

Herbert Marcuse's Critique of Technological Rationality: An Exegetical Reading

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“[W]hen technics becomes the universal form of material production, it circumscribes an entire culture; it projects a historical totality – a world.”

~Herbert Marcuse, 1964, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 154

“In the exigencies of thought and in the madness of love is the destructive refusal of the established ways of life. Truth transforms the modes of thought and existence. Reason and freedom converge.”

~Herbert Marcuse, 1964, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 127

I. Introduction: Technological Rationality within One-Dimensional Society

For Herbert Marcuse, “technological rationality” is a rationality of domination and social control characteristic of advanced industrial societies. Underpinned by a formal rationality that overrides the more substantive, values-laden forms of reason distinguishing pre-industrial societies, technological rationality fashions everyday life into a “technological reality” that encloses the subject’s perceptions, experiences, and thoughts by projecting the world’s objects and nature as a “a world of instrumentalities” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 218). Sharing intellectual ground with Horkheimer’s critique of “instrumental reason,” for Marcuse technological rationality is a form of reason that “predefines” the very “form” of the appearance of objects as empirically “value-free” materials for the subjects that apprehend and manipulate them. Under such a formally rationalized world, objects become detached, fungible, and orderable things that are emptied of any transcendent meaning beyond perhaps their exchange-value (p. 219). At the disposal of willful subjects operating in a world without objective limits, objects now enter into the abstracted realm of equivalencies, differentiated only by their function and the predetermined and stunted choices of the marketplace.

The critique of technological rationality woven throughout *One-Dimensional Man* also draws from and parallels Marx’s critique of the commodity form and the rationality of capitalist markets (Feenberg, 2002). Technological rationality both makes up and drives the social control of a society subdivided into hierarchic social divisions of production, ownership, and aggressive competition under the profit motive (p. 66). Moreover, Marcuse’s dialectical and historically materialist diagnosis of technological rationality reveals that technocratic social control in modern advanced industrial societies is practiced diffusely under the assumption that social hierarchies are extrinsic to “neutral systems and machines” (Feenberg, 2002, p. 66). Marcuse’s materialist analysis in *One-Dimensional Man* sets out to question and lay bare the contradictions in this assumption. Subsequently supported by myriad social and historical studies of technology,¹ Marcuse’s dialectical reflection reveals that in actuality the systems and machines of control are not neutral but politically inscribed in their very structures and applications:

[T]he notion of the ‘neutrality’ of technology can no longer be maintained. Technology as such cannot be isolated from the use to which it is put; the technological society is a system of domination which operates already in the concept and construction of technique. (Marcuse, 1964, p. xvi)²

In this paper I set out to exegetically work through Marcuse’s dialectically enfolded and historically materialist concept of “technological rationality” as it is presented in *One-Dimensional Man*. In the process, I will first continue to outline what Marcuse means by “technological rationality” and clarify how he situates the concept within his broader critique of the ideology and practices of advanced industrial society. Second, I will sketch out Marcuse’s complex dialectical sojourns that diagnose how we have become “preconditioned” to think one-dimensionally (Marcuse, 1964, p. 8) and how this technologically rationalized preconditioning both differs from its roots in “pre-technological rationality” and yet is presupposed by this genealogical inheritance. And lastly, I will attempt to articulate how Marcuse’s “post-technological rationality” envisions civilizational change not only depending on redirecting the goals and ends of technological systems but, more vitally, on transforming the very *rationality* that permeates technology’s logic and advanced industrial society’s technological base.³

II. The Modes of Technological Reason

Marcuse’s critique of technological rationality is fundamentally an ideology critique of advanced industrial society that springboards from Adorno and Horkheimer’s (2002) seminal work in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Feenberg, 2002). In the technologically rationalized reality of advanced industrial society, alienation from our work and each other extends beyond Marx’s industrial nightmare of the factory and now permeates every nook and cranny of life. Our alienation, however, propagated by the cultural industry’s manipulation of thought, is now veiled by the ideology of efficiency and the empty promises of affluence that permeate one-dimensional society. “The efficiency of the system,” writes Marcuse, “blunts the individual’s recognition that it contains no facts which do not communicate the repressive power of the whole” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 11). Saturated in abundance and a cultural imaginary of well-being, alienation as a concept “seems to [now] become questionable when the individuals identify themselves with the existence which is imposed upon them and have in it their own development and satisfaction,” Marcuse continues (p.

