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**The Containment of Social Change in Western Capitalist Society: Technological  
Rationality and the Liberation of Humanity**

By

**Brittany R. Morris**

A Major Research Paper

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of Philosophy  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts  
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2019

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**The Containment of Social Change in Western Capitalist Society: Technological  
Rationality and the Liberation of Humanity**

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December, 11<sup>th</sup> 2019,

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## **ABSTRACT**

Western civilization is one of the most advanced civilizations to date. The resources to meet the basic life requirements of all members of society. However, the struggle to survive and meet one's basic needs persist. Herbert Marcuse argued that the reason social change is not enacted is because humanity is effectively being contained. Containment is the tendency's in society that condition the behaviours, rationality and nature of human beings; which causes the compliance with an immoral and irrational society. This analysis addresses the major forms of containment Marcuse identified. This includes the subtle nature of social control, the false idea that individuals in western society no longer need to be liberated, the change in the master slave relationship between owners and workers, the psychological dimensions of containment and most importantly technological rationality. This project argues that there forces in industrial capitalist society that prevent constructive changes to the quality of human life and freedom. It is imperative that critical theorists and humanity understand and dissolution themselves from the oppressive conditions in our world today. This can be done through creating a new sensibility in individuals and the redirection of technology towards the intentional use of the available material and intellectual resources to satisfy basic needs on a global scale to bring about a truly human society.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For Marcuse, the containment of social rebellion is one of the most important political achievements of modern industrial society. By “containment” Marcuse means the prevention of qualitative social change that would create conditions that promote the peaceful, full and free development of human capacities. This transformation would lead to a better human society. The sort of human flourishing he envisions depends upon the development of a new direction for the production of goods and resources. Production would have to shift from the production of the means of production and consumer commodities towards the production of goods that meet all human life requirements. By propelling us towards destruction and blocking consciousness of the real character of Capitalist society, containment dissolves the possibilities of achieving a new, and better human existence. For one of the first times in history, it is a real possibility to meet everyone’s basic needs. If the scarcity and dreadful competition in capitalist society were eliminated, human beings could potentially be less violent and develop their capacities to the fullest extent; However, the execution of qualitative changes to human existence has been prevented by the social containment of individuals values and political goals.

Chapter two will focus on the possibility of emancipation from oppressive conditions in society. According to Marcuse "(1) advanced industrial society is capable of containing qualitative change for the foreseeable future; (2)...forces and tendencies exist which may break this containment and explode the society"<sup>1</sup>. Were these later potentials to be realized, we could create a radically new world where everyone is fed, clothed, housed and educated and everyone enabled to fully realize their human potential. The material conditions of living would be so drastically

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<sup>1</sup> Marcuse, Herbert, *One-Dimensional Man, Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, (Boston: Beacon Press 1991), XXXIII.

changed that society would be unrecognizable to today. Individuals would no longer need to struggle to survive and pursue their passions.

Without providing a blueprint for liberation from oppressive conditions in society, this paper will gesture towards practical ideas that could provide a foundation for how society can begin to realize the goal of creating the necessary conditions for the full and free development of human capacities. This will include a revolution of values and a transformation of how basic human life requirements are met with a minimum of toil and within the limits of nature. The end ambition is achieving what Marcuse called the pacification of existence. The pacification of existence is the meeting of all human life-requirements, which creates the necessary condition for the fullest development of human capacities.

In Chapter Three, I will address the containment structures that were present when Marcuse was writing and how they have persisted and evolved into present day. This discussion will include: the subtle nature of social control, the false idea that individuals in western society no longer need to be liberated, the change in the master slave relationship between owners and workers, and the psychological dimensions of containment. These methods of containment have been woven together with technological rationality into an omnipresent force subjecting humanity to a dominating ideology. This force has prevented the emergence of effective movements for qualitative social change to human life and the fostered the continuation of unnecessary toil.

Chapter Four will be devoted to Marcuse's idea of technological rationality. I will argue that the containment is inseparable from the technological modes of control. Technological rationality is the social "habit of thought,"<sup>2</sup> caused by the omnipresent use of modern technology. Marcuse defines it as "technology, as a mode of production, as the totality of instruments, devices and contrivances which characterize the machine age is thus at the same time a mode of organizing

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



and perpetuating (or changing) social relationships, a manifestation of prevalent thought and behavior patterns, an instrument for control and domination.”<sup>3</sup> Marcuse is not only critiquing the technology but also asserting the unbalanced power and undemocratic methods that govern technological development. It is important to keep in mind that the apparatus alone does not bear the entirety of the blame for the containment of human beings, because the technology is “things moving by themselves once they have been set on the wrong track, so that all intellectual mastery generates its own servitude”<sup>4</sup>. There are a set of reified relations associated with technological development that are essential to Marcuse’s critique of technological rationality.

Operationalism, productivity, efficiency and compliance with capitalist production has become the most common habit of thought amongst individuals. Operationalism reduces a concept with normative and practical implications that transcend the present state of things to a set of operations associated with existing institutions which results in the collapse of values into facts. I will elaborate on this process in the second section of Part Three. The first generation of critical theory and Marcuse's philosophy are more pertinent than ever because our society could reach a height of barbarism that Marcuse predicted and feared would occur.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter five of this paper will return to the alternatives to containment and the tendencies towards liberation present in our institutionalized social relations. This examination of alternatives will include the importance of becoming conscious of and enacting what Marcuse referred to as the New Sensibility, “which expresses the ascent of the life instinct over the aggressiveness and guilt, would foster, on a social scale, the vital need for the abolition of injustice and misery and would

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<sup>3</sup> Marcuse, Herbert “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology”, *Technology War and Fascism: Collected Papers Volume on*, Edited By, Douglas Kellner (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group: New York 1998), 42.

<sup>4</sup> Hebert, Marcuse, “Reflections on Science and Technology”, *Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation: Collected Papers of Hebert Marcuse Volume Five*, Edited by, Douglas Kellner and Clayton Pierce (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group: New York, 2011), 144.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Marcuse, “The New Sensibility (1970),” YouTube Video, 53:21, Posted By, “Biophily2” October 1, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBWiiFtqg84>

shape the further evolution of the “standard of living.””<sup>6</sup> As I will argue in this conclusion, while modern technology is a vehicle for containment and the perpetuation of oppressive conditions; it is also necessary for the liberation of all humanity. Technology can be directed towards the intentional use of the available material and intellectual abilities to satisfy basic needs on a global scale to bring about a truly human society.<sup>7</sup> I will argue that the new sensibility and a transformation of technology will indicate a turning point in the evolution of contemporary society towards the pacification of existence. The scientific and technological resources to create qualitative improvements to human existence are available. It is more necessary than ever to try to make these possibilities a reality.

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<sup>6</sup> Herbert, Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Beacon Press: Boston 1969), 26.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew, Feenberg, *Technosystem: The Social Life of Reason* (Harvard University Press: Massachusetts 2017) 8.

## CHAPTER 2: VALUES, NEEDS AND A PACIFIED SOCIETY

Herbert Marcuse was a dialectical thinker and one of the revolutionary minds of his age. He had the intellectual courage to look critically at the setting in which we live; but, also had the nerve to offer prescriptions to the problems he identified and critiqued. Marcuse used the power of negative dialectical thinking as a tool for analyzing the world of facts in terms of its internal inadequacy. In a “Note on Dialectic,” Marcuse stated,

Dialectical thought thus becomes negative in itself. Its function is to break down the self-assurance and self-contentment of common sense, to undermine the sinister confidence in the power and language of facts, to demonstrate that unfreedom is so much at the core of things that the development of their internal contradictions leads necessarily to qualitative change: the explosion and catastrophe of the established state of affairs”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, dialectical thought is the power of negative thinking; the power to examine how the given came to be given, and thus undermine its claim to the authority of given fact. Nevertheless, Marcuse was not a pessimist. There is a hope and a utopian, theme that runs through all of his publications.<sup>9</sup> For Marcuse, our capacity to imagine alternatives is the intellectual basis of social change. That which starts in the mind as an ideal to be realized becomes actual through process of social change. Humans are never simply what they are: there is always an element of what they could make themselves be. This “more than” is what containment tries to contain.

As Marcuse states in *Negations*:

“What May I hope?”, it would point less to eternal bliss and inner freedom than to the already possible unfolding and fulfillment of needs and wants. In a situation where

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<sup>8</sup> Herbert Marcuse, “A Note on Dialectic,” *The Essential Marcuse Selected writings of Philosopher Herbert Marcuse*, Edited by Andrew Feenberg and William Leiss (Beacon Press, Boston 2007) 66.

<sup>9</sup> In this context utopia is defined not as a ‘perfect’ world of all struggle and conflicts as” the historical realization in a refashioned world of the rational contents of the imagination” Andrew Feenberg “Marcuse: Reason, Imagination, and Utopia” ( *Radical Philosophy Review*, volume 21, number 2 (2018): 271-298) 1.

such a future is a real possibility, phantasy is an important instrument in the task of continually holding a goal up to view.<sup>10</sup>

This paper would be pointless unless there were very real possibilities for change. Marcuse's critiques of containment presuppose this possibility for real solutions to our deepest problems.

### ***A Revolution of Values and Needs***

Marcuse often appealed to values, which he argued were at the root of the possibility of social transformation. He defines values as the norms and aspirations that motivate the behavior of individuals. Values are a reflection of the social relations in a society. There are two sides to the dialectical coin of values. When values are one-dimensional, they confine aspirations to those which the current social system can satisfy. These values close off possibilities. However, there are also critical values that transcend the given universe of thought and action. On one hand, there are systems of values instilled in us through socialization, and on the other hand, deeper species values anchored in our social biological nature. Under capitalism values become transfigured, Marcuse states, "The established values become the people's own values: adaptation turns into spontaneity, autonomy; and the choice between social necessities appears as freedom."<sup>11</sup> However, these transfigured values are rooted in true needs, like the need for freedom, beauty and instinctual solidarity between human beings.

Individuals can become bound by a current value and that can perpetuate their own containment. For example, "the values of liberty and equality express first of all the exigencies of the capitalist mode of production, namely, free competition, among relative equals, free wage

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<sup>10</sup> Herbert, Marcuse, "The Concept of Essence" *Negations* (Mayfly Books, 2009), 114.  
<http://mayflybooks.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/9781906948054Negations.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 13.

labour, exchange of equivalents regardless of race, status and so on.”<sup>12</sup> However, unsatisfied values anchored deep in our nature can become a powerful motivation for creating social change.<sup>13</sup> Values can go beyond the current social system by projecting individuals towards possibilities that are currently blocked because these values are anchored in deep bio-social primary nature. The values of liberty and equity signal unrealized possibilities in the current society that can motivate social change.

To illustrate, for the majority of the population participating in work of alienated labour is a human necessity in order to survive. Work, in capitalist society is not fulfilling. However, at the same time, the capitalist concept of work points towards the possibility of work as one’s aptitude or passion for an activity, or “the self-realization of a human being in creative work.”<sup>14</sup> For example, the self-realization of human being in creative work can be illuminated by the difference between producing a wooden furniture on an assembly line contrasted against a handmade piece by a carpenter with a passion and talent work the craft.

A revolution of values is a pre-requisite for the pacification of existence. It is imperative that a transformation of the current values in society precedes changes to the current material and intellectual culture and their institutions. The new values would emerge on the basis of satisfied basic needs and unsatisfied transcendent needs or basic needs for the pacified existence. This transformation of values would invalidate the existing political and economic institutions and would create new free relations between the sexes and nature. It would be a switch from self-propelling productivity, collectively controlled production to freely developing needs or

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<sup>12</sup> Herbert, Marcuse, “A Revolution in Values” *Towards a Critical Theory of Society: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse Volume Two*, Edited by Douglas Kellner (Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group 2001) 196.

<sup>13</sup> “For example, Marcuse States in ‘A Revolution of Values’ “For the vast majority of the population work has always been dehumanizing, painful alienated labour that is an activity in which a human being cannot develop and satisfy his or her own individual faculties and capabilities. At the same time, this concept of work as a calling and vocation projects a very different attitude and position of work in life; namely, the self-realization of a human being in creative work” 196.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 196.

comprehensively satisfying existing needs and fully unfolding our creative capacities. Essentially, these new values would refuse calculable utility values in favour aesthetic values. A transformation from life as a means to an end to life as an end in itself.

The experience of necessary but denied needs can be catalyst for change. The feeling of the unmet vital need to be freed from the administered comforts and the destructive productivity of an exploitive society can be positive and a hopeful catalyst driving society to new possibilities. Marcuse states a revolution of values would, “be a revolution under the pressure of the vital need for self-determination, the need for joy, for no longer being an instrument of the ever-present apparatus.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, the awareness of non-utilitarian, non-oppressive and non-instrumental goals that undermine the established class structure of oppression and concepts of values to create a new rationality and a new morality.

