

This Body, This Civilization, This Repression: Marcuse's Sexual Theory and the Ongoing Relevance of Negative Thinking

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The claim that sexuality has become increasingly liberalized over the past several decades in North America is hardly controversial. Indeed, it would be virtually impossible to proceed through an ordinary day without confronting various images, advertisements, and products which make use of and appeal to our sexuality. Television programs and commercials, billboards and magazines all inform us of how we might become more attractive, marketable, productive members of society and provide us with the means for completing our otherwise inadequate sexual image. Countless self-help books prescribe various ways to appeal to potential sexual partners and inform us how to “seal the deal.” In order to ensure that this “deal” will be carried out most efficiently, various sources provide us with the appropriate techniques with which to complete our sexual transactions. Now more than ever, sexuality is also being incorporated into the work world where sex appeal is often considered to be a prerequisite for job success. Considering the ubiquity of sexuality both in and outside of the work place, one might conclude that the sexual revolution has come to its logical, life-affirming completion without compromising the requirements of capitalist production and consumption.

Throughout much of his work, Herbert Marcuse takes this conclusion to task. In *One-Dimensional Man* he writes, “It has often been noted that advanced industrial civilization operates with a greater degree of sexual freedom—‘operates’ in the sense that the latter becomes

a market value and a factor of social mores.”¹ Marcuse goes to great theoretical lengths to reveal a deep-rooted contradiction concerning how sexuality is employed in advanced industrial society. In *An Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse maintains that we are now “faced with the contradiction that the liberalization of sexuality provides an instinctual basis for the repressive and aggressive power of the affluent society.”² According to Marcuse, our current civilization is characterized by the wholesale incorporation of all dimensions of human life into a system which seeks to control and dominate individuals in order to maximize profit for a relative few. Through his Marxist reinterpretation of Freud, Marcuse maintains that individuals actively contribute to the reproduction of the capitalist system—the “affluent monster”³—due to our instinctual identification with the comforts, commodities, and sexual horizons which this current establishment provides.

In the following analysis, I shall explicate Marcuse’s central arguments concerning sexual repression in *Eros and Civilization* before proceeding to his notion of “repressive desublimation” in *One-Dimensional Man*. Through the lens of Marcuse’s sexual theory, I shall argue that the liberalization of sexuality represents its containment within a system that reduces all human interests and activities to their market value and binds individuals to a market system that is structured to maximize profit and impoverish human experience. Furthermore, I shall elucidate Marcuse’s argument that the incorporation and commodification of sexuality, as well as human beings’ identification with and acceptance of the “cruel affluence” of late capitalism, leads individuals to reproduce their status as repressed sexual beings. Finally, drawing upon Adorno’s conception of “critique,” I shall elaborate upon

¹ Marcuse, H. (1964). *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 74.

² *Idem*. (1969). *An Essay on Liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 9.

Marcuse's view that we must arrive at an alternative to the deep-rooted modes of surplus sexual repression through "negative thinking"—a method by which philosophy as social critique is able to recognize unactualized possibilities within the given reality and open the horizon for more unique, life-affirming forms of sexual expression in a genuinely free society.

Marcuse's Freudo-Marxist Project: Eros and Civilization

In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse proceeds from Sigmund Freud's late theory of "instincts," or the "primary 'drives' of the human organism which are subject to *historical* modification."⁴ According to Marcuse, the instincts can be defined "in terms of a determining force which gives the life processes a definite 'direction' (*Richtung*), in terms of 'life-principles'. The notions *instinct*, *principle*, *regulation* are being assimilated."⁵ Proceeding from this Freudian groundwork, Marcuse maintains that the primary dynamic of instinctual life which both underlies and is influenced by civilization is that between Eros (the life instincts) and Thanatos (the death instincts). While Eros is a unifying drive which seeks to preserve the life of the organism and the species as a whole, Thanatos is the drive towards destruction. The life instincts—a term which includes the sex instincts as "the part of Eros which is directed towards objects"⁶—attempt "to combine organic substances into ever larger unities."⁷ On the other hand, the death instincts seek "to lead organic life back into the inanimate state,"⁸ and are characterized by aggressiveness, violence, and the annihilation of living substance. Drawing upon an observation made by Otto Fenichel, Marcuse argues