11). But these satisfactions, he clarifies, are false ones, actually belonging to “a more progressive stage of alienation” (p. 11)

Herein lies the sophistication of a technologically rationalized system that both provides abundantly to individuals yet, to use Heidegger’s term, “enframes” their thoughts and controls their behaviours and practices by “prescrib[ing] attitudes and habits” (p. 12). By accepting this material abundance we paradoxically submit to endless servitude as workers and consumers that have had our time, experiences, and consciousnesses captured by advanced industrial society’s technocratic means. Moreover, individuals now tacitly uphold the totalizing and alienating tendencies of the system by actively and even earnestly participating in the means of production and consumption that, on the one hand, deliver them the goods ever more efficiently while, at the same time, extending and reproducing the repetitious, numbing patterns and behaviours of the workplace into their everyday lives. In our technologically rationalized society, autonomy and the subversive capacities of thought and the imagination are mollified and contained by the closed “universe of discourse” (p. 23). Instead, in their tacit collusion with the system, technologically rationalized people find empty solace in the glimmering but vapid products of the marketplace. Our manufactured patterns of thought and experience further alienate us within the “technological veil that conceals the reproduction of inequality and enslavement” (p. 32). Alienated and not completely aware of our alienation, unfree in our freedom, living “euphor[ically] in unhappiness” (p. 5), acceptance of our technologically mediated reality of abundance, it seems, is a Faustian bargain.

This technological structuring of society – its “technical necessity” and its logic of technology (Marcuse, 1968, p. 212)⁴ – is historically prefigured by the development of formal and deductive logic that paved the road for the emergence of “scientific thought – the first step only, for a much higher degree of abstraction and mathematization” that modified reason and the experiences mediated by it for technical means (p. 137). As a result of this historical-materialist diagnosis, Marcuse shows the contradiction inherent in the claim that technical-scientific reason is neutral. Under Marcuse’s scrutiny, technologically rationalized society is revealed for what it is: a hegemonic ordering driven by technocratic means.

Indeed, despite the claims of current technical-scientific discourse, our contemporary technological enclosures are *not* neutral but rather political and socio-historically determined, burdened with the values of control, hierarchic order, and capitalist logics of production and accumulation. Further, it is not technology *per se* which is the problem but a technology shaped by the dominative, operationalist, and instrumentalized rationality that undergirds society's technological base and that falsely deems this technological base to be a deterministically evolutionary given of "progress." For Marcuse, it is the "project" of industrialization and the logic of a society administered from above that has captured the technical into a system that perverts technological means. Once applied, this technology embodies the politics that underlies it within its very structures; technology thus comes to have a "logic of its own independent of the goals it serves" (Feenberg, 2004, p. 98). Consequently, merely changing the goals of technology would not transform its dominative logic. Rather, Marcuse believed that a move towards a new civilizational project that was more sensitive to the affirmation of life; the reduction of "toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice" for all (Marcuse, 1964, p. 5); and the possibilities for self-actualization, depended on qualitatively changing the very *rationality* that drove the technological base by transforming it into another kind of rationality. This new, "post-technological rationality" (p. 239) would be one that both recognized the capacity for science and technology to "[*translate*] values into technical tasks – the materialization of values [–]" (p. 232) while also recognizing the need to transform technical-scientific logic by redirecting and limiting it within the boundaries of other values that "break with the prevailing technological rationality" (p. 231).

Marcuse's proposal for a post-technological project was not a call for a regressive return to a pre-modern state of living off the land, nor was it a resignation into quietism. Rather, it called for a *reworking* of the technological base. This, for Marcuse, would be a "*completion* of the technological project" (p. 231, emphasis added). It would also see a transformation of modernity's project that had paradoxically "rendered possible the satisfaction of needs[,]...the reduction of toil," and the escape from myth while in the process also capturing nature and human experience within the technical-scientific concept of a "universally controllable nature" projected "as endless matter-in-function," a "technological universe...of mental and physical instrumentalities," pure means (p. 168). A project towards a post-technological rationality was the

“transcendent project” (p. 220) that Marcuse attempted to lay out – provisionally and in fragmentary form – in the last half of *One-Dimensional Man*. This transcendent project called for a “higher rationality” that would: 1) unveil the current state of domination; 2) strive to “falsify this established reality;” and 3) demonstrate its own higher rationality by “preserving and improving” the achievements of civilization for reducing the hardships of survival in the struggle for existence – what Marcuse viewed as an accomplishment of modern civilization – but that would also set the stage for the “pacification of existence” from its dysfunctional, perverse capture within the current technocratic framework (p. 220). To accomplish this, Marcuse believed that the new rationality he was calling for required the rending of reason away from the value-neutrality of pure science, which had prefigured and entered into current modes of technocratic institutions. In Marcuse’s transcendent project, rationality was to be re-entrenched with the sort of value judgments that more traditional societies upheld – albeit now materialistically contextualized. This new technological rationality would be able to assess the “truth” of this transcendent civilizational project according to life affirming values. These values would be arrived at through the subversive power of an aestheticized rationality guided by a negative dialectics; the desublimated and oppositional forces of artistic expressions and sensuous life; and, broadly, the “productive imagination” (p. 227-246). Marcuse’s “normative conception of truth” (Feenberg, 2004, p. 102) and his call for the materialization of values were thus grounded in a project that proposed the optimization of “the free development of human needs and faculties” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 220).