In his collected lectures, Marcuse distinguishes between true needs and false needs. He believes so many people are preoccupied with false needs that they are unable to see the ways in which society fails to meet true needs. False needs are not requirements of life and real flourishing but are rather consumer demands for junk that are superimposed on the individuals by an irrational society and are harmful to the individual. False needs are not necessary for real fulfilment of life. For example, under capitalism aggressive performances in alienated labour in order to survive. True needs are authentic needs that are determined by and through the individual without external manipulation. True needs are universally human, and include basic needs for survival like lodging, food and air. However, true needs can include universal biological social needs such as freedom, peace and joy. For example, creating a world where “the necessities of life cease to demand the aggressive performances of earning a living and the “non-necessary becomes a vital need.”<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 199.

<sup>16</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 5.

satisfaction of true needs provides the necessary condition for the fullest development of human capacities.

However, there are some that find Marcuse's distinction between true and false needs unsatisfactory. The term 'need' is ambiguous, and therefore, to provide clearer illumination of the distinction between false and true needs I will draw upon Jeff Noonan's articulation of life requirements in *Materialist Ethics and Life Value*. Noonan defines life-requirements as "anything which, if we are deprived of it, results in harm to our organism or our humanity."<sup>17</sup> A life-requirement exists regardless of the manipulation of an individual's thoughts or what the individual desires. For example, individuals require food to survive and will experience harm if they go a prolonged period of time without consuming nutrients. However, the sustenance the individual requires is healthy food that is full of the nutrients our bodies require

The life-requirements of a human being become increasingly difficult to identify in a capitalist society; thus, Noonan differentiates life-requirements from the demands inculcated in people by the requirements of the commodity market. The difference between a life-requirement and a consumer demand is that the deprivation of a life-requirement will cause objective harm; not meeting a demand placed on them by consumer culture only results in a *feeling* of harm. The feeling of harm that arises when an individual is without a consumer demand can be assuaged by redirecting their desires. It is vital to understand life-ground in value or making life worth living to differentiate the two. There is a difference between those needs that we must satisfy in order to flourish, and instrumental needs that we must satisfy to see the completion of a project.

This distinction is a much clearer distinction because it emphasizes the real needs are the necessary requirements for the development of human capacities. The goal is to ensure that all human beings can express and enjoy human capacities. Practically speaking, "people have a

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<sup>17</sup> Jeff, Noonan, *Materialist Ethics and Life Value* (McGill-Queens University Press 2012), 47.

legitimate claim that the ruling value system under which they live to ensure the satisfaction of universal life-requirements but not any and every instrumental input required by any individuals project whatsoever.”<sup>18</sup> The life requirements of individuals include organic life requirements that human beings all share because they are biologically similar like food, water, air, shelter, clothing and health care. But, the social-cultural requirements of human life are equally important. For example, “to be a human being is to be a member of a species which builds its own social world, evaluates it according to theoretical, ethical, political, and aesthetic standards and changes it in response to systemic problems and contradictions.”<sup>19</sup> It is important to keep this clear understanding of the human being in life-requirements and consumer demand in mind throughout the following discussions on meeting all human needs and the conditioning of needs.

Marcuse predicted that a new liberated society would be characterized by a change in the quality of life which hinges on the satisfaction of needs. He states that:

This Qualitative change must occur in the needs, in the infrastructure of man (itself a dimension of the infrastructure of society) : the new direction, the new institutions and relationships of production, must express the ascent of needs and satisfaction very different from and even antagonistic to those prevalent in the exploitative societies.<sup>20</sup>

Human beings can find solidarity in the shared drive to acquire what sustains life. In other words, human beings share the organic needs to survive. It is something that unites all living things. However, it is currently being used to isolate individuals from each other by forcing them to compete for scarce resources. When individuals recognize their shared needs, in contrast, solidarity is stimulated and the struggle for the pacified society begins. Thus, for qualitative social change towards a better society requires a revolution of needs, not only how an individual meets their needs

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<sup>18</sup> Noonan, *Materialist Ethics and Life Value*, 49.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 59

<sup>20</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 4.



but in the foundation of the kind of needs that are met, where individuals can determine their own needs.

Marcuse argues in an *Essay on Liberation* that liberation requires that we re-evaluate our biological nature. He states that the unmet needs are rooted in our biology and once we recognize this deep level, we become aware of how actually unhappy we are and begin to struggle towards a society that would satisfy our deep unmet erotic needs for unity, peace and beauty. In a footnote in *Essay on Liberation* Marcuse states he defines biological, “not in the sense of the scientific discipline, but in order to designate the process and the dimension in which inclinations, behavior patterns, and aspirations become vital needs which, if not satisfied become harmful to the organism. Conversely, socially induced needs and aspirations may result in a more pleasurable organic behavior.”<sup>21</sup> This includes different instinctual needs, different reactions of the body as well as the mind.

It is not a supposed unescapable human nature that causes people to be cruel, destructive, competitive and exploitive. It is a set of institutionalized relations that forces individuals to adapt to the commodity form of capitalism. With the adaptation to a cruel affluent system, human beings perpetuate the extension of the social controls over their behaviours and satisfactions of the needs that society produces. Human nature is malleable because “once a specific morality is firmly established as a norm social behavior, it is not only interjected it also operates as a norm of organic behavior:”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the cultural needs or social life-requirements of individuals can become embedded in the instinctual nature of the individual. As a result, a revolution of the ways in which needs are met and the kind of needs met is necessary to foster the fullest development of human capacities.

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<sup>21</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 10.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 11.

## *The Pacification of Existence*

The goal of the social critique that Marcuse is directed towards is the pacification of existence. Marcuse defines the pacification of existence as a life free from domination, scarcity and toil. The pacification of existence is not a utopian (in the sense of utopian that means unrealistic) because the resources, both intellectual and material are available to achieve this goal today. The pacification of life is not the static resolution of all problems and conflicts. Instead, it is the deployment of social conditions in order to permit the full development of human capacities.<sup>23</sup> If society meet everyone's basic needs, it would create the necessary conditions for promoting human capacities to the highest scale. If people had their basic needs met it would create a more human existence and would be possible to create an improved relationship with each other and nature because,

Without this dreadful competition, socialism could overcome the fetishism of the "productive forces." It could gradually reduce the subordination of man to the instruments of his labor, direct production toward the elimination of alienated labor, while renouncing the wasteful and enslaving conveniences of the capitalist consumer society.<sup>24</sup>

In a pacified society, necessary conditions for promoting the development of human capacities in the highest degree would be met. If people had their life requirements met it would be possible to create a better relationship with each other and nature. That aggressive energy would be transformed into erotic energy of the life instincts. Erotic instincts are "the impulse to preserve and enrich life by mastering nature in accordance with the developing vital needs"<sup>25</sup> This is the foundation for a less aggressive reality principle and a free society.

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<sup>23</sup> Feenberg, "Marcuse: Reason, Imagination, and Utopia" 2.

<sup>24</sup> Herbert, Marcuse, *Counter Revolution and Revolt*, (Beacon Press: Boston 1972) 2.

<sup>25</sup> Herbert, Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, (Beacon Press Boston, 1966), 125.

<http://freudians.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Marcuse-Eros-and-Civilization-Part-I-Under-the-Rule-of->

The Pacification of existence would free individuals from the socially imposed necessity to struggle to survive. Individuals' competing needs, desires, and aspirations are no longer organized and controlled capitalist interests of domination and scarcity. The collective ownership, collective control and planning of the distribution and production of goods is a necessary foundation for the distribution of all available resources for the elimination of scarcity. However, it is not enough to implement these initial intuitions of liberation. The consciousness and nature of human beings must be rehabilitated and behave in accordance with a pacified society. This can only be done by understanding the conditioning of human beings' behaviors and thoughts. Society must rupture the consciousness from the familiar to liberate existence from the contained capitalist society.

### CHAPTER 3: THE CONTAINMENT OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE GREAT SOCIETY

Containment is a means of social control; it prevents thought and action from posing radical alternative to industrial capitalist society. Containment works through social structures which dissolve forces and thoughts that contradict the current social, political and cultural states of affairs. The containment of human potential ensures that most individuals are unable to identify this contradiction and act to make qualitative improvements to human life. The room to critique this society is still open. However, this space must be occupied by critical social theory to allow for revolutionary activity or real, democratic positive changes to occur.

Marcuse refers to containment as the tendencies in society that prevent the pacification of existence. For Marcuse, the degrees of repression should not only be measured against the past and present. Marcuse's philosophy often juxtaposes "what could be" articulated in these texts that highlight the bleakness of "what is."<sup>26</sup> One ought not only examine the ways individuals have been unfree in the past in comparison to the present, but also, examine the degrees to which individuals are socially controlled in contrast to the levels of self-determination that could be potentially achieved based on the current material conditions.

For Marcuse, oppression of the individual should be measured against the future and the possibilities available to individuals and society. For example, labour is still alienated when it could be radically transformed into pleasurable and socially valuable work. This could be further illustrated by the increase of the unfreedom of individuals and the lack of originality in thought and expression, especially in regard to developing human freedoms. With the rise of industrial enterprise and the integration of technology into individual lives, there has not been the scope of advancements possible in self-determination and the ability for individuals to be the architects of

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<sup>26</sup> Douglas, Kellner, "Introduction to The Second Edition" *One Dimensional Man*, xxxjjj.

their own existence. For example, members of this society are still required to struggle to pay for their existence, time spent at work continues to exceed free time when this no longer is a requirement. The scientific, technological and material resources are available to reduce significantly the time spent engaged in unnecessary labour and fulfill the majority of individual needs; yet, we are not even conscious of this possibility. As civilization and society have progressed, the individual has become even more powerless when confronted with the political, economic and technological apparatus society has created.

### ***The Subtle Social Control in Western Capitalist Society***

For Marcuse, social control in industrial western society takes a much more insidious shape than the violent domination or overt force seen in totalitarian regimes. This point is true even though “torture has become a normal instrument of ‘interrogation’ around the world.”<sup>27</sup> The fear of radical social change in the West is not directly and primarily countered by the various mainstream methods of police, state and open dictatorship. These methods are still used: for example, immigrants, racialized groups and minorities suffer from the brutality of the police state and violent oppression. Furthermore, the surveillance of the public in the name of protecting individuals from other foreign threats or the curtailing of civil rights in the United States after the 9/11 tragedy. However, the surveillance is hidden from the majority of the population by a technological and ideological veil. Furthermore, surveillance is justified as the will of the people when it is against their interests. Many believe trading their individual freedom and rights to privacy are a reasonable exchange for security against forging threats. The other portion of the population that recognizes the authoritarian nature of security and surveillance are forced to accept it because decisions of personal and national security are made at places which the individuals have no control.

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<sup>27</sup> Marcuse, *Counter Revolution and Revolt*, 1

Though overt authoritarian methods are implemented in some cases, the more subtle modes of social control are more comfortable and effective. First, more covert methods of domination are more difficult to identify and revolt against. Second, subtle coercion techniques used in modern containment close the space where critical thought takes place. It is much more effective to diminish the dimension of thought where people can question their society than to allow people the intellectual space to levy critiques and later prevent revolt with force. If individuals are not able to recognize that they need to be emancipated, they remain complacent and docile. For example, “there is no recent revolution to be undone, and there is none in the offing. And yet fear of revolution which creates the common interest linked the various stages and forms of counter-revolution.”<sup>28</sup> Those in power rarely need to end revolts with violence because revolutionary activity is prevented from being incepted and acted upon in the first place.

Therefore, containment as a form of social control, does not always manifest itself as an unconcealed political force because “the counter revolution is preventative, and in the western world, altogether preventative.”<sup>29</sup> Western society is being contained, controlled and manipulated without overt violence.<sup>30</sup> Behaviors, rationality, and morality are being conditioned with the mass majority of people being unaware of the tactics being deployed. For example, the economic system appears to deliver goods on a much higher scale than ever before. People can buy the latest commodities and the quality of living is better than it has been in the past. People for the most part think they are happy or are “too well off to care.” With only the minorities bearing the brunt of the suffering from the system. The less underprivileged buy into the false illusion and they are content for the most part because, “society takes care of the need for liberation by satisfying the needs which make servitude palatable and perhaps even unnoticeable, and it accomplishes this fact in the

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> These claims do not necessarily apply with equal weight to racial minorities, indigenous communities, minorities where overt violence and police presence is much of an epidemic.

process of production itself.”<sup>31</sup> Yet, the requirement for unnecessary labour and surplus repression persists. Individuals are indoctrinated grave diggers whether they believe they enjoy it or not, they are still digging their own graves.

That is not to say individuals do not feel there is something missing from their lives. Individuals have a vague awareness that life could be made worth living for all members of society. Those who are unable to sublimate the awareness that capitalist society is miserable and obscene suffer the misery of knowing the problem but not having a solution. This what Marcuse refers to as the malcontent. Marcuse states that “The malcontent who cannot repress his observation that the affluent society is as miserable as it is preposterous, as destructive as it is productive, as inefficient as it is efficient is tempted to put blame on the “technological society.”<sup>32</sup> Yet, the technology alone is not to blame. The undemocratic development of technology, the rationality associated with the apparatus and a set of reified structures maintained by human beings in this society are the more difficult harbingers of containment to understand.