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴ *Idem.* (1956). *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* London: Routledge, p. 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶ Freud, S. (1961). *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, J. Strachey (Tr.), New York: Liverlight, p. 54-55.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

that psychological energy is harnessed and driven either by an erotic or by a destructive impulse.⁹

On Marcuse's account, civilization has been characterized by the repression of these instincts, particularly the repression of Eros.¹⁰ In order for the dominant civilization to function most efficiently, these drives become "sublimated" which, in Marcuse's reformulation of this term, involves the repressive channeling of instinctual energy towards socially useful behaviour under late capitalism. Considering the competitive dynamic of advanced industrial civilization, Marcuse maintains that instinctual energy is largely driven by the death instincts, fostering competition and hostility between purely self-motivated individuals. However, unlike Freud, who maintained that civilization *necessarily* involves this repressive organization of the instincts in order to ensure our survival, Marcuse believes that current modes of sexual repression are the product of a society bent on the domination of human beings and the natural environment. As Douglas Kellner nicely articulates, "Marcuse wishes to answer Freud's pessimism concerning the possibility of attaining happiness in civilization and to refute Freud's argument that a non-repressive society is impossible."¹¹

Marcuse ventures beyond the Freudian equation of civilization with repression by differentiating between "basic repression" and "surplus repression." According to Marcuse, basic repression involves "the 'modifications' of the instincts necessary for the perpetuation of the

⁸ *Idem.* (1960). *The Ego and the Id*, J. Riviere (Tr.), New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., p. 30.

⁹ Marcuse, H. *Eros and Civilization*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁰ It is important to note here that Marcuse employs the term "repression" in a less technical sense than Freud intended it. To put it briefly, Freud saw repression as a continuous process by which the ego keeps something out of consciousness. Marcuse, on the other hand, uses the term repression "in the non-technical sense to designate both conscious and unconscious, internal and external processes of restraint, constraint, and suppression." See *Eros and Civilization*, *op. cit.*, p. 8. For a discussion of some of the problems with Marcuse's reformulation of the Freudian concept of repression and the difficulties it presents for his understanding of sublimation, see Schoolman, M. (1980). *The Imaginary Witness: The Critical Theory of Herbert Marcuse*. New York: The Free Press, pp. 97-108.

¹¹ Kellner, D. (1984). *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*. Berkeley: University of California Press,

human race in civilization.”¹² In this respect, Marcuse agrees with Freud that unrestrained instinctual energy could lead to chaotic and irrational forms of social organization. By surplus repression, however, Marcuse is referring to “the restrictions necessitated by social domination.”¹³ It is evident that Marcuse has appropriated the Marxian notion of “surplus value” in order to reveal the excessive forms of instinctual restraint necessitated by the advanced industrial capitalist system. As Joel Whitebook explains, “The distinction [between basic and surplus repression] is meant to provide a quasi-quantitative concept for measuring the degree of historically unnecessary renunciation that operates in a given society.”¹⁴ Through surplus repression, libidinal gratification is checked through the continuous deflection of instinctual energy towards productive labour. Most of this labour involves the production of superfluous commodities, the consumption of which sustains and perpetuates the capitalist system.

Alongside this distinction between basic and surplus repression, Marcuse also elaborates upon another dichotomy in Freudian theory: the pleasure principle and the reality principle. According to Freud, the pleasure principle is a tendency in mental life to keep levels of unpleasurable excitation as low as possible.¹⁵ When the ego develops out of the id, it turns towards external reality and at one and the same time attempts to satisfy the instinctual demands of the id *and* to ensure the survival of the organism in the face of harsh external pressures and demands. Marcuse historicizes Freud’s notion of the reality principle to argue that the pleasure principle now confronts a specific historical form

p. 157.

¹² Marcuse, H. *Eros and Civilization*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁴ Whitebook, J. (1995). *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, p. 27.

