuse also stresses the potential oppositional power of extreme love, a position adumbrated in his dissertation on *The German Artist Novel* that will be taken up in his emphasis on the emancipatory potential of the aesthetic-erotic dimension in *Eros and Civilization* and later writings. With its *promesse du bonheur*, love is presented in French resistance writing as a force that pits the lovers against the constraints of existing social reality. Citing writings and poetry of Aragon, Paul Éluard, and other French resistance writers, Marcuse maintains:

In the night of the fascist terror appear the images of tenderness, “*douceur*,” calmness and free fulfillment; the agony of the Gestapo becomes the agony of love. As a mere juxtaposition, this would be romanticism, cheap escapism. But as an element of the a prioristic artistic form of this poetry, the language of love emerges as the instrument of estrangement; its artificial, unnatural, “inadequate” character is to produce the shock which may bare the true relationship between the two worlds and languages: the one being the positive negation of the other. The beloved is “*enfant craintif*,” “*soeur*,” and *Geliebte*; her free weakness, laxity, and compliance evokes the image of the victim as well as the conqueror of the fascist order, of the sacrificed utopia which is to emerge as the historical reality. As the language of estrangement, the paraphernalia of love and sensuality thus are part of the political form of these poems.

(SRA, p. 207)

Aragon and Éluard, Marcuse claims, returned to classical style and form to resist the banalization and brutalization of language under fascism. Likewise, in his novel cycle *Monde réel*, Aragon takes up the social novel to depict love and its negation by fascist totalitarianism, and his novel *Aurélien* provides a “picture of the whole epoch in its repercussions on the representative strata of society, and reflects the historical fate of the epoch in the personal story of the hero and the heroine, Aurélien and Bérénice” (SRA, p. 208). In section III of his study, Marcuse provides a detailed reading of *Aurélien* which presents the story of two star-crossed lovers who reunite after a long separation only for the beloved to be shot in the arms of the hero by fascists. As with the images in Picasso’s *Guernica*, Aragon’s novel brings “darkness, terror and utter destruction” to life “by grace of the artistic creation and in the artistic form; they are therefore incomparable to the fascist reality.”

Marcuse thus sketches in “Some Remarks on Aragon” what would emerge as his characteristic valorization of the aesthetic and erotic dimensions of existence as preserving the possibility of another reality, a higher condition of transcendence to the existing world, which are preserved and communicated via the aesthetic form. In the realms of art and love, Marcuse suggests, one transcends the banality and oppressiveness of everyday life and exists in a higher dimension. But dominant forces in the existing society and culture negate the superior possibilities for human freedom and happiness, and thus

must in turn be negated. Authentic art refuses an oppressive social reality, promotes estrangement from this world, and projects images of a better world. Marcuse would spend the next 35 years elaborating these aesthetic ideals and fleshing out his ideal of liberation and the emancipatory potential of art.

For the next decade, Marcuse's work focused on his government service and his few publications dealt mainly with philosophy, while the many manuscripts he produced for the U.S. government in World War II dealt with German fascism and those after the war with the possibilities of democratization in Europe and with the dangers of communism.<sup>48</sup>

### ART AND LIBERATION IN EROS AND CIVILIZATION

*The truth of art is the liberation of sensuousness through its reconciliation with reason. . . . In a genuinely humane civilization, the human existence will be play rather than toil, and man will live in display rather than need.*

(Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, pp. 184, 188)

After the war, Marcuse remained in Washington for some years, continuing to work in government bureaucracies. In 1950, he taught a course on Freud at the Washington School of Psychiatry, elaborating a philosophical reading of Freud that would help shape *Eros and Civilization* (hereafter *EC*).<sup>49</sup> Marcuse also intensified his study of art and aesthetics which he merged with critical social theory, visions of utopia and a nonrepressive civilization, and multifaceted perspectives on liberation. Indeed, *Eros and Civilization* carried through a revolution in aesthetic theory, combining psychoanalysis with radical philosophy and social theory in elaborating perspectives on how the aesthetic dimension could help promote individual liberation and the creation of a nonrepressive society and culture. Taking aesthetic theory out of the realm of pure philosophy, Marcuse moved aesthetics into the center of critical social theory and revolutionary theory and practice.

Despite Marcuse's many contributions to philosophy, social theory and critique in his previous writings, it was really not until *EC* that the full Marcusean vision came to fruition. Written in the depths of radical despair

48 Kellner, "Introduction," *Technology, War and Fascism*.

49 See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955; second edition 1974; I will cite from this edition). For my detailed reading of *Eros and Civilization*, see Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse*, Chapter 6. In Volume Five of *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation*, we will engage systematically Marcuse's adventures with Freud and psychoanalysis.

during an era dominated by McCarthyism and Stalinism, and with his wife Sophie dying of cancer, Marcuse summoned his radical imagination to develop utopian perspectives on liberation and to sketch the possibility of a nonrepressive civilization, drawing on the resources of his emerging aesthetic theory.

In this ground-breaking text, Marcuse uses Marx, Freud, Kant, Schiller, and modernist aesthetics to develop his vision of a free and nonrepressive civilization during a historical epoch characterized by repression and attacks on radical thought in the conformist 1950s. His emphasis on liberation, play, love, and Eros anticipated the ethos of the 1960s counterculture that in turn made him a popular social critic and liberationist. In addition, the text provides an extremely radical critique of contemporary civilization that was to make Marcuse a darling of the New Left and one of the most influential thinkers of his epoch.

For Marcuse, however, there is a “hidden trend in psychoanalysis” which discloses those aspects of human nature that oppose the dominant ethic of labor and renunciation, while upholding “the tabooed aspirations of humanity” (EC p. 18). Marcuse subtly reformulated the therapeutic role of memory stressed in psychoanalysis. Drawing on the distinction between *Gedachtnis* (a standard term for “memory”) and *Erinnerung* (or remembrance) Marcuse interprets *Erinnerung* as bringing together repressed elements of the past, utopian longings, and struggles for a better world. In Freud’s theory, the suppression of memory takes place through the repression of unpleasant or traumatic experiences, which are usually concerned with sexuality or aggression. The task of psychoanalysis is to free the patient from the burden of repressed, traumatic memories by providing understanding and insight that enables the individual to work through painful experiences of the past. Although Marcuse preserves the psychoanalytic linkage between forgetting and repression, he stresses the liberating potentialities of remembrance and the recollection of pleasurable or euphoric experiences, as well as the traumatic experiences stressed by Freud.

For Marcuse, memory contains images of gratification and can play a cognitive and therapeutic role in mental life: “Its truth value lies in the specific function of memory to preserve promises and potentialities which are betrayed and even outlawed by the mature, civilized individual, but which had once been fulfilled in the dim past and which are never entirely forgotten” (EC, pp. 18–19). In his reconstruction of Freud, Marcuse suggests that remembrance of past experiences of freedom and happiness could put into question the painful performances of alienated labor and manifold oppressions of everyday life. These re-collections are embedded in individual experiences of a happier past and historical conditions that offered more and better freedom, gratification, and happiness. Marcuse will link these emancipatory dimensions of remembrance with phantasy and imagination, arguing that both human beings and their cultural tradition contain resources that can be mobilized against suffering and oppression in the present.

Remembrance for Marcuse thus re-members, reconstructs experience, going to the past to construct future possibilities of freedom and happiness. Whereas romanticism is past-oriented, remembering the joys of nature and the past in the face of the onslaught of industrialization, Marcuse is future-oriented, looking to the past to construct a better future.<sup>50</sup> Marcuse's analysis implies that society trains the individual for the systematic repression of those emancipatory memories, and devalues experiences guided solely by the pleasure principle. Following Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morals*, Marcuse criticizes

the one-sidedness of memory-training in civilization: the faculty was chiefly directed toward remembering duties rather than pleasures; memory was linked with bad conscience, guilt and sin. Unhappiness and the threat of punishment, not happiness and the promise of freedom, linger in the memory.

(EC, p. 232)

Marcuse claims that for Freud "phantasy" is a crucial mode of "thought-activity" that is split off from the reality principle (EC, pp. 14ff., 140ff.).<sup>51</sup> For Freud, phantasy "was kept free from reality-testing and remained subordinated to the pleasure principle alone. This is the act of phantasy-making (*das Phantasieren*), which begins already with the games of children, and later, continued as daydreaming, abandons its dependence on real objects" (EC, p. 140). Building on this conception, Marcuse suggests that phantasy – in daydreaming, dreams at night, play, and its embodiments in art – can project images of integral gratification, pleasure, and reconciliation, often denied in everyday life.

Hence, along with memory, Marcuse argues that phantasy can imagine another world and generate images of a better life by speaking the language of the pleasure principle and its demands for gratification. Art encodes memory and phantasy mediated by the faculty of the imagination. For Marcuse, art is the "most visible 'return of the repressed'" (EC, p. 144),

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50 This conception might be contrasted with Walter Benjamin who in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (in *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken, 1969, p. 260) claims that "images of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren" drive the oppressed to struggle against their oppressors. Benjamin's conception is similar to that of Freud, who holds that past traumas enslave individuals, and argues, in a different register than Benjamin, that working through the source of trauma can free individuals from past blockages and suffering. A dialectical conception of memory merging Marcuse and Benjamin might argue that both remembrances of past joys and happiness *and* suffering and oppression could motivate construction of a better future if oriented toward changing rather than just remembering the world.

51 I shall follow Marcuse's convention of using Freud's term "phantasy" in the following analysis. In the section of *Eros and Civilization* under discussion, Marcuse repeatedly uses the phrase "phantasy (imagination)" to connote that he is combining Freudian notions of phantasy with conceptions of the imagination, merging play with the construction of images.



bringing to expression repressed desires, phantasies, hopes, and dreams. All authentic art for Marcuse aims at “the negation of unfreedom” (ibid.) and expresses a demand for liberation. The truth value of its images relates not only to the past, but to the future, for authentic art refuses “to accept as final the limitations imposed upon freedom and happiness by the reality principle (ibid.). Art for Marcuse practices the “Great Refusal,” incarnating the emancipatory contents of memory, phantasy, and the imagination through producing images of happiness and a life without anxiety.

The key Marcusean concept of the *Great Refusal* demanding a total rejection of the institutions, ideas, and ways of life in the existing society has aesthetic roots connected to the surrealist André Breton.<sup>52</sup> Marcuse specifically equated surrealism with an aesthetics of liberation, citing Breton’s celebration of the imagination as a faculty that can reveal “what *can be*,” that can dream of a better life. Marcuse suggested:

The surrealists recognized the revolutionary implications of Freud’s discoveries: “Imagination is perhaps about to reclaim its rights.” But when they asked, “Cannot the dream also be applied to the solution of the fundamental problems of life?” they went beyond psychoanalysis in demanding that the dream be made into reality without compromising its content. Art allied itself with the revolution. Uncompromising adherence to the strict truth value of imagination comprehends reality more fully.

(EC, p. 149)

Marcuse also quotes the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead’s version of the “Great Refusal,” which he defines as “the protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom, ‘to live without anxiety’” (ibid.). For Marcuse:

Phantasy is cognitive in so far as it preserves the truth of the Great Refusal, or positively, in so far as it protects, against all reason, the aspirations for the integral fulfillment of man and nature that are repressed by reason. In the realm of phantasy, the unreasonable images of freedom become rational, and the “lower depth” of instinctual gratification assumes a new dignity. The culture of the performance principle makes its bow before the strange truths which imagination keeps alive in folklore and fairy tales, in literature and art.

(EC, p. 160)

Phantasy and emancipatory art aim at surmounting an antagonistic reality and overcoming repression. For Marcuse, imagination envisions “the reconciliation of the individual with the whole, of desire with realization, of happiness with reason” (EC, p. 146). Thus art in its highest potentialities is a protest against the existing order, a refusal to conform to its repression and

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52 See André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), and *What is Surrealism?* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978). Marcuse makes explicit the connection between Breton, the Great Refusal, and the artistic avant-garde in the 1960 preface to *R&R*, pp. x–xi.

domination, a projection of alternatives and, in the case of the surrealists and aesthetic modernist groups, a demand that they be realized.

Examples of the archetypal images of liberation that Marcuse interprets as harbingers of a nonrepressive civilization are Orpheus and Narcissus. He contrasts these two cultural figures to Prometheus, the hero of labor and progress. Orpheus and Narcissus are the “image of joy and fulfillment; the voice which does not command but sings; the gesture which offers and receives; the deed which is peace and ends the labor of conquest; the liberation from time which unites man with god, man with nature” (*EC*, p. 162). Citing poets such as Hesiod, Rilke, Gide, and Valéry, Marcuse shows how these archetypes of gratification symbolize a nonrepressive civilization through their “revolt against culture based on toil, domination, and renunciation” (*EC*, p. 164). They symbolize an ideal of released (and not repressed) Eros, a state of peace and beauty, a redemption of pleasure and halt of time: “silence, sleep, night, paradise” (*ibid.*). In Baudelaire’s “L’Invitation au voyage” (cited in *EC*, p. 164):

There all is order and beauty  
Luxury, calm, and sensuousness.

Marcuse thus uses Freud’s categories and classical and modernist aesthetics to interrogate art and its potential role in liberation and the development of a nonrepressive civilization. In an important chapter on “The Aesthetic Dimension” (*EC*, pp. 172ff.), Marcuse elaborates on his notion of the aesthetic and the importance of imagination and play in his conception. Following Kant, Marcuse emphasizes the double meaning of the aesthetic as pertaining to the senses and as pertaining to art. For Kant, it is the imagination that mediates between the senses and reason, mind and body, and which is crucial in the generation of art and the aesthetic dimension. The imagination (*Einbildungskraft* in German) has the power to form or build images and works of art. The imagination synthesizes reason and the senses providing a realm free from the compulsions of the body, and is able to generate a free play of the faculties and to produce harmonious and beautiful form. For Kant, beauty is a symbol of freedom and provides an experience of harmony and pleasure.

Moving from Kant to Schiller, Marcuse takes up Schiller’s conception of aesthetic education and play, arguing that in aesthetic experience and play, the conflict between reason and the senses would be overcome so that “reason is sensuous and sensuousness rational” (*EC*, p. 180). Operating through the play impulse, the aesthetic function would

“abolish compulsion, and place man, both morally and physically in freedom.”  
It would harmonize the feelings and affections with the ideas of reason, deprive the “laws of reason of their moral compulsion” and “reconcile them with the interest of the senses.”

(*EC*, p. 182)

For Schiller and Marcuse, the play impulse is connected with the aesthetic function that would mediate between the passive, receptive “sensuous impulse” and the active creative “form impulse,” thus reconciling reason and the senses. The play impulse aspires to a condition of freedom from restraint and anxiety, involving “freedom from the established reality: man is free when the ‘reality loses its seriousness’ and when its necessity ‘becomes light’” (EC, p. 187). In Marcuse’s reading of Schiller, freedom involves play with the potentials of nature, technology, and human life and the construction of a more aesthetically pleasing environment and less repressive life. One’s “world is then display (*Schein*) and its order is that of beauty” (EC, p. 188).

This “freedom to play” and to create an “aesthetic reality” requires liberation of the senses and, as both Schiller and Marcuse called for, “a total revolution in the mode of perception and feeling” (EC, p. 189). The resultant conception of an aestheticized and eroticized subjectivity preserves the connotation of *Sinnlichkeit* as pertaining to sensuality, receptiveness, aesthetic experience, and Eros, thus redeeming the body and the senses against the tyranny of repressive reason and affirming the importance of aesthetics, play, and erotic activity in human life. Hence, against the rational and domineering subject of mastery enshrined in Western philosophy (see EC, pp. 106ff.), Marcuse advances a notion of subjectivity as mediating reason and the senses, as seeking harmony and gratification. Far from being an irrationalist, Marcuse always argued that the senses and reason need to be mediated, that reason should be reconstructed, and that critical and dialectical thinking are an important core of the new sensibility. Marcuse maintained that aesthetic education constituted a cultivation of the senses and that theory and education were essential components of liberation and transformative social change.<sup>53</sup>

These ideas would be expanded and concretized in the context of the eruption of the revolutionary movements and counterculture of the 1960s. But from the publication of EC into the mid-1960s, Marcuse experienced growing social oppression and what he called one-dimensionality, the shrinking of the universe of thought and behavior, discourse and art, into an apparatus of domination that reproduced the status quo, eliminating the dimension of critique, vision, and opposition that he saw as necessary to radical social change. The next section accordingly explicates his notion of one-dimensional culture and the fate of art in a one-dimensional world. While he developed quite different analyses in the later 1960s and 1970s, the threat of one-dimensional culture and society to human and social development remained potent in the Marcusean vision until the end and thus emerges as an important and central component of his work.

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53 For a systematic study of Marcuse’s perspectives on art and education, see Reitz, *Art, Alienation, and the Humanities*.

## FROM ONE-DIMENSIONAL MAN AND THE REIFICATION OF CULTURE TO CULTURAL REVOLUTION

*The world of a work of art is “unreal” in the ordinary sense of the word: it is a fictitious reality. But it is “unreal” not because it is less, but because it is more as well as qualitatively “other” than the established reality. A fictitious world, as illusion (Schein) it contains more truth than does everyday reality.*

(Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, p. 154)

Marcuse increasingly used the term “one-dimensional” to describe tendencies in advanced industrial societies, capitalist and communist, regarding their ever-proliferating modes of social control and domination. It referred to the increasingly homogeneous society and culture that suppressed higher dimensions of critique and alternatives. In a provocative manner, he began using the term “totalitarian” to describe tendencies in both contemporary capitalist and communist societies, whereas it was generally used in post-World War II and Cold War discourse to refer to fascist and communist societies that were distinguished from democratic ones.

In his book *Soviet Marxism* (1958; hereafter SM), Marcuse critiqued Soviet modes of cultural domination and in particular the preferred version of “Soviet realist” art.<sup>54</sup> He noted that realist art “can be – and has been – a highly critical and progressive form of art; confronting reality ‘as it is’ with its ideological and idealized representations, realism upholds the truth against concealment and falsification” (SM, pp. 113–14). By contrast, Soviet realism “conforms to the pattern of a repressive state” (ibid.). Idealizing the existing society, Soviet realism provides propaganda and subverts the critical and emancipatory functions of art: “It wants art that is not art and gets what it asks for” (SM, p. 116).

In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964; hereafter ODM), Marcuse describes how culture and ideology replace brute force as a means of integrating individuals into the existing industrial and consumer society. He argues that culture and art have progressively lost their radical potential and are becoming more conservative as they are integrated into the structure of the existing society. As art has become incorporated into the industrial and commodity world, it becomes a cog in an one-dimensional cultural machine and takes on increasingly conservative and stabilizing functions, serving to reproduce the established society. Further, mass culture absorbs and transforms high culture, robbing it of its subversive potential, so that art is at most an adornment, or a mild diversion. Marcuse asserts:

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54 See Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); I am using the 1961 Vintage paperback edition; Marcuse’s engagement with Soviet Marxism will be discussed in Vol. Six of *The Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*.

Today's novel feature is the flattening out of the antagonism between culture and social reality through the obliteration of the transcendent elements in the higher culture by virtue of which is constituted *another dimension* of reality. This liquidation of *two-dimensional* culture takes place not through the denial and repression of the "cultural values," but through their wholesale incorporation into the established order, through their reproduction and display on a massive scale.

(ODM, p. 57)

The authentic works of bourgeois culture, Marcuse claimed, "express a conscious, methodical alienation from the entire sphere of business and industry, and from its calculable and profitable order" (ODM, p. 58). While the bourgeois order found rich and compelling representation in art and literature in Dutch painters, Goethe, the English novel, or Thomas Mann, another dimension antagonistic to this order was represented in "disruptive characters as the artist, the prostitute, the adulteress, the great criminal and outcast, the rebel-poet, the devil, the fool, and other subversive characters" (ODM, pp. 58–9). While such character types have not disappeared from the culture of advanced industrial society, they no longer represent another way of life, but are "freaks or types of the same life, serving as an affirmation rather than negation of the established order" (ODM, p. 59).

The romantic and subversive figures of pre-industrial society represented a higher alienation, alienation from the alienated world of labor, commerce, and oppression. But today, Marcuse claims, "the new totalitarianism manifests itself precisely in a harmonizing pluralism, where the most contradictory works and truths peacefully coexist in indifference" (ODM, p. 61). Art for Marcuse is the Great Refusal – "the protest against that which is" (ODM, p. 64). But the refusal is negated in a society capable of absorbing its forms and contents "into the prevailing state of affairs" (ibid.).

Such integration of high culture is, Marcuse claims, "historically premature: it establishes cultural equality while preserving domination" (ODM, p. 65). The avant-garde is aware of this problem, but its attempts to create new aesthetic techniques, forms, and language are ever more difficult for

the total mobilization of all media for the defense of the established reality has coordinated the means of expression to the point where communication of transcending contents becomes technically impossible. The specter that has haunted the artistic consciousness since Mallarmé – the impossibility of speaking a non-reified language, of communicating the negative – has ceased to be a specter. It has materialized.

(ODM, p. 68)

The most radical attempts to break with previous art forms and create new ones "suffer the fate of being absorbed by what they refute. As modern classics, the avant-garde and the beatniks shared the function of entertaining without endangering the good conscience of men of good will" (ODM, p. 70). And so, Marcuse concludes, the "truly avant-garde work of literature

communicates the break with communication" (p. 68). Rimbaud, dada, surrealism, and other avant-gardists reject the structure of everyday discourse, presenting compelling words, images, harmonies, and works in a context of refusal and negation.

While Chapter 3 of *ODM* tended to stress the incorporation of existing culture into the apparatus of cultural integration and domination, in the concluding section Marcuse returns to his more positive valorization of art, writing:

If the established society manages all normal communication, validating or invalidating it in accordance with social requirements, then the values alien to these requirements may perhaps have no other medium of communication than the abnormal one of fiction. The aesthetic dimension still retains a freedom of expression which enables the writers and artists to call men and things by their name – to name the otherwise unnameable.

(*ODM*, p. 247)

He then suggests that "the real face of our time" is shown in Samuel Beckett's novels and Rolf Hochhuth's plays, arguing that art is a preserve of critical truths which cannot be otherwise expressed and thus has an important revelatory function.

Although *ODM* has been stigmatized as a bible of "one-dimensional pessimism,"<sup>55</sup> Marcuse is, in fact, concerned to valorize modes of thought, culture, and behavior opposed to a non-critical, one-dimensional conformity to which he contests critical and dialectical thinking, radical art, and social protest. Moreover, in a neglected section of the text he urges a merger of art and technology in the radical reconstruction of technology and the environment guided by what he calls an "aesthetic reduction" (*ODM*, pp. 238–9ff.). In the merger of art and technology, reason would converge with art, recapturing the affinity between art and technique stressed by the Greeks. A new technology would help create a more aestheticized reality and could be part of an art of life.

Marcuse's synthesis of technology and art can be elucidated by unpacking his notion of an aesthetic reduction – an extremely provocative and progressive notion that has been little appreciated in many discussions of Marcuse's concepts of aesthetics and technology. For Hegel, Marcuse suggests, great art reduces reality to its essentials and shows the fundamental constituents of spirit and freedom. The aesthetic reduction frees its object from all that is contingent and oppressive, and produces works of art that contain images of freedom and gratification (*ODM*, pp. 238–40). For example, an architect projects an image of a house which will be efficient, comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing; the "aesthetic reduction" here

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55 See Alan Graubard, "One-Dimensional Pessimism," *Dissent* XV (May–June 1968), pp. 196ff., and my critique in Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse*.

eliminates what is not useful and desirable in current houses and develops new designs to increase human happiness and gratification. New emancipatory technologies would embody such an aesthetic reduction, shaping and forming objects to liberate their natural potentialities and creating new aesthetic forms, aiming to enhance human life. Marcuse argues:

The rationality of art, its ability to “project” existence, to define yet unrealized possibilities could then be envisaged as *validated by and functioning in the scientific-technological transformation of the world*. Rather than being the handmaiden of the established apparatus, beautifying its business and its misery, art would become a technology for destroying this business and this misery.

(ODM, p. 239)

The aesthetic reduction also involved the reduction of violence, of power, of the destruction of the environment and entails a more nurturing, ecologically harmonious relation to nature, as well as other human beings (ODM, pp. 239ff.). In this conception, aesthetic values would be merged with practice in the transforming activity of rebuilding the environment, houses, and cities, producing “society as a work of art,” as he would soon propose (see below pp. 123ff.).

Marcuse would continue to reflect for the rest of his life on how art and aesthetic values could help reshape social reality, reconstruct technology, and help create a nonrepressive civilization. Far from affirming the total defeat of art and humanity in one-dimensional society, Marcuse envisages a fundamental role of aesthetic values and culture in the making of a new world. This utopian vision would be developed in the 1960s and 1970s as social groups and practices grounded his ideas in aesthetic experiments, social movements, and oppositional cultural forms and practices.

In addition, Marcuse’s evocation of the “Great Refusal” is more praxis-oriented in ODM than in previous writings that largely associated it with art by encompassing art, individual revolt, and collective political action. Marcuse concludes the text with an invocation of the civil rights struggles and other marginal protest movements (ODM, pp. 256–7).<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the term “Great Refusal” is a code-word for opposition to the existing society and culture in its totality, a connotation that Marcuse would continue to use. Thus, since Marcuse associated the Great Refusal with political protest, artistic creation, and critical and dialectical thought, while advocating the liberation of the imagination, freeing science and technology from domination by instrumental rationality. Since he himself participated in the creation of a “second dimension” that critically appraises and seeks to transform one-dimensional society and culture, it is hardly correct to label him a pessimist, aestheticist, or defeatist.

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56 I discuss this passage and Marcuse’s politics in detail in my Introduction to Herbert Marcuse, *The New Left and the 1960s*, pp. 8ff.

Some essays of the mid-1960s interpret contemporary culture and art in the framework of his analysis of one-dimensional society and culture and the potential for opposition, while other articles begin to stress more the reconstructive and transformation themes. His 1965 essay, "Notes toward a Redefinition of Culture," begins with the same dualism between culture and civilization that marked his study of affirmative culture.<sup>57</sup> The professed goals of Western culture, Marcuse suggests, include humanization and the reduction of suffering. While he concedes that cultural values are always socially and historically specific and can always be deployed by extremist groups to mobilize violence against "enemies," nonetheless "higher" culture (art, religion, philosophy, etc.) contain critical values that can be used to critique specific cultures and their material civilizations.

Following his analysis in *ODM*, Marcuse notes how the current mode of capitalist society has incorporated the higher culture into its apparatus of production and administration. While religion and philosophy lend themselves more to absorption in the existing universe of discourse and practice, *art*, Marcuse suggests, is more often distanced from everyday life and provides a mental space to see things differently and an "Archimedean point" for the transformation of culture and life:

By virtue of its remoteness from the world of socially necessary labor, of socially useful needs and behavior, because of its separation from the daily struggle for existence, culture could create and preserve the mental space in which critical transgressions, opposition, and denial could develop – a space of privacy and autonomy which the mind could find an Archimedean point outside the Establishment from which to view it in a different light, comprehend it in different concepts, discover tabooed images and possibilities. This Archimedean point seems to have disappeared.<sup>58</sup>

The incorporation of higher culture into the current society requires development of the space of critique and vision in which oppressive elements of a society organized around profit, militarization, and aggression could be seen and alternatives perceived. This requires "education of intellectual and emotional independence" and a reversal of trends toward conformity, passivity, and acceptance of the status quo. Culture would need to be re-defined as a space of critique and opposition, and education would have to be totally reconstructed to cultivate critical thinking, perceiving alternatives, and exploring how science and technology themselves could be reconstructed to develop a freer and happier world.

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57 See Herbert Marcuse, "Notes Toward a Redefinition of Culture," published originally in *Daedalus* 94, 1 (Cambridge: Winter 1965), pp. 190–207. Reprinted in *Science and Culture*, ed. Gerald Holton (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), pp. 218–35; I am citing from the latter publication.

58 Herbert Marcuse, "Notes Toward a Redefinition of Culture."



In the mid-1970s, Marcuse continues to develop ideas of the potentially transformative role of culture and art in producing a better society. A 1967 essay “Art in the One-Dimensional Society,” collected in this volume (pp. 113ff.) was first presented as a lecture at the New York School of Visual Arts, March 8, 1967. In the text, Marcuse opens with an uncharacteristic personal confession, noting:

I would like to say a few words about how I came to feel the need for occupying myself with the phenomenon of art . . . It was some sort of despair or desperation. Despair in realizing that all language, all prosaic language, and particularly the traditional language somehow seems to be dead. It seems to be incapable of communicating what is going on today, and archaic and obsolete compared with some of the achievements and force of the artistic and poetic language, especially in the context of the opposition against this society among the protesting and rebellious youth of our time.

(p. 113 below)

In *ODM*, Marcuse criticized the one-dimensional language of the media, politicians, academic research, philosophy, and other sectors of what he saw emerging as a one-dimensional society. He now increasingly began the search for what he considered a new language, capable of naming and indicting the reality of contemporary society and prefiguring emancipatory alternatives. This language would include words and images, critical theory and the arts, individual protest and oppositional cultural and social movements. At this time, he began intensely exploring to what extent the more radical forms of modernist art and current forms of cultural rebellion provided language and cultural forms that would help develop oppositional modes of seeing and acting that could subvert the one-dimensional society and culture and provide alternatives.

Impressed with the songs of Bob Dylan, Marcuse wrote:

When I saw and participated in their demonstration against the war in Vietnam, when I heard them singing the songs of Bob Dylan, I somehow felt, and it is very hard to define, that this is really the only revolutionary language left today.

(p. 113 below)<sup>59</sup>

Questioning the rejection of art in a violent and totalitarian world, Marcuse claimed that

traditional concepts and the traditional words used to designate a better society, that is a free society . . . seem to be without meaning today. They are

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59 I have been told that in the 1960s Marcuse lectured on the emancipatory features of Dylan’s “Bringing It All Back Home” (1965) (conversation with Al Martinich, December 1978). Marcuse continued to make positive references to Dylan’s work into the 1970s; see *CR&R*, pp. 117, 121.

inadequate to convey what man and things are today, and inadequate to convey what man and things can be and ought to be.

(p. 114 below)

In this world, perhaps art can help produce words, images, and vision that can inspire the construction of more emancipatory modes of culture, perception, thought, and society.

Praising the surrealist search for a new poetic language, he doubts that poetry should be merely instrumental to political movements; it should proclaim the power of the poetic imagination and its “language of defiance,” of indictment and protest. Indeed, in the light of the ways that a one-dimensional cultural and political establishment absorb art and political protest, a revolutionary art and movement must seek genuine emancipatory alternatives and see how art can produce a different reality. In this context, art would no longer be a separate sphere cut off from social life, but would become a productive force helping to produce a new society. Drawing on Hegel’s conception of the end of art, Marcuse envisages a situation in which art could shape social reality, producing a new culture and “society as a work of art,” and thus lose its illusory status as a realm independent of reality.

But in the meantime, art must discover “hidden and repressed truth” (p. 117 below) and reveal things in their immediacy through the production of “sensuous form.” Once new forms of perception and life are produced, art can help transform reality in a “total reorientation of life in a new society” that creates forms of peace, harmony, tranquility, beauty, and happiness. Taking up his theme of the aesthetic reduction in *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse insists:

This image of art as technique in building or guiding the building of the society calls for the interplay of science, technique and imagination to construct and sustain a new system of life. Technique as art, as construction of the beautiful, not as beautiful objects or places but as the Form of a totality of life – society and nature.

(p. 119 below)

While Marcuse was well aware of how art works could be commodified and coopted, producing illusory aesthetic escape, or affirmation and beautification of the status quo, he was encouraged that art was connected with political and cultural protest movements in the 1960s, that it was becoming an active and powerful force of social transformation. Moreover, although Marcuse was aware that protest movements and their songs and culture could be defeated and repressed, their rebellious spirit persists, as do the works, for instance, of folk and protest singers like Bob Dylan, inspiring further struggle. In this situation, Marcuse wanted to appraise and valorize the most radical and transformative potentialities of art to help strengthen the cultural and protest movements seeking societal and cultural change.

In another 1967 lecture and essay “Society as a Work of Art,” delivered in Salzburg, Austria, in August 1967, and published here in English translation for the first time, Marcuse continues his utopian and revolutionary perspectives on art and how it could be a transformative force in the contemporary situation. Beginning with discussion of the crisis of art in the earlier twentieth century, he notes how members of the expressionist, dadaist, surrealist, and other avant-garde movements called for new forms of art, perception, objects, language, and social functions. The incorporation of even the most radical forms of modernist art in the contemporary consumer and capitalist society, Marcuse claims, provides new challenges for avant-garde art.

In a section on “Beauty and Nonrepressive Order,” Marcuse sketches out the positive valorization of beauty as a normative criterion of authentic art that he will continue to develop and defend until his death. For Marcuse, beauty is the feature of an aesthetic form that provides an experience of harmony, satisfaction, and pleasure. Yet beautiful art is also an art of illusion and can be a beautifying component of a repressive society. This is indeed the problem in a one-dimensional society that incorporates art into the very fabric of commercialization and consumption. And yet his dialectics of art spins into a utopian vision that as art and technology continue to converge, art can be a productive force in producing a new kind of society which will itself be a work of art. For this to happen, there would have to be a full-blown revolution, an event to which Marcuse will be seriously dedicated in the years ahead. Such an event would constitute a possible realization of art, and the end of art as a separate domain.

Continuing these reflections in a 1969 talk and article, “Art as Form of Reality,” which we are including in this volume, Marcuse sharply articulates his dialectics of art, writing:

No matter how much Art may be determined, shaped, directed by prevailing values . . . it is always more and other than beautification and sublimation . . . of that which is. Even the most realistic oeuvre constructs a reality of its own: its men and women, its objects . . . reveal what remains unsaid, unseen, unheard in everyday life.

(p. 143 below)

Marcuse frequently stresses the contradictory tendencies within art and its ambivalent role in everyday life and political revolution, arguing: “As part of the *established* culture, Art is *affirmative*, sustaining this culture; as *alienation* from the established reality, Art is a *negating* force. The *history of Art* can be understood as the *harmonization of this antagonism*” (ibid.). Marcuse thus sees art as a Hegelian unity of opposites, that has both affirmative and negating dimensions, is both part of reality and sustaining of it, and distanced from it and in partial opposition, having at once affirmative and critical-utopian features. Some of Marcuse’s writings stress the affirmative and ideological dimensions of art, whereas at other times, the more negative, critical, and utopian dimensions come to the fore.

In Marcuse's one text dedicated to music, a commencement speech to the New England Conservatory of Music delivered on June 9, 1968, which we publish here in the original English for the first time (pp. 130ff. below), he offers an unabashedly celebratory analysis of music. Marcuse notes that he is more comfortable speaking "in the domain of the arts, of music . . . perhaps more at home than among philosophers, sociologists, political scientists – with whom I do not seem to share the same world, the same experience" (ibid.). Further,

- I feel more at home in the domain of the arts,
- because my work has led me to believe that the arts, today more than ever before, must play a decisive role in changing the human condition and the human experience
  - a decisive role in helping us out of the inhuman, brutal, hypocritical, false world in which we are caught;
  - helping us in envisaging, perceiving, and perhaps even building a better, a free, humane society.

(pp. 130–1 below)

Marcuse goes on to say that he is primarily a consumer of music, educated by his friend Adorno, and that as a philosopher, "I approach music via *Hegel* and *Schopenhauer*." He explicates key insights of Hegel and Schopenhauer concerning music as the expression of pure subjectivity and will, of truths not expressible in other media, and in obtaining freedom from dominant ideology and debased language. Music articulates pure universal "pain, sorrow, joy, desire *by and in themselves*, 'objectively', as they are the essence, the substance, the truth of our existence, our universe, of *Life*" (p. 132 below). Music is a great force of negation "which breaks through the false and deceptive appearance of our world," and thus is connected with the Great Refusal and quest for liberation.

In creating its own form and language, music operates in another world that preserves forgotten experiences and truths "by giving them its own beautiful" Form, Harmony, Dissonance, Rhythm, Dance, and thus, music beautifies, sublimates, pacifies the human experience, the human condition" (p. 133 below). But after culmination of the great traditional symphony in Mahler and the advent of a break, a new music, in Schönberg ("Ich fühle Luft von anderen Planeten"), it's "*roll over Beethoven*"! Pure musical form is dissolving and with new technology and an explosion of popular music from jazz and blues to rock and roll, a "desublimated" and "non-contemplative" music is spreading, challenging classical music and creating a new musical experience:

- an art which *moves a whole generation*, in all parts of the globe,  
to sing and dance and march
- *not* behind a sergeant or colonel,
- *not* to the tunes of beautiful restraint or peasant relaxation

but

behind nobody but their like,  
and to the tune of their own body and their own mind

(p. 137 below)

In a ringing conclusion, Marcuse tells his audience that they have “come face to face with *a music of the oppressed which denies and defies the entire white culture* as experienced by the oppressed.” This music and the social movements and turmoil of which it is a part force the world of music to respond, to create new values and forms, to engage a generation that really wants “music from other planets, very real and close planets” (p. 138 below). In conclusion:

The great rebellion against our repressive civilization encompasses the realm of music,

- and *makes you accessories or adversaries*.
- you will *defend and rescue the old*, with its still unfulfilled and still valid promises and forms,

or

- you will work *to give the new form* to the new forces.

In either case – you are in it!

(pp. 138–9 below)

### MARCUSE’S RADICAL AESTHETICS: AN ESSAY ON LIBERATION AND COUNTERREVOLUTION AND REVOLT

*The rebels revive the desperate laughter and the cynical defiance of the fool  
as means for demasking the deeds of the serious ones who govern the whole.*

(Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p. 64)

Marcuse’s (re)turn to reflections on art and aesthetics in the post-ODM period corresponds to some of his more radical and activist texts, such as *An Essay on Liberation* (hereafter *EL*).<sup>60</sup> The text glows and burns with revolutionary optimism, affirming the most radical political and cultural movements of the moment, ranging from Third World revolution in Vietnam, to the French 1968 uprising, to New Left antiwar protests throughout the world, to a growing counterculture and black radical movements in the U.S. and elsewhere. Whereas his 1960s post-ODM essays on art were speculative

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60 See Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). The text was titled “Beyond One-Dimensional Man” until the page proof process; a letter in Marcuse’s personal collection from his Beacon Press editor Arnold Tovell notes: “As of 5:05 p.m. on October 16, the title of the forthcoming Marcuse book is AN ESSAY ON LIBERATION. With the author’s approval, the subject is now closed and the matter is Holy Writ.”

and posed probing questions, a different tone emerges in *EL* that is assertive, aggressive, and highly enthusiastic about the radical potentials of art and contemporary political movements as agents of liberation and radical social transformation.

In the text, Marcuse calls for the integration of aesthetics and rationality in the production of a new sensibility and the merger of art and technology in the construction of a new social reality, society as a work of art. The new sensibility would be developed, Marcuse claimed, by an aesthetic education that would cultivate imagination, fantasy, the senses, and memory. The new sensibility would combine the senses and reason, producing a “new rationality” in which reason would be bodily, erotic, and political.

In *EL*, Marcuse argues that the cultural subversion contained in the new sensibility manifests an instinctual, moral and aesthetic revolt against the established society, leading to political rebellion that “envisages a new culture which fulfills the humanistic promises betrayed by the old culture” (*EL*, p. 10). The revolt is generated by new needs and values which represent a break with the needs and consciousness of the consumer society, thus indicating that capitalist engineering of needs and consciousness may have its limits and is vulnerable to subversion and change. The transformation of needs

would constitute the instinctual basis for freedom which the long history of class society has blocked. Freedom would become the environment of an organism which is no longer capable of adapting to the competitive performances required for well-being under domination, no longer capable of tolerating the aggressiveness, brutality, and ugliness of the established way of life. The rebellion would then have taken root in the very nature, the “biology” of the individual; and on these new grounds, the rebels would redefine the objectives and the strategy of the political struggle, in which alone the concrete goals of liberation can be determined.

(*EL*, pp. 4–5)

The new sensibility, Marcuse believes, contains aesthetic-erotic aspects that constitute a qualitative difference from personality structures in the existing society. In place of consumer needs, there would be aesthetic needs for beauty and erotic needs for gratification and happiness. The aesthetic-erotic needs would be in the service of the life-instincts and would seek to cultivate and enhance life and counter aggression and destruction. Nietzsche defines the beautiful as life-enhancing, and Marcuse stresses the connection of beauty with sensuousness and pleasure, thus calling attention to the inner connection between the aesthetic and erotic components of the sensibility. The aesthetic-erotic needs would manifest themselves in the drive to create a beautiful and pleasing environment that would eliminate the horrors of capitalist industrialization, terminating in a new society that would eliminate surplus repression. Marcuse concludes that: “The aesthetic universe is the *Lebenswelt* on which the needs and faculties of freedom depend for their liberation” (*EL*, p. 31).

Marcuse believes that without a change in the sensibility, there can be no real social change, and that art can help cultivate the conditions for a new sensibility. Underlying the theory of the new sensibility is a concept of the active role of the senses in the constitution of experience that rejects the Kantian and other philosophical devaluations of the senses as passive, merely receptive. For Marcuse, our senses are shaped and molded by society, yet constitute in turn our primary experience of the world and provide both imagination and reason with its material. He believes that the senses are currently socially constrained and mutilated and argues that only an emancipation of the senses and a new sensibility can produce liberating social change (*EL*, pp. 24ff.).

Marcuse frequently alludes in his writings to a close relation between Eros, beauty, and a harmonious sensibility. Beauty has the power, he suggests, “to check aggression: it forbids and immobilizes the aggressor” (*EL*, p. 26), a capacity he believes is symbolized by the Medusa myth. Marcuse also frequently cites Stendhal’s notion that beauty expresses the “promise of happiness.” Further, he builds on Kant’s equation of beauty with harmony, fulfillment, and pure “disinterested” pleasure. Further, aesthetic needs for beauty could be translated into the drive to create a joyful, peaceful, and harmonious environment that would make possible the gratification of aesthetic-erotic needs.

Throughout his writings of the period, Marcuse stresses the subversive and political quality of the aesthetic needs:

The aesthetic needs have their own social content: they are the claims of the human organism, mind and body, for a dimension of fulfillment which can be created only in the struggle against the institutions which, by their very functioning, deny and violate these claims.

(*EL*, p. 27)

Fighting for the gratification of aesthetic needs has a very concrete and subversive social content:

The radical social content of the aesthetic needs becomes evident as the demand for their most elementary satisfaction is translated into group action on an enlarged scale. From the harmless drive for better zoning regulations and a modicum of protection from noise and dirt to the pressure for closing of whole city areas to automobiles, prohibition of transistor radios in all public places, decommercialization of nature, total urban reconstruction, control of the birth rate – such action would become increasingly subversive of the institutions of capitalism and of their morality.

(*EL*, pp. 27–8)

In the process of social reconstruction, the imagination would mediate between reason and sensibility and would be given free rein in “the collective practice of creating an environment: level by level, step by step – in the material and intellectual production, an environment in which the non-

aggressive, erotic, receptive faculties of man, in harmony with the consciousness of freedom strive for the pacification of man and nature" (*EL*, p. 31). This would involve "affirmation of the right to build a society in which the abolition of poverty and toil terminates in a universe where the sensuous, the playful, the calm, and the beautiful become forms of existence and thereby the Form of the society itself" (*EL*, p. 25). In such a world,

Released from the bondage to exploitation, the imagination, sustained by the achievements of science, could turn its productive power to the radical reconstruction of experience and the universe of experience. In this reconstruction, the historical topos of the aesthetic would change: it would find expression in the transformation of the *Lebenswelt* – society as a work of art.

(*EL*, p. 45)

The collective practice of creating a new society, culture, and sensibility would be a veritable cultural revolution, which would express itself in a new language, a new art, a new life-style and new modes of experience and expression (*EL*, pp. 31ff.). Previously, Marcuse saw the most advanced development of images, ideas, style, and language in the most progressive artists of the modernist avant-garde, but he is now valorizing the use of language by militants to denounce the existing using of society, which he at the time saw as "a methodical subversion of the linguistic universe of the Establishment" (*EL*, p. 35). Calling politicians "pigs," or responding to their rhetoric with "oink, oink," "breaks the false ideological language and invalidates its definition . . . They are 'redefined' as that which they really are in the eyes of the radicals" (*ibid.*). And radical use of obscenities "is the elemental act of giving a new name to men and things, obliterating the false and hypocritical name which the renamed figures proudly bear in and for the system" (*ibid.*).

Further, the language of black militants, Marcuse claims, constitutes a "more subversive universe of discourse" as blacks "take over" and redefine

some of the most sublime and sublimated concepts of Western civilization, desublimates them, and redefine them. For example, the "soul" (in its essence lily-white ever since Plato), the traditional seat of everything that is truly human in man, tender, deep, immortal – the word which has become embarrassing, corny, false in the established universe of discourse, has been desublimated and in this transubstantiation, migrated to the Negro culture: they are soul brothers; the soul is black, violent, orgiastic; it is no longer in Beethoven, Schubert, but in the blues, in jazz, in rock 'n' roll, in "soul food." Similarly, the militant slogan "black is beautiful" redefines another central concept of the traditional culture by reversing its symbolic value and associating it with the anti-color of darkness, tabooed magic, the uncanny.

(*EL*, pp. 35–6)

Likewise at the other pole of the affluent society, non-conformist youth give flowers to the police and assert "flower power"; for Marcuse "the redefinition and very negation of the sense of 'power'" (*EL*, p. 36). Rebellious



youth exhibit as well “erotic belligerency in the songs of protest; the sensuousness of long hair, of the body unsoiled by plastic cleanliness” (ibid.). These political manifestations of the new sensibility represent, Marcuse claims, “the depth of the rebellion, of the rupture with the continuum of repression” (ibid.).

Marcuse reveals himself here as a theorist of cultural revolution as an indispensable component of radical social change and affirms the most transgressive cultural forms and practices of the oppositional movements of the era. He also celebrates modernist and experimental art as a subversive force, maintaining that the new sensibility and radical art forms are playing an indispensable role in the practice of liberation. He now stresses the primary of the aesthetic-erotic components in his vision of a free society and assigns to aesthetics a fundamental role in its construction, affirming that the cultural revolution is a crucial part of the struggle for liberation, celebrating rock and protest music, soul music and blues, slang and obscenity, and guerrilla street theater, as well as surrealism, Russian formalism and other movements of the avant-garde (although he warns that some forms of anti-art lose their political and transformative potential by refusing to undergo the exigencies of form, a point that he will soon take up in earnest).

Hence, in *EL*, Marcuse champions all the most radical breaks with bourgeois culture and affirms these aesthetic movements and artifacts as revolutionary per se, as part of the movement of liberation that postulates a radical break with the existing society, as part of a cultural revolution. In his 1972 text *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (hereafter *CR&R*),<sup>61</sup> which contains the most sustained and focused aesthetic analysis to appear in his work so far, Marcuse rethinks the cultural revolution of the counterculture and rebellious groups, and argues for the need to preserve certain aspects of bourgeois culture and aesthetic form precisely for the goals of the revolution. He roots his concept of the new sensibility here in Marx’s conception of “the

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61 See Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972). Marcuse’s turn from celebration of contemporary oppositional art back to his preferred eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels and poetry did not please all his comrades in the cultural revolution. In a stinging review of *CR&R*, his friend Kingsley Widmer argued that Marcuse’s apologetics for standard culturism seem not only “misfocused but a mystification of radical retreat,” “Marcuse’s Mystification,” *The Village Voice* (September 28, 1972), pp. 23–6. Widmer complains that Marcuse greatly overestimates the radical potential of “high art” and underestimates the potential of contemporary aesthetic forms and rebellions. Stronger, Widmer accuses Marcuse of “a left-religiosity of accepted high-art which can only encourage intellectual falsification,” finding it odd that one of the most perceptive and thoroughgoing critics of contemporary culture exempts bourgeois art from his negative critique. In fact, Marcuse had long criticized, in paradigmatic form, the “affirmative” and ideological aspects of bourgeois culture, and was merely trying to defend aspects and certain forms of bourgeois culture from a totalizing critique and rejection that he discerned in some revolutionary cultural activism and anti-art movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities” (*CR&R*, p. 64).<sup>62</sup> Marx dropped his early anthropological-aesthetic speculations, which played a prominent role in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, but Marcuse believes that they elucidate essential insights into human liberation and important goals for revolutionary change. Art would play an important role in this process, cultivating a new sensibility and becoming a material force in social reconstruction.

Marcuse continues to relate his aesthetic reflections to New Left and other quests for a new language to indict contemporary society and a new politics to transform it, aiming at “a total transformation of the entire traditional culture” (*CR&R*, p. 79). He continues to insist that “communication of the radically nonconformist, new historical goals of the revolution requires an equally nonconformist language” (*CR&R*, pp. 79–80). But he argues that such a new language and culture cannot be “invented” anew in a cultural vacuum, but “will necessarily depend on the subverting use of traditional material” (*CR&R*, p. 80).

Such potentially oppositional cultural languages and forms exist in art and the folk tradition. Marcuse continues to defend certain forms of oppositional popular culture that speak “the language of the oppressed” and have “a natural affinity to protest and refusal,” such as culture and language “fostered by black people today” (*ibid.*). But he now criticizes “the systematic use of obscenity” that he had defended in *An Essay on Liberation*. He claims that the entire culture is so obscene that such language “no longer defines the radical,” can be used to debase sexuality, and is losing its power to shock as it falls prey to repetition (*CR&R*, pp. 80–1).

In an interesting analysis that anticipated Daniel Bell’s argument in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*,<sup>63</sup> Marcuse argues that there is a major contradiction between bourgeois intellectual and aesthetic culture and

62 Marcuse attributes crucial importance to the anthropology in Marx’s 1844 *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*. In fact, Marcuse was one of the first to call attention to their significance and to appropriate aspects of the Marxian theory of human nature into his own emerging theory. See Marcuse, “The Foundations of Historical Materialism,” *Studies in Critical Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1973), discussed in Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse*, Chapter 3, for his 1932 review of Marx’s just published *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Marcuse returns to Marx’s *Manuscripts* in *CR&R*, disclosing again that the section labeled by the editors “Private Property and Communism” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton: 1978, pp. 293–306), is of vital importance for his own project; his connection to the early Marx will be discussed in following volumes of *Herbert Marcuse Collected Papers* that will be dedicated to philosophy and Marxism.

63 See Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996). Bell and Marcuse both articulate contradictions between traditional bourgeois values and contemporary capitalism, but Bell affirms returning to religion and traditional values, while Marcuse calls for new emancipatory values, sensibility, and culture.

its material culture and values, with its preoccupation with money and business. Marcuse now claims that capitalist culture itself with its emphasis on materialist values, pornographic sex, brutality, and violence is undermining traditional bourgeois culture in line with a new stage of capitalism that emphasizes unrestrained spending and gratification. Moreover, Marcuse argues that the higher and best works of bourgeois culture “show that a thoroughly anti-bourgeois stance is prevalent: the higher culture indicts, rejects, withdraws from the material culture of the bourgeoisie” (*CR&R*, p. 86). Moreover, the great bourgeois works open up another dimension, “that of possible liberation” (*CR&R*, p. 87). It is by virtue of the aesthetic form that “another reality shows forth,” that “a dimension of freedom and fulfillment” appears by virtue of the aesthetic form that preserves the critique and indictment and vision of liberation for later generations. Since all great art for Marcuse preserves and communicates “facts and possibilities of the human existence,” it is nihilistic and wrong-headed to attempt to destroy this tradition which, in his view, continues to hold “the promise of liberation” (*CR&R*, pp. 88–9).

In the second section of his study of “Art and Revolution,” Marcuse lays out the “indictment of the aesthetic form” by cultural radicals who decry its harmony, illusions, and beauty as narcotizing and ideological. Referring to his own critique of “affirmative culture” (see p. 82 and my discussion, p. 23 below), Marcuse recognizes the partial validity of this critique, but argues that authentic art breaks with the purely affirmative dimension of bourgeois culture and unfolds “the power of the negative” (*CR&R*, p. 92). In addition, precisely the world of harmony and beauty have an utopian dimension, projecting images of peace, happiness, and security. In an exceptionally violent world, the call for the end to violence and for peace, harmony, and stability has radical implications, he insists. In his view, “aesthetic qualities are essentially nonviolent, nondomineering”; they enable one “to see things in their own right, to experience the joy enclosed in them, the erotic energy of nature” (*CR&R*, p. 74).

It is style and form that preserve aesthetic transcendence, thus the call for their destruction in anti-art movements and manifestos is self-defeating and vitiates resources that could be used for liberation and radical social transformation. Marcuse’s main argument is that the “relation between art and revolution is a unity of opposites, an antagonistic unity” (*CR&R*, p. 105). Art and revolution are united in changing the world and seeking liberation. But the revolution itself is in great art qua art, and art serves the revolution in its own dimension and not by being mere propaganda or instrument: “it remains non-operational” (*ibid.*).

In the final three sections of the chapter “Art and Revolution” in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, published here under the title of the chapter (pp. 166ff. below), Marcuse critiques the most extreme anti-art positions of the day, from Antonin Artaud’s “theater of cruelty” to contemporary guerrilla and “living theater” (though he affirms his solidarity with the latter

which was under severe political persecution in Brazil and elsewhere). He criticizes the excesses of rock culture while continuing to affirm black music that “has indeed an authentic basis . . . as the cry and song of the slaves and the ghettos” (pp. 168–9 below). Marcuse also insists that the seemingly formless music of John Cage, Stockhausen, and others may exhibit radical negation of the existing world, as does the work of Beckett, and thus contains critical potential. But he also extols the form in the poems of Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti and songs of Bob Dylan and theater and poems of Bertolt Brecht (pp. 170ff below).

These examples make clear that Marcuse is identifying his aesthetic ideal with the most radical creations of the contemporary avant-garde and is not privileging the classics of the previous bourgeois era as the ideals of great art to be emulated in the contemporary moment. Indeed, he clearly insists that the historical nature of art “precludes any notion that recapturing the aesthetic form today could mean revival of classicism, romanticism, or any other traditional form” (p. 170). Instead, Marcuse is claiming that the anti-art tendencies of the day that completely disavow form and reject bourgeois culture as a whole subvert the radical potential of art and the ways that traditional art can be used to critique the existing world and provide a tradition upon which contemporary art could build.

Written on the eve of what would become an explosion of so-called postmodern art, Marcuse’s critique of aesthetic revivalism and defense of the most radical forms of modernism provide a critique in advance of the sort of postmodern culture that Marcuse’s colleague and friend Fredric Jameson would critically present as postmodernism.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, the sort of postmodern pastiche without critique, flat and glitzy one-dimensional forms without depth or meaning, and hyper-irony and cynicism would surely have repelled Marcuse who most empathetically was not calling for revivalism or a turn to models of the past for present aesthetic creation.

Yet in *CR&R* (1972), Marcuse had second thoughts about the fervent affirmation of cultural rebellion that he advanced in *EL*. In particular, he undertook in *CR&R* a defense of bourgeois culture and the aesthetic form that had been under assault by cultural radicals who wanted to destroy bourgeois culture and produce a completely new one and to destroy traditional forms and institutions of art through producing an anti-art. Marcuse appeared to be sympathetic to the first goal as he strongly affirmed the efforts

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64 See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Capital* (Durham, N.C., and London: Duke University Press, 1991), for an early and extremely influential critical position on postmodernism; on Jameson and postmodernism, see Douglas Kellner (ed.), *Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique* (Washington, D.C.: Maisonnette, 1989), and Sean Homer and Douglas Kellner (eds), *Fredric Jameson: A Critical Reader* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). On the postmodern turn in art, see also Douglas Kellner and Steven Best, *The Postmodern Turn* (London and New York: Routledge and Guilford Press, 1997).

to create a new culture and attack existing culture, but he was never comfortable with anti-art and always believed that politically efficacious art must preserve the aesthetic form.

Hence, the apparent conflict between Marcuse's theory in *EL* and other 1960s affirmations of cultural revolution in his 1970s writings on art is not as striking as one might conclude. To be sure, no longer does Marcuse advocate the "desublimation of art" and he is more skeptical about contemporary artistic rebellion, and is more nuanced in advocating the superseding (*Aufhebung*) of art in reality. There is no more celebration of current dissident art, slang, obscenity, or the politicization of art. No longer are certain forms of contemporary political art celebrated as revolutionary per se, as part and parcel of the revolution. Instead, the tension between art and revolution is stressed, as is its necessary distance between the aesthetic dimension and revolutionary practice.<sup>65</sup> Marcuse now defends the form of art as the vehicle of the aesthetic liberation and argues that the forms of the great classical and modernist bourgeois art reveal the potential of genuine art to transcend and critique existing reality, but he valorizes the most radical examples of modernism as his ideal.

When I asked Marcuse why there was such a seemingly abrupt divergence between his theories of emancipatory art from the 1960s to the 1970s, he stressed instead the continuities in his aesthetic theory.<sup>66</sup> He simply thought that countercultural art, dissident artistic revolts, and the political uses of art in the 1960s were better than in the 1970s. He claimed that 1960s folk and protest music, the songs of Bob Dylan, radical theater and other forms of movement art successfully combined aesthetic form with political messages, and by contributing to a large-scale radicalizing process were playing an important part in a political movement. In the 1970s, Marcuse claims, the dissident cultures were losing, for the most part, both their aesthetic and political quality, sacrificing both concern with the formal qualities that he ascribes to authentic art and political content and effects. Hence, in this situation, Marcuse perceived the need to go back and defend the aesthetic values and works of the classical bourgeois heritage which, he believed, contained important emancipatory and political potential that was being neglected by the concern with the cultural fads of the moment.

In October 1974 Marcuse delivered a lecture in Bremen, Germany, under the title "Kunst und Revolution," which further developed the positions that he had set out in *CR&R*.<sup>67</sup> In addition, the Marcuse archive and his personal

65 See Marcuse, *CR&R*, pp. 195ff., and *AD*, p. xff. and 71ff.

66 Conversation with Marcuse, San Francisco, California, March 24, 1978.

67 Marcuse delivered a radio broadcast on "Kunst und Revolution" in July 1974 via Sender Freies Berlin that was the basis of his Bremen lecture. The text became the basis for his final book on the aesthetic dimension; it is found in the Herbert Marcuse Archive under the rubric 497.00.

collection show that he was engaged in many aesthetic studies, mostly unpublished and little known, which we have collected for this volume and that I shall describe in the next section.

**MARCUSE'S AESTHETIC STUDIES:  
SURREALISM, PROUST,  
AND LYRIC POETRY AFTER AUSCHWITZ**

*Art survives only where it cancels itself, where it saves its substance by denying its traditional form and thereby denying reconciliation: where it becomes surrealistic and atonal.*

(Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 132)

Throughout the 1970s, Marcuse was deeply involved in aesthetic theory and reflections on the role of art in radical political transformation, but as I have been arguing, his reflections on art and revolution always took place within the context of his critical philosophy and social theory and revolutionary project. During the last decade of his life, he engaged in a remarkable exchange with a Chicago surrealist group, continued to give lectures and engage in studies of art, and devoted major sections of his published books to radical aesthetics, as well as publishing his final book on the topic.

Marcuse was long interested in surrealism. During the 1920s, the avant-garde surrealist movement became an international force. Encompassing poetry and writing, painting and film, music and the poetics of everyday life, surrealism called for a revolution in art and life. Finding emancipatory potential in dreams, fantasy, eroticism, and the unconscious, surrealist artists like Breton, Aragon, Magritte, Dali, Buñuel, and a multitude of others in a growing international surrealist movement attempted to find aesthetic expression for emancipatory fantasies and desires, creating a revolutionary tendency that called for the radical transformation of art and life. Deploying methods like automatic writing, the free expression of fantasies in painting, the construction of personal symbols for deeply rooted desires, using shock techniques to disrupt perception, and the breaking of accepted rules in the arts and subversion of dominant ideology, the surrealists created storms of controversy that are still raging.

In an exchange of letters with a Chicago surrealist group, Marcuse depicts his position on the “irreconcilable contradiction between art and politics, due to the transcendence of art beyond all political goals” and articulates his great fascination with surrealism.<sup>68</sup> For Marcuse, surrealism strives for the character of authentic art, attempting “to sustain and recapture the transcendent,

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<sup>68</sup> See below, pp. 178ff, for the circumstances of Marcuse’s engagement with the Chicago surrealists and his probing analysis and critique of surrealism.

*sur*-realistic qualities of art, to sustain and recapture the *alienating* force of art as force *in* and *for* the political struggle” (p. 181 below).

Surrealism explores those explosive “irrational” forces that stand in contradiction to and threaten to explode the existing reality principle, opening the senses and reason to an alternative universe, to a world that transcends science and common sense. “This is more,” he argues, “than a mere enlargement of our perception, imagination, reason. The restructuring and redirection of the mental faculties is not an end-in-itself, but is to undo the mutilation of our faculties by the established society and its requirements” (*ibid.*).

Surrealism suggests that we live in another metaphysical, spiritual world that “interferes with the established one without invalidating or abolishing it” (*ibid.*). It is a subversive world that challenges, upsets, and negates the established reality. The alternative worlds of surrealism require a new language, new images, new modes of communication, and thus new aesthetic forms and modes of writing. But against the surrealist celebration of irrational, spontaneous language, giving expression to the unconscious, and so on, Marcuse defends the rationality of art, the need to give form to experience to produce genuine art.