It is rare that one can appropriately identify the source of their dissatisfaction, but there is indeed a felt lack of meaning in modern society. In most cases the hatred and frustration of the alienated worker is misdirected onto scapegoats like immigrants. For many the capitalist mode of production; the requirement to participate in dehumanizing alienated labour at least pays, and with the money workers can drown their sorrows in and acquiring luxury commodities.

To illustrate: when the price of oil drops to forty dollars a barrel it becomes too expensive to extract the oil. The oil companies will lay-off thousands of their workers to ensure the value of the company’s stock is maintained. For example, in 2015 when the world oil price dropped by 55%, “Cenovus Energy Inc., which cut 800 jobs this year, announced that it had identified as many as

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<sup>31</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Hebert, Marcuse, “Reflections on Science and Technology”, *Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation: Collected Papers of Hebert Marcuse Volume Five*, Edited by, Douglas Kellner and Clayton Pierce (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group: New York, 2011), 144.

400 more positions that are “no longer required because of the decrease in work due to the continued low price environment,””<sup>33</sup> Since world oil prices are set globally, the layoffs are not the fault of left leaning people and environmental activist. Yet, the frustration of the fired worker is not directed to the company or the capitalist mode of production because the worker believes they are happy with those systems. Rather, the frustration of the worker is directed towards environmentalists and ‘Socialist’ governments (like former Alberta premier Rachel Notley’s NDP government) who are falsely blamed negatively influencing their industry.

Most people are happy operating within the status quo rationality. Individuals believe they are free within the capitalist mode of production because it is the system that delivers the goods. As we have seen, these goods do not in fact satisfy any real needs. Those who benefit the most from the capitalist order are thus those who have conned the population into defending their servitude through the containment of alternatives.

Marcuse states that

The alternative is not democratic evolution versus radical action, but rationalization of the status quo versus change. As long as a social system reproduces, by indoctrination and integration, a self-perpetuating conservative majority, the majority reproduces the system itself -- open to changes within, but not beyond, its institutional framework<sup>34</sup>

For Marcuse, an aspect of the emergence of containment is there has been a transformation in the relationship between those that rule and those being ruled. For example, the domination of person by person is maintained through the labour process, which has been dramatically transformed by technology. The wrongdoings of those in power are hidden

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<sup>33</sup> Morgan, Geoffrey, Cenovus and Shell Slash Jobs and spending, Suncor Profit surprises, Financial, July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Post <https://business.financialpost.com/commodities/energy/suncor-energy-inc-cenovus-energy-inc-and-shell-slash-jobs-and-spending-as-oil-carnage-continues>

<sup>34</sup> Marcuse, *Essay on Liberation*, 50.



under a veil of technology. Marcuse argues that “behind the technological veil, behind the political veil of democracy, appears the reality, the universal servitude, the loss of human dignity in a prefabricated freedom of choice.”<sup>35</sup> Destruction, unnecessary waste, exploitation of workers and acts of war go for the most part unseen by the everyday person. According to Marcuse, the capitalist technostructure has transformed the political power structure into a totalitarian regime that de-legitimizes the changes demanded by oppositional forces. The labouring classes have been indoctrinated into the capitalist mode of production and strive to reproduce the system.

The working class or Marx's proletariat is no longer the agent of the revolution in the sense that Marx thought it would be because they have been indoctrinated and integrated into the system. The class structure has changed and cannot be overthrown by the proletariat rising up in the same way Marx predicted they would. To ignore this would be to ignore the historical aspect of historical materialism. Marcuse correctly disagreed with Marxian notion that tools to reject, and reform capitalist were not inherent in the structure. A crisis in capitalism that would allow for a revolution would not necessarily occur because of capitalism's ability to adapt and control society. The revolutionary class has been dispersed to groups that have been marginalized. There is no longer a need to liberate individuals from what is considered a poor society. It would seem foolish to oppose a system that appears to make life easier than before.

The transformation between the relationship amongst the rulers and the ruled can be characterized by the proletariat no longer being a revolutionary agent because “The mass base created by the relation between capital and labor in the 18th and 19th centuries no longer exists in the metropolises of monopoly capital.”<sup>36</sup> For example, a large body of the working class has become

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<sup>35</sup> Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 48.

<sup>36</sup> Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*, 9.

a class that participate in what Marcuse referred to as white collar labour in *One-Dimensional Man*. The organization, exploitation and members of the working class has grown exponentially in tandem with the incorporation of the blue-and-white-collar working class. Those who do not own the means of production for the most part have a higher standard of living than that of Marx's proletariat because, "The assimilating trend shows forth in the occupational stratification. In the key industrial establishments, the "blue-collar" work force declines in relation to the "white-collar" element; the number of non-production workers increases"<sup>37</sup>. There are still laborers that produce material goods. However, creating a distinction between intellectual and material labour has been blurred because the mechanization of the workforce has made the production of goods less physically demanding. Thus, the master-slave relationship between the worker and management has been transformed because the exploitation of the worker is concealed, "the new technological work-world enforces a weakening of the negative position of the working class: the latter no longer appears to be the living contradiction to the established society."<sup>38</sup> The hate and frustration of the worker has been redirected and sublimated by the technological super structure.

Containment is perpetuated by the change within the capitalist mode of production. Firstly, industrialization of the work force has blurred the line between white-collar and blue-collar workers. The drudgery of labour is less physical; however, it reduces the mental space for autonomy. Second, the masters of the wage workers are hidden behind a technological veil. Third, is the production of illusionary forms of freedom reducing the term freedom to something meaningless and derivative. Marcuse uses the examples of "free competition at administrative prices; free discussion after exclusion of all truly deviating opinion; free press which sensors itself better than any state-appointed censor, free choice between brands and gadgets."<sup>39</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>37</sup> Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 31.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Herbert, Marcuse, "The Problem of Social Change in the Technological Society" *Towards a Critical Theory of Society: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse Volume Two*, Edited by Douglas Kellner (Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group 2001), 52.

working class is not the same historical revolutionary agent they were in the past. In order to reignite their potential, their consciousness must be awakened and enlightened through education. People must realize they are unnecessarily conditioned.

Marcuse states, “Now the ever-more-complete mechanization of labor in advanced capitalism, while sustaining exploitation, modifies the attitude and the status of the exploited.”<sup>40</sup> The exploited labour that is executed no longer requires the same kind of physical energy and muscular fatigue executed by the proletariat. However, fatigue of the body has been replaced with mental fatigue and repetition. The atomized work day is filled with repetitive, automatic, and semi-automatic operations, “these operations become even more exhausting because of increased speed-up, control of the machine operators (rather than of the product), and isolation of the workers from each other.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the need for liberation is contained in individuals through changing individuals relationship with their labour through technology.

The repetitive nature of labour is not only present in the world of automation, standardization of activity in employment is present in jobs that do not produce tangible things. The weakening of the political position of the working class is strengthened by the organization of administration. Marcuse states, “The Capitalist bosses and owners are losing their identity as responsible agents; they are assuming the function of bureaucrats in a cooperate machine.”<sup>42</sup> The aggression the workers have towards the system is sublimated and redirected by a technological veil.

The individual members of working class have become an instrument that serves the system. People have been conditioned to believe that they define intellectual and material culture when they are only legitimizing what those that rule have chosen for them. The working class

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<sup>40</sup> Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 27.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 33.

makes capitalist society richer and continues to do so because the individual believes they benefit from the system. Only minorities who are part of the most marginalized feel the full extent of the pains from the system.

Individuals do not establish free meaningful and need satisfying politics, and economics because, they “are the product and object of this management and of this administration, and they, in turn, become active and vociferous, and determine the policies which their managers and administrators want them to determine.”<sup>43</sup> People for the most part, think as a single unit; they embody the rationality of those in control. The various forms of containment ensure the members of society remain complacent in their subordination.

### ***The Contained Psyche***

The social order is thus not maintained by the threat of violence as it is through the containment of individual’s own inner nature. In Marcuse’s ‘Essay Freedom and Freud's Theory of Instincts’<sup>44</sup> he addresses “the notion that what is commonly called ‘progress’ in civilization is based on repression of the individual’s instinctual striving for pleasure and fulfillment.”<sup>45</sup> Marcuse draws on Freud’s theory of instincts to develop his views on what is of essential value in human life and the ways these life-instincts are repressed by the capitalist system.

According to Freud, there are three fundamental forces in individuals. The first is *Eros*, it is the life instinct that binds the living subject into larger and more permanent units.<sup>46</sup> *Eros* strives to make the pleasure principle eternal. The pleasure principle is the driving force in human beings to have instant gratification of needs and urges; it seeks to

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<sup>43</sup> Marcuse, “The Containment of Social Change in Industrial Society.” 83-84.

<sup>44</sup> Herbert, Marcuse, “Freedom and Freud's Theory of Instincts” *The Essential Marcuse Selected Writings of Philosopher Herbert Marcuse*, Edited by Andrew Feenberg and William Leiss (Beacon Press, Boston 2007) 66.

<sup>45</sup> Andrew, Feenberg *The Essential Marcuse*, 159

<sup>46</sup> Marcuse, “Freedom and Freud's theory of Instincts.” 166

maximize the pleasure experienced by the organism. For Marcuse there is a repressed or arrested *organic*, biological needs: to make the human body an instrument of pleasure rather than labor.”<sup>47</sup>

The second is the death instinct or nirvana principle. It is the destructive instinct that desires regression to the condition before birth. The third force is the reality principle or the outside world. The reality principle enforces pressure on the death instinct and the life instinct adapting the pleasure principle and nirvana principle to the outside world. However, the conditions of the outside world are too hostile to meet the needs of these two instincts.

Both the life instinct the death instinct creates forms energy, Eros strives for pleasure and fulfilment and the death instinct strives for eternal peace. However, the energy created by the death instinct is a “destructive energy is diverted from the organism itself and directed toward the outside world in the form of socially useful aggression-toward nature sanctioned enemies-or, in the form of conscience of morality, it is used by the superego for the socially useful mastery of ones drives.”<sup>48</sup> Under capitalism the repression of individuals reaches new heights as part of the process of adapting them to socially useful but alienated labour. Marcuse argues that which is consider progress in western society is often characterized by the surplus repression of an individual striving for pleasure and fulfillment. Surplus repression serves the performance principle, which is the preponderant form of the reality principle but a transfigured form of the reality principle that forces people to adapt to the western capitalist society in the form of alienated labour. Marcuse states, “For the duration of work, which occupies practically the entire existence of the

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<sup>47</sup> Herbert, Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, xv.

<sup>48</sup> Marcuse, “Freedom and Freud's theory of Instincts.” 166.

mature individual, pleasure is "suspended" and pain prevails."<sup>49</sup> The pleasure principle is incompatible with the capitalist social reality. Thus, in order to serve the performance principle, human instincts undergo a repressive transformation.

The social structure is to condition instincts to serve the performance principle. The goal of existence is not happiness or individual peace because "that goal is rather labour, and labour is essentially alienated labour."<sup>50</sup> Finding pleasure in one's life is a reward for labour or a mere coincidence because the surplus repression of individual instincts serves the performance principle or what is considered socially useful by capitalist society.

That is not to say that we can do completely without repression. Freedom in some sense, is possible only on the basis of the repression of some instincts. This is what Marcuse refers to as basic repression. If individuals were completely driven by the pleasure principle and instincts, they would be unable to function because they would be slaves to their instincts. Therefore, the repression of instincts is rational in the sense that it prevents individuals from becoming slaves to their instincts and permits the construction of social institutions which could embody a higher sense of freedom. However, repression became irrational in the development of capitalist civilization and thus it became surplus repression. What Marcuse is concerned with is surplus repression of the instincts. For example, the excess repression of taboos or repressed energy being transformed into the subject-object relationship of work. In industrial society, the reality principle creates a hostile world that transforms individuals into subjects of work.

To contain human potential, capitalist society creates what Marcuse calls a "second nature"<sup>51</sup> in individuals. The second nature controls the biological instincts of human beings by creating consumer demands that sink down to the biology of human beings. Marcuse is not using

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<sup>49</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, 36.

<sup>50</sup> Marcuse, "Freedom and Freud's theory of Instincts." 167.

<sup>51</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 11.

a scientific definition of biology but uses the term to denote the way in which consumer demands and instincts, behaviours and patterns become needs in the sense that if they are not satisfied the human being becomes dysfunctional.

Marcuse states that second nature

Militates against any change that would disrupt and perhaps even abolish this dependence of man on a market ever more densely filled with merchandise-abolish his existence is a consumer consuming himself in buying and selling. The needs generated by this system are thus eminently stabilizing, conservative needs: the counterrevolution anchored in the instinctual structure<sup>52</sup>

Second nature thus generates a new problem. In earlier eras, the key task facing people was how to produce enough to survive. The problem now is how to separate real needs from the false consumer demands that capitalism produces.

Capitalist society is continually producing new things to be consumed and new activities in which to engage. As Marcuse states in 'The Problem of Social Change in Technological Society' "those who control the economy also control the creation of new needs and the ways and means of their satisfaction"<sup>53</sup> Therefore, political leaders and those who control the means of production are continuously steering the needs and how those needs are met at an instinctual level.