¹⁵ Freud, S. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *op. cit.*, p. 3. In this section, Freud discusses the pleasure principle in relation to the principle of constancy.

of the reality principle. Marcuse labels our current reality principle the “performance principle,” which, as Kellner explains, involves a “thoroughgoing domination of the individual by society which shapes thought and behaviour, desires and needs, language and consciousness.”¹⁶ The performance principle, as a specific historical manifestation of the reality principle, still demands instinctual renunciation in order to ensure the survival of the organism in the face of material scarcity. However, the instinctual renunciations demanded by the performance principle are also exacted for particular social interests, primarily profit-maximization. If the distinction between basic and surplus repression offers a “quasi-quantitative” concept for assessing the amount of unnecessary repression within a given period, Paul A. Robinson explains that the performance principle corresponds to “Marx’s *qualitative* characterization of existence under capitalism, namely the notions of alienation and reification.”¹⁷

According to Marcuse, libidinal gratification needed to become a temporary, operationalized activity under the performance principle in order to ensure that the majority of the worker’s time—indeed, the better part of the worker’s time—is spent labouring. Perhaps most interestingly, Marcuse maintains that the demands of the capitalist labour system explain the concentration of sexual gratification to the genitals. Freud maintained that the child experiences “polymorphous” sexual gratification in the early stages of psychosexual development, by which one is able to obtain pleasure from all zones of the body. Proceeding from this insight, Marcuse argues that under the performance principle the labourer’s source of sexual gratification is derived only from genital stimulation and that any pleasure resulting from this limited stimulation

¹⁶ Kellner, D. *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

¹⁷ Robinson, P. A. (1969). *The Sexual Radicals: Wilhelm Reich, Geza Roheim, Herbert Marcuse*. London: Temple Smith, p. 204.

is considered an unessential consequence of the more primary task of reproduction. As Robinson explains, Marcuse argues that “libido became concentrated in one part of the body, namely the genitals, in order to leave the rest of the body free for use as an instrument of labour.”¹⁸

Although Marcuse does acknowledge “a biological and thus transhistorical substratum for ‘the primacy of the genital zone,’ which results from the internal maturation of the organism,” his discussion of “genital tyranny” is intended to reveal the diminution of individuals’ potential for libidinal cathexis under the repressive performance principle, which Whitebook labels “surplus genitalization.”¹⁹ By relegating libidinal satisfaction to the few waking hours outside of labour and necessitating the “desexualization” of the body, the performance principle ensures the seamless operations of capitalist production. Thus, Marcuse writes, “In introducing the term surplus-repression we have focused the discussion on the institutions and relations that constitute the social ‘body’ of the reality principle.”²⁰ The worker comes to identify herself with this “body,” making the performance principle—as well as the surplus repression it exacts—appear reasonable, natural, and unavoidable.

Throughout the remainder of *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse explicates this subordination of the pleasure principle by the performance principle and points to the possibility of transcending the instinctual repression of advanced industrial capitalism. To put it briefly, Marcuse suggests that the reduction of the working day,²¹ which would be rendered possible by a more rational deployment of technology, could eliminate the need for toilsome, alienated labour while also ensuring universal human need satisfaction. Such a societal transformation would

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

¹⁹ Whitebook, J. *Perversion and Utopia*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

²⁰ Marcuse, H. *Eros and Civilization*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

lead to the conversion of “sexuality into Eros,” which would “eroticize” both private sexual relations *and* social relations more generally: “the free development of transformed libido within transformed institutions, while eroticizing previously tabooed zones, time, and relations, would *minimize* the manifestations of *mere* sexuality by integrating them into a far larger order, including the order of work.”²² This emergence of a “non-repressive reality principle” would create the possibility of non-repressive modes of “self-sublimation” in a society committed to the satisfaction of human needs for the erotic, free play of human faculties and capabilities.