While surrealism wished to place its energies “in the service of revolution,” it failed and “was soon confronted with the insoluble contradiction between art and the people, art and revolution” (p. 182 below). The challenge, then, is to link art with revolution, to make it a revolutionary force. This requires, Marcuse suggests, that art subvert “the predominant experience, consciousness and unconscious needs of the people.” It “would be a function of extreme alienation, expressed in the language, the images, the forms and contents.” Since the masses do not constitute a revolutionary class, since their consciousness and needs are integrated into the existing system, it is precisely this sensibility that must be attacked, that must be undermined and subverted.

In this situation, the direct politization of art, i.e. its proletarianization or popularization, can be attained only at the price of sacrificing the radically nonconformist qualities of art, and sacrificing the commitment to the internal, autonomous (though historical) truth of art which calls for its own, autonomous forms of representation and communication.

(p. 183 below)

Since surrealism made this commitment it necessarily clashed with the exigencies of more prosaic politics, it refused to be instrumentalized for immediate political goals, and thus was not able to realize its revolutionary political intentions. Likewise, the call in 1968 for “All power to the imagination” was, Marcuse suggests, a “genuine surrealist call in the midst of insurrection,” but this “call was silenced in the confrontation with the political reality: the organizations of labor, the armed forces of the government, the hostility of the vast majority of the people” (*ibid.*).

But “authentic art” for Marcuse must take the surrealist rebellion to a higher aesthetic level, it must find an aesthetic form for the “elemental”

forces of passion, the unconscious, love, and spirituality, to preserve and articulate the “higher truth” in the aesthetic medium of form and image. This “subjection of the unconscious to a new rationality” is also “the radical substance of Freud’s program (so easily converted into conformistic therapy)! *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden!* [Where there was Id, let there Ego be!]” (pp. 184–5 below). The Id, or desire, in this program is “no motor of liberation” and may be enslaving, repressive, destructive. The cult of the irrational and spontaneity can easily serve irrational politics, Marcuse warns, thus art must transform its emancipatory potential into aesthetic form. Indeed, “the creative ability to transform the subjective, ‘subrealistic,’ subrational dimension into a realm of truth constitutes the political potential of art” (p. 185 below).

In the “Second Letter” Marcuse responds to criticisms of his “First Letter” by reminding his critics of key statements by major surrealists of “the revolutionary heart and core of surrealism, its radical transcendence beyond the *given* reality principle” (pp. 189ff below). Here Marcuse stresses again the inevitable contradiction between art and revolution, the fact that art cannot be instrumentalized to serve pragmatic purposes, that art cannot serve existing reality, that it constitutes another reality, an aesthetic dimension that can promote the interests of liberation.

Thus, Marcuse sees surrealism as championing the autonomy of art and the absolute freedom of imagination and creation. To realize the dreams of surrealism requires the creation of another reality and for this we must depend on politics, on revolutionary transformation of the existing society.

The exchange with the Chicago surrealists constitutes Marcuse’s most detailed reflections on a specific aesthetic movement and tendency. His writings on aesthetics tend to focus on theoretical issues like the nature of authentic art, the relation of art to politics, and its relation to domination and emancipation. Thus it was exciting to find in his archives more detailed studies like “Some Remarks on Aragon: Art in Politics in the Totalitarian Era” begun in World War II and the “Letters to the Chicago Surrealists” published in this volume. Other engagements with specific writers and literary phenomena found in his archives include a manuscript on the French writer Marcel Proust, published here in English for the first time.

Marcuse exhibited a strong interest in French writers at least since the “Remarks on Aragon” begun in the mid-1940s. There is no date on the Proust manuscript found in his archive that we are publishing in this volume and it is not certain when it was written, although its thematics fit well into the study of Aragon and French resistance writers in that it valorizes art and love. The Proust article constitutes the only example of a serious engagement of a single literary writer by Marcuse. Typically, it is more philosophical than interpretative and focuses on the theme of how time threatens love, and, not surprisingly, the relation between love, time, and memory. The intensity of passionate love cannot be maintained so remembrance attempts to relive the ecstasies of romantic love. Love also conflicts with “normalcy,” as the demands of everyday life do not allow the intense pleasures of erotic love.



Likewise, the exclusiveness of the romantic couple cuts them off from others and the demands of society and morality. In Proust's novel, Marcuse suggests only homosexuals experience pleasure divorced from love and the bourgeois couples inevitably find that their intense romantic love leads to unhappiness, as it cannot be maintained indefinitely.

Another untitled manuscript found in Marcuse's archive that we are calling "Lyric Poetry after Auschwitz," published here in English translation for the first time, is perhaps the only literary essay in the style and manner of Adorno found in Marcuse's oeuvre. The text takes up Adorno's query of how lyric poetry is possible after Auschwitz. Marcuse's powerful memorial to Adorno after his death discloses both his respect for Adorno and how the question of culture after Auschwitz became a major concern of his own thought. In a 1963 commemorative article written for Adorno on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, "Zur Stellung des Denkens heute" ("On the Situation of Thought Today") Marcuse writes:

The assertion that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric is already obsolete. "Barbaric" no longer gets to what is going on. When even that poetry that is equal to the event and gives in neither to cynicism nor to the beatniks, is absorbed by established culture and marketed; when even an uncompromising negativity – assuming it is ever heard – becomes affirmative and serves to demonstrate to the existing culture that there is still "freedom of speech and thought," then not only the intellectual dimension but even the physical dimension of contradiction has become a dimension of the established world. It is impossible to push ahead and squeeze negation out of the fully reified language: refusal and accusation do not fall on deaf ears but rather on understanding ones, which hear the message and translate it into sociology, psychology, or aesthetics. The rest is politics and propaganda, which pretend to be self-criticism.<sup>69</sup>

Marcuse's essay expresses deep revulsion and horror at the historical atrocities that were continuing to happen into the 1970s and reflects on how literature can deal with brutal torture, suffering, and death. The essay reflects on the relations between subjectivity and literature and the ways that poetry can and cannot deal with horrors like Auschwitz and the extreme situations of human misery and death.

One can only imagine Marcuse's horror during the Bush–Cheney regime,<sup>70</sup> and it is indeed his sharp critical focus on the vicissitudes of the present moment and the continuing monstrous crimes and suffering in history that

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69 See Herbert Marcuse, "Zur Stellung des Denkens heute," in *Zeugnisse: Theodor W. Adorno zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Max Horkheimer (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1963), pp. 45–9. A translation of this article by Russell Berman will appear in the next volume of *The Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, Volume Five, *Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation*.

70 See Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy* (Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Press, 2005).

makes the 1978 study uncannily relevant in the contemporary era. The text reveals that Marcuse continued to be deeply concerned about the imbrications of culture, politics, and history up until the end of his life and used art and aesthetics to reflect upon the deepest theoretical issues and human suffering and the ways that art could provide critical insight and reveal possible alternatives.

### THE AESTHETIC DIMENSION AND MARCUSE'S FINAL PERSPECTIVES ON ART AND LIBERATION

*Art can do nothing to prevent the ascent of barbarism – it cannot by itself keep open its own domain in and against society. For its own preservation and development, art depends on the struggle for the abolition of the social system which generated barbarism as its own potential state: potential form of its progress. The fate of art remains linked to that of the revolution. In this sense, it is indeed an internal exigency of art which drives the artist to the streets – to fight for the revolution of 1918, for the Chinese and Cuban revolutions, for all the revolutions which have the historical chance of liberation.*

(Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, pp. 121–2)

After a period of intense political activity in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Marcuse was under contract to deliver a book to Beacon Press in the mid-1970s with the title “Marxism, Feminism, and the New Left Today”, which would contain essays of the period such as “Marxism and Feminism,” “Failure of the New Left,” and “Theory and Practice,” along with one on “Art and Revolution” (the former three texts appeared in the German Suhrkamp edition of *Zeit-Messungen*).<sup>71</sup> Marcuse’s letter of September 9, 1975, notes: “As to my essay on aesthetics it is still far from completed.” In a letter of February 19, 1976, from Marcuse to Mary Ann Lash at Beacon, he suggests substituting a recent text on “The Responsibility of Intellectuals” for the essay on “Art and Revolution,” and indicated he could not address himself to the political essays collection “before I have finished my text on aesthetics. This is, in my view, a very responsible text, not a lecture, but a larger essay, and should in all circumstances be published separately.”

Correspondence with editors at Beacon Press found in Marcuse’s personal collection indicate that although a collection of his political essays was under contract and was planned to be published, a letter from the publisher on November 22, 1976, documented that the contract for the collection of political essays was cancelled and that Beacon Press would publish instead

<sup>71</sup> See Herbert Marcuse, *Zeit-Messungen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), and correspondence with editors at Beacon Press found in Marcuse’s personal collection.

a book on aesthetics which was provisionally titled *Art and Revolution*.<sup>72</sup> This letter and the appearance of a text in German *Die Permanenz der Kunst* in 1977 and *The Aesthetic Dimension* in 1978 disclose a turn toward intense reflection on art and aesthetics in the late Marcuse.<sup>73</sup> I want, however, to argue against dominant critiques of Marcuse's final publication that the text did not mark a move toward aestheticism and inwardness, but rather

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- 72 Letter from Mary Ann Lash to Herbert Marcuse, November 22, 1976 in his private collection. While Marcuse published his reflections on the New Left, feminism, and contemporary politics in the short German edition *Zeit-Messungen*, he never produced a final summing of his views of contemporary society and politics in English; many of his essays and lectures on politics in the 1960s and 1970s are collected in Herbert Marcuse, *The New Left and the 1960s*.
- 73 Peter-Erwin Jansen provides interesting background information on Marcuse's changing reflections on the title of his book on aesthetics in its initial 1977 German publication. In an e-mail of January 22, 2006, Jansen writes:

The story of the title of Herbert's *Permanenz der Kunst* is interesting. In short: it was a back-and-forth concerning the title. The process of the book took more than three years. On September 2, 1975 Michel Krüger from Hanser, who was the editor of the book, wrote: "Ich habe hier [i.e. in the publishing house] den Titel 'Wider eine bestimmte marxistische Ästhetik' vorgestellt, der allseits mit Beifall bedacht wurde. Wir sollten also dabei bleiben." In a letter of September 20, 1975 Marcuse calls his working title: "Mein Versuch über Ästhetik." The first cover from the publishing house calls the book only: "Wider eine bestimmte marxistische Ästhetik. Ein Essay" (October 22, 1975). In a letter of February 15th, 1976 Marcuse wrote: "Mit dem in München diskutierten Titel bin ich auch nicht recht zufrieden: er wird dem Gehalt des Textes nicht gerecht. Wie wäre es mit: *Die Permanenz der Kunst. Eine marxistische Kritik der marxistischen Ästhetik*." In a letter of December 27 Marcuse wrote: "Titel: *Die Permanenz der Kunst* ist viel zu anspruchsvoll." On January 4, 1977, the publishing house did the cover as "*Die Permanenz der Kunst*," but Marcuse didn't agree again. He wrote on February 9, 1977 that he wanted to think about a new title. Michel Krüger wrote in a letter of February 9, 1977: "Der Titel ist schon gedruckt. Das Buch in der Auslieferung." The last time that Marcuse wanted to change the title is mentioned in a letter of February 21, 1977. Marcuse asked Krüger if there was any chance to get a new cover. The book appeared in March 1977 and Marcuse accepted it. In all letters Marcuse told Krüger that his wife Erica Sherover Marcuse and friend Reinhard Lettau would reread the "Druckfahnen" and that he would meet Leo Lowenthal who was involved in the process of the "*Permanenz der Kunst*." Löwenthal read the manuscript too and Marcuse did not want to send to the publisher the last draft until Lowenthal had read it again (November 1976). It seems to me that Herbert was still thinking about the title. He initially titled the book *Permanenz der Kunst* but was skeptical because he thought that the title would lead the reader in a wrong direction. I am not sure, but I guess that he wanted always come back to the title *Ein Versuch über Ästhetik*.

Jansen's reflections are interesting because they signal Marcuse was worried about the weightiness of the title "The Permanence of Art" and was inclined toward a title like "An Essay on Aesthetics," a title that would be congruent with his *An Essay on Liberation*.

concerned the connections between art, politics, and history, issues that had marked his work for decades.<sup>74</sup>

*The Aesthetic Dimension* (hereafter *AD*) is a sustained attack on reductive Marxist aesthetics, criticizing notions that revolutionary art should be proletarian art, that all bourgeois art is decadent and ideological, and that art should be interpreted primarily in terms of its connections to the social relation of production. From the time he began seriously writing about art in the 1960s, Marcuse encountered many orthodox Marxist aestheticians throughout the world who reduced art to political instrumentalization. Furthermore, he was dismayed by views published under the rubric of Marxist aesthetics which he thought were not adequate to the dialectical core of the Marxist tradition, or even to the few ideas sketched out by Marx pertaining to art and the aesthetic dimension. His archive contained a large number of particularly German-language Marxist aesthetic texts of which he was largely critical. In addition, representatives of a reductive Marxist aesthetic approach began publishing fierce critiques of Marcuse's work.<sup>75</sup>

In retrospect, this highly condensed poetical work is Marcuse's last testament to his vision of liberation, and sums up and reveals both the contributions and the limitations of his thought, as he continues his defense of high bourgeois culture and reflections on the emancipatory potential of aesthetic form. In challenging the prevailing Marxist aesthetic orthodoxy, Marcuse provides criticisms of dominant Marxist theoreticians of revolutionary art, including Lukács, Brecht, and Sartre. The work is deeply influenced by Adorno and contains a distillation of Marcuse's late aesthetic theory. Taking issue with Marxist views that progressive art is distinguished by its political tendency, Marcuse argues:

In contrast to orthodox Marxist aesthetics I see the political potential of art in art itself, in the aesthetic form as such. Furthermore, I argue that by virtue of

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74 *The Aesthetic Dimension* was written with Erica Sherover Marcuse, his third wife and former student, and is dedicated to her: "my wife, my friend and collaborator" (*AD*, p. vii). The book first appeared in German with the title *Die Permanenz der Kunst: Wider eine bestimmte Marxistische Ästhetik* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1977). The German edition is slightly different, omitting, for instance, the concluding sentence in the English preface, discussed below, that "there may be more subversive potential in the poetry of Baudelaire and Rimbaud than in the didactic plays of Brecht" (*AD*, p. xiii). The book received fewer reviews than many of Marcuse's books, some hostile, and was generally sharply criticized by many who wrote books on Marcuse's work and aesthetics. Although *AD* develops the defense of bourgeois art in *CR&R*, and the critique of "anti-art" and "socialist realism," it contains some departures from Marcuse's earlier positions that I emphasize below.

75 For one example, see Leo Kofler, *Haut den Lukács – Realismus und Subjektivismus. Marcuses ästhetische Gegenrevolution* (Lollar: Verlag Andreas Achenbach, 1977). Kofler takes Marcuse to task from a Lukácsian position, claiming his late aesthetic is "unMarxist."

its aesthetic form, art is largely autonomous vis-à-vis the given social relations. In its autonomy art both protests these relations, and at the same time transcends them. Thereby art subverts the dominant consciousness, the ordinary experience.

(AD, p. ix)

Marcuse argues that all “authentic art” or “autonomous art” is emancipatory per se because it “breaks with everyday reality” and

does not obey the norms of the existing reality principle, but has instead its own set of rules. This autonomy of art comes long before bourgeois society. Medieval cathedrals, for example, represent such a break with the everyday world. Whoever enters it enters a sphere which is not that of the everyday world.<sup>76</sup>

“A work may be called revolutionary,” in Marcuse’s view,

if, by virtue of the aesthetic transformation, it represents, in the exemplary fate of individuals, the prevailing unfreedom and the rebelling forces, thus breaking through the mystified (and petrified) social reality, and opening the horizon of change (liberation). In this sense, every authentic work of art would be revolutionary, i.e. subversive of perception and understanding, an indictment of the established reality, the appearance of the image of liberation. This would hold true of the classical drama as well as Brecht’s plays, of Goethe’s *Wahlverwandtschaften* as well as Günter Grass’s *Hundejahre*, of William Blake as well as Rimbaud.

(AD, pp. x–xi)

These passages make clear the extent to which Marcuse defends the political potential of art because “the world really is as it appears in the work of art” (AD, p. xii) and because great art projects another world which stands in opposition to the existing world. Marcuse continues his reflections on the oppositional role of art, his defense of aesthetic form, sublimation, catharsis and of beauty as a crucial normative aesthetic criterion, along the lines sketched out in *EC*, *EL*, and *CR&R*. There is, in fact, a continuity that runs through Marcuse’s post-1950s aesthetics in his defense of “authentic art,” which projects another world, speaks the language of the instincts and pleasure principle, negates existing social reality, and projects images of liberation. There is a renewed emphasis on the Freudian anthropology which he draws upon throughout the book (see AD, pp. 20–1, 24f., 44, 64f., 69 and 72) and a strong valorization of what he calls “liberating subjectivity”:

With the affirmation of the inwardness of subjectivity, the individual steps out of the network of exchange relationships and exchange values, withdraws from the reality of bourgeois society, and enters another dimension of existence. Indeed, this escape from reality led to an experience which could (and did)

76 Marcuse, “Theory and Politics: A Discussion,” *Telos* 38 (St. Louis: Winter 1978–9, pp. 142–53.

become a powerful force in *invalidating* the actually prevailing bourgeois values, namely by skirting the locus of the individual's realization from the domain of the performance principle and the profit motive to that of the inner resources of the human being: passion, imagination, conscience. Moreover, withdrawal and retreat were not the last position. Subjectivity strove to break out of its inwardness into the material and intellectual culture. And today, in the totalitarian period, it has become a political value as a counterforce against aggressive and exploitative socialization.

(AD, pp. 4–5)

Thus Marcuse provides a final formulation of his defense of the emancipatory power of a liberated subjectivity which moves from withdrawal into an inner world of its own to spring forth to action in the external world. Marcuse is clearly not advocating withdrawal or inwardness, but is claiming that genuine art provides an experience that helps liberate the individual from thrall to the existing society to cultivate a critical subjectivity capable of motivation to transformative action to produce a better world.

In AD, however, Marcuse no longer posits the goal of an ultimate harmony between art and reality, and the human being and its world (see AD, pp. 28–9), taking over instead Adorno's principle of the "permanent non-identity between subject and object, between individual and individual" (AD, p. 29), thus affirming Adorno's "non-identity thesis" over Hegel's "identity thesis."<sup>77</sup> Moreover, Marcuse no longer sees any possibility of the end of art, of art being sublated into reality (AD, pp. 68–9, 71–2).

In this unflinchingly critical work, Marcuse takes his aesthetic theory in a more pessimistic direction by denying the possibility of the reconciliation of instincts and society which he posited as an ideal in EC, suggesting instead that there can never be a condition of perfect social harmony that will not require art as the bearer of those truths, desires, and hopes not realized in the existing world (AD, pp. 56ff.). These reflections culminate in a powerful passage where Marcuse writes:

Art declares its caveat to the thesis according to which the time has come to change the world. While art bears witness to the necessity of liberation, it also testifies to its limits. What has been done cannot be undone; what has passed cannot be recaptured. History is guilt but not redemption. Eros and Thanatos are lovers as well as adversaries. Destructive energy may be brought into the service of life to an ever higher degree – Eros itself lives under the sign of finitude, of pain. The "eternity of joy" constitutes itself through the death of individuals. For them, this eternity is an abstract universal. And, perhaps, the eternity does not last very long. The world was not made for the sake of the human being and it has not become more human.

(AD, pp. 68–9)

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<sup>77</sup> Marcuse acknowledges his debt to Adorno in AD, p. vii and passim. See T.W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), translated as *Aesthetic Theory*, by C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

In this passage, Marcuse starkly stresses human finitude and embeddedness in nature. He argues that Eros is always subject to limitations and the ingression of destructive energies, making pure and lasting joy impossible. The aesthetic dimension can offer consolation in the face of the impossibility of attaining lasting happiness, but it cannot realize absolute freedom and happiness. Through the “artistic catharsis,” we can come to terms with human suffering, but cannot ultimately transcend it. Although happiness and liberation can be obtained in the aesthetic dimension, they cannot be fully realized in the real world. The realization of our deepest hopes, needs, and fantasies can take place in art and dreams but not in everyday life. Reconciliation with nature, of the sort envisaged in *EC*, can therefore only take place in the aesthetic dimension and not in reality. Although the hope which art represents “ought not to remain ideal” (*AD*, p. 57), it cannot in fact be fully realized. The aesthetic transcendence can affirm its own transitoriness and in doing so reveals the transitoriness of human life: “*Es war doch so schön*” [“It was so beautiful!”] (*AD*, p. 59) is the final and ultimate expression of the demand for happiness that art can represent but cannot extend and secure in reality.

Moreover, Marcuse now suggests that the aesthetic reconciliation “also preserves the irreconcilable” (*ibid.*). Much great art for him contains a “unity of affirmation and negation,” in which happiness is mixed with sorrow, joy with transitoriness, and peace with a memory of anguish of a world which, as Adorno suggests, “refuses peace” (*AD*, pp. 60–1). In *AD*, Marcuse stresses the limits to the hopes for utopia and liberation. He also suggests that death constitutes the final limit of human joy and striving and is an ineradicable otherness that renders the human being limited and finite. In a powerful passage, Marcuse expresses his final simultaneous acceptance and defiance of death:

Though the universe of art is permeated with death, art spurns the temptation to give death a meaning. For art, death is a constant hazard, misfortune, a constant threat even in moments of happiness, triumph, fulfillment. (Even in *Tristan*, death remains an accident, a double accident of the love potion and of the wound. The hymn on death is a hymn on love.) All suffering becomes sickness unto death – though the disease itself may be cured. *La Mort des Pauvres* may well be liberation; poverty can be abolished. Still, death remains the negation inherent in society, in history. It is the final remembrance of things past – last remembrance of all possibilities forsaken, of all that which could have been said and was not, of every gesture, every tenderness not shown.

(*AD*, p. 68)

It is hard not to read this passage – and several other beautifully lyrical passages – as an acceptance of his own impending death and as a fond farewell to friends and readers.<sup>78</sup> *The Aesthetic Dimension* is one of Marcuse’s

78 In the passage before this, Marcuse articulates his final reflections on death (*AD*, p. 68). Compare *EC*, pp. 235ff.; the poem to Inge Marcuse collected here (pp.

most evocative, compressed and expressive works. It is, however, controversial in its break with traditional Marxist aesthetics and defense of the “permanence of art.”

### CRITICAL COMMENTS ON MARCUSE’S AESTHETICS

*The autonomy of art contains the categorical imperative: “things must change.”*

(Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, p. 13)

Although at times Marcuse’s writings on art seem to be a replay of the tendency of romanticism and some versions of artistic modernism to celebrate the artist as the true revolutionary and art as the true revolution, in fact Marcuse posits art more modestly as the helpmate of revolution.<sup>79</sup> For Marcuse, emancipatory art can help produce revolutionary consciousness, or the subjective conditions of revolution, but there is an irresolvable tension between art and politics, the artistic revolution and the political revolution. Although Marcuse insists on the importance of political struggle as the means to realize revolutionary hopes and imperatives, he likewise insists on the autonomy of art, claiming that the most revolutionary art may well be the most removed from the demands of political struggle:

This thesis implies that literature is not revolutionary because it is written for the working class or for “the revolution.” Literature can be called revolutionary in a meaningful sense only with reference to itself, as content having become form. The political potential of art lies only in its own aesthetic dimension. Its relation to praxis is inexorably indirect, mediated and frustrating. The more immediately political the work of art, the more it reduces the power of estrangement and the radical, transcendent goals of change. In this sense, there may be more subversive potential in the poetry of Baudelaire and Rimbaud than in the didactic plays of Brecht.

(*AD*, pp. xii–xiii)

This passage underlines some problems with Marcuse’s final work on aesthetics. While Marcuse is right that there are subversive elements in classical and modernist art, there are also ideological elements that in turn may undermine the political potential that he valorizes. Marcuse seems to underemphasize here those conservative-ideological elements in high culture in his eagerness to defend its subversive moments. Thus, whereas he correctly

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196f); his article “The Ideology of Death” in *The Meaning of Death*, ed. Herman Feifel (New York: McGraw Hill, 1959), pp. 64–76; and Reinhard Lettau’s reflections, “Herbert Marcuse and the Vulgarly of Death,” *New German Critique* 18 (Fall 1979).

79 *AD*, pp. viiff. Marcuse also takes the position that art is supplemental to political struggle and only a helpmate to revolution in *CR&R*, pp. 79ff.



polemicalizes against those Marxist theories of ideology that reduce bourgeois culture to illusion, distorted expressions of class interests, and false consciousness, Marcuse argues that much great art also often contains progressive and utopian moments (*AD*, pp. 13ff.). While he seems to minimize those stabilizing and mystifying elements of ideology in his preferred classics by defining “authentic art” as art that most diligently cultivates aesthetic form and preserves the image of liberation, his most coherent position stresses the dialectical unity of art that contains both affirmative and ideological, contrasted to subversive and potentially utopian, moments.

In his later writings, the universal and transhistorical features of art often take precedence while his study of *The German Artist Novel* and many of his concrete studies of art and aesthetics collected here are highly contextual. The German title of his final aesthetic treatise was *Die Permanenz der Kunst* and in his last text, he analyzes those features that make great art universal and permanent. For Marcuse, “authentic art” is expressive of a human “species being,” and the appeal of great art throughout history seems to be its articulation of universal humanity and enduring visions of freedom and happiness, or expressions of the tragedy and limitations of human life (*AD*, pp. 18ff., 29ff., and 54ff.), or joy and happiness. Authentic art for Marcuse is also a vehicle for “the ingression of the primary erotic-destructive forces which explode the normal universe of communication and behavior” (*AD*, p. 20). Art is thus by nature subversive and oppositional through its expression of erotic and instinctual energies which are stifled by social repression. Art thus expresses primary needs and desires, the “return of the repressed,” and contains the memory of integral gratification and fulfillment by evoking memory of past gratification and happiness (*AD*, p. 56).

Marcuse’s emphasis on the permanent, transhistorical qualities of “authentic art” ultimately takes beauty as a universal criterion of aesthetic value. He stresses “the permanence of certain qualities of art through all changes of style and historical periods (transcendence, estrangement, aesthetic order, manifestations of the beautiful)” (*AD*, p. 16), and defends beauty as the privileged quality of aesthetic universality (*AD*, pp. 6, 46ff., 62ff., *passim*). A more historicist position, however, might argue that “beauty” is itself a preeminently historical category, and that not only are concepts of beauty different in various cultures and historical periods, but the elevation of beauty to a privileged aesthetic role is itself a historical phenomenon. Marcuse is once again returning here to central tenets of the idealist aesthetics that have so profoundly shaped his views on art, but he does not clearly enough stress the dialectics of art set forth in “The Affirmative Character of Culture” (see pp. 82ff below): that great art serves as both an affirmation of existing society and escape from its problems, as well as a negation of this reality and a genuine expression of human hopes and desires.

Marcuse never satisfactorily developed his aesthetic theory into a comprehensive volume such as is found in the works of Adorno, Lukács, and in more fragmentary forms in Sartre, Goldmann, and Benjamin. Marcuse never

worked into *The Aesthetic Dimension* his concrete studies of Aragon and French resistance poetry, surrealism, Proust, and lyric poetry after Auschwitz that we include here in this volume. His final book *The Aesthetic Dimension* is thus quite slim and terse, and suffers from the lack of illustrative material – such as he had in a number of unpublished manuscripts. While he was taken by Peter Weiss's stunning novel series *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, mentioning it in his last book and planning a study of this brilliant text, which in an utterly unique form dealt with the fate of the leftwing opposition to Hitler, fictionalizing key historical characters and inventing a trio of German oppositional youth, he never had a chance to write it up, or at least nothing on it has yet turned up in his archives or private collection. Nor did Marcuse ever do a detailed study of Beckett, Brecht, or the other writers mentioned repeatedly in his aesthetic writings of the 1960s and 1970s.

In addition, Marcuse never really situated his later aesthetic studies of surrealism, Proust, or lyric poetry in their historical contexts, as he did with his dissertation on *The German Artist Novel*, nor did he contextualize his aesthetic studies in the social history and the vicissitudes of capitalism as did Lukács and more orthodox Marxist thinkers. He scorned Lukács's sometimes reductionist aesthetic, but surely more contextualized analysis and detailed studies of actual works and artists in their historical context would have bolstered his own aesthetics. It would have been quite a tour de force to see Marcuse update the studies in *The German Artist Novel* and then add on his beloved French literature, and more contemporary modernist writers from Brecht through to Peter Weiss.

Likewise, Marcuse eschewed interpretation, engaging more in formal, philosophical, and political analysis of art, than in the detailed reading of specific works – as his general remarks on Lucien Goldmann and comments in some of his interviews indicate (see below, pp. 203, 228, *passim*). Marcuse never affirmed or utilized hermeneutics as a method of interpretation, although this was a method that his teacher Heidegger impressively utilized to do close readings of philosophy from the pre-Socratics through to the modern period.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps Marcuse's apparent – although never spelled out – aversion to hermeneutics was a reaction to what he perceived as hermeneutics becoming a superficial mode of interpretation that could valorize any reading of texts whatsoever. Perhaps Marcuse the philosopher thought that contemporary hermeneutics was the realm of the contingent, subjective, and contextualist meanings of texts, whereas philosophy concerned itself with deeper levels of truth and essence. Thus while for Adorno philosophy involved interpretation and the deciphering of a wide range of societal

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80 For a good overview of hermeneutics as it was seen in the 1960s which also discusses Heidegger's version, see Richard Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

phenomena from opera to horoscopes, Marcuse stuck to a more traditional notion of philosophy and aesthetics.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, with the exception of one period in the 1960s and early 1970s where he embraced some of the forms of cultural rebellion of the day, such as the songs of Bob Dylan, black music, and political art, he did little work on the emancipatory potential of popular culture and never wrote on forms like film or broadcasting which he generally dismissed as products of the “culture industry.” When I asked him once if he thought film had any radical potential, he said yes, gave the example of the Odessa Steps sequence in Sergei Eisenstein’s *Potemkin*, but confessed that he hadn’t really engaged with film.<sup>82</sup>

Probably Marcuse was simply getting too old to put in the sustained work to finish his aesthetic, unlike Adorno’s later work, which was compiled by Adorno’s wife and editor after his death. Marcuse had had several operations in the 1970s, including insertion of a pacemaker which he was never comfortable with. But in addition Marcuse never really gave himself over completely to aesthetics as the later Adorno was to do. His 1970s lectures and essays contain many folders of material on the politics of the day and the vicissitudes of the New Left, theoretical reflections on capital, ecology, progress, the Holocaust, and other themes, many unpublished, some of which we will collect in the remaining volumes of the Routledge *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*.

Thus, against those who argue that Marcuse’s aesthetics were absolutely central to his work, the fact that in his last years he refused to completely dedicate himself to aesthetics and continued to be intensely focused on

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81 On philosophy-as-interpretation, see T.W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), and the reading of his work in Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (New York: Free Press, 1979). For helpful discussion of Marcuse’s anti-hermeneutics I am indebted to Tyson Lewis, who also suggested that Fredric Jameson’s notion of the difficulty of hermeneutics in a flat, one-dimensional society of images and simulacra could also explain why Marcuse mistrusted hermeneutics in the contemporary era; see Jameson, *Postmodernism*.

82 Interview with Herbert Marcuse, La Jolla, California, December 1978. Marcuse’s student Angela Davis, however, stressed the political potential of women in the black blues tradition and used Marcuse’s notion of the aesthetic dimension in her analysis, while Marcuse in turn was appreciative of the political and aesthetic potential in black culture; see Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (New York: Pantheon, 1998). In addition, as John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb point out: “In *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Tradition in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge UK, 1998), Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison draw heavily on Marcuse’s writings on aesthetics in the sixties to analyze the important links between popular music and emancipatory social movements.” See John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb, “Introduction,” *Herbert Marcuse. A Critical Reader*, ed. John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 37. A German scholar appropriates Marcuse’s work to provide an aesthetic of everyday life; see Ulrich Gmünder, *Ästhetik-Wunsch-Alltäglichkeit*.

theory and politics in the contemporary era suggest that he cannot be primarily read and extolled or dismissed as an aesthete. In one of his last statements on art and politics in a lecture at Irvine in 1979, Marcuse once again noted that difference between art and political practice, and stated that:

But art can enter, as *regulative idea*, the political struggle to change the world;  
 — against the fetishism of the productive forces,  
 — against the continued enslavement of the individuals by their labor,  
 art would re-present, and continue to recall the ultimate goal of all revolution:  
     the free human being,  
     the pacification of the struggle for existence,  
     the liberation of nature.

But art would also continue to recall the crimes and suffering inflicted on man and nature throughout history

- the terrible *remembrance* of things past
- which remains a precondition of liberation.<sup>83</sup>

Indeed, as I have been arguing, Marcuse's work on art and aesthetics is best contextualized in the trajectory of his critical philosophy, social theory, and radical politics in which theory, including aesthetics, is to comprehend and transform the contemporary world. In fact, Marcuse's major works like *Eros and Civilization*, *One-Dimensional Man*, *An Essay on Liberation*, and *Counterrevolution and Revolt* mediated aesthetics with critical philosophy and social theory and a project of radical political critique and transformation. Thus, Marcuse was never an aesthete per se, but rather saw art as a crucial phenomenon that helped reveal the vicissitudes of contemporary society and that could help in the transformation of an oppressive world while inspiring the construction of a better one and promoting human liberation. Moreover, despite their limitations, Marcuse's continual reflections on utopia and liberation and the role of art in aiding social change contain many important insights. Much great art does have emancipatory potential, and Marcuse's works help us reflect on how cultural revolution can help promote social change. In a difficult historical period, Marcuse had the courage and vision to project alternative possibilities in which a happier and freer life could be envisaged. In his vision of cultural revolution and social reconstruction, art

would then be creativity, a creation in the material as well as intellectual sense, a juncture of technique and the arts in the total reconstruction of the environment, a juncture of town and country, industry and nature, after all have been freed from the horrors of commercial exploitation and beautification, so that Art can no longer serve as a stimulus of business. Evidently, the very possibility of creating such an environment depends on the total transformation of the existing society: a new mode and new goals of production, a new type of

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83 Herbert Marcuse, lecture notes found in his personal collection, marked "Irvine March 5, 1979."

human being as producer, the end of role-playing, of the established division of labor, of work and pleasure.<sup>84</sup>

In this passage, Marcuse's utopia finds integral expression. Only the union of art, technique and the new sensibility in a process of cultural transformation and social reconstruction can provide the preconditions for a free society. Marcuse's vision of liberation presupposes anthropological, technical, and cultural transformation, integrated into a process of radical social and political transformation. He emphasizes aspects of liberation neglected by many radical traditions, and remains an important corrective to the deficiencies of certain forms of theories and politics that neglect systematic and multidimensional critique, the delineation of utopian alternatives, and sustained interrogation of the role of culture in everyday life and social transformation.

Once again I would like to acknowledge the help and support of Peter Marcuse in preparing this manuscript. I am especially grateful to Charles Reitz, Peter-Erwin Jansen, and Gerhard Schweppenhauser for responding to frequent e-mails on Marcuse's aesthetic texts and to Tyson Lewis and Clayton Pierce for illuminating discussion and help in preparation of the text. Finally I am grateful to Sonja van Leeuwen and Annamarie Kino for assistance in the production of the text and to Sandra Jones for expert copy-editing.

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84 Marcuse, "Art as Form of Reality," p. 147.

# I

## THE GERMAN ARTIST NOVEL: INTRODUCTION\*

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*Translated by Charles Reitz*

If in this investigation the artist novel is viewed separately as something special apart from the set of all other novels, such a distinction can only be justified by establishing that the artist novel possesses an authentic quality and subject matter that give it a unique place among novels and in epic literary art as such.

To begin with, the artist novel shares its special place in epic literary art with the novel itself. Epic poetry presupposes the preconscious embeddedness of its sense of life and the whole experience of a people and its culture; it is an art that is born of the unity of individual and community, subjectivity and objectivity, is and ought, reality and form of life. The ego is not yet awakened to the self-awareness of a free personality. It senses itself only as a member of the community and is absorbed in the community's form of life. "Epic poetry still demands an immediate unity of perception and action, external occurrences and events and internal goals achieved through immanent necessity, a unity, which, in its undifferentiated primordially, is

\* *Editor's note:*

We open with a translation of the Introduction to Marcuse's 1922 doctoral dissertation *The German Artist Novel*, first published in German as Herbert Marcuse, "Einleitung," *Der deutsche Künstlerroman*, in *Schriften* Vol. I (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978, pp. 9–19; reprinted Springe: zu Klampen-Verlag, 2004). The Introduction appears here in English for the first time in a translation by Charles Reitz. For interpretations of the importance of Marcuse's study of *The German Artist Novel*, see my Introduction to this volume, pp. 4ff.; Charles Reitz, *Art, Alienation, and the Humanities* (Albany, N.Y.: State University, 2000); and Berthold Langerbein, *Roman und Revolte. Zur Grundlegung der ästhetischen Theorie Herbert Marcuses und ihrer Stellung in seinem politisch-anthropologischen Denken* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1985). (DK)

only to be found as poetry in the first periods of the life of a nation" (Hegel, *Ästhetik* III, p. 334). Its content is a stream of events that reflects the life of the whole people, its gods and its heroes; its form is the kind of verse and spoken account that expresses this internal unity and social embeddedness.

Just as epic poetry stands at the origin of peoples and cultures, the novel testifies to their further development. Inheriting the tradition of the ancient epic, the novel aims also at giving the full historical picture. Yet the novel is no longer the direct expression of a kind of life, but rather also of a sense of longing and striving. The rupture, the cleft, between what is and what could be, the ideal and the reality, has demolished the original wholeness. The progressive differentiation and diffusion of the nation into estates and classes, the expansion of social and cultural life, do not fit any longer into one strictly closed artistic form. The novel adapts itself to the social estates, accompanies their development, is compelled more and more to present "excerpts" from life – though each must have a "hero" in the middle, about whom an historical scene is constructed which he experiences in a characteristic way. In this manner, the novel presupposes a "reality that has already become *prose*" (Hegel, *Ästhetik* III, p. 395). It is the "epopoeia of an age in which the broad totality of life is no longer very evident and in which the immanent meaning of life has become problematic" (Lukács, *Die Theorie des Romans*, p. 44).

In terms of the distinctions presented above – such that the novel presents an historical picture of separate estates and occupations through representative characters – the artist novel would thus be a novel in which an artist is treated in his milieu and as possessing a characteristic type of life. Hence the historical place of the artist novel within epic literary art: it is only possible if the very being of an artist means having a peculiar type of life, not congruent with that of people in general, that is, when art is no longer the immanent and necessary expression of the comprehensive life of the community. This is only the case when Idea (*Idee*) and reality still converge, where thought is still embodied in life, and therefore where the form of life infused with thought is "artistic." Only when the artist stands in such a fusion can he gratify himself as a part of the community, absorbed in the form of life of the whole. Only when the very environment itself expresses a perfect unity of thought and form, intelligence and sensuousness, essence and appearance, does the artist find the appropriate and needed way of life at his disposal. Greek culture displayed this condition: from the time of its flourishing epics to the coming of Socrates. Here – and only here – life itself was art and mythology itself was life, possessed in common by the entire nation, coalesced with its essence, and of evident vigor; the artist found his materials in his immediate surroundings, nothing urged him beyond the community, nothing separated him from it (Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst* § 42ff.; Hegel, *Ästhetik* II, p. 16).

And just as in the ancient period, so too at the inception of the Germanic spirit there stands also a culture completely and strictly integrated: the Viking

way of life, as it was when the epic flourished in Iceland (ca. 930–1030 A.D.) where it found its purest expression. Here an entire people attained its fulfillment on a new basis, in a self-wrought free state, giving itself to the breadth and depth of life here and now. Here there was more than enough free space to quench the deepest yearning to do heroic deeds, and those who could not satisfy their desire for individual accomplishment abroad (in Norway or on Viking voyages) raged at home through massacres, dueling, arson, and murder. No one stood outside of the society: the vendetta, the unmistakable token of a close tribal bond, was applied most frequently and effectively. Nothing here indicated anything beyond this reality. The attitude of the Icelanders to the gods is characteristic of this: these are “ruthless and valiant warriors . . . a violent people as are their enemies, the giants.” “One may hardly speak of . . . a definitive attitude toward the gods given such a strange indifference to religion among the people.” “What we here encounter as myth was almost always brought about by fear or by superstition with regard to natural disaster on Iceland” (Niedner, *Islands Kultur*, p. 44ff.). Even in the year 1000 as Christianity was introduced on the island, this occurred only for practical-political reasons, and the essentially pagan character of the Viking way of life retained its reality beneath the Christian mask for very many years.

The artist too had his place within this community. Those who were skalds had no particularly artistic type of life, no unique sense of being that served to separate them fundamentally from society as a whole. The skald is first and foremost a hero, a warrior, a fighter, a “brute”; just like the others he rushes from one battle to the next, he sets sail with the Vikings. This is demonstrated through a figure such as Egil,<sup>1</sup> the greatest of all of them, and becomes very clear through the manner in which the sagas introduce the skalds: “He was a great, strong, and very respected man, also a good skald” (Niedner, *Vier Skaldengeschichten*, p. 32; cf. also pp. 31, 212). The complete unity of art and life is expressed in them: “Egil sang only of that which he lived, and he only lived when he sang” (Niedner, *Islands Kultur*, p. 149). What they created were songs of their deeds, fight-songs and mocking-songs in competition, songs of praise to foreign kings: pleas

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1 *Translator's note:* See Will Durant's particularly relevant description in light of Marcuse's fuller account of the epic quality of the artist novel below: “Egil Skallagrimsson (900–83) was the leading figure of his time in Iceland – a mighty warrior, an individualistic baron, a passionate poet. . . . His *Sonatorrek* [‘The Loss of the Son’] is a defiant denunciation of the god, whom he blames for the death; he regrets that he cannot find Odin and fight him as he fought other enemies. Then a softer mood comes, as he reflects that the gods have given him not only sorrow but the gift of poesy; reconciled, he resolves to live, and resumes his high seat in the councils of his country.” Cf. Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol. IV, *The Age of Faith* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1950), p. 509.



for protection and support. Only in the love poetry of Cormac,<sup>2</sup> heavy with unrequited desire, does a sense of the dark duality of being break into the monolithic realm of the saga. Nowhere else does the culture of the Viking epoch position artistic subjectivity in essential opposition to the surrounding world.

The non-personal quality, which is the foundation of the epic sense of life, may be taken for granted in such a uniform culture. Nothing compels the epic poet to highlight a particularly personal awareness, and the calm, pleasant, restless objectivity of the Homeric epics flows from an untroubled submission to the fullness of experience. But only in the event that the artist does become a particular personality, the representative of his own type of life that he fundamentally does not share with those around him, may he become the “hero” of a novel. The epic sense of life is alien to the particular form of the artist’s life, and hence to the artist novel. But there’s more. The epic sense of life can emerge even in cultures that are no longer unified: though only in smaller spaces and with a conscious renunciation. The modern epic poet must gain the non-personal quality, which was directly given to the ancient ones, through an impassioned struggle. He has “stepped outside of the preconscious unity with the world, he has taken up the painful, lonely struggle for his subjectivity,” through to the recognition that he can only possess the world “insofar as he renounces it. Insofar as he abandons all personal desires, insofar as he does not want to be a single one, he can be all. Thus he sacrifices himself for the world . . . And now the duality is effaced, the epic objectivity is possible” (Witkop, *Lyrik* II, p. 287). For the modern epic poet the life of the artist is a unique form of life, but he renounces it, and consciously assimilates himself into the surrounding world. Thus he must also overcome the artist novel. For him this can only occur through a depiction of his own development: the artist who abandons his own existence as artist, with this renunciation he enters into the larger circles of his surrounding world. The artist novel is transformed into an epic and objective “novel of education” (*Bildungsroman*). With Goethe, Keller, and Thomas Mann we will return to these problems.

Focusing on this one typical developmental form is, however, getting ahead of ourselves. Let us return to our point of departure. The artist novel is only possible when the unity of art and life has been ruptured, when the artist is no longer absorbed in the form of life of the surrounding world and has awakened to his inner most consciousness. When does this sort of thing occur?

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2 *Translator’s note:* The anonymous Icelandic saga of Cormac written between 1250 and 1300 A.D. highlights his love poetry: “At the door of my soul she is standing, / So sweet in the gleam of her garment: Her footfall awakens a fury, / A fierceness of love that I knew not . . .” This English version by W.G. Collingwood and J. Stefansson (Ulverston, 1901) is from “The Life and Death of Cormac the Skald” or “Kormak’s Saga.” Cf. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/cormac.htm>.

The integral nature of art and life could only persist as long as life is actually conceived of as the embodiment of Idea, spirit. As soon as earthly life was stripped of the gods, the spirit had to sense its incarnation as a divergence and a diminution, and seek to present itself purely as untethered to reality – and in opposition to it. Now life is no longer the material and the form of art: it is in itself without art, without thought, it has become a “problem.” The art of this period does not have life itself “as such, in its most authentic conception as its goal,” instead it “turns its back on this epitome of beauty” (Hegel, *Ästhetik* II, p. 133). Generally this period coincided with the acceptance of Christianity, and this also leads art henceforth to form a new bond: to religion, to the church. The awakening of subjectivity is incapacitated, and even as the colorful and joyful this-worldliness of the medieval German aristocracy was given its due and flourished, art was tied anew to the knightly estate and the artist was absorbed into the world of chivalry. Only those who were not embedded in this estate, or who liberated themselves from it with an excess of this-worldly exuberance, could attain a breakthrough to their authentic awareness and subjectivity. The traveling bands of theater folk and mimes and, especially, young clerics and students, broke free from the “strict discipline of the cloister school and cell and charged out into a life of laughter, from one region to another . . .” (Winterfeld, *Deutsche Dichter des lateinischen Mittelalters*, p. 123). But this overconfident new wave got dashed on the permanence of chivalric and churchly obligations. It is true that the vagabond poets were welcomed here and there at courts and festivals, and some of them even enjoyed the protection of princes – like the greatest of them, Archipoeta<sup>3</sup> – but all in all they were exiles and outsiders, for whom there was no space in the surrounding world’s form of life. Too proud, too wild in their frenzy for freedom to ever seek compromise or stability, their lives evaporated into austere begging and continual wandering. Archipoeta is perhaps the first artist with the artist’s genuine awareness of himself, who comprehended and openly emphasized that his vagabond life and his opposition to the surrounding world were an artistic necessity: “He attested everywhere to the posture of the spirit proud and free. In opposition to the princes of the church he recommended the princeliness of the freelance but penniless vagabond. His poetry was ingenious, his words irreplaceable, and he knew it” (Winterfeld, *Deutsche Dichte*, p. 125). The splendid strophes of his vagabond’s confession resonate with the elevated consciousness of the authentic lifestyle of the freelance artist (Winterfeld, *Deutsche Dichte*, p. 229):

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3 *Translator’s note:* The most famous of the Goliardic poets “whose name is lost, but who his admirers called Archipoeta, the Archpoet (c. 1161), a German knight who preferred wine and ink to sword and blood . . .” Cf. Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol. IV, *The Age of Faith*, p. 1025.

Because it's said a thoughtful man  
 Takes care to be secure:  
 And build his house upon a rock, I am a fool  
 But like the river bold,  
 Whose flow no weir can hold,  
 I make my bed in meadow's fold.  
 A ship without a helmsman  
 I leave the shores behind;  
 A bird upon the breeze  
 I glide over the countryside.  
 Not a latch can keep me in,  
 There is no bond can bind me.

This solitary sense of life, that charges off beyond all environmental boundaries, can only take flight in this sort of lyrical exclamation and song. Epic poetry and the novel are essentially distanced as far as possible from this. And the vagabond life is itself extirpated through its own lonely subjectivity, never finding a way to regain its balance.

The decline of chivalric culture and the rise of the towns generates yet another social connection for the artist: the bourgeoisie. If formerly the artist had been a knight, now he is a decent citizen who is absorbed in the type of life of the bourgeoisie. Art becomes a craft to be mastered through study, with its guilds, like the *Meistersinger*. In the period following Luther's creation of a new community, a free space is opened up for the inwardness of the subject, yet this is quickly confined to the constraints of dogma. Then, in the aftermath of the Thirty Years War, every social bond and form of life was torn apart. The subject viewed with disgust the completely debased, immiserated, raw, and hostile social environment that allowed for no fulfillment. The experience of this division of Idea from reality then generated the greatest novel of that century. Grimmelshausen's *Simplizissimus*<sup>4</sup> grasped, and protested, the terrible disillusionment with a world stripped of god: "Your life has not been living but rather a dying; your days a heavy shadow, your years a burdensome dream . . . This is what you have achieved: I am poor in possessions, my heart is heavy with care, there is nothing that makes me happy, and above all I have become my own enemy."<sup>5</sup> And this

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4 *Translator's note:* Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen (ca. 1621–76) is said to be the greatest German novelist of the seventeenth century. "His *Abenteuerlicher Simplicius Simplizissimus* remains the one German novel of its time that has attained the stature of 'world literature': its unique mix of violent action and solitary reflection, its superlative humor, its realistic portrayal of a peasant turned soldier turned hermit has made it the longest-running bestseller in German literature . . . bearing the imprint of the most advanced political thinking of the time . . ." from Karl F. Otto (ed.) *A Companion to the Works of Grimmelshausen* <http://www.camden-house.com/71131841.HTM>.

5 *Translator's note:* This shift from the second to the first person reflects the original.

awareness is intensified into a wild opposition to this reality with no way out except to flee into loneliness.

Oh world, you impure world, for your sake I swear to you, I beg, I beseech, I admonish, and I protest against you, because you wanted no more part of me. And therefore I desire no longer to have hope in you, because you know I have made up my mind about something, namely this: "Posui finem curis, spes et fortuna, valete!"<sup>6</sup>

What takes shape here is the subject awakened to authentic consciousness through the experience of suffering in an extremely debased set of surroundings. Still, this outburst emanates from the pure, not-as-yet-miseducated, primordiality of the people – the "artists" themselves do not hear it, do not experience the pain. The artists of this period stand apart from life and are not moved by life's own contrariness and struggles. They are academics, armchair poets, for whom artistry in literature must be acquired through the study of, and reliance on, foreign models. The inner life of the subject can only still be heard in the spiritual lyrics of those influenced by folksongs and mysticism, and then only when the most personal fate of the artist has been swept up into the cyclone of life, where the contradiction between inner life and external world, subject and object, appears as a productive protest, as a prologue to the great tragedies of literary art: in Christian Günther.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, major changes gradually came about. Two tendencies were occurring together in the German culture that was gathering strength that would complete the liberation of the artistic self and its breakthrough to an authentic type of life. On the one hand, the religious movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries culminated in Pietism, which ultimately positioned the fullness of the inner life of the subject at the pivotal element of existence, as "heart." On the other hand, Enlightenment rationality set the reasonable and moral person in the middle of a world which one's understanding could control, and thereby loosened "the chains of theology that had more or less constrained all higher level thinking hitherto" (Steinhausen, *Die deutsche Kultur*, p. 6). The danger of this rationalism for art was neutralized with the triumph of Bodmer and Breitinger over Gottsched.<sup>8</sup> These

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6 *Translator's note*: "To put an end to care; hope and happiness, farewell!" George Schulz-Behrend's rendition of this Latin phrase was consulted in his recent translation of Grimmelshausen's *Simplizissimus* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993), p. 266. The Latin citation in Marcuse's *Schriften I* (p. 15) contains a transcription error: "ouris" should be "curis."

7 *Translator's note*: Günther ca. 1720 in Leipzig broke away from mannerism and learned humanism and recorded his personal sufferings in such poems as the *Leonorenlieder* [Songs of Leonora].

8 *Translator's note*: Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–66) was a German literary theorist who proposed rational criteria for oratory and literature. He was challenged by Swiss literary critics, Johann Jakob Bodmer (1698–1783) and Johann Jakob Breitinger (1701–76), who attacked him as a narrow rationalist.

Swiss critics clearly disclose the implications of this new world view for the artist: they complete an emancipation proclamation in literary theory for the free subjectivity of the artist when they recommend that the artist be liberated from the coercion of norms and slavish imitation, and when they designate immediate experience to be the artesian source of creativity. When the artist, who had demanded that the private self had a right to a life of its own, then steps out into the surrounding world, he endures the curse of a culture in which Idea and reality, art and life, subject and object, stand in stark opposition to one another. He finds no fulfillment in the surrounding world's forms of life with all their limitations; his authentic self (*Wesen*) and his desires find no resonance there; in solitude he stands against reality.

Here is where the artist novel sets itself to work. Here the artist seeks somehow to come to grips with his painful twoness, which pits his essential being as an artist (*sein Künstlertum*) against the surrounding world, which is not allowing him to find satisfaction in its forms of life. Somehow a solution, a new unity, must be found, because this contradiction is so painful that in the long run it is unbearable without destroying the artist and humanity. As a human being, the artist is placed in the middle of the real world's forms of life. In an ongoing reciprocal fashion he is obliged to express within these forms what he has felt and desired, what he has endured and suffered, and what he would require to flourish within them. As an artist a metaphysical yearning lives within him for the ideal (*die Idee*) and its actualization. He recognizes reality's great distance from the ideal, sees through the utter pettiness and emptiness of its forms of life, and this knowledge makes it impossible for him ever to blossom or to find fulfillment in them. The artist must overcome this twoness: he must be able to configure a type of life that can bind together what has been torn asunder, that pulls together the contradictions between spirit and sensuality, art and life, artists' values and those of the surrounding world.

This is the fundamental problem and theme of the artist novel: it generally presents us with the attempt of an artist to reconcile this dichotomy in some manner. In his *Allgemeine Ästhetik* Jonas Cohn advises that the "struggle about types of life" is the artist's most urgent task when living in a no-longer-integral culture:

Where the forms of life have attained their fullest development and continue to possess an unquestioned validity, an art is possible that unfolds, as if all by itself, as the highest flowering of a national culture completely integrated with the sentiments of a people. The borders between art and life are nowhere sharply delineated, and they need not be, because one and the same life generated them both.

As soon as the forms of life are no longer permeated with spirit and artistry, new challenges emerge

between the realities that have become prosaic and the demands of the artist . . . a division. . . . In this situation the artist is confronted with . . . new tasks.

He must either work up the content of the manifold kinds of cultural life, giving them vitality and shape, or he must create a sanctuary to which his yearning for intensive living might flee.

(Cohn, *Allgemeine Ästhetik*, p. 281f.)

Here two types of solutions are already indicated that at the same time denote the two major types of artist novel. Due the broadness of its form, encompassing the surrounding world and types of life, the novel is best suited to the creation of these experiments: the realistic-objective and the romantic artist novel. In the realistic-objective artist novel the artist acknowledges that the world's contemporary surroundings are the basis of his artistry, yet he seeks to transform, transfigure, and renew them. Hegel finds the essence of the novel constituted by the fact that

on the one hand, the characters who are directly resisting the routine order of the world ultimately learn to accept what is genuine and substantive within it, and become reconciled to the set of relationships given, while at the same time being effectively engaged within them; on the other hand, because their deeds and accomplishments strip away the prosaic quality of these given relationships, they posit a reality befriended by beauty and art in place of what is pre-given.

(*Ästhetik* III, p. 395)

In the romantic artist novel the artist finds it impossible to see even any potential satisfaction within the frame of the world's given conditions: he thus flees into an otherworldly idealist dreamland, and constructs there his poeticized world of fulfillment.

It is clear that these are not the only ways to solve the problem, that multiple variations and combinations occur; clear also that the artist novel need not necessarily even attempt to present a solution, that it can become something more like a lyrical or psychological novel. This typology is not intended to be theoretically pure or set up in advance, instead it emerges from this investigation without coercion of any kind. One thing is especially emphasized here, however: the epic poet in the broadest sense (hence also the novelist) engages the surrounding world to a greater or lesser extent in the formation of the work of art. In the artist novel, the artist who has penetrated into his own self-consciousness seeks to come to terms especially with the environment that stands against him. From this it follows that the currently prevailing historical movements and forms of culture will exert a strong influence upon the content and form of the artist novel, and if a great creative personality is not involved, these will quite directly define the type and direction of the artist novel. The surrounding world impacts the sense of life of the epic poet immensely. The analysis of the artist novel therefore needs to trace the general outlines of cultural life, and only in the early stages, where a newly liberated subjectivity emerges, does the artist novel primarily display a strongly lyrical or autobiographical quality. This is less pronounced when confident and creative characters have attained an integrated and balanced form of life on the basis of an epic sensibility and where noble epic

voices develop – here the artist novel is able to grow from the deeper sense of being of these literary artists. In the cases where the historical and cultural situations primarily delimit the artist novel's central issues and form, these must be pulled together in a characteristic and representative way.

From the very beginning here it is a question of assuaging some irritation from the surrounding world, bridging a gap, reconciling opposites, attempting to regain balance and equilibrium. Therefore, the aesthetic form of the drama is not applicable: this revolves around an affirmation of the fight, the contest between subject and object. If a drama does construct its plot around an issue belonging to the essential experience of the artist, it will usually stress the acute collision of contradictory elements: the separation of art from life, the artist's world from the world of the common man, with conflict rising to a symbolic climax. Alternatively, there is a kind of artist drama – aside from the “historical” plays about artists – where the artist experiences universally human pressures, though with heightened perception and sensibility. Likewise, an artist drama may engage isolated problems and conflicts in the life of an artist without getting to their roots in the artist's total encounter with life. Only the first type of artist drama will have eventual relevance to the comparative analysis presented below.

The novella stands essentially in even greater contrast to the fundamental themes of the artist novel.

The essence of the novella form, in short, is this: the infinite sensual power of a *fateful hour* (*Schicksalsstunde*) comes to represent an entire human life. The difference in length between the novella and the novel is only a token of the genuine, deep, and decisive difference between the totality of life contained by the novel, which presents the entire world of a person and his fate in its rich fullness, and the novella, which does this only formally, through *an episode of life*, that is nonetheless so powerfully configured and comprehensive, and made so sensually apparent, that it renders all other parts of life superfluous.

(Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen*, p. 158, emphasis added)

A novella formulates a single event, a single situation, a single episode: therefore the artist novella can only present single scenes from the artist's life, and cannot develop their individual and social embeddedness. Only in one unique instance can the whole set of issues confronting the artist be pulled together in such a “fateful hour” – when the episode presented is symbolic,  
i.e.  
a typical experience in which the whole being of the living artist is revealed as if in a flash. In the course of the investigation below we shall consider the symbolic episode in the novella as this was elevated to its highest form by Thomas Mann.

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## II

# THE AFFIRMATIVE CHARACTER OF CULTURE<sup>1\*</sup>

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*Translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro*

The doctrine that all human knowledge is oriented toward practice belonged to the nucleus of ancient philosophy. It was Aristotle's view that the truths arrived at through knowledge should direct practice in daily life as in the arts and sciences. In their struggle for existence, men need the effort of knowledge, the search for truth, because what is good, beneficial, and right for them is not immediately evident. Artisan and merchant, captain and physician, general and statesman – each must have correct knowledge in his field in order to be capable of acting as the changing situation demands.

While Aristotle maintained the practical character of every instance of knowledge, he made a significant distinction between forms of knowledge. He ordered them, as it were, in a hierarchy of value whose nadir is functional acquaintance with the necessities of everyday life and whose zenith is philosophical knowledge. The latter has no purpose outside itself. Rather, it occurs only for its own sake and to afford men felicity. Within this hierarchy

\* *Editor's note:*

"The Affirmative Character of Culture" first appeared in German as "Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 6, 1 (Paris: 1937), pp. 54–94. This English translation, by Jeremy J. Shapiro, appeared in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 88–133. *Negations* contains translations of several of Marcuse's 1930s Institute articles and some 1960s studies. It is now out of print and so we have chosen to include here this important essay that lays out some of Marcuse's key ideas on culture and art. (DK)

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1 This essay was prompted by Max Horkheimer's remarks about "affirmative culture" and the "false idealism" of modern culture. Cf. *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, V (1936), p. 219.

there is a fundamental break between the necessary and useful on the one hand and the “beautiful” on the other. “The whole of life is further divided into two parts, business and leisure, war and peace, and of actions some aim at what is necessary and useful, and some at what is beautiful [τὰ καλὰ].”<sup>2</sup> Since this division is not itself questioned, and since, together with other regions of the “beautiful,” “pure” theory congeals into an independent activity alongside and above other activities, philosophy’s original demand disintegrates: the demand that practice be guided by known truths. Separating the useful and necessary from the beautiful and from enjoyment initiated a development that abandons the field to the materialism of bourgeois practice on the one hand and to the appeasement of happiness and the mind within the preserve of “culture” on the other.

One theme continually recurs in the reasons given for the relegation of the highest form of knowledge and of pleasure to pure, purposeless theory: the world of necessity, of everyday provision for life, is inconstant, insecure, unfree – not merely in fact, but in essence. Disposal over material goods is never entirely the work of human industry and wisdom, for it is subject to the rule of contingency. The individual who places his highest goal, happiness, in these goods makes himself the slave of men and things. He surrenders his freedom. Wealth and well-being do not come or persist due to his autonomous decision but rather through the changeable fortune of opaque circumstances. Man thus subjects his existence to a purpose situated outside him. Of itself, such an external purpose can vitiate and enslave men only if the material conditions of life are poorly ordered, that is, if their reproduction is regulated through the anarchy of opposing social interests. In this order the preservation of the common existence is incompatible with individual happiness and freedom. Insofar as philosophy is concerned with man’s happiness – and the theory of classical antiquity held it to be the highest good – it cannot find it in the established material organization of life. That is why it must transcend this order’s facticity.