To further illustrate the steered satisfaction of needs, consider the old cliché about trying to 'keep up with the Jones's'. Individuals are driven by those in control to acquire new items not because they need them but because other members of their class have those items. The new commodities are created before demand for the commodity is present. Aggressive marketing campaigns are employed to ensure continuous consumption of goods is stimulated. However, the changes the conditioning of needs introduces into the psyche goes much deeper than desire for

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Hebert, Marcuse, "The Problem of Social Change in a Technological Society", 47.

superfluous commodities. Marcuse argues that this conditioning changes individual's nature and drives. As he argues, "the need for possessing, consuming handling, and constantly renewing the gadgets, devices, instruments, engines, offered to and imposed upon the people for using the wares even at the danger of one's own destruction has becomes "biological" in the sense just defined""<sup>54</sup>

Socially profitable needs require mass production and mass consumption in order for the newly created needs to be satisfied. To ensure that there is a demand for the commodities, they need to be marketed to the producers and consumers on an enlarged scale. The needs that are being satisfied are steered by those in control of all major social institutions. The aggressive production required to satisfy the new needs created requires mass production; therefore, individuals are required to work longer days and new coordinated technologies are created to meet the manufactured needs. Therefore, the immense production of new commodities interferes with the free development of needs for creative self-realization. In contrast, the free development of needs would be understood as rooted in the fulfillment life-requirements which is sensuous, ethical and rational. For example, Marcuse states, "planned obsolescence, waste, and the creation of socially preferable needs sustain toil and enslavement by the productive apparatus."<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the creation of new needs not only includes new commodities to consume but also intentional scarcity to ensure a commodities demand and planned obsolescence.

Planned obsolescence means intentionally designing a product to become obsolete by ensuring the product has an artificially restricted duration of use whether that item become unfixable or unfunctional. The concept of planned obsolescence was introduced to the United States by economist Bernard London in 1932.<sup>56</sup> In his article Bernard states:

In the present inadequate economic organization of society, far too much is

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<sup>54</sup> Marcuse, *Essay on Liberation*, 11.

<sup>55</sup> Marcuse, "The Problem of Social Change in a Technological Society", 48.

<sup>56</sup> London, Bernard "Ending the Depression Through Planned Obsolescence" PDF [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/27/London\\_\(1932\)\\_Ending\\_the\\_depression\\_through\\_planned\\_obsolescence.pdf](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/27/London_(1932)_Ending_the_depression_through_planned_obsolescence.pdf)



staked on the unpredictable whims and caprices of the consumer. Changing habits of consumption have destroyed property values and opportunities for employment. The welfare of society has been left to pure chance and accident.<sup>57</sup>

Bernard's suggested solution is to intentionally make the products obsolete by design and government to ensure the chaos of the capitalist economy is controlled and sustained.<sup>58</sup>

Planned obsolescence is a practice implemented and used to sustain the economy in the West. To only name a few items, mobile phones, automobiles, textbooks, fast fashion, light bulbs, kitchen appliances, etc. are all built to fail to ensure repeat customers and the stimulation and reproduction of a contained society

The steered satisfaction of needs by those in power requires individuals to engage in certain activities created by the capitalist system. Most importantly, people continue to work. As Marcuse explains, "this society must under the pressure for enlarged capital accumulation, incessantly create and stimulate needs over and above the needs of subsistence, in other words cultural luxury needs."<sup>59</sup> Industrial capitalist society contains the need for liberation by satisfying the needs which make servitude tolerable and feasibly unnoticed.

The second form of psychological containment is the repressive de-sublimation of sexuality. Eros as the life instinct is sexuality. Its original function was simply "deriving pleasure from the whole body"<sup>60</sup> However, in capitalist society the function of Eros is reduced to instant genital satisfaction. The weakening of Eros creates destructive energy which heightens the need for the control and manipulation of members of society. From being a fundamental expression of

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<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.* 1.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.* 5.

<sup>59</sup> Marcuse, "A Revolution of Values," 199.

<sup>60</sup> Marcuse, "Freedom and Freud's Theory of Instincts" 166.

Eros, sexuality is reduced to a tool of salesmanship. Repressive de-sublimation is a form of containment where the transcending elements of culture have been liquidated, and gratification of sexual desires has become more instant. Contained society, "turns everything it touches into a potential source of progress and of exploitation, drudgery *and* satisfaction, of freedom and of oppression. Sexuality is no exception."<sup>61</sup> Containment has furthered the *happy consciousness* and the de-sublimation of individuals. The *happy consciousness* has made society unaware of their subordination; it is the 'productive' satisfaction libidinal instincts while repressing other erotic forms to facilitate the acceptance of the wrongdoings of society. Through the predominant "repressive de-sublimation of man,"<sup>62</sup> individuals are able to receive instant sexual gratification, but Eros it is not expressed in a higher, mutualistic, more deeply bonding, gratifying form. This instant sexual gratification has made individuals less likely to revolt. For example, sexuality has become a tool to coerce individuals into acquiring items they do not need. Sex is used as advertisement, and in addition, enterprises like the beauty industry are based on making oneself sexually desirable.

Sexuality has been commodified and the true meaning of *Eros* is mutilated. Eros has been reduced to genital satisfaction. The world is more sexually free than previously, however, any sexual liberation in a repressive society will be a repressive liberation because, "the relaxation of taboos alleviates the sense of guilt and binds (through considerable ambivalence) the 'free' individuals libido to the institutionalized fathers."<sup>63</sup> Aggressiveness is steered socially by the de-sublimation of sexuality through the simulated beauty industry reducing but eliminating humanity's sense of guilt in a hostile society.

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<sup>61</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 78.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 56.

<sup>63</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 9.

Containment has been furthered by the reality that art and high culture have been levelled to the status of mere of advertising for the current order of things. Culture has become affirmative, since “the domain of culture is also industrialized; esthetic expressions are robbed of their critical function and circulate as mediators of affirmative contents of the consciousness.”<sup>64</sup> One of many examples is that culture has been turned into a commodity, great pieces of art are now mass produced by the industrialized machine. Copies of Picasso and the Vitruvian Man can be found on coffee mugs and fridge magnets. Art is used to legitimizing and perpetuating the existing order, rather than realizing its critical potential as an elevating contrast to existing reality: objective proof of the creative power of the imagination. Art does not contradict reality or reveal what it could become but endorses it Capitalist society’s containment methods have liquidized culture, making art a luxury and turning culture into a commodity that can be sold "The music of the soul is also the music of salesmanship. Exchange value, not truth value counts."<sup>65</sup> Technological rationality contains society and is unopposed because of the liquidation of culture.

Reality has betrayed the truth of art because in reality art has become elitist and commodified. Now, the great themes of art are used to confirm corporate culture. Choices are no longer made to meet one’s own free will and interest, since “individuals are stripped of their individuality, not by external compulsion, but by the very rationality under which they live.”<sup>66</sup> Modern society teaches submission and going along with the prevailing order of an industrial capitalist society.

It would appear irrational for the public to radically oppose a system that appears to efficiently and productively deliver the comforts and conveniences they believe the machine delivers. Marcuse states, there is a “loss of conscience due to the satisfactory liberties granted by

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<sup>64</sup>Claus, Offe, “Technology and One-Dimensionality: A Version of a Technocracy Thesis?” Ed. Robert, Pippin, Trans. Anne-Marie Feenberg, *Marcuse: Critical Theory & The Promise of Utopia*, (Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, INC. 1998), 218.

<sup>65</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 158.

<sup>66</sup> Marcuse, “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology,” 48.

an unfree society makes for a happy consciousness which facilitates acceptance of the misdeeds of this society. It is the token of declining autonomy and comprehension.”<sup>67</sup> The apparatus amalgamates all aspects of existence in accordance with the interests of the capitalist system. The rationality of productivity and efficiency spread, ensuring more comforts, which then purchase the compliance of the members of society. There is a contradiction in modernity. It makes life easier but at the same time furthers oppression. This contradiction can only be resolved through praxis. Individuals are willing to exchange their potential freedom that can be understood separate from the free market for false convinces they believe the market delivers.

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<sup>67</sup> Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 25.

## CHAPTER 4: TECHNOLOGICAL RATIONALITY AND CONTAINMENT

By technology, Marcuse means precisely what one would think: machinery, industry and devices. Modern Technology is the production and transformation of goods by a methodical scientific apparatus set up with the improvement of productivity and efficiency as its goal. Nevertheless, individual devices and apparatus are a partial factor in the magnitude of the social implications of technological rationality and technological control. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse describes modern technology and the undemocratic means of its development as a social process of domination. But to be clear this is not a critique of all individual devices and apparatus but a critique of the ideology and rationality that has emerged in the development and use of modern technologies.

It is impossible for technology to function or be understood outside of the social universe within which it operates. Therefore, there is a history and social values of cohesion entrenched in technology. With the foundation of logically designed technical artifacts and institutions informed by rational technical disciplines modern capitalist society claims to be a rational form of social life. Thus, rationality has a social function that is intertwined with modern technology. The difference between modern technologies and ancient tools is precisely that ancient tools were not inscribed in an abstract process of rationalization affecting all domains of social life. Historically, rationality has been confined to the means ends reasoning required to completing a task. It did not have the social function of organizing and controlling society.<sup>68</sup> Within modern technologies rationality has the social function of organizing everything in accordance with the apparatus and the interests of the commodity market and capitalist power.

The terms rational and irrational are used in a normative sense. “Rational” means, to the rulers of capitalist society, the most efficient means to a given end but excludes consideration of

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<sup>68</sup> Feenberg, “Technosystem,” xi.

those ends themselves: do they or do they not promote real human flourishing. From a normative perspective, this conception of rationality is irrational because it has become oppressive. The rational or what is considered normal with the initialized social relations has become ethically irrational especially when juxtaposed against what society could achieve. For example, it has become normal and rational for an individual to value money and individual's greed over the value of another human beings' life. Any idea which contradicts the prevailing order of things is considered irrational, even if its realization would promote flourishing.

It is important to note that Marcuse's critique of technical rationality is not anti-technological. Marcuse is critiquing the concrete social coercion entrenched in the rationality created by technology. Accordingly, Marcuse is not arguing technology be done away with and that the world turn back to a romanticized pre-technological world. Rather, Marcuse is arguing technological domination needs to be done away with.

The difference between technological rationality and technics proper is technological rationality is the production and transformation of materials both things and people by a planned and scientific apparatus setup with productivity and social domination as its a goal. It undemocratically organizes and controls things and people, the factory and civil service, work and leisure and therefore, runs contrary to freedom. Where Technics proper, has the potential to liberate man, technological rationality is a habit of thought associated with industrial advancement and technology is the devices associated with creating a habit of thought. Marcuse switches between technics and Technique. Feenberg clarifies Marcuse's meaning. In the "The Bias of Technology" he explains that "it makes sense to reserve the term "technique" for specific technical elements, such as the lever or the electric circuit, which are in themselves neutral with respect to concrete social ends."<sup>69</sup> The machine can liberate humanity in some ways but suppresses the individual in

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<sup>69</sup> Andrew, Feenberg, "The Bias of Technology," *Marcuse: Critical Theory & The Promise of Utopia*, edited by, Robert, Pippin and Contributors, (Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, INC. 1998), 233.

myriad of ways “is it still necessary to repeat that science and technology are the great vehicles of liberation, and that it is only their use and restriction in a repressive society makes them into vehicles of domination.”<sup>70</sup> However, in western Capitalist society the ruling class create new types of technology for suppression to be carried out; "Everything cooperates to turn human instincts, desires and thoughts into channels that feed the apparatus."<sup>71</sup>

Marcuse defines technological rationality as the social ‘habit of thought’<sup>72</sup> caused by the omnipresent use of technology in modern industrial labour. In Western capitalist society, operationalism, productivity, efficacy, domination and control of humans and nature has become the predominate habit of thought. This is the case because, “in a capitalist society, control of technology is transferred from craftsman to owners of the enterprise and their agents Capitalist enterprise is unusual among social institutions in having a very narrow goal: profit. The freedom to pursue that goal is not inhibited by regard for the social and natural environment.”<sup>73</sup> All spheres of private and public life have been arranged to affirm the status quo and benefit the industrial capitalist mode of thought.

Productivity has increased, but it has done so in a way that is often destructive to the development of human faculties, needs, and nature. For example, goods are being produced at a much a larger scale than ever before. Automation has increased the speed at which goods are being produced, yet many people are still required to work three different jobs to ensure they can survive. The coincidence of overwork and overproduction is sure proof of the absurdity of the social order.

At the deepest level, technological society becomes obscene:

This society is Obscene in producing and indecently exposing a stifling abundance of wares while depriving it victims abroad the necessities of

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<sup>70</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 12.

<sup>71</sup> Marcuse, “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology,” 47.

<sup>72</sup> Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 85.

<sup>73</sup> Feenberg, *Technosystem*, 3.

life; obscene in stuffing itself and its garbage cans while poisoning and burning the scarce foodstuffs in the fields of its aggression; obscene in the words and smiles of its politicians and entertainers; in its prayers, in its ignorance, and in the wisdom of its kept intellectuals.<sup>74</sup>

Some signs of this obscenity are: It has become 'rational' for a person to care about their car more than they care about another human being.<sup>75</sup> It has become common for a political leader to be collecting and boasting about nuclear weapons. Technological rationality has created and contains a fundamentally ethically irrational civilization because its attention and resources are directed to instrumentally rather than qualitative ends.