In the face of this potential for liberation, Marcuse maintains that the rationality of domination which characterizes the capitalist system becomes internalized by the labourer to the point where the repressive apparatus appears reasonable. “The restrictions imposed upon the libido...operate on the individual as external objective laws and as an internalized force: the societal authority is absorbed into the ‘conscience’ and into the unconscious of the individual and works as his own desire, morality, and fulfillment.”²³ The labourer thus perpetuates this system by embracing the limited gratification she is afforded and succumbing to the administered “needs” provided by the establishment.²⁴ Marcuse writes, “the goods and services that the individuals buy control their needs and petrify their faculties. In exchange for the commodities that enrich their life, the individuals sell not only their labor but also their free time. The

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 202.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁴ Marcuse elaborates upon the distinction between “true” and “false” needs in *One-Dimensional Man, op. cit.*, pp. 4-5: “‘False’ needs are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice. Their satisfaction might be most gratifying to the individual, but this happiness is not a condition which has to be maintained and protected if it serves to arrest the development of the ability (his own and others) to recognize the disease of the whole and grasp the chances of curing the disease.”

better living is offset by the all-pervasive control over living.”²⁵ Thus, the labourer forfeits her autonomy and life-satisfaction for the mind-numbing, repressive comforts provided by the establishment. The “needs” created by the establishment—which depend upon various commodities and services for their fulfillment—become the needs of the individual. These early arguments concerning the limits of revolutionary societal transformation, the “false needs” administered by the establishment, and the incorporation of sexuality provide the foundation for Marcuse’s discussion of “repressive desublimation” in *One-Dimensional Man*, to which we now turn.

The Containment of Sexuality in One-Dimensional Society: Repressive Desublimation

One-Dimensional Man is a continuation of Marcuse’s radical critique of advanced industrial capitalism. In a similar critical vein as Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Marcuse argues that our advanced industrial society operates in accordance with “technological rationality.” By this, Marcuse means that all aspects of human life are operationalized; all interactions are reduced to means-ends, calculated exchanges between alienated labourer-consumers. However, Marcuse also highlights the unprecedented productive achievements attained by this technologically rational society. In relation to sexuality in particular, Marcuse writes, “Without ceasing to be an instrument of labor, the body is allowed to exhibit its sexual features in the everyday work world and in work relations. This is one of the unique achievements of industrial society—rendered possible by the reduction of dirty and heavy physical labour, by the availability of cheap, attractive clothing, beauty culture, and physical hygiene; by the requirements of the

²⁵ Marcuse, H. *Eros and Civilization*, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

advertising industry, etc.”²⁶ Indeed, the achievements of our current civilization have led to improved conditions of labour, the relaxation of sexual taboos, and the “liberalization” of sexuality.

Yet Marcuse recognizes as early as *Eros and Civilization* that “sexual liberty is harmonized with profitable conformity” under the advanced industrial capitalist apparatus.²⁷ As such, the liberalization of sexuality amounts to its more effective incorporation and control, to its “containment.” To explicate this idea, Marcuse refers to the current liberalization and containment of sexuality as “repressive desublimation.” Whereas in *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse emphasizes the repressive sublimation of the instincts under the performance principle,²⁸ he now claims that the life instincts—a term which, again, subsumes the earlier sex-instincts—appear to be free for more complete, immediate release in both work and leisure activities. Hence sublimation tends to become desublimation: more direct, immediate release of libidinal energy. However, as Robinson elucidates, repressive desublimation connotes “the manner in which sexuality has been put to work in the service of the established order, particularly the established economic system.”²⁹ In this sense, individuals are now bound up with a system that has an interest in “liberalizing” sexuality only insofar as those individuals will be made dependent upon the commodities necessary to complete their sexual being. As he writes in *An Essay on Liberation*, individuals “have to buy part and parcel of their own existence on the market,”³⁰ and in turn they also become more efficient commodities in the labour force. “The sexy office and sales girls, the

²⁶ Marcuse, H. *One-Dimensional Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

²⁷ *Idem. Eros and Civilization*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

²⁸ Cf. Marcuse, H. *Eros and Civilization*, *op. cit.*, p. 199: “Under the rule of the performance principle, the libidinal cathexis of the individual body and libidinal relations with others are normally confined to leisure time and directed to the preparation and execution of genital intercourse; only in exceptional cases, and with a high degree of sublimation, are libidinal relations allowed to enter into the sphere of work.”