Along with metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, this transcendence also affects psychology. Like the extrapsychic<sup>3</sup> world, the human soul is divided into a lower and a higher region. The history of the soul transpires between the poles of sensuality<sup>4</sup> and reason. The devaluation of sensuality results

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2 Aristotle *Politics* 1333 30ff., trans. by Benjamin Jowett in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Richard McKeon, ed. (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 1298 (with change in translation).

3 *Translator’s note*: While *Seele* has an adjectival form, *seelisch*, its English counterpart “soul” does not. I have used “psychic” or “spiritual,” depending on the context. Accordingly, although the word *geistig* means both “spiritual” and “mental,” in the present essay I have tendered it as “mental,” and “spiritual” refers to a quality of “soul,” not of “mind.”

4 *Translator’s note*: *Sinnlich* means simultaneously “sensual,” which stresses its appetitive aspect, and “sensuous,” which stresses its aesthetic aspect. I have

from the same motives as that of the material world: because sensuality is a realm of anarchy, of inconstancy, and of unfreedom. Sensual pleasure is not in itself bad. It is bad because, like man's lower activities, it is fulfilled in a bad order. The "lower parts of the soul" drive man to covet gain and possessions, purchase and sale. He is led to "admire and value nothing but wealth and its possessors."<sup>5</sup> Accordingly the "appetitive" part of the soul, which is oriented toward sensual pleasure, is also termed by Plato the "money-loving" part, "because money is the principal means of satisfying desires of this kind."<sup>6</sup>

All the ontological classifications of ancient idealism express the badness of a social reality in which knowledge of the truth about human existence is no longer incorporated into practice. The world of the true, the good, and the beautiful is in fact an "ideal" world insofar as it lies beyond the existing conditions of life, beyond a form of existence in which the majority of men either work as slaves or spend their life in commerce, with only a small group having the opportunity of being concerned with anything more than the provision and preservation of the necessary. When the reproduction of material life takes place under the rule of the commodity form and continually renews the poverty of class society, then the good, beautiful, and true are transcendent to this life. And if everything requisite to preserving and securing material life is produced in this form, then whatever lies beyond it is certainly "superfluous." What is of authentic import to man, the highest truths, the highest goods, and the highest joys, is separated in significance from the necessary by an abyss. They are a "luxury." Aristotle did not conceal this state of affairs. "First philosophy," which includes the highest good and the highest pleasure, is a function of the leisure of the few, for whom all necessities of life are already adequately taken care of. "Pure theory" is appropriated as the profession of an elite and cordoned off with iron chains from the majority of mankind. Aristotle did not assert that the good, the beautiful, and the true are universally valid and obligatory values which should also permeate and transfigure "from above" the realm of necessity, of the material provision for life. Only when this claim is raised are we in the presence of the concept of culture that became central to bourgeois practice and its corresponding *weltanschauung*. The ancient theory of the higher value of truths above the realm of necessity includes as well the "higher" level of society. For these truths are supposed to have their abode in the ruling social strata, whose dominant status is in turn confirmed

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translated it in each case according to the emphasis of the context, but both meanings are always implied. For further discussion, see Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), pp. 166–167.

5 Plato *Republ.* 553 in *The Republic of Plato*, trans. by Francis M. Cornford (New York: Oxford, 1945), p. 277. Cf. *Republ.* 525.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 306–307.

by the theory insofar as concern with the highest truths is supposed to be their profession.

In Aristotelian philosophy, ancient theory is precisely at the point where idealism retreats in the face of social contradictions and expresses them as ontological conditions. Platonic philosophy still contended with the social order of commercial Athens. Plato's idealism is interlaced with motifs of social criticism. What appears as facticity from the standpoint of the Ideas is the material world in which men and things encounter one another as commodities. The just order of the soul is destroyed by

the passion for wealth which leaves a man not a moment of leisure to attend to anything beyond his personal fortunes. So long as a citizen's whole soul is wrapped up in these, he cannot give a thought to anything but the day's takings.<sup>7</sup>

And the authentic, basic demand of idealism is that this material world be transformed and improved in accordance with the truths yielded by knowledge of the Ideas. Plato's answer to this demand is his program for a reorganization of society. This program reveals what Plato sees as the root of evil. He demands, for the ruling strata, the abolition of private property (even in women and children) and the prohibition of trade. This same program, however, tries to root the contradictions of class society in the depths of human nature, thereby perpetuating them. While the majority of the members of the state are engaged for their entire lives in the cheerless business of providing for the necessities of life, enjoyment of the true, the good, and the beautiful is reserved for a small elite. Although Aristotle still lets ethics terminate in politics, for him the reorganization of society no longer occupies a central role in philosophy. To the extent to which he is more "realistic" than Plato, his idealism is more resigned in the face of the historical tasks of mankind. The true philosopher is for him no longer essentially the true statesman. The distance between facticity and Idea has increased precisely because they are conceived of as in closer relationship. The purport of idealism, viz, the realization of the Idea, dissipates. The history of idealism is also the history of its coming to terms with the established order.

Behind the ontological and epistemological separation of the realm of the senses and the realm of Ideas, of sensuousness and reason, of necessity and beauty, stands not only the rejection of a bad historical form of existence, but also its exoneration. The material world (i.e. the manifold forms of the

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7 Plato *Leges* 831 trans. by A.E. Taylor in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds. (New York: Bollingen Foundation-Pantheon Books, 1964), p. 1397. Cf. J. Brake, *Wirtschaften und Charakter in der antiken Bildung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1935), pp. 124ff.

respective “lower” member of this relation) is in itself mere matter, mere potentiality, akin more to Non-Being than to Being. It becomes real only insofar as it partakes of the “higher” world. In all these forms the material world remains bare matter or stuff for something outside it which alone gives it value. All and any truth, goodness, and beauty can accrue to it only “from above” by the grace of the Idea. All activity relating to the material provision of life remains in its essence untrue, bad, and ugly. Even with these characteristics, however, such activity is as necessary as matter is for the Idea. The misery of slave labor, the degradation of men and things to commodities, the joylessness and lowliness in which the totality of the material conditions of existence continuously reproduces itself, all these do not fall within the sphere of interest of idealist philosophy, for they are not yet the actual reality that constitutes the object of this philosophy. Due to its irrevocably material quality, material practice is exonerated from responsibility for the true, good, and beautiful, which is instead taken care of by the pursuit of theory. The ontological cleavage of ideal from material values tranquilizes idealism in all that regards the material processes of life. In idealism, a specific historical form of the division of labor and of social stratification takes on the eternal, metaphysical form of the relationship of necessity and beauty, of matter and Idea.

In the bourgeois epoch the theory of the relationship between necessity and beauty, labor and enjoyment, underwent decisive changes. First, the view that concern with the highest values is appropriated as a profession by particular social strata disappears. In its place emerges the thesis of the universality and universal validity of “culture.” With good conscience, the theory of antiquity had expressed the fact that most men had to spend their lives providing for necessities while a small number devoted themselves to enjoyment and truth. Although the fact has not changed, the good conscience has disappeared. Free competition places individuals in the relation of buyers and sellers of labor power. The pure abstractness to which men are reduced in their social relations extends as well to intercourse with ideas. It is no longer supposed to be the case that some are born to and suited to labor and others to leisure, some to necessity and others to beauty. Just as each individual’s relation to the market is immediate (without his personal qualities and needs being relevant except as commodities), so his relations to God, to beauty, to goodness, and to truth are relations of immediacy. As abstract beings, all men are supposed to participate equally in these values. As in material practice the product separates itself from the producers and becomes independent as the universal reified form of the “commodity,” so in cultural practice a work and its content congeal into universally valid “values.” By their very nature the truth of a philosophical judgment, the goodness of a moral action, and the beauty of a work of art should appeal to everyone, relate to everyone, be binding upon everyone. Without distinction of sex or birth, regardless of their position in the process of production, individuals must subordinate themselves to cultural values. They must

absorb them into their lives and let their existence be permeated and transfigured by them. "Civilization" is animated and inspired by "culture."

This is not the place to discuss the various attempts to define culture. There is a concept of culture that can serve as an important instrument of social research because it expresses the implication of the mind in the historical process of society. It signifies the totality of social life in a given situation, insofar as both the areas of ideational reproduction (culture in the narrower sense, the "spiritual world") and of material reproduction ("civilization") form a historically distinguishable and comprehensible unity.<sup>8</sup> There is, however, another fairly widespread usage of the concept of culture, in which the spiritual world is lifted out of its social context, making culture a (false) collective noun and attributing (false) universality to it. This second concept of culture (clearly seen in such expressions as "national culture," "Germanic culture," or "Roman culture") plays off the spiritual world against the material world by holding up culture as the realm of authentic values and self-contained ends in opposition to the world of social utility and means. Through the use of this concept, culture is distinguished from civilization and sociologically and valuationally removed from the social process.<sup>9</sup> This concept itself has developed on the basis of a specific historical form of culture, which is termed "affirmative culture" in what follows. By affirmative culture is meant that culture of the bourgeois epoch which led in the course of its own development to the segregation from civilization of the mental and spiritual world as an independent realm of value that is also considered superior to civilization. Its decisive characteristic is the assertion of a universally obligatory, eternally better and more valuable world that must be unconditionally affirmed: a world essentially different from the factual world of the daily struggle for existence, yet realizable by every individual for himself "from within," without any transformation of the state of fact. It is only in this culture that cultural activities and objects gain that value which elevates them above the everyday sphere. Their reception becomes an act of celebration and exaltation.

Although the distinction between civilization and culture may have joined only recently the mental equipment of the social and cultural sciences, the state of affairs that it expresses has long been characteristic of the conduct of life and the *weltanschauung* of the bourgeois era. "Civilization and culture" is not simply a translation of the ancient relation of purposeful and purposeless, necessary and beautiful. As the purposeless and beautiful

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8 See *Studien über Autorität und Familie* ("Schriften des Instituts für Sozialforschung," V [Paris, 1936]), pp. 7ff.

9 Spengler interprets the relationship of culture and civilization not as simultaneity, but as "necessary organic succession." Civilization is the inevitable fate and end of every culture. See *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 23d to 32d editions (Munich, 1920), I, pp. 43–44. Such reformulation does not modify the abovementioned traditional evaluation of culture and civilization.

were internalized and, along with the qualities of binding universal validity and sublime beauty, made into the cultural values of the bourgeoisie, a realm of apparent unity and apparent freedom was constructed within culture in which the antagonistic relations of existence were supposed to be stabilized and pacified. Culture affirms and conceals the new conditions of social life.

In antiquity, the world of the beautiful beyond necessity was essentially a world of happiness and enjoyment. The ancient theory had never doubted that men's concern was ultimately their worldly gratification, their happiness. Ultimately, not immediately; for man's first concern is the struggle for the preservation and protection of mere existence. In view of the meager development of the productive forces in the ancient economy, it never occurred to philosophy that material practice could ever be fashioned in such a way that it would itself contain the space and time for happiness. Anxiety stands at the source of all idealistic doctrines that look for the highest felicity in ideational practice: anxiety about the uncertainty of all the conditions of life, about the contingency of loss, of dependence, and of poverty, but anxiety also about satiation, ennui, and envy of men and the gods. Nonetheless, anxiety about happiness, which drove philosophy to separate beauty and necessity, preserves the demand for happiness even within the separated sphere. Happiness becomes a preserve, in order for it to be able to be present at all. What man is to find in the philosophical knowledge of the true, the good, and the beautiful is ultimate pleasure, which has all the opposite characteristics of material facticity: permanence in change, purity amidst impurity, freedom amidst unfreedom.

The abstract individual who emerges as the subject of practice at the beginning of the bourgeois epoch also becomes the bearer of a new claim to happiness, merely on the basis of the new constellation of social forces. No longer acting as the representative or delegate of higher social bodies, each separate individual is supposed to take the provision of his needs and the fulfillment of his wants into his own hands and be in immediate relation to his "vocation," to his purpose and goals, without the social, ecclesiastical, and political mediations of feudalism. In this situation the individual was allotted more room for individual requirements and satisfactions: room which developing capitalist production began to fill with more and more objects of possible satisfaction in the form of commodities. To this extent, the bourgeois liberation of the individual made possible a new happiness.

But the universality of this happiness is immediately canceled, since the abstract equality of men realizes itself in capitalist production as concrete inequality. Only a small number of men dispose of the purchasing power required for the quantity of goods necessary in order to secure happiness. Equality does not extend to the conditions for attaining the means. For the strata of the rural and urban proletariat, on whom the bourgeoisie depended in their struggle against the feudal powers, abstract equality could have meaning only as real equality. For the bourgeoisie, when it came to power, abstract equality sufficed for the flourishing of real individual freedom and

real individual happiness, since it already disposed of the material conditions that could bring about such satisfaction. Indeed, stopping at the stage of abstract freedom belonged to the conditions of bourgeois rule, which would have been endangered by a transition from abstract to concrete universality. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie could not give up the general character of its demand (that equality be extended to all men) without denouncing itself and openly proclaiming to the ruled strata that, for the majority, everything was still the same with regard to the improvement of the conditions of life. Such a concession became even less likely as growing social wealth made the real fulfillment of this general demand possible while there was in contrast the relatively increasing poverty of the poor in city and country. Thus the demand became a postulate, and its object a mere idea. The vocation of man, to whom general fulfillment is denied in the material world, is hypostatized as an ideal.

The rising bourgeois groups had based their demand for a new social freedom on the universality of human reason. Against the belief in the divinely instituted eternity of a restrictive order they maintained their belief in progress, in a better future. But reason and freedom did not extend beyond these groups' interest, which came into increasing opposition to the interest of the majority. To accusing questions the bourgeoisie gave a decisive answer: affirmative culture. The latter is fundamentally idealist. To the need of the isolated individual it responds with general humanity, to bodily misery with the beauty of the soul, to external bondage with internal freedom, to brutal egoism with the duty of the realm of virtue. Whereas during the period of the militant rise of the new society all of these ideas had a progressive character by pointing beyond the attained organization of existence, they entered increasingly into the service of the suppression of the discontented masses and of mere self-justifying exaltation, once bourgeois rule began to be stabilized. They concealed the physical and psychic vitiation of the individual.

But bourgeois idealism is not merely ideology, for it expresses a correct objective content. It contains not only the justification of the established form of existence, but also the pain of its establishment: not only quiescence about what is, but also remembrance of what could be. By making suffering and sorrow into eternal, universal forces, great bourgeois art has continually shattered in the hearts of men the facile resignation of everyday life. By painting in the luminous colors of this world the beauty of men and things and transmundane happiness, it has planted real longing alongside poor consolation and false consecration in the soil of bourgeois life. This art raised pain and sorrow, desperation and loneliness, to the level of metaphysical powers and set individuals against one another and the gods in the nakedness of physical immediacy, beyond all social mediations. This exaggeration contains the higher truth that such a world cannot be changed piecemeal, but only through its destruction. Classical bourgeois art put its ideal forms at such a distance from everyday occurrence that those whose suffering and



hope reside in daily life could only rediscover themselves through a leap into a totally other world. In this way art nourished the belief that all previous history had been only the dark and tragic prehistory of a coming existence. And philosophy took this idea seriously enough to be concerned about its realization. Hegel's system is the last protest against the degradation of the idea: against playing officiously with the mind as though it were an object that really has nothing to do with human history. At least idealism maintained that the materialism of bourgeois practice is not the last word and that mankind must be led beyond it. Thus idealism belongs to a more progressive stage of development than later positivism, which in fighting metaphysical ideas eliminates not only their metaphysical character, but their content as well. It thus links itself inevitably to the status quo.

Culture is supposed to assume concern for the individual's claim to happiness. But the social antagonisms at the root of culture let it admit this claim only in an internalized and rationalized form. In a society that reproduces itself through economic competition, the mere demand for a happier social existence constitutes rebellion. For if men value the enjoyment of worldly happiness, then they certainly cannot value acquisitive activity, profit, and the authority of the economic powers that preserve the existence of this society. The claim to happiness has a dangerous ring in an order that for the majority means need, privation, and toil. The contradictions of such an order provide the impetus to the idealization of that claim. But the real gratification of individuals cannot be contained by an idealistic dynamic which either continually postpones gratification or transmutes it into striving for the unattained. It can only be realized *against* idealist culture, and only *against* this culture is it propagated as a general demand: the demand for a real transformation of the material conditions of existence, for a new life, for a new form of labor and of enjoyment. Thus it has remained active in the revolutionary groups that have fought the expanding new system of injustice since the waning of the Middle Ages. And while idealism surrenders the earth to bourgeois society and makes its ideas unreal by finding satisfaction in heaven and the soul, materialist philosophy takes seriously the concern for happiness and fights for its realization in history. In the philosophy of the Enlightenment, this connection becomes clear.

False philosophy can, like theology, promise us an eternal happiness and, cradling us in beautiful chimeras, lead us there at the expense of our days or our pleasure. Quite different and wiser, true philosophy affords only a temporal happiness. It sows roses and flowers in our path and teaches us to pick them.<sup>10</sup>

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10 La Mettrie, "Discours sur le Bonheur," *Oeuvres Philosophiques* (Berlin, 1775), II, p. 102.

Idealist philosophy, too, admits the centrality of human happiness. But in its controversy with stoicism, the Enlightenment adopted precisely that form of the claim to happiness which is incompatible with idealism and with which affirmative culture cannot deal:

And how we shall be anti-Stoics! These philosophers are strict, sad, and hard; we shall be tender, joyful, and agreeable. All soul, they abstract from their body; all body, we shall abstract from our soul. They show themselves inaccessible to pleasure and pain; we shall be proud to feel both the one and the other. Aiming at the sublime, they elevate themselves above all occurrences and believe themselves to be truly men only insofar as they cease to exist. Ourselves, we shall not control what governs us, although circumstances will not command our feelings. By acknowledging their lordship and our bondage, we shall try to make them agreeable to us, in the conviction that it is here that the happiness of life resides. Finally, we shall believe ourselves that much happier, the more we feel nature, humanity, and all social virtues. We shall recognize none but these, nor any life other than this one.<sup>11</sup>

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In its idea of pure humanity, affirmative culture took up the historical demand for the general liberation of the individual. "If we consider mankind as we know it according to the laws which it embodies, we find nothing higher in man than humanity."<sup>12</sup> This concept is meant to comprise everything that is directed toward "man's noble education to reason and freedom, to more refined senses and instincts, to the most delicate and the heartiest health, to the fulfillment and domination of the earth."<sup>13</sup> All human laws and forms of government are to have the exclusive purpose of "enabling man, free from attack by others, to exercise his powers and acquire a more beautiful and freer enjoyment of life."<sup>14</sup> The highest point which man can attain is a community of free and rational persons in which each has the same opportunity to unfold and fulfill all of his powers. The concept of the person, in which the struggle against repressive collectivities has remained active through the present, disregards social conflicts and conventions and addresses itself to all individuals. No one relieves the individual of the burden of his existence, but no one prescribes his rights and sphere of action – no one except the "law in his own breast."

Nature intended that man generate entirely out of himself everything going beyond the mechanical organization of his animal existence, and that he

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11 *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87.

12 Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* in *Werke*, Bernhard Suphan, ed. (Berlin, 1877–1913), XIV, p. 208.

13 *Ibid.*, XIII, p. 154.

14 *Ibid.*, XIV, p. 209.

partake of no other happiness or perfection than that which he provides for himself, free of instinct, by means of his own reason.<sup>15</sup>

All wealth and all poverty derive from him and react back upon him. Each individual is immediate to himself: without worldly or heavenly mediations. And this immediacy also holds for his relations to others. The clearest representation of this idea of the person is to be found in classical literature since Shakespeare. In its dramas, individuals are so close to one another that between them there is nothing that is in principle ineffable or inexpressible. Verse makes possible what has already become impossible in prosaic reality. In poetry men can transcend all social isolation and distance and speak of the first and last things. They overcome the factual loneliness in the glow of great and beautiful words; they may even let loneliness appear in its metaphysical beauty. Criminal and saint, prince and servant, sage and fool, rich and poor join in discussion whose free flow is supposed to give rise to truth. The unity represented by art and the pure humanity of its persons are unreal; they are the counterimage of what occurs in social reality. The critical and revolutionary force of the ideal, which in its very unreality keeps alive the best desires of men amidst a bad reality, becomes clearest in those times when the satiated social strata have accomplished the betrayal of their own ideals. The ideal, to be sure, was conceived in such a fashion that its regressive and apologetic, rather than its progressive and critical, characteristics predominated. Its realization is supposed to be effected through the cultural education of individuals. Culture means not so much a better world as a nobler one: a world to be brought about not through the overthrow of the material order of life but through events in the individual's soul. Humanity becomes an inner state. Freedom, goodness, and beauty become spiritual qualities: understanding for everything human, knowledge about the greatness of all times, appreciation of everything difficult and sublime, respect for history in which all of this has become what it is. This inner state is to be the source of action that does not come into conflict with the given order. Culture belongs not to him who comprehends the truths of humanity as a battle cry, but to him in whom they have become a posture which leads to a mode of proper behavior: exhibiting harmony and reflectiveness even in daily routine. Culture should ennoble the given by permeating it, rather than putting something new in its place. It thus exalts the individual without freeing him from his factual debasement. Culture speaks of the dignity of "man" without concerning itself with a concretely more dignified status for men. The beauty of culture is above all an inner beauty and can only reach the external world from within. Its realm is essentially a realm of the *soul*.

That culture is a matter of spiritual (*seelisch*) values is constitutive of the affirmative concept of culture at least since Herder. Spiritual values belong

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15 Kant, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* in *Werke*, Ernst Cassirer, ed. (Berlin, 1912ff.), IV, p. 153.

to the definition of culture in contrast to mere civilization. Alfred Weber was merely summing up a conceptual scheme with a long history when he wrote:

Culture . . . is merely spiritual expression and spiritual will and thus the expression and will of an "essence" that lies behind all intellectual mastery of existence, of a "soul" that, in its striving for expression and in its willing, pays no regard to purposiveness and utility. . . . From this follows the concept of culture as the prevailing form in which the spiritual is expressed and released in the materially and spiritually given substance of existence.<sup>16</sup>

The soul posited by this interpretation is other and more than the totality of psychic forces and mechanisms (such as might be the object of empirical psychology). Rather, this noncorporeal being of man is asserted as the real substance of the individual.

The character of the soul as substance has since Descartes been founded upon the uniqueness of the ego as *res cogitans*. While the entire world outside the ego becomes in principle one of measurable matter with calculable motion, the ego is the only dimension of reality to evade the materialistic rationality of the rising bourgeoisie. By coming into opposition to the corporeal world as a substance differing from it in essence, the ego is subjected to a remarkable division into two regions. The ego as the subject of thought (*mens*, mind) remains, in the independence of self-certainty, on this side of the being of matter – its a priori, as it were – while Descartes attempts to explain materialistically the ego as soul (*anima*), as the subject of "passions" (love and hate, joy and sorrow, shame, jealousy, regret, gratitude, and so forth). The passions of the soul are traced to blood circulation and its transformation in the brain. This reduction does not quite succeed. To be sure, all muscular movements and sense perceptions are thought to depend on the nerves, which "are like small filaments or small pipes that all come from the brain," but the nerves themselves contain "a certain very fine air or wind called animal spirits."<sup>17</sup> Despite this immaterial residue, the tendency of the interpretation is clear: the ego is either mind (thought, *cogito me cogitare*) or, insofar as it is not merely thought (*cogitatio*), it is no longer authentically ego, but rather corporeal. In the latter case, the properties and activities ascribed to it belonged to *res extensa*.<sup>18</sup> Yet they do not quite admit of being dissolved into matter. The soul remains an unmastered intermediate realm

16 Alfred Weber, "Prinzipielles zur Kulturosoziologie," *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft*, XLVII (1920–21), pp. 29ff. See also Georg Simmel, "Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur," where "the soul's way to itself" is described as the fundamental fact of culture [in *Philosophische Kultur* (Leipzig, 1919), p. 222]. Spengler characterizes culture as "the realization of the spiritually possible"; *op. cit.*, p. 418.

17 Descartes, *Traité des Passions*, François Mizrachi, ed. (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1965), p. 39.

18 See Descartes' reply to Gassendi's objections to the second Meditation, *Meditationen über die Grundlagen der Philosophie*, trans. by A. Buchenau (Leipzig, 1915), pp. 327–328.

between the unshakable self-certainty of pure thought and the mathematical and physical certainty of material being. Already in the original project of rationalism there is no room in the system for what is later considered actually to compose the soul, viz. the individual's feelings, appetites, desires, and instincts. The position within rationalism of empirical psychology, i.e. of the discipline really dealing with the human soul, is characteristic, for it exists although reason is unable to legitimate it.

Kant polemized against the treatment of empirical psychology within rational metaphysics (by Baumgarten). Empirical psychology must be "completely banished from the domain of metaphysics; it is indeed already completely excluded by the very idea of the latter science." But, he goes on, "in conformity, however, with scholastic usage we must allow it some sort of a place (although as an episode only) in metaphysics, and this from economical motives, because it is not yet so rich as to be able to form a subject of study by itself, and yet is too important to be entirely excluded and forced to settle elsewhere. . . . It is thus merely a stranger who is taken in for a short while until he finds a home of his own, in a complete anthropology."<sup>19</sup> And in his metaphysics lectures of 1792–93 Kant expressed himself even more sceptically about this "stranger": "Is an empirical psychology possible as science? No – our knowledge of the soul is entirely too limited."<sup>20</sup>

Rationalism's estrangement from the soul points to an important state of affairs. For in fact the soul does not enter into the social labor process. Concrete labor is reduced to abstract labor that makes possible the exchange of the products of labor as commodities. The idea of the soul seems to allude to those areas of life which cannot be managed by the abstract reason of bourgeois practice. It is as though the processing of matter is accomplished only by a part of the *res cogitans*: by technical reason. Beginning with the division of labor in manufacture and brought to completion in machine industry, "the intellectual [*geistigen*] potencies of the material process of production" come into opposition to the immediate producers as "the property of another and as a power that rules them."<sup>21</sup> To the extent that thought is not immediately technical reason, it has freed itself since Descartes from conscious connection with social practice and tolerates the reification that it itself promotes. When in this practice human relations appear as material relations, as the very laws of things, philosophy abandons the individual to this appearance by retreating and re-establishing itself at the level of the transcendental constitution of the world in pure subjectivity. Transcendental

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19 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1958), p. 654 (with changes in translation).

20 *Die Philosophischen Hauptvorlesungen Immanuel Kants*, A. Kowalewski, ed. (Munich and Leipzig, 1924), p. 602.

21 Marx, *Das Kapital*, Meissner, ed. (Hamburg, n.d.), I, p. 326.

philosophy does not make contact with reification, for it investigates only the process of cognition of the immemorially (*je schon*) reified world.

The soul is not comprehended by the dichotomy of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, for it cannot be understood merely as one or the other. Kant destroyed rational psychology without arriving at an empirical psychology. For Hegel, every single attribute of the soul is comprehended from the standpoint of mind (*Geist*), into which the soul passes over (*übergeht*); for mind reveals itself to be the soul's true content. The soul is essentially characterized by its "not yet being mind."<sup>22</sup> Where Hegel treats psychology, i.e. the human soul, in his doctrine of subjective mind, the guiding principle is no longer soul but mind. Hegel deals with the soul principally as part of "anthropology," where it is still completely "bound to the attributes of nature."<sup>23</sup> He examines planetary life on a general scale, natural racial distinctions, the ages of man, magic, somnambulism, various forms of psychopathic self-images, and – only for a few pages – the "real soul." For him the latter is nothing but the transition to the ego of consciousness, wherewith the anthropological doctrine of soul is already left behind, and the phenomenology of mind arrived at. The soul is thus allotted to physiological anthropology on the one hand and the philosophy of mind on the other. Even in the greatest system of bourgeois rationalism there is no place for the independence of the soul. The authentic objects of psychology, feelings, instincts, and will, are conceived only as forms of the existence of mind.

With its concept of the soul, however, affirmative culture means precisely what is not mind. Indeed, the concept of soul comes into ever sharper contradiction to the concept of mind. What is meant by soul "is forever inaccessible to the lucid mind, to the understanding, or to empirical, factual research. . . . One could sooner dissect with a knife a theme by Beethoven or dissolve it with an acid than analyze the soul with the means of abstract thought."<sup>24</sup> In the idea of the soul, the noncorporeal faculties, activities, and properties of man (according to the traditional classifications, reason, will, and appetite) are combined in an indivisible unity that manifestly endures through all of the individual's behavior and, indeed, constitutes his individuality.

The concept of the soul typical of affirmative culture was not developed by philosophy, and the examples from Descartes, Kant, and Hegel were intended only to illustrate philosophy's embarrassment with regard to the soul.<sup>25</sup> This concept found its first positive expression in the literature of the Renaissance. Here the soul is in the first instance an unexplored part

22 Hegel, *Enzyklopödie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, II, par. 388.

23 *Ibid.*, par. 387, addendum.

24 Spengler, *op. cit.*, p. 406.

25 Characteristic is the introduction of the concept of the soul in Herbart's psychology: The soul is "not anywhere or anytime" and has "absolutely no predisposition and faculties either to receive or produce anything." "The simple nature of the soul is fully unknown and forever remains so; is as little an object of speculative as of

of the world to be discovered and enjoyed. To it are extended those demands with whose proclamation the new society accompanied the rational domination of the world by liberated man: freedom and the intrinsic worth of the individual. The riches of the soul, of the “inner life,” were thus the correlate of the new-found riches of external life. Interest in the neglected “individual, incomparable, living states” of the soul belonged to the program of “living out one’s life fully and entirely.”<sup>26</sup> Concern with the soul “reacts upon the increasing differentiation of individualities and augments man’s consciousness of enjoying life with a natural development rooted in man’s essence.”<sup>27</sup> Seen from the standpoint of the consummated affirmative culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this spiritual demand appears as an unfulfilled promise. The idea of “natural development” remains, but it signifies primarily inner development. In the external world the soul cannot freely “live itself out.” The organization of this world by the capitalist labor process has turned the development of the individual into economic competition and left the satisfaction of his needs to the commodity market. Affirmative culture uses the soul as a protest against reification, only to succumb to it in the end. The soul is sheltered as the only area of life that has not been drawn into the social labor process.

The word “soul” gives the higher man a feeling of his inner existence, separated from all that is real or has evolved, a very definite feeling of the most secret and genuine potentialities of his life, his destiny, his history. In the early stages of the languages of all cultures, the word “soul” is a sign that encompasses everything that is not world.<sup>28</sup>

And in this – negative – quality it now becomes the only still immaculate guarantor of bourgeois ideals. The soul glorifies resignation. The ideal that man, individual, irreplaceable man, beyond all natural and social distinctions, be the ultimate end; that truth, goodness, and justice hold between men; that all human weaknesses be expiated by humanity – this ideal can be represented, in a society determined by the economic law of value, only by the soul and as spiritual occurrence. All else is inhuman and discredited. The soul alone obviously has no exchange value. The value of the soul does not enter into the body in such a way as to congeal into an object and become a commodity. There can be a beautiful soul in an ugly body, a healthy one in a sick body, a noble one in a common body – and vice versa. There is a

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empirical psychology.” Herbart, *Lehrbuch zur Psychologie in Sämtliche Werke*, Hartenstein, ed. (Leipzig, 1850), V, pp. 108–109.

26 Wilhelm Dilthey on Petrarch in “Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance und Reformation,” *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leipzig, 1914), II, p. 20.

See also Dilthey’s analysis of the transition from metaphysical to “descriptive and analytical” psychology in the thought of L. Vives, *ibid.*, pp. 423ff.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

28 Spengler, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

kernel of truth in the proposition that what happens to the body cannot affect the soul. But in the established order this truth has taken on a terrible form. The freedom of the soul was used to excuse the poverty, martyrdom, and bondage of the body. It served the ideological surrender of existence to the economy of capitalism. Correctly understood, however, spiritual freedom does not mean the participation of man in an eternal beyond where everything is righted when the individual can no longer benefit from it. Rather, it anticipates the higher truth that in this world a form of social existence is possible in which the economy does not preempt the entire life of individuals. Man does not live by bread alone; this truth is thoroughly falsified by the interpretation that spiritual nourishment is an adequate substitute for too little bread.

The soul appears to escape reification just as it does the law of value. As a matter of fact, it can almost be defined by the assertion that through its means all reified relations are dissolved into human relations and negated. The soul institutes an all-encompassing inner community of men that spans the centuries. "The first thought in the first human soul links up with the last thought in the last human soul."<sup>29</sup> In the realm of culture, spiritual education and spiritual greatness overcome the inequality and unfreedom of everyday competition, for men participate in culture as free and equal beings. He who looks to the soul sees through economic relations to men in themselves. Where the soul speaks, the contingent position and merit of men in the social process are transcended. Love breaks through barriers between rich and poor, high and lowly. Friendship keeps faith even with the outcast and despised, and truth raises its voice even before the tyrant's throne. Despite all social obstacles and encroachments, the soul develops in the individual's interior. The most cramped surroundings are large enough to expand into an infinite environment for the soul. In its classical era, affirmative culture continually poetized the soul in such a manner.

The individual's soul is first set off from, and against, his body. Its adoption as the decisive area of life can have two meanings: the release of sensuality (as the irrelevant area of life) or, to the contrary, the subjection of sensuality to the domination of the soul. Affirmative culture unequivocally took the second course. Release of sensuality would be release of enjoyment, which presupposes the absence of guilty conscience and the real possibility of gratification. In bourgeois society, such a trend is increasingly opposed by the necessity of disciplining discontented masses. The internalization of enjoyment through spiritualization therefore becomes one of the decisive tasks of cultural education. By being incorporated into spiritual life, sensuality is to be harnessed and transfigured. From the coupling of sensuality and the soul proceeds the bourgeois idea of love.

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29 Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, op. cit., V, p. 135.



The spiritualization of sensuality fuses matter with heaven and death with eternity. The weaker the belief in a heavenly beyond, the stronger the veneration of the spiritual beyond. The idea of love absorbs the longing for the permanence of worldly happiness, for the blessing of the unconditional, for the conquest of termination. In bourgeois poetry, lovers love in opposition to everyday inconstancy, to the demands of reality, to the subjugation of the individual, and to death. Death does not come from outside, but from love itself. The liberation of the individual was effected in a society based not on solidarity but on conflict of interests among individuals. The individual has the character of an independent, self-sufficient monad. His relation to the (human and non-human) world is either abstractly immediate (the individual constitutes the world immemorally in itself as knowing, feeling, and willing ego) or abstractly mediated (i.e. determined by the blind laws of the production of commodities and of the market). In neither case is the monadic isolation of the individual overcome. To do so would mean the establishment of real solidarity and presupposes the replacement of individualist society by a higher form of social existence.

The idea of love, however, requires that the individual overcome monadic isolation and find fulfillment through the surrender of individuality in the unconditional solidarity of two persons. In a society in which conflict of interest is the *principium individuationis*, this complete surrender can appear in pure form only in death. For only death eliminates all of the external conditions that destroy permanent solidarity and in the struggle with which individuals wear themselves out. It appears not as the cessation of existence in nothingness, but rather as the only possible consummation of love and thus as its deepest significance.

While in art love is elevated to tragedy, it threatens to become mere duty and habit in everyday bourgeois life. Love contains the individualistic principle of the new society: it demands exclusiveness. The latter appears in the requirement of unconditional fidelity which, originating in the soul, should also be obligatory for sensuality. But the spiritualization of sensuality demands of the latter what it cannot achieve: withdrawal from change and fluctuation and absorption into the unity and indivisibility of the person. Just at this point, inwardness and outwardness, potentiality and reality are supposed to be found in a pre-established harmony which the anarchic principle of society destroys everywhere. This contradiction makes exclusive fidelity untrue and vitiates sensuality, which finds an outlet in the furtive improprieties of the *petit bourgeois*.

Purely private relationships such as love and friendship are the only realm in which the dominion of the soul is supposed to be immediately confirmed in reality. Otherwise the soul has primarily the function of elevating men to the ideal without urging the latter's realization. The soul has a tranquilizing effect. Because it is exempted from reification, it suffers from it least, consequently meeting it with the least resistance. Since the soul's meaning and worth do not fall within historical reality, it can maintain itself un-

harmful in a bad reality. Spiritual joys are cheaper than bodily ones; they are less dangerous and are granted more willingly. An essential difference between the soul and the mind is that the former is not oriented toward critical knowledge of truth. The soul can understand what the mind must condemn. Conceptual knowledge attempts to distinguish the one from the other and resolves contradiction only on the basis of the "dispassionately proceeding necessity of the object," while the soul rapidly reconciles all "external" antitheses in some "internal" unity. If there is a Western, Germanic, Faustian soul, then a Western, Germanic, and Faustian culture belongs to it, and feudal, capitalist, and socialist societies are nothing but manifestations of such souls. Their firm antitheses dissolve into the beautiful and profound unity of culture. The reconciliatory nature of the soul manifests itself clearly where psychology is made the organon of the social and cultural sciences, without foundation in a theory of society that penetrates behind culture. The soul has a strong affinity with historicism. As early as Herder we find the idea that the soul, freed from rationalism, should be capable of universal empathy (*empfinden*). He adjures the soul,

Entire nature of the soul that rules all things, that models all other inclinations and psychic forces after itself and tinges even the most indifferent actions – in order to feel these, do not answer in words, but penetrate into the epoch, into the region of heaven, into all of history, feel yourself into everything . . .<sup>30</sup>

With its property of universal empathy the soul devalues the distinction between true and false, good and bad, or rational and irrational that can be made through the analysis of social reality with regard to the attainable potentialities of the organization of material existence. Every historical epoch, then, as Ranke stated, manifests but another facet of the same human spirit. Each one possesses its own meaning, "and its value rests not on what results from it, but on its very existence, on its own self."<sup>31</sup> Soul has nothing to do with the correctness of what it expresses. It can do honor to a bad cause (as in Dostoevski's case).<sup>32</sup> In the struggle for a better human future, profound and refined souls may stand aside or on the wrong side. The soul takes fright at the hard truth of theory, which points up the necessity of changing an impoverished form of existence. How can an external transformation determine the authentic, inner substance of man? Soul lets one be soft and compliant, submitting to the facts; for, after all, they do not really

30 Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*, *ibid.*, p. 503.

31 Ranke, *Über die Epochen der neueren Geschichte*, in *Das politische Gespräch und andere Schriften zur Wissenschaftslehre*, Erich Rothacker, ed. (Halle, 1925), pp. 61–62.

32 On the quietist character of spiritual demands in Dostoevski see L. Löwenthal, "Die Auffassung Dostojewskis im Vorkriegsdeutschland," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, III (1934), p. 363.

matter. In this way the soul was able to become a useful factor in the technique of mass domination when, in the epoch of authoritarian states, all available forces had to be mobilized against a real transformation of social existence. With the help of the soul, the bourgeoisie in advanced capitalist society buried its ideals of an earlier period. That soul is of the essence makes a good slogan when only power is of the essence.

But the soul really is essential – as the unexpressed, unfulfilled life of the individual. The culture of souls absorbed in a false form those forces and wants which could find no place in everyday life. The cultural ideal assimilated men's longing for a happier life: for humanity, goodness, joy, truth, and solidarity. Only, in this ideal, they are all furnished with the affirmative accent of belonging to a higher, purer, nonprosaic world. They are either internalized as the duty of the individual soul (to achieve what is constantly betrayed in the external existence of the whole) or represented as objects of art (whereby their reality is relegated to a realm essentially different from that of everyday life). There is a good reason for the exemplification of the cultural ideal in art, for only in art has bourgeois society tolerated its own ideals and taken them seriously as a general demand. What counts as utopia, phantasy, and rebellion in the world of fact is allowed in art. There affirmative culture has displayed the forgotten truths over which "realism" triumphs in daily life. The medium of beauty decontaminates truth and sets it apart from the present. What occurs in art occurs with no obligation. When this beautiful world is not completely represented as something long past (the classic artistic portrayal of victorious humanity, Goethe's *Iphigenie*, is a "historical" drama), it is deprived of concrete relevance by the magic of beauty.

In the medium of beauty, men have been permitted to partake of happiness. But even beauty has been affirmed with good conscience only in the ideal of art, for it contains a dangerous violence that threatens the given form of existence. The immediate sensuousness of beauty immediately suggests sensual happiness. According to Hume the power to stimulate pleasure belongs to the essential character of beauty. Pleasure is not merely a by-product of beauty, but constitutes its very essence.<sup>33</sup> And for Nietzsche beauty reawakens "aphrodisiac bliss." He polemizes against Kant's definition of the beautiful as the object of completely disinterested pleasure (*Wohlgefallen*) and opposes to it Stendhal's assertion that beauty is "une promesse de bonheur."<sup>34</sup> Therein lies its danger in a society that must rationalize and regulate happiness. Beauty is fundamentally shameless.<sup>35</sup> It displays what may not be promised openly and what is denied the majority. In the

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33 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, L. A. Selby-Bigge, ed. (Oxford, 1928), p. 301.

34 Nietzsche, *Werke* (large 8vo ed., 1917), XVI, p. 233, and VII, p. 408.

35 Goethe, *Faust II*, Phorkias: "Old is the saying, yet noble and true its meaning still,

region of mere sensuality, separated from its connection with the ideal, beauty falls prey to the general devaluation of this sphere. Loosed from all spiritual and mental demands, beauty may be enjoyed in good conscience only in well delimited areas, with the awareness that it is only for a short period of relaxation or dissipation.

Bourgeois society has liberated individuals, but as persons who are to keep themselves in check. From the beginning, the prohibition of pleasure was a condition of freedom. A society split into classes can afford to make man into a means of pleasure only in the form of bondage and exploitation. Since in the new order the regulated classes rendered services not immediately, with their persons, but only mediated by the production of surplus value for the market, it was considered inhuman to exploit an underling's body as a source of pleasure, i.e., to use men directly as means (Kant). On the other hand, harnessing their bodies and intelligence for profit was considered a natural activation of freedom. Correspondingly, for the poor, hiring oneself out to work in a factory became a moral duty, while hiring out one's body as a means to pleasure was depravity and "prostitution." Also, in this society, poverty is a condition of profit and power, yet dependence takes place in the medium of abstract freedom. The sale of labor power is supposed to occur due to the poor man's own decision. He labors in the service of his employer, while he may keep for himself and cultivate as a sacred preserve the abstraction that is his person-in-itself, separated from its socially valuable functions. He is supposed to keep it pure. The prohibition against marketing the body not merely as an instrument of labor but as an instrument of pleasure as well is one of the chief social and psychological roots of bourgeois patriarchal ideology. Here reification has firm limits important to the system. Nonetheless, insofar as the body becomes a commodity as a manifestation or bearer of the sexual function, this occurs subject to general contempt. The taboo is violated. This holds not only for prostitution but for all production of pleasure that does not occur for reasons of "social hygiene" in the service of reproduction.

Those social strata, however, which are kept back in semi-medieval forms, pushed to the lowest margin of society, and thoroughly demoralized, provide, even in these circumstances, an anticipatory memory. When the body has completely become an object, a beautiful thing, it can foreshadow a new happiness. In suffering the most extreme reification man triumphs over reification. The artistry of the beautiful body, its effortless agility and relaxation, which can be displayed today only in the circus, vaudeville, and burlesque, herald the joy to which men will attain in being liberated from the ideal, once mankind, having become a true subject, succeeds in the mastery of matter. When all links to the affirmative ideal have been dissolved, when

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that shame and beauty never hand in hand traverse earth's green path," *Werke* (Cotta Jubiläumsausgabe), XIII, p. 159.

in the context of an existence marked by knowledge it becomes possible to have real enjoyment without any rationalization and without the least puritanical guilt feeling, when sensuality, in other words, is entirely released by the soul, then the first glimmer of a new culture emerges.

But in affirmative culture, the “soulless” regions do not belong to culture. Like every other commodity of the sphere of civilization, they are openly abandoned to the economic law of value. Only spiritual beauty and spiritual enjoyment are left in culture. According to Shaftesbury, it follows from the inability of animals to know and enjoy beauty

“that neither can man by the same sense or brutish part conceive or enjoy beauty; but all the beauty and good he enjoys is in a nobler way, and by the help of what is noblest, his mind and reason.” . . . When you place a joy elsewhere than in the mind, the enjoyment itself will be no beautiful subject, nor of any graceful or agreeable appearance.<sup>36</sup>

Only in the medium of ideal beauty, in art, was happiness permitted to be reproduced as a cultural value in the totality of social life. Not so in the two areas of culture which in other respects share with art in the representation of ideal truth: philosophy and religion. In its idealist trend, philosophy became increasingly distrustful of happiness, and religion accorded it a place only in the hereafter. Ideal beauty was the form in which yearning could be expressed and happiness enjoyed. Thus art became the presage of possible truth. Classical German aesthetics comprehended the relation between beauty and truth in the idea of an aesthetic education of the human species. Schiller says that the “political problem” of a better organization of society “must take the path through the aesthetic realm, because it is through beauty that one arrives at freedom.”<sup>37</sup> And in his poem “*Die Künstler*” [“The Artists”] he expresses the relation between the established and the coming culture in the lines: “What we have here perceived as beauty / We shall some day encounter as truth” (“*Was wir als Schönheit hier empfunden / Wird einst als Wahrheit uns entgegengehn*”). With respect to the extent of socially permitted truth and to the form of attained happiness, art is the highest and most representative area within affirmative culture. “Culture: dominion of art over life” – this was Nietzsche’s definition.<sup>38</sup> What entitles art to this unique role?

Unlike the truth of theory, the beauty of art is compatible with the bad present, despite and within which it can afford happiness. True theory recognizes the misery and lack of happiness prevailing in the established order.

36 “The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody” in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, etc.* by the Right Honourable Anthony Earl of Shaftesbury. John M. Robertson, ed. (in two volumes; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1900), II, p. 143.

37 Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, end of the second letter.

38 Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, X, p. 245.

Even when it shows the way to transformation, it offers no consolation that reconciles one to the present. In a world without happiness, however, happiness cannot but be a consolation: the consolation of a beautiful moment in an interminable chain of misfortune. The enjoyment of happiness is compressed into a momentary episode. But the moment embodies the bitterness of its disappearance. Given the isolation of lone individuals, there is no one in whom one's own happiness can be preserved after the moment passes, no one who is not subject to the same isolation. Ephemerality which does not leave behind solidarity among the survivors must be eternalized in order to become at all bearable. For it recurs in every moment of existence and in each one, as it were, it anticipates death. Because every moment comprehends death, the beautiful moment must be eternalized in order to make possible anything like happiness. In the happiness it proffers, affirmative culture eternalizes the beautiful moment; it immortalizes the ephemeral.

One of the decisive social tasks of affirmative culture is based on this contradiction between the insufferable mutability of a bad existence and the need for happiness in order to make such existence bearable. Within this existence the resolution can be only illusory. And the possibility of a solution rests precisely on the character of artistic beauty as *illusion*. On the one hand the enjoyment of happiness is permitted only in spiritualized, idealized form. On the other, idealization annuls the meaning of happiness. For the ideal cannot be enjoyed, since all pleasure is foreign to it and would destroy the rigor and purity that must adhere to it in idealless reality if it is to be able to carry out its internalizing, disciplining function. The ideal emulated by the person who renounces his instincts and places himself under the categorical imperative of duty (this Kantian ideal is merely the epitome of all affirmative tendencies of culture) is insensitive to happiness. It can provide neither happiness nor consolation since it never affords gratification in the present. If the individual is ever to come under the power of the ideal to the extent of believing that his concrete longings and needs are to be found in it – found moreover in a state of fulfillment and gratification, then the ideal must give the illusion of granting present satisfaction. It is this illusory reality that neither philosophy nor religion can attain. Only art achieves it – in the medium of beauty. Goethe disclosed the deceptive and consoling role of beauty when he wrote:

The human mind finds itself in a glorious state when it admires, when it worships, when it exalts an object and is exalted by it. Only it cannot long abide in this condition. The universal left it cold, the ideal elevated it above itself. Now, however, it would like to return to itself. It would like to enjoy again the earlier inclination that it cherished toward the individual without returning to a state of limitation, and does not want to let the significant, that which exalts the mind, depart. What would become of the mind in this condition if beauty did not intervene and happily solve the riddle! Only beauty gives life and warmth to the scientific; and by moderating the high and significant and showering it with heavenly charm, beauty brings us closer to it.

A beautiful work of art has come full circle; it is now a sort of individual that we can embrace with affection, that we can appropriate.<sup>39</sup>

What is decisive in this connection is not that art represents ideal reality, but that it represents it as beautiful reality. Beauty gives the ideal the character of the charming, the gladdening, and the gratifying – of happiness. It alone perfects the illusion of art. For only through it does the illusory world arouse the appearance of familiarity, of being present: in short, of reality. Illusion (*Schein*) really enables something to appear (*erscheinen*): in the beauty of the work of art, longing is momentarily fulfilled. The percipient experiences happiness. And once it has taken form in the work, the beautiful moment can be continually repeated. It is eternalized in the art work. In artistic enjoyment, the percipient can always reproduce such happiness.

Affirmative culture was the historical form in which were preserved those human wants which surpassed the material reproduction of existence. To that extent, what is true of the form of social reality to which it belonged holds for it as well: right is on its side. Certainly, it exonerated “external conditions” from responsibility for the “vocation of man,” thus stabilizing their injustice. But it also held up to them as a task the image of a better order. The image is distorted, and the distortion falsified all cultural values of the bourgeoisie. Nevertheless it is an image of happiness. There is an element of earthly delight in the works of great bourgeois art, even when they portray heaven. The individual enjoys beauty, goodness, splendor, peace, and victorious joy. He even enjoys pain and suffering, cruelty and crime. He experiences liberation. And he understands, and encounters understanding for and in response to, his instincts and demands. Reification is transpierced in private. In art one does not have to be “realistic,” for man is at stake, not his occupation or status. Suffering is suffering and joy is joy. The world appears as what it is behind the commodity form: a landscape is really a landscape, a man really a man, a thing really a thing.

In the form of existence to which affirmative culture belongs, “happiness in existing . . . is possible only as happiness in illusion.”<sup>40</sup> But this illusion has a real effect, producing satisfaction. The latter’s meaning, though, is decisively altered; it enters the service of the status quo. The rebellious idea becomes an accessory in justification. The truth of a higher world, of a higher good than material existence, conceals the truth that a better material existence can be created in which such happiness is realized. In affirmative culture even unhappiness becomes a means of subordination and acquiescence. By exhibiting the beautiful as present, art pacifies rebellious desire. Together with the other cultural areas it has contributed to the great educational achievement of so disciplining the liberated individual, for whom the new

39 Goethe, *Der Sammler und die Seinigen*, toward the end of the sixth letter.

40 Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, XIV, p. 366.

freedom has brought a new form of bondage, that he tolerates the unfreedom of social existence. The potentiality of a richer life, a potentiality disclosed with the help of modern thought, and the impoverished actual form of life have come into open opposition, repeatedly compelling this thought to internalize its own demands and deflect its own conclusions. It took a centuries-long education to help make bearable the daily reproduced shock that arises from the contradiction between the constant sermon of the inalienable freedom, majesty, and dignity of the person, the magnificence and autonomy of reason, the goodness of humanity and of impartial charity and justice, on the one hand, and the general degradation of the majority of mankind, the irrationality of the social life process, the victory of the labor market over humanity, and of profit over charity, on the other. "The entire counterfeit of transcendence and of the hereafter has grown up on the basis of an *impoverished* life . . ." <sup>41</sup> but the injection of cultural happiness into unhappiness and the spiritualization of sensuality mitigate the misery and the sickness of that life to a "healthy" work capacity. This is the real miracle of affirmative culture. Men can feel themselves happy even without being so at all. The effect of illusion renders incorrect even one's own assertion that one is happy. The individual, thrown back upon himself, learns to bear and, in a certain sense, to love his isolation. Factual loneliness is sublimated to metaphysical loneliness and, as such, is accorded the entire aura and rapture of inner plenitude alongside external poverty. In its idea of personality affirmative culture reproduces and glorifies individuals' social isolation and impoverishment.

The personality is the bearer of the cultural ideal. It is supposed to represent happiness in the form in which this culture proclaims it as the highest good: private harmony amidst general anarchy, joyful activity amidst bitter labor. The personality has absorbed everything good and cast off or refined everything bad. It matters not that man lives. What matters is only that he live as well as possible. That is one of the precepts of affirmative culture. "Well" here refers essentially to culture: participating in spiritual and mental values, patterning individual existence after the humanity of the soul and the breadth of the mind. The happiness of unrationalized enjoyment has been omitted from the ideal of felicity. The latter may not violate the laws of the established order and, indeed, does not need to violate them, for it is to be realized immanently. The personality, which in developed affirmative culture is supposed to be the "highest happiness" of man, must respect the foundations of the status quo: deference to given relations of domination belongs to its virtues. It may only kick over the traces if it remains conscious of what it is doing and takes it back afterward.

It was not always so. Formerly, at the beginning of the new era, the personality showed another face. Like the soul whose completed human

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41 *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 41.



embodiment it was supposed to be, it belonged in the first instance to the ideology of the bourgeois liberation of the individual. The person was the source of all forces and properties that made the individual capable of mastering his fate and shaping his environment in accordance with his needs. Jacob Burckhardt depicted this idea of the personality in his description of the "uomo universale" of the Renaissance.<sup>42</sup> If the individual was addressed as a personality, this was to emphasize that all that he made of himself he owed only to himself, not to his ancestors, his social status, or God. The distinguishing mark of the personality was not soul (in the sense of the "beautiful soul") but power, influence, fame: a life as extensive and as full of deeds as possible.

In the concept of personality which has been representative of affirmative culture since Kant, there is nothing left of this expansive activism. The personality remains lord of its existence only as a spiritual and ethical subject. "Freedom and independence from the mechanism of nature as a whole," which is now the token of its nature,<sup>43</sup> is only an "intelligible" freedom that accepts the given circumstances of life as the material of duty. Space for external fulfillment has shrunk; space for inner fulfillment has expanded considerably. The individual has learned to place all demands primarily upon himself. The rule of the soul has become more exacting inwardly and more modest outwardly. The person is no longer a springboard for attacking the world, but rather a protected line of retreat behind the front. In its inwardness, as an ethical person, it is the individual's only secure possession, the only one he can never lose.<sup>44</sup> It is no longer the source of conquest, but of renunciation. Personality characterizes above all him who renounces, who ekes out fulfillment within given conditions, no matter how poor they might be. He finds happiness in the Establishment. But even in this impoverished form, the idea of personality contains a progressive aspect: the individual is still the ultimate concern. To be sure, culture individuates men to the isolation of self-contained personalities whose fulfillment lies within themselves. But this corresponds to a method of discipline still liberal in nature, for it exempts a concrete region of private life from domination. It lets the individual subsist as a person as long as he does not disturb the labor process, and lets the immanent laws of this labor process, i.e. economic forces, take care of men's social integration.



42 *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, 11th ed., L. Geiger, ed. (Leipzig, 1913), especially I, pp. 150ff.

43 Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, *op. cit.*, V. p. 95.

44 Goethe once expressed as follows the quality "only" that is present in the idea of personality: "People are always carping at the personality, reasonably and boldly. But what do you have that gladdens you aside from your beloved personality, of whatever sort it be?" "Zahme Xenien," *Werke*, IV, p. 54.

Changes occur as soon as the preservation of the established form of the labor process can no longer gain its end with merely partial mobilization (leaving the individual's private life in reserve), but rather requires "total mobilization," through which the individual must be subjected in all spheres of his existence to the discipline of the authoritarian state. Now the bourgeoisie comes into conflict with its own culture. Total mobilization in the era of monopoly capitalism is incompatible with the progressive aspects of culture centered about the idea of personality. The self-abolition of affirmative culture begins.

The loud pugnacity of the authoritarian state against the "liberal ideals" of humanity, individuality, and rationality and against idealist art and philosophy cannot conceal that what is occurring is a process of self-abolition. Just as the social reorganization involved in passing from parliamentary democracy to an authoritarian leadership-state is only a reorganization within the established order, so the cultural reorganization in which liberalist idealism changes into "heroic realism" takes place within affirmative culture itself. Its nature is to provide a new defense of old forms of existence. The basic function of culture remains the same. Only the ways in which it exercises this function change.

The identity of content preserved within a complete change of form is particularly visible in the idea of internalization. The latter, involving the conversion of explosive instincts and forces into spiritual dimensions, had been one of the strongest levers of the disciplining process.<sup>45</sup> Affirmative culture had canceled social antagonisms in an abstract internal community. As persons, in their spiritual freedom and dignity, all men were considered of equal value. High above factual antitheses lay the realm of cultural solidarity. During the most recent period of affirmative culture, this abstract internal community (abstract because it left the real antagonisms untouched) has turned into an equally abstract external community. The individual is inserted into a false collectivity (race, folk, blood, and soil). But this externalization has the same function as internalization: renunciation and subjection to the status quo, made bearable by the real appearance of gratification. That individuals freed for over four hundred years march with so little trouble in the communal columns of the authoritarian state is due in no small measure to affirmative culture.

The new methods of discipline would not be possible without casting off the progressive elements contained in the earlier stages of culture. Seen from the standpoint of the most recent development, the culture of those stages seems like a happy past. But no matter how much the authoritarian reorganization of existence actually serves only the interests of small social groups, it presents itself, like its predecessor, as the way in which the social totality

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45 See *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, V (1936), pp. 219ff.

preserves itself in the changed situation. To that extent it represents – in a bad form and to the increasing unhappiness of the majority – the interest of all individuals whose existence is bound up with the preservation of this order. And it is this order in which idealist culture was implicated. This double contradiction is in part the source of the weakness with which culture today protests against its new form.

The extent to which idealist inwardness is related to heroic outwardness is shown by their united front against the mind. Along with the high esteem for the mind which was characteristic of several areas and bearers of affirmative culture, a deep contempt for the mind was always present in bourgeois practice. It could find its justification in philosophy's lack of concern for the real problems of men. But there were still other reasons why affirmative culture was essentially a culture of the soul and not of the mind. Even before its decline the mind was always somewhat suspect. It is more tangible, more demanding, and nearer to reality than the soul. Its critical lucidity and rationality and its contradiction of irrational facticity are difficult to hide and to silence. Hegel goes poorly with an authoritarian state; he was for the mind, while the moderns are for the soul and for feeling. The mind cannot escape reality without denying itself; the soul can, and is supposed to do so. It is precisely because the soul dwells beyond the economy that the latter can manage it so easily. The soul derives its value from its property of not being subjected to the law of value. An individual full of soul is more compliant, acquiesces more humbly to fate, and is better at obeying authority. For he gets to keep for himself the entire wealth of his soul and can exalt himself tragically and heroically. The intensive education to inner freedom that has been in progress since Luther is now, when inner freedom abolishes itself by turning into outer unfreedom, bearing its choicest fruit. While the mind falls prey to hate and contempt, the soul is still cherished. Liberalism is even reproached with no longer caring for "soul and ethical content." "Greatness of soul and personality with strong character," and "the infinite expansion of the soul" are extolled as the "deepest spiritual feature of classic art."<sup>46</sup> The festivals and celebrations of the authoritarian state, its parades, its physiognomy, and the speeches of its leaders are all addressed to the soul. They go to the heart, even when their intent is power.

The outlines of the heroic form of affirmative culture were most clearly drawn during the period of ideological preparation for the authoritarian state. Noteworthy is hostility to the "academic and artistic [*museal*] establishment" and to the "grotesque forms of edification" it has taken on.<sup>47</sup> This

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46 Walter Stang, *Grundlagen nationalsozialistischer Kulturpflege* (Berlin, 1935), pp. 13 and 43.

47 Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt*, 2d ed. (Hamburg, 1932), p. 198.

cultural establishment is judged and rejected from the standpoint of the requisites of total mobilization. It “represents nothing other than one of the last oases of bourgeois security. It provides the apparently most plausible excuse for avoiding political decision.” Cultural propaganda is

a sort of opium that veils danger and calls forth the deceptive consciousness of order. But this is an unbearable luxury in a situation in which the need of the day is not to speak of tradition, but to create it. We live in a period of history in which everything depends on an immense mobilization and concentration of available forces.<sup>48</sup>

Mobilization and concentration for what? What Ernst Jünger could still designate as the salvation of the “totality of our life,” as the creation of a heroic world of labor, and so forth, reveals itself in action increasingly as the reshaping of all of human existence in the service of the most powerful economic interests. They also determine the demands for a new culture. The requisite intensification and expansion of labor discipline make occupation with the “ideals of an objective science and of an art existing for its own sake” appear a waste of time. It seems desirable to cast off ballast in this area. “Our entire so-called culture cannot prevent even the smallest neighboring state from violating the border,” which is really what is primary. The world must know that the government would not hesitate for a minute “to auction off all art treasures in the museums if national defense required it.”<sup>49</sup> This attitude determines the shape of the new culture that is to replace the old. It must be represented by young and reckless leadership. “The less education of the usual kind possessed by this stratum, the better it will be.”<sup>50</sup>

The cynical suggestions offered by Jünger are vague and restricted primarily to art. “Just as the victor writes history, i.e., creates his myth, so he decides what is to count as art.”<sup>51</sup> Even art must enter the service of national defense and of labor and military discipline. (Jünger mentions city planning: the dismemberment of large city blocks in order to disperse the masses in the event of war and revolution, the military organization of the countryside, and so forth.) Insofar as such culture aims at the enrichment, beautification, and security of the authoritarian state, it is marked by its social function of organizing the whole society in the interest of a few economically powerful groups and their hangers-on. Hence its attributes of humility, sacrifice, poverty, and dutifulness on the one hand, and extreme will to power, impulse to expansion, and technical and military perfection on the other. “The task

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48 *Ibid.*, p. 199.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 200.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 203.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 204.

of total mobilization is the transformation of life into energy as manifested in economics, technology, and transportation by the whirring of wheels or, on the battlefield, by fire and movement.”<sup>52</sup> The idealist cult of inwardness and the heroic cult of the state serve a fundamentally identical social order to which the individual is now completely sacrificed. Whereas formerly cultural exaltation was to satisfy the personal wish for happiness, now the individual’s happiness is to disappear completely in the greatness of the folk. While culture formerly appeased the demand for happiness in real illusion, it is now to teach the individual that he may not advance such a claim at all: “The given criterion lies in the worker’s way of life. What is necessary is not to improve this way of life, but to lend it an ultimate and decisive significance.”<sup>53</sup> Here, too, “exaltation” replaces transformation. Demolishing culture in this way is thus an expression of the utmost intensification of tendencies fundamental to affirmative culture.