The argument is not that all individual technologies are dominating and acting to control individuals because “not the automobile is repressive, not the television set is repressive, not the household gadgets are repressive, but the automobile, the television, the gadgets which, produced in accordance with the requirements of profitable exchange, have become part and parcel of the peoples own existence, own actualization.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, the critique of technology and technological rationality is aimed at the dominating presence in technology and masters who determine the machine process to the exclusion of the satisfaction of higher needs rooted in the erotic instincts.

Furthermore, sometimes the problem is not the harm technologies create but rather the good they might achieve. Some technologies do in fact improve human capacities and abilities. For example, “the internet has been largely shaped by hackers and users who have made it into a medium of free and open communication. They continually disturb emerging patterns and prevent the naturalization of the technology. Popular resistance to business strategies still plays an important role in protecting this remarkable achievement.”<sup>77</sup> However, these positive are

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<sup>74</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 8.

<sup>75</sup> Marcuse, “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology”, 47.

<sup>76</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 12.

<sup>77</sup> Andrew Feenberg, *Technosystem*, 34.



overshadowed by Technological Rationality and modern industrial technologizes considered in terms of its overall social function are all part of a reified milieu that directs a certain pattern of behaviors and thought. This pattern of behaviors and thought prevents multidimensional thought and the creation of a better existence.

The technology that has been developed has potential to improve human life. However, the more it appears technology can lead to the pacification of existence, the more technology organizes minds and bodies against that possibility. Technology has liberated humans in some ways, but the contradiction that must be noted is it leads to the containment of individuals. Technological rationality has undermined and blocked the original possibilities for liberation that were its condition of possibility, and thereafter, has become the embodiment of reason for group and interests. For example, the destructive apparatus has been essential to subjecting the population to the social division of labour. The scientific and technological abilities of people have simply increased the scope of domination of individuals and nature. The social division of labour was imposed by violence, but now it compels by force of economic necessity. Technological advancements have opened up new possibilities for critical thought but at the same time it has undermined the potential for liberation by containing individuals.

Technological containment prevents individuals from thinking critically about the contradictions of the prevailing order of things. Because they do not think critically about these contradictions, we cannot imagine more liberating ways of life than Western industrial capitalist society. Technological rationality is the most effective mode of containment for it has lulled people into believing they do not need liberated. As Marcuse states:

We must live with the consciousness that technology has become an instrument of domination: the most rational domination because it delivers the goods and makes life

more comfortable for those who are accepted and accept, the most irrational because it is accepted by its victims, who are no longer in need of liberation.<sup>78</sup>

There are still unrealized possibilities which, if people directed their consciousness towards them, could become the basis of struggles for an improved quality of life. Individuals do not believe they need liberation, but individuals are still radically unfree. The structures of containment appear to make life easier for the majority of the population, but this comfort is a mere illusion because, “the slaves of developed industrial civilization are sublimated slaves, but they are slaves, for slavery is determined.”<sup>79</sup> In essence, decisions are made for the individual in spheres where they have no control. Most people exist as an instrument or a reified thing to serve and consume within the capitalist structure. The need for a capitalist society to become more prosperous, stronger, and bigger has become the priority of individuals. The whole becomes the embodiment of technological reason and thus contains social change.

Technological rationality seeps into all aspects of society until it becomes a new, improved juggernaut of oppression undermining all normative and practical basis of opposition. As Marcuse writes, “society and nature, mind and body are kept in a state of permanent mobilization for the defense of this universe.”<sup>80</sup>

Marcuse states that technological rationality is a distorted form of technics because it involves “the use of technology as an instrument of repression, an instrument of control.”<sup>81</sup> It is the society that determines technological rationality because technology is embedded in a culture that is structured on the domination of individuals and nature. Yet, technological devices demand

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<sup>78</sup> Marcuse, “Reflections on Science and Technology,” 144.

<sup>79</sup> Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 32

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* 18.

<sup>81</sup> Marcuse, Hebert, Marcuse, “The Containment of Social Change in Industrial Society” *Towards a Critical Theory of Society: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse Volume Two*, Edited by Douglas Kellner (Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group 2001), 84.

compliance from their users and further enforces the pattern of oppressive thought. Technological rationality in civilizations is a force of control that represses and manipulates the individual because, “there is an essential connection between modern technology and the domination of man by man in existing societies.”<sup>82</sup> For Marcuse, technological rationality is the most dominant method of containing society because it re-programs individual thinking and makes it one-dimensional: better means more of what the market can sell. Thus, eliminating the space for oppositional thought. The governing force of technological rationality occurs on an economic, political psychological and cultural spectrum.

Technology does not only govern factories, weapons production, the production of goods, and what is traditionally conceived of when one mentions technology, but technology also oversees all aspects of civilization. This includes but is not limited to culture, language, schools, relaxation, leisure politics, the satisfaction of needs and individuals' rationality. Marcuse writes in “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology”

Technology, as a mode of production, as the totality of instruments, devices and contrivances which characterizes the machine age is thus at the same time a mode of organizing and perpetuating (or changing) social relationships, a manifestation of prevalent thought and behaviour patterns, an instrument for control and domination.<sup>83</sup>

The machine generates a mode of organization that is imposed on individuals and integrates the labourer into its rationality. The thought process of individuals begins to conform to the technological apparatus to the detriment of critical, oppositional thought. Technological advancement in the factory has reduced the drudgery of the labour process for the worker, however, the physical and mental space for autonomy in human beings has also been reduced. Marcuse states,

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<sup>82</sup> Feenberg, "The Bias of Technology," 226.

<sup>83</sup> Marcuse, “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology, 41.

“to the degree to which physical energy is replaced by mental energy, the later tends to regress from conscious to semi- or subconscious process, such as “day-dreaming”, strictly re-active association of ideas and images engendered by the rhythm of the machine.”<sup>84</sup> Therefore, the monotonous isolating and alienated motions associated with engaging with the apparatus causes individuals to incorporate operational thought into their everyday life.

In the industrial machine age, technological one-dimensional rationality rules. Technological rationality runs contrary to dialectical and critical modes of thinking because technological rationality deters oppositional thought. Rational thought is not free, since “in this universe technology also provides the great rationalization of the un-freedom of individuals and demonstrates the “technical” impossibility of being autonomous, determining one’s own life.”<sup>85</sup> *If* individual rationality still prevails, it is centered on efficiency and productivity of the society it is a part. Efficiency, which is the relationship between inputs and outputs, weighing profit against cost, has become fetishized. And where it is still present, it is normalized and made impotent to the dominant system. Oppositional thought still exists in the west; however, they gain very little traction in ways of qualitative change. They become mocked by those indoctrinated into the system and act as a placeholder of false opisthion. They are regarded as posing no real threat to the established order of things.

In nations that appear advanced enough for the transition to Socialism appear to be degenerating and are undermining the technological advancements that actually improve human life. Marcuse’s worry in his lifetime that “The fascist movement was still growing in strength, and if it should succeed in conquering Europe and North America, then all hope of a better future would vanish indefinitely,”<sup>86</sup> has become a reality. Today North America and Europe are currently seeing

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<sup>84</sup> Marcuse, “The Problem of Social Change in the Technological Society,” 49.

<sup>85</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 158.

<sup>86</sup> Andrew Feenberg, *The Essential Marcuse Selected writings of Philosopher Herbert Marcuse*, Edited by Andrew Feenberg and William Leiss (Beacon Press, Boston 2007), xxiii.

a rise of fascism, especially in the United States. The most glaring examples is the seemingly unchecked actions of President Donald Trump. These actions range from imprisoning immigrants, separating children from their parents at the US border, to having his lawyers declare that President Trump is above the law because, “Lawyers Representing the president either in his personal or institutional capacity have argued that law enforcement can’t investigate the president at all; that he can shut down the investigations into himself or his associates; and that obstruction-of-justice laws don’t apply to the president.”<sup>87</sup> Trumps rallies are often full. Large groups of people support, promote and defend Trumps absurd behaviors. It is his actions as president and the motions he passes that are what ensures the members of his constituency’s remain unfree and unsatisfied.

Technological rationality is the prevailing form of thought, and it runs practically unopposed. It is true historically in the events in 1967-1968 students protested and fought against the continued Capitalist oppression of individuals and today many individuals criticize the continued alienation and exploitation of human beings. However, those who oppose the system have yet to be successful. They are often placated with little to no real changes being implemented because “throughout the industrialization process workers and others subject to its side effects are silenced.”<sup>88</sup> Socialist and critical theorists promote the most important human values like individual and political freedom, universal education, equality, tolerance, democracy, enlightenment, rationality. But the reality of these values continues to be diluted, ignored, mocked and manipulated by the governing social order.

This modern technological rationality legitimates and perpetuates the ethically irrational belief it is “necessarily ‘the natural order of things’ that “we live and die rationally and productively. We know that destruction is the price of progress as death is the price of life, that

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<sup>87</sup> Tau, Byron, “Trump Attorneys Assert Immunity from Broad Sweep of Law” *The Wall Street Journal* October 29, 2019

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-attorneys-assert-immunity-from-broad-sweep-of-law-11572346801>

<sup>88</sup> Feenberg, *Technosystem*, 3.

renunciation and toil are the prerequisites for gratification and joy, that business must go on, and that the alternatives are utopian.”<sup>89</sup> Individuals, even those who reject these principles must subordinate their goals and hopes to the pre-given standards in order to survive, to attempt to change and to prevent isolation from society. Rationality has become complete compliance and coordination to the existing order of things.

Though it does not represent the whole of science, Monsanto Seed Corporation is an example of technology and science being bound to the capitalist super structure and thus, used to dominate man and nature. Monsanto Seed Corporation is an example of the indifference science has to the ‘pacification of existence’ and of science being used for profit, manipulation and social control. Monsanto Seed Corporation is a company that engages in the scientific research and production of crop products and seeds. As a brand, Monsanto has used “algorithms and science data to address issues of sustainability of the products farmers grow,”<sup>90</sup> They have produced a seed product “that meets farmer’s needs”<sup>91</sup> and “developed crop protection products that help protect plants on farms, in gardens, and on public land from pests, diseases, and weeds. The safety and effectiveness of these products have also been confirmed by third parties.”<sup>92</sup> In other words, Monsanto Seed Corporation has used scientific research to create farming products that make it easier to provide renewable food sources that could serve the pacification existence. It appears the Monsanto Seed Corporation has developed a scientific solution to ending starvation; yet, this is not the case. Monsanto Seed Corporation’s business model and patenting laws are much too concerned with using scientific advancement to maintain Monsanto’s status as a “Fortune 500 company”<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>89</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 145.

<sup>90</sup> Monsanto Seed Corporation. “Monsanto Products” *ww.monsanto.com*  
<https://monsanto.com/products/> 2002-2017 Monsanto Company, (Accessed. November 13, 2017)

<sup>91</sup> *ibid*

<sup>92</sup> *ibid*

<sup>93</sup> *ibid*

The scientific research to provide these revolutionary crop products is done for profit. At the end of the day, the scientific research is subjugated to Monsanto as a business, and Monsanto states that

No business can survive without being paid for its products or services and we (Monsanto Seed Corporation) maintain rigor in assuring the success of the business models we (Monsanto Seed Corporation) implement to deliver our (Monsanto Seed Corporation's) products and services to the market.<sup>94</sup>

The scientific research done in the name of Monsanto Seed Corporation is devoid of 'ethics', since it does not serve the "needs of the farmer."<sup>95</sup> or the necessary needs of humanity. It serves the domination of humanity and nature and is driven by profit and efficacy. This is truly a fascinating paradox. The resources to feed a larger portion of the population and potentially end world hunger have been created by scientific research. However, the new science entrapped in the commodity market has perpetuated scarcity.<sup>96</sup>

In addition, the products Monsanto Seed Corporation has created demonstrate science's need to manipulate and control what has already been provided in nature, the 'crops' are just matter in nature that can be wrought and operated to meet immoral profitable ends. The formalization of science and technological rationality is a profitable means of authority Science under capitalist rationality that can be bent to any end, that is driven by profit, used for the mass production of weapons and for the domination and manipulation of external nature, has no concern with what is morally right. Science changes and manipulates the world. Therefore, scientific rationality paved the way for technology to be used as an insidious force of domination and control because technology is considered logical and scientific, and logic and science predisposed to domination.

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<sup>94</sup> Monsanto Seed Corporation. "Monsanto Patents" [www.monsanto.com](http://www.monsanto.com)  
<https://monsanto.com/products/product-stewardship/patents/> 2002-2017 Monsanto Company, (Accessed. November 13, 2017).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> I am not critiquing Genetically Modified organisms in this paper. The debate around developing Genetically modified organisms is a question reserved for another time.