²⁹ Robinson, P. A. *The Sexual Radicals*, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

handsome, virile junior executive and floor walker are highly marketable commodities.”³¹ With the liberalization of sexuality comes an increase in controlled satisfaction and the “systematic inclusion of libidinal components into the realm of commodity production and exchange.”³²

As we saw in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse argues that the quality of sexual gratification is diminished by the centralization of pleasure to the genitals. As such, libidinal cathexis is reduced to limited zones of the body and is only allowed to occur outside of work relations. At this point, Marcuse elaborates upon this earlier claim in relation to the environment in which the “saved” libido is able to achieve fulfillment. While he retains his idea of the “genital tyranny” necessitated by the performance principle, he also extends his critique to the “de-eroticized” character of the environment in which sexual relations occur. “For example,” writes Marcuse, “compare love-making in a meadow and in an automobile, on a lovers’ walk outside the town walls and on a Manhattan street. In the former cases, the environment partakes of and invites libidinal cathexis and tends to be eroticized.”³³ Although this may seem to be a romantic portrayal—in the pejorative sense—of the pre-technical world, we should interpret Marcuse to mean that a crucial dimension of sexual experience is lost in a mechanized society in which commodities mediate our every interaction and, indeed, where human beings are becoming more efficient, attractive commodities. In a civilization consisting of purely operationalized social relations and prevailing unfreedom existing below the consciousness of the temporarily pacified worker, Marcuse believes that the environment in which sexual relations occur is fundamentally de-eroticized.

³⁰ Marcuse, H. *Eros and Civilization*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³¹ *Idem. One-Dimensional Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 75.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Perhaps Marcuse's most crucial underlying criticism lies in his claim that the liberalization of sexuality, and thus its containment, prevents individuals from recognizing the prevailing unfreedom of late capitalist society and the need to rebel against it. As he puts it, the "loss of conscience due to the satisfactory liberties granted by an unfree society makes for a *happy consciousness* which facilitates acceptance of the misdeeds of this society."³⁴ In other words, by appeasing the masses through increased sexual liberties and commodities, the society which, for instance, wages illegitimate wars against other nations, is likely to go unquestioned as long as it continues to "deliver the goods." Advanced industrial civilization thus conquers all of the oppositional, transcendent elements of thought, experience, and action, providing individuals with satisfactions which generate "submission and weaken the rationality of protest."³⁵ As Marcuse so forcefully asserts in *An Essay on Liberation*, "The entire realm of competitive performances and standardized fun, all the symbols of status, prestige, power, of advertised virility and charm, of commercialized beauty—this entire realm kills in its citizens the very disposition, the organs, for the alternative: freedom without exploitation."³⁶ The increased sexual liberties of late capitalism tend to numb the human faculties, rendering the ameliorated worker satisfied and without complaint.

Critical Resolutions: Negative Thinking

As we have seen, beneath the veil of our comfortable and sexually permissive advanced industrial civilization, Marcuse unearths

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 76. Cf. G.W.F. Hegel's discussion of the "unhappy consciousness" in (1977). *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A.V. Miller (Tr.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 119-138. To put it briefly, Marcuse's use of "happy consciousness" here is intended to contrast with both the asceticism Hegel discusses, as well as the ability of the *unhappy* consciousness to recognize the rift between self-consciousness and truth, happiness, fulfillment.

³⁵ Marcuse, H. *One-Dimensional Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

³⁶ *Idem*. *An Essay on Liberation*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

the repressive character of the liberalization of sexuality. As a proposed solution to this problem, Marcuse argues that individuals must reach new forms of social consciousness, refuse the “cruel affluence” of the dominant society, and collectively reorient the means of technological production towards creating a truly life-enhancing, eroticized environment. In response, commentators such as Andrew Feenberg and Alasdair MacIntyre have criticized Marcuse for neglecting to provide a concrete plan of political action. Andrew Feenberg maintains that “Marcuse lacked an adequate account of how radical change might be brought about,” and that his “gestures in this direction were so abstract and sketchy they cannot easily be linked to any concrete practice.”³⁷ In his polemical attack on Marcuse, MacIntyre contends that Marcuse’s “idealized students...have produced the first parent-financed revolts in what is more like a new version of the children’s crusade than a revolutionary movement.”³⁸ These critics ignore the underlying purpose and force of Marcuse’s criticisms by demanding that he provide “positive” content for a truly liberated society. Considering Marcuse’s commitment to radical democracy, he and his colleagues at the Institute for Social Research avoid venturing exact prescriptions for creating a better world in order to open the horizon for collectively decided social change. What we should take from Marcuse is the value and critical force of what he calls “negative thinking,” and the role that philosophy as “critique” can play in diagnosing social problems with the view of revealing the inherent potentialities within “damaged life.” Accordingly, I shall devote this last section to an explication of Marcuse’s notion of “negative thinking” and buttress it with Adorno’s related notion of “critique.”