Marcuse’s proposal for a post-technological project and the new technological reason that was to undergird it would see the transformation of the *means* of technology, not just its ends, and would be rooted in *new values* disclosed and affirmed by the oppositional power of aesthetics and erotics to put into relief the inauthenticity of current societal conditions. This technological change cannot, however, be merely a moral one – i.e., simply changing the ends of current technocratic systems while leaving its structures intact, such as the “welfare state” or the current management trends of open-concept workspaces. Moralistically-driven changes within the current system would leave in place the linchpins of domination within capitalist power: intuitional hierarchies and their technocratic frameworks. For a true alternative, Marcuse believed that not

only the technical base needed to be change, but also the institutional “superstructures” (Feenberg, 2004, p. 98). A post-technological society must create a different kind of science and a new type of technology. Further, these new rational dispositions and redesigned technical structures must not conflict with nature but be in harmony with it; they must “treat nature as another subject instead of as mere raw materials” (p. 98). Our untapped societal and individual potentialities – i.e., the possibilities that lay beyond the already exhausted potentialities of routinization, domination, and the profit motive – must be the new aim undergirding human life. Thus, Marcuse was not advocating ridding ourselves of the technological base and structures *tout court*. Indeed, freedom from the toil of constantly provisioning for our necessities depended on technical progress. Science and technology could still be vehicles of freedom. Rather, technoscience’s means, directions, and goals would have to change. Technology must be liberated from its current forms of technics and must be transformed into a “technology of liberation” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 19). In doing so, our very reality would also be transformed through a new technical-scientific imagination that would be “free to project and design the forms of a human universe without exploitation and toil” (p. 19).

But what could Marcuse possibly mean by freedom in technical progress? How can we have a “technology of liberation”? If it was the ideology of technical progress that dominated and enframed humanity in the first place, how could it also provide liberation? His view for a new rationality, a post-technological one, lay with what he implicitly considered to be the *ambiguousness* – or in Feenberg’s (2002) terms, the “ambivalence” (p.79) – of technological rationality. Since it was inherently ambivalent, Marcuse saw the possibility to root technological rationality in the soil of different values. More fundamentally, for Marcuse, reason itself was also ambivalent – that is, reason is underdetermined and socio-culturally influenced, possessing an openness to comprehend and, together with the faculty of the imagination, creatively move beyond the given and begin to realize other “potentialities” to the given. With the ambivalence of reason, Marcuse is thinking of something akin to the “ambiguous” and “open horizons” of the Platonic dialectic (Marcuse, 1964, p. 131) (see next section). In particular, the ambivalence of reason meant that a new mode of reason could transcend the given’s ideologically congealed contingencies by returning value judgments into the realm of the rational. Thus, reason, particularly a negatively dialectical

one, could also be *subversive*. As such, the possibility for a technology of liberation also rested with the *potentialities* that a subversive reason could reveal. Marcuse believed that this new, subversive, and dialectic rationality would be able to keep the tension between the subject and the object open and that, borrowing from Hegel while also echoing Adorno, the object would no longer be feared. A new, post-technologically rationalized, two-dimensional thought would replace our current one-dimensional one. Finally, the capacity for reason to re-conceptualize reality with the help of the productive imagination would lead us to another type of technology, wresting it away from “the metaphysics of domination” and tapping it into “the metaphysics of liberation” (p. 167).

III. From Pre-Technological Rationality to Technological Rationality

Before “technological man” could take flight and soar above “technological nature” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 138), the mind had to first be made to think a certain way. For Marcuse, to think of nature in an abstracted way that allowed us to calculate, dissect, capture, and control it was an historical project. The beginnings of this project were dictated by necessity – humans need to control and take from nature to some extent to survive. Our rational capacities have helped us do this. Moreover, all thinking tends towards universalizing and identifying (pp. 138-139), towards comprehending reality by grasping and knowing what appears through the concepts we give it. Here, Marcuse discloses his Frankfurt School inheritance. Marcuse posits that “all objects of thought are universals” (p. 139). In a similar vein, Adorno (1973) writes that “[t]o think is to identify” (p. 5). “Conceptual order is content to screen what thinking seeks to comprehend” (p. 5). But in further agreement with the rest of the Frankfurt School, Marcuse (1964) contends that universal concepts are never “merely...formal” but are rather materialistically contextualized and constituted “in the interrelationship between the (thinking and acting) subjects and their world” (p. 139). Hence, there is for Marcuse a fundamental difference between the ways moderns and ancients apply universals; modern, instrumentally rationalized ways of satiating necessity and comprehending the world differs from the pre-technologically rational ways of the Greeks – Marcuse’s exemplars for pre-modernist thinking. What we could learn from the Greeks, Marcuse thought, were the ways in which they continued to respect the objects they engaged with by not tearing them away from the meanings and values bestowed on them by a greater

objective realm. But paradoxically, the formation of “technological man,” Marcuse argues, also begins with the Greeks.

Techné vs. Modern Technological Reason. Implicit in Marcuse’s