Science became attached to the larger social project of controlling human beings when the fetishization of facts, logic, and quantitative modelling were confused with reality as such, and bent to purposes of dominating nature and people. Of course, it is important to understand facts. But the fetishization of facts, as in operational thinking, has caused people to think that facts are opposed to values, and thus to let go of the human dimension of experience and understanding. Furthermore, in some cases opinions become presented and accepted as fact. Data can be manipulated to the point where individuals present them as accurate information supporting opinions where there is very little support for their claims. Data and statistics can be found to prove any position. Representing nature through numbers and something humans can control has led to a divide between thought and reality. Facts have been collapsed into values because the later cannot be verified by the scientific method and are therefore judged unreal. No matter how much objectively important values are to criticize and improving society, they suffer from not being verifiable by reigning scientific method. Science can be bent to any end, and "by virtue of its own method and concepts, [it] has projected and promoted a universe in which the domination of nature has remained linked to the domination of man a link which tends to be fatal to this universe as a whole"<sup>97</sup>.

Individuals do not know they are being dominated thus; they do not believe they need to be liberated from the affluent society. The current way of life appears better, does not mean we should stop questioning the prevailing order and striving for a better society. However, technological rationality succeeds at actively quelling all alternative modes of thought in the majority of the population because, technology "appears rational because people indeed have more comforts and more fun. Domination appears as freedom because people indeed have a choice of prefabricated goods and prefabricated candidates."<sup>98</sup> Yet, a life committed to work does not allow

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<sup>97</sup> Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 166.

<sup>98</sup> Marcuse, "The Containment of Social Change in Industrial Society", 87.



individuals to develop their capacities and skills to the fullest extent and pursue their passions freely. Those who spend their life working at alienated jobs do not live a very humane existence at all. Individuals, groups and art still negate oppressive mode of thought, but they still are required to adapt and conform to a political order and rationality they know is not necessarily right.

As Marcuse states in reference to oppositional stances revolutionary movements and art, “The fact that they contradict the society which sells them does not count. Just as people know or feel that advertisement and political platforms must not be necessarily true or right, and yet hear and read them and even let themselves be guided by them, so that accepting the traditional values and make them part of their mental equipment”<sup>99</sup> Thought that runs contrary to technological rationality is suspended because there are reified structures that require one’s integration into the prevailing patterns of thought.

Technological rationality is ethically irrational because it solidifies and continues the need for alienated labour, the struggle to survive in order to meet the necessary requirements to live. It creates a guise of freedom and choice when individuals are fundamentally unfree. Most members of society do not question being dominated by technological rationality because the rationality under which we live is so deeply embedded in their understanding any alternative seems absurd.

Marcuse states that technological rationality is perverse because it involves “the use of technology as an instrument of repression, an instrument of control.”<sup>100</sup> It is society that determines technological rationality because technology is embedded in a culture that is structured on the domination of individuals and nature. Technological rationality in civilizations is a force of control that represses and manipulates the individual; “there is an essential connection between modern technology and the domination of man by man in existing societies.”<sup>101</sup> Technological rationality

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<sup>99</sup> Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 57.

<sup>100</sup> Marcuse, “The Containment of Social Change in Industrial Society”, 86.

<sup>101</sup> Feenberg, “The Bias of Technology,” 226.

originates from the formalization of science and logic leading to the flattening out of oppositional thought. The problem for Marcuse is not that science discovers facts of models of nature, but that all other forms of thought are rendered absurd and useless. Marcuse is not suggesting that we do away with the scientific models we have today. Science and technology are fundamental to the pacification of existence and can be redirected to a more effective goal of satisfying human needs. Yet, technology cannot be neutral; it is not transparent because technology is embedded in a hierarchal class society. For Marcuse, technological progress is the most dominant method of containing society. It controls humanity, precisely their needs and ability to think critically. The governing force of technological rationality occurs on an economic, political and cultural spectrum.

### ***Operationalism***

In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse equates containment with operationalism.<sup>102</sup> Operationalism is when concepts are defined in terms of measurable procedures divorced from substantive meanings and values. It is the collapse of values into facts discussed above. For example, democracy today is defined in terms of voting procedures, regardless of whether the votes translate into real popular power over conditions of life with a particular set of functions.

To further illustrate this point, a medical doctor and a philosopher will have two very different conceptions of love. A doctor would potentially define love as an operation of the brain releasing dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin which results in profound affection for another person or pleasure that is associated with sexual gratification and the biological need to reproduce to ensure the survival of the species. A philosopher would potentially describe the concept of love in many different ways that do not reduce the concept to its operations. For example, love is constituted by a lack and the desire to have the good and beautiful forever. This desire can be

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<sup>102</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 13.

extended to sexual love, the love of many, the love of knowledge and leads to the moral opposite of selfishness.

Marcuse illustrates his understanding of operationalism through the example of P.W. Bridgeman's *The Logic of Modern Physics*. Bridgeman predicted several dangers to the operational point of view. First, operationalism would be more than a restriction to the senses because it changes ideologies around understanding concepts and reduces concepts to their empirical function. Second, operationalism would cause changes to the habits of thought in individuals. Third, individuals would no longer be able use thoughts as a tool to give an adequate account of operations. Marcuse rightly asserts that Bridgeman's prediction has come true.<sup>103</sup> Capitalist ideology works hard to reduce the meaning of all substantive norms those norms that might be the basis for critique and opposition to nothing more than a set of operations that define its existing social function.

Operationalism denies the power of normative ideas to transcend the given reality. For example, certain concepts are regarded as meaningless because they cannot be explained by operations or behaviors. Concepts like truth, love, justice and freedom become empty words that have been eliminated or used by the status quo to manipulate the population because the concept cannot be explained by operations. Reality has been virtually reduced to physical and mathematical structures. Cognition, freed from the tension between facts and essence, becomes recognition, sacrificing critical thought. Thus, what is considered true is reduced to what can be measured and calculated. Operational knowledge, facts, and statistics is beneficial because it has provided a fundamental understanding of our universe. Society requires facts in order to survive, develop and thrive. However, the supremacy of operationalism has led to the neglect of concepts necessary to understanding individual social existence. For example, scientific laws involve individuals "only

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<sup>103</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 13.

insofar as he himself is pure “physical-biological” matter. In all his other aspects, man finds himself eliminated from nature or rather, the reality acknowledged and encompassed of any individual and social existence.”<sup>104</sup> Individuals become an instrumental tool or a statistic to serve the system, the cathartic totality of human sensuality, values, morally and experiences are blocked.

Operationalism undermines the very possibility of critical thought. For example, the concept of freedom has been mostly reduced to the free market. The varieties of commodities one can acquire or the choice of occupations a person can devote the majority of their living life to is not freedom. In contrast, the concept of freedom ought to be understood as the fulfillment of vital needs for all members of society allowing the sensuous and ethical development of human faculties *in a qualitative different society*.

Operational thought has become the most prevalent tendency in intellectual and other fields. However, outside of academia the change in thoughts and habits caused by operationalism is much worse. Marcuse states that “outside of the intelligentsia operational thought serves to coordinate ideas and goals with those of the prevailing system.”<sup>105</sup> First, operationalism confirms the exploitive capitalist system. Second, it encloses the capitalist system in ready-made ideological justifications that force individuals to adapt to the prevailing system because values are only explained through the given modes of actualization. Third, if a concept cannot be explained through an empirical measure the concept is deemed unnecessary and eliminated. Third, operational thought repels what is irreconcilable with the system and incorporates what it finds favorable.

For example, spiritual and metaphysical activities like God and Zen,<sup>106</sup> still exist. However, they have been appropriated by the system and robbed of their critical function. Modes of protest are no longer negative and the spiritual no longer contradicts the status quo but are instead

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<sup>104</sup> Marcuse “Reflections on Science and Technology” 142.

<sup>105</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 14.

<sup>106</sup> This example is from chapter Two of *One Dimensional Man*

used to improve one's competitiveness. As Marcuse states "such modes of protest and transcendence are no longer contradictory to the status quo and are no longer negative. They are rather ceremonial part of practical behaviorism, its harmless negation, and are quickly digested by the status quo as a part of a healthy diet."<sup>107</sup> Marcuse is arguing that even the attempt to protest prevailing consumerism through religious or spiritual devotion is absorbed by the system: another life-style choice that changes nothing. In other words, anything in the concept or practice that might have contradicted the status quo is negated. The concept becomes empty and reduced to a ritualistic activity.

Furthermore, operationalism has masked the causes of the antagonisms within the capitalist production process and the central problems connected with it. The corrupt divisions of social hierarchy, institutions of science, technology and education appear to individuals as non-oppressive. Their true function in the social process is concealed and individuals base their actions on appearances.

Thought has the power to say what things are and what they could be; yet, this power is becoming diminished since "logic has become the logic of domination."<sup>108</sup> Technological rationality has become the new reason, "it is the latest transmutation in the idea of Reason."<sup>109</sup> The truth was once thought to exist objectively: "in classical Greek philosophy, Reason is the cognitive faculty of distinguishing what is true and what is false insofar as truth (and falsehood) is primarily a condition of Being, of Reality"<sup>110</sup>. The ancient philosophers contemplated what humanity ought to be and provided a model for the good life.

For Plato and Aristotle, life was subject to change; it was considered not only possible but imperative that the 'ideal' could be realized. Knowledge was a human project that was filled with

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<sup>107</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 13.

<sup>108</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 123.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* 123.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* 124.

morality, committed to truth and engaged human existence, with a tension between what existed in the real world and what should be.<sup>111</sup> However, Marcuse recognizes that the classical philosophical thought of Plato and Aristotle was deeply defective because it was embedded with class privilege and endorsed slavery. The classical mode of thought encouraged and perpetuated domination because freedom of thought was a class privilege and rested on the belief that women were incapable of rational thought. Speech, freedom, and thought, “depends on the fulfilling the function—thus it depends on those who control these requirements.”<sup>112</sup> In addition, the classical mode of thought from the beginning advocated dominating the senses, repressing inner nature, and holding *Logos* as the higher standard over the *Eros*. The reposition of instincts in the name of logic was part of classical philosophy. In essence reason and logic have been elevated above other human capacities like the emotions and ethics. Therefore, there was a precursor in place for the mode of domination that is technological rationality in early Greek philosophy. Greek philosophy is not an alternative to one-dimensional thought but signifies the potential for multidirectional thought.

At least in the classical mode of thought, there was a distinction between what is and what ought to be. Thought once had the power to demonstrate that things are not what they could be. Capitalism and the technological age have caused this change that prevents the critical power of thought. Thought with the power to transform society has lost its foundation; radical thought is no longer present. The ideals of technological rationality have become everyone's ideals because, Philosophy no longer intervenes in the world. Thought has become more abstract, contradictions have been separated from the world, and truth has been separated from the good. Concrete critical thought has dissolved, and the tension that once was in thought between what occurs in experience

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<sup>111</sup> Plato ‘Republic’, *Plato Complete Works* Edited by John M. Cooper, Associate Editor D.S. Hutchinson (Hackett Publishing Company Indianapolis/Cambridge 1997) pp, 971-1224.

<sup>112</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 128.

and what is and what could be has completely dissipated. Values that contrast with reality have been closed off because they have come to be considered as abstract.

However, Marcuse argues that values are a material force in the process of change. Realized values can impel change on a mass scale. Values are the norms and aspirations which motivate the behavior of social groups in the process of satisfying their needs, material as well as cultural. Values guide how individuals determine their needs and how individuals' needs are met. However, needs and values are not an expression of the individual's personal preference because values "express the exigencies of the established production relations and the established pattern of consumption."<sup>113</sup> For example, under the scientific rationality of capitalism values like liberty and equity become distorted and embody the present patterns of production and consumption. The aforementioned values are articulated in measurable and calculable terms, for example; free consumption, wage labour, exchange equivalents, etc. The non-distorted values like liberty and freedom becomes meaningless because they are too abstract and cannot be empirically demonstrated.

Andrew Feenberg states that:

formal universals are indeed value-free, in the sense that they do not prescribe the ends of objects they conceive of means; however, they are value-laden in systematically overlooking the difference between the extrinsic values of an instrumental telos of an independent self-developing being.<sup>114</sup>

Mathematics and logic have become replacements for substantive moral truth: "scientific, objective truth is exclusively a matter of establishing what the world, the physical as well as the spiritual world is in fact."<sup>115</sup> These facts are important. However, viewed as sole and ultimate truths,

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<sup>113</sup> Marcuse, "A Revolution of Values", 196.

<sup>114</sup> Andrew, Feenberg, *Critical Theory of Technology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 169.

<sup>115</sup> Edmund, Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Intro. David Car, General Editor. John Wild. Associate Editor. James M. Edie. Consulting Editors Herbert Spiegelberg,

scientific facts liquidate an entire dimension of substantive value essential for human life. For example, mathematics and its calculable, predictable relations have an orientation towards domination because its embodiment in the technological apparatus is linked to a ruling class. The logical structures themselves are not domination in the structure. However, when the theorems become practice, they bear an influence on society and that society is controlled by a ruling class with specific interests and goals. Their use is embedded in a system of domination because they have been extended beyond their scope to weigh in on decisions about which of any given set of social possibilities should be chosen. Facts have been collapsed into values, and knowledge is reduced to expected models. Science and logic have paved the way for technological rationality because critical values have been reduced to the mere facts of social functioning thus, neglecting dimension of human experience.