³⁷ Feenberg, A. (1995). *Alternative Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 34.

³⁸ MacIntyre, A. (1970). *Marcuse*. London: Fontana, p. 89.

As Marcuse writes in the concluding pages of *An Essay on Liberation*, “Negative thinking draws whatever force it may have from its empirical basis: the actual human condition in the ‘given’ society, and the ‘given’ possibilities to transcend this condition, to enlarge the realm of freedom.”³⁹ In other words, by critically reflecting upon material social life, philosophy as social critique has the power to identify “the actual human condition” as it is lived and felt in our civilization, while at the same time acknowledging the unactualized possibilities inherent within individual and social life. It is on the basis of this recognition of unfreedom, injustice, and unhappiness that “emphatic” counter-concepts such as freedom, justice, and happiness can be formulated, even if we do not yet know the precise form our freedom and happiness will take. This construction of emphatic concepts—those concepts which arise as the antithesis of the given reality—constitutes the properly critical, however tentative or incomplete, dimension of philosophy as critique.⁴⁰

Despite his resolutely negative approach to sexual repression, Marcuse does provide some positive content for a non-repressive society. He recognizes both the prevailing unfreedom associated with the current liberalization of sexuality, as well as the inherent possibility within this society to drastically reduce material scarcity, to minimize painful physical labour, and to enable individuals to determine their own sexual horizons beyond the system of repressive satisfaction. However, against critics such as Feenberg and MacIntyre, it is not necessarily the task of critique to offer an exact map of a better world. With regards to such contentions demanding that all criticism be “constructive,” or positive, Adorno writes, “The insinuation is that only someone can practice critique who can propose something better than what is being

³⁹ Marcuse, H. *An Essay on Liberation*, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

⁴⁰ On these points, I wish to thank Dr. Deborah Cook for her invaluable clarifications, elucidations, and indefatigable encouragement.

criticized....By making the positive a condition for it, critique is tamed from the very beginning and loses its vehemence.”⁴¹ The task of critique is to identify contradictions and falsities within material social life in order to open the horizon for rational, collectively organized social change. In this light, Adorno concludes his essay “Critique” with the claim that “the false, once determinately known and precisely expressed, is already an index of what is right and better.”⁴²

In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse echoes Adorno’s ideas concerning emphatic concepts when he claims that such universal concepts “conceptualize the stuff of which the experienced world consists, and they conceptualize it with a view of its possibilities, in the light of their actual limitation, suppression, and denial.”⁴³ Far from prescribing acceptable desires, aspirations, leisure activities, or exact courses of political action, Marcuse’s diagnosis of the repression of sexuality under late capitalism is intended to create the opening for a new social consciousness—a “new sensibility”—which will lead to more autonomous, gratifying forms of thought, experience, and action. Such a world would consist of individuals who are able to think critically about sexual life with a view of what it could become if the circumstances under which sexuality has been repressed were improved.⁴⁴ Marcuse’s critique is intended to indict the repressive affluence of advanced industrial civilization in order to envisage a world in which free individuals choose and determine their own pleasures and “really exist as individuals, each shaping his [or her] own life; they would face each

⁴¹ Adorno, T.W. (1998). “Critique,” In *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*. H. W. Pickford (Tr.). New York: Columbia University Press, p. 287.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 288.

⁴³ Marcuse, H. *One-Dimensional Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

⁴⁴ On this point, we should recall Marcuse’s appropriation of Paul Valéry’s characterization of thought as “le travail qui fait vivre en nous ce qui n’existe pas.” See Marcuse, H. *One-Dimensional Man*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

other with truly different needs and truly different modes of satisfaction—with their own refusals and their own selection.”⁴⁵

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⁴⁵ Marcuse, H. *Eros and Civilization*, *op. cit.*, pp. 227-228.