Overcoming these tendencies in any real sense would lead not to demolishing culture as such but to abolishing its affirmative character. Affirmative culture was the counterimage of an order in which the material reproduction of life left no space or time for those regions of existence which the ancients had designated as the “beautiful.” It became customary to see the entire sphere of material reproduction as essentially tainted with the blemish of poverty, severity, and injustice and to abandon or suppress any demands protesting it. The orientation of all traditional cultural philosophy, i.e. setting culture apart from civilization and from the material life process, is based upon acknowledging as perpetual this historical situation. The latter is metaphysically exculpated by the theory of culture according to which life must be “deadened to a certain extent” in order “to arrive at goods of independent value.”<sup>54</sup>

The integration of culture into the material life process is considered a sin against the mind and the soul. As a matter of fact, its occurrence would only make explicit what has long been in effect blindly, since not only the production but also the reception of cultural goods is already governed by the law of value. Yet the reproach is justified to the extent that until now such resorption has taken place only in the form of utilitarianism. The latter is simply the obverse of affirmative culture. Its concept of utility is nothing but that of the businessman who enters happiness in his books as an inevitable expense: as necessary regimen and recreation. Happiness is calculated at the outset with regard to its utility just as the chance of profit is weighed in relation to risk and cost. It is thus smoothly integrated into the economic principle of this society. In utilitarianism the interest of the individual remains linked to the basic interest of the established order. His happiness

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52 *Ibid.*, p. 210.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

54 Heinrich Rickert, “Lebenswerte und Kulturwerte,” *Logos*, II (1911–12), p. 154.

is harmless, and this harmlessness is preserved even in the organization of leisure in the authoritarian state. Whatever joy is permitted is now organized. The idyllic countryside, the site of Sunday happiness, is transformed into drilling grounds, the picnic of the petit bourgeois is replaced by scouting. Harmlessness generates its own negation.

From the standpoint of the interest of the status quo, the real abolition of affirmative culture must appear utopian. For it goes beyond the social totality in which culture has been enmeshed. Insofar as in Western thought culture has meant affirmative culture, the abolition of its affirmative character will appear as the abolition of culture as such. To the extent that culture has transmuted fulfillable, but factually unfulfilled, longings and instincts, it will lose its object. The assertion that today culture has become unnecessary contains a dynamic, progressive element. It is only that culture's lack of object in the authoritarian state derives not from fulfillment but from the awareness that even keeping alive the desire for fulfillment is dangerous in the present situation. When culture gets to the point of having to sustain fulfillment itself and no longer merely desire, it will no longer be able to do so in contents that, as such, bear an affirmative character. "Gratitude" will then perhaps really be its essence, as Nietzsche asserted of all beautiful and great art.<sup>55</sup> Beauty will find a new embodiment when it no longer is represented as real illusion but, instead, expresses reality and joy in reality. A foretaste of such potentialities can be had in experiencing the unassuming display of Greek statues or the music of Mozart or late Beethoven. Perhaps, however, beauty and its enjoyment will not even devolve upon art. Perhaps art as such will have no objects. For the common man it has been confined to museums for at least a century. The museum was the most suitable place for reproducing in the individual withdrawal from facticity and the consolation of being elevated to a more dignified world – an experience limited by temporal restriction to special occasions. This museum-like quality was also present in the ceremonious treatment of the classics, where dignity alone was enough to still all explosive elements. What a classic writer or thinker did or said did not have to be taken too seriously, for it belonged to another world and could not come into conflict with this one. The authoritarian state's polemic against the cultural (*museal*) establishment contains an element of correct knowledge. But when it opposes "grotesque forms of edification," it only wants to replace obsolete methods of affirmation with more modern ones.

Every attempt to sketch out the counterimage of affirmative culture comes up against the ineradicable cliché about the fools' paradise. It would be better to accept this cliché than the one about the transformation of the earth into a gigantic community center, which seems to be at the root of some

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55 Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, VIII, p. 50.

theories of culture. There is talk of a “general diffusion of cultural values,” of the “right of all members of the nation (*Volk*) to cultural benefits,” of “raising the level of the nation’s physical, spiritual, and ethical culture.”<sup>56</sup> But all this would be merely raising the ideology of a conflicted society to the conscious mode of life of another, making a new virtue out of its necessity. When Kautsky speaks of the “coming happiness,” he means primarily “the gladdening effects of scientific work,” and “sympathetic enjoyment in the areas of science and art, nature, sport, and games.”<sup>57</sup> “Everything hitherto created in the way of culture should be . . . put at the disposal of the masses,” whose task is “to conquer this entire culture for themselves.”<sup>58</sup> This can mean nothing other than winning the masses to the social order that is affirmed by the “entire culture.” Such views miss the main point: the abolition of this culture. It is not the primitive, materialistic element of the idea of fools’ paradise that is false, but its perpetuation. As long as the world is mutable there will be enough conflict, sorrow, and suffering to destroy the idyllic picture. As long as there is a realm of necessity, there will be enough need. Even a nonaffirmative culture will be burdened with mutability and necessity: dancing on the volcano, laughter in sorrow, flirtation with death. As long as this is true, the reproduction of life will still involve the reproduction of culture: the molding of unfulfilled longings and the purification of unfulfilled instincts. In affirmative culture, renunciation is linked to the external vitiation of the individual, to his compliance with a bad order. The struggle against ephemerality does not liberate sensuality but devalues it and is, indeed, possible only on the basis of this devaluation. This unhappiness is not metaphysical. It is the product of an irrational social organization. By eliminating affirmative culture, the abolition of this social organization will not eliminate individuality, but realize it. And “if we are ever happy at all, we can do nothing other than promote culture.”<sup>59</sup>

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56 Program of the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (German Social Democratic Party) of 1921 and of the *Sächsische Volkspartei* (Saxon Popular Party) of 1866.

57 Karl Kautsky, *Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung* (Berlin, 1927), II, pp. 819 and 837.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 824.

59 Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, XI, p. 241.

# III

## ART IN THE ONE-DIMENSIONAL SOCIETY\*

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As a kind of personal introduction, I would like to say a few words about how I came to feel the need for occupying myself with the phenomenon of art. I use the term 'art' throughout in the general sense which covers literature and music as well as the visual arts. Similarly, 'language' (of art, artistic language) is meant to refer to the picture, sculpture, and tone as well as to the word.

It was some sort of despair or desperation. Despair in realizing that all language, all prosaic language, and particularly the traditional language somehow seems to be dead. It seems to be incapable of communicating what is going on today, and archaic and obsolete compared with some of the achievements and force of the artistic and the poetic language, especially in the context of the opposition against this society among the protesting and rebellious youth of our time. When I saw and participated in their demonstration against the war in Vietnam, when I heard them singing the songs of Bob Dylan, I somehow felt, and it is very hard to define, that this is really the only revolutionary language left today.

Now, this may sound romantic, and I often blame myself for perhaps being too romantic in evaluating the liberating, radical power of art. I remember

\* *Editor's note:*

"Art in the One-Dimensional Society" was first presented as a lecture at the New York School of Visual Arts, March 8, 1967. A transcript of Marcuse's lecture notes was found in the Marcuse archives along with a manuscript that typed up the notes into essay form; it has some corrections, most of which, but not all, were put into the published versions. Hence we have incorporated Marcuse's edits left out of the published version. The text was first published in May 1967 in *Arts Magazine*, 41, 7, pp. 26–31, and was later reprinted in a volume edited by Lee Baxandall, *Radical Perspectives in the Arts* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1972), pp. 53–67 which we draw upon, making some corrections suggested in Marcuse's original typescript. (DK)



the familiar statement made long ago about the futility and perhaps even about the crime of art: that the Parthenon wasn't worth the blood and tears of a single Greek slave. And equally futile is the contrary statement that only the Parthenon justified slave society. Now, which one of the two statements is correct? If I look at Western civilization and culture today, at the wholesale slaughter and brutality it is engaged in, it seems to me that the first statement is probably more correct than the second. And still, the survival of art may turn out to be the only weak link that today connects the present with hope for the future.

In many a discussion I've had, the question was raised about the survival of art in our times. The very possibility of art, the truth of art was questioned. And it was questioned because of the totalitarian character of our 'affluent society' which easily absorbs all non-conformist activities, and by virtue of this very fact invalidates art as communication and representation of a world other than that of the Establishment. I would like to discuss here whether this statement is actually correct, whether the closed society, the omnipresent, overwhelming society in which we live today, whether this is really the reason for the agony of art in our times. And discussing this question involves the larger question as to the historical element in all art. And if we look at this historical element in art, we would have to say that the crisis of art today is only part of the general crisis of the political and moral opposition to our society, of its inability to define, name and communicate the goals of the opposition to a society which, after all, delivers the goods. It delivers the goods bigger and perhaps even better than ever before and it exacts, for the delivery of these goods, the constant sacrifice of human lives; death, mutilation, enslavement. But they occur far away enough so that it doesn't really touch the majority of us very much.

The traditional concepts and the traditional words used to designate a better society, that is, a free society (and art has something to do with freedom), seem to be without any meaning today. They are inadequate to convey what man and things are today, and inadequate to convey what man and things can be and ought to be. These traditional concepts pertain to a language which is still that of a pre-technological and pre-totalitarian era in which we no longer live. They do not contain the experience of the thirties, forties and sixties, and their rationality itself seems to militate against the new language which may be capable of communicating the horror of that which is and the promise of that which can be. Thus, since the thirties, we see the intensified and methodical search for a new language, for a poetic language as a revolutionary language, for an artistic language as a revolutionary language. This implies the concept of the *imagination* as a cognitive faculty, capable of transcending and breaking the spell of the Establishment.

In this sense, the Surrealist thesis as it was developed during this period elevates the poetic language to the rank of being the only language that does not succumb to the all-embracing language spoken by the Establishment, a 'meta-language' of total negation – a total negation transcending even

the revolutionary action itself. In other words, art can fulfil its inner revolutionary function only if it does not itself become part of any Establishment, including the revolutionary Establishment. This, I believe, is most clearly presented in a statement by Benjamin Péret, made in 1943:

The poet can no longer be recognized as such unless he opposes to the world in which he lives a total non-conformity. He stands against all, including the revolutionaries who place themselves into the political arena only, which is thereby arbitrarily isolated from the whole of the cultural movement. These revolutionaries thus proclaim the submission of culture to the accomplishment of the social revolution.

In contrast, the Surrealists proclaim the submission of the social revolution to the truth of the poetic imagination. However, this Surrealistic thesis is undialectical inasmuch as it minimizes the extent to which the poetic language itself is infested and infected with the general falsity and deception; it does not remain pure. And Surrealism has long since become a saleable commodity.

And yet, art, in spite of this infection and absorption, continues. The language of the imagination remains a language of defiance, of indictment and protest. Reading an article in *Ramparts* on 'The Children's Crusade' and Bob Dylan, I came across the following lines from a poem by Arthur O'Shaughnessy. I did not have the slightest idea who Arthur O'Shaughnessy was. I am told he is a pretty bad poet indeed, and to my horror I saw that the very same poem by O'Shaughnessy is quoted at length in the Blue Book of the John Birch Society. Nevertheless, and that may show you how little I know about art, I love these verses. I think they say something and I think they say something important and I will not be ashamed to repeat them to you.

One man with a dream, at Pleasure  
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;  
And three with a new song's measure  
Can trample an empire down.

Apart from the poetic merits of these verses (at least they rhyme), they are simply untrue, incorrect. Because what actually happened was that the Children's Crusades, ever since the Middle Ages, with guitars or without guitars, have always been trampled down by the empires, and not the other way around, as these verses want to say.

But still, in spite of this fact, the poems and the songs persist; the arts persist, and they even seem to assume a new Form and function: namely, they want to be consciously and methodically destructive, disorderly, negative nonsense anti-art. And today in a world in which sense and order, the 'positive', must be imposed with all available means of repression, these arts assume by themselves a political position: a position of protest, denial and refusal.

This objective political content of art may assert itself, even there where, instead of a Form of disruption, negation and nonsense, classical and traditional Forms are revived; for example, in the celebration of legitimate love and liberty in the poetry of the French Resistance – the poetry which Péret rejects. It seems that today, elements enter into art (now enter into art more than ever before) which are usually considered extraneous and alien to art, that art by itself in its own inner process and procedure tends toward the political dimension, without giving up the form of art itself. And in this dynamic process, the aesthetic dimension is losing its semblance of independence, of neutrality. Or, the historical situation of art has changed in such a manner that the purity, even the possibility of art *as art* becomes questionable. The artist is driven to formulate and communicate a truth which seems to be incompatible with and inaccessible to the artistic Form.

I said that art today responds to the crisis of our society. Not merely certain aspects and Forms of the established system of life are at stake but the system as a whole, and the emergence of qualitatively different needs and satisfactions, of new goals. The construction of a qualitatively new environment, technical and natural, by an essentially new type of human being seems necessary if the age of advanced barbarism and brutality is not to continue indefinitely.

This means that art must find the language and the images capable of communicating this necessity *as its own*. For how can we possibly imagine that new relationships between men and things can ever arise if men continue to see the images and to speak the language of repression, exploitation, and mystification? The new system of needs and goals belongs to the realm of possible experience: we can define it in terms of the negation of the established system, namely, forms of life, a system of needs and satisfactions in which the aggressive, repressive, and exploitative instincts are subjugated to the sensuous, assuasive energy of the life instincts.

Now what can possibly be the role of art in the development and realization of the idea of such a universe? The definite negation of the established reality would be an 'aesthetic' universe, 'aesthetic' in the dual sense of pertaining to sensibility and pertaining to art, namely the capacity of receiving the impression of Form: beautiful and pleasurable Form as the possible mode of existence of men and things. I believe that the image and the imaginary realization of such a universe is the end of art, that the language of art speaks into such a universe without ever being able to reach it, and that the right and truth of art were defined and validated by the very irreality, non-existence of its objective. In other words, art could realize itself only by remaining illusion and by creating illusions. But, and that I think is the significance of the present situation of art, today art, for the first time in history, is confronted with the possibility of entirely new modes of realization. Or the place of art in the world is changing, and art today is becoming a potential factor in the construction of a new reality, a prospect which would mean the cancellation *and* the transcendence of art in the fulfilment of its own end.

In order to make clearer what I want to say, I want to discuss first in what sense art is a cognitive faculty with a truth of its own, and in what sense the language of art discovers a hidden and a repressed truth. I would like to propose to you that art in an extreme sense speaks the language of discovery.

Art (primarily, but not exclusively, the visual arts) discovers that there are *things*; things and not mere fragments and parts of matter to be handled and used up arbitrarily, but 'things in themselves'; things which 'want' something, which suffer, and which lend themselves to the domain of Form, that is to say, things which are inherently 'aesthetic'. Thus art discovers and liberates the domain of sensuous Form, the pleasure of sensibility, as against the false, the formless and the ugly in perception which is repressive of the truth and power of sensibility, of the sensuous dimension as erotic dimension.

I quote from one of the great Russian 'Formalists' who wrote at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution:<sup>1</sup>

Art exists in order to give the sensation of life, to feel the object, to experience that a stone is a stone. The aim of art is the sensation of the object as vision and not as familiar object. Art 'singularizes the object'; it obscures the familiar Forms, and it increases the difficulty and the duration of perception. In art, the act of perception is an end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a means of experiencing the becoming of the object; that which is already there is of no importance to art.

The artistic process thus is the 'liberation of the object from the automatism of perception' which distorts and restricts what things are and what things can be. Accordingly, we may say that art discovers and creates a new immediacy, which emerges only with the destruction of the old. The new immediacy is attained in a process of recollection: images, concepts, ideas long since 'known' find, in the work of art, their sensuous representation and – verification.

It seems that art as cognition and recollection depends to a great extent on the aesthetic power of *silence*: the silence of the picture and statue; the silence that permeates the tragedy; the silence in which the music is heard. Silence as medium of communication, the break with the familiar; silence not only at some place or time reserved for contemplation, but as a whole dimension which is there without being used. Noise is everywhere the companion of organized aggression. The narcissistic Eros, primary stage of all erotic and aesthetic energy, seeks above all tranquillity. This is the tranquillity in which

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1 *Editor's note*: In the lecture notes version of the text, Marcuse indicates that the author is V. Chklovski in a 1917 text cited in *Théories de la littérature*, edited by Roman Jakobson. While the Russian formalist author's name is spelled in a variety of ways in different languages, the standard English reference is to Viktor Shklovsky, the founder of OPOJAZ (Society for the Study of Poetic Language), which helped to develop the methods of linguistic technique and style of Russian Formalism. (DK)

the senses can perceive and listen to that which is suppressed in the daily business and daily fun, in which we can really see and hear and feel what we are and what things are.

These propositions may indicate to what extent the aesthetic dimension is a potential dimension of reality itself and not only of art as contrasted with reality. Or we can say that art is tending toward its own realization. Art is committed to sensibility: in the artistic Forms, repressed instinctual, biological needs find their representation – they become ‘objectified’ in the project of a different reality. ‘Aesthetic’ is an existential and sociological category, and as such, it is not brought to bear on art ‘from outside’ but it belongs to art as art.

But then the question arises: why has the biological and existential content of ‘aesthetic’ been sublimated in the unreal, illusory realm of art rather than in the transformation of *reality*? Is there perhaps some truth in the vulgar proposition that art, as a special branch of creative activity, divorced from material social production, pertains to what Marx called the ‘prehistory’ of mankind, that is, the history of man prior to his liberation in a free society? And is this the reason why an entire dimension of reality remained ‘imaginary’, ‘illusion’? And it is tempting to ask a related question: has now perhaps come the time to free art from its confinement to mere art, to an illusion? Has the time come for uniting the aesthetic and the political dimension, preparing the ground in thought and action for making society a work of art? And is perhaps in this sense the notion of the ‘end of art’ historically justified? Do not the achievements of technological civilization indicate the possible transformation of art into technique and technique into art? In the very complete sense of a controlled experimentation with nature and society in order to give nature and society their aesthetic Form, that is to say, the Form of a pacified and harmonious universe?

To be sure, ‘political art’ is a monstrous concept, and art by itself could never achieve this transformation, but it could free the perception and sensibility needed for the transformation. And, once a social change has occurred, art, Form of the imagination, could guide the construction of the new society. And inasmuch as the aesthetic values are the non-aggressive values par excellence, art as technology and technique would imply the emergence of a new rationality in the construction of a free society, that is, the emergence of new modes and goals of technical progress itself.

Here, however, I would like to insert a warning. Any attempt to explain aesthetic categories in terms of their application to society, to the construction of the social environment, suggests almost inevitably the swindle of beautification campaigns or the horror of Soviet realism. We have to remember: the realization of art as principle of social reconstruction *presupposes* fundamental social change. At stake is not the beautification of that which is, but the total reorientation of life in a new society.

I spoke of the cognitive power of art in this context, of art as expressing and communicating a specific mode of perception, knowledge, understanding,

even science, of art as conveying a specific truth applicable to reality. In other words, I took up again the familiar cliché of the kinship between truth and beauty. In discussing this cliché I want to ask the following question. Why the traditional definition of art in terms of beauty, when so much of art, and of great art, is evidently not beautiful in any sense? Is the beautiful perhaps to prepare the mind for the truth, or is the kinship between truth and beauty meant to denote the harmony between sensibility and understanding, of sensuousness and reason? But then we remember that sensuousness and reason, the receptivity for beauty and the activity of knowledge seem to be opposites rather than akin. Knowledge of the truth is painful and ugly in most cases, and truth in turn can be called beautiful only in a highly desensitized, sublimated manner, for example, if we speak of the beauty of a mathematical solution. Or is beauty perhaps meant to be the sensuous medium for a truth otherwise and still unaccomplished, namely, that harmony between man and nature, matter and spirit, freedom and pleasure, which indeed would be the end of the prehistory of man? Hegel in his *Philosophy of Fine Art* has a vision of a state of the world in which unorganic as well as organic nature, things and men partake of a rational organization of life, in which aggression has come to rest in the harmony between the general and the particular. Is this not also the vision of society as a work of art, the historical realization of art?

This image of art as technique in building or guiding the building of the society calls for the interplay of science, technique and imagination to construct and sustain a new system of life. Technique as art, as construction of the beautiful, not as beautiful objects or places but as the Form of a totality of life – society and nature. The beautiful as Form of such a totality can never be natural, immediate; it must be created and mediated by reason and imagination in the most exacting sense. Thus it is the result of a technique, but of a technique which is the opposite of the technology and technique which dominate the repressive societies of today, namely, a technique freed from the destructive power that experiences men and things, spirit and matter as mere stuff of splitting, combining, transforming, and consuming. Instead, art – technique – would liberate the life-protecting and life-enhancing potentialities of matter; it would be governed by a reality principle which subjugates, on the social scale, aggressive energy to the energy of the life instincts. By virtue of what quality can the beautiful possibly counteract the destructive power of instinctual aggression and develop erotic sensibility?

The beautiful seems to be in a half-way position between unsublimated and sublimated objectives; it is not germane to the unsublimated drive; rather is it the sensuous manifestations of something other than sensuous. And that, I think, is the traditional definition of beauty in terms of *Form*.

What does Form actually accomplish? Form assembles, determines, and bestows order on matter so as to give it an end. End in a literal sense, namely, to set definite limits within which the force of matter comes to rest within the limits of accomplishment and fulfilment. The matter thus formed may be

organic or un-organic, Form of a face, Form of a life, Form of a stone or a table but also Form of a work of art. And such Form is beautiful to the degree to which it embodies this coming to rest of violence, disorder and force. Such Form is order, even suppression, but in the service of sensibility and joy.

Now, if Form in this sense is essential to art, and if the beautiful is an essential Form element of art, it would follow that art was in its very structure false, deceptive and self-defeating; art is indeed an illusion: it presents as being that which is *not*. Thus, art pleases; it provides substitute gratification in a miserable reality. The cliché of substitute gratification contains more than a mere kernel of truth. Not the psyche of the artist is meant here; I suggest that the structure of art itself is vicarious. And this vicarious structure shaped the relation of art to the recipient, to the consumer. Precisely the most authentic works of art testify to this objective vicariousness of art. The great artist may capture all the pain, horror, all the sorrow and despair of reality – all this becomes beautiful, even gratifying by grace of the artistic form itself. And it is only in this transfiguration that art keeps alive the pain and the horror and the despair, keeps them alive as beautiful, satisfying for eternity. Thus a *catharsis*, a purification really occurs in art which pacifies the fury of rebellion and indictment and which turns the negative into the affirmative. The magic staff of the artist brings to a standstill the horror as well as the joy: transformation of pain into pleasure and entertainment; transformation of the fleeting moment into an enduring value, stored in the great treasure house of culture which will go underground in times of war to come up again when the slaughter is over.

Art cannot do without this transfiguration and affirmation. It cannot break the magic catharsis of the Form; it cannot de-sublimate the horror and the joy. This painting which represents nothing or just a piece of something is still a painting, framed even if it has no frame, potential merchandise for the market. Nor would de-sublimation help. Such de-sublimation in art can obliterate the difference between the meta-language of art and ordinary language. It can capture and it can take pride in capturing the happenings of the bedroom and the bathroom but the shock has long since worn off and is also bought up and absorbed. In one way or another, in the setting of the lines, in the rhythm, in the smuggling in of transcending elements of beauty the artistic Form asserts itself and negates the negation. Art seems condemned to remain art, culture for a world and in a world of terror. The wildest anti-art remains faced with the impossible task of beautifying, of forming the terror. It seems to me that the Head of Medusa is the eternal and adequate symbol of art: terror as beauty; terror caught in the gratifying form of the magnificent object.

Is the situation of art today different? Has art become incapable of creating and facing the Head of Medusa? That is to say, all but incapable of facing itself? One has said that it is impossible to write poems after Auschwitz; the magnitude of the terror today defies all Forms, even the Form of formlessness.

But my question is: Has the terror of reality ever prevented the creation of art? Greek sculpture and architecture coexisted peacefully with the horror of slave society. The great romances of love and adventure in the Middle Ages coincided with the slaughter of the Albigensians and the torture of the Inquisition; and the peaceful landscapes painted by the Impressionists coexisted with the reality represented in Zola's *Germinal* and *La Débâcle*.

Now, if this is true, and if it is not the magnitude of the terror which accounts for the futility of art today, is it the totalitarian, one-dimensional character of our society which is responsible for the new situation of art? Here too we have to be doubtful. The *elements* of the artistic Form have always been the same as those of the established reality. The colours of the painter, the materials of the sculptor, are elements of this common universe. Why does the artist today seem incapable of finding the transfiguring and transubstantiating Form which seizes things and frees them from their bondage in an ugly and destructive reality?

Again, we have to direct our attention to the historical character of art. Art as such, not only its various styles and forms, is a historical phenomenon. And history perhaps now is catching up with art, or art is catching up with history. The historical locus and function of art are now changing. The *real, reality*, is becoming the prospective domain of art, and art is becoming technique in a literal, 'practical' sense: making and remaking things rather than painting pictures; experimenting with the potential of words and sounds rather than writing poems or composing music.<sup>2</sup> Do these creations perhaps foreshadow the possibility of the artistic Form becoming a 'reality principle' – the self-transcendence of art on the basis of the achievements of science and technology, and of the achievements of art itself?

If we can do everything with nature and society, if we can do everything with man and things – why can one not make them the subject-object in a pacified world, in a non-aggressive aesthetic environment? The know-how is there. The instruments and the materials are there for the construction of such an environment, social and natural, in which the unsublimated life instincts would redirect the development of human needs and faculties, would redirect technical progress. These pre-conditions are there for the creation of the beautiful not as ornaments, not as surface of the ugly, not as museum piece, but as expression and objective of a new type of man: as biological need in a new system of life. And with this possible change in

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2 *Editor's note:* In the manuscript version of the text, Marcuse calls for the insertion of some handwritten comments (DK):

Art as making and remaking "things," playing with the possibilities of matter – We can no longer ask, in front of a painting, on hearing a piece of music etc.: "What on earth *is* this? What does it say, represent?"  
For it is supposed to redefine that which *is* – to free perception from the range and shape of objects making up our repressive universe.



the place of art and in its function, art transcending itself would become a factor in the reconstruction of nature and society, in the reconstruction of the polis, a political factor. Not political art, not politics as art, but art as the architecture of a free society.

As against this technical possibility of a free society, the established repressive societies mobilize, for their defence, aggressiveness on an unprecedented scale. Their tremendous power and productivity bar the roads to liberation – and to the realization of art.

The present situation of art is, in my view, perhaps most clearly expressed in Thomas Mann's demand that one must revoke the Ninth Symphony. One must revoke the Ninth Symphony not only because it is wrong and false (we cannot and should not sing an ode to joy, not even as promise), but also because it is there and is true in its own right. It stands in our universe as the justification of that 'illusion' which is no longer justifiable.

However, the revocation of a work of art would be another work of art. As far as one can go in revocation of the Ninth Symphony, I think Stockhausen has achieved it.<sup>3</sup> And if the revocation of the great art of the past can only be another work of art, then we have the process of art from one Form to another, from one style to another, from one illusion to another.

But perhaps something really happens in this process. If the development of consciousness and of the unconscious leads to making us see the things which we do not see or are not allowed to see, speak and hear a language which we do not hear and do not speak and are not allowed to hear and to speak, and if this development now affects the very Form of art itself – then art would, with all its affirmation, work as part of the liberating power of the negative and would help to free the mutilated unconscious and the mutilated consciousness which solidify the repressive Establishment. I believe that art today performs this task more consciously and methodically than before.

The rest is not up to the artist. The realization, the real change which would free men and things, remains the task of political action; the artist participates not as artist. But this extraneous activity today is perhaps germane to the situation of art – and perhaps even germane to the achievement of art.

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3 *Editor's note:* Marcuse greatly respected avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen. In Marcuse's private collection there is a Stockhausen file with a description of a "Semaine Stockhausen" in Paris (May 28–June 4), a June 14, 1969 poem by Stockhausen, as well as an interview with Stockhausen in the English magazine, *Circuit* (*Circuit* 7, Spring 1969, pp. 135–44). While it is not clear from Marcuse's reference here or the collected material exactly which works of Stockhausen Marcuse is praising so extravagantly or why, a passage in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p. 116, suggests an answer: "According to Adorno, art responds to the total character of repression and administration with total alienation. The highly intellectual, constructivist, and at the same time spontaneous-formless music of John Cage, Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez may be the extreme examples." Thanks to Charles Reitz for sending this quote and making the connection. (DK)

# IV

## SOCIETY AS A WORK OF ART\*

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*Translated by John Abromeit*

The function of art – one of the functions of art – consists in bringing spiritual (*geistigen*) peace to humanity. I believe one cannot characterize the state of consciousness in contemporary art any better than by saying: more and more people are becoming conscious that *spiritual* peace is not enough because it has never prevented nor could it ever prevent real strife, and that perhaps one of the functions of art today is also to contribute to real peace – a function that cannot be foisted upon art, but must lie in the essence of art itself.

If one wants to analyze the contemporary function of art, one must return to its major crisis in the period before World War I. I believe that this crisis was more than the replacement of a dominant style with other forms, for example the dissolution of the object, of figure, etc. This crisis was a rebellion against the entire traditional function of art, a rebellion against the traditional meaning of art – beginning with cubism and futurism, then expressionism, dadaism, surrealism up to the forms of the present.

In order to convey the breadth and depth of this rebellion I would like to recall a statement of Franz Marc's from 1914: "We set a 'No' in opposition

\* *Editor's note:*

"Society as a Work of Art" was first presented in German at the Third Salzburg Humanismusgespräch (Conversation on Humanism) in August 1967; it was published, along with a piece by Herbert Read, "Kunst als zweite Welt," in the Austrian journal *Neues Forum* XIV/167–8 (863–6). It is published here for the first time in English in a translation by John Abromeit. While Marcuse's text is similar to some passages later published in *An Essay on Liberation*, the version here provides the first systematic outline of aspects of the aesthetic theory that Marcuse would work on for the last two decades of his life and a fuller presentation of his emerging aesthetic theory. (DK)

to entire centuries; to the disdainful astonishment of our contemporaries, we take a side path that hardly seems to be a path at all and we declare: this is the royal road for the development of humanity.” Following Raoul Hausmann, in 1919, this “No” was opposed to the representational art of Europe, because this art represented the world as a world of things to be dominated and owned by men and thereby falsified it. The consequence: the task of art in this situation is to supplement and correct this false image – to portray the truth, but in a way that is possible for art and art alone.

Traditional art, so it is said, remained powerless and foreign with respect to real life. It was mere semblance. For this reason art remained a privilege: something for the church, the museum, or the collector.

The artificial character of this art and the truth it contains appears in the beautiful as its essential stylistic form, which transforms the object world through semblance. In so doing it does indeed represent a hidden and repressed truth, albeit a truth that retains the character of semblance.

The rebellion against traditional art succeeded, [first] because this art was *conformist*; it remained under the spell of a world shaped by domination. It succeeded, second, because this spell made and had to make the truth accessible to art into *beautiful semblance*. This dual objection raised against traditional art brings a strongly political element into art – “political” in the broadest sense, as art’s oppositional stance to the status quo. Furthermore, a new cognitive function of art is contained in this oppositional stance; art is called upon to represent the truth. I cite Franz Marc once again: “We seek the internal, the spiritual side of nature.”

Raoul Hausmann goes one step further and characterizes art with a highly significant statement, which is subsequently adopted by the formalists: “Art is a painted or molded *critique of cognition*.”

This statement contains a demand for a new optics, a new perception, a new consciousness, a new language which would bring with it the dissolution of the existing form of perception and its objects.

This is a radical break; new possibilities of representing people and things are at stake. But must not this radical function of art remain bound to a world of semblance precisely because it would be realized only in art, only as a work of art? The rebellion is acutely aware of this contradiction. Art should no longer be powerless with respect to life, but should instead help give it shape – and nonetheless remain art, i.e. semblance.

The first way out of this contradiction was revealed by the great European revolutions of 1918; there was a demand for the subordination of art to politics. Just remember the so-called cult of the proletariat and the final disastrous manifestation of this tendency in “socialist realism.” One quickly recognized that this way out was no way out at all.

A decisive new antithesis arose in the 1920s and early 1930s with surrealism. Not the subordination of art to politics, but the subordination of politics to art, to the creative imagination. I quote from a 1943 essay by the surrealist Benjamin Péret:

The poet can no longer be recognized as such today, unless he opposes the world in which he lives with *total nonconformity*. The poet stands opposed to everything, including those movements that act only in the political arena and thus isolate art from the totality of cultural developments. These revolutionaries proclaim the subordination of culture to the social revolution.

Why is there a contrary demand for the subordination of political and social movements to the artistic imagination? Because this imagination creates – according to surrealism – new objects in both language and images: an environment in which humans and nature are liberated from reification and domination. As a result, it ceases to be merely imagination; it creates a new world. The power of knowing, seeing, hearing, which is limited, repressed and falsified in reality, becomes in art the power of truth and liberation.

In this way art is rescued in its dual, antagonistic function. As a product of the imagination it is [mere] semblance, but the possible truth and reality to come appear in this semblance and art is able to shatter the false reality of the status quo.

So much for the thesis of the surrealists. But a new aporia is immediately apparent here. Art is supposed to fulfill the function of dissolving and transforming reality *as art*, as writing, image, sound. As such it remains a second reality, a *non-material* culture. How can it become a material force, a force of real change, without negating itself as art?

The form of art is essentially different than the form of reality; art is stylized reality, even negative, negated reality. Indeed, the truth of art is not the truth of conceptual thinking, of philosophy or science, which transforms reality. Sensibility, understood both internally and externally (*die innere und äußere Sinnlichkeit*), is the element of art, of aesthetics. It is receptive rather than positive.

Is there a way to get from one dimension to the other: a material reality of art, which not only maintains but also, and for the first time, fulfills art as form? Something in society must meet art halfway, for such a realization of art to be possible. But not in a way that subordinates art to the social process; not in a way that subjects art to any interests springing from social domination; not in a way that forces art to submit to heteronomy – even of the socially necessary kind – but instead, only in a way that society creates the material and intellectual possibilities for the truth of art to be incorporated in the social process itself and for the form of art to be materialized.

Why has there been an insistence upon the beautiful (*das Schöne*) as the essential quality of art in the philosophy of art until now when it is so obvious that so much art is not beautiful at all? The philosophical definition of the beautiful is the sensuous appearance of the idea. As such, beauty seems to stand halfway between the sublimated and unsublimated instinctual spheres. The immediate sexual object does not need to be beautiful, while at the other extreme the most sublimated object can be considered beautiful

only in a very abstract sense. The beautiful belongs to the sphere of non-repressive sublimation, as the free formation of the raw material of the senses and thus the sensuous embodiment (*Versinnlichung*) of the mere idea.

### BEAUTY AS NONREPRESSIVE ORDER

In this sense the beautiful exists in inseparable unity with order, but order in its sole *nonrepressive* sense; in the sense, for example, in which the word “ordre” is used by Baudelaire in his “Invitation au voyage,” together with “luxe” and “volupté.”

Order as bringing to a halt, reining in the violence of the raw material, also in its human form, order as pacification – in this sense the beautiful is form in art. Every work of art is consummate in this sense, self-sufficient, meaningful and as such it disturbs you, consoles you, and reconciles you with life.

This is also true of the most radical works of nonobjective, abstract art. Even these works are images or sculptures, they have a frame as their border and limit. If they do not have a frame, they have their space, their surfaces. They are all potential museum pieces.

Actually, in literature, there are no authentic works with “happy endings.” They are all full of unhappiness, violence, suffering and despair. But these negative elements are sublated (*aufgehoben*) in the form of the work itself, through the style, structure, order, and consummation of the work of art. Good does not prevail, not at all, but its defeat is meaningful and necessary within the work as a whole.

Aesthetic order is justice. It is in this sense, whether it wants to be or not, a *moral* order and as such does indeed imply catharsis, which Aristotle considered the essence of tragedy. Art purifies, it removes what is and remains unreconciled, unjust, and meaningless in life.

The rebellion in the current period has been directed from the beginning against this false, illusory (*scheinhaft*) transfiguration of meaninglessness into something meaningful in art. In so doing it targets the very existence of art. It is the response of art to objective, social, and historical conditions and situations; the rebellion against the representational art of Europe is only one aspect of the late capitalist period, in which the contradictions in society have manifested themselves in two world wars, a series of revolutions and in an increase of productive destruction.

In the consciousness of the avant-garde artist, art becomes in this period a more or less beautiful, pleasant *decorative background in a world of terror*. This luxury function of art must be destroyed. The protest of the artist becomes passionate, socially critical analysis. I cite a writing from Otto Freundlich, in which this avant-garde artist addresses the bourgeoisie of his time:

For too long you have pressed the world into your baking tins, you gourmet, you baker and confectioner. But you are not sweet yourself, everything is supposed to taste good for you alone, so your tables can overflow, for your insatiable stomachs. One must get to know you, you lover of sweets, how bitter you are when the dough is not as pliable as your greedy palate would like. For in the one hand you have your baking tin and in the other hand sword, dagger, canons, poison, gas and martyrs are poised to force the recalcitrant dough into submission.

There is no more terrible demonstration of the truth Freundlich spoke of here, in 1918, than his own life. I cite the index of the anthology from which this passage was taken:

Freundlich, Otto. Born 1878, gassed 1943 in the concentration camp Maidanek; German sculptor, painter, illustrator, member of the November Group in Berlin; went to Paris in 1924, deported as a Jew in 1943.

Since then the essential incompatibility of art and society has intensified and has found expression, for example, in the statement that it is impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz.

Against this it has been said: if art is not able to withstand this situation as well, then it is not art at all and cannot have any further function. I believe that there is art today that has in fact withstood. In literature I would just like to mention Samuel Beckett; he is not the only one for whom there is no longer any immanent justice or meaning. This demonstrates the radical transformation in the function of art.

## ART AND CONSUMER SOCIETY

My working hypothesis is the following: it is not the terror of reality which seems to make art impossible, but instead the specific character of what I have called *one-dimensional society*, and the level of its productivity. It indicates the end of traditional art and the possibility of its fulfilling sublation (*Aufhebung*).

Great art has never had any problem coexisting with the horrors of reality. Just think of contradictions such as the following: the Parthenon and a society based on slavery; medieval romances and the slaughter of the Albigensians; Racine and the mass famines of his time; the beautiful landscapes of the impressionists and reality as it is portrayed during the same time in Zola's *Germinal*.

In its beautiful form art has also preserved its transcendent content. Here in the beautiful form lies the critical element of aesthetic reconciliation, the image of the powers to be liberated and pacified. This other, transcendent dimension of art, which is antagonistically opposed to reality, is neutralized and occupied by the repressive society itself.

In the so-called consumer society, art becomes an article of mass consumption and seems to lose its transcendent, critical, antagonistic function. In this society the consciousness of and instinct for an alternative existence atrophies or seems powerless. Quantitative progress absorbs the qualitative difference between possible freedom and prevailing freedoms.

All the designs of creative imagination seem to transform themselves today into technological (*technische*) possibilities. But the prevailing order is mobilized against their realization, because the content and forms of freedom possible today, within the power of the creative imagination, are not reconcilable with the material and moral foundations of the prevailing order. Thus today the creative imagination, as systematic experimentation with human and material possibilities, has become a social force for the *transformation of reality*, and the social environment has become the potential material and space for art.

The convergence of technology and art is not something fabricated; rather, it is already apparent in the development of the material process of production. It is something ancient, this affinity between technology and art: the creation of things based on reason and the creation of things based on the imagination. But the ancient affinity between technology and art has been torn apart in the historical process; technology was still the transformation of the real life world, but art was damned to imaginary formation and transformation. The two dimensions drifted apart: in the real social world the domination of technology and technology as a means of domination, and in the aesthetic world illusory semblance.

Today we can foresee the possible unity of both dimensions: *society as a work of art*. This tendency seems inherent in society itself, especially in the increasing predominance of technology in the material process of production, in the reduction of physical human labor power in this process and in the reduction of the necessity of self-denying, alienated labor in the struggle for existence. This tendency intrinsically leads toward systematic experimentation with the technical possibilities of labor and leisure, without burden, without alienation and without exploitation.

This would mean experimenting with possibilities of liberating and pacifying human existence – the idea of a convergence not only of technology and art but also of work and play; the idea of a possible artistic formation of the life world.

Art creates in opposition to nature: in opposition to false, violated and ugly nature, but also in opposition to the “second nature” of society. The technician as artist, society as a work of art – this will be possible when art and technology are liberated from their servitude to a repressive society, when they no longer model themselves on this society and its reason – in other words, only during and after a radical transformation of society as a whole.

*The utopian idea of an aesthetic reality must be defended even in the face of ridicule, which it must necessarily evoke today.* For it may well indicate the qualitative difference between freedom and the prevailing order.

The aesthetic is more than merely “aesthetic.” It is the reason of sensibility, the form of the senses as pervaded by reason and as such the possible form of human existence. Beautiful form as the form of life is possible only as the totality of a potential free society and not merely in private, in one particular part or in the museum.

As a contemporary possibility the historical sublation of art signifies the fusion of material and intellectual production, the *mutual penetration of socially necessary and creative labor*, of practicality and beauty, of use value and value. This type of unity is not possible as a systematic embellishment of ugliness, as a decorative façade for brutality, but only as a general way of life, which free people in a free society are able to provide for themselves.

Nothing concrete can be said in anticipation of such a form except that it is contained as a possibility within the dynamic of the present society. In any case such a sublation of art would not be accomplished by art itself, but would instead be a result of a social process in all its dimensions – economic, political, psychological, intellectual.

For art itself can never become political without destroying itself, without violating its own essence, without abdicating itself. The contents and forms of art are never those of direct action, they are always only the language, images, and sounds of a world not yet in existence. Art can preserve the hope for and the memory of such a world only when it *remains itself*. Today that means: no longer the great representational, reconciling, purifying art of the past, which is no longer any match for contemporary reality and is condemned to the museum, but instead the uncompromising *rejection of illusion*, the repudiation of the pact with the status quo, the liberation of consciousness, imagination, perception, and language from its mutilation in the prevailing order.



# V

## COMMENCEMENT SPEECH TO THE NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC \*

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Deeply touched that I was chosen to talk to you, musicians,  
— you who will work in a field which is not that of my profession and learning,  
— in which I am a stranger, a layman.

But indeed I feel at home here,  
— in the domain of the arts, of music;  
— perhaps more at home than among philosophers, sociologists, political scientists,  
— with whom I do not seem to share the same world, the same experience.

I feel more at home in the domain of the arts,  
— because my work has led me to believe that the arts, today more than ever before, must play a decisive role in changing the human condition and the human experience

*\* Editor's note:*

Marcuse delivered a commencement speech to the New England Conservatory of Music on June 7, 1968. It was unpublished and constitutes Marcuse's only sustained statement on music, so we are presenting his lecture notes as they are found unedited in his archive under the title, "Commencement Speech to the New England Conservatory of Music." In a German translation, Peter-Erwin Jansen titled it "Musik von anderen Planeten," after a phrase from the composer Arnold Schönberg, which Marcuse cites in the lecture; see *Kunst und Befreiung*, ed. Peter-Erwin Jansen (Lüneburg: zu Klampen, 2000), pp. 87–94. The text was found in the Herbert Marcuse archive in a 19-page, typewritten set of notes typical of Marcuse's lecture format under the number 345.00. Publishing the lecture notes as they were found demonstrates the meticulous work that Marcuse put into the preparation of every invited lecture. The italicized words in the text often signal the words he emphasized in presentation. Marcuse's lectures were rich and substantive, an exciting event, and the reader here can share in the experience of a Marcuse lecture on a topic on which he never published. (DK)

- a decisive role in helping us out of the inhuman, brutal, hypocritical, false world in which we are caught;
- helping us in envisaging, perceiving, and perhaps even building a better, a free, humane society.

I talk as a philosopher, a *political philosopher*; to music,  
 I am related *as a consumer*,  
 though “educated” by my friend *Adorno*,  
 educated to feel at home with Mahler, Schoenberg,  
 Alban Berg, Webern, even Stockhausen  
 — to you probably outdated “classics”!<sup>1</sup>

As a philosopher,  
 I approach music via *Hegel* and *Schopenhauer*,  
 — who, I believe,  
 have indicated the qualities by virtue of which music has a *unique function in culture*:  
 the freest, the most self-legislating of the arts,  
 in *transcending* that which is, *the present*, and in *invoking the future*:  
 — a possible, a necessary future, *for which we must work*.

For *Hegel*,  
 music is the *romantic* art,  
 because it expresses the pure subjectivity, the innermost being of man,  
 freed from all external intermediaries,  
 freed from all material, from the limits of space,  
 — and  
 therefore, harbinger of a truth not communicable  
 in any other form,  
 in any other language!  
 And in this concept of the uniqueness of music, he *agrees with his great opponent*

*Schopenhauer*  
 — music is the only free, immediate expression of the force which sustains the universe,  
 — expression of the *Will*,  
 the will to live, *the Life Instinct*.

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1 *Editor's note*: These composers were frequently discussed by T.W. Adorno who Marcuse notes here deeply influenced his thinking on music. For Stockhausen's importance for Marcuse, see the Editor's note on p. 122. (DK)

- Music does not “represent,” does not “imitate,” like the visual arts; music does not, is not compelled, is not bound to speak the language, the abused and “false” language, the abused words by which even the most extravagant poetry is bound.

Thus, for Schopenhauer, too,  
music enjoys a *unique freedom*:

- *freed from*  
the false, repressive, deceptive words and images and values of the false, repressive, deceptive existence of man,
  - music arrests, *brings to a halt the forces which conceal the true nature of the universe*
  - it *tears the “veil of Maya”* and brings the will to life *face to face with the reality*, with the *truth*: for music does *not* express any *subjective, personal, particular* pain, sorrow, joy, desire,

but

pain, sorrow, joy, desire *by and in themselves*,  
“*objectively*,” as they are the essence, the substance,  
the truth of our existence, our universe, of *Life*.

And in bringing the will to life face to face with the undistorted reality, free from the veil of illusion,

art, and esp. music, *generates a new consciousness*,  
and a new unconscious:

- a traumatic experience, a *shock*,  
which *tears open a gap* between the individual and the established,  
“false,” distorted reality;

For Schopenhauer,

- art, with its insight, invokes the *necessity of translating its “aesthetic” truth into reality*:  
i.e., to suspend the self-defeating struggle for existence,
  - to *bring the Will itself to a halt*,
  - to tear the veil of Maya: to refuse, to *deny the principium individuationis*:
- return to the original union
- come to rest in *Nirvana*.

Music,

Art is thus the *great force of negation*:

- it alone disposes over the “language” which breaks through the false and deceptive appearance of our world, of our struggle in it.

We must take this existential pessimism seriously:

- as the *great refusal to accept the unscrupulous faith in progress*,  
in the march of history to ever higher stages of reason and freedom,
  - a march which is exacting ever more victims and sacrifices,
  - which led to the Nazi concentration camps and to the torture grounds of Vietnam.

And we must come to grips with the idea of *art*, music as the *great power of negation*

- a negation which in turn prepares the ground for the new affirmation:  
literally: a *music for the future, of the future!*
- for us: *not Death, Nirvana,*  
*but: Commencement!*

Let me add a few words, a layman's words, in the way of explanation.

In creating its own Form, its own "language," art moves in a dimension of reality

which is other than, and antagonistic to the established everyday reality;  
but so that,

- in "canceling," transforming, even transsubstantiating the given images, words, sounds,
- music "preserves" their forgotten or perverted truth, preserves it by giving them its own "beautiful" Form, Harmony, Dissonance, Rhythm, Dance, and thus, music beautifies, sublimates, pacifies the human experience, the human condition.

To create *harmony out of suffering*,  
*the eternity of joy out of the transitoriness of pleasure*,  
to justify the dissonance,  
to *sing* while the others can only *speak*:

this, I think, was the *great cultural achievement* of traditional music:

- the affirmation in the negation, *reconciliation*, after all!

This reconciliation of the irreconcilable is the incredible achievement of the period that has its beginnings in Bach,

- with Beethoven, the pure subjectivity emerges and demands its right and freedom:
  - it expresses, and, at the same time, *restrains itself*,  
sublimates its experience in the beautiful forms of the classic and romantic.

The tension between negation and affirmation,  
rebellion and reconciliation,  
disorder and form is stressed to the breaking point.

This period comes to an end with *Mahler*:

- “he writes symphonies at a time when it has become impossible to write symphonies” (Adorno):
  - the last triumph of the beautiful form,
  - of the song over the cry,
  - the last *song* of the earth  
(to be followed by the *cry* from the earth).

And then, the *break*, in *Schoenberg*:

“Ich fühle Luft von anderen Planeten”: (F sharp minor):

- the *cry*, the denial, the emergence of the new Form out of the dissolution of the old:
  - “we can no longer make music to what is going on,”

but:

we *must make music* because we breathe air from other planets:  
     fresh air which may chase the polluted air;  
     a storm which neither Bach nor Beethoven can ban any longer.

“Roll over, Bach,

roll over *Beethoven*;

also: roll over, *Schoenberg*, *Webern*, etc.”?

Were the planets whose air they felt too far away?

- did their negation remain “*abstract*,”  
     or was this *negation*, in spite of all destruction, *still committed to the past*,
  - *unable to give form*, sound, word *to the new air*, the new music?
  - are there still *too many* “*quotations*” of the past, which could not stand up to the world of Auschwitz and Vietnam?

*Has this world*, our world today, *finally refused the cultural sublimation*, the reconciliation of the irreconcilable?

In any case,

- the time-honored *distinction between serious and popular music* seems to have *collapsed*:
- the pure Form, in which the substance as well as the beautiful of music is to consist,
  - seems to have canceled (dissolved) its classical, romantic, and even post-romantic features.

I believe what is happening is more than another change in “style,” another “fashion”: something much more radical,

*changing the relation of music to the society, a relation which pertains to the very essence and fate of music.*

We come to grips with the *historical* character and essence of music, i.e.,

with the fact that it is composed by a human  
*subject for human subjects.*

and that,

by virtue of this fact, the composition “*incorporates*” a *twofold historical context*: namely,

- (a) the attained stage of the *technical development* of the instruments, and of the range and differentiation of the auditory sense; and
- (b) the attained *stage of consciousness*, awareness of the horror of the human condition.

On both levels, the *society* (its capabilities, structure, ideology) *enters into the composition and the composer*,

— into the artistic arrangement of sounds and motion

— and *opens the Form* (which is the substance, content of music) to that which happens in the *social reality*:

It is the *meeting ground* between *technology and art*, between the ordinary *daily universe* of experience *and* that of *musical experience*.

And in this way,

the internal development of art, music, *responds to*, *and*  
at the same time *negates* the society for which, and  
against which it is created.

Perhaps these abstract, philosophical reflections permit a *hypothesis* on the significance of the collapse of the distinction between serious and popular music!

Is contemporary popular music, from the classic Blues to Jazz and Rock and Roll, *the legitimate heir* of serious music?

Do we, in this development, witness the *Aufhebung* of serious music:

— preserving the content which can no longer be expressed in “classical” forms,

— by destroying these forms,  
and replacing them by forms which may well *foreshadow the end of “traditional” art*,

and:

the end of *the society whose art it was!*

Explain!

the *difference* between *serious* and *popular* music:

(only by enumerating some general qualities):

“Serious” music:

- (1) high degree of *sublimation* of experience, and of the protest, negation,
  - *expressed* in the degree to which the Form remains *committed to the beautiful in music*
  - in melody, rhythm,
  - in the “taming” of dissonance and distortion, their subordination to harmony;
- (2) high degree of *contemplation*, as Form-element, and as element in the reception;
- (3) a “*closed structure*”: end and end in itself; “containing” and restraining its explosive force,
  - barring, *prohibiting its translation into reality* =  
it bars the translation of the *motion* (of sounds) *in time*, into the *motion* (of the *body* of the recipient) *in space* (Hanslick).<sup>2</sup>  
(This reserved to dance and march music at the very margin of serious music.) *Result*:
- (4) the closed space of the *concert hall*, the *salon*, the opera house, the church *as the musical space*:
  - a space of segregation, a reservation, *shut off* from the other reality,
    - colorblind, even mute and *deaf to an entire world which remains “outside”*:
    - the world of the *real struggle for existence*.

No misunderstanding:

- (traditional) art *must of necessity sustain this segregation and reservation*,
- *only in this sublimation* could it remain art.

What is at stake is precisely this dimension of art itself:

does the reality still permit this segregation and sublimation?

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2 *Editor’s note*: Marcuse is citing music critic Edward Hanslick (1825–1904), author of a well-known book, *On the Musically Beautiful*, G. Payzant, trans., (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishers, 1986), which develops a highly formalistic theory of music. In his lecture reproduced here, Marcuse had a page of notes explicating Hanslick’s theory, but they were crossed out and therefore have not been included. (DK)

Here we are confronted with the *class character* of traditional serious music:

- music for those who have the organs, education, time for productive sublimation, contemplation –
- the good conscience for the beautiful in sorrow, joy, passion, etc.
  - this music was, by virtue of its *internal Form, upper and middle class music*
  - even if composed by their retainers, dependents, entertainers.

As you know, the *disintegration* of this Form takes place *within the continuum of serious music*,

but,

it seems that the *qualitative change* is inspired (perhaps preceded?) “*from below*”: *black music*;

and

*not* in the sense of *folkloristic* inspirations, enriching and rejuvenating the tradition,

but

as the eruption and expression of a life, an experience outside and below the universe of the tradition, even the atonal tradition,

- a life and an experience which could not take serious music seriously; for which it had no relevance;
  - “black” music not only because played and sung by Negroes, but also because, like the black novel, or black humor, it rejects and subverts the time-honored taboos of civilization:
  - a *desublimated* music, which directly *translates* the motion of *sounds into* the motion of *bodies*.
- a *non-contemplative* music, which bridges the gap between creation and reception by directly (almost automatically) moving the body to spontaneous action,
  - repelling, twisting, distorting the “normal” pattern of motion: disrupting it by a subversive pattern, motion on the spot, refusal to move along
  - rebellion in joy, the exuberance of *repression thrown off*; but also the consciousness of oppression and degradation, exploding, immediately and without the artistic restraints imposed by the traditional form of beauty and order.

*Concluding:*

Now what is all this supposed to mean to you on this day?

Just the word of a layman, an outsider:

you will be confronted with

- something that is no longer the noble, elevating, beautiful thing it was,



- no longer the highest manifestation of the sublime values of culture.

but rather

something more vulgar, more technical, more material:

an art *which seems to deny itself as art*

and,

in *doing so, catches up with reality without* succumbing to it —

- an art which *moves a whole generation*, in all parts of the globe,  
*to sing and dance and march*  
 — *not* behind a sergeant or colonel,  
 — *not* to the tunes of beautiful restraint or peasant relaxation

*but*

behind nobody but their like,

and to the tune of their own body and their own mind:

You have come face to face with a *music of the oppressed*

which denies and *defies the entire white culture* as experienced by the oppressed.

According to the standards of this culture,

- this music is not nice, not beautiful, not art; is messy, unrestrained.

Moreover,

- *much of its most popular manifestation* has become part of the Establishment,
- *is made by and for the market*, for sale
  - branch of the great enterprise of manipulation and *social engineering*:
  - harmless and enjoyable mobilization of the instincts.

In both aspects,

by virtue of its subversive character, and

its commitment to the market of steered aggressiveness and fun,

what happens

is that the “higher culture” apparently can no longer move and remain within its protective domain.

And you,

exponents and practitioners of this culture, will, in your work, *have to answer to the new values which invade the realm of culture*:

- the new values, the new goals which announce themselves in the *shouts and cries and moanings against* that which is, *and for* that which can be and ought to be
- a life without fear, cruelty, oppression, which, the young people know, is a real possibility today!

- These values, these instincts want to come to voice, to song and rhythm,  
— they rebel against the sublimating, harmonizing, consoling forms of the tradition,  
— they have become the cry of the young all over the globe;
- this is the outcry of men and women who have lost patience, who have felt the lie, the hypocrisy, the indifference in our culture, our art  
— they really want “*music from other planets*,” very real and close planets.

Thus,

The great rebellion against our repressive civilization encompasses the realm of music,  
— and *makes you accessories or adversaries*.

— you will *defend and rescue the old*, with its still unfulfilled and still valid promises and forms,

or

— you will work *to give the new form* to the new forces.  
In either case – *you are in it!*

# VI

## ART AS FORM OF REALITY \*

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The thesis of the end of art has become a familiar slogan: radicals take it as a truism; they reject or ‘suspend’ art as part of bourgeois culture, just as they reject or suspend its literature or philosophy. This verdict extends easily to all theory, all intelligence (no matter how ‘creative’) that does not spark action and practice, that does not noticeably help to change the world, that does not—be it only for a short time—break through the universe of mental and physical pollution in which we live. Music does it, with song and dance: the music which activates the body; the songs which no longer sing but cry and shout. To measure the road travelled in the last thirty years, compare the ‘traditional’, classical tone and text of the songs of the Spanish Civil War with today’s songs of protest and defiance. Or compare the ‘classical’ theatre of Brecht with the Living Theatre of today. We witness not only the political but also, and primarily, the artistic attack on art in all its forms, on art as Form itself. The distance and dissociation of art from reality are denied, refused, and destroyed; if art is still anything at all, it must be real, part and parcel of life—but of a life which is itself the conscious negation of the established way of life, with all its institutions, with its entire material and intellectual culture, its entire immoral morality, its required and its clandestine behaviour, its work and its fun.

A double reality has emerged (or re-emerged), that of those who say ‘no’, and that of those who say ‘yes’. Those engaged in whatever artistic effort is

\* *Editor’s note:*

“Art as Form of Reality” was presented in 1969 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in a lecture series on the future of art. It was published in 1970 in a volume *On the Future of Art*, ed. Edward F. Fry (New York: Viking Press, 1970), pp. 123–34 with the title “Art as a Form of Reality.” It was reprinted in *New Left Review* 74 (London: July–August 1972), pp. 51–8 with the title, more consistent with Marcuse’s position, “Art as Form of Reality.” We are publishing here the *New Left Review* version, one in which the editors added subheadings not found in Marcuse’s original that highlight some of the themes of the essay. (DK)

still 'valid', refuse to say 'yes' to both reality *and* to art. Yet the refusal itself *is* also reality—very real are the young who have no more patience, who have, with their own bodies and minds, experienced the horrors and the oppressive comforts of the given reality; real are the ghettos and their spokesmen; real are the forces of liberation all over the globe, East and West; First, Second, and Third Worlds. But the meaning of this reality to those who experience it can no longer be communicated in the established language and images—in the available forms of expression, no matter how new, how radical they may be.

## THE DOMAIN OF FORMS

What is at stake is the vision, the experience of a reality that is so fundamentally different, so antagonistic to the prevailing reality that any communication through the established means seems to reduce this difference, to vitiate this experience. This irreconcilability with the very medium of communication also extends to the forms of art themselves, to *Art as Form*.<sup>1</sup> From the position of today's rebellion and refusal, Art itself appears as part and force of the tradition which perpetuates that which *is*, and prevents the realization of that which can and ought to be. Art does so precisely inasmuch as it *is* Form, because the artistic Form (no matter how *anti-art* it strives to be) arrests that which is in motion, gives it limit and frame and place in the prevailing universe of experience and aspirations, gives it a value *in* this universe, makes it an object among others. This means that, in this universe, the work of art, as well as of anti-art, becomes *exchange* value, commodity: and it is precisely the *Commodity Form*, as the form of reality, which is the target of today's rebellion.

True, the commercialization of Art is not new, and not even of very recent date. It is as old as bourgeois society. The process gains momentum with the almost unlimited reproducibility of the work of art, by virtue of which the *oeuvre* becomes susceptible to imitation and repetition even in its finest and most sublime achievements. In his masterful analysis of this process, Walter Benjamin has shown that there is one thing which militates against all reproduction, namely, the 'aura' of the *oeuvre*, the unique historical situation in which the work of art is created, into which it speaks, and which defines its function and meaning. As soon as the *oeuvre* leaves its own historical moment, which is unrepeatable and unredeemable, its 'original'

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1 I shall use the term *Art* (capitalized) as including not only the visual arts but also literature and music. I shall use the term *Form* (capitalized) for that which defines Art as Art, that is to say, as essentially (ontologically) different not only from (everyday) reality but also from such other manifestations of intellectual culture as science and philosophy.

truth is falsified, or (more cautiously) modified: it acquires a different meaning, responding (affirmatively or negatively) to the different historical situation. Owing to new instruments and techniques, to new forms of perception and thought, the original *oeuvre* may now be interpreted, instrumented, 'translated', and thus become richer, more complex, refined, fuller of meaning. Nevertheless, the fact remains that it is no longer what it *was* to the artist and his audience and public.