In modern capitalist society technology and sciences set out to conquer and quantify nature. This project undermines itself because human beings are a part of nature. Thus, conquering and quantifying nature means reducing the human experience to the measurement, calculation, and the manipulation of nature is thought to be the most objective truth. Paradoxically, they have become more abstract, further solidifying logic's character of domination.

### ***The Neutral Thesis***

Technology emerges as a tool of domination and containment in industrial capitalist society. This is primarily justified by the widespread belief that technology and science is neutral and free of value. The connection between *Logos* and *Eros* has been ruptured, and the 'neutral' scientific rationale emerges. Values and ethics have been discarded because what is morally right cannot be measured. What is deemed as ethical, ideas like the *good*, *liberation*, and *justice* cannot

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William Earle, Gorge A. Schrader, Maurice Natanson, Paul Ricoeur, Aron Gurwitsch, Calvin O. Shrag, Hubert L. Dreyfus (Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1970), 6



became fully realized because they have no empirically verifiable content from the perspective of natural science. Philosophy does not intervene in the objective world because the ideas are not considered real; thus, they cannot be explained by operations or in some cases the scientific method. Consequently, the formalization of science has removed values from society. Higher philosophical values do not serve the domination of man by man and do not legitimize the existing order of things and therefore, do not have a place in Capitalist society. According to Marcuse "if the good and the Beautiful, Peace and Justice cannot be derived either from ontological or scientific-rational conditions, they cannot logically claim universal validity and realization. In terms of scientific reason, they become matters of preference"<sup>116</sup>. The abandonment of the *ideals* demanded by science has left technological rationality unopposed. Ideas of the good are barred from their former use as bases of social transformation because they have no place in a quantified universe. The ideals that justify the world coincide with the given institutions and that is what makes one-dimensional operational definition of democracy. Our current political structure refers to itself as democracy, even if it is obviously unconnected with the people.

Technological rationality is not neutral. There is a possibility some abstract aspects of technology could be neutral; however, that very character of the possibility of technology being neutral makes it more susceptible to domination.

Technical principles can be formulated in abstraction from any content, that is, in abstraction from any interest or ideology. However, they are merely abstractions, as soon as they enter reality, they take on a socially specific content relative to the 'historical' subject that applies them.<sup>117</sup>

Technological rationality may appear unbiased, but it is a much more appealing form of social control that is deeply embedded in individual rationality and social constructs.

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<sup>116</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*. 148.

<sup>117</sup> Feenberg, *Questioning Technology*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 160.

Feenberg makes this point clear when he argues that "'technological rationality' constitutes the bias for elite control of society. That control is not simply an extrinsic purpose served by neutral systems and machines but is internal to their very structure"<sup>118</sup>. Science and technology cannot be understood outside of the world in which they function. As soon as a new technological product, apparatus, or tool is invented, its social function is already decided.

Technology is a way of life with a clear cultural framework embodying its own particular values. There is no aspect of technology that is not value-laden. Even when technology is being assembled, the technologies are intended for a specific function in a society that technology serves and in turn, the society serves technology. Society does not use technology in whatever way it wants. Indeed, it would be closer to the truth to say that society serves technology.

There are some who will argue that technology is neutral. Marcuse notes that "one may still insist the machinery of the technological universe is "as such" indifferent towards political ends-it can revolutionize or retard society."<sup>119</sup> However, this is not the case as technology is embedded in and reinforces dominant structures of control and power. The idea that technology is neutral is the most-simple, most-familiar and widely accepted common sense approach to technology. To oversimplify the argument that technology is neutral, would be similar to the rationale 'guns don't kill people, people kill people'. Yet, guns were invented for the specific purpose of destruction.

The idea that technology is neutral is referred to as the "instrumental theory"<sup>120</sup> of technology. The instrumental theory of technology thinks of technology simply as tools that serve humanity. The instrumental theory of technology considers technologies to be neutral and a computer is just a computer, an assembly belt is just an assembly belt, and a lever is just a lever.

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<sup>118</sup> Feenberg, *Critical Theory of Technology*, 69.

<sup>119</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 154.

<sup>120</sup> Feenberg, *Critical Theory of Technology*, 5

The instrumental theory of technology does not acknowledge that technology has the concrete social implication of domination. The aforementioned judgements of a neutral technology manifests as being simple, reasonable and self-evident.<sup>121</sup>

There are four main themes within a neutral theory of technology. The first is that technologies are indifferent to the end's technologies serve. Technology is just a tool with no other implication. This consequence of the neutral theory of technology is that technology is separate from the universe it operates in; thus, technologies are only "contingently related to the substantive values they serve"<sup>122</sup>. Technology is just a tool.

In response, I argue that technology embodies the particular civilization it is part of, and science and technology are rationalizations of a particular hierarchical class structure. The real world, the world technology operates in, is "the larger context of experience, this real empirical world today is still that of gas chambers and concentration camps, of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of American Cadillac's and German Mercedes, of the Pentagon and the Kremlin of Brainwashing and Massacres."<sup>123</sup> Technology is embedded in the context of the real empirical world. Its present rationality cannot be directed to the pacification of existence as equally as it is directed towards the reaffirmation of the current rationality.

The second theme associated with a theory of a neutral technology is that technology has no political or social influence. Within technology, instruments are just tools that can be used in any context. Technology can be transferred to any social context, any society without any consequences. The only limitation of accessibility to technology is affordability. Pragmatist John Dewey holds this view of technology: "In Dewey's view, certain judgements in the techno-sciences

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*. 180

and the social sciences are universalizable: they are globally reliable regardless of individual and cultural variability”<sup>124</sup>

An example from Historian Melvin Katzenberg further illustrates the second theory of the natural thesis. Katzenberg states “many technical applications that seemed to boon mankind when first introduced became threats when their use became widespread”<sup>125</sup>. Technologies do not act the same when implemented in different social circumstances. The idea that technology is universally neutral can be overturned by looking toward factories in the Third World. Industrial factories in the Third World operate in the peripheral vision of Western capitalist civilization, and the working conditions and operations are of value to those in the West benefit from the factory and the class structure in which it operates. The technology operates much differently in less affluent parts of the world but still as a means of domination because Third World factories are influenced by Western capitalist society. The working conditions are much worse due to the infrastructure. For example, sewage systems and garbage disposal are significantly improved.

The third thesis of the neutral theory of technology is that technology is neutral because it seems to have a reasonable character, a ‘rational’ character. Technology is “based on verifiable causal propositions.”<sup>126</sup> This thesis assumes that technology will act the same and ‘properly’ in any universe it is implemented in because technology maintains its ‘rationality’; technology being so ‘rational’ will behave the same way science would in any social context.

However, the ‘rational’ character of technology is, an illusion. Thus, it is considered rational, but it is actually irrational because it is unethical. The rationality of technology is illusory

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<sup>124</sup> A. Larry, Hickman, ‘Pragmatism, Constructivism and The Philosophy of Technology’, *John Dewy Between Pragmatism and Constructivism* Ed. Larry A Hickman, Stefan Neubert, Kersten Reich, (Fordham University Press, New York 2009), 143

<sup>125</sup> Melvin, Kranzberg “Technology and History “Kranzberg’s Laws” *Technology and Culture*. eBook. (Wayne State University, Press Detroit, Mich. July 1, 1986)  
<https://searchproquestcom.ledproxy2.uwindsor.ca/docview/1301544564/citation/2828E1928D084306PQ/1?accountid=14789> p.546

<sup>126</sup> Feenberg, *Critical Theory of Technology*, 6.

because technology is used for maintaining a social order that is needlessly aggressive, oppressive and irrational. Technology appears to have a rational character because it is scientific and is seemingly grounded on empirical knowledge of natural forces and processes. However, the very attribute that makes technology appear 'rational' makes technology into a more deceptive form of control. It has already been established that modern formalized science is not ethically rational and is inclined towards domination. Technological rationality is domination because its origins are from an irrational formalized science.

Technology cannot be purely neutral because it is intertwined with society and politics.

Marcuse writes that:

In the construction of the technological reality, there is no such thing as a purely rational scientific order; the process is a political process. Technology entails "the destruction of resources and the proliferation of waste" to "demonstrate its opulence and the high levels of well-being; "the community is too well off to care!"<sup>127</sup>

Consequently, technology cannot be considered rational or neutral because technology is in fact, ethically irrational. Technology dominates nature by manipulation, the production of surplus waste; the destruction of resources and the domination of nature is linked to the domination of man.<sup>128</sup> This is because a technology of liberation is incompatible with industrial capitalist society. However, it is possible to change institutionalized social relations and allow for technics to serve the pacification of existence.

The fourth aspect claims that technology is neutral because it represents advancements and progress in human beings' productivity and efficiency in producing goods. It is seen as neutral because it has always been understood under the same standard of efficacy and productivity. Technology is considered successful only in so far as it is efficient and productive. For a

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<sup>127</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 85.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* 166.

technological apparatus to be fruitful, it has to both increase the luxury of a standard of living and be profitable.

An argument against this position is to say that efficacy discloses that technology is not neutral. The fact that a successful technological apparatus is what performs a task efficiently inclines technology towards domination. For example, gas chambers used throughout World War II were considered efficient and productive and were also used for a merciless genocide. However, if gas chambers are thought of in terms of efficacy alone, one could claim they are a successful technology and that consideration is ethically irrational, morally disgraceful, and inexcusable. This is an extreme example of the criticisms that can be levied against scientific-technological rationality but is a risk of destruction that must be kept in mind.

On the contrary, Marcuse states that technics proper is neutral because it can be directed to the liberation of humans or the continuation and extension of toil. It is because technics disregards its final cause and remains instrumental that it does not end misery destruction and violence.

There is a history of all science and technological advances. Technological progress is imbued with history. Technology embodies the history and civilizations it is a part of, the same way as evident ancient artifacts like the Great Pyramids of Giza.<sup>129</sup> It cannot be separated from the civilization it was built within. The illusion that technology is neutral further solidifies technology as a force of domination because it creates the idea technology can be bent to any end. Whether it is a nuclear weapon of mass destruction, an exit sign,<sup>130</sup> or a book, technology is entwined with a history, and thereby a set of values of domination of man by man. No technology arose out of random functionality and causations. Technological rationality has encompassed the world.

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<sup>129</sup> Feenberg Andrew, *Alternative Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory*, 30

<sup>130</sup> The exit sign was created and used in theatres due to a fire in Chicago in 1902 that killed several people because no one was able to find a way out.

It is the very character of technology appearing as neutral that makes technology predisposed to domination. It is possible technology can be envisioned neutral in some minuscule way; however, technology's potential "neutrality" sub verses it to domination and so ties it to the history of class domination".<sup>131</sup> Hence, the fundamentally irrational technological rationality is a force of containment and control because technology is not neutral; it is currently biased towards the capitalist enterprise.

Technological rationality contains man and nature politically, economically and culturally. The whole society has been standardized and turned into a commodity. Needs, thought, and individual autonomy are determined not by the individual but forces beyond them. The potentiality of individuals has been repressed; conformity has become the norm. The grasp of technological rationality has become so strong, so universal it shrouds every human being. However, there is a contradiction in the sciences and technology that can only be resolved through practical activity. Technology has the power to 'pacify existence', free individuals and meet all needs, but it curtly caters to efficacy, profit, toil and the continuation of the struggle to survive.

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<sup>131</sup> Feenberg, "The Bias of Technology," 242.

## CHAPTER 5: A SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVES

Yet, there is real potential to create a liberated existence where basic human needs are met. This hope for a better world is the gasoline to start the fire of social change. As Marcuse states in *An Essay on Liberation*, “the awareness of the transcendent possibilities of freedom must become a driving power in the consciousness and the imagination which prepare the soil for this revolution.”<sup>132</sup> Marcuse never provided a blueprint for exactly how the pacification of existence would transpire or operate because that is how authoritarian dictatorships and new cycles of domination emerge. However, Marcuse does gesture towards the new sensibility, aesthetics, and new goals for technology and sciences as a potential revolutionary force within an affluent society. These are fundamental aspects of the possibility of social change today.

### *A New Sensibility*

In order to escape containment in capitalist western society individuals must refuse to play by the rules of the market economy. This rejection requires a break with what individuals are accustomed to, with the routine ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, communicating and understanding so that individuals can become receptive to the potential forms of a nonaggressive, nonexploitative world. A new type of human being must be created to ensure that the pacification of existence comes to fruition; this is what Marcuse refers to as the new sensibility. The new sensibility must begin with unmet needs, values and the erotic instincts.

In an *Essay on Liberation*, and *One-Dimensional Man* Marcuse suggests the new sensibility is a significant political factor in social change. Social revolution must start with sensibility; it is a necessary foundation for liberation in people because “the roots of social relationships there where the individuals most directly and profoundly experience the world and

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<sup>132</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 79.



themselves: in their sensibility in their instinctual needs.”<sup>133</sup> Fully developing the New Sensibility is necessary for the construction of a new and free society. Should the mutilated instincts of individuals persist through revolution and reform the pacification of existence will not be achieved, and the domination of individuals inner nature will be reproduced.