Yet, through all these changes, something remains identically the same: the *oeuvre* itself, to which all these modifications happen. The most 'updated' work of art is still the particular, unique work of art updated. What kind of entity is it which remains the identical 'substance' of all its modifications?

It is not the 'plot': Sophocles' tragedy shares the 'story' of Oedipus with many other literary expressions; it is not the 'object' of a painting, which recurs innumerable times (as general category: portrait of a man sitting, standing; mountainous landscape, etc.); it is not the stuff, the raw material of which the work is made. What constitutes the unique and enduring identity of an *oeuvre*, and what makes a *work* into a work of *art*—this entity is the Form. By virtue of the Form, and the Form alone, the content achieves that uniqueness which makes it the content of one particular work of art and of no other. The way in which the story is told; the structure and selectiveness of verse and prose; that which is *not* said, *not* represented and yet present; the interrelations of lines and colours and points—these are some aspects of the Form which removes, dissociates, alienates the *oeuvre* from the given reality and makes it enter into its own reality: the realm of forms.

The realm of forms: it is an *historical* reality, an irreversible sequence of styles, subjects, techniques, rules—each inseparably related to its society, and repeatable only as imitation. However, in all their almost infinite diversity, they are but variations of the *one Form* which distinguishes Art from any other product of human activity. Ever since Art left the magical stage, ever since it ceased to be 'practical', to be one 'technique' among others—that is to say, ever since it became a separate branch of the social division of labour, it assumed a Form of its own, common to all arts.

This Form corresponded to the new function of Art in society: to provide the 'holiday', the elevation, the break in the terrible routine of life—to present something 'higher', 'deeper', perhaps 'truer' and better, satisfying needs not satisfied in daily work and fun, and therefore pleasurable. (I am speaking of the social, the 'objective' historical function of Art; I am not speaking of what Art is to the artist, not of his intentions and goals, which are of a very different order.) In other, more brutal words: Art is not (or not supposed to be) a use value to be consumed in the course of the daily performances of men; its utility is of a transcendent kind, utility for the soul or the mind which does not enter the normal behaviour of men and does not really change it—except for precisely that short period of elevation, the cultured holiday: in church, in the museum, the concert hall, the theatre,

before the monuments and ruins of the great past. After the break, real life continues: business as usual.

### CLASSICAL AESTHETICS

With these features, Art becomes a force *in* the (given) society, but not *of* the (given) society. Produced in and for the established reality, providing it with the beautiful and the sublime, elevation and pleasure, Art also dissociates itself from this reality and confronts it with another one: the beautiful and the sublime, the pleasure and the truth that Art presents are not merely those obtaining in the actual society. No matter how much Art may be determined, shaped, directed by prevailing values, standards of taste and behaviour, limits of experience, it is always more and other than beautification and sublimation, recreation and validation of that which is. Even the most realistic *oeuvre* constructs a reality of its own: its men and women, its objects, its landscape, its music reveal what remains unsaid, unseen, unheard in everyday life. Art is 'alienating'.

As part of the *established* culture, Art is *affirmative*, sustaining this culture; as *alienation* from the established reality, Art is a *negating* force. The *history of Art* can be understood as the *harmonization of this antagonism*.

The material, stuff, and data of Art (words, sounds, lines and colours; but also thoughts, emotions, images) are ordered, interrelated, defined and 'contained' in the *oeuvre* in such a manner that they constitute a structured whole—closed, in its external appearance, between the two covers of a book, in a frame, at a specific place; its presentation takes a specific time, before and after which is the *other* reality, daily life. In its effect on the recipient, the *oeuvre itself* may endure and recur; but it will remain, as recurrent, a self-contained whole, a mental or sensuous object clearly separated and distinct from (real) things. The laws or rules governing the organization of the elements in the *oeuvre* as a unified whole seem of infinite variety, but the classical aesthetic tradition has given them a common denominator: they are supposed to be guided by the idea of the *beautiful*.

This central idea of classical aesthetics invokes the sensibility as well as the rationality of man, Pleasure Principle and Reality Principle: the work of art is to appeal to the senses, to satisfy sensuous needs—but in a highly sublimated manner. Art is to have a reconciling, tranquillizing, *and* a cognitive function, to be beautiful *and* true. The beautiful was to lead to the truth: *in* the beautiful, a truth was supposed to appear that did not, and could not appear in any other form.

Harmonization of the beautiful and the true—what was supposed to make up the essential unity of the work of art has turned out to be an increasingly impossible *unification of opposites*, for the true has appeared as increasingly incompatible with the beautiful. Life, the human condition, has militated increasingly against the sublimation of reality in the Form of Art.

This sublimation is not primarily (and perhaps not at all!) a process in the psyche of the artist but rather an ontological condition, pertaining to the *Form* of Art itself. It necessitates an organization of the material into the unity and enduring stability of the *oeuvre*, and this organization ‘succumbs’ as it were to the idea of the Beautiful. It is as if this idea would impose itself upon the material through the creative energy of the artist (though by no means as his conscious intention). The result is most evident in those works which are the uncompromisingly ‘direct’ accusation of reality. The artist indicts—but the indictment anaesthetizes the terror. Thus, the brutality, stupidity, horror of war are all there in the work of Goya, but as ‘pictures’, they are caught up in the dynamic of aesthetic transfiguration—they can be admired, side by side with the glorious portraits of the king who presided over the horror. The Form contradicts the content, and triumphs over the content: at the price of its anaesthetization. The immediate, unsublimated (physiological and psychological) response: vomiting, cry, fury, gives way to the aesthetic experience: the germane response to the work of art.

The character of this aesthetic sublimation, essential to Art and inseparable from its history as part of affirmative culture, has found its perhaps most striking formulation in Kant’s concept of *interesseloses Wohlgefallen*: delight, pleasure divorced from all interest, desire, inclination. The aesthetic object is, as it were, without a particular Subject, or rather without any relation to a Subject other than that of pure contemplation—pure eye, pure ear, pure mind. Only in this purification of ordinary experience and its objects, only in this transfiguration of reality emerges the aesthetic universe and the aesthetic object as pleasurable, beautiful and sublime. In other and more brutal words: the precondition for Art is a radical looking into reality, and a looking away from it—a repression of its immediacy, and of the immediate response to it. It is the *oeuvre* itself which *is*, and which achieves this repression; and as aesthetic repression, it is ‘satisfying’, enjoyable. In this sense, Art is in itself a ‘happy end’; despair becomes sublime; pain beautiful.

The artistic presentation of the Crucifixion throughout the centuries is still the best example for this aesthetic transfiguration. Nietzsche saw in the Cross ‘the most subterranean conspiracy of all times—a conspiracy against sanity, beauty, health, courage, spirit, nobility of the soul, a conspiracy *against life itself*’ (*The Antichrist* 62). The Cross as aesthetic object denounces the repressive force in the beauty and spirit of Art: ‘a conspiracy against life itself’.

Nietzsche’s formula may well serve to elucidate the impetus and the scope of today’s rebellion against Art as part and parcel of the affirmative bourgeois culture—a rebellion sparked by the now intolerable, brutal conflict between the potential and the actual, between the very real possibilities of liberation, and the indeed all but conspiratorial efforts, by the powers that be, to prevent this liberation. It seems that the aesthetic sublimation is approaching its historical limits, that the commitment of Art to the Ideal, to

the beautiful and the sublime, and with it the 'holiday' function of Art, now offend the human condition. It also seems that the cognitive function of Art can no longer obey the harmonizing 'law of Beauty': the contradiction between form and content shatters the traditional Form of Art.

## THE REBELLION AGAINST ART

The rebellion against the very Form of Art has a long history. At the height of classical aesthetics, it was an integral part of the Romanticist programme; its first desperate outcry was Georg Büchner's indictment that all idealistic art displays a 'disgraceful contempt for humanity'. The protest continues in the renewed efforts to 'save' Art by destroying the familiar, dominating forms of perception, the familiar appearance of the object, the thing, because it is part of a false, mutilated experience. The development of Art to non-objective art, minimal art, anti-art was a way towards the liberation of the *Subject*, preparing it for a new object-world instead of accepting and sublimating, beautifying the existing one, freeing mind and body for a new sensibility and sensitivity which can no longer tolerate a mutilated experience and a mutilated sensibility.

The next step is to 'living art' (a *contradictio in adjecto*?), Art in motion, as motion. In its own internal development, in its struggle against its own illusions, Art comes to join the struggle against the powers that be, mental and physical, the struggle against domination and repression—in other words, Art, by virtue of its own internal dynamic, is to become a *political force*. It refuses to be for the museum or mausoleum, for the exhibitions of a no longer existing aristocracy, for the holiday of the soul and the elevation of the masses—it wants to be *real*. Today, Art enters the forces of rebellion only as it is *desublimated*: a living Form which gives word and image and sound to the Unnameable, to the lie and its debunking, to the horror and to the liberation from it, to the body and its sensibility as the source and seat of all 'aesthetics', as the seat of the soul and its culture, as the first 'apperception' of the spirits, *Geist*.

Living Art, anti-art in all its variety—is its aim self-defeating? All these frantic efforts to produce the absence of Form, to substitute the real for the aesthetic object, to ridicule oneself and the bourgeois customer—are they not so many activities of frustration, already part of the culture industry and the museum culture? I believe the aim of the 'new act' is self-defeating because it retains, and must retain no matter how minimally, the Form of Art as different from non-art, and it is the Art-Form itself which frustrates the intention to reduce or even annul this difference, to make Art 'real', 'living'.

Art cannot become reality, cannot realize itself without cancelling itself as Art in *all* its forms, even in its most destructive, most minimal, most 'living' forms. The gap which separates Art from reality, the essential otherness of Art, its 'illusory' character can be reduced only to the degree to which *reality*



*itself* tends towards Art as reality's own Form, that is to say, in the course of a revolution, with the emergence of a free society. In this process, the artist would participate—as *artist* rather than as political *activist*, for the tradition of Art cannot be simply left behind or discarded; that which it has achieved, shown, and revealed in authentic forms, contains a truth *beyond* immediate realization or solution, perhaps beyond any realization and solution.

The anti-art of today is condemned to remain Art, no matter how 'anti' it strives to be. Incapable of bridging the gap between Art and reality, of escaping from the fetters of the Art-Form, the rebellion against 'form' only succeeds in a loss of artistic quality; illusory destruction, illusory overcoming of alienation. The authentic *oeuvres*, the true avant-garde of our time, far from obscuring this distance, far from *playing down* alienation, *enlarge* it and harden their incompatibility with the given reality to an extent that defies any (behavioural) application. They fulfil in this way the cognitive function of Art (which is its inherent radical, 'political' function), that is, to name the Unnameable, to confront man with the dreams he betrays and the crimes he forgets. The greater the terrible conflict between that which is and that which can be, the more will the work of art be estranged from the immediacy of real life, thought and behaviour—even political thought and behaviour. I believe that the authentic avant-garde of today are not those who try desperately to produce the absence of Form and the union with real life, but rather those who do not recoil from the exigencies of Form, who find the new word, image, and sound which are capable of 'comprehending' reality as only Art can comprehend—and negate it. This authentic new Form has emerged in the work (already 'classic') of Schönberg, Berg, and Webern; of Kafka and Joyce; of Picasso; it continues today in such achievements as Stockhausen's *Spirale*, and Samuel Beckett's novels. They invalidate the notion of the 'end of art'.

### BEYOND THE ESTABLISHED DIVISION OF LABOUR

In contrast, the 'living art', and especially the 'living theatre' of today, does away with the Form of estrangement: in eliminating the distance between the actors, the audience, and the 'outside', it establishes a familiarity and identification with the actors and their message which quickly draws the negation, the rebellion into the daily universe—as an enjoyable and understandable element of this universe. The participation of the audience is spurious and the result of previous arrangements; the change in consciousness and behaviour is itself part of the play—illusion is strengthened rather than destroyed.

There is a phrase of Marx: 'these petrified [social] conditions must be forced to dance by singing to them their own melody.' Dance will bring the dead world to life and make it a human world. But today, 'their own melody' seems no longer communicable except in forms of extreme estrangement and

dissociation from all immediacy—in the most conscious and deliberate forms of *Art*.

I believe that 'living art', the 'realization' of *Art*, can only be the event of a qualitatively different society in which a new type of men and women, no longer the subject or object of exploitation, can develop in their life and work the vision of the suppressed *aesthetic* possibilities of men and things—aesthetic not as to the specific property of certain objects (the *objet d'art*) but as forms and modes of existence corresponding to the reason and sensibility of free individuals, what Marx called 'the sensuous appropriation of the world'. The realization of *Art*, the 'new art' is conceivable only as the process of constructing the universe of a free society—in other words: *Art as Form of reality*.

*Art as Form of reality*: it is impossible to ward off the horrible associations provoked by this notion, such as gigantic programmes of beautification, artistic corporation offices, aesthetic factories, industrial parks. These associations belong to the practice of repression. *Art as Form of reality* means, not the beautification of the given, but the construction of an entirely different and opposed reality. The aesthetic vision is part of the *revolution*; it is a vision of Marx: 'the animal constructs (*formiert*) only according to need; man forms also in accordance with the laws of beauty.'

It is impossible to concretize *Art as Form of reality*: it would then be creativity, a creation in the material as well as intellectual sense, a juncture of technique and the arts in the total reconstruction of the environment, a juncture of town and country, industry and nature after all have been freed from the horrors of commercial exploitation and beautification, so that *Art* can no longer serve as a stimulus of business. Evidently, the very possibility of creating such an environment depends on the total transformation of the existing society: a new mode and new goals of production, a new type of human being as producer, the end of role-playing, of the established social division of labour, of work and pleasure.

Would such realization of *Art* imply the 'invalidation' of the traditional arts? In other words, would it imply the 'atrophy' of the capability to understand and enjoy them, atrophy of the intellectual faculty and the sensuous organs to experience the arts of the past? I suggest a negative answer. *Art* is transcendent in a sense which distinguishes and divorces it from any 'daily' reality we can possibly envisage. No matter how free, society will be inflicted with necessity—the necessity of labour, of the fight against death and disease, of scarcity. Thus, the arts will retain forms of expression germane to them—and only to them: of a beauty and truth antagonistic to those of reality. There is, even in the most 'impossible' verses of the traditional drama, even in the most impossible opera arias and duets, some element of rebellion which is still 'valid'. There is in them some faithfulness to one's passions, some 'freedom of expression' in defiance of common sense, language, and behaviour which indicts and contradicts the established ways of life. It is by virtue of this 'otherness' that the Beautiful in the traditional arts would retain its truth.

And this otherness could not and would not be cancelled by the social development. On the contrary: what would be cancelled is the *opposite*, namely, the false, conformist and comfortable reception (and creation!) of Art, its spurious integration with the Establishment, its harmonization and sublimation of repressive conditions. Then, perhaps for the first time, men could *enjoy* the infinite sorrow of Beethoven and Mahler because it is overcome and preserved in the reality of freedom. Perhaps for the first time men would *see* with the eyes of Corot, of Cézanne, of Monet because the perception of these artists has helped to form this reality.

# VII

## JERUSALEM LECTURES\*

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*The Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation  
December 21, 1971*

*Chairman:* Good evening. I want in the name of all of us, that is, in the name of the Van Leer Institute and its guests, in the name of Jerusalemites, Israelis, and anyone else who happens to be present, to welcome our guest, Professor Marcuse. Seeing that the crowd is so dense, he will demonstrate his powers as a crowd tamer tonight!

I think that he doesn't really need an introduction but because of whatever slight doubt remains and I suppose in order to salve my own ego as chairman, I'll say a few words to introduce him.

You know, I'm sure, that geographically he has had a rich life already. He has been through Berlin, Freiburg, New York – i.e. the University of Columbia, Harvard, Brandeis, and the University of California. His intellectual odyssey leads him at least from Hegel, into Marx, into Freud, to Nietzsche, and I think even to the surrealists.

\* *Editor's note:*

Marcuse was invited in summer 1971 to give some lectures at the Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation that was connected with Hebrew University. Marcuse noted that he had never been to Israel and would be accompanied by his wife Inge who had been there in the 1930s and had some relatives there. Marcuse exchanged some letters with friends and agreed on a two-week visit that would focus on his two presentations at Hebrew University and involve contact with some Israeli and Palestinian groups. The dates for his lectures were set for December 21 and 23 and would focus primarily on aesthetics. Marcuse makes clear in his opening remarks that he was told to lecture on a philosophical subject and he chose aesthetics, but warned that this would lead inevitably to politics. The two-part lecture provides a good overview of his developing aesthetics and how it was indeed connected with his political positions. A transcript in lecture note form exists in his private papers along with a typescript that appeared to be prepared for possible publication. For reasons not clear, the lectures were never published and appear here in their original English for the first time. The version published here constitutes a lightly edited version of the transcript which corrects obvious transcription errors. (DK)

He is, as you can see and as you will experience tonight, a mild and personable man who is sometimes and somehow regarded as dangerous! And I suppose the reason he is regarded as dangerous is because he preaches – a term that sounds as if it might be Nietzsche’s – the great refusal, in which in order for us to reach the good world I suppose we all hope for, we have to refuse the present one. And he has a hope that seemed to me, perhaps you will not agree, to have a tinge of an old mystic hope: the case of the man, the future man, in whom the mind and the heart, or the poetry and the science, will no longer be any different; a case of a culture which will no longer be split between a higher half, either in art or in any other aspect, and a somewhat brutalized, mindless lower half; in which the dehumanized lower part will not have to demonstrate its power by attacking the aristocratic half that is split off from it. There is something in here of liking or at least appreciation of the anti-art of the Dadaistic art we know, of the hope of something which is sensuous and frightening and the kind of antithesis which precedes a true or perhaps a synthetic dawn.

He can be characterized in many ways, as you know. You can regard him as a kind of sub-dimension, like all of us, of a one-dimensional society; regard him as a destroyer in the clothing of a sheep and a wolf at once: as a momentary prophet whom the revolutionists, the true revolutionists, will cast off or as a true prophet. I think that tonight he will preach the kind of combination of morality and aesthetics that recalls Plato and Confucius, but without their love of hierarchy. And the fact that we are present here now means at the very least that this Herbert Marcuse is what the French used to call an *idée force*. And I think we are here to feel and to appreciate the force of his ideas: Professor Marcuse.

*Professor Marcuse:* Well you have heard, I have many, many sides and am many, many things. The only thing I want to stress is I am very mild and I’m afraid you will have a taste of my mildness tonight and I may just as well tell you why.

When I was invited by the Van Leer Foundation, for which I am very grateful, they suggested that I select a strictly philosophical and non-political subject. Of course I complied. I was happy to comply in view of the bad reputation I have and so I selected what has been announced under the title – certainly mild – “A Philosophy of Aesthetics.” But what happened is what always happens to me, that once I look a little closer at a philosophical problem it turns out to be loaded with social and political content and I think it is my task precisely also as a philosopher not to forget about this content, not simply to brush it aside as not belonging to the topic, but rather to show how it belongs to it.

Now a very good example of this internal connection between apparently purely philosophical and social problems, is aesthetics itself and in the realm of aesthetics the important change of meaning which the

term underwent and which I will very briefly here recapitulate, namely, a change of meaning from something that pertains to the senses, to sense perception, to sensibility, to something that pertains to art. Or a change of meaning from a rather physiological to an artistic condition. Now, I believe that this change in meaning, which seems to belong strictly to the history of philosophy, is in itself belonging to social history, namely, this change in meaning reflects one aspect and mode of social repression, namely, the claims and the potentialities of the human senses, the fulfillment of human sensibility – these two are relegated to the realm of the arts. That is to say, to fiction, poetry, illusion. In the work of art and mainly in the work of art, man can find that promise, that hope, that truth, that is refused to him in reality. In the dimension of art man can express the passions, desires, and yearnings which he has to restrain and restrict at the price of his life or happiness in real life. And by virtue of this transformation, of this transfiguration, art assumes an affirmative character – an affirmative character that will say art leaves the miserable condition of man, his material condition in reality, untouched and unchanged. Even more, art supports the social repression by giving illusory comfort, illusory fulfillment, illusory harmony. Now it is precisely this apparently very abstract relation between art and society which explodes today and becomes a powerful factor in a political movement, in a radically political movement.

I am speaking of the so-called cultural revolution in the West, which has very little to do with the Chinese cultural revolution, mainly in the technically advanced industrial countries of the West, and it is there in this radical opposition that the entire tradition of art is rejected. Not only is the entire tradition of art rejected – the aesthetic form itself is repelled, is rejected as illusion, and with it, the entire so-called bourgeois culture which is historically connected with this illusory art, is likewise rejected. And in place of the traditional illusory art which is considered as a support and affirmation of a miserable reality, the opposition wants a living art, anti-art, an art which becomes a force in the struggle for radical social change – an art which can function as a vehicle of liberation rather than as the hand-maiden of repression.

And this politicization of art would also undo the sublimation of the senses, of sensibility which is expressed in the aesthetic form. What one asks for is a desublimating art and desublimated art – an art liberating rather than restricting and repressing the life instincts of man, his erotic energy – his erotic energy which has been repressed throughout the centuries in the interest of domination and exploitation of man and nature.

This political situation of art in the service of national as well as social reconstruction is actually an aspect of one of the most important phenomena we can see today, namely, of the enlarged scope of today's rebellion against the established society – compare today's radical movement with the radical movement even of the most recent past.

The cultural revolution which this movement wants to prepare for is indeed a total revolution. It wants a change and a radical change not only in the material conditions of man, not only in the political structure, not only in the consciousness, but also in the sensibility, in the innermost drives and needs of man. It wants the emancipation of the senses as a precondition for the construction of a free society.

What is at stake? What is being challenged is not only man's relation to man, but also man's relation to nature – the nature of man himself and nature as his life environment. The question which we have to ask and which I shall try to answer very, very briefly, is: why? What is the basis and what are the reasons for this radicalization which involves the entire traditional culture?

I can take out only two points: first, at this historical stage, technical progress has provided all the resources – natural, technical, and human – for abolishing poverty, inequality, and oppression on a global scale. Secondly, to translate this technical possibility into reality, to believe in the new possibility which indeed can be realized, to believe in the new possibilities of human freedom, mind and body must become open to a new experience of the world. The new experience of a world which can be made the place where men and women determine their own life, where the individuals in their work and in their leisure can develop their own truly human needs and faculties. Before being able to build and live in a truly free society among equals, man must free himself from his own repressed and distorted humanity, and this liberation begins where we experience most directly and most immediately our world, namely, with our senses, with our sensibility.

This is the concrete link between aesthetics and the practice of social change – the need not only for a new consciousness, not only for a new theory, but for a new sensibility, for new ways and modes of perception in man himself. And I would like to discuss this link on the two levels which have historically developed, namely, tonight I will discuss very briefly the inherent social content of sensibility; in my lecture on Thursday the inherent social content of art.

To begin the first part. I will now, and I would like to warn you beforehand, really fulfill my promise, and go into the history of philosophy, try to discuss rather technical philosophical problems. I don't mind doing that at all because I think this will give you again another beautiful example of how the apparently most abstract philosophical history, the most abstract philosophical tradition, reflects in a demonstrative way what is going on in the society.

Now, in the philosophical tradition and practically from its beginning, the human senses, sensibility, together with that other strange faculty of the human mind, the imagination, were condemned to a rather inferior role, subordinated to reason and understanding. The truth of the senses and of the imagination – if any truth at all was granted to them – was a

highly dependent one, if not altogether negative. Now, this conception of the hierarchical structure of the human mind that begins with Plato, and goes throughout the history of philosophy, seems to take a decisive turn beginning with German idealism in the philosophy of Kant, Schiller, and Hegel. And the whole conception explodes in the theory of Marx, especially the young Marx, who, as I will be able at least briefly to discuss, made the demand for “emancipation of the senses” into a revolutionary concept. And the same hierarchical structure is today shattered by the emergence of the new life styles and of the imagination as an element of radical action. The May–June events in France in 1968 have clearly shown not only this total reinterpretation of the value and functions of the human faculties, but they appear to the imagination as a radical social power.

Now, this radicalization, this change in the place of sensibility and imagination, announces a radical transformation of values, namely, the revolt against the performance principle as an outdated principle of social organization. The performance principle, as I may briefly define it here, means the norms and standards which regulate human behaviour, human relationships, the human position in society, in accordance with the competitive performance of the individual in socially necessary and rewarded labor.

Now, against this competitive performance principle is the appeal to a new experience, a new experience which changes the place and function of sensibility and makes it a practical force, as Marx expressed it.

This change can be in a very fascinating way traced in the development from Kant, via Hegel, to Marx. And I would like very briefly to identify at least the main points in this development by virtue of which the traditional hierarchical structure of the human mind is gradually being dissolved and makes room for other possibilities.

If we have a look at the three critiques of Kant, we find an interesting change in his definition of freedom connected with his concept of the role of sensibility in the structure of the mind as a whole. In the first critique, sensibility appears as merely receptive – its organizing forms, the forms in which the senses organize our experience are pure forms, that is empty of any material content – namely, time and space. The central role, however, of the imagination is already indicated. At this stage Kant himself calls it a mysterious faculty in the depths of the human mind but in spite of this mysterious and ill-defined character, he attributes to the imagination a central role in the working of the human mind, namely, the mediation between sensibility and understanding. This is the first stage in the redefinition of freedom. According to the first critique [of Pure Reason], only the cognitive subject is free, which is [for Kant] the “I think” in the so-called transcendental apperception. Freedom [is] merely a cognitive condition.

Now in the second critique, the step is made from the subject of knowledge to the subject of practice. The moral human being acting as a



moral human being, as a person, is free. But in the second critique human freedom is rigidly restricted to the moral person and the whole conception comes to naught in the futile attempt to reconcile the causality of freedom, namely the free moral subject which begins a chain of cause and effect, with the causality of necessity, namely the causality of nature. And in the last analysis, the role of sensibility in the second critique remains negative – it is as inclination, something which gets into the way of purely moral action and demands repression.

The picture changes considerably in the, in my view, most important of the three critiques – the critique of judgment. There, and this is something one would not have expected of Kant, freedom and necessity, man and nature, are reconciled in the aesthetic dimension. In the third critique Kant discovers, or rather recaptures, the idea of nature as a subject in its own right, purposefulness without purpose. And the beautiful in nature indicates nature's "capacity" to form itself in its freedom also in an aesthetically purposeful way according to chemical laws. I repeat, the beautiful in nature indicates nature's capacity to form itself in its freedom also in an aesthetically purposeful way. I stressed this strange sentence because we will find it again almost literally in Marx, where the role of the beautiful is directly linked with the idea of a free society, and in one of the most amazing and most advanced ideas of free society which we find in Marx, is the proposition which says: in a free society "man forms the object world in accordance with the laws of beauty" – the passage occurs in the economic-philosophical manuscripts of 1844. I think there is no proposition in the history of philosophy and Marxian theory which gives you in a more condensed way the internal relation between aesthetics, the beautiful, on one side and a free society on the other.

I will try on Thursday to elucidate at least with a few words this relation.

Now at the same time as this strange redefinition of freedom takes place, there is a change in the concept and function of sensibility. In the third critique sensibility becomes active, creative, in the harmonious interplay of the human faculties – sensibility, imagination, and reason or understanding are in harmonious relation in the aesthetic attitude, in the aesthetic object. We can therefore sum up the third stage in the redefinition of freedom: Free is the aesthetic subject.

If we turn now from Kant to Hegel we find a very different and more radical approach, namely, the discovery within the realm of a strictly speculative philosophy, the discovery of the social content of sense perception, of sense certainty. In the very beginning of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, the familiar structure of sense perception as immediate individual experience is dissolved and Hegel's analysis of what actually happens in sense perception, reveals as he says, the "we" in the "I perceive," the "we" in the "I" of perception. It reveals this when the individual subject of sense experience discovers that behind the immediate

appearance of things another common rational object world exists, then it discovers that we are behind the curtain of individual experience and this “we” now unfolds as social reality in the struggle between master and servant and from there at the other stages of the phenomenology.

I think we can draw the conclusion from Hegel’s analysis that in contrast to Kant, we can perhaps speak of a material empirical, historical *a priori*: namely, the primary, the intersubjective organization of our experience takes place not only, as Kant believed, in the pure forms of intuition of time and space, but in very concrete – in material and historical – forms pre-given to the individual sense perception. Or, the data of sense perception are social data formed by human labor and their material content cannot be separated from the forms of experience.

It is only on the way from Hegel to Marx and in Marx himself that the last consequences from this conception are drawn and that the senses are now redefined as practical. Practical and instrumental in changing the world. What is in this conception? It is a break with the familiar way of seeing, hearing, feeling, and touching things and men. Our senses are infested, are distorted, by the universe of acquisition and domination in which we immediately experience our world. Things to us already in sense perception appear as objects of exploitation, appropriation, and acquisition and nature itself appears as the so-called value-free stuff, as a matter of domination. And the destructive exploitation of nature which accompanies the development of industrial society from the beginning, the destructive exploitation of nature, serves in turn to strengthen the exploitation of man by man and vice versa.

The senses as practical, the way we see and feel things, this is also the way we use things. This is also the way in which we conceive of the possibilities and potentialities of things and nature, and not only our mind, also our body, has become an instrument of the performance principle and is thus deprived of its own liberating faculties. The instinctual dynamic of man is thus subverted. The life instincts, the affirmation of life, are subdued and come more and more under the influence of the destruction instinct and in this way individuals reproduce in their own organism their own servitude and their own frustration.

Consequently, only a new sensibility can break this way in which even our most immediate, our most direct, our most personal experience is bound, is shaped by the world in which we live. Or radical social change, the vital need for liberation, must become rooted in the instinctual and sensuous being of the individuals themselves and this means the construction of a really free society. [It] presupposes the emergence of a new type of man and woman – a new type of man and woman who have a qualitatively different relation to each other and to the object world, qualitatively different values, aspirations, and priorities. Men and women who see, feel, and touch things in their new way, who experience nature in a new way, namely, as their life environment, no longer as a mere stuff

of mastery and domination. Or, in other words, the liberation of nature from the destructive violation of industrialization, repressive industrialization, is an essential part of the liberation of man.

I think we can now understand why you find in Marxian theory itself, where it otherwise seems to be entirely absent, the strange emphasis on the emancipation of the senses, and on an entirely different relation between man and nature, as a precondition for ending, for breaking the continuum of domination which has characterized history until now. And by this new relation he means making an end with the experience of nature as value-free stuff. Instead of the inhuman and destructive acquisitive appropriation of nature, something that he calls the human appropriation of nature, in which man and nature are reconciled [is championed].

Now evidently these tendencies toward a radicalization and totalization of social change are operating in the industrial countries, technically advanced industrial countries, today. They are operating there not only as a side-line, as a mere surface or ideological phenomenon, but because they themselves express the new objective conditions, the new possibilities of human freedom on the basis of the achievement of technical progress itself. It is technical progress which in its achievements has made possible this transition to a new and essentially different way of life. Namely, the reduction, the progressive reduction of alienated labor – that is to say, of labor which must be done in order to reproduce society, but which does not and cannot fulfill and satisfy individual human faculties. That is to say, all semi-mechanized routine and standardized labor which can and could be progressively reduced by automation.

Moreover, [Marx aims at] the abolition or at least gradual reduction of alienated labor, the abolition of poverty and inequality the world over and the abolition of the repressive morality imposed by a society governed by the performance principle.

Now, inasmuch as these new possibilities of freedom are grounded on the achievements of technical progress itself, the emancipation of sensibility and the liberation of nature cannot possibly mean a return to nature in the sense of a return to a pre-technological stage. On the contrary, no free society, no humane society is imaginable without that level of technical progress that allows the reduction of alienated labor and the progressive mechanization of labor. Not retrogression behind technological society, but on the contrary, developing, advancing science and technology and to free science and technology from their service to destruction and repression. What is at stake is not the cult of instinctual and sexual release which would simply mean a private and personal liberation, but a sensibility which in itself is geared to a new rationality. In other words, in the change in the relations between sensibility and reason, it is not sensibility that makes itself independent of reason – what is at stake is not the relationship between sensibility and reason, but

between sensibility and a repressive and destructive rationality. And the harmonization of sensibility with a new rationality, namely, the collective effort to reconstruct society and nature, to use all available resources with the goal of eliminating misery, inequality, and repression.

I want to conclude by taking up the objection that is always made here, namely, that these are utopian notions. Human nature cannot be changed – it will more or less always be what it is now. Now, while it is perfectly correct that precisely the political radical has to be realistic, it would be a slap in the face of history to do away with the ideas which offer themselves today by relegating them to the realm of utopia. Today the utopian, in my view correct sense of the term, is only that which, according to the most advanced notions of science, cannot possibly become reality. The fact of aging, not the way people are aging now, but the fact of aging in general, is one of those conditions of which we can say the idea of their abolition is utopian. Perhaps the brute fact of death, today at least, must still be called necessary and the idea of the abolition of death a utopian idea, but not the notion that we now can on the basis of our achievements, create a society which is not bigger and better than the existing society, which is not the old social system reconstructed all over, but only so that it is more streamlined and more rationalized, but a society which we can correctly call qualitatively different because the whole way of life, the whole value system, the aspirations and needs of men will be different. This too I would like to take up, at least briefly, on Thursday. Here I want, as against this defamation of historical possibilities as utopian, to say only this: Human nature, certainly there are vast levels and dimensions of human nature which are unchangeable, namely those in which the human being still is and will remain an animal. Beyond the animal dimension and the animal instincts, human nature is changeable not only on the surface but in its very essence. Further, we can, and must, challenge the defamation of this notion as utopian – we can accept the term utopian only if we believe that the established societies are in themselves eternal; only if we make political and social conditions into unchangeable metaphysical conditions; only if we forget that history under given conditions is made by human beings and that what is defined as human nature is very often only that human being which the established society has made of us, but is certainly not the unchangeable nature of human beings. Thank you.

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*The Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation*  
*Thursday, December 23, 1971*

*Chairman:* Since Professor Marcuse spoke last time about the rediscovery of sensibility and, as you all know, time being a form of sensibility in Kant, let me say something about my own past relations with Professor Marcuse.

When I just started to be apprenticed in the field of philosophy, I came across his writings – some of them in the journal *Gesellschaft*, later in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, [and found] his major opus on Hegel's ontology of history – a book which nobody in the field cannot utilize, study and see, through the prism of that book, this very great philosophical system.

There are two or three outstanding features which I consider it my duty to reiterate tonight, precisely from the strict philosophical point of view: One is Professor Marcuse's continuing rejection of anti-rationalism and his criticism of attempts to replace reason and critical attitudes with intuition. In the concept of critical theory which took shape in the early 1930s and which again is a continuous thread in his thought – we are right now with Professor Marcuse, after his first lecture, already involved in his own interpretation and continuation of the leitmotif of critical theory.

It gives me great pleasure, Professor Marcuse, to call on you.

*Professor Marcuse:* I have again today to start with an introduction – I shall make it as brief as possible.

The problem which I want to discuss tonight is one of the main aspects of the so-called cultural revolution in the West. Now, this cultural revolution is a feature of the advanced, industrial societies of the West, and the society in this country is, or seems to be, very different from the society in the United States of which I will speak mainly. However, there are two very good reasons why I should not be so afraid to present these problems here. First, it is a familiar historical tendency that the most advanced – technically most advanced – country provides the model of development for other, still more backward countries living in different surroundings. And secondly, this country is economically, culturally, and politically closely connected with the United States.

Now, if we keep these two facts in mind, we cannot close our eyes before a decisive trend in the advanced industrial countries today – a trend which is certainly not yet acknowledged and which is certainly not yet obvious, which is there nevertheless and in my view assumes ever more serious proportions. Namely, I believe that today the growth – nay, the very stability – of the advanced Western societies are challenged, are threatened and threatened in a new way. In a new way because they are not threatened by a proletarian revolution or anything like it, according

to the pattern of 1871 and 1917 and following – they are rather threatened by a gradual internal disintegration which itself is the expression of the blatant contradiction between the vast available resources and their destructive and wasteful use. In other words, we are faced with the possibility of a disintegration of an established society in conditions of affluence – and this seems to be indeed a new historical pattern; new with a question mark, because the parallel between the present period of Western civilization and the Roman Empire has often been made.

Now, under these new conditions the demands and goals of the opposition to the established society also assume a new form, namely, as I indicated last time, they involve now the material and the intellectual culture; they are now involving a political, moral, and psychological transformation.

The point I would like to stress is that it is the internal dynamic of the established system which today makes for the political radicalization of the demands of the opposition – radicalization to the extent that these demands are not confined to economic and political goals but imply cultural goals of the greatest variety. How can we show that this trend towards disintegration according to the new pattern, that this opposition with a new pattern, that they derive from the internal workings of the established society?

I think I have, at least in the discussion last time, indicated the evidence I can bring up here. I will briefly recapitulate it: I believe that at the present stage capitalism has succeeded in satisfying the basic needs – i.e. the subsistence needs at the attained cultural level – for the larger part of the population in the advanced, and only in the advanced, industrial countries.

Now, on the basis of this achievement, the system is compelled to create and to stimulate needs over and above those of subsistence at the attained cultural level. That is to say, an ever larger part of social labor is devoted to the production of luxuries, of goods and services over and above the subsistence level. And this decisive shift undermines the very rationality of the system – it seems to invalidate the still sustained necessity of full-time alienated labor and it creates what I call transcendent needs – that is to say, needs the satisfaction of which would mean the termination of the established modes of production. At this historical stage, the impulses for social change are, as it were, displaced, from material privation to human deprivation; from the demand for ever more and bigger commodities, to the demand for the abolition of the commodity form altogether and of the exchange society with its values and priorities.

This situation would create and is creating the precondition for the transition to a new and qualitatively different society. It is in view of this possibility that the so-called transcendent needs can at least be vaguely indicated as follows: They are the demand – more than the demand, the vital need, for new relationships between the generations and between the sexes; new relationships between man and nature and between man

and things – in one word, a new morality, a new concept of work and, as we shall see, a new aesthetics. And this historical turning point activates the radical potential of those human faculties which since the beginning of modern society were rigidly subjected to the requirements of domination, to the requirements of what has been called instrumentalistic reason. They were subjected to the requirements of domination in the interest of an ever more productive mastery of man and nature. Imagination, I repeat, was reduced to fantasy, fiction, poetry – and sensibility was reduced to the so-called secondary qualities of man, to which was attributed a merely subjective validity unless translated into the terms of quantitative reason.

But now, with the shift in the impulses for social change beyond the entire universe of only quantitative progress – bigger and better things of the same sort – now, this repressive reorganization of the human faculties is being dissolved and the defamed secondary qualities, the senses and the imagination, demand their right. Demand their right not – and that is why I am grateful for the remark my colleague made in his introduction – not as private and personal liberation, as private escape from politics and work, not as what we call a body trip, but as factors and goals of movements aiming at a total reconstruction of society and the ascent of a new rationality.

Now, it is in these movements, mainly among the youth, that art is systematically used and mobilized as an oppositional force destined to develop a new consciousness, a new sensibility and a new imagination. It is this mobilization of art which I want to discuss tonight and I will center on the question [of] whether the direct politicization of art is not only ambivalent but also self-defeating.

In saying that, I want to stress from the beginning – it will be one of the main concerns of my interpretation – to show that art has an internal, inherent social and political force and that therefore alone a politicization of art is unnecessary and damaging. Art has an inherent, internal political potential – first as indictment of the existing human condition: as an indictment of the existing mode of life and secondly, as the imagery of repressed and tabooed possibilities of freedom.

Now, the communication of these repressed and tabooed possibilities of freedom demand first of all what I call a non-integrated language – that is, a language that is not loaded with and not confined to the meaning given to words by the existing universe of discourse: a non-integrated language and a non-integrated sensibility and imagination which contest the established social universe.

Now, if this is required to communicate the new possibilities of freedom at this historical stage, we must remember that such a contesting human faculty has always existed and it has existed precisely in art. Art speaks that non-integrated language which is not succumbing to the meaning given to words by the existing conditions. Art does not speak

this language and art presents non-integrated images; images which break methodically and systematically with the established universe of perception – break with this universe of perception in the name of that which this universe destroys and distorts.

This transcendence, this contestation, this nonconformist imagery which projects freedom and fulfillment – this negation of the established reality – is in all great art since its beginning. It is the inherent critical, we can even say now political quality of art, its subversive quality – and this subversive quality of art is realized in the alienation of art from the alienated society.

Two modes of alienation – the alienation which actually prevails in work and leisure in the daily reality today; and the systematic and methodical alienation from this alienated society – the artistic alienation – the creative alienation which belongs to the very essence of art. You see already here I want to anticipate the contradiction in the attempt to directly politicize art – if it is only in its alienation from its existing society that art can in fact communicate its contradictory, critical function, then the termination of this function, that is to say, the taking back of the artistic alienation, would destroy – as I hope you will see – this very quality of art.

Now, in the artistic tradition itself, the creative alienation was expressed in what is called the aesthetic form – the aesthetic form, an independent self-enclosed structure, that is itself the work of art; the aesthetic form governed by the laws of harmony, order, and beauty.

Now today in the movements I have described, we see the rebellion against the aesthetic form itself; rebellion against the aesthetic form as imposing a repressive, static, unreal, illusory, fictional order and harmony and in this way repressing creative and popular spontaneity and thus becoming the hand-maiden of political tyranny. I paraphrase, but almost literally, a statement made in the 1930s by the English philosopher of art, Herbert Read, who, at the first surrealist exhibition in London, made a statement which has since become famous, namely, that we have to reject entirely and altogether the aesthetic Form itself because by virtue of the qualities – illusory, static qualities – I have just mentioned, the aesthetic form is in cahoots with political and social repression and in addition to it, it is oppressive of the very life instinct, of the erotic instincts of man.

Now, Herbert Read's criticism referred to all forms of traditional art, characterized as illusory art, and this indictment has since been extended to cover the entire "bourgeois culture." I say bourgeois culture in quotation marks and you will soon see why. It is not because I am afraid to use the term "bourgeois"!

This enlarged criticism attacks now the entire cultural tradition of the last century. I want to question myself and ask here whether this attack on bourgeois culture does not play into the very hands from which it



wants to liberate culture? Whether it does not surrender radically progressive and liberating forces in traditional art and replace them with spurious new art and culture, which as we indeed see already, are easily co-opted and integrated into the Establishment? I will try at least to indicate why I raise this question.

First, what is bourgeois art? What is bourgeois literature? And it will be literature that I will focus on in this brief discussion. If we do not accept clichés, but really look at the facts, I think the first thing to be noticed, which may already be what invalidates the concept, is that ever since bourgeois literature emerged from the struggle against the feudal and post-feudal nobility, that is to say, approximately ever since the time of the French Revolution, bourgeois literature displays a strong anti-bourgeois stance. It is full, from the beginning to the end, with attacks on bourgeois materialism, on the bourgeois preoccupation with money; it fights against the hypocritical bourgeois morality, it fights against the exploitation of women, and so on and so on.

All these qualities which abound in the literature of the last century – all these qualities seem to testify to a negative rather than affirmative attitude and function of literature in the modern world. And yet, there is validity in the attack on the aesthetic form. Indeed, the aesthetic form contains an element of affirmation and reservation which makes the work of art itself, this art, compatible with the miserable reality and which perhaps even absolves this reality as it is. Why? Because indeed this art establishes a fictitious realm of harmony – the German term *schein* – this art establishes and fights for and proclaims the inner freedom and fulfillment of man but it is largely indifferent [i.e. ineffectual] against the miserable material conditions – conditions of servitude – under which the majority of the population lived, and this art engages in a celebration of the soul at the expense of the body. But here too we can speak of a dialectic of affirmation. Whereas we can say that there is indeed no authentic work of art which does not show this affirmative character, there is also no authentic work of art in which this affirmation is not broken, is not taken back in the aesthetic transformation of the material. It is this aesthetic transformation of the story told of the poet – it is this aesthetic transformation which invokes the imagery, the language, and the music of another reality repelled by the existing one and yet alive in memory and anticipation – alive in what happens to men and women and in their rebellion against that which happens to men and women, in the rebellion against that which is called their fate.

This is the inherent indictment of art – the indictment of art against the existing society – and it is in the same work of art, the commitment of all authentic art to the highest goal of Mankind – a life without fear, as Adorno formulated it.

If we formulate these inherent goals of art, it seems that these inherent goals are at the same time the never yet attained goals of the historical

revolution, and it seems that the permanent revolution in the social reality, the permanent transformation of the social reality, is accompanied by a parallel permanent revolution and transformation in the development of art – the revolution of styles, the succession of forms, etc. etc. But – and that I think is the decisive point – these two revolutions and transformations, the social one and the artistic one, are never moving in one and the same universe of practice. The revolution in art remains aesthetic transformation – art can never become revolutionary practice itself – art also contests the exigencies of revolutionary practice. Precisely today we should remember that perhaps the most consistent and the most uncompromising attempt to place art into the service of revolution was made in the 1930s by the surrealist movement in France and it is precisely André Breton as the spokesman of this very movement which only a very short time later declared that art will never submit to the exigencies of the revolution, that the goals of art will forever remain in a different universe.

Art can communicate its own images of a realm of freedom only by sustaining the ever-changing aesthetic form in its tension, in its alienation from reality. This creative alienation was central to bourgeois art and is expressed in the historical achievement of bourgeois art, namely, the discovery of the subject as an agent of potential freedom and fulfillment.

In the repressive societies this objective dimension was essentially, as I mentioned, one of the inner being of man, of his soul, of his imagination, of his passions. Which meant that in the outer world resignation, adjustment, death or insanity were the consequence.

But in spite of, or is it perhaps because of, this ambivalence of freedom as inner freedom only, this art achieved the opening of another dimension, another world in and against the established reality. It is this other dimension, the second reality, which appears in Bach, which dominates classical and romantic music and poetry, which determined the great novels of the nineteenth century and which came to an end, for the time being, in the stream of consciousness literature of the beginning of the twentieth century. And in the work of Franz Kafka, this creative alienation seizes the given reality in its entirety and makes a very horror of this reality [in] the aesthetic form and substance of art.

This is a unique achievement of art – the images of freedom appear in the realm of unfreedom itself. Again we have “appear in the realm of unfreedom” – appearance, *schein*, but not mere illusion – appear in the realm of unfreedom and can appear only in the realm of unfreedom, and this appearance is the work of the aesthetic transformation, of the style which is at the same time the latent content of the work of art.

This aesthetic transformation which alone can bring out and reveal the critical subversive function of art, which alone can make appear the tabooed possibilities of freedom to which art is committed – this aesthetic transformation aims in its most radical form as the methodical estrangement, the denormalization of ordinary language and of ordinary

perception and thought. In other words, it aims at the emancipation of the imagination as cognitive faculty of the human mind. And this transformation means regrouping, reinventing, rediscovery of words, colors, shapes, sounds. Rediscovering the power of silence which is in every authentic work of art and one of the marks and tokens of its rupture with the given reality.

And this transformation terminates in that self-contained, sensuous and rational totality, the *oeuvre* itself, with its own truth, its own truth of the illusion, revealing the truth about and above the established reality – the truth which is in the desires, passions, hopes, and promises of man – his secular redemption. This is still fiction, this is still illusion. Yet for the realm it must be, for the realm of fulfillment is not yet real and only imagination can project its reality. This art is indeed sublimation, yes, but liberation of man is more and other than the release of sexuality, it is a transformation of sexuality into Eros, which itself is already a sublimation.

In contrast to this inherently radical quality and function of the aesthetic form, today's anti-art and living art succumb to what I might call, paraphrasing Whitehead, the fallacy of misplaced political concreteness. The radical critical qualities of art, its power of the negative, are precisely in the dissociation, separation, alienation of art from the established reality in the aesthetic form.

Consequently, the synthetic [systematic] undoing of this separation means reducing rather than increasing the radical potential of art. In other words, it is self-defeating. The destruction of the aesthetic form, if it ever succeeds, would mean the destruction of art itself, reducing the two-dimensionality in which all authentic art lives and moves to one-dimensional performances; performance in the liberal sense, as used in the theater and concert.

Narrowing the gap between art and reality, abolishing the elitist character of art – this goal can only be approximated in the social process itself in which art can never directly and immediately interfere. What art can do in this process is contribute to changes in the consciousness and in the sensibility. And even then only if the objective conditions for such change are already given. Art can fulfill its critical function only while remaining a reality type of its own, not part of the established universe, not even an opposed part of the established universe, which would amount to substituting propaganda for art.

Living art may well do away with the artistic illusion presented and held in the aesthetic form, but it will do so only by creating another illusion, namely, the illusion of spontaneity of real life, of immediacy, of concreteness. I call it an illusion in all its concreteness, because even the most wild painting, or anti-painting, remains a painting, potential museum piece, saleable. And the most spontaneous and anti-harmonic music is still performed. Even the most primitive street theater requires a

nucleus of organization, an audience, actors even if they are not professional actors, and so forth. And these conditions condemn this type of living art to spurious art, against all honest intentions, protest and rebellion remain plain. The universe of living art remains an illusory universe without the inherent transcending function of art.

The last question I would like to indicate very briefly is a question which today again is raised frequently: Can we ever envisage such a thing as the end of art? Namely, art becoming a form of real life? Art somehow being the daily life of men and women? If the gap between art and reality can be reduced, as I suggested, in the historical process of social change, does this mean such realization of art as a form of life? Does it mean, can it possibly mean a society where art is the daily existence of the individuals? Where art is indeed the form of reality?

I would like to propose a negative answer. There is one state where such a realization of art is imaginable – that is the state as has been formulated by a young writer where name and the thing coincide. All potentiality is absorbed by the actual and people don't know anymore what freedom is. And this would be a state of perfect barbarism – the exact opposite of a free society.

Whether we like it or not, in a free society people are likely to continue speaking prose and acting prose. A society in which everybody would go around talking poetry and writing poetry would be a nightmare! Prose will continue and so will the qualitative difference between reason and imagination and the difference forever between the goals and the attainment – the struggle with necessity will continue and precisely because it will be continued, and must continue, the dream character of art which is the refuge of the radical function of art will also remain a feature of authentic art.

If the surrealists insisted on the truth value of the dream they meant, beyond all Freudian interpretation, that the images of a freedom and fulfillment not yet attained must be present as a regulative idea of reason, as [a] norm of thought and practice in the struggle with necessity – must be present in the reconstruction of society from the beginning. To sustain this dream as against the dreamless society still is the great subversive function of art, whereas the progressive realization of the dream, while preserving the dream, remains the task of the struggle for a better society where all men and women, for the first time in history, live as human beings. Thank you.

# VIII

## ART AND REVOLUTION\*

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At precisely this stage, the radical effort to sustain and intensify the “power of the negative,” the subversive potential of art, must sustain and intensify the *alienating* power of art: the aesthetic form, in which alone the radical force of art becomes communicable.

In his essay “Die Phantasie im Spätkapitalismus und die Kulturrevolution,” Peter Schneider calls this recapture of the aesthetic transcendence the “propagandistic function of art”:

Propagandistic art would seek in the recorded dream history [*Wunschgeschichte*] of mankind the utopian images, would free them from the distorted forms which were imposed upon them by the material conditions of life, and show to these dreams [*Wünschen*] the road to realization which now, finally, has become possible. . . . The aesthetic of this art should be the strategy of dream realization.<sup>1</sup>

This strategy of realization, precisely because it is to be that of a dream, can never be “complete,” never be a translation into reality, which would make art into a psychoanalytic process. Realization rather means finding the *aesthetic* forms which can communicate the possibilities of a liberating transformation of the technical and natural environment. But here, too, the distance between art and practice, the dissociation of the former from the latter, remains.

\* *Editor's note:*

“Art and Revolution” was published in *Partisan Review* 39, 2 (New Brunswick: Spring 1972), pp. 174–87. The essay contains passages reproduced in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), and provides an excellent summary of Marcuse’s early 1970s positions on art and revolution that would continue to preoccupy him for the rest of his life. (DK)

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1 *Kurbuch* 16, 1969, p. 31.

At the time between the two World Wars, where the protest seemed to be directly translatable into action, joined to action, where the shattering of the aesthetic form seemed to be the response to the revolutionary forces in action, Antonin Artaud formulated the program for the abolition of art: "En finir avec les chefs-d'oeuvre"; art must become the concern of the masses (*la foule*), must be an affair of the streets, and above all, of the organism, the body, of nature. Thus, it would *move* men, would move things, for: "il faut que les choses crèvent pour repartir et recommencer." The serpent moves to the tones of the music not because of their "spiritual content" but because their vibrations communicate themselves through the earth to the serpent's entire body. Art has cut off this communication and "deprived a gesture [*un geste*] from its repercussion in the organism": this unity with nature must be restored: "beneath the poetry of text, there is a poetry *tout court*, without form and without text." This natural poetry must be recaptured which is still present in the eternal myths of mankind (such as "beneath the text" in Sophocles' *Oedipus*) and in the magic of the primitives: its rediscovery is prerequisite for the liberation of man. For "we are not free, and the sky can still fall on our head. And the theater is made first of all in order to teach us all this."<sup>2</sup> To attain this goal, the theater must leave the stage and go on the street, to the masses. And it must *shock*, cruelly shock and *shatter* the complacent consciousness and unconscious.

... [a theater] where violent physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator, seized in the theater as by a whirlwind of superior forces.

Even at the time when Artaud wrote, the "superior forces" were of a very different kind, and they seized man, not to liberate but rather to enslave and destroy him more effectively. And today, what possible language, what possible image can crush and hypnotize minds and bodies which live in peaceful coexistence with (and even profiting from) genocide, torture and poison? And if Artaud wants a "constant sonorization: sounds and noises and cries, first for their quality of vibration and then for that which they represent," we ask: has not the audience, even the "natural" audience on the streets, long since become familiar with the violent noises, cries, which are the daily equipment of the mass media, sports, highways, places of recreation? They do not break the oppressive familiarity with destruction; they reproduce it.

The German writer Peter Handke blasted the "ekelhafte Unwahrheit von Ernsthaftigkeiten im Spielraum [the loathsome untruth of seriousness in play]."<sup>3</sup> This indictment is not an attempt to keep politics out of the

2 Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp. 113, 119, 121, 123, 124, 126 (written in 1933).

3 Quoted in Yark Karsunke, "Die Strasse und das Theater," in *Kursbuch* 20, 1969, p. 67.

theater, but to indicate the form in which it can find expression. The indictment cannot be upheld with respect to Greek tragedy, to Shakespeare, Racine, Klein, Ibsen, Brecht, Beckett: there, by virtue of the aesthetic form, the “play” creates its own universe of “seriousness” which is *not* that of the given reality, but rather its negation. But the indictment holds for the guerilla theater of today: it is a *contradictio in adjecto*; altogether different from the Chinese (regardless of whether it was played on or after the Long March); there, the theater did not take place in a “universe of play”; it was part of a revolution in actual process, and established, as an episode, the identity between the players and the fighters: unity of the space of the play and the space of the revolution.

The Living Theatre may serve as an example of self-defeating purpose.<sup>4</sup> It makes a systematic attempt to unite the theater and the Revolution, the play and the battle, bodily and spiritual liberation, individual internal and social external change. But this union is shrouded in mysticism: “the Kabbalah, Tantric and Hasidic teaching, the I Ching, and other sources.” The mixture of Marxism and mysticism, of Lenin and Dr. R.D. Laing does not work; it vitiates the political impulse. The liberation of the body, the sexual revolution, becoming a ritual to be performed (“the rite of universal intercourse”), loses its place in the political revolution: if sex is a voyage to God, it can be tolerated even in extreme forms. The revolution of love, the non-violent revolution, is no serious threat; the powers that be have always been capable of coping with the forces of love. The radical desublimation which takes place in the theater, as theater, is organized, arranged, performed desublimation — it is close to turning into its opposite.<sup>5</sup>

Untruth is the fate of the unsublimated, direct representation. Here, the “illusory” character of art is not abolished but doubled: the players only play the actions they want to demonstrate, and this action itself is unreal, is play.

The distinction between an internal revolution of the aesthetic form and its destruction, between authentic and contrived directness (a distinction based on the tension between art and reality), has also become decisive in the development (and function) of “living music,” “natural music.” It is as if the cultural revolution had fulfilled Artaud’s demand that, in a literal sense, music move the body, thereby drawing nature into the rebellion. Life music has indeed an authentic basis: *black music* as the cry and song of the slaves

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4 See *Paradise Now: Collective Creation of the Living Theatre*, written down by Judith Malina and Julian Beck (Random House).

5 In the summer of 1971, the Living Theatre group that had been playing before the wretched of the earth in Brazil was incarcerated by the fascist government. There, in the midst of the terror which is the life of the people, and which precluded any integration into the established order, even the mystified liberation play seemed a threat to the regimen. I wish to express my solidarity with Judith Malina and Julian Beck and their group; my criticism is fraternal, since we share the same struggle.

and the ghettos.<sup>6</sup> In this music, the very life and death of black men and women are lived again: the music *is* body; the aesthetic form is the “gesture” of pain, sorrow, indictment. With the takeover by the whites, a significant change occurs: white “rock” is what its black paradigm is *not*, namely, *performance*. It is as if the crying and shouting, the jumping and playing, now take place in an artificial, organized space; that they are directed toward a (sympathetic) *audience*. What had been part of the permanence of life now becomes a concert, festival, a disc in the making. “The group” becomes a fixed entity (*verdinglicht*), absorbing the individuals; it is “totalitarian” in the way in which it overwhelms individual consciousness and mobilizes a collective unconscious which remains without social foundation.

And as this music loses its radical impact, it tends to massification: the listeners and coperformers in the audience are masses streaming to a spectacle, a performance.

True, in this spectacle, the audience actively participates: the music *moves* their bodies, makes them “natural.” But their (literally) electrical excitation often assumes the features of hysteria. The aggressive force of the endlessly repeated hammering rhythm (the variations of which do not open another dimension of music), the squeezing dissonances, the standardized “frozen” distortions, the noise level in general — is it not the force of frustration?<sup>7</sup> And the identical gestures, the twisting and shaking of bodies which rarely (if ever) really touch each other — it seems like treading on the spot, it does not get you anywhere except into a mass soon to disperse. This music is, in a literal sense, *imitation*, *mimesis* of effective aggression: it is, moreover, another case of *catharsis*: group therapy which, temporarily, removes inhibitions. Liberation remains a private affair.

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6 Pierre Lere analyzes the dialectic of this black music in his article “Free Jazz: Évolution ou Révolution”:

... the liberty of the musical forms is only the aesthetic translation of the will to social liberation. Transcending the tonal framework of the theme, the musician finds himself in a position of freedom. This search for freedom is translated into atonal musicality; it defines a modal climate where the Black expresses a new order. The melodic line becomes the medium of communication between an initial order which is rejected and a final order which is hoped for. The frustrating possession of the one, joined with the liberating attainment of the other, establishes a rupture in between the web of harmony which gives way to an aesthetic of the cry (*esthétique du cri*). This cry, the characteristic resonant (*sonore*) element of “free music,” born in an exasperated tension, announces the violent rupture with the established white order and translates the advancing [*promotrice*] violence of a new black order.

(*Revue d'Esthétique*, vols. 3–4, 1970, pp. 320, 321)

7 The frustration behind the noisy aggression is revealed very neatly in a statement by Grace Slick of the “Jefferson Airplane” group, reported in *The New York Times Magazine* (October 18, 1970): “Our eternal goal in life, Grace says, absolutely deadpan, is to get louder.”



The tension between art and revolution seems irreducible. Art itself, in practice, cannot change reality, and art cannot submit to the actual requirements of the revolution without denying itself. But art can and will draw its inspirations, and its very form, from the then prevailing revolutionary movement — for revolution is in the substance of art. The historical substance of art asserts itself in all modes of alienation; it precludes any notion that recapturing the aesthetic form today could mean revival of classicism, romanticism or any other traditional form. Does an analysis of the social reality allow any indication as to which art forms would respond to the revolutionary potential in the contemporary world?

According to Adorno, art responds to the total character of repression and administration with total alienation. The highly intellectual, constructivist and at the same time spontaneous-formless music of John Cage, Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez, may be the extreme examples.

But has this effort already reached the point of no return, that is, the point where the *oeuvre* drops out of the dimension of alienation, of *formed* negation and contradiction, and turns into a sound game, language game — harmless and without commitment, shock which no longer shocks, and thus succumbing?

The radical literature which speaks in formless semispontaneity and directness loses with the aesthetic form the political content, while this content erupts in the most highly formed poems of Allen Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti. The most uncompromising, most extreme indictment has found expression in a work which precisely because of its radicalism repels the political sphere: in the work of Samuel Beckett, there is no hope which can be translated into political terms, the aesthetic form excludes all accommodation and leaves literature as literature. And as literature, the work carries one single message: to make an end with things as they are. Similarly, the revolution is in Bertolt Brecht's most perfect lyric rather than in his political plays, and in Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* rather than in today's antifascist opera.