Marcuse draws on a reading of the young Marx’s philosophical manuscripts to develop the concept of The New Sensibility. In modernity, aesthetics has come to have two meaning. Originally, aesthetics meant pertaining to the senses of man in contrast with logic, but it has since been reinterpreted to refer to arts. The original meaning of aesthetic ‘pertaining to the senses signified individuals’ sight, touch, taste, instincts, morality and drives. When Marcuse speaks of aesthetics in relation to a new sensibility, he is appealing to the first definition of aesthetics. However, the emergence of the new sensibility would combine a sublimated scientific intelligence with artistic technique in the creation of an *aesthetic ethos*. An *aesthetic ethos* can be defending as that which is life enhancing.

The new sensibility is political and a potential instrument of qualitative change in the affluent society. This is the case because the capitalist aesthetic is a method employed by businesses to sell commodities. The goods that society delivers, the merchandise must be pleasing and appealing to the senses and instincts. The senses are constantly overstimulated with merchandise it must sell, whenever we open our internet browser, walk down the street, walk into a store, etc. Thus, the current conditioning of the sensibility and instincts of human beings that drive needs are a repressive conditioning, whose only rational function is to contain liberation. Should individuals be able to go beyond the limits and power of repressive reason and develop a new relationship of harmony between sensibility and human consciousness the faculties would be adept to outlining the possibilities and limits of creating the material conditions for freedom.

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<sup>133</sup> Marcuse, *Counter Revolution and Revolt*, 62.

Marcuse describes the new sensibility as an emancipation of the senses or as a liberated consciousness. The new sensibility, “has become this very token *praxis*, it emerges in the struggle against violence and exploitation where this struggle is waged for essentially new forms of life.”<sup>134</sup> Thus, the new sensibility is the creation of a new type of human being that refuses the entire capitalist establishment. It is the development of a new morality, culture and the conviction to build a society that does not tolerate poverty, scarcity, unnecessary suffering, and toil. In a universe where the sensuous becomes forms of existence and the form of society itself, the playful, calm and beautiful become the governing ideology creating a free society.

In uniting the artistic imagination and the potential for liberation embedded in a technology freed from capitalist institutions, new possibilities for the pacification of existence can be explored. “This would mean experimenting with possibilities of liberating and pacifying human existence—the idea of a convergence not only of technology and art but of work and play; the idea of a possible artistic formation of the life world.”<sup>135</sup> For Marcuse some of the ideal functions of Art has been to bring spiritual peace to humanity and portray the truth. The other function is art ought to be called upon to shape life. For art to properly shape material culture it must occur in a way that society creates the material and intellectual properties. Creative imagination can alter technological possibilities because the imagination is rooted in the sense. Under the new sensibility and the development of new freedoms, the creative imagination of art can be reconciled with the material and technological world. However, in order to achieve this the imagination must be emancipated from the prison of capitalist society.

For Marcuse, the imagination is a necessity to developing the new sensibility and for the liberation from a repressive society. Marcuse, states “Released from the bondage to exploitation,

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>135</sup> Marcuse, “Society as a Work of Art”, *Art and Liberation: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse Volume Four*, Edited by Douglas Kellner, (Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group: New York, 2007), 128.

the imagination, sustained by the achievements of science, could turn its productive power to the radical reconstruction of experience and the universe of experience.”<sup>136</sup> Thus, allowing the aesthetic ethos to find expression in society. Therefore, a reconstruction of society of free individuals realizing goals that enhance and improve the quality of human life.

Piloted by the imagination mediating between rational faculties and the sensuous needs the new sensibility would see a shift of directing aggressive energy towards erotic energy of the life instincts. It would create a new type of human being who could no longer tolerate the suffering of their fellow human prioritizing our values and goals in accordance with the life instinct over the death instinct. The new sensibility would be about the pacification of existence because, “such a world could (in a literal sense!) embody, incorporate, the human faculties and desires to such an extent that they appear as part of the objective determinism of nature-coincidence of causality through nature and causality through freedom”<sup>137</sup> Thus, the technological and the creative imagination can be reconciled.

The development of new sensibility in individuals is necessary prior to revolutionary action. Otherwise, we risk reproducing the systems of domination on another scale. The new sensibility will direct human beings toward different ends that are not destruction, profit, productivity and efficiency. An aesthetic ethos that involves a set of values that enhances life and true freedom will become a biological necessity.

For Marcuse, the aesthetic dimension is the bridge between reason and moral. Beauty and the sublime have a biological and ethical value. For beauty “belongs to the spear of non-repressive sublimation as the free formation of raw material of the senses and thus the sensuous embodiment of a mere idea.”<sup>138</sup> Beauty or life enhancing qualities can provide a biological catharsis or

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<sup>136</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 45.

<sup>137</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 31.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

purification within the individual. Beauty as a harmonious union can become the sensuous bases of non-repressive order in society.

As Marcuse states

By virtue of these qualities, the aesthetic dimension can serve as a sort of gauge for a free society. A universe of human relationships no longer mediated by the market, no longer based on competitive exploitation or terror, demands a sensitivity freed from the repressive satisfactions of the unfree societies; a sensitivity receptive to forms and modes of reality which thus far have been projected only by the aesthetic imagination.<sup>139</sup>

The aesthetic dimension and a new sensibility can promote a society in which we are open to each other's needs and a politics that is tied to creating the necessary conditions to promote human capacities to the fullest extent. It would be a society free of scarcity and based on peace, joy, beauty and spontaneity. Society must try different things that are neither communist nor capitalist and make new choices on the form of buildings, goods, and through testing out new potentialities. By playing with the possibility, a new reality principle will emerge. Society must turn the world into something aesthetically pleasing, playful, calm and beautiful, thus transforming the senses. We as individuals are not determined. We are capable of determining ourselves and the world around us.

The question remains how the transformation of sensibility will be developed in individuals. A jolt that changes the consciousness of individuals who can then change the world is needed to stop society from being charmed with western capitalism. For example, during the Vietnam War images of the atrocities of war were shown on television. Images of people being napalmed, images of war crimes and hearing the lists of those who died in Vietnam created a moral revulsion that drove anti-war protesters to the streets to voice their disgust with the violence and

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* 24.

destruction that was being enacted in the name of their country. Major demonstrations still occur across the world, however, the new sensibility has yet to be fully realized.

However, through the process of education, talks, and presentations that show the inherent qualities of the distortions of the human being in society, the new sensibility can begin to take form. For example, Art can be used to reveal the possibility of social change to the consciousness of man. It can be a token of truth and imagination that points to the future. Art, books and film can act as an antagonist towards the order of business; it creates a tension between the actual and the possible. Great Art can reveal an alternate existence to the viewer and inspire the imaginative faculties towards utopia. It can provide hope for the future and liberate the consciousness of man. Art can be a solution to liberating the consciousness of man and woman because it acts as a refusal of reality.

### *A Technology of Liberation*

It has become clear that under capitalist control and the competition of the market economy, technologies and sciences have become attached to the larger social project of domination. The idea that technology and sciences are fundamental to the liberation has been gestured toward; yet it has not been explained in its entirety. Though technology and sciences act as a force of domination in western capitalist society, it is essential to the freedom of man. The very existence of technology and science points towards the possibility to the emancipation of human beings from a cruel and affluent society. The goals that are predetermined for technology and sciences that cause a bias towards the containment of man need to be re-directed towards creating a world without exploitation and toil. Sciences and technology need to be directed towards the pacification of existence.

Marcuse stated in *An Essay on Liberation*:

Freedom indeed depends largely on technical progress, on the advancement of science. But this fact is easily obscured by the essential precondition: in order to become vehicles of freedom science and technology would have to change their present direction and goals; they would have to be reconstructed in accord with a new sensibility—the technology of liberation, product of scientific imagination free to project design the forms of a human universe without exploitation and toil.<sup>140</sup>

We cannot hope for a romantic return to a pre-technological society because “Nature is a part of history, an object of history; therefore, a “liberation of nature” cannot mean returning to a pre-technological stage, but advancing the use of the achievements of technological civilization for freeing human beings and nature from the destructive abuse of science and technology.”<sup>141</sup> As technology is freed from service to capitalist institutions and dynamics, it becomes a creative force central to the possibility of social change in the world.

In his critiques of technology and technological rationality it would be absurd to think Marcuse is demanding we return to a pre-technological society because there is a distinct possibility for technics and science to liberate and emancipate society. Marcuse states in *Some Social Implications of Modern Technology* “technics by itself can promote authoritarianism as well as liberty, scarcity as well as abundance, the extension as well as the abolition of toil.”<sup>142</sup> Technology and the sciences have advanced affluent society to the level of comforts society has today, however, these comforts come at the cost of oppression, the domination of man and the increase of dehumanizing alienated labour. Technology and science can improve upon the quality of life for all of humanity. There needs to be a change in technical progress, and a total reconstruction of technical operations where members of society play a role in their development and use where values are realized in the technology itself.<sup>143</sup> A new technology, where the users determine the

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<sup>140</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 19.

<sup>141</sup> Marcuse, *Counter Revolution and Revolt*, 60.

<sup>142</sup> Marcuse, “*Some Social Implications of Modern Technology*,” 41.

<sup>143</sup> Feenberg, *Technosystem*, 59.

technology, as opposed to technology that determines the user could lead to a freer and more fulfilled society.

For example, the automation of the workforce could reduce the work week to four hours a day and eliminate surplus alienated labour because “the quantitative reduction of necessary labour could turn into quality (freedom), not in proportion to the reduction but rather to the transformation of the working day, a transformation in which the stupefying, enervating, pseudo-automatic jobs of capitalist progress will be abolished.”<sup>144</sup> A common critique of automation is it will take people jobs, cooperation would just increase their profit margins, and business would continue as usual. The workers will suffer because the profits will be appropriated by the owners of the means of production. This is true, yet, people will be more likely to protest. If enough jobs are replaced, the system of servitude is no longer sustaining itself, the hold of cruel affluence and luxury on the individual will be broken. Individuals would hopefully, protest, and realize if machines are capable of doing the work they would no longer need to struggle to survive.

At the same time science is endowed with a liberating potential. No one will deny that the scientific mathematical studies have given humanity an understanding of the universe. For example, under the impact of democratic interventions like the have made capitalism more humane and better able to take into account the needs of the underlying population. For example, “the environmental movement has made tremendous impact on public attitudes and on the design of industrial technologies more than any social movement, environmentalism has revealed the social contingency of technology.”<sup>145</sup> The growing struggles and changes to technological design are evidence to the developing desire on the part of individuals in advanced civilizations to shape their technological destinies. However, growing economic inequality testifies to the fact the power of

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<sup>144</sup> Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 21.

<sup>145</sup> Feenberg, *Technosystem*, 36.

Capitalism has not diminished. The idea of environmental movements can become easily neutralized to serve the beatification of the establishment.

Technology and sciences have so much potential. Should a new direction and goal for these disciplines be conceived in tandem with a new sensibility and consciousness of human beings, a sense of solidarity and achievement of the pacification of existence could be formed. The world we currently live in is obscene and absurd. But through the development of the new sensibility and a technology that is influenced by the user, a society with fewer private goods that are enjoyed by the few elite members of the highest class but is richer in public goods that can be enjoyed by a larger portion of the population will exist. A human masterpiece of the necessary institutions like schools, parks, medical care and free development of capacities will be created. This time will come, and society will become more peaceful, inclusive and will help the poorest of peoples pacify their struggles. The technological and scientific resources are present. What is left to do is to actualize these possibilities through praxis.



## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The potential for change has been foreshadowed by past revolutionary events, democratic reforms to society and the liberating potential of technology. Democratic intervention might liberate the potential for a new technology based on power relations incompatible with capitalism however, this prospect may not be realistic. Democratic struggles produce reforms, which may not be the negation of the capitalist society that is required to achieve the pacification of existence. Examples of this include equal rights for women, environmental reforms, improvements to racism and the appropriation of the internet for mass communication. These reforms are not modest in what they have achieved. However, these changes have been absorbed by the capitalist system and the system persists. The ability to emancipate ourselves from the contained society is available.

Human beings are prevented from liberating themselves and society by the containment structures discussed in this paper. The strategies are found in changes in the means of production, the conditioning of their needs, the psychological control of the drives of one's inner nature and the flattening out of culture. With the rise of technological rationality and the mutilation of the true potential of science, human beings have been effectively contained. The very nature, senses, instinct and consciousness of individuals has been moderated. It is only by negative social critique that the ways capitalist control of the human being can be unconcealed.

There is more hope to break the cycle of reproducing new modes of containment and influence over society. Through creating a new sensibility of human beings and redirecting the goals of sciences and technology the pacification of existence can be achieved. It is more imperative than ever that we strive for the liberating of all humanity and create a more humane existence. The tradition of critical theory and the philosophy of Herbert Marcuse is as important today as it was at the time of its conception. We can create a world so drastically different from the

current oppressive and competitive existence we live in today, it is difficult to imagine. But the sparks of possibility are there.

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