This is the passing of antiart, the reemergence of form. And with it we find a new expression of the inherently subversive qualities of the aesthetic dimension, especially beauty as the sensuous appearance of the idea of freedom. The delight of beauty and the horror of politics; Brecht has condensed it in five lines:

Within me there is a struggle between  
The delight about the blooming apple tree  
And the horror about a Hitler speech.  
But only the latter  
Forces me to my desk

(Translated from the German by Reinhard Lettau)

The image of the tree remains present in the poem which is “enforced” by a Hitler speech. The horror of that which is marks the moment of creation, is the origin of the poem which celebrates the beauty of the blooming apple

tree. The political dimension remains committed to the other, the aesthetic dimension, which, in turn, assumes political value. This happens not only in the work of Brecht (who is already considered a “classic”) but also in some of the radical songs of protest of today — or yesterday, especially in the lyrics and music of Bob Dylan. Beauty returns, the “soul” returns: not the one in food and “on ice” but the old and repressed one, the one that was in the *Lied*, in the melody: *cantabile*. It becomes the form of the subversive content, not as artificial revival, but as a “return of the repressed.” The music, in its own development, carries the song to the point of rebellion where the voice, in word and pitch, *halts* the melody, the song, and turns into outcry, shout.

Junction of art and revolution in the aesthetic dimension,<sup>8</sup> in art itself. Art which has become capable of being political even in the (apparently) total absence of political content, where nothing remains but the poem — about what? Brecht accomplishes the miracle of making the simplest ordinary language say the unutterable: the poem invokes, for a vanishing moment, the images of a liberated world, liberated nature:

### Die Liebenden

Sieh jene Kraniche in grossem Bogen!  
 Die Wolken, welche ihnen beigegeben  
 Zogen mit ihnen schon, als sie entflohen  
 Aus einem Leben in ein andres Leben.  
 In gleicher Höhe und mit gleicher Eile  
 Scheinen sie alle beide nur daneben.  
 Dass so der Kranich mit der Wolke teile  
 Dean schönen Himmel, den sie kurz befliegen  
 Dass also keiner länger hier verweile  
 Und keines andres sehe als das Wiegen  
 Des andern in dem Wind, den beide spüren  
 Die jetzt im Fluge beieinander liegen  
 So mag der Wind sie in das Nichts entführen  
 Wenn sie nur nicht vergehen und sich bleiben

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8 One only has to read some of the authentic-sounding poems of young activists (or former activists) in order to see how poetry, remaining poetry, can be political also today. These love poems are political as love poems: not where they are fashionably desublimated, verbal release of sexuality, but on the contrary: where the erotic energy finds sublimated, poetic expression — a poetic language becoming the outcry against that which is done to men and women who love in this society. In contrast, the union of love and subversion, the social liberation inherent in Eros is lost where the poetic language is abandoned in favor of versified (or pseudoversified) pig language. There is such a thing as pornography, namely, the sexual publicity, propaganda with the exhibitionist, marketable Eros. Today, the pig language and the glossy photography of sex have exchange value — not the romantic love poem.

So lange kann sie beide nichts berühren  
 So lange kann man sie von jedem Ort vertreiben  
 Wo Regen drohen oder Schüsse schallen.  
 So under Sonn und Monds wenig verschiedenen Scheiben  
 Fliegen sie hin, einander ganz verfallen.  
 Wohin, ihr? — Nirgend hin. — Von wem davon? — Von allen.  
 Ihr fragt, wie lange sind sie schon beisammen?  
 Seit kurzem. — Und wann werden sie sich trennen? — Bald.  
 So scheint die Liebe Liebenden ein Halt.<sup>9</sup>

### The Lovers

See those cranes in their wide sweep!  
 See the clouds given to be at their side  
 Traveling with them already when they left  
 One life to fly into another life.  
 At the same height and with the same speed  
 Both seem merely at each other's side.  
 That the crane may share with the cloud  
 The beautiful sky through which they briefly fly  
 That neither may linger here longer  
 And neither see but the swinging  
 Of the other in the wind which both feel  
 Now lying next to each other in flight.  
 If only they not perish and stay with each other  
 The wind may lead them into nothingness  
 They can be driven from each place  
 Where rain threatens and shots ring out  
 Nothing can touch either of them.  
 Thus under the sun's and the moon's little varying orbs  
 They fly on together lost and belonging to each other.  
 Where to, you? — Nowhere. Away from whom? — From all.  
 You ask how long are they together?  
 A short time. And when will they leave each other?  
 Thus seem the lovers to draw strength from love.

(Translated from the German by Inge S. Marcuse)

The image of liberation is in the flight of the cranes, through their beautiful sky, with the clouds which accompany them: sky and clouds belong to them — without mastery and domination. The image is in their ability to flee the spaces where they are threatened: the rain and the rifle shots. They are safe as long as they remain themselves, entirely with each other. The image is a vanishing one: the wind can take them into nothingness — they would

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9 *Gedichte*, vol. II (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1960), p. 210. Erich Kahler and Theodor W. Adorno have revealed the significance of this poem. See Adorno, *Aesthetische Theorie* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 123.

still be safe: they fly from one life into another life. Time itself matters no longer: the cranes met only a short while ago, and they will leave each other soon. Space is no longer a limit: they fly nowhere, and they flee from everyone, from all. The end is illusion: love *seems* to give duration, to conquer time and space, to evade destruction. But the illusion cannot deny the reality which it invokes: the cranes *are*, in their sky, with their clouds. The end is also denial of the illusion, insistence on its reality, realization. This insistence is in the poem's language which is prose becoming verse and song in the midst of the brutality and corruption of the *Netzestadt* ([i.e. Brecht's] Mahagonny) — in the dialogue between a whore and a bum. There is no word in this poem which is not prose. But these words are joined to sentences, or parts of sentences which say and show what ordinary language never says and shows. The apparent "protocol statements," which seem to describe things and movements in direct perception, turn into images of that which goes beyond all direct perception: the flight into the realm of freedom which is also the realm of beauty.

Strange phenomenon: beauty as a quality which is in an opera of Verdi as well as in a Bob Dylan song, in a painting of Ingres as well as Picasso, in phrase of Flaubert as well as James Joyce, in a gesture of the Duchess of Guermantes as well as of a hippie girl! Common to all of them is the expression, against its plastic de-erotization, of beauty as negation of the commodity world and of the performances, attitudes, looks, gestures, required by it.

The aesthetic form will continue to change as the political practice succeeds (or fails) to build a better society. At the optimum, we can envisage a universe common to art and reality, but in this common universe, art would retain its transcendence. In all likelihood, people would not talk or write or compose poetry; *la prose du monde* would persist. The "end of art" is conceivable only if men are no longer capable of distinguishing between true and false, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, present and future. This would be the state of perfect barbarism at the height of civilization — and such a state is indeed a historical possibility.

Art can do nothing to prevent the ascent of barbarism — it cannot by itself keep open its own domain in and against society. For its own preservation and development, art depends on the struggle for the abolition of the social system which generates barbarism as its own potential stage: potential form of its progress. The fate of art remains linked to that of the revolution. In this sense, it is indeed an internal exigency of art which drives the artist to the streets — to fight for the Commune, for the Bolshevik revolution, for the German revolution of 1918, for the Chinese and Cuban revolutions, for all revolutions which have the historical chance of liberation. But in doing so he leaves the universe of art and enters the larger universe of which art remains an antagonistic part: that of radical practice.

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Today's cultural revolution places anew on the agenda the problems of a Marxist aesthetics. In the preceding sections, I tried to make a tentative contribution to this subject; an adequate discussion would require another book. But one specific question must again be raised in this context, namely, the meaning, and the very possibility, of a "proletarian literature" (or working-class literature). In my view, the discussion has never again reached the theoretical level it attained in the twenties and early thirties, especially in the controversy between Georg Lukács, Johannes R. Becher and Andor Gabor on the one side, and Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Hanns Eisler and Ernst Bloch on the other. The discussion during this period is recorded and reexamined in Helga Gallas' excellent book *Marxistische Literaturtheorie*.<sup>10</sup>

All protagonists accept the central concept according to which art (the discussion is practically confined to literature) is determined, in its "truth content" as well as in its forms, by the class situation of the author (of course not simply in terms of his personal position and consciousness but of the objective correspondence of his work to the material and ideological position of the class). The conclusion which emerges from this discussion is that at the historical stage where the position of the proletariat alone renders possible insight into the totality of the social process, and into the necessity and direction of radical change (i.e., into "the truth"), only a proletarian literature can fulfill the progressive function of art and develop a revolutionary consciousness: indispensable weapon in the class struggle.

Can such a literature arise in the traditional forms of art, or will it develop new forms and techniques? This is the case of the controversy: while Lukács (and with him the then "official" Communist line) insists on the validity of the (revamped) tradition (especially the great realistic novel of the nineteenth century), Brecht demands radically different forms (such as the "epic theater") and Benjamin calls for the transition from the art form itself to such new technical expressions as the film: "large, closed forms versus small, open forms."

In a sense, the confrontation between closed and open forms seems no longer an adequate expression of the problem: compared with today's antiart, Brecht's open forms appear as "traditional" literature. The problem is rather the underlying concept of a *proletarian world view* which, by virtue of its (particular) class character, represents the truth which art must communicate if it is to be authentic art. This theory

presupposes the existence of a proletarian world view. But precisely this presupposition does not stand up to an even tentative [*annähernde*] examination.<sup>11</sup>

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10 (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1971).

11 Ibid., p. 73.

This is a statement of fact — and a theoretical insight. If the term “proletarian world view” is to mean the world view that is prevalent among the working class, then it is, in the advanced capitalist countries, a world view shared by a large part of the other classes, especially the middle classes. (In ritualized Marxist language, it would be called petty bourgeois reformist consciousness.) If the term is to designate *revolutionary* consciousness (latent or actual), then it is today certainly not distinctively or even predominantly “proletarian” — not only because the revolution against global monopoly capitalism is more and other than a proletarian revolution, but also because its conditions, prospects and goals cannot be adequately formulated in terms of a proletarian revolution. And if this revolution is to be (in whatever form) present as a goal in literature, such literature could not be typically proletarian.

This is at least the conclusion suggested by Marxian theory. I recall again the dialectic of the universal and the particular in the concept of the proletariat: as a class in but not of capitalist society, its particular interest (its own liberation) is at the same time the general interest: it cannot free itself without abolishing itself as a class, and all classes. This is not an “ideal,” but the very dynamic of the socialist revolution. It follows that the goals of the proletariat *as revolutionary class* are self-transcendent: while remaining historical concrete goals, they extend, in their class content, beyond the specific class content. And if such transcendence is an essential quality of all art and Trotsky, as well as Lenin, was critical of the notion of a bourgeois art, and in all forms of art. It seems to be more than a matter of personal preference if Marx had a conservative taste in art and Trotsky, as well as Lenin, was critical of the notion of a “proletarian culture.”<sup>12</sup>

It is therefore no paradox, and no exception, when even specifically proletarian contents find their home in “bourgeois literature.” They are often accompanied by a kind of linguistic revolution, which replaces the language of the ruling class by that of the proletariat — without exploding the traditional form (of the novel, the drama). Or, conversely, the proletarian revolutionary contents are formed in the “high,” stylized language of (traditional) poetry: as in Brecht’s *Three Penny Opera* and *Mahagonny* and in the “artistic” prose of his *Galilei*.

The spokesmen for a specifically proletarian literature tried to save this notion by establishing a sweeping criterion that would allow them to reject the “reformist” bourgeois radicals, namely, the appearance, in the work, of the basic laws which govern capitalist society. Lukács himself made this the shibboleth by which to identify authentic revolutionary literature. But precisely this requirement offends the very nature of art. The basic structure and dynamic of society can never find sensuous, aesthetic expression: they

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12 Ibid., p. 210f.

are, in Marxian theory, the essence behind the appearance, which can only be attained through scientific analysis, and formulated only in the terms of such an analysis. The "open form" cannot close the gap between the scientific truth and its aesthetic appearance. The introduction, into the play or the novel, of montage, documentation, reportage may well (as in Brecht) become an essential part of the aesthetic form — but it can do so only as a subordinate part.

Art can indeed become a weapon in the class struggle by promoting changes in the prevailing consciousness. However, the cases where a transparent correlation exists between the respective *class* consciousness and the work of art are extremely rare (Molière, Beaumarchais, Defoe). By virtue of its own subversive quality, art is associated with revolutionary consciousness, but to the degree to which the prevailing consciousness of a class is affirmative, integrated, blunted, revolutionary art will be opposed to it. Where the proletariat is nonrevolutionary, revolutionary literature will *not* be proletarian literature. Nor can it be "anchored" in the prevailing ("nonrevolutionary") consciousness: only the *rupture*, the *leap*, can prevent the resurrection of the "false" consciousness in a socialist society.

The fallacies which surround the notion of a revolutionary literature are still aggravated in today's cultural revolution. The anti-intellectualism rampant in the New Left champions the demand for a working-class literature which expresses the worker's actual interests and "emotions." For example:

"Intellectual pundits of the Left" are blamed for their "revolutionary aesthetic," and a "certain coterie of talmudists" is taken to task for being more "expert in weighing the many shadings and nuances of a word than involvement in the revolutionary process."<sup>13</sup> Archaic anti-intellectualism abhors the idea that the former may be an essential part of the latter, part of that translation of the world into a new language which may communicate the radically new claims of liberation.

Such spokesmen for the proletarian ideology criticize the cultural revolution as a "middle-class trip." The philistine mind is at its very best when it proclaims that this revolution will "become meaningful" only "when it begins to understand the very real cultural meaning that a washing machine, for instance, has for a working class family with small children in diapers." And the philistine mind demands that "the artists of that revolution . . . tune in on the emotions of that family on the day, after months of debate and planning, that the washing machine is delivered . . ."<sup>14</sup>

This demand is reactionary not only from an artistic but also from a political point of view. Regressive is not the emotion of the working-class family, but the idea to make them into a standard for authentic radical

13 Irvin Silber, in *Guardian*, December 13, 1969.

14 Irvin Silver, in *Guardian*, December 6, 1969, p. 17.

and socialist literature: what is proclaimed to be the focal point of a revolutionary new culture is in fact the adjustment to the established one.

To be sure, the cultural revolution must recognize and subvert this atmosphere of the working-class home, but this will not be done by “tuning in” on the emotions aroused by the delivery of a washing machine. On the contrary, such empathy perpetuates the prevailing “atmosphere.”

The concept of proletarian literature = revolutionary literature remains questionable even if it is freed from the “tuning in” on *prevailing* emotions, and, instead, related to the most *advanced* working-class consciousness. This would be a political consciousness, and prevalent only among a minority of the working class. If art and literature would reflect such advanced consciousness, they would have to express the actual conditions of the class struggle and the actual prospects of subverting the capitalist system. But precisely these brutally political contents *militate* against their aesthetic transformation — therefore the very valid objection against “pure art.” However, these contents also militate against a less pure translation into art, namely, the translation into the concreteness of the daily life and practice. Lukács has, on these grounds, criticized a representative workers’ novel of the time: the personages of this novel talk at the dinner table at home the same language as a delegate at a party meeting.<sup>15</sup>

A revolutionary literature in which the working class is the subject-object, and which is the historical heir, the definite negation, of “bourgeois” literature, remains a thing of the future.

But what holds true for the notion of revolutionary art with respect to the working classes in the advanced capitalist countries does not apply to the situation of the racial minorities in these countries, and the majorities in the Third World. I have already referred to black music; there is also a black literature, especially poetry, which may well be called revolutionary: it lends voice to a total rebellion which finds expression in the aesthetic form. It is not a “class” literature, and its particular content is at the same time the universal one: what is at stake in the specific situation of the oppressed racial minority is the most general of all needs, namely, the very existence of the individual and his group as human beings. The most extreme political content does not repel traditional forms.

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15 Gallas, *op. cit.*, p. 121. A Communist participant in the discussion remarked correctly that in this case one should call things by their name and speak not of art or literature but of propaganda.



# IX

## LETTERS TO THE CHICAGO SURREALISTS \*

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October 12, 1971

*Dear Comrade Rosemont:*

I was simply delighted to receive your envelope and its contents. I put the envelope on the wall of my study;<sup>1</sup> the contents I read. Congratulations on the Chicago leaflet;<sup>2</sup> one of the rare examples how mad humor can turn into radically political truth (which, for that very reason, will never come true).

\* *Editor's note:*

"Letters to the Chicago Surrealists," written in 1972 and 1973, were published in French in a limited run in *Bulletin de liaison surréaliste*, 6 (April 1973), pp. 20–9; the letters were translated into German with an Introduction by Douglas Kellner in *Weg und Ziel*, 2 (May 1997), pp. 38–41, and appeared for the first time in English with a long and interesting introduction by Franklin Rosemont in *Arsenal. Surrealist Subversion* 4 (1989), pp. 31–47. Marcuse's most extensive reflections on an avant-garde movement published here comprise two texts in the form of "letters" to a Chicago surrealist group whose originals can be found in the Marcuse archive. Marcuse wrote a friendly letter to a representative of the Chicago surrealist group, Franklin Rosemont, on October 12, 1971, thanking him for sending material from the Chicago group and noting: "It is somehow comforting to see how much our lines of thought converge."

Marcuse met with some of the Chicago surrealists at the Second International *Telos* Conference held in Buffalo, New York, in November 1971 and he agreed to exchange texts on the question: "What is your estimate of the present and future viability of surrealism?" Marcuse's first substantive response published here, dated "October 1972," contains 19 pages of heavily edited notes written in the form of a letter to the Chicago surrealists. The other text, titled "Second Letter" with no date, addresses criticisms that the surrealist group made of Marcuse's text and was mailed with a letter to Rosemont dated October 12, 1973. Rosemont sums up his exchange with Marcuse and notes their affinities and differences in a text "Herbert Marcuse and the Surrealist Revolution" in the *Surrealist Subversion* text cited above that can be found online at <http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/70spubs/73surreal/arsenalindex.htm>. Marcuse's letters on surrealism are important as they contain a detailed sketch of his emerging aesthetics and the most serious engagement with surrealism, a movement that strongly influenced his aesthetic theory. (DK)

It is somehow comforting to see how much our lines of thought converge. I hope you will recognize much of your animal leaflet<sup>3</sup> in my new book; I am now trying to complete it for publication in the spring.

But I never received your package with the first issue of *Arsenal*. Someone else must have liked it!

*With best wishes,  
(but not yet for "poetry by all"),  
Herbert Marcuse  
8831 Cliffridge Ave.  
La Jolla, Calif. 92037*

I like your surrealist address: North Racine Ave.

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November 4, 1971

*Dear Comrade Rosemont:*

Many thanks for the package: I received it and would like to send you some comments—but I can't. I am still all too busy with the completion of my book.<sup>4</sup> Hopefully I shall be through with it in a few weeks.

I do expect to go to Buffalo for the Telos conference,<sup>5</sup> at least for one or two days. Would I see you there?

*With best wishes,  
Herbert Marcuse*

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\* *Editor's note:*

The notes appended here to Marcuse's letters on surrealism were written by Franklin Rosemont, and will be signaled by (FR) to distinguish them from the notes Marcuse added to his own letters.

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- 1 Several of us in the Surrealist Group embellished our envelopes with drawings and collages. (FR)
  - 2 The "Chicago leaflet," *Toward the Second Chicago Fire: Surrealism and the Housing Question*, a tract issued by the Surrealist Group in Chicago on the occasion of the Chicago Fire Centennial (September 1971). (FR)
  - 3 The "animal leaflet": *The Anteater's Umbrella: A Contribution to the Critique of the Ideology of Zoos*, a tract issued by the Chicago Surrealist Group in August 1971. Marcuse's "new book" was *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. (FR)
  - 4 *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. (FR)
  - 5 The Second International Telos Conference, sponsored by the philosophical journal *Telos*, was held at the State University of New York at Buffalo in November 1971. Four participants in the Chicago Surrealist Group attended, as did a French surrealist comrade, Guy Ducornet, who was then living in Canada. (FR)

July 12, 1972

*Dear Comrade Rosemont:*

This is just to let you know that your letter was forwarded to me here in France. I am glad to have it, and I am working on an answer. I have no idea how long it will take and what will come out of it!

*Thanks, and best wishes,**Herbert Marcuse**Poste Restante**06 Cabris, France*

August 13, 1972

*Dear Comrade Rosemont:*

No—I did not give up, wrote already over ten pages. But it nears the end very slowly, with bad interruptions. I discuss surrealism in terms governing literature, art in general, supplementing the third chapter of my recent book. I think it cannot be done otherwise. The thing still has to be corrected and retyped, which will have to wait until my return to California in September.

And I would much like to have from you a real critique of my chapter;<sup>6</sup> real = one which does not simply operate with the stereotype of a proletarian *Weltanschauung* (which doesn't exist) and art as service to this *Weltanschauung*.

*With best wishes,**Herbert Marcuse*

October 12, 1972

*Dear Franklin:*

I do not want to procrastinate any longer. Here is what I have done so far. This is of course a draft and I shall continue working on it. As you will see, I had to deal with the problem on a rather general basis, I do not think it could be handled in any other way.

*Sincerely yours,**Herbert Marcuse*

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6 "Art and Revolution" in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. (FR)

Herbert Marcuse, First Letter, October 1972

*Thesis:* irreconcilable contradiction between art and politics, due to the transcendence of art beyond all political goals (including those of the revolution!).

*In abstracto:* the contradiction between the potential and actual; *in concreto*, with reference to art: the contradiction between sensibility and common sense, imagination and reason, poetry and prose—a contradiction in which the two contradictory parts are both real: the reality and truth of fiction (poetry, music, etc.) as against the reality and truth of the established universe of existence.

Art is the imagery of the potential appearing *in* the established universe of existence.

These are historical terms: the contradiction prevails in various degrees, modes, and forms (“styles”) in the respective societies and at the various stages of development.

Solution of the contradiction would mean the end of art (though by no means necessarily the advent of the realm of freedom!). I shall discuss this thesis taking as an example the situation of surrealism rather than that of the “living theatre,” “people’s art,” etc. because as against the impossible realism of “living art,” which is tantamount to the liquidation (abstract negation) of art, surrealism tried to sustain and recapture the transcendent, *sur*-realistic qualities of art, to sustain and recapture the *alienating* force of art as force *in* and *for* the political struggle.

The surrealist effort: that in our world, forces are operating with which we refuse to come to grips. We are subject not only to the causality of reason, as explored in the natural sciences and in common sense, but also to “irrational,” surreal or subreal (in terms of the accepted rationality) forces.

This is more than a mere enlargement of our perception, imagination, reason. The restructuring and redirection of the mental faculties is not an end-in-itself, but is to undo the mutilation of our faculties by the established society and its requirements.

Surrealism thus invokes an infinitely richer, denser universe, where people, things, nature are stripped of their false familiar appearance. It is an uncanny universe, for what could be more disturbing than to discover that we live under the law of another, unfamiliar, repressed causality: meta-physical, spiritual, but altogether of this world, not of some heaven or hell, a different order which interferes with the established one without abolishing it.

Causality by freedom? By Desire? Recognition of natural forces which, normally, we do not see and feel?

In any case, normal action and reaction are “suspended,” interrupted; people, things, and nature confront each other in a new, silent world of their own, without their business, function, performance, without their exchange value.

Now, surrealism shares these qualities with other styles and movements

in art. Specific is (or rather was) the expressed political intent—communicated in a systematically estranged, anti-aesthetic form (the surrealist prose and poetry, painting, etc.). And in this form, surrealism went to work “in the service of the revolution.”

In this political intent, surrealism has failed—it was soon confronted with the insoluble contradiction between art and the people, art and revolution.

I shall try to formulate this contradiction in terms of the contemporary situation: avoiding the facile clichés of elitism, snobbism, ivory tower, etc.; focusing on the (hypothetical) conditions under which the contradiction could be reduced (not eliminated).

Evidently, the contradiction can be reduced only on a societal basis: in the process of radical social change.

Precondition for placing art in the service of revolution (without abandoning art itself) is the existence of a revolutionary class, in whose praxis the transcending qualities of art are preserved (as goals): the struggle for non-exploitative relationships between human beings, a morality and sensibility of freedom, and the reconciliation of man and nature.

These were supposed to be the possible achievements of a socialist society, and the working class was supposed to fight for a revolution in which the new economic and political institutions (of socialism) would provide the basis for such a qualitative change, in the existence of man and nature. Consequently, the politicization of art was oriented on the working class, “the masses.”

Now, it is a truism that today a working class in the advanced industrial countries is not a revolutionary class. It is also a truism that the working class does not always and everywhere exist as a revolutionary class. The question is: are the conditions given under which a *potential* revolutionary class (class-in-itself) develops into an *actual* revolutionary class (class-for-itself)?

This transition involves not only the position of the working class in the process of production (numerical and technical strength, organization on the factory level), but also (1) the degree of political consciousness: the aspirations and values of the class in as much as they determine its praxis; (2) its standard of living: its level of (material and cultural) *consumption*.

Indeed, the sphere of consumption is part of the *infrastructure* of society, of the material base. Its relegation to the status of a “surface” phenomenon goes badly with dialectical *materialism*. The fragmentation of the “social existence” of man into two compartments (production and consumption) is entirely un-Marxist (Marx’s own division of the production process in the two sections of production and consumption goods remains within the unity of the process as a totality).

Certainly, production generates consumption, but the latter reacts on the former and on the consciousness of the working class. This interrelation is part of the internal dynamic of capitalism and communism today: the more productive the established system of production the less revolutionary the

working class. (Consequently, the Communist Parties become “partis de l’ordre.”) Exploitation now has compensations which it did not have previously: it is not “ideology” or “false interest” if the worker has a relatively human place to live in, adequate food, apparel, some vacation, television, etc.

Moreover, and most important: the increasingly technological character of the process of production, and the increasing proportion of white collar employees in the material process of production tend to diminish the difference between employee and worker and to make the working class *system-immanent*, petty-bourgeois.

With this development (very different in the Third World), the politicization of art loses its social base. The orientation of art on “the masses,” on a non-existent proletarian *Weltanschauung*, moves in a social vacuum, is oriented on nothing (Marx: “the working class is revolutionary, or it is nothing at all”); or is oriented on an actual petty-bourgeois *Weltanschauung* (a sell-out which surrealism has consistently refused.)

In this situation, the direct politicization of art, *i.e.*, its proletarianization or popularization, can be attained only at the price of sacrificing the radically nonconformist qualities of art, and sacrificing the commitment to the internal, autonomous (though historical) truth of art which calls for its own autonomous forms of representation and communication.

Surrealism chose this commitment. Consequently, a dichotomy developed between the surrealist prose and poetry on one side, and the political opinions and behavior of the surrealists on the other. Breton’s *Nadja*, *L’Amour fou*, *Arcane 17* have become, against his own intentions, masterpieces of literature. And the surrealist impulse, expressed in the aesthetic form, comes into conflict with the revolutionary praxis. (Similarly the great, authentically surrealist works of Julien Gracq.) Surrealism pays tribute to the essential estrangement of art.

1968 is no refutation, “All power to the imagination” was a genuine surrealist call in the midst of the insurrection: direct politicization of the domain of art. But the call was silenced in the confrontation with the political reality: the organizations of the labor movement, the armed forces of the government.

In this confrontation, the surrealist appeal to spontaneity, to the unconscious, madness also comes to naught. It runs counter to the internal *rationality* of art, according to which art can communicate its radical contents only in a twofold process of *transformation* and *sublimation*: (1) transformation of the given, prevailing reality into an aesthetic universe in which this reality is deprived of its monopoly of binding norms and values. Appearance of the “other” reality, that of liberation; (2) sublimation of the immediate, individual, particular experience into the mediated experience of the universal *in* the particular.

It is only by virtue of this sublimation that the work of art becomes an object for a subject (of perception, imagination, comprehension) outside the

individual artist who created the *oeuvre*, that art becomes a *social* (rather than private) subject and object.

This twofold process constitutes the rationality of art as inherently linked with, and opposed to the rationality governing the established society. To be sure, art *explodes* the rationality of the existing society, and it can do so only if it speaks a language of its own and presents its own images. But this other language is *contained* in the ordinary discourse and ordinary perception. The artist reveals their radically non-conformist, critical possibilities: they invoke the necessity of liberation. The extreme goals of liberation (not attained, though present, in the historical revolutions) remain alive in art: in words, images and tones which are not of this world (this world = the given reality), and only in this otherness does art communicate these goals. However (and this is the unique dialectic of art), it can create its own universe only through and “out of” the *existing* universe of words, images and tones. This means more than the obvious dependence of art on the tradition (the linguistic, sensuous, intellectual “material”). It is an essential aspect of the *historicity* of art.

The aesthetic rationality is twofold: (1) it establishes and preserves the internal link between the given universe and that of the work of art, (2) it invokes the images of liberation as those of a possible reality, viewed from the given reality. Art gives the unconscious, madness, spontaneity their “higher truth” by subjecting these “elemental” forces to a de-mystified and de-mystifying consciousness and sensibility. Thus the Greek tragedy is the myth *and* its de-mystification in the citystate; thus Balzac’s great novels present the myth of adventure, capitalism *and* its de-mystification in bourgeois society. Rimbaud’s poetry itself is the myth which is de-mystified in his life, and is Lautréamont’s *Maldoror* perhaps the myth de-mystified in his *Poésies*? Art reveals throughout this dual commitment: to the given reality and to its negation—both parts of one and the same universe.

Rationalization is indeed an essential aspect of art: making present (representation) of that which is repressed, hidden, distorted—not as end in itself, but as elements in the creation of the aesthetic universe: the universe of *form*.<sup>7</sup> For it still holds true: form is the triumph over destructive disorder *and* order, the banning of fear.

Subjection of the unconscious to a new rationality, the rationality of freedom: this is also the radical substance of Freud’s program (so easily converted into conformistic therapy)! *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*. The Id itself is no motor of liberation. Even in its revolt against repression, it bears the marks of repression. To celebrate the Desire as ultimate reality (as a

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7 Nietzsche: “Man ist um den Preis Künstler, dass man das, was alle Nicht Künstler ‘Form’ nennen, also *Inhalt*, als ‘die Sache selbst’ empfindet. Damit gehört man freilich in eine verkehrte Welt: denn ninmehr wird einem der Inhalt zu etwas bloss Formalen – unser Leben eingerechnet” [*Marcuse’s note*].

pseudo-radical psychology does) is mystification, bad metaphysics, naturalistic, not dialectical materialism. Desire is always only the desire of particular individuals under the particular conditions of their existence and shaped by these conditions. It follows that even the most elemental desire may well be regressive, enslaving, and may thus have to be repressed in the struggle for autonomy. Similarly: madness, spontaneity. (The madness of the "Manson family" is throughout characterized by the destructive features of American society—not by protest against it.) The cult of spontaneity has a long historical record of service to reactionary politics.

The creative ability to "translate" the entire "subrealistic," subrational dimension into the terms of the clash between the given and the possible universe of existence is the prerequisite for the expression of the political potential of art. This translation does not destroy the aesthetic form—on the contrary, it is the aesthetic form: harmony of sensibility, imagination, reason. And only in this form, as *oeuvre*, can art join the permanent revolution, expression of the permanent need for liberation. But also of the *limits* of liberation.

The very permanence of art indicates these limits. Art is essentially tragic. Not everything is the fault of class society, exploitation, the exchange economy; and the proletariat is no Savior. The limits of liberation, and of desire, are in the dual antagonism between the universal and the particular, and between subject and object. The statement that the "free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" does not deny this antagonism: it only envisages its non-destructive manifestation. The universal (society, community) is as such essentially other than the particular (individual) even when it is not superimposed upon the latter as independent power, and matter, nature retaining an objectivity not dissoluble into the subjectivity of man.

The universal is real in the basic institutions of the material and intellectual culture, the social division of labor and leisure, the natural environment. The abolition of classes would not abolish this reality as different from that of the individuals. By this token, even integral socialism would necessitate the "rationalization" of desire, that is, its satisfaction within the universal system of needs. Repression? Yes. But (in the optimal case) repression by the associated individuals and in their true interest. We are far from this state. The self which finds authentic expression in the work of art is always the transformed, sublimated self; only thus can it express the universal content and concern, over and above all personal, private liberation and necessity. It is this internal dynamic which links art with the struggle to change the world.

The surrealist emphasis on automatism, on the creativity of the unconscious, is fallacious. The unconscious may well be phylogenetic as well as ontogenetic, pertaining to the development of the species as well as that of the individual, but the supra-individual, general contents of the Id are accessible only to the efforts of conceptual thought (in art: to sensuous rationality: the *aesthetic* formation). If X starts writing down what "comes to him"



automatically, spontaneously, this is a private affair, release of private pains or pleasures, of desires which cannot claim any “higher truth.” Just as there are Ego trips which are without any other than private relevance, so there are Id trips: narcissistic satisfaction. (Besides, I do not believe that there is such a thing as automatic writing or painting. As soon as writing or painting starts, consciousness interferes with spontaneity—though perhaps in a very devious, unconscious way.) The most avantgardistic artist is still bound by his commitment to words, pictures, tones as means of communication, and this commitment rigidly limits his “spontaneity,” the liberty with which he can play with images, break the structure of sentences, create his own language (for his own free development is not yet the condition for the free development of all).

Art emerges within the medium of experience *while subverting* the familiarity of this medium: estrangement from within. The possible modes of such subversion are circumscribed by the given historical situation (in the development of art as well as society). Walter Benjamin could still believe that the “parasitarian” and elitist character of “bourgeois art” and its appreciation could be subverted by “shock”—fascism has dispelled this illusion, and a society which easily absorbs genocide and geocide seems to be immune against shock in art.

In the third chapter of *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, I implied an affirmative answer to the question whether, after Auschwitz and Vietnam, art (poetry) is still possible. The ideas and images of liberation still have a home in art, and they are still akin to the aesthetic form as the form of estrangement. This may today mean regression, defensive retreat, return—perhaps a necessary phase of development in a historical situation where the destruction of the aesthetic form is all too akin to the violence and destruction which are the features of the established society.

Naturally, no *chef-d'oeuvre* ever got the masses to “take to the streets”—nor will it ever do so. And the question is not how to bring art to the people or the people to art. The radical potential contained in art cannot be made popular as long as it is contrary to the repressive and aggressive needs imposed upon and introjected into the people by their society. There is a glaring conflict (not to be resolved by art) between the needs of the people in class society, and the aesthetic qualities of art: as long as the people are compelled to fight for their daily existence, to fight against their dehumanization, against their own brutality and that of their masters, the preservation of the forms of art, of art itself, will be an *anti-populist* movement.

The gap which separates art and the people could be reduced to the degree to which the people cease to be “the people” (= those who are ruled) and become freely associated individuals. The real socialist revolution of the 20th and 21st centuries would be the catastrophic transformation not only of the material and cultural institutions but also of the sensibility, imagination and reason of the men and women engaged in this transformation. In this

transformation, the aesthetic qualities would play a decisive part—not as decoration, ritual, and surface but as the expression of the vital needs of the individuals. (This, hopefully, would not mean “poetry made by all”—a notion incompatible with dialectical materialism. The difference between poetry and “*la prose du monde*” is insurmountable, and the realm of necessity will continue to militate against such generalization of art.)

The transformation of the *mental* faculties (receptive and creative) can become an impulse of radical *social* transformation only on a specific stage in the development of capitalism and communism, namely, the stage where the established social organization and division of labor, and the existence of men and women as performers of full-time jobs, have become manifestly *unnecessary*. At this stage, the concrete alternative would appear in the daily process of work, in the process of production, of manual and intellectual labor. I believe that the coming of this stage is indicated today by the fight for a reorganization of work in the technically most advanced capitalist industries. This trend (slow and by no means irreversible) makes for a gradual dissolution of the assemblyline, leading to the establishment of self-responsibility of the individual and associated workers over ever larger units of the job.<sup>8</sup> If these goals would become the demands of the organized practice of the working class, its practice would terminate in the abolition of the wasteful and inhuman features of production, and in the abolition of the hierarchy enforcing these features.

The production of the work of art is also the production of the subject who is the (potential) “consumer” of the work of art (Marx, *Grundrisse* . . . , p. 14), namely, the men and women whose sensibility, imagination, and reason are susceptible to the truth of art, the aesthetic truth and reality. In class society, the subject of art can only be individuals, not “the people.” In contrast, the (social) subject of rock festivals, the street theater, etc. are the people. However, this direct popularization (which does not correspond to a change in the social structure which would make “the people” subjects of their existence) renounces the aesthetic transformation and sublimation, *i.e.*, the essential estrangement of art. Co-option is therefore inherent in these productions, and this in a way very different from the affirmative character of traditional art. A “classic” certainly loses the quality of critical estrangement, dissociation, when it becomes a piece of the established culture, but in its reception, something will remain that militates against a spontaneous identification and kinship—something “foreign,” vacuous.

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8 At the opposite pole of the global spectrum, this trend finds its counterpart in the decentralized, largely autonomous industrialization of the Chinese Communes. The technical and administrative reorganization of production “from below” (but within the general plan) develops autonomous faculties and needs of the producers – and consumers [Marcuse’s note].

The people can become the subject of art only as real *social* subject, that is to say, when alienated labor gradually gives way to creative work in the reproduction of society. This would be the turn from quantitative to qualitative productivity: token of the real socialist revolution. Qualitative productivity: that means not only improving the quantity of wares and services produced, but also producing different things in different ways—by different human beings for different human beings. Only in this process could the infrastructure of society, the mode of production become open to the aesthetic dimension, and show its kinship to art. And only in this process could aesthetic needs be rooted in the infrastructure itself. Creative work is the basic process of production, of the necessities as well as “luxuries.” Creative work, not as hobby, as mere relaxation from alienated labor, but as the development of faculties set free in the total reconstruction and reproduction of society. Then, artisan work would not replace the technological, automated production; on the contrary, it would presuppose and preserve its achievements, it would emerge on the basis of technology and science. This would be the aesthetic formation of things “also according to the laws of beauty” as Marx once noted: creation of an environment for the development of free individuals, of their desire, imagination, intelligence, of their peace, their triumph over violence and fear.

*Herbert Marcuse*

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*March 6, 1973*

*Dear Friends:*

Here are my remarks on your critical comments. They are again very sketchy and unorganized, but I just don't have the time to do any better.

Rosemont's and Simmons's<sup>9</sup> remarks call for detailed oral discussion. I hope to be in Chicago late in the spring and would be happy if you could arrange a meeting.

*With best wishes,  
Sincerely yours,  
Herbert Marcuse*

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<sup>9</sup> John Simmons and David Schanoes (mentioned on p. 190) took part in surrealist activity briefly in the 1970s. (FR)

Herbert Marcuse, second letter

Have you really not noticed that the thesis on the irreconcilable contradiction between art and revolution is but a paraphrase of the central thesis on surrealism in its most uncompromising form?

Have you forgotten that the very Manifesto (1938) which calls for “*un art révolutionnaire*” proclaims “*un art indépendant*”?<sup>10</sup> That the same Manifesto contains the key sentence that veritable art “*ne peut pas ne pas être révolutionnaire*”? In other words, authentic art is in its very substance revolutionary and, precisely for this reason, free from the requirements of any specific revolutionary praxis. In this sense, art is *autonomous*, and the same Manifesto calls for “*toute licence en art.*” Could there be anything more contradictory to the discipline of revolutionary praxis? Long before the Mexico Manifesto, the *Légitime Défense* of 1926 states “... il n’est pas moins nécessaire, selon nous, que les expériences de la vie intérieure se poursuivent et cela, bien entendu, sans contrôle extérieur, *même marxiste*” (my emphasis).<sup>11</sup> And Pierre Naville (1927): “Le surréalisme ... s’aiguille ... dans une direction qui peut le mettre d’un moment à l’autre *en contradiction avec les nécessités les plus élémentaires de la révolution prolétarien*” (my emphasis).<sup>12</sup>

To be sure, I am quoting authorities, Holy Writ—I do so because I believe that these statements contain the revolutionary heart and core of surrealism, its radical transcendence beyond the *given* reality principle. Nor would it be correct to interpret these theses as referring only to the praxis of the Communist Party. In fact, they refer to the relation between art and *any* revolutionary praxis. And in thus sustaining the internal necessities and requirement of art (its autonomy), surrealism recognized the necessities and requirements of revolutionary praxis and its goals. Surrealism fights for these goals while fighting its own independent revolution: the revolution of art.

I spoke of an irreconcilable “contradiction”—assuming your familiarity with dialectical thought. Surrealism and revolutionary praxis = the unity of opposites. This may sum up what I wanted to say!

As against the surrender of surrealism to undialectical materialism, the insistence on the *liberté totale de l’esprit*, on the cognitive power of the imagination, corrects the vulgar schematization of the relation between social existence and consciousness (ideology).

10 Marcuse is referring to the *Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art* (1938), written by André Breton and Leon Trotsky, though signed by Breton and Diego Rivera. An English translation appears in *What Is Surrealism? Selected Writings of André Breton* (New York: Monad, 1978), pp. 183–7. (FR)

11 *Légitime Défense* was written by André Breton. An English translation appears in *What Is Surrealism?*, pp. 31–42. (FR)

12 Pierre Naville, *La Révolution et les intellectuels* (Paris: Gallimard, 1926). (FR)

Surrealism thus avoids one of the pitfalls of Marxist aesthetics: the super-imposed orientation of art on a (nonexistent) proletarian *Weltanschauung*, on the needs of the masses.

"Social existence determines consciousness." The social existence of the masses is one of lifelong servitude, which generates an unfree, arrested consciousness which, in turn, determines (and distorts) the needs and aspirations of the masses. This (negative) determination will be the stronger the more effectively the masses are integrated into the capitalist society: it will be reproduced by the masses themselves to the degree to which it has its roots in their needs and aspirations.

How, under these circumstances, can revolutionary consciousness possibly develop "from within"? Why not finally admit that Lenin's theory of the avant-garde, which draws the correct consequence from this situation, is an "elitist" theory if ever there was one? And the same argument, *mutatis mutanda*, applies to the relation between art and the masses: whatever art may contribute to the development of revolutionary consciousness will be "from without" the prevailing consciousness, and existence of the masses.

But this other, this radical-revolutionary consciousness would also be determined by a social existence, namely, a social existence not chained to full-time alienated labor, free, by virtue of its privileged education, to pursue needs and aspirations beyond and against the established ones—free for the theory, the imagination, the possibilities of a qualitatively different universe of needs and their satisfaction. And this freedom becomes a pre-requisite for the development of a revolutionary consciousness at large. This is the political function of the *autonomie absolue de l'esprit*, of Aragon's praise of the transcendent *idea* of freedom (at a time when he was still a surrealist).

Without this element of idealism, without this recognition of the autonomy of the imagination, of the *expérience intérieure* in sustaining the goals of revolution, surrealism is politically irrelevant.

I have no argument with David Schanoes because he does not offer any arguments. Instead, he repeats the familiar petty-bourgeois clichés. They are all there: the denunciation of "the brain of Germany," the Germanic style; the resentment against abstract thought (has he ever read the first chapter of *Capital*?), the suspicion of idealistic elements in materialism (does he consider Hegel extraneous to Marx and Lenin?). He plays havoc with facts: he still thinks of jazz as a poetic negation of capitalism at a time where jazz had been safely incorporated into the Establishment. He thinks Adorno's essay on jazz appeared "nearly 30 years after Benjamin's "The Work of Art . . ."—in fact, it appeared in the same year. (By the way, you can use many invectives against Adorno; to accuse him of "total stupidity" is the most stupid one!)

The rest of his paper is romantic nostalgia. He writes as if the working class of the second half of the twentieth century were still that of the middle

nineteenth century, as if the 1920s and 1930s were still our own years, as if the Russian revolution were still the Bolshevik Revolution, etc. He uses a Marx statement of 1843 as a “corollary” to one of 1865—nice example of the utter disregard of the internal historical substance of dialectical materialism.

I sort of regret the lack of humor in your reaction to my remarks. Example: the “*esprit de sérieux*” with which you treat the notion of automatic writing. Apart from the samples offered at the time of the experiment, none of the authentic surrealist writings is automatic, and the samples themselves contribute nothing to the surrealist *oeuvre*. Another example: Breton’s statement on painting as a “lamentable expedient.” Have another look at *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture* and at Max Ernst. There is a wonderful irony, self-correction in surrealism which is lamentably lacking in your responses. And Marcel Duchamp’s urinal in the museum cannot in permanence be misunderstood as the beginning of radical art!

What art is does not depend on changing tastes, modes, etc. A specific style or form cannot be “outmoded.” The essential historical quality of art is more and other than a mutation of fads and fashions; it is rather a transformation in which the substance of art persists in changing expressions. For example, the *Jugendstil* prior to the First World War no longer appears as a germane aesthetic form, but that which was art in it (perhaps even revolutionary art) has left its impact on subsequent styles after a period of contempt and oblivion: a less sophisticated, less critical, less sublimated sensuousness of things and persons. Another example: the grandeur of Beethoven’s symphonies has come to sound somewhat hollow because the humanism which animated them no longer lends itself to this form of expression; it is refuted by the inhuman brutality of the twentieth century. However, the idea of humanism as formative principle of the *oeuvre* remains valid.

I said that an essential quality of art which remains through all its historical transformation is the difference between art and reality. The statement needs clarification. Obviously, a statue, a painting, a book, the score of a musical composition are real objects in the real world (*res extensae*, things) but they are not experienced like other objects which make up the universe of practice. They are what they are not as objects (a piece of marble, paper, canvas with colors, etc.) but as objectifications of an *imaginary* universe constructed with the stuff of the real one (the linguistic, visual, sonic, historical, etc. material). And this ideational universe has *its own* objectivity: the *oeuvre* is never only the product of the artist’s private imagination (and sensibility, reason); his own mental faculties reflect a consciousness and sensibility still to become those of *all*.

Only the transformed reality is the reality of art, and only this transformation (which alters every object and every aspect of the object) renders possible the new perception, experience, understanding of the world in

the aesthetic reception; the break with the monopoly of the established experience and the established reality itself renders possible the new subject.

This twofold transformation (subjective and objective) changes the structure and the function of object and subject. The mere geographical displacement of an object can never achieve this rupture: it remains within the Establishment, as part of the Establishment, of its ideological and material equipment. Duchamp's urinal remains a urinal even in the museum or gallery; it carries its function with it—as suspended, “real” function: a pisspot! Conversely, a picture of Cézanne remains a picture by Cézanne even in the toilet.

The self-styled new radicalism which is engaged in such geographical displacement of a real object means neither the end of art nor of bourgeois art nor the rise of a new art; it rather testifies to the abdication or absence of that critical imagination which is committed to the indictment of, and liberation from, the Establishment—the creative imagination. We are, in the face of these displaced objects, where we were before and where we will be after: the Campbell Soup can on display in an exhibition recalls the soup can in the supermarket (and may thus help the sale). The reaction on the part of the recipient not yet taken in by the clique is not shock but embarrassment; here is something they are supposed to take seriously or with black humor—but they feel that the thing is phony.

“Let art come down off its pedestal.” Let's take the battle-cry seriously—how does it sound? What is its flavor? What is up must come down, what is too high must be lowered. The flavor of petty-bourgeois resentment is strong; art is not “to remain above this dirty world. . .” Above? Was it ever? Even the purest art has always been *in* this “dirty” world; the artists got a good deal of it, and their works testify to it. The conflict between art and reality is one *within* one and the same world . . . But the image of the pedestal, and of the “coming down” is not only false, it also reveals a definite social position. If it is true (as I assume) that alienation from the established reality and the creation of an “imaginary” counter-reality constitute art as a radically *critical* force, then the reduction and elimination of these qualities would integrate art into the repressive society: it would become Establishment-fun, Establishment-discontent, Establishment-business. This transposition of art destroys the dimension of “privileged communication” which is the life element of art: privileged in the sense of being the unique medium for the expression of truths which cannot be communicated in any other form—the aesthetic form.

In the development of Western civilization, this privilege has indeed become a social one. To the degree to which it presupposed freedom from full-time labor, from earning a living, the laboring classes were all but excluded (as were, for similar reasons, women). It should be obvious that the historical link between art and social privilege cannot be broken by manipulation of art, its objects, and its recipients, but only by the abolition

of the established social division of labor. Nor would the attainment of this goal eliminate the “privilege” of art—but it would make possible the development of talent, genius, creativity among the people on a much larger scale.

*Herbert Marcuse*



# X

## SHORT TAKES

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### REVIEW OF GEORG LUKÁCS, *GOETHE UND SEINE ZEIT*\*

*Goethe und seine Zeit.* Georg Lukács. A. Francke Verlag,  
Bern, 1947. Pp. 207.

The book contains essays on Goethe's "Werther," *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, and *Faust*; on Schiller's theory of modern literature; and on Hölderlin's *Hyperion*. Written between 1934 and 1940, these essays interpret the classical German literature in terms of the "ideological preparation of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Germany." According to this interpretation, the literary works of this period reflect the basic contradiction of the bourgeois revolution: that between the ideology of liberty and liberation on the one side, and the "miserable reality" of capitalist society on the other. This contradiction, insoluble within the bourgeois world, determines the inner limitations and the various literary forms of the classical *Humanitätsideal*. In developing this conception, Lukács places the exemplary products of classical German literature in the framework of the specific historical conditions prevalent in Germany at that time. He uses the well-known concept of the "retarded bourgeois-democratic revolution." In contrast with the more advanced countries of Western Europe, there was no strong and progressive middle class in Germany capable of defeating the obsolete feudal-absolutistic regime and its institutions; there was above all no "Jacobin" force, no radical petty bourgeoisie

\* *Editor's note:*

"Short Takes" opens with Marcuse's review of Georg Lukács, *Goethe und seine Zeit*, which appeared in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 11 (September 1950), pp. 142–4. It shows that Marcuse continued his interest in German literature, but had evolved a more complex attitude toward Lukács, who had developed a dogmatic and reductive Marxist aesthetic of which Marcuse would become increasingly critical. Yet despite strong reservations about Lukács's Marxist literary approach, he also exhibits sympathy in the review for Lukács and his work. (DK)

and semi-proletariat which could give the progressive demands of the bourgeois revolution their political manifestation. This lack of an actual struggle for the fulfillment of these demands had a twofold effect. On the one hand, the remoteness from political *practice* and its consequence gave the German poets and philosophers an apparently unlimited realm for the development of the *theory* of the bourgeois world. "It is no accident that the laws of contradictory development, the principles of the dialectical method were consciously elaborated in Germany during the period from Lessing to Heine, that Goethe and Hegel raised this method to the highest possible level within the limits of bourgeois thought." On the other hand, however, the lack of a political solution forced the most advanced representatives of bourgeois thought either into romanticist obscurantism, or into heroic-utopian desperation (Hölderlin), or into realistic accommodation and resignation (Goethe and Hegel). But even the remotest transfigurations of the revolutionary bourgeois demands in classical German literature retain their societal origin and content—although in distorted and metaphysical forms.

One of the finest achievements of Lukács's book is his successful fight against the irrationalistic-metaphysical interpretation of classical German literature (especially by Dilthey and Gundolf). Against them, Lukács shows to what extent Hölderlin's "cult of nature" and of the Greek city state remains committed to Robespierre and the Jacobins. He emphasizes the links which connect Goethe with the Enlightenment, and he focuses his interpretation of *Faust* on the materialistic elements, which he traces even behind the Catholic transcendentalism of the final scene. However, his method fails insofar as it connects the literary works more or less externally with the social reality instead of tracing the societal indices in the very style and content of these works. For example, Lukács says that Mephistopheles brings the "devilish-cynical elements of capitalism into the foreground," and that this character has "so to speak a capitalistic basis." Or: "the practice in which 'Faust' ends and which fulfills his *weltanschauliche Sehnsucht* for unity of theory and practice, for the practical progress of mankind, is objectively impossible without Mephistopheles: (that is to say) the development of the productive forces in bourgeois society is possible only capitalistically." Such statements sound slightly comical; no matter how true they may be, they seem to contribute little to the understanding of the tragedy. If they fail to reach the dimension in which the tragedy moves, it is because they are essentially undialectical. An adequate interpretation in Lukács's terms would not be satisfied by showing how the social reality is "reflected" in the literary work, by linking certain aspects or passages of *Faust* with certain aspects of the capitalistic mode of production, or division of labor, or with the general contradictions of capitalist society. This is a leap from the individual to the universal which skips the particular mediations in which the societal indices constitute themselves in the work of art. In omitting these mediations, Lukács omits precisely that dimension which gives the societal content its specific artistic expression. This dimension

is defined by the “style” or the inner form of the work, which manifests itself in its verse, or prose, in its various “settings,” in the supra-realistic and still real appearance of its characters, in their tragic interrelationships. Confronted with this dimension, Lukács retreats into the most standardized interpretations. “Mastery of one’s passions, their sublimation (*Veredelung*) and direction toward the really great goals of the human kind: this is Goethe’s ethics.” Or: “the broadness and depth of Goethe’s shaping of this love tragedy (in *Faust*) manifests itself in that through it all problems of moral life, directly or indirectly, come to words.” The petty bourgeois content of such statements is matched by the petty bourgeois style. They are not incidental, but reveal the mechanistic-abstract elements of Lukács’s method, which limit the truth of his interpretation. However, in view of the stupid attacks against Lukács emanating from Hungary,<sup>1</sup> it must be emphasized that he elucidates a whole dimension in classical literature which the traditional interpretation almost unanimously overlooks or distorts.

*Herbert Marcuse*

# HERBERT MARCUSE, “ON INGE’S DEATH”\*

*Translated by Peter Marcuse and*

*Charles Reitz*

Why do we begin to write poems for ourselves  
 In the Vicinity of Death?  
 (Others write poems at the beginning.)  
 Because we are no longer subject to the laws of every-day  
 But rather under a higher law  
 Whose language is no longer that of every-day,  
     No longer prose,  
 Although the words are the same.

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1 See Martin Horvath, “Sur l’autocritique de Lukács,” *La Nouvelle Critique*, 2. année, no. 13 (Paris, February, 1950).

## \* Editor’s note:

Included here is a text by Herbert Marcuse, found in his archive, which reflects on why one turns to poetry to express extreme emotions, such as the death of a loved one. Handwritten in the form of a poem, the text was discovered in a file containing material on Marcuse’s first wife Sophie by Peter-Erwin Jansen. Circulation of the text to the Marcuse family suggested, however, that the references to flowers, animals, and other objects indicates that it was written on the occasion of Marcuse’s second wife Inge’s death in 1972. The text is published here for the first time in a translation from the German by Peter Marcuse and Charles Reitz, and we have chosen the title “On Inge’s Death.” It can be compared to Marcuse’s reflections on death in *Eros and Civilization* (1955) written after the death of his first wife Sophie in 1951.

When we say love  
 We know  
 That death is stronger than love  
 That love is sad  
 Deathly sad  
 and cannot be otherwise.  
 For all love seeks eternity<sup>1</sup>  
 and that can never be.

Love is as strong as death.  
 This nonsense  
 I never believed.  
 And remembring doesn't help:  
 It is deathly sad.  
 Nor the flowers  
 Your flowers, our flowers  
 That you arranged for me.  
 Because they are your picture  
 And you are no longer there.  
 That there is no longer you  
 Is unimaginable  
 Imaginable is only  
 That there is also no longer me.

And you will be there  
 (not only in memory,  
 which is only a picture),  
 But in the things and events  
 That you liked  
 In your room  
 The small cows  
 Your jewelry and your clothing  
 The little statues,  
 The garden stool . . .  
 It will all stay as it is and as it was  
 I will change nothing  
 The sadness stays.  
 With the love  
 Until there is no longer me either.  
 Soon.<sup>2</sup>

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1 *Translator's note (CR)*: A reference to Nietzsche's repeated refrain "For all joy wants eternity" (from a central poem in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part III, "The Other Dancing Song" as well as from Part IV, "The Drunken Song [Strophes 10 and 17]"), Nietzsche: "Doch alle lust will Ewigkeit", Marcuse: "Denn Alle Lust will Ewigkeit". In German the word *lust* mainly refers to joyful pleasure and love. This can also be colored with corporeal desire in the sense vividly conveyed by the English cognate, *lust*.

2 *Translator's note (CR)*: *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972) includes a Brecht poem translated by Inge S. Marcuse. It makes explicit reference to the parting of

## INTERVIEW WITH L'ARCHIBRAS\*

*Translated by Guy Ducornet*

*What social events or phenomena have been, in your opinion, most representative of a wish for total emancipation, during the past ten years?*

*Marcuse:* The effective guerrilla resistance to the internal machine of imperialism; the “Provos”; the political opposition of young intellectuals in the United States.

*On the other hand, which recent events have been the most significant signs of a reinforcement — or more exactly of a “perfecting” — of the system of oppression?*

*Marcuse:* The integration of the “lower classes”— the exploited on the one hand, and the white-collar intelligentsia on the other — into the system of the “affluent society.”

*If we situate the thesis advanced in Eros and Civilization within the debate opposing Marxist and anarchist traditions as to the legitimacy of all forms of state authority (even if the latter were presented as containing all prerequisites to insure the passage to socialism, that is to say its own disappearance), what new theoretical light can this thesis bring into the debate?*

*Marcuse:* The anarchist thesis runs up against the fundamental condition of an evolved industrial society, that is to say the formation, the satisfaction and the control of all needs by the repressive forces of society. This condition of instinctive integration, of primary integration, represses — in the majority of people — all revolutionary spontaneity, all need for negation, for total emancipation. Consequently, “total emancipation”

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two lovers. The question “And when will they leave each other?” (p. 120) is followed by a one-word sentence in its own line, “Soon.” Herbert Marcuse’s use of “Soon” in this poem — also as a one-word sentence in its own line — appears to interlock with Inge Marcuse’s translation. Brecht’s word, like that of Marcuse here, also carries the connotation of impending inevitability and is doubtless a reference to the famous last line of Goethe’s classic poem, “Wanderers Nachtlied” (Wonderer’s Night Song), “Soon you too shall rest” cited also by Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978) pp. 61, 78.

\* *Editor’s note:*

This text provides an interview with Marcuse published in the French journal *L’Archibras* (October 1967), p. 63, and translated into English by Guy Ducornet in *Cultural Correspondence* (Summer 1981), pp. 12–14. It showed how in the 1960s aesthetic concerns were beginning to merge with his theoretical and political interests. (DK)

depends, more than ever, on a powerful authority, a force — material as well as intellectual — which is capable of liberating and developing oppositional needs and libertarian aggression. In a word, counter-intelligence wins over intelligence, counter-propaganda negates propaganda, counter-images replace the images of mass communication, counter-language breaks away from language.

*Does the idea that history might not necessarily evolve toward more freedom seem to you to warrant being examined, and why?*

*Marcuse:* I believe that the idea according to which history evolves more or less necessarily toward more freedom is very dangerous, because it is probably false. I think this idea intrudes even into the Marxist dialectic, in spite of the insistence on consciousness and the conscious action of the working class. The facts of fascism, of Nazism and of neoimperialism refute the concept of progress.

*Many believe, following Denis de Rougemont, that romantic love originates in the constraints opposed to Eros. What do you think of this idea? Could a non-repressive society favor romantic love or other forms of erotic relationships, and which ones?*

*Marcuse:* The constraints in opposition to Eros have very different values and functions: some repress and reduce the libido, others intensify and fortify it — eroticism of the preparatory stages, obstacles in the service of stimulation, late refinements, etc. However, the affirmative constraints must be established by the lovers themselves or at least accepted by them and transformed into intermediary agents of desire. In this way, one can test the truth of the proposition according to which it is mediation that constitutes the density of being.

*What do you expect from poetry?*

*Marcuse:* I expect it to continue to denounce prose as well as the “poetry” of bourgeois repression and exploitation; to continue to speak the counter-language of imagination which today is the only human language and the true language of politics.

*Does the idea of evil strongly attract you, in certain cases? If so, which ones?*

*Marcuse:* I must admit that the idea of evil, in certain cases, exerts a strong attraction on me: above all, in the case of evil striking the authors of evil — *i.e.*, the architects of imperialist politics and their hirelings. In this case I nurture even sadistic dreams, but they remain dreams.

*(December 15, 1966)*

SAMUEL BECKETT'S POEM FOR MARCUSE AND  
AN EXCHANGE OF LETTERS

Samuel Beckett: Poem Dedicated to Herbert Marcuse on  
his Eightieth Birthday\*

*Translated by Edith Fourier*

Pas a pas	step by step
Nulle part	nowhere
Nul seul	not a single one
Ne sait comment	knows how
Petits pas	tiny steps
Nulle part	nowhere
Obstinément	stubbornly

\* *Editor's note:*

Samuel Beckett surprised Marcuse with a poem for his eightieth birthday that we publish above with an English translation by Edith Fourier; the poem was first published in *Akzente*, vol. 3/June 1978, in a special issue commemorating Marcuse's eightieth birthday. (DK)

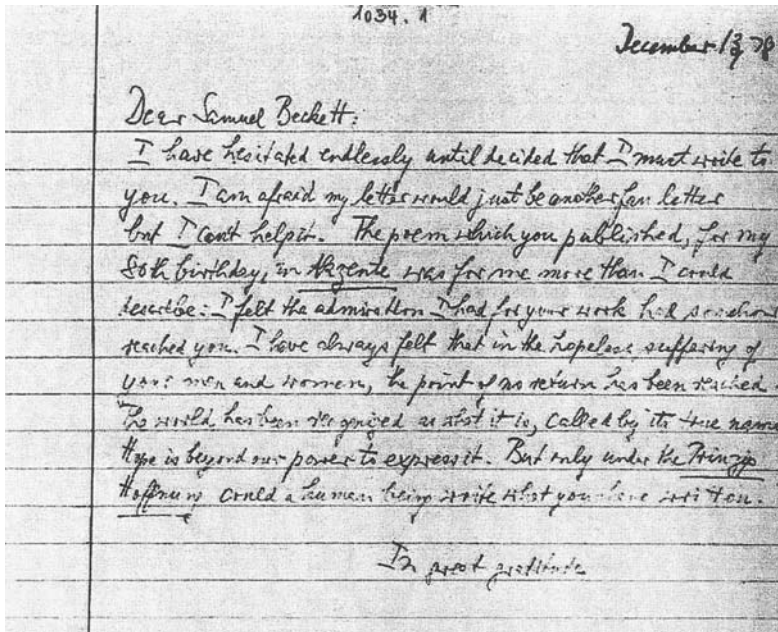
## Marcuse–Beckett Exchange of Letters\*

December 13, 1978

Dear Samuel Beckett:

I have hesitated endlessly until [I] decided that I must write to you. I am afraid my letter would just be another fan letter but I can't help it. The poem which you published, for my 80th birthday, in *Akzente* was for me more than I could describe. I felt the admiration I had for your work had somehow reached you. I have always felt that in the hopeless suffering of your men and women, the point of no return has been reached. The world has been recognized as what it is, called by its true name. Hope is beyond our power to express it. But only under the *Prinzip Hoffnung* could a human being write what you have written.

In great gratitude



\* Editor's note:

We include an exchange of letters that took place in 1978 and 1979 between Marcuse and Beckett. Marcuse had cited Beckett as a major writer, noting: "The real face of our time shows in Samuel Beckett's novels" (*One-Dimensional Man*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1964 p. 247), and constantly referred to Beckett's uncompromisingly radical critique of the world in his later writings (see in this volume, pp. 211, 224, 230 passim). Marcuse was obviously delighted that Beckett had written a poem for him. The Marcuse–Beckett letters were found in the Herbert Marcuse archives by Peter-Erwin Jansen and an English translation is published for the first time. (DK)



Paris

January 3, 1999

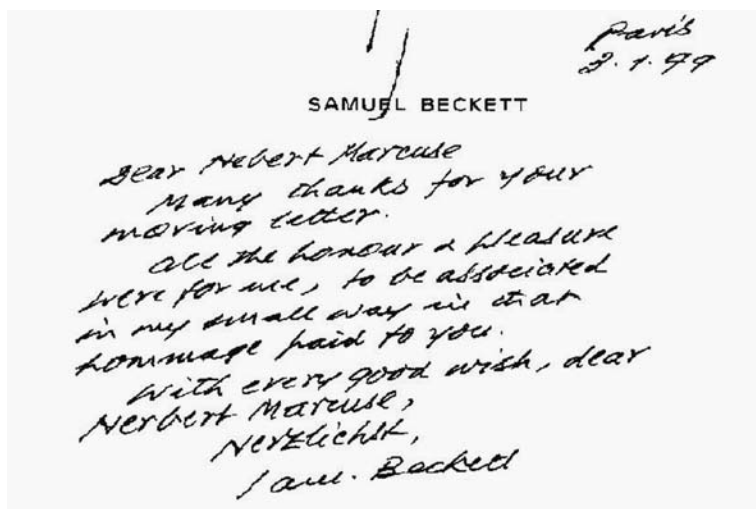
Dear Herbert Marcuse

Many thanks for your moving letter. All the honour and pleasure were for me, to be associated in my small way in that hommage paid to you.

With every good wish, dear Herbert Marcuse,

Herzlichst

Sam. Beckett



### SOME GENERAL REMARKS ON LUCIEN GOLDMANN\*

Lucien Goldmann is still much too close to me, too much alive – I cannot attempt to give any kind of “evaluation” of his work, I can only offer some general remarks.

For me, perhaps the most impressive aspect of Goldmann’s work was the unity of scholarship and life. To him, philosophy and political radicalism were one, Marxist theory was in the facts themselves; the philosophical and literary documents contained, in themselves their translation into social reality. “Sociology” was not just one interpretation in addition to others – it rather was the union of all adequate interpretations. Sociology was *in* the philosophical, theological, literary content and form of the works themselves. *Le Dieu caché* is the best example of this union. The book has been criticized on the ground that it shows an excess of sociological imagination, that Goldmann constructs too freely, etc. I would answer by paraphrasing Adorno’s statement on psychoanalysis: that only its exaggerations are true. For it is the extreme point which illuminates the hidden impulses and dimensions of the work.

Similarly in Goldmann’s analysis of contemporary literature, especially Malraux, Genet, Robbe-Grillet. Does he interpret too much? I think it is true that the literary substance and the aesthetic form sometimes disappear behind the sociological explication. I was often irritated by it; I used the familiar argument that if the author would have meant all this he would have said so. What was it in the aesthetic form and its exigencies which caused him *not* to say it? We never settled the issue: after lengthy discussions, I felt that Goldmann had made his point – that I was right too.

Aesthetics is the least developed field in Marxist theory. Goldmann’s analysis of the *Nouveau Roman*, the theatre, the film belong to its most advanced contributions. He remains indebted to Lukács, but here too, Goldmann goes his own way. It is the pre-Marxist Lukács, the author of *Die Seele und die Formen* and *Theorie des Romans*, where Goldmann discovers some of the basic concepts of philosophical aesthetics – just as it was Kant rather than Hegel who led him on the road to Marxism.

\* *Editor’s note:*

Marcuse’s short reflections, “Some General Remarks on Lucien Goldmann,” were published in *Lucien Goldmann et la sociologie de la littérature* (Brussels 1973–4), pp. 51–2. Goldmann was a French literary critic and theorist who was a good friend of Marcuse for many years; Goldmann had earlier published a friendly critical analysis of Marcuse’s work, “Understanding Marcuse,” *Partisan Review*, XXXVIII, 3 (1971), pp. 247–62, which Marcuse responded to in “A Reply to Lucien Goldmann,” *Partisan Review*, XXXVIII, 4 (1971/1972), pp. 397–400. It is interesting that Marcuse’s critique centered on Goldmann’s tendency to engage in over-interpretation of art works and texts, reflecting Marcuse’s more formalist and philosophical approach to art compared to Goldmann’s more hermeneutical and philosophical approach. (DK)

But prior to all literature and philosophy, Goldmann's Marxism was to him a necessity. He was an eminently political being, and the imperative to change the world was in all his ideas. This imperative was to him a very concrete one, and the social possibilities of its realization had to be examined *in concreto*. He saw in workers' control the most promising vehicle of radical transformation, and he spent much time in studying its practice in Yugoslavia.

I should like to add a few personal remarks.

Goldmann was a radical intellectual who was proud to be an intellectual – without the slightest inferiority complex, so widespread among the New Left, of being a revolutionary and not being a worker. To him, the intellect was by its nature revolutionary. And yet, he was without violence (I never heard him shout) and without malice. Discussion, dialogue were his element. We used to joke: there could not possibly be any conference in his field (and how large was his field!) without Goldmann: Korcula, Cérisy, Brussels, Royaumont, and many others were unthinkable without him. He had to be there, he had to talk: not out of vanity, not because he was egocentric but because discussion and dialogue were to him ways of living with other human beings – ways of finding out, together, what could be done to change things. Strange – but Lucien never showed any signs that he was suffering from the way things were, and yet: I felt he did suffer, but still he smiled, his warm, open smile. I shall never forget an episode (harmless enough) which happened at Korcula. We were all swimming around in the sea, Lucien, who could not swim, was lying on a rubber mat in the water, floating near the beach. Quite suddenly, some of us pulled him off the mat to which he was clinging, and he fell into the water (which was not very deep). He quickly reemerged – heartily laughing with all the others; there was not a trace of resentment in him . . . A volume of Goldmann's last papers, published in the *Bibliothèque Médiations*, shows on the cover his picture as I remember him so well: his broad open face, his eyes, and his smile. The volume testifies to Goldmann's deep apprehension lest Western society destroy all that was dear to him, to us; that literature and art succumb to the forces of barbarism and a new fascism for a long time to come. Reading these papers, one knows that Goldmann was suffering, but he did not lose his smile of knowledge and hope – his faith in liberation.

La Jolla, California, October 1971

## PROUST\*

*Translated by Russell Berman*

Due to the ambiguous relationship of love to the world, time is the sole immanent danger that retains its power over it. Time cures, as much as it makes ill, and the cure is the feared outcome. Despite all breakthroughs out of normalcy, love belongs to the *temps perdu*. It succumbs to the damning judgment directed at this world. Yet the terrible sentence about the “paradis perdu,” which is the only true paradise, avenges both itself and the lost time. The lost paradise is not the true one because somehow past desire (*Lust*) appears greater and clearer in memory than it was in reality.<sup>1</sup> But memory relieves this desire of the fear of coming to an end, giving to it an otherwise impossible duration. Time has no more power over that which is already lost, and memory itself elevates it out of not-being to being. In this way the *temps perdu* becomes linked to the *temps retrouvé*. Time reappears there, in its true shape, emancipated from any normalcy. Art which finds time again also has love as its content. It thrives only from the lost time.

The relation of love to time is decisive. Aspiring to duration, love at first struggles against time: against transitoriness, against everyday normalization. It wants an uninterrupted series of moments. Yet love can only find fulfillment in time. Not only in the sense that love, like every other event, only takes place in temporal extension. In a strict sense, time becomes constitutive of love, in that the threat of time, the very fear of loss, ending and standing still becomes a source of the desire that repeatedly nourishes

## \* Editor's note:

An untitled eight-page text on Proust was found in Marcuse's archive, handwritten and without his usual corrections and editing, followed by a two-page list of references to passages in an unnamed French edition of Proust's multi-volumed *À la recherche du temps perdu* and two pages of quotes from the novel. It appears here in translation by Russell Berman in English for the first time.

Peter-Erwin Jansen in his German edition speculates that the Proust study was done in the late 1970s around the time of *The Aesthetic Dimension* (*Kunst und Befreiung*, 2000, pp. 151–2). Elena Tebano sees its genesis in the period of the 1950s when Marcuse dealt with his wife Sophie's death and was working on *Eros and Civilization*; see “Proust Notizen: Carte d'archivio,” *Belfagor*, Anno LVII, 342 (30 November, 2002), pp. 693–701. Katz (1982: 125), situates it in the early 1940s, several years before the Aragon study, but offers no evidence for this claim. Yet its thematics fit well into the study of Aragon and French resistance writers in that it valorizes art and love, and Peter Marcuse remembers his father reading Proust in the 1940s. Yet it remains uncertain when, where, and why the text was written. It is collected in the Herbert Marcuse archive under the number 560.00. Since the text has no title and it is unclear what Marcuse intended for it, we are simply using the title “Proust.” (DK)

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1 Translator's note: The German term *Lust* is translated variously as desire and pleasure.

and drives love on. Here too the guaranteed security of possession would let love die. For its absolutelessness stands, in class society, against the system of normalcy and all its supporting and stabilizing institutions. The fear of time is a sign of its truth, because time works for that which exists. Love can only maintain its absoluteness outside of this existence, and this outsideness is only possible as a moment. Time is so strongly marked by desire that the beloved herself appears as the great “*déesse du temps*” [goddess of time] in whose image love and time become identical.

The *temps perdu* is lost in a double sense: as past and as squandered time. As past time, it can only be lost due to the happiness that it contained and that makes its recovery desirable. It is a happiness that only takes place in moments; indeed it is strongest when it erupts in moments of desire that disappear immediately. Unhappiness constantly predominates – but one of the insights of *temps perdu* is that only unhappiness makes happiness possible. Not in the sense that only the unhappy person is capable of happiness. Happiness is itself negative: it is essentially a soothing, calming, and quieting of pain. It is therefore more than the mere absence of pain and lack of desire, both of which remain present as the foundation of happiness.

What makes love essentially immoral is its wanting to continue pleasure. Precisely thereby it turns against the decisive social taboo that only recognizes pleasure as sporadic and regulated, not however as the foundation of human relationships. In love, the dimension of pleasure is certainly sensuality, the sole remaining source of desire in class society. But the expansion of desire from sensuality into other dimensions of the person and existence leads it into a hostility to normalcy. The separations of sensuality and understanding, body and soul, nature and spirit are sublated. The understanding, soul, and spirit of the beloved also become sources of pleasure. When pleasure occupies understanding it is transformed into a total critique of normalcy: a critique whose claim and legitimacy derive solely from pleasure, not however from genuine theory or from historical practice. Just as the supersession of that separation in love is immediate, so too are the critique and the truth at which it arrives. Love anticipates for itself, for the two lovers, that which can only be realized for everyone. Yet this anticipation and immediacy are the only forms in which it can currently be at all.

For two: The respective exclusiveness and loyalty of love are also immediate. They are based in the loss of desire associated with every division of pleasure.

If love is, in every case, a “*sentiment erroné*,” the error does not lie with the lovers or with love itself. Rather, it is an error of culture itself, which has linked love and pleasure (sexuality) inextricably. Proust’s full work – with the decisive exception of a whole sphere – lies under the spell of this link. Sexuality becomes love: it grips not only the body but the whole essence of the desired person; it wants not only pleasure but continuous pleasure, full devotion. It demands in the medium of sexuality what can only take place in the medium of the spirit, and perhaps not even there.

The real reaction against love: Pleasure emancipated from love lives in Proust's work only in Sodom and Gomorrah, among the homosexuals. The natural appears in the trappings of the unnatural.

The absolute belonging of two people breaks the law of normalcy. The other necessarily also belongs to others: friends, relations, job, sociability. All these relations are sources of danger: in each he might be lost to love. The loyalty, which might afford protection, is conditioned on the division of labor and contracts. It only protects marriage, not love. For love is, from its very beginning, incompatible with marriage. It is after all based in the condition that one never fully has the other, who is always threatened and potentially lost. Property that has been secured through a normal contract and thereby generally recognized turns the beloved human into a subject of rights and duties. It normalizes that which is essentially not normal. But it also moralizes that which is essentially not moral. Love must be immoral, because morality rules all of that social existence which love profoundly opposes. It seeks the other not as a useful and happy member of society, who belongs partially to a profession, partially to other duties and partially to the beloved – love wants the other in its essence, outside of normalcy. Pleasure does not conform to any schedule and runs into conflict with every duty.

So too with knowledge and any action dependent on it. Love only knows its own truth and does not care about other ones. It anticipates a happiness for itself that can only be a universal happiness. It therefore cannot be happy. It makes itself unhappy, just as it makes itself wrong. Normalcy turns out to be in the right, against love, because normalcy preserves the claims of the universal (*die Ansprüche der Allgemeinheit*) and of a better future.

Love carries with it the sign of this untruth and this wrong. But just as the guilt of love is also its innocence, containing the positive next to the negative – that it protests against a bad normalcy and wants to have humans in their most beautiful possibilities – this sign is also one of truth and happiness. It takes the shape of longing, in which the contents and knowledge that have been excluded from and sacrificed to love remain alive, constantly insisting on their existence. Nature, humanity, art, distance and freedom flow into love and explode its isolation in the beloved. Albertine and her friends against the breadth and glow of the ocean, the sunsets and dawns, the sonata and the septet of Vineteuil, Elstir's paintings, Venice, the incomplete duties and joys are not arbitrary: they are as much the content of love as Albertine's body. In fact the body is often merely scaffolding and memory: it retains the smell of the ocean and the color of the sun in all its pores. Those greater contents make it possible that it can be forgotten so quickly. And yet preserved: the *temps retrouvé* is nothing without it. Ultimately, the isolation of love, the binding to the one beloved, is only a salvation from the unbearable longing for general happiness.

The "inability to love" in Proust is the "hero's" persistence in the search for truth. He remains open to knowledge. He does not want to bring the ultimate sacrifice to love, the *sacrificium intellectus*. Yet he thereby sins

against love, which cannot take place without this sacrifice in the context of an order of untruth and unreason. The great lovers in literature are not wise; they are nearly dumb. As soon as knowledge can proceed, man pursues other duties than love. Love becomes unimportant. The categories of love which aspire to fulfillment in the present and not in some to-be-constructed future are not the categories of reason, but rather the categories of unreason.

Love is no community of knowledge or any other kind of “spiritual” community. That perspective would depend on a harmonizing, conformist understanding of spirit. In the context of an unspiritual normalcy, spirit is essentially destructive, because the truth with which it is concerned does not lie within the given and can only be realized through the destruction of the given. Yet, in all its struggles against normalcy, love remains dependent on normalcy, insofar as it seeks happiness in the present.

### LETTER TO CHRISTIAN ENZENSBERGER\*

*Translated by Charles Reitz*

20 December 1978

8831 Cliffridge Ave.  
La Jolla, Cal. 92037

Dear Christian Enzensberger:

If I were actually to give a critical commentary on your book,<sup>1</sup> I would need to reiterate and further develop much of what I have said in *The Aesthetic Dimension*. Today I need to limit myself, instead, to a few especially important problems, and wait for a personal conversation!

In spite of your many caveats and corrections, you do hold fast to the “compensatory theory” of art. I have never been able to understand this. Art may “compensate” for really existing needs only to the extent that a couple of glasses of Scotch do: they help get through a minor dejection! I believe

\* *Editor's note:*

A letter to Christian Enzensberger was found in Marcuse's private collection and archive, and was translated from the German by Charles Reitz. Marcuse criticizes Enzensberger's compensatory theory of art and chides him for reducing it to ideological interests and conservative social functions. Marcuse is pleased, however, with the latter part of the book on fine art where “the emancipatory interests of art have their say – as if art wanted to take revenge on the first part of the book!” The letter shows Marcuse as a vigorous yet friendly polemicist on aesthetics. (DK)

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<sup>1</sup>*Translator's note:* Apparently *Literatur und Interesse: Eine politische Ästhetik mit zwei Beispielen aus der englischen Literatur* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 1977).

that art does something vastly different, and even the opposite; it makes us aware of really existing needs and indeed *sharpens* them. That it necessarily also gives rise to enjoyment and satisfaction has nothing to do with the ideological function of art: catharsis is a quality of the aesthetic form and an aspect of the autonomy of art that endures under all social conditions.

In art and literature internal and inalterable interconnections (to borrow the terms of Bahro)<sup>2</sup> bind compensatory and emancipatory interests. With you the latter are given too short shrift. As a result: you conceive of the relationship between literature and domination as far too unmediated (undialectical!). Art neither stabilizes domination nor causes domination to convulse (how could it!), yet it illumines domination in its entire depth-dimension. Thus art speaks for the victims, the subjugated, and against that which the status quo does to people (and has always done to people). Neither does art represent the interests of the rulers – unless one believes that the reading of novels and poems will distract from practice, damage the revolution! Is the objectionable collapse of the honorable state of matrimony in the *Wahlverwandschaften*<sup>3</sup> in the interest of those who rule? Do Balzac's scenes stem from finance capital? Tolstoy's apotheosis of "the people"?

You write that literature makes class antagonisms into general human needs – an aspect of the diversionary and compensatory tendencies of literature. But it is exactly here, in the "generalization" of need, that art speaks its truth. Because there is something universally human which is not "false" (Marx's concept of man elevated this universally human quality as species being). There really is a whole dimension of humanity and nature that preserves itself "underneath" all class conflicts and class struggles. I have described this (much abbreviated and insufficiently nuanced) as the dimension of Eros and Thanatos. This is art's native land.

You say that art does not present the truth about experiential reality. But this is just what it does – although in a different medium than theory. It does so inasmuch as it (among other things) "overwrites" the status quo "with theory": with concrete theory, i.e. real possibility, necessity. Because art is not practice and cannot be, it can do it only as ideology that reveals experiential reality. You say: art came about because we did not want utopia – because of interests. Yes, but I would say: because a utopia-that-is-not-one is not what we were interested in.

And then comes, in the last part of your book, your theory of the fine arts, and there quite a different atmosphere prevails. The emancipatory interests

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2 Translator's note: Rudolf Bahro, *Die Alternative: Zur Kritik des real existierenden Sozialismus* (Frankfurt a. M.: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1977). Marcuse discussed Bahro's politics and art in "Protosocialism and Late Capitalism: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis Based on Bahro's Analysis," *International Journal of Politics* 10, 2–3 (1978).

3 Translator's note: Goethe's 1809 novel about the problem of "elective affinities," sexual chemistry, extramarital affairs, and reconciliation.



of art have their say – as if art wanted to take revenge on the first part of the book! It is here that I can enthusiastically applaud! Naturally these remarks cannot replace a discussion. How fine it would be if we could have one soon. You should not have given up your plan to come to California. There is the possibility that we might travel to the Federal Republic in summer, but you should plan in any event to visit here.

# XI

## LYRIC POETRY AFTER AUSCHWITZ\*

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*Translated by Russell Berman*

The question whether after Auschwitz, poetry is still possible can perhaps be answered: yes, if it re-presents, in uncompromising estrangement, the horror that was – and still is. Can the same be said about prose? Prose is much more committed to reality than poetry, consequently estrangement is much harder to achieve – estrangement which still is communicable, “makes sense.” It has been achieved: Kafka, Beckett, Peter Weiss (in *Asthetik des Widerstands*).<sup>1</sup>

What is involved is more than the “tragic experience” of the world of death and destruction, cruelty and injustice. The tragic experience of suffering is also the vision of its mitigation: Fate or the Gods, or Reason may still prevail (even the Greek tragedy has its negation in the ensuing Satyr-play).

\* *Editor's note:*

An untitled text we are titling “Lyric Poetry after Auschwitz” was found in the Marcuse archive. It consists of four pages in English, followed by eleven pages in German, some fragmentary, and two rather fragmentary pages in English. It is not clear what the origins of this article are, what Marcuse intended it for, and why he wrote first in English, then in German, reverting in the final pages to English. It is found in the Herbert Marcuse archive under the number 560.00 with the description “Entwurf La Jolla, 1978.” A German version of the text with the title “Lyrik nach Auschwitz” was published in Peter-Erwin Jansen’s edited edition *Kunst und Befreiung* (Lüneburg: zu Klampen, 2000), pp. 157–66. We are following Jansen’s suggested title translated into English and Russell Berman has translated the German passages. (DK)

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1 *Editor's Note:* Peter Weiss, *Asthetik des Widerstands*, appeared in German in a three-volume edition in 1975, 1978, and 1981; an English translation by Joachim Neugroschel with an introduction by Fredric Jameson has appeared, *The Aesthetic of Resistance*, Volume 1 (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2005). (DK)

But Auschwitz is the ultimate, is the refutation of Fate, the Gods, Reason; is the demonstration of total human freedom: the freedom to order to organize, to perform, the slaughter. That human freedom can be exercised with equal efficiency to prevent the slaughter, history still has to prove.

The Ultimate cannot be re-presented, cannot become “literature” without mitigating the horror. This is the guilt of the aesthetic form which is essential to art: sublimation. And the Anti-form, the negation of form, remains literature while the slaughter continues.

How can the immediacy be attained which undoes or suspends the sublimation without ceasing to be literature? For it is the immediacy that has to be caught here – as the starting point of all mediations (perhaps, as the ultimate reality, it defies all mediations). This immediacy is in the cry, the despair, the resistance of the victims. And it is preserved only in *memory*. To preserve and develop the memory of those who did not have a chance (and of the many millions who have no chance) is the legitimation of literature after Auschwitz.

Memory is a potential of (human) *subjectivity*. The turn toward subjectivity happens in a specific political, historical context: the continued power of those who were responsible or co-responsible for Auschwitz, and the apparently continued impotence of the Left. The rediscovery of the subject, and of subjective responsibility could at last be the negation of that degenerate historical materialism which shies away from the question of subjective responsibility by stipulating the objective responsibility of capital, labor, class, production process, etc. – the human subject disappears behind these relationships reified into thing-like entities moving under their own power. But if “the conditions” are responsible, what about the human subjects who make and who suffer the conditions? They are the ones who change them: literature is an emancipatory process *in* the human subjects before it becomes an objective process of changing institutions and economic-political conditions. And this process involves the entire mental structure: consciousness and the unconscious, intellect and emotions, drives striving for objectification.

It is nonsense to say we’re all responsible for Auschwitz, but we are responsible for preserving the memory. We? Those who know what happened, that it [is] still happening in many areas of the globe, and that there is no historical law which would perpetuate the Ultimate. Why should we refuse to live with the horror? Because there are, in spite of the sages of Marxist orthodoxy, not only men and women who are members of their class, who are existing in class relationships, who are shaped by the mode of production, etc. – there are also men and women who are the *human beings* in and against these conditions. They are supposed to be liberated and to fight for their liberation – not a *class*, not a bureaucracy. And they are those who have to organize (themselves).

Emancipation from the given conditions of life (which in the class society are necessarily repressive), transcendence beyond them toward more free-

dom, joy, tranquility are the drives which constitute subjectivity. This means that subjectivity is “in itself” (*an sich*) “political.” At least since Aristotle’s definition of man as *logos echon*, the Western tradition has restricted subjectivity to its rational features, and with Descartes, concentrated it in the Ego. In the last analysis a solitary Ego in a world of things, which has great trouble in getting together with other Egos, [DK: makes it difficult] to understand intersubjectivity.<sup>2</sup> Hegel connects this conception in comprehending the subject as spirit, objectifying itself in nature and society. And phenomenology sees in the transcendence of the Ego the very essence of the subject as consciousness: enclosed in the domain of thought.<sup>3</sup> But the transcendence of (“pure”) consciousness is only the abstract, purified form of a *political* process in the individuals, in which the individual introjects, and confronts his and her society.

The turn to subjectivity as emancipation is never a turn to the Ego as the center of a private sphere or as “unique.” Rather, the Ego always only appears as a particular manifestation of the general, which does not merely constitute its exterior but its interior as well. This general (the “context” of the Ego, which is inseparable from it) is the social, which in turn is rooted in biology. It is the Freudian unity of Ego, Superego, and Id, which only [together – RB] constitute the individual. The Superego and a “part” of the Ego are the representative of social conditions and institutions. The general penetrates the Ego in both poles of the psyche: (1) in the Superego as society; (2) in the Id as the various realizations of the primary instincts: Eros and Thanatos (life instinct and death instinct). Subjectivity is therefore generality, and the recourse to a private sphere is at best an abstraction. This abstraction is not only a matter of thought but also of behavior. It takes on a social function. It was always ambivalent in capitalism: a necessary sphere of protection against dehumanization and the deindividualization of life in everyday relations – but also powerlessness, unable to prevent the intrusion of exchange relations into the private sphere.

Today the power of exchange relations over the private sphere is reaching completion: the identification of the individual with the roles that it must play in society. For example: the liberalization of sexual morality. This subjugates the private sphere to exchange relations. It tends to turn the other person into an exchangeable object – repressive desublimation. A genuine liberation of the sexual sphere is incompatible with the repressive society. It would [instead – RB] require a sublimation of sexual relations to eroticism

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2 *Editor’s Note:* Marcuse’s point seems to be here that the model of a solitary Ego makes it difficult to comprehend intersubjectivity, a defect of modern philosophy that Marcuse believes is overcome in Hegel. (DK)

3 *Editor’s Note:* Marcuse is referring here to the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and perhaps the early work of Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991), which lays out an interpretation and critique of Husserl. (DK)

and their “broadening” into a common life-world, autonomy as solidarity – community as *destiny*. When great literature elevates sexuality to Eros, this transformation is not only that sublimation characteristic of all art but also the rebellion against the limitation of the life instincts in society.

Today system-conformist, repressive desublimation is becoming totalitarian. In multiple forms, it generates a *captive audience*, which is condemned to see, hear, and feel the manifestations of immediacy. In literature, desublimation appears in the discarding of *form*. Aesthetic form demands that the general be preserved in the particular of a work, as a binding testimony to truth. This essential quality of the aesthetic is by no means only the imperative of a specific historical style but rather a matter of the transhistorical power of art to uncover dimensions of man and nature which have been buried or leveled. When this dimension is absent, the writing remains solely a private matter, the publication of which has the sole rationale of private therapy.

It seems to offer an escape from the horror and impotence of the individual in society. Yet the flight into immediacy, encountering the Ego, also encounters the same society, which has made it an Ego. Society appears in a work indirectly, not as what it is, but rather as the *context*, in which the word is written. In the regression to the immediate Ego, this context is reduced, both in quantity and quality, to the experiential sphere of the Ego. The external is centered on the internal: form does not depend on what happens but on how the Ego experiences events. This was still possible in the classical epistolary novel (*Werther!*): but subjectivity as the basis of aesthetic form has become questionable today. Poetry and reality make this development evident in the extreme case: Werther’s suicide was still a challenge to society, while Jean Améry’s was a matter of despair, for which there was no more tomorrow.

If literature should nonetheless maintain its particular dimension of truth and represent the breach between dominant consciousness and the unconscious, then its subject can only appear as a *victim* of existing society, an existence that embodies resistance and hope. The author registers what is done to the subject. This labor is not a matter of the private Ego and its immediate experiences; instead the Ego “opens itself” to the general and to reality. And reality, measured at the extreme, is Auschwitz – as reality and possibility. But then it is not representable – neither in realism nor in formalism. For image and world already conjure up the unsayable and the unimaginable.

This consciousness motivates the struggle of the avant-garde against form and against the “work.” But the production of non-works dispenses with the inherent contents and the truth of form. Such non-works therefore frequently have a playful, uncommitted and artificial character (against Adorno!): they are exactly what they say they want to oppose: abstract. They lack substance: what makes them literature are words and their ordering – in other words, style, again exactly what they do not want to be (*parallel*: analytic philosophy).

Perhaps the possible presence of Auschwitz can be suggested in literature only negatively: the author must forbid himself from writing or describing trivialities – and such trivialities include some things he might think, do or not do. He cannot sing about parts of his body and their activities – after what Auschwitz has done to the body. He cannot describe his own love life, or those of others, without inviting the question as to how such love can still be possible, and without eliciting hate for whoever renders this love questionable. Nor can he sprinkle poverty and labor strife as “episodes” in his narrative. Given the desperation they entail, any such treatment would be untrue.

Yet a literature respecting such taboos would not be without hope. The hopelessness of those who struggle is reflected in the power of the author to communicate through the description of horror some of the resistance to reality today. But aesthetic form refuses an immediate representation of resistance and of the forces, always alive within it and able to survive all defeats: the will to live – and the need to destroy whatever suppresses this will.

The taboos just mentioned are not brought extrinsically to literature. They are based in the *mimesis* function of literature: to re-present reality in the light of that negativity that preserves hope. Auschwitz cannot be excluded from this thinking or dismissed. Nor can it be represented without sublimating the unsublimable through formal construction. It can only be present in the inability of humans to speak with each other without roles, and to love and to hate without anxiety and without fear of happiness. This inability must appear as the general in the particular, the destiny of reality – not as personal bad luck, misfortune, incapacity or psychological deficit.

Only the sublimation of personal experience can insert it into the dimension in which the reality appears as the general in the particular. The immediate cannot be separated from the particular individuality; everything else is external. Horror, as personalized, becomes a private event, which, however, because it is literature, needs to be published. Indeed it is published and sold because only such looking away from the real generality, from the external reality, can provide a good conscience to existing conditions. Reading what they do in bed and how still provides unspoiled pleasure.

It appears that literature after Auschwitz may still be possible, indeed even necessary, but it can no longer provide pleasure, at least not aesthetic enjoyment (but certainly pornographic enjoyment). This does not mean that [all – RB] literature which does not provide enjoyment is therefore authentic. The pitiful epigones of the dadaists and surrealists provide no aesthetic enjoyment, nor do they want to, without invoking the horror of reality. The destruction of form, the rejection of the (“organic”) work reflect only in a very limited way the real destruction underway in the world: in a bad abstraction, with no vision of hope.

Desublimated literature remains literature, i.e., it elicits the enjoyment which is inherent in aesthetic form. The classical (organic) form (the “work”)

demands the transformation of the object, the content. In desublimated literature, the content is no longer transformed by form, nor internalized by form. Form becomes independent and reduced to *style*. Style can be extremely accomplished and mastered in all tiers of language, from everyday jargon, dialect, and administrative German all the way to the highest high language. Style “beautifies” the description of a sex act as well as a murder, the appearance of Hitler as well as Lenin . . .

The power of style indicates the poverty, indeed the irrelevance of the content. It is not formed by style: it remains rather in its immediacy: episodes from a whole, that is imperceptible. Or that is only a personal context for a hero, without transcendence and without the real sublimation that constitutes the general. Where reality beyond the private context constitutes the work (for example, the early Soviet state in the “Stories from Production”), reality renounces the beauty of style. People speak in perfect verses, but they versify a doctrine that has already congealed into ideology as well as a horrible reality, that robs the verse of any seriousness. For example: the piece becomes a hymn to the machine that requires human sacrifice. Reification of communism.

There is evidently a reality that resists form-giving, and which therefore cannot become an object of literature, without being falsified and reduced – and this is precisely the reality which should be remembered in literature. This would mean that there is an internal border in literature: not every material would be appropriate for literature or form. Where is the legitimation of this imperative?

Just as literature has its internal truth, so too does it have an internal morality. That critical transcendence which is essential to literature ties literature both to the harm that oppression does to humans and to the memory of that past and to what can return. But the reality of Auschwitz cannot be transcended, it is a *point of no return*. Literature can remind us of it only through breaks and evasions: in the representation of people and conditions that led to Auschwitz and the desperate struggle against them. Representation remains obligated to the transformational mimesis: the brutal facts are subjugated to form-giving; reportage and documentary become raw material for formation through creative love (the principle of hope) and creative hate (the principle of resistance). The two principles of formation constitute an (antagonistic) unity, which is the political potential of art.

This principle forbids the trivializing and privatizing of literature. It does not permit centering the work on eating or sexuality . . . Precisely the political potential of art demands the formation of a *general* in the particular, that surpasses the “natural sphere.”<sup>4</sup>

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4 *Editor's Note:* Marcuse inserts “*Vernunft?*” (reason) in a handwritten note at the side of the margin at this point and the rest of the text is in English, is somewhat

But art abdicates not only before the extreme horror but also before the extreme situation as such. A telling example is the incompatibility between art and the depiction of the extreme manifestations of the body (such as fucking, masturbating, vomiting, defecating, etc.). This taboo is not asserted in terms of a more or less puritanical and petty bourgeois morality, but in terms of the very quality of the aesthetic form, its essential beauty. The avant-garde rejection in its liberty to violate and shock petty bourgeois prejudice and repression – it achieves only the attraction of pornography. Not that these extreme situations are disgusting or perversions or ugly (the opposite may be the case), but they are turned into what they are *not*: “literature,” and the author plays the role of the voyeur.

According to Lessing, the extreme horror lies outside of the domain of the visual arts because its representation violates the law of Beauty to which art is subject. This law is also binding for literature, but there the extreme horror is within the power of production *in a mediated form*, that is, if it appears only as transitory in the context of the work, as a moment “in the story” – *aufgehoben* in the whole. Only by virtue of its transitoriness does the representation of the extreme horror allow the enjoyment of the work, the feeling of pleasure in its reception.

In the case of Auschwitz, no such aesthetic sublimation seems imaginable. The whole in the context of which Auschwitz could appear as transitory is itself one of horror, and the availability of ever more efficient scientific-technological killing suggests the possibility of repetition rather than passing.

If it is the historical imperative of survival that the memory of Auschwitz must be preserved in art, and that art exists necessarily under the law of Beauty, then we must admit the idea of an art that cannot be and should not be “enjoyed” and yet appeals to the consciousness of unconscious of the recipient. Release of “*mauvaise* (bad) conscience”? The drive to know the things which are not revealed in scientific as well as in everyday thought and speech and which are yet

[*Editor's Note:* The manuscript breaks off at this point.]

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fragmentary, and breaks off before it is concluded. We do not know why Marcuse switched from English to German and then back to English in constructing this text.



# XII

## ON THE AESTHETIC DIMENSION

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### A Conversation between Herbert Marcuse and Larry Hartwick\*

*Hartwick:* I'd like to begin with a paraphrase of a critical response that is being made to *The Aesthetic Dimension*, which is that Marcuse has finally shown himself not to be a Marxist.

*Marcuse:* This criticism, of course, I knew beforehand. And the book was written intentionally in a provocative way to reply exactly to that accusation. In the first place, I don't care what label is being given me; nothing could be of less interest to me. Secondly, I quote old man Marx himself, who said, "*Moi je ne suis pas Marxiste.*" In English: "I myself am not a Marxist." So, if you look at many of the people who today call themselves Marxists, I don't mind if I don't belong to the same group and don't have the same label.

To be a little more serious about it, I do claim to be a Marxist. I do believe that his analysis of the capitalist society and the basic mechanisms which keep it going are still, today, more valid than ever before. As you may know, there is no such thing as a theory of socialism in Marx; there are only a few remarks. He never elaborated them because he never claimed to be a prophet, and it would make no sense to give a prescription for the behavior of people in a free society which does not yet exist. That's a contradiction in itself.

\* *Editor's note:*

"On the Aesthetic Dimension," 1978 interview; 12 pages, *Contemporary Literature*, XXII, 4 (Fall 1981), pp. 416–24. This interview with Larry Hartwick helps elucidate Marcuse's views on art and politics and the ways that his reflections on the aesthetic dimension relate to classical Marxism and his own theoretical positions. (DK)

Now I did not claim in my little book that art is free from social determination, but I do deny that the social determinants affect the very *substance* of the work. One can formulate that by saying that the social determinants pertain to the style of the work but not to its substance or quality. Let's take an example—*Hamlet*, or, for that matter, any other of Shakespeare's plays. How much can you learn from these plays about the real workings of the society in which Shakespeare lived? I would say absolutely nothing. Nor is *Hamlet* in any way adequately understood by pointing to the social determinants. "To be or not to be" transcends any kind of social determination. And it will prove true, in different forms, for every and any kind of society.

I have at the beginning of *The Aesthetic Dimension* outlined what social determination of art I think does indeed prevail: it is, essentially, the material, the tradition, the historical horizon under which the writer, the artist, has to work. He cannot ignore it. He lives in a continuum of tradition even when he breaks it. This social determination affects any work of art. But, as I said, it does not constitute its substance.

Q. To be more specific about this criticism of *The Aesthetic Dimension*, it is that you have made the aesthetic a transcendental category.

A. That is not the case, because I think I use the term transhistorical. Transhistorical means transcending every and any *particular* stage of the historical process, but not transcending the historical process as a whole. That should be evident, because we cannot think of anything under the sun that could transcend the historical process as a whole. Everything is in history, even nature.

Q. Historically, would you say that the aesthetic appears as a dimension as a result or consequence of the Enlightenment, or what marks for Hegel the emergence of self-consciousness? Secondly, would you say that as capitalism ceases to be a progressive force in history that the aesthetic dimension becomes less accessible because late capitalism cannot tolerate its critical potential . . .

A. May I interrupt you: it cannot "tolerate"? I think we have seen today that there seems to be hardly anything that capitalist society cannot tolerate. It incorporated and accepted the most radical and avant-garde forms of art and literature. You can buy them in the drug store. But I think that this does not affect or detract from the quality and truth of these "accepted" works of art. Let's take an example from the visual arts: a statue by Barlach, or the artistic value and truth of a statue by Rodin. It is in no way reduced or falsified if you put that statue, as happens today, in the lobby of a bank or in the lobby of the offices of a big corporation. What has changed is the receptivity of the consumer, not the work of art itself. James Joyce remains James Joyce; whether you can buy him at the drug store makes no difference. A Beethoven quartet remains what it is even if it's played over the radio while you are doing the dishes.

Q. Doesn't that last example speak more of the historically affirmative nature of art that survives today as opposed to the negative: that this society is still able to appreciate a certain kind of labor that is not being reproduced by this society?

A. You say this society: as a whole? Or only certain groups? The majority of the population has always been excluded from this relation to art, due to the separation between intellectual and material production to which art necessarily succumbs. You said that it would be characteristic of the affirmative function of art. I would say this is correct, but art by itself cannot under any circumstances change the social condition. And that is the necessary and essential powerlessness of art, that it cannot have an effective, direct impact on the praxis of change. I don't know of any case in which you could say that art has changed the established society. Art can prepare such change. Art can contribute to it only via several negations and mediations, the most important being the change of consciousness and, especially, the change of perception. I think we can say that after the impressionists, after Cézanne especially, we see differently than we saw before. That you can say; further you cannot go.

Q. You speak of the bifurcation of mental and material labor, and suggest that art is able to preserve in its autonomy, in its separation from material production, a certain promise of liberation. With the presence of "surplus repression" in advanced capitalism, is it possible that art's autonomy can actually serve advanced capitalism insofar as the labor we see in art, if not unalienated, is maintained as separate, as special, as "other" from material production? To go back to the *Gründrisse*, Marx makes a very strong case for the ontological dimension of labor—that it not be seen simply as sacrifice, but that labor itself is a unifying principle of human life.

A. What kind of labor? The labor on the assembly line? Marx certainly didn't mean that. He meant labor in a socialist society, but not in a capitalist society. He saw the possibility of reducing alienated labor already in capitalism, namely as a consequence of technical progress or, as we would say today, increasing automation, mechanization, computerization, whatever you want to call it. That, however, is only the anticipation, or the first traces, of the liberation of the human being from full-time alienated labor—I say *full-time* alienation because alienated labor as such can never be abrogated. There will always have to be persons who adjust machines, who read gauges or whatever it is. So, alienated labor, and Marx said this, can never be entirely abrogated. But it can be reduced quantitatively and qualitatively so that it's no longer a full-time occupation to which the individual is bound during his or her entire personal and social life.

Q. But isn't it only in the realm of art, in its aesthetic dimension, that we are given the promise of a labor that is not simply the accommodation of oneself to a gauge or a machine?

A. Yes. And that is one of the interconnections and relations between art and, let's say, critical theory or revolutionary theory.

Q. Then the function of art is always one of mediation?

A. Yes. A mediation, but also more than that because art can represent the image of the human condition as it is rooted above and beyond the social sphere, which was my main point in relating art to Eros; art represents conflicts, hopes, and sufferings which cannot in any way be settled by the class struggle. We can again say in a transhistorical sense that there are permanent and eternal conflicts in the human condition, in the relation between human beings and between man and nature which transcend the entire sphere of the class struggle. Erotic conflicts and primary aggression can change their humiliating and destructive form in a socialist society, but they will continue to exist.

Q. Does your having written *The Aesthetic Dimension* imply that the philosopher has a primary critical function that the artist may or may not have?

A. Yes. Let me give you an example. The Marxist theory can reveal and represent the inner mechanisms and dynamics of capitalist society, especially in the economic sphere. Art cannot do this. The demand made by Brecht, for example, that art should represent the totality of the production relations in a given society is in my view absolutely contradictory to the potentiality of art. It cannot; nor can art represent the extreme horror in the prevailing reality. We have here a good example, namely, the Holocaust.

Q. Since we have come to the Holocaust, in your book you almost seem to beg the question—it struck me as almost a *Verneinung* [Negation]—when you bring in Leni Riefenstahl parenthetically as having filmed the beauty of a fascist feast. Is it possible to find art in a fascist form?

A. Yes—as exiled art and hidden art—but in no other way. I have asked this question myself many times, also, in the form: is there such a thing as fascist art? And I think I would like to deny it, but I must confess that one has probably to reformulate the question, because you cannot deny that there is literature produced by writers with strong proto-fascist features, at least utterly reactionary ones—the case of Dostoevsky, the case of Yeats. And there are more, but whenever I want to think of them I repress their names . . . So, it is possible that a distinct reactionary and a repressive authoritarian can produce authentic literature. The question is: under what historical conditions?

Q. But there was a certain manipulation of conceptions of beauty in Nazi Germany, which may have been simply a devaluation of the aesthetic handed to it, of the tradition of art before it. But it did try to take the idea of an aesthetic form and call that art and in the process deny the Eros principle which underlies your own definition of the aesthetic.

A. It is a realism that conceals, that hides what reality actually is. And that, of course, is opposed to the very essence of art. Art should reveal and not conceal.

Q. Can you speak, then, of a successful art, an art that presents the problem properly? In Yeats, for instance, I never feel that he is presenting the

problem correctly because in his poetry he is always invoking an archaic class structure which somehow denies the reality of his moment.

A. He denies the reality, but I would say in spite of everything he also preserves the images of a very different reality. I am not a Yeats expert. As a layman, this is my feeling when I read him.

Q. To what extent, then, would you deny, to go to the other extreme, art in its radical forms in our society?

A. Art in its radical forms—the present day avant-garde, for example: I would say yes, it is art. But the question is to what extent aesthetic criteria can be applied to some manifestations of avant-garde art. I had a long discussion on that here with the Visual Arts department two or three years ago. There was an exhibit that simply reproduced a garage sale. That wouldn't do because it just isn't art; it's a repetition of the given reality. It does not have the transcendence and dissociation which in my view are essential for art.

Q. In general, that seems very similar to Lukács, who grants his aesthetic approval to Balzac and denies it to a certain extent to Flaubert and to Zola for reasons not too unlike yours.

A. I would say there is indeed a difference in quality between the *Comédie Humaine* and the *Rougon-Macquart*. It is not so obvious in Flaubert.

Q. After 1848, which should have marked the passing of capitalism, art entered a decadent subject-object split, according to Lukács, which became increasingly irreconcilable, as evidenced, for instance, in Flaubert and Zola. My question is whether avant-garde art today can be seen as having finally assumed in some instances a more tactical position in its radical form, having finally realized that because Duchamps could be recuperated in a museum and could be given a monetary value, that it is the function of radical art to deny late capitalism the aesthetic completely?

A. Art continues in late capitalism. It might be the case that it is co-opted, but again that would mean something in terms of the recipient of art but not to the work of art itself. The work of art itself doesn't change. And by the way, decadent, you know, is a favorite fascist and Nazi slogan and we should be very, very careful in using it. Is Rimbaud decadent? Of course he's decadent, but at the same time he's a great poet. So was Baudelaire. And in this respect Lukács is certainly not a guide.

Q. What I want to ask now is related to the subject-object split, to the Oedipus complex and the weakening of the function of the father in society today. This, if I understand correctly, leads to an imbalance in the development of the individual, a weakening of the ego because the function of the father has been displaced to the state . . .

A. To the state, to the media, to peer groups, to the school, whatever it is. Yes.

Q. Does that displacement imply that the artist today has greater difficulty invoking the aesthetic because the repression is greater?

A. What you say refers to the increasingly total character of the management and steering of individuals, of their consciousness and unconscious.

The consequence for art would be that the estrangement factor would be stronger than it was before. The contradiction of reality in art must be more radical than it could have been before—because there is more to contradict, to transcend. If and when practically all dimensions of human existence are socially managed, then, obviously, art, in order to be able to communicate its proper truths, must be able to break this totalization in consciousness and perception and to intensify the estrangement. Here is a difficulty: Adorno, as you may know, thought that the more repressive corporate capitalism is, the more alienated, the more estranged art must be and will be. But if this estrangement goes so far that the work of art no longer communicates, then any link with the reality is lost in the negation of reality; it becomes an abstract negation.

Q. But, in a way, can't this extreme form of art be seen as the "Great Refusal" without the content?

A. Yes, but the Great Refusal must in one way or another be communicable, understandable. If you break off the last remnant of communication, you have art in a total vacuum.

Q. I don't want to say that all art tends toward what Adorno is describing as its extreme form. But I am asking if that form today can serve as a negative focal point precisely because of a lack of content, its abstract negation?

A. I don't know. Looking at some of these super-supra avantgardistic works, the refusal is lost; it's an intellectual game, intellectual masturbation, and no more. I may be wrong. I may not have enough affinity with this kind of art, but that is my experience. It begins already with the later Picasso works; for me, at least, it is difficult to take them as more than intellectual or technical games.

Q. Could you characterize that as art trying to define itself only in terms of art and not in terms of its situation in the established reality?

A. Yes, but I would say that by defining itself only and solely in terms of art, art also expresses its internal and essential relation to reality. And only in this form—definition in its own terms—can art carry the indictment and the negation.

Q. I feel the need to bring the idea of audience into the aesthetic dimension. I can see what you are saying about a Rodin sculpture or a play by Shakespeare not being changed through time; it still is that work, but it seems to me that our relationship to art does change. Our reading of Shakespeare is different from that of the audience to which he originally spoke because our linguistic and social reality is different. The aesthetic we create is not the aesthetic of his audience, of his creative process.

A. Well, I think we know the audience of Shakespeare very well. And it seems to me, as far as I can see, that the majority of the audience was mostly interested in the murders and battles, or whatever, and didn't give a damn about the underlying philosophy. Except for "elitist" groups. Our reading of Shakespeare is, of course, different from that of his average audience, but

there remains a core of identity, affinity grounded in the transhistorical substance of his work.

Q. To bring this back to contemporary art, you speak of the totalization of perception in the established reality as perhaps involving an idea of “mass,” that we no longer genuinely speak of individuals, we speak of a mass, of a consumer society in which identity is merged into a single function. Do you therefore see some kind of relationship between the aesthetic form and an idea of audience as an aesthetic category?

A. I think it’s a truism to say that without an audience you don’t have art. But the question is whether you can define the audience. Theoretically, the audience is anonymous. And art written for one particular and definite audience? Take, for instance, the degree to which Mozart composed for the nobility of his time. That was composition with respect to a very definite audience. But it was also more; it was also the negation of this relationship. There is a dimension in Mozart’s music that has nothing to do with a specific audience; it is the depth dimension of his music which transcends the particular social determination: the universal appears in the particular!

Q. But what of art like that of Beckett, which can’t seem to formulate a positive vision of the future?

A. I think it is precisely the total absence of all false hopes that brings out the depth of the necessary change. It has been said that reality is only adequately represented in its most extreme forms. In its normal forms, it doesn’t reveal what it actually is. You have, if you want to really judge a repressive society, to go to the mental institutions, the insane asylums, the prisons, whatever are the extreme manifestations. Can the same be said with respect to art?

# XIII

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART AND POLITICS \*

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### A Dialogue between Richard Kearney and Herbert Marcuse \*

*Kearney:* As a Marxist thinker of international renown and inspirational mentor of student revolutions in both the United States and Europe in the sixties, you have puzzled many by the turn to primarily aesthetic questions in your recent works. How would you wish to explain or justify the turn?

*Marcuse:* It seems to have become quite evident that the advanced industrial countries have long since reached the stage of wealth and productivity which Marx projected for the construction of a socialist society. Consequently, a quantitative increase in material productivity is now seen to be insufficient in itself, and a qualitative change in society as a whole is seen to be necessary. Such a qualitative change presupposes, of course, new and unalienating conditions of labour, distribution and living, but that *alone* is not enough. The qualitative change necessary to build a truly socialist society, something we haven't yet seen, depends on other values – not so much economic (quantitative) as aesthetic (qualitative) in character. This change in turn requires more than just a gratification of needs; it requires, in addition, a change in the nature of these needs

\* *Editor's note:*

Marcuse's interview with Richard Kearney titled "The Philosophy of Art and Politics" is taken from Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers. The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 73–87. Kearney's probing questions help clarify Marcuse's basic positions on aesthetics, and reveal strengths and limitations of his final views on art and politics.  
(DK)



themselves. This is why the Marxian revolution in our age must look to art also, if it is to succeed.

*Kearney:* If art, then, is to play such a central role in the revolutionary transition to a new society, why didn't Marx himself say that?

*Marcuse:* Marx did not say that, because Marx lived over a hundred years ago and so did not write in an age when, as I have just maintained, the problems of the material culture could in fact be resolved by the establishment of genuinely socialist institutions and relationships. Consequently, he did not fully realize that a purely economic resolution of the problem can never be enough, and so lacked the insight that a twentieth-century revolution would require a different type of human being and that such a revolution would have to aim at, and, if successful, implement, an entirely new set of personal and sexual relationships, a new morality, a new sensibility and a total reconstruction of the environment. These are, to a great extent, aesthetic values (aesthetic to be understood in the larger sense of our sensory and imaginative culture which I outlined in *Eros and Civilization*, following Kant and Schiller), and that is why I think that one viewing the possibility of struggle and change in our time recognizes the decisive role which art must play.

*Kearney:* You spoke there, rather dangerously it seems to me, about the possible necessity of 'implementing' these new personal relationships, etc., which would characterize the qualitatively new society. How can art or culture be instrumental in this implementation without becoming the tool of some dictatorial elite (which would see it as its role to determine what should be 'implemented') and without, consequently, degenerating into propaganda?

*Marcuse:* Art can never and never should become *directly* and immediately a factor of political praxis. It can only have effect *indirectly*, by its impact on the consciousness and on the subconsciousness of human beings.

*Kearney:* You are saying therefore that art must always maintain a critical and *negative* detachment from the realm of everyday political practice?

*Marcuse:* Yes, I would claim that all authentic art is *negative*, in the sense that it refuses to obey the established reality, its language, its order, its conventions and its images. As such, it can be negative in two ways: *either* in so far as it serves to give asylum or refuge to defamed humanity and thus preserves in another form an alternative to the 'affirmed' reality of the establishment; *or* in so far as it serves to negate this 'affirmed' reality by denouncing both it and the defamers of humanity who have affirmed it in the first place.

*Kearney:* Is it not true, however, that in many of your writings (I think particularly of *Essay on Liberation* and *Eros and Civilization*) you suggest that art can play a more directly political and indeed *positive* role, by helping to point the way to a socialist utopia?

*Marcuse:* Art can give you the 'images' of a freer society and of more human relationships but beyond that it cannot go. In this sense, the difference

between aesthetic and political theory remains unbridgeable: art can say what it wants to say only in terms of the complete and formal fate of individuals in their struggle with their society in the medium of *sensibility*; its images are felt and imagined rather than intellectually formulated or propounded, whereas political theory is necessarily *conceptual*.

*Kearney*: How then would you view the role of reason in art – I refer not to ‘*Verstand*’ (reason in the narrow enlightenment sense of strictly logical, mathematical and empirico-metric calculation) but to the larger Kantian and Hegelian concept of ‘*Vernunft*’ (reason in the larger sense, which is the critical and regulative faculty of man) concerned primarily with those realms of human perception, intuition, evaluation and ethical deliberation so central, it would seem, to the concerns of any cultural aesthetic?

*Marcuse*: I believe that you cannot have the liberation of human sensitivity and sensibility without a corresponding liberation of the rational faculty (*Vernunft*) of man. Any liberation effected by art signifies, therefore, a liberation of both the senses and reason from their present servitude.

*Kearney*: Would you be opposed then to the emotionally euphoric and Dionysian character of much of contemporary popular culture – rock music, for example?

*Marcuse*: I am wary of all exhibitions of free-wheeling emotionalism and as I explained in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, I think that both the ‘living’ theatre movement (the attempt to bring theatre out into the street and make it ‘immediate’ by ‘tuning in’ to the language and sentiments of the working class) and the ‘rock’ cult are prone to this error. The former, despite its noble struggle, is ultimately self-defeating. It tries to blend the theatre and the revolution, but ends up blending a contrived immediacy with a clever brand of mystical humanism. The latter, the ‘rock-group’ cult, seems open to the danger of a form of commercial totalitarianism which absorbs the individual into an uninhibited mass where the power of a collective unconscious is mobilized but left without any radical or critical awareness. It could, at times, prove a dangerous outburst of irrationalism.

*Kearney*: Accepting the fact, then, that a revolutionary liberation of the senses requires also a liberation of reason, the question still remains as to who is to decide what is rational, what criteria, in turn, are to be deployed in such a decision and, also, who is consequently to endorse and implement this rational liberation? In other words, how do you obviate the unsavoury prospect of a benevolent, ‘rational’ dictator or elite imposing their criteria on the manipulated and ‘irrational’ masses?

*Marcuse*: The aesthetic liberation of the rational and sensible faculties (at present repressed) will have to begin with individuals and small groups, trying, as it were, such an experiment in unalienated living. How it then gradually becomes effective in terms of the society at large and makes for a different construction of social relationships in general, we cannot say. Such premature programming could only lead to yet another example of ideological tyranny.

*Kearney:* Would you then disagree with your former colleague, Walter Benjamin, when he urges that popular culture, and particularly the cinema (which he held enables the critical and receptive attitudes of the public to coincide), be used in a politically committed fashion to aid and abet the socialist revolution?

*Marcuse:* Yes, I would have to disagree with Benjamin there. Any attempt to use art to effect a 'mass' conversion of sensibility and consciousness is inevitably an abuse of its true functions.

*Kearney:* Its true functions being . . . ?

*Marcuse:* Its true functions being (1) to negate our present society, (2) to anticipate the trends of future society, (3) to criticize destructive or alienating trends, and (4) to suggest 'images' of creative and unalienating ones.

*Kearney:* And this fourfold function of *negation, anticipation, critique* and *suggestion* would presumably be aimed at the individual or small group?

*Marcuse:* Yes, that is correct.

*Kearney:* Would you wish to retract your allegiance to the Frankfurt School's Marxist aesthetic as expressed in the following formulation: 'We interpret art as a kind of a code language for processes taking place within society which must be deciphered by means of critical analysis'?

*Marcuse:* Yes, that seems to me to be too reductive. Art is more than a code or puzzle which would 'reflect' the world in terms of a second-order aesthetic structure. Art is not just a mirror. It can never only imitate reality. Photography does that much better. Art has to transform reality so that it appears in the light (1) of what it does to human beings, and (2) of the possible images of freedom and happiness which it might provide for these same human beings; and this is something photography cannot do. Art, therefore, does not just mirror the present, it leads beyond it. It preserves, and thus allows us to remember, values which are no longer to be found in our world; and it points to another possible society in which these values may be realized. Art is a code only to the extent that it acts as a mediated critique of society. But it cannot as such be a direct or immediate indictment of society – that is the work of theory and politics.

*Kearney:* Would you not say that the works of Orwell, Dickens, or the French Surrealists, for example, were directly or immediately an indictment of their society?

*Marcuse:* Well, the Surrealists were never, it seems to me, *directly* political; Orwell was not a great writer; and Dickens, like all great writers, was far more than a political theorist; reading him gives us positive pleasure and thereby ensures that there is a reader for the book in the first place. This is one of the central dilemmas of art conceived as an agent of revolution. Even the most radical art cannot, in its denunciation of the evils of society, dispense with the element of entertainment. That is why Bertolt Brecht always maintained that even the work which most brutally depicts what is going on in the world must also please. And one additional

point to be remembered here is that even when certain works of art *appear* directly social or political in *content*, e.g. Orwell and Dickens, but also Zola, Ibsen, Buchner, Delacroix, Picasso, etc., they are never so in *form*, for the work always remains committed to the structure of art, to the form of the novel, drama, poem and painting, etc. and thereby testifies to a distance from reality.

*Kearney*: What is your opinion then of the notion of a 'proletarian' art?

*Marcuse*: I think it is false for several reasons. Its attempt to transcend the distancing forms of classical and romantic art and to unite art and reality by providing in their stead a 'living art' to 'anti-art' rooted in the actions, slang and spontaneous sensations of the oppressed folk, seems to me to be doomed to failure, as I have argued in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. Although in earlier works I stressed the political potential of the linguistic rebellion of the blacks witnessed in their folk music, dance and particularly language (whose very obscenity I interpreted as a legitimate protest against their misery and repressed cultural tradition), I now believe that such a potential is ultimately ineffective, for it has become standardized and can no longer be identified as the expression of frustrated radicals, but all too often as the futile gratification of aggressiveness which too easily turns against sexuality itself. (For instance, the 'obligatory' verbalization of the genital sphere in 'radical' speech has not been a political threat to the Establishment so much as a debasement of sexuality, e.g. if some radical exclaims, 'Fuck Nixon', he is associating the term for the highest gratification with the highest member of the oppressive Establishment!)

*Kearney*: What is your view of 'living' or 'natural' music which has always been associated with the oppressed classes in the West and particularly with the black culture?

*Marcuse*: Well, it seems to me that here again one finds the same thing occurring. What originally started out as an authentic cry and song of the oppressed black community has since been transformed and commercialized into 'white' rock, which, by means of contrived 'performances', serves as an orgiastic group therapy which removes all the frustrations and inhibitions of the audiences, but only *temporarily* and without any socio-political foundation.

*Kearney*: I take it then that you would not support the idea of an art of the masses, an art devoted to the working-class struggle?

*Marcuse*: No, it seems to me that rather than being a particular code of the struggle of the proletariat or working class, art can transcend any *particular* class interest without eliminating such an interest. It is always concerned with history but history is the history of *all* classes. And it is this generality which accounts for that universal validity and objectivity of art which Marx called the quality of 'prehistory' and which Hegel called the 'continuity of substance' from the beginning of art to the end – the truth which links the modern novel and the medieval epic, the

facts and possibilities of human existence, conflict and reconciliation between man and man, man and nature. A work of art will obviously contain a class content (to the extent to which it reflects the values, situations and sentiments of a feudal, bourgeois or proletarian world view) but it becomes transparent as the condition of the universal dreams of humanity. Authentic art never *merely* acts as a mirror of a class or as an 'automatic', spontaneous outburst of its frustrations and desires. The very 'sensuous immediacy' which art expresses, presupposes, however surreptitiously (and this is something which most of our popular culture has forgotten), a complex, disciplined and formal synthesis of experience according to certain universal principles which alone can lend to the work more than a purely private significance. It is because of this 'universal' dimension of art that some of the greatest political radicals have displayed the most apolitical stances and tastes in art (e.g. the famous sympathizers of the Paris Commune of 1871, or even Marx himself). Many of the apparently *formless* works of modern art (those of Cage, Stockhausen, Beckett or Ginsberg) are in fact highly intellectual, constructivist and *formal*. And indeed this fact hints, I believe, at the passing of anti-art and the return to *form*. It is because of this 'universal' significance of art as form that we may find the meaning of revolution better expressed in Bertolt Brecht's most perfect lyrics than in his explicitly political polemics; or in Bob Dylan's most 'soulful' and deeply personal songs rather than in his propagandist manifestos. Both Brecht and Dylan have one message: to make an end with things as they are. Even in the event of a total absence of political content, their works can invoke, for a vanishing moment, the image of a liberated world and the pain of an alienated one. Thus, the aesthetic dimension assumes a political and revolutionary value, but without becoming the mouthpiece of any particular class interest.

*Kearney:* A certain detachment from the political reality would seem then almost prerequisite for a genuinely revolutionary art, would it not?

*Marcuse:* Yes, art must always remain alienated to some extent and this precludes an identification of art with revolutionary praxis. As I argued in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, art cannot represent the revolution, it can only invoke it in another medium, in an aesthetic structure in which the political content becomes *metapolitical*, governed by the formal necessity of art. And so the goal of all revolution – a world of tranquillity and freedom – can appear in a totally unpolitical medium under the aesthetic laws of beauty and harmony.

*Kearney:* Would it be fair to conclude, therefore, that you reject the various attempts by Lenin, Lukács and other Marxist dialecticians to formulate the possibility of *progressive art* as a weapon of class war?

*Marcuse:* The belief that only a 'proletarian' literature can fulfil the progressive function of art and develop a revolutionary consciousness seems to me a mistaken one in our age. Today the working class shares the same

world view and values as those of a large part of other classes, especially the middle class. The conditions and goals of a revolution against global monopoly capitalism today cannot therefore be adequately articulated in terms of a proletarian revolution; and so if this revolution is to be present in some way as a goal in art, such art could not be typically proletarian. Indeed, it seems to me more than a matter of personal preference that both Lenin and Trotsky were critical of the notion of a 'proletarian culture'. But even if you could argue for a 'proletarian culture', you would still be left asking whether there is such a thing as a proletariat (as Marx described it) in our age. In the United States, for example, one finds that the working people are often apathetic if not totally hostile to socialism, while in Italy and France, strongholds of the Marxist tradition of labour, the workers seem to be ruled by a Communist Party and trade unionism manipulated very often by the USSR and committed to the minimum strategy of compromise or tolerance. In both situations, that is, in the US and in Europe, it would seem that a large part of the working class has become a class of bourgeois society, and their 'proletarian' socialism, if it exists at all, no longer appears as a definitive negation of capitalism. Consequently, the attempt to turn the emotions of the working class into a standard for authentic radical and socialist art is a regressive step and can only result in a superficial adjustment of the established order, and a perpetuation of the prevailing 'atmosphere' of oppression and alienation. For instance, authentic 'black literature' is revolutionary but it is not a 'class' literature as such, and its *particular* content is at the same time a *universal* one. One finds here in the particular situation of an alienated radical minority the most 'universal' of all needs: the need of the individual and his group to exist as *human* beings.

*Kearney:* We seem to have returned again to the notion of 'aesthetic' revolution as something centred around individuals and small groups in its advocacy of and experimentation with unalienated living. Are you in fact suggesting that it might be possible for certain individuals and small groups to live in a non-alienated manner in an alienated world? (I think here in particular of certain dissenting artists, intellectuals, ecologists, anti-nuclear pacifists, or the advocates of alternative modes of co-operative or community existence.)

*Marcuse:* No. One cannot actually *live* in a non-alienated manner in an alienated world. You can *experiment* with it, you can *remember* it; you can in your own little circle try your best to develop it, but beyond that you cannot go.

*Kearney:* Would you agree that it is by means of the aesthetic imagination that one can transcend one's alienated world, in order to 'experiment' with and 'remember' alternative forms of life as you suggest?

*Marcuse:* Yes, that is correct, and imaginative remembrance is particularly important, for it is by remembering the values and desires which, unable over the ages to express themselves in a politically corrupt world, took

refuge in art and thus preserved themselves, that we shall be able to find hints of a direction out of our present alienation.

*Kearney:* This notion of art as hinting at a new direction would seem to me to be a *positive* one; but have you not already on many occasions, and even in this interview, confirmed the view, held by Brecht, Beckett and Kafka, to name but a few, that art must be *negative* ('estranged') and 'alienating' if it is to remain authentic?

*Marcuse:* Yes, indeed, I did and still do support that view. Art must never lose its negative and alienating power, for it is there that its most radical potential lies. To lose this 'negating' power is, in effect, to eliminate the tension between art and reality, and so also the very real distinctions between subject and object, quantity and quality, freedom and servitude, beauty and ugliness, good and evil, future and present, justice and injustice, etc. Such a claim to a final synthesis of these historical oppositions in the here and now would be the materialist version of absolute idealism. It would signal a state of perfect barbarism at the height of civilization. In other words, to do away with these distinctions between value and fact is to deny present reality and forestall our search for another more human one. Indeed, the common negative force of a piece of music by Verdi and Bob Dylan, a piece of writing by Flaubert and Joyce or a painting by Ingres and Picasso is precisely that hint of beauty which acts as refusal of the commodity world and of the performances, attitudes, looks and sounds required by it.

*Kearney:* So the artistic imagination, you would say, can in no way be revolutionary in a 'positive' sense?

*Marcuse:* Art, as we know it, cannot transform reality and cannot, therefore, submit to the actual requirements of the revolution without denying itself. It is only as a negative and alienating power that it can in fact negate, dialectically, the alienation of the political reality. And, as such, as the negation of the negation, to use Hegel's term, it is indeed revolutionary. That is why in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* and elsewhere I described the relation between art and politics as a unity of opposites, an antagonistic unity which must always remain antagonistic.

*Kearney:* In *Essay on Liberation*, you speak at one point about technology being used by the revolutionary in the same way as the painter uses his canvas and brush. Does not this analogy suggest a direct and positive relationship to the socio-political reality?

*Marcuse:* In some limited sense I suppose it does. It is true, I believe, that technology should, ideally, be used creatively and imaginatively to reconstruct nature and the environment.

*Kearney:* But according to what criteria?

*Marcuse:* According to the criterion of beauty.

*Kearney:* But who decides this criterion? Is it universal for all men and women? And if so, in what way does it, as an 'aesthetic' criterion, differ from a theological or ontological system of value?

*Marcuse:* I think that the striving for beauty is simply an essential part of human sensibility.

*Kearney:* But surely, if our world is to undergo a revolutionary reconstruction in the name of and for the sake of beauty, one must be quite sure in advance what this 'beauty' is – whether it is in fact the universal and absolute goal of all human striving, or merely the subjective and particular goal of one revolutionary leader/artist or an elite of revolutionary leaders/artists? If the latter, then how does one deny the charge of totalitarian imposition, manipulation and tyranny?

*Marcuse:* A revolution cannot be waged for the sake of beauty. Beauty is but one criterion which plays a leading role in one element of the revolution, i.e. the restoration and reconstruction of the environment. It cannot be used to 'reconstruct' men without, as you correctly infer, running the risk of totalitarianism. It simply cannot presume to go that far.

*Kearney:* In *Eros and Civilization* it certainly seems, however, as if you are suggesting that 'beauty' is no less than the ultimate end or *telos* of all human struggle; and that this teleological struggle is itself synonymous with Freud's 'meta-psychological' interpretation of 'eros' or Kant's view that 'all aesthetic endeavour seeks beauty as its final purpose'.

*Marcuse:* No. Beauty is only one amongst other goals.

*Kearney:* You would not wish then in any sense to ascribe an absolute character to beauty?

*Marcuse:* No, beauty can never be absolute. Nevertheless, I think that certain evaluative criteria can be established in relation to it.

*Kearney:* How then would you react to Martin Jay's assertion in his book on the Frankfurt School, entitled *The Dialectical Imagination*, that your repeated attempts to describe man's desire for an ideal utopia are rooted in the latent Judaeo-Messianic optimism of the Frankfurt School, which, in fact, consisted almost exclusively of German Jewish intellectuals, e.g. Adorno, Fromm, Horkheimer, Benjamin and of course, yourself, who wished to synthesize the intuitions of two other Jews, Marx and Freud?

*Marcuse:* I do not recall on any occasion having described or even attempted to describe such a thing as utopia. The relationships which I indicate as essential for qualitative change are certainly 'aesthetic' but they are not utopian.

*Kearney:* So you would deny any link between your political optimism about a new society and the Messianic optimism of Judaism?

*Marcuse:* Absolutely.

*Kearney:* Another current interpretation of the continual striving for universal and objective value-criteria in your recent writings on the 'aesthetic revolution' is that you are in fact returning, albeit surreptitiously, to the 'fundamental ontology' of your original mentor, Martin Heidegger – seeking a new kind of 'poetic dwelling on earth'. Do you see your later works as a return to your early attempts in the thirties to reconcile a



Heideggerean phenomenology of subjective historicity and a Marxist dialectics of collective history?

*Marcuse:* That Heidegger had a profound influence on me is without any doubt, and I have never denied it. He taught me a great deal about what real phenomenological 'thinking' is, about how thinking is not just a logical function of 'representing' what *is*, here and now in the present, but operates at deeper levels in its 'recalling' of what has been forgotten and its 'projecting' what might yet come to pass in the future. That appreciation of the temporal and intentional nature of phenomena has been extremely important for me, but that is as far as it goes.

*Kearney:* Evidently art has, in your opinion, a radical role to play in detaching individuals from their mindless slavery to the present conditions of work, competition, performance, advertising, mass media, etc., and thereby educating them in their own reality. Indeed, you have spoken very often of late about *art as education*. Would you like to briefly comment on this relationship?

*Marcuse:* Such an education in the reality of one's repressed faculties – sensory, imaginative and rational – and in our repressive environmental and working conditions would have to be based not on a mass education plan (that again would be to abuse art by turning it into propaganda) but in small communal projects of *auto-critique*. Such auto-critique would not, of course, replace a general education. It could not be a question of substituting one for the other, of abandoning the traditional tools of education altogether; not so much a question of *deschooling* as *reschooling*.

*Kearney:* Such an 'aesthetic' reschooling, which as you say would not be alternative, but supplementary to a general basic education, would presumably be concerned with those ethical and existential areas of human relations which constitute the locus of a *qualitative* leap to another society, would it not?

*Marcuse:* Yes it would.

*Kearney:* And presumably you would like to be able to base such an aesthetic education on certain universal principles whose objectivity would preclude the danger of an ideological indoctrination of the 'ignorant' and 'gullible' masses by some 'enlightened' elite: an abuse of education which is directly conducive to totalitarianism and fascism.

*Marcuse:* Yes, that is certainly a very real danger. And in order to be as objective as possible, one must try to determine objectively what are the seats of power today and how they influence what they have established as reality. This objectivity would then be based on what is the reality of our present society and not on ideological constructions.

*Kearney:* But I suspect that in your projection of the 'images' of a new society you tend to go behind an objectivity founded in *what is*, to an objectivity founded in *what ought to be*; and so we return to the old question: what is this 'ought' which would govern the aesthetic transformation of human beings and their relations with one another?

*Marcuse:* There is no such thing as an absolute prescriptive criterion for change. If a man is happy in the society in which he presently finds himself, then he has condemned himself. This problem has never bothered me. A human being who today still thinks that the world ought not to be changed is below the level of discussion. I have no problems about the 'is' and the 'ought'; it is a problem invented by philosophers.

*Kearney:* But if the question is so unproblematical, what is it that separates man's desire for a freer and unalienated society from the animal's? I mean, why doesn't an animal feel the imperative need to change its world into a qualitatively better one?

*Marcuse:* It cannot, but it does at least have enough instinct to realize that when its environment is lacking in food, warmth and a mate it must migrate to another.

*Kearney:* How then would you account for the difference between man's desire to change his world and the animal's desire to change his?

*Marcuse:* An animal has no reason whereas a human being has and so can outline, indirectly by means of art and directly by means of political theory, *possible* directions for future improvement.

*Kearney:* Man, therefore, would seem by virtue of his reason (*vernunft*) to possess some universal orientation towards a future society – something which you frequently spoke of in your early writings – which the animal does not possess. But by viewing man's rational imagination in this way, as a power capable of transcending the immediate continuum of history, and of projecting alternative possibilities for a future society, you would seem once again, would you not, to have moved beyond the strictly empirical realm of the 'is'? How would you account then for this exigency, so manifest in the passions of artists and intellectuals, to transcend the given mores and conventions of our present society in search of new and better ones?

*Marcuse:* Everyone searches for something better. Everyone searches for a society in which there is no more alienated labour. There is no need for a guiding principle or goal; it is simply a matter of common sense.

*Kearney:* Would you wish to equate the striving for beauty and the ideal society with the abolition of alienated labour?

*Marcuse:* Of course not. Once the problem of alienated labour is solved there will be many others which remain. The creative and imaginative faculties of man will never be redundant. If art is something which among other things can point to the 'images' of a political utopia, it is inevitably something which can never cease to be. Art and politics will never finally coalesce because the ideal society which art strives for in its negation of all alienated societies presupposes an ideal reconciliation of opposites, which can never be achieved in any absolute or Hegelian sense. The relationship between art and political praxis is therefore dialectical. As soon as one problem is solved in a synthesis, new problems are born and so the process continues without end. The day when men try to identify

opposites in an ultimate sense, thus ignoring the inevitable rupture between art and revolutionary praxis, will sound the death-knell for art. Man must never cease to be an artist, to criticize and negate his present self and society and to project by means of his creative imagination alternative 'images' of existence. He can never cease to imagine for he can never cease to change.

## AFTERWORD

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# Art as Cognition and Remembrance: Autonomy and Transformation of Art in Herbert Marcuse's Aesthetics

*Gerhard Schweppenhäuser*

*Translated by Matthew Isom*

Since the 1960s, Herbert Marcuse has been perceived chiefly as a political philosopher of critical theory. This distinguishes him from other Frankfurt School critical thinkers like Adorno, Benjamin, and Kracauer. If Marcuse is present today in the discourse of cultural theory, it is as a political philosopher. He is often used negatively, as an example of an anachronistic type of theory. In reality, however, many points of Marcuse's political philosophy appear to become truer and truer over time. In his 1964 book *One-Dimensional Man*, he described Western industrial societies as being rationally organized to a large degree. Technological progress, economics, law, and public administration are all highly developed in the modern era, and differentiated into autonomous spheres of validity. But the progressive and rational potential of these societies takes a downturn because they are slanted to upholding the status quo. Western industrial societies are at once rational and irrational. Their productive forces are extensively developed.

They embody rationality, just like their organizational structures. But the humane and liberal goal was lost somewhere. In order to hide this from themselves, the Western industrial societies cultivated the wrong kinds of consumer and conformist consciousness. These are not rationally justifiable.

The descriptive part of Marcuse's diagnosis was inspired by Max Weber, who spoke of the "de-mystification of the world" and the processes of "rationalization" in Europe and North America. He observed that in comparison with earlier stages and other existing, less developed societies, the modern Western societies were the most rational and progressive. Economics, science, administration, law, and politics are all structured according to rational principles. Working and living conditions as well as education and upbringing are highly developed. Their living conditions offer more room for freedom and self-determination than ever before. This is due to Weber's "means-ends rationality," which developed as the predominant form of reason in these societies. But this type of reason also has its drawbacks. Reason, in its philosophical sense, asks "why" our actions are carried out. It attempts to define ends autonomously. Means-ends rationality is different: it finds the means to a given end and abstains from defining this end in a critical, rational way. The ends are invariably taken over by dominant existing social forces and power relations. Means-ends rationality seeks nothing else but the optimal means to accomplish already existing purposes. Atomic research is the means to accomplish the objective of mass slaughter with atomic bombs. Medicine and pharmaceutical sciences serve the profit motives of their operators, and the healing of human ailments becomes an instrument of this purpose. The human desire for information is subordinated to the sale of news as a commodity. The human need for entertainment becomes the means of their economic exploitation by national and global entertainment monopolists. Max Horkheimer called this type of rationalism "instrumental reason," and today, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor identifies it as the cause of the *Malaise of Modernity*.<sup>1</sup>

Marcuse held that this restricted type of reason in industrial societies became predominant after 1945. Existing power and property relationships become the measure of all things. They had to be preserved, whatever the cost. Self-preservation of the status quo became the only goal. That made these societies "one-dimensional": individual thought and feeling were reduced to the conformity of social participation and success. This refers to language, communication, and the culture as a whole. Therefore, the rationalism of rationalized society gradually becomes irrational. Social purposes such as the fulfillment of individual need as well as freedom and well-being thus fall prey to the means of one-dimensional society, which are

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1 See Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York 1947), and Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Concord, Ontario 1991).

developed to perfection. These means are the production and exploitation of surplus value. They serve for organization, administration, power, and the deterrence and intimidation of outside enemies. On an internal level, humans are made one-dimensional. Their needs, thoughts, and communication are reduced to means of maintaining the existing whole. One-dimensional society appears pluralistic, but according to Marcuse, in truth it is totalitarian.

Marcuse described the social pathologies that develop, if this type of reason controls the environment: utopian thinking is suppressed. Alternatives to the status quo become inconceivable. The self-preservation of the system allows for individual self-preservation, but it does so at a high price. The individuals bring their actions, thoughts, and feelings into accordance with the values and standards of the existing social form. The last instances of resistance to the totality of the status quo are the vulnerable sides of subjectivity. These still come into interpersonal intimacy and artistic expression. For Marcuse, aesthetic experience was one of last resources of the nonconformist. Even in earlier periods, art was always ahead of its time. Artists could articulate experiences and insights that opposed the status quo. The language of the imagination was, for Marcuse, the language of protest. In the imagination we see the outline of a more fair and reasonable world. In the imaginary world of the arts, freedom could be real. Humans, with their needs, could be recognized as a substantive goal of social progress.

And what about outside of the Western industrial societies? Today, there is no longer any "outside." The Soviet system was subsumed in the competition of the world powers. Already in the 1950s, Marcuse had examined the internal aporia, which, apart from other factors, would ultimately lead to its failure.<sup>2</sup> Since that time, the political universe has become more one-dimensional than ever. However, one-dimensionality on a global scale has taken a different form than Marcuse had anticipated. The one-dimensionality he described in *One-Dimensional Man* was, paradoxically, of modern Western and Eastern industrial societies. It was mediated by its alignment with the bipolarity of the political world between the capitalist and communist spheres. This bipolarity bore a coordinate system in which two power blocs competed. Within their hemispheres everything pointing outside of the repressive order could be suppressed, preserving the instrumental rationality of exchange, value, and technological productivity. The fixation for self-preservation and growth had worked. Today, we know that the alternative system of "socialism/communism" was a futile effort to postpone modernization. As an alternative, it has vanished. Now social one-dimensionality can be produced and maintained more easily and efficiently. Globalization did not develop from nothing; it is not a natural phenomenon

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2 Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism* (New York 1958).

that arose from the structural laws of the market. It was politically implemented on many levels yet it appears as a natural economic occurrence, reducing the significance of the political.<sup>3</sup> There is no organized political resistance against economic heteronomy; there is only a crowding around the best places in the realm of the “new center.”

“Late capitalism’s form of domination [. . .] is global,” Marcuse wrote to Adorno in July 1969, “and it is its democracy that is operated, paid and equipped with all the same flaws of neocolonialism and neofascism, and liberation is prevented.”<sup>4</sup> Today, this analysis would have to be reformulated in light of postcolonial and post-Fordian discourses. This would be quite possible, and would be rewarding, as a critical theory of globalization.<sup>5</sup> Models of the mobilization of civil and social resistance against formalized democracy achieved through economic systematic imperatives would go well together with Marcuse’s immanent-critical theory of democracy. For Marcuse it was always important to connect “the problem of individual participation in the community” with the “question of real autonomy and an expanded life perspective.”<sup>6</sup>

But no Marcuse Renaissance has taken place in Germany. Marcuse’s practical-philosophical variant of critical theory is frequently stigmatized as a romantic one. It is considered an example of the hated mentality of the “1968 generation,” implied by its critique of capitalism as well as its apparent hedonism and Jacobinism. Such a dismissal, of course, is too rash. But one problem does exist from today’s perspective: Marcuse’s theory is based on a historical-philosophical construction: the teleology of a collective social subject. This is to constitute a universal subject through which all individual attempts at emancipation are made. Marcuse himself naturally had no illusions about the strength of this teleology, but nevertheless, today it seems too strong a utopia. Jürgen Habermas’s *Theory of Communicative Action* seems more plausible today:<sup>7</sup> a reconstructive theory of new social

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3 See Christoph Görg, “Kritik der Naturbeherrschung,” *Zeitschrift für kritische Theorie*, 9 (1999), pp. 82f. See also Willem van Reijen, “Globalisierung – die Rhetorik der Heilsversprechen,” in Gerhard Schweppenhäuser and Jörg H. Gleiter (eds) *Paradoxien der Globalisierung* (Weimar 1999), pp. 132–52.

4 Wolfgang Kraushaar (ed.) *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung. Von der Flaschenpost zum Molotowcocktail, 1946–1995*, vol. 2 (Hamburg 1998), p. 654.

5 See Christoph Görg, “Widerspruch und Befreiung. Perspektiven einer kritischen Theorie globaler Vergesellschaftung,” *Zeitschrift für kritische Theorie*, 15 (2002), pp. 56–78.

6 Oskar Negt, “Marcuses dialektisches Verständnis von Demokratie,” introduction to Marcuse, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, Bd. 1: *Das Schicksal der bürgerlichen Demokratie*, ed. Peter-Erwin Jansen (Lüneburg 1999), p. 20.

7 For a discussion of Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Habermas see Seyla Benhabib, “Die Moderne und die Aporien der Kritischen Theorie,” in Wolfgang Bonß and Axel Honneth (eds) *Sozialforschung als Kritik. Zum sozialwissenschaftlichen Potential der Kritischen Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main

movements that compete for participation in the political decision-making processes. Habermas interprets the struggles for acknowledgment of minority rights and ways of life as struggles for communication, and describes new social movements as communicative conflicts. This is of considerable merit. But there is no longer any theory of “radical opposition,” as Marcuse had formulated it. Marcuse did not formulate this theory in order to invent a de facto radical opposition where, in fact, none existed. He wanted to specify the well-justifiable goals of the “radical opposition” as well as their aporia and dilemmas. Today, no theory reflecting conceptually on “that which capitalism makes from humans today, and that which one can really change” exists.<sup>8</sup> Such a theory has not become superfluous simply because the economic system of global capitalism appears to be an immutable fate. In France the beginnings of such a theory exist, for example in the authority-critical sociology of the Bourdieu school. In Germany today, there is scant criticism of civil institutions. Human rights are seldom understood as real social rights.<sup>9</sup> The egalitarian or revolutionary implications of natural law, which were so important to Marcuse, are no longer of much interest in sociological discussions. The struggle for the reconciliation of humanity’s relationship with nature was a crucial point for Marcuse that has since become an ecological alibi for budgetary or neoliberal fund-skimming.

These are hard times for radical political philosophy. Marcuse’s writings, however, were also analytical works of cultural theory in which he investigated the form and social function of art. From his essays in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (later called *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*) in the 1930s to his last work in the 1970s, Marcuse acted for the aesthetic research program of the Institute for Social Research, which saw art “as a kind of linguistic code for processes taking place in society, as a code to be deciphered with the help of critical analysis.”<sup>10</sup> This statement is taken from a 1944 memorandum, in which the Institute for Social Research presented his work in exile in the U.S. Marcuse never understood the deciphering process of art as a reduction of aesthetics to extra-aesthetic “conditions.” In 1922, he had been awarded a doctorate in Freiburg for *The German Artist Novel*, and three years later he published a bibliography of Friedrich Schiller.

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1982), pp. 127–75. See also Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm and Utopia. A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York 1986).

8 Herbert Marcuse, “USA – Organisationsfrage und revolutionäres Subjekt,” in *Zeit-Messungen. Drei Vorträge und ein Interview* (1975), *Schriften* vol. 9 (Springe 2004), p. 186.

9 See my discussion of the aporia of the human rights debate in Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, *Die Antinomie des Universalismus. Zum moralphilosophischen Diskurs der Moderne* (Würzburg 2005), pp. 134–42.

10 “Ten Years on Morningside Heights. A Report on the Institute’s History, 1934–1944,” quoted in Martin Jay, *Dialektische Phantasie. Die Geschichte des Instituts für Sozialforschung 1923–1950* (Frankfurt am Main 1987), p. 213.



His approach was different from that of orthodox Marxist theoreticians who temporarily worked in the periphery of the Institute.

In Marxism, all past history was seen as merely “prehistory.” Humans had always controlled their affairs, but without autonomous self-determination. Only in a society liberated from the constraints of capitalistic production could self-determination be practiced. Until then, all our forms of practice are not what they could be – and this includes art. Art is artifice, illusionary. If we were one day to become free individuals and could act autonomously, then art could be more than that. The aesthetic sphere could be connected with the sphere of material action and politics. In this way, art could actively transform reality.

Marcuse conceived of the transformation of the sensory into a productive social force with which he wanted to work to produce a new type of human being. However, he immediately limited the perspective of this implementation of the aesthetic dimension anew. Every time art is adapted to a political function, we have to deal with variants of one-dimensionality. Irrevocable transcendence is essential to art – that is, its differentiation from the existing. Beauty, made apparent in aesthetic form, provides a model for a new mode of life, transcendent of everyday life. On the other hand, artistic beauty is never an image that is identical to its social purpose, but always something more. This irrevocable transcendence of the aesthetic must be recognized. Only then could the aesthetic become a productive force with the help of which another society could be designed.

The discourses of radically oppositional aesthetics, which carried on into the 1960s and 1970s in the West, dominated traditional political aesthetics. In the West, “proletarian art” was seldom the topic; more common were the themes of “art against the establishment” or “anti-art.” Years earlier, Marcuse had written a lengthy essay, which appeared as a book in 1969: his *Essay on Liberation*. In this work, he appeared to take the statements of protesting youth to the aesthetic level. In Paris and in the United States, as well as in the large cities of the Eastern bloc, art campaigns inspired by surrealism and Dada were revitalized. “All power to the imagination” was the slogan. In the subcultures’ happenings and hedonistic forms of communication, Marcuse saw the roots of a “new sensibility.” Even their use of music, poetry, drugs, and sex fitted this “new sensibility,” which should have been a component of a new, oppositional political culture. The neo-avant-garde had rejected traditional art, with its elitist markets, exhibitions, and museums. Marcuse interpreted this gesture of rejection as the basis of a new political art that seemed to be concerned with aesthetic experiences of a completely new kind. Marcuse always stressed the double character of aesthetics, which was for him both the philosophy of art and the theory of sensuality. But the autonomy of aesthetic form must not be negated – an important point for Marcuse in his engagement with the aesthetics of revolting subcultures, with whom he sympathized but also drew clear borders. Even anti-art is art, he argued. As long as something is written,

painted, and played, it is a work of art, and Marcuse welcomed this. Works of art possess an alienating power: they set individual aesthetic experience free, and are thus agents against social alienation – Marcuse knew just how precarious these agents are.

Marcuse's aesthetics drew from many sources, among the most important Schiller's socio-philosophical radicalization of the Kantian autonomy aesthetics, Stendhal's dictum that beauty is a promise of erotic bliss, Baudelaire's aesthetics of contradictory modernity, the subversive shock paradigm of surrealism, Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky's theory that the essence of art consisted in the "de-automation" of seeing (that is, sight opens to people and things through new forms, preventing us from recognizing the forms to which we are accustomed), and not the least Brecht's aesthetics of political estrangement (inspired by Shklovsky). And above all, Nietzsche's archeology of the somatic substratum of aesthetic experience and psychological view into the abysses of our culture. In his last years, Marcuse was inspired more than ever by Adorno's aesthetics. Adorno had examined the double character of the work of art as *fait social* and autonomous entity. He accentuated the validity of the "autonomous work of art" – this at a time when it had become commonplace to speak of the end of the work of art.

The previously mentioned deciphering of art as "linguistic code for social processes" was, for Marcuse, an immanent moment of reflection. Reflection must begin with the question of the definition of artistic form. Marcuse's consideration of the nature of aesthetic form centers on art's linguistic character, as Franz Koppe had presented. Works of art make it possible to generate meaning: thus they make audible or visible that which is and which could be. Works of art organize matters according to structural laws; art is a "language of its own." It is communication and concept at the same time. The "symbolic-pragmatic unit" of an individual work of art is achieved through its "style," the structural principle that organizes the parts of a work of art as a whole.<sup>11</sup> In 1968, Marcuse explained to a Boston audience of musicians that

In creating its own Form, its own "language," art moves in a dimension of reality

which is other than, and antagonistic to the established everyday reality; but so that,

- in "canceling," transforming, even transsubstantiating the given images, words, sounds,
- music "preserves" their forgotten or perverted truth, preserves it by giving them its own "beautiful" Form, Harmony, Dissonance,

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<sup>11</sup> Franz Koppe, Grundzüge einer Kunstphilosophie im Ausgang von Herbert Marcuse, "Durchsichtig als Situation und Traum der Menschheit" in *Kritik und Utopie im Werk von Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Institut für Sozialforschung (Frankfurt am Main 1992), pp. 250–1.

Rhythm, Dance, and thus, music beautifies, sublimates, pacifies the human experience, the human condition.<sup>12</sup>

With his theory of the new sensibility from the 1960s, Marcuse took just a single step beyond the aesthetics of the work of art. He was impressed by the cultural-revolutionary implications of the New Left in the United States and Western Europe. Now he envisioned a superseding of art as a social institution. This superseding of art, however, should have been art itself. It was to have preserved the artistic impulse in a transformed social practice, one of humans acting autonomously and in solidarity. Art, said Marcuse, is ambivalent. On the one hand it negates existing reality and refuses to be anything other than beautiful illusion; it follows no laws but its own, which differ significantly from the industrialized commodity-producing societies' reality principle, which follows the logic of the subsumption and realization of surplus value. But on the other hand, art transfigures existence, granting mankind consolation. According to Marcuse, this ambivalence need not be understood as an ontological constant. It is a historical consequence of class society. In a liberated form of society, the concrete-utopian content of art could be realized. But art would then stop being art, having lost its ambivalence and its illusory character. It would instead be part of a qualitatively new form of social practice, and would be involved in shaping the characteristics of that society.

The art of the neo-avant-garde in the 1960s was communication-oriented. Happenings dissolved the traditional perception of art as consisting of unique and original "works." Art came to be classified as installation, environment, or performance. In this, Marcuse recognized a twofold character. On the one hand, the productive model of surrealism and the Soviet formalism of the 1920s, and on the other the forerunners of coming social revolutions. Here again, the topic of losing boundaries (*Entgrenzungsthematik*) seemed to come into force, known to art historians as "the avant-garde's central dogma of progress."<sup>13</sup> While revolutionary hope often burns out quickly, the aesthetic transformations proved to be rejuvenating cures for marketplace art. Its ritual character contributed to the "transfiguration of the commonplace" (Arthur C. Danto) that had been introduced by pop art. Pop art had rehabilitated objectivity and mimetic reproducibility in art and semantically loaded the commodity-world of Western everyday culture. Marcuse revised his neo-avant-garde theory, which held that art finds a productive end, if it organizes its life-world (*Lebenswelt*) and environment. In the early 1970s, he criticized the late followers of surrealism, whose aesthetics was one of the dissolution of the subject. The "event" cannot replace the productive subject,

12 Herbert Marcuse, "Commencement Speech to the New England Conservatory of Music", included in this volume, pp. 130ff.

13 Heinrich Klotz, *Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert. Moderne – Postmoderne – Zweite Moderne* (Munich 1994), p. 29.

however: it does not take the place of authentic change of experience. This can only be successfully mediated by aesthetic transcendence. Otherwise, only changes of location or duplications of the commodity-shaped world of things occur. “Marcel Duchamp’s urinal in the museum cannot forever be understood as the beginning of radical art,”<sup>14</sup> wrote an angry Marcuse.

The mere geographical displacement of an object can never achieve this rupture: it remains within the Establishment, as part of the Establishment, of its ideological and material equipment. Duchamp’s urinal remains a urinal even in the museum or gallery; it carries its function with it—as suspended, “real” function: a pisspot! Conversely, a picture of Cézanne remains a picture by Cézanne even in the toilet.<sup>15</sup>

Marcuse not only attacked Duchamp, but also Andy Warhol, pop art’s cult figure:

The self-styled new radicalism which is engaged in such geographical displacement of a real object means neither the end of art nor of bourgeois art nor the rise of a new art; it rather testifies to the abdication or absence of that critical imagination which is committed to the indictment of, and liberation from, the Establishment—the creative imagination. We are, in the face of these displaced objects, where we were before and where we will be after: the Campbell Soup can on display in an exhibition recalls the soup can in the supermarket (and may thus help the sale). The reaction on the part of the recipient not yet taken in by the clique is not shock but embarrassment; here is something they are supposed to take seriously or with black humor—but they feel that the thing is phony.<sup>16</sup>

But Duchamp’s pissoir in the museum would actually fit Marcuse’s refusal aesthetics well. Can’t one illustrate Marcuse’s theory of the liberation of things with Duchamp’s work? If things are liberated from their false reification, they can become objects of the human imagination. Reification means that people and things are reduced to mere carriers of exchange value. But Marcuse emphatically rejected Duchamp’s surreal prank. Nonetheless, it is Duchamp who can plainly be described as an artist of “Great Refusal.”

Duchamp enacted the moment of the falsehood of aesthetic form. He put it, with clear consciousness, into a performative contradiction. His aesthetic practice led to a realization that fits his aesthetics well: only the break with existing coding is capable of coding the existing productively in order to irritate. The *ready-mades* remain in immanence, thereby encouraging the recipients of this irritation to reflect upon the difference between immanence and transcendence. The form of the work is dissolved, and a form of action

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14 Herbert Marcuse, “Letters to the Chicago Surrealists”, included in this volume, pp. 178ff.

15 Ibid., p. 192.

16 Ibid.

develops in its place. On the symbolic level, this action form resembles usual practice: the artist sets up a sculpture in the museum. On the semantic and pragmatic levels, however, this action form differs radically. It negates the metaphorical character of all art, demonstrating it at the same time. The artist sets up a finished, purchased everyday object as a sculpture. Duchamp demonstrated ironically that the social subsystem of art is based on conventions. He also demonstrated the limitations of an ontological aesthetics, which tries to determine what art is and what it is not. Duchamp's *ready-mades* can be read as statements. They oppose the capitalist obligation to constantly manufacture new things. Duchamp rejected the imposition of permanence on artistic individuality. "Behind the ready-made . . . no social utopia hides, but rather the equally banal and existential question of which forms of individuality could still have when faced with an always prefabricated 'ready made' world."<sup>17</sup>

Marcuse's charge that Duchamp doubled the commodity world affirmatively thus appears implausible. Pop art's subsequent celebration of the commodity world seemed like no more than pseudo-liberation to Marcuse. The objects were not freed from their obligatory exchange value. Their exchange value, Marcuse held, was symbolically doubled. But I find it fair to neither Duchamp nor Warhol to criticize their work as documents of creative impotence, lacking in critical imagination. Warhol did not flatten out the difference between advertisement and art. He sharpened our senses to recognize their respective, differing codes. This was not always understood in such a way, but is Warhol to be blamed?

But it would be rash to understand Marcuse's rejection of Warhol and Duchamp as mere misunderstanding. Did Marcuse see something correctly with his faulty interpretation of Duchamp? A possible reference to this was made by Duchamp himself, who in the 1960s stated that he "threw" the *ready-mades* "in the face of" the art world and the public "as a challenge, and now they discover the aesthetical beauty within them."<sup>18</sup> Was he not at all concerned with the liberation of these commodities from their bondage to utility? Was he not at all concerned with the freeing of our perception from its constraints? Was he concerned only with provoking the art market? The answers are not clearly discernible from Duchamp's ambiguous remark. But even if it were, shouldn't the critical theory of aesthetics have formed a virtual work alliance with Duchamp? Didn't Duchamp make a contribution to the demystification of an ideological sector of modernity?

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17 Dieter Daniels, "Marcel Duchamp – der einflussreichste Künstler des 20. Jahrhunderts?," in *Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Museum Jean Tinguely (Basel, Ostfildern-Ruit 2002), p. 32.

18 Quoted in Manfred Schneckenburger, "Skulpturen und Objekte," in K. Ruhrberg, M. Schneckenburger, C. Fricke, and K. Honnef (eds) *Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Part II (Cologne 2000), p. 509.

Marcuse did not interpret Duchamp's ironic nobilization of the pissoir as the promising symbolic rehabilitation of nature. For Marcuse, this was an early form of "repressive desublimation."<sup>19</sup> Apparently, Marcuse harbored a deep distrust of Duchamp's sincerity. He does not seem to have regarded him as a performing critic of the modern art industry. To Marcuse, he was a cynic who profited from this enterprise.

Marcuse considered the function of art ambivalent: at once concrete-utopian and affirmative. He asked the question again and again whether this ambivalence was permanent. As early as in the aesthetic sections of *Eros and Civilization*, his socio-philosophical reading of Freud from the 1950s, and also in the neo-avant-garde concept of art from the *Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse provided the basis of an instinct-naturalistic anthropology. The experience of artistic beauty was linked to libidinous need structures. "Aesthetics is based on sensibility," he wrote in *Essay on Liberation*: "that which is beautiful, is first sensual; it addresses the senses, it is object of unrepressed instinct." But even at that time, in the deliriously sensual 1960s, Marcuse did not reduce aesthetic experience to physical pleasure. He sympathized "with the large concept of the lifting of cultural repression . . . which represents a vital aspect of liberation for the radicals."<sup>20</sup> But he knew that this project stood in the shadow of consumer-oriented "repressive desublimation," the instrument with which the culture industries enabled mankind to experience vicarious satisfaction.

This vicarious satisfaction was still quite far removed from the sexualization of the everyday world's visual media that we experience today, but the tendency was already in effect at that time. Adorno had examined the culture industry of the U.S. during the 1940s (coining the term).<sup>21</sup> At that time, the bosom of the film heroine cast its allure from *underneath* her sweater. The "foreplay" was permanent. Adorno thought that she carried with her a permanent castration threat. Naked torsos were there to see, if necessary, on male film heroes. Nevertheless, in the 1950s and 1960s, sexual activity was already suggested. Today, the permanence of "foreplay" is produced with more drastic pictures and soundtracks. It remains the same. But an important difference is often overlooked, which may not be ignored:

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19 Herbert Marcuse, *Der eindimensionale Mensch. Studien zur Ideologie der fortgeschrittenen Industriegesellschaft*, trans. by Alfred Schmidt (Neuwied and Berlin 1967), p. 76.

20 Herbert Marcuse, *Versuch über die Befreiung*, trans. Helmut Reinicke and Alfred Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main 1969), p. 59, footnote 8.

21 See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*, in Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, ed. G. Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt am Main 1987), pp. 144–96. For an overview on the contemporary debate of the concept "Kulturindustrie" see the contributions by Roger Behrens, Gernot Böhme, Rodrigo Duarte, Oliver Fahle, Jürgen Hasse, Dieter Prokop, Heinz Steinert, and Moshe Zuckermann, in *Zeitschrift für kritische Theorie*, vols 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, and 16 (2000–2003).

the culture industry today no longer needs to produce this tension between instinct–desires and their symbolic coding; they now show with mimetic realism what everyone is thinking. The old culture industry spread a binary coded message: polymorphic perversion on the one hand, puritanical standards on the other. That is today obsolete. Sexuality is stylized as a component of the event-culture made profane. At that time a visual “foreplay” was produced, and sexual execution made taboo. Today, the sexual act is glamorized, so that the foreplay does not become weaker. “The body is the message” – this applies as much to advertising and entertainment television as to the Love Parade [i.e. a popular festival and parade that originated in Berlin, 1989].<sup>22</sup> With Marcuse, one could say that this is how the current variants of the domestication of physical resistance works. In 1978, he wrote that “the liberalization of sexual morality . . . subjects the private sphere to exchange relations.”<sup>23</sup>

Back again to Marcuse’s *Essay on Liberation*: “Beauty seems nevertheless to take a position midway between repressed and unrepressed goals. Beauty is not substantial, ‘organic’ characteristic of the unrepressed sex drive.”<sup>24</sup> Marcuse continued to make use of this notion in the 1970s, introducing the other pole of the conflict over the organization of instinct. There is a biological limit to the satisfaction of human need. The finite nature of the human being is irreversible. Utopia has a thanatological boundary. Therefore, we cannot do without the medium of appearance, which enables one to experience sensually that which, in reality, requires a considerable effort to experience only partially, if at all. We have comprehensive, unfragmented beauty only in the medium of aesthetic experience. Beauty’s promise of bliss is redeemed only in the realm of beautiful appearance. But it is precisely there that the truth of appearance lies. Even the concrete utopia thus transcends the realm of realizable freedom, which is defined by the permanence of death. “To define” means “to limit” and “to negate.” Even if social liberation were to succeed, Eros could be never freed from the rule of Thanatos. “Poverty can and must be abolished: death remains the inherent negation of society. It is the last memory of all unrealized possibilities,”<sup>25</sup> wrote Marcuse in 1977, in the spirit of Walter Benjamin.

History is debt, but not atonement. Eros and Thanatos are not only opponents, but also love each other. Aggression and destruction may come more and more

22 See Reinhard Mohr, “Die Tyrannei der Lust,” *Der Spiegel* 27/2000, p. 142.

23 Herbert Marcuse, “Lyric Poetry after Auschwitz,” included in this volume, pp. 211ff. The quotation in German is from Marcuse, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, Bd. 2: *Kunst und Befreiung*, ed. Peter-Erwin Jansen (Lüneburg 2000), p. 161.

24 Herbert Marcuse, *Versuch über die Befreiung*, trans. Helmut Reinicke and Alfred Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main 1969), p. 68.

25 Herbert Marcuse, *Die Permanenz der Kunst. Wider eine bestimmte marxistische Ästhetik* (Munich and Vienna 1977), p. 74.

into the service of the Eros, but Eros works under the sign of suffering, the past.<sup>26</sup>

Nietzsche's aesthetic justification of existence was based on a Dionysian credo, to which Marcuse later contributed a melancholic dimension.

The eternality of desire is achieved through the death of the individual. And perhaps eternity does not last for a very long time. The world is not made for humans, and it has not become more human. As art attests to this truth by retaining this memory with the promise of bliss, it can enter the desperate struggle to change the world as a "regulative idea."<sup>27</sup>

In the aesthetic realm, Apollonian reason is also present. This becomes rehabilitated, it is part of finite nature's anamnestic solidarity. Here, Marcuse is close to the Schopenhauerian roots that characterize the late philosophy of his friend Horkheimer – though the two had become politically alienated from each other; Horkheimer had defended the U.S. intervention in Vietnam, while Marcuse supported the Vietnam protests emphatically.

Marcuse corrected his aesthetics into the 1970s, a fact that has often been misunderstood. Various different interpreters all tended to ignore a simple fact: these corrections entailed a revision of a revision. Marcuse stressed that one must grasp the concept of the "permanent perspective of utopia."<sup>28</sup> He spoke of the "permanence of art," thus turning back to a mode of thought he had already formulated in 1937, at which time he had been concerned with the ambivalence of art in civil society. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art objects were components of the "affirmative culture" of the middle class. While this class had not yet achieved political authority, it emphatically proclaimed the rights of universal liberty and happiness. Later, after becoming the ruling class, it abandoned this slogan. Bourgeois culture had interiorized the entitlement to happiness. It produced a false reconciliation of the individual with the existing repressive social order. The processes of mechanical reproduction governed the lives of humans. In this idealistic, super-elevated cultural field, humans are to rise "mentally" above everyday life. Marcuse held that this was how conditions were perpetuated, preventing the realization of happiness for humanity. Humans were distracted from their misery, and this prevented them from practically changing their living conditions.

But Marcuse also showed that bourgeois culture cannot be reduced to its affirmative function. Pain, misery, and suffering can find authentic aesthetic forms. In the medium of appearance, then, human suffering is expressed.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Franz Koppe, "'Durchsichtig als Situation und Traum der Menschheit'. Grundzüge einer Kunstphilosophie im Ausgang von Herbert Marcuse," in *Kritik und Utopie im Werk von Herbert Marcuse*, p. 249.



Happiness, fulfillment, and beauty are not realized for everyone in bourgeois society; only in aesthetic appearance do they remain present to consciousness. This “substantial appearance,” wrote Marcuse after Hegel, contains truths about humans and things, truths that transcend the existing society and call it into question. “Only in art did bourgeois society accept the realization of its own ideals and take them seriously as postulates.”<sup>29</sup>

Appearance thus makes possible the aesthetic experience of “otherness” for bourgeois society. It provides an inkling of the state of happiness. For Marcuse, appearance was thus “pre-appearance” (as Ernst Bloch was wont to say). Works of art are the basis of the insight “that such a world cannot be changed by this or the other of bourgeois society, but only by their destruction.”<sup>30</sup> Beauty in art can be understood, as with Stendhal, as *promesse du bonheur*. Then it refers to sensual pleasure and fulfillment in reality. It thus acts to subvert the compulsory suppression of instinct, the basis of the repressive social order. Otherwise, the beauty and appearance of the work of art is also an instrument of assimilation to present existence, for in conjunction with affirmative culture, art is separated from society and banished into an “autonomous” realm. Thus, for Marcuse, the autonomy of art was both truth and ideology at the same time. Works of art obey only their own laws of motion, and are thus disconnected from their social function. But they are nonetheless products of social labor, and as such, they also reflect compulsory relationships. But the falsehood of aesthetic appearance consists in the following: the classic doctrine of aesthetic autonomy wanted to silence the social character of art, precisely its socially affirmative function. In art, there is a reconciliation of contradiction that cannot take place in reality. The radical entitlement to happiness is spiritualized, and thus relativized. Foul reality is made more bearable and glorified: “The medium of beauty detoxifies the truth and moves it away from the present. That which happens in art, is obliged to nothing.”<sup>31</sup>

How can the truth contained within aesthetic appearance be saved, if it nevertheless serves to deny humankind through ideology? The answer according to Marcuse: What is kept in aesthetic appearance would have to be realized in a liberated society. “Beauty will find another embodiment if it is presented as nothing more than material appearance, the reality and joy in it will find expression.”<sup>32</sup> The affirmative character of culture had to be overcome. That would be not the pathway to barbarism, but the rescue of the truth contained in the culture. Here, Marcuse had already formulated

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29 Herbert Marcuse, “The Affirmative Character of Culture” included in this volume, p. 82. The quotation in German is from Marcuse, *Schriften vol. 3, Aufsätze aus der Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung 1934–1941* (Springe 2004), p. 210.

30 Ibid., p. 195–6.

31 Ibid., p. 210.

32 Ibid., p. 225.

the concept of the superseding of art through transformation into another social practice. But he formulated such speculations very carefully: "Perhaps art as such will become groundless."<sup>33</sup> But

as long as there is transience, there will be enough struggle, mourning and suffering to destroy the idyllic picture. . . . Even a non-affirmative culture would be loaded with transience and necessity: a dance on the volcano, a smile under mourning, a game with death. As long as the reproduction of life is still another reproduction of the culture: the organization of unfulfilled longings, the purification of unfulfilled impulses.<sup>34</sup>

This ontology of art is very un-utopian. It considers the therapeutic task of art that was so important to Aristotle. Marcuse thereby uses the oft-recurring exception "as long as," frequently found in *Studies in Philosophy and Social Research*. Many essays in the journal end with a "revolutionary" perspective that is more or less messianic. It was concerned with expressing the concept of "nevertheless" before analyzing the existing situation mercilessly, which was not at all revolutionary. If Marcuse writes: "as long as transience exists," this can mean: "until transience is abolished." In addition, it can mean "as long as humans live," which is what he probably meant – an anthropological dictum over the *conditio humana*. And that was typical of Marcuse's philosophy.

Twenty years later, in his interpretation of Freud, Marcuse tried to outline the "concrete utopia" of a realized culture more precisely. It dealt with the idealistic aesthetics of Kant and Schiller. According to Kant, "disinterested satisfaction" (*interesseloses Wohlgefallen*) constituted the beauty of aesthetic perception. This was, for Marcuse, a refuge of the liberty from the imposed purposes forced upon humans and things outside of the aesthetic sphere. With Schiller, this aesthetic liberty was radicalized: it was conceived as a driving force for real human liberation. Marcuse showed that Schiller's cultural theory exhibited insight far beyond its idealistic framework. Every culture is governed by the antagonistic relationship of reason and the sensuous, and this is a cause of the miscarriage of the culture. Humanity could become enduringly material only if reason and the sensuous without obligation obtained. That can occur in the free development of the "aesthetic imagination." Marcuse hoped that the nonviolent "self-sublimation of the sensuous" and the "desublimation of reason"<sup>35</sup> could one day become the basis of social coexistence. "In a truthful human culture," we could do without repression and denial of instinct. Then "being would become much

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>35</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*. The quotation in German is from Marcuse, *Triebstruktur und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main 1980), p. 192.

more game play than toil, and humans would live in playful development instead of in deprivation.”<sup>36</sup>

That presupposes that humankind brings the process of mechanical reproduction under social control, and that the hardship of life could be permanently eliminated. Marcuse concretized Schiller’s ideal of a free, playful culture following late Marx, who had written in *Das Kapital*, “the realm of liberty truly begins only where labor, which is governed by need and ability, ceases; the nature of the thing therefore lies beyond the sphere of existing material production,” which “always [remains] a realm of necessity.”

At the same time on the other side, the development of human force begins, which is seen as an end in itself, the true realm of liberty, but which can only flourish with that realm of necessity as its basis.<sup>37</sup>

We can reduce the realm of necessity to a bare minimum. “Play and self-development as principles of civilization,” held Marcuse, “do not mean a reshaping of arduous labor, but its complete subordination under the freely unfolding possibilities of humanity and nature.”<sup>38</sup> He came to see this differently later, as I stated above. Over a period of time, Marcuse formulated a cultural-revolutionary, subcultural version of the early romantic connection between aesthetics and historical philosophy, influenced by the French and Soviet avant-garde. Marcuse anticipated then, just as Heinz Paetzold formulated, “the possibility of successful repression-free emergence of art in the society, that is, the dialectic superseding of art, whereby its accepted shape is peeled away and transformed according to the structural principles of a truly free culture.”<sup>39</sup>

But even then, Marcuse did not allow himself get so carried away as to bid art farewell. “Would such a realization of art push the traditional arts out of power?” he asked in a 1969 lecture at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

Would such realization of Art imply the ‘invalidation’ of the traditional arts? In other words, would it imply the ‘atrophy’ of the capability to understand and enjoy them, atrophy of the intellectual faculty and the sensuous organs to experience the arts of the past? I suggest a negative answer. Art is transcendent in a sense which distinguishes and divorces it from any ‘daily’ reality we can possibly envisage. No matter how free, society will be inflicted with necessity—the necessity of labour, of the fight against death and disease, of scarcity. Thus, the arts will retain forms of expression germane to them—and only to them: of a beauty and truth antagonistic to those of reality.<sup>40</sup>

36 Ibid., p. 186.

37 Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt am Main 1968), p. 828.

38 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*. Quotation in German is from Marcuse, *Triebstruktur und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main 1980), p. 194.

39 Heinz Paetzold, *Neomarxistische Ästhetik*, vol. 2 (Düsseldorf 1974), p. 113.

40 Herbert Marcuse, “Art as Form of Reality,” included in this volume, pp. 140ff.

Here, Marcuse had already dropped his much too exuberant vision of the “reshaping of labor into play.” He realized that the negation of aesthetic form had been understood as an end in itself. Now he abandoned the theorem of the realized aesthetic utopia, instead stressing again the utopia of the aesthetic in reality. He had already laid out his cultural theory in the late 1930s. Now he focused again, and more strongly, on the critical aesthetics of the “authentic work of art.” He held its potential for experience to be a reservoir of political resistance.

Marcuse took the term “Great Refusal” from a non-political context. This can be reread in his 1945 essay on Aragon’s resistance poetry. Alfred North Whitehead, the teacher of Bertrand Russell, had in the 1920s considered the semantic truth contained in aesthetic statements about non-fictional reality. According to Whitehead, the “Great Refusal” was the “primary characteristic” of “aesthetic fulfillment.” Verbal concepts can never sufficiently describe the complexity of reality: they target the universal and forgo the individual. Aesthetic experience corrects the conceptual description of reality. It refuses to be reduced.<sup>41</sup>

Marcuse’s aesthetics of subversion reconstructed the linguistic character of art according to the grammar of classical modernity. In retrospect, he seems to have been firmly anchored in the 1960s. Today it seems as if aesthetic and artistic developments have come a long way in the interceding decades. Marcuse’s philosophy of art adheres to the terms and conditions of historical materialism. Realism connected Marcuse with Lukács and Adorno. According to Marcuse, art always maintains a mimetic relationship to reality. But that does not refer to mimesis in the sense of reproducibility (as in the “reflection theory” of Marxist dogma). Marcuse thought of a stylized, estranging mimesis. Alban Berg’s *Wozzeck*, Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*, or Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame* are prominent examples in Marcuse’s concept of estranging mimesis. He was, naturally, strongly inspired by Adorno. “In this way, art founds its own world order,” said Marcuse in 1974 in Bremen. “In this sense, great art is always concrete, mimesis of reality, estrangement that nonetheless remains connected to familiar reality. Abstract art, which is not faithful to the mimesis of reality,” he said, “is just decoration.”<sup>42</sup>

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German quotation from Marcuse, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, Bd. 2: *Kunst und Befreiung*, ed. Peter-Erwin Jansen (Lüneburg 2000), p. 106.

41 Herbert Marcuse, “Some Remarks on Aragon: Art in Politics in the Totalitarian Era,” in Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism* (London and New York 1998). [Quotation in German is from Marcuse, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, Bd. 2: *Kunst und Befreiung*, ed. Peter-Erwin Jansen (Lüneburg 2000), pp. 49f. See Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York 1948).

42 Herbert Marcuse, “Art and Revolution”, included in this volume, pp. 160ff. Quotation in German from Marcuse, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, Bd. 2: *Kunst und Befreiung*, p. 143.

This comes across as outmoded, but this connection between art and reality ties Marcuse's aesthetics to the questions of today. The realism of new audiovisual media is indeed mimetic, but it is not necessarily critically estranging. Postmodernism rehabilitated representation and verisimilitude in visual arts, and this is an indication that Marcuse's coordinate system is not obsolete. Even the neo-sensualism of present-day media aesthetics is connected with these tendencies.

The new media, which can no longer be described according to the literary model, engage their users in a much more direct, physical way than did the former book culture. That which with Nietzsche was philosophical speculation, the physiological basis of art, is now implemented by engineers who install channels whose tones and pictures affect the human senses directly through the alphabetic code.

Something was thus won back from the "performative-motor dimension of aesthetic experience" into which our written culture had been "displaced by the literary model, coupling discourse exclusively to 'inner experience.'"<sup>43</sup> Such shifts can be clarified and grasped using Marcuse's categories. Today's media world arose from the convergence of computer and telecommunications technologies. A critical theory of the media world and its aesthetics criticizes the "event culture." It criticizes the apologetics of shopping malls and theme parks, which are stylized as mass culture's "worlds of experience" – the social spaces for conspicuous consumption. Their basis is the economic dominance and cultural hegemony of the communications and service sectors. With the aid of technology, an "impressive simplification" and "experienced play with strong stimuli," they operate an "optical raid" in the intensified "struggle for the attention of the masses."<sup>44</sup>

"Works of art" were, for Marcuse, not only great works of the level of Goethe and Brecht, Beethoven and Berg or Cézanne and Picasso. Certain products of mass culture also constituted works of art for Marcuse: the songs of Bob Dylan, photos, films, or jazz. Marcuse listened to and examined precisely what took place in their details. In free jazz improvisation, something else happens than in commercial rock music. Improvisation and compositional freedom is something other than the conformist cult of stars and bands. Marcuse observed how jazz, in the entertainment industry, gradually ran out of its *Air from Other Planets*. But he did not draw the conclusion that the commercial-caused collapse of the distinction between serious and popular music in the 1960s was only the expression of false consciousness. He saw a legitimate aesthetic need coming into justification.

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43 Friedrich Balke, "Die Tyrannei der Medien und die Literatur," *Merkur*, 5 (2000), pp. 454, 452.

44 Georg Franck, "Medienästhetik und Unterhaltungsarchitektur," *Merkur*, 7 (2000), pp. 595, 594.

In his lecture before the musicians in Boston, Marcuse stated that popular music was a “legitimate heiress of classical music.” It contains a similar element of humanity as Beethoven’s symphonies, whose artistic language, in the century of the Destruction – the century of Auschwitz, Vietnam, and Biafra – is no longer state of the art. Therefore “these forms [would have to] be destroyed and replaced by others.” As stated earlier, he did not hold to this thesis for long. But he did maintain the other point of his Boston address on popular music. This referred to a dimension of aesthetic experience, which had been displaced in literary culture since the classical period. In the field of music, it was displaced into the subaltern realm of dance and march music. The lecture concerns physical participation in performative events. It is concerned with the “translation” of music into the corporal reality of the sense of hearing, the “translation of acoustic movement (of the body of the recipients) into movement in space.” Black music introduced a “qualitative change.” The new “*desublimated* music transfers the movement of *sounds* directly into bodily movement.” It is a “*non-contemplative* music, which bridges the gap between performance and reception by setting the body directly (nearly automatically) into spontaneous motion, the ‘normal’ movement pattern distorted and twisted by subversive sounds and rhythms.” Those who go along with this music do not regress. They are not struck by the spell of the march pulse. Marcuse was inspired: the “whole generation follows itself alone and the melody of its body.”<sup>45</sup>

Naturally, it did not escape Marcuse that this Dionysian unshackling was rapidly curtailed. Fans of rock and pop music frequently exhibit conformist behavior patterns. Five years after the Boston lecture, Marcuse formulated a critique of the rock scene in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, acknowledging that the *nachleben* (afterlife) of the ancient aesthetic categories of mimesis and catharsis in late capitalist modernity has its downside.<sup>46</sup> But Marcuse’s thesis of the Dionysian and physiological truth of popular music remains valid. Bob Dylan’s artistic song lyrics or Jimi Hendrix’s ingenious cross-fading technology, with which he brought the martial violence of liberty to expression at Woodstock, are authentic art forms. There are worlds between them and the narcissistic rituals of Mick Jagger or Michael Jackson. The rhythmic sophistication of Detroit’s Motown music intensifies the experience of the physical. The monotonous beat in sports arenas and

45 Herbert Marcuse, “Commencement Speech to the New England Conservatory of Music”, included in this volume, p. 137. Quotation in German from Marcuse, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, Bd. 2: *Kunst und Befreiung*, pp. 91–2.

46 Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. Quotation in German from *Konterrevolution und Revolte*, trans. Alfred Schmidt assisted by Rolf and Renate Wiggershaus (Frankfurt am Main 1973), pp. 134–5. For a recent discussion of that topic see Roger Behrens, “Schwierigkeiten einer Philosophie der Popkultur,” in Gerhard Schweppenhäuser and Jörg H. Gleiter (eds) *Kultur – philosophische Spurensuche* (Weimar 2000), pp. 94–110.

rave halls (or concerts of German neo-Nazi rock) lives, like the march music of old, on the primacy of both its rigidly struck chords and its general bass pattern.

Marcuse sympathized with the lifting of restrictions in the worlds of art and of everyday life that took place in pop culture. Nevertheless, he did not interpret it as a harbinger of revolution, but rather as an indication of the “state of disintegration within the system.”<sup>47</sup> The new aesthetic forms and content of everyday culture appeared relevant to Marcuse, but only if it could integrate them, using the technique of estrangement, into the discourse of critical social theory. Marcuse compared the songs of Dylan to Brecht’s lyrics, because both laid claim to subjectivity, which cannot be functionalized for mimetic reproduction. Dylan interested Marcuse because he criticized social conformity on one hand, but remained obliged to an autonomous law of form. Dylan refused to be politically functionalized.<sup>48</sup> For Marcuse, popular music was a resource of experience that did not alienate physicality. But it interested him more as a medium of critical estrangement. Through it, humans should experience their exception to heteronomic functionality in the production process. From this perspective – and from no other – Marcuse legitimized the Dionysian elements of popular culture. For him, the intoxication and orgiastic experience were the determinate negation of the suppression of instinct. He saw it as an engine of the imagination and a “pre-appearance” of utopia. That quite approximates the Nietzschean interpretation of mass celebration in Hermann Hesse’s *Steppenwolf*.<sup>49</sup> This view of things undoubtedly holds a great deal of truth. But I nevertheless regard it as a reductionist view of the popular arts.<sup>50</sup> These, too, always satisfy the need for entertainment and self-indulgence, and that is completely legitimate. If we truly want to appreciate the popular arts adequately, we must not interpret them from an exclusively historical-philosophical perspective, or from that of estrangement theory. Today’s dialogue between critical theorists and researchers of popular culture in the field of cultural studies shows the way that advances in this area may be made. Yet Marcuse contributed important insights to the debate on art and popular culture, as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer did in their own way.

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47 Herbert Marcuse, *Das Ende der Utopie. Vorträge und Diskussionen in Berlin 1967* (Frankfurt am Main 1980), p. 19.

48 For a discussion of Dylan as an authentic artist within the culture industry, see Richard Klein’s brilliant book: *My Name It Is Nothing. Bob Dylan: Nicht Pop, nicht Kunst* (Berlin 2006).

49 See Herbert Marcuse, “USA – Organisationsfrage und revolutionäres Subjekt,” in *Zeit-Messungen. Drei Vorträge und ein Interview* (1975), p. 184.

50 See Douglas Kellner, “Kulturindustrie und Massenkommunikation. Die Kritische Theorie und ihre Folgen”, in Wolfgang Bonß and Axel Honneth (eds) *Sozialforschung als Kritik. Zum sozialwissenschaftlichen Potential der Kritischen Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main 1982), pp. 482–515. See also Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, “Naddel” gegen ihre Liebhaber verteidigt. *Ästhetik und Kommunikation in der Massenkultur* (Bielefeld 2004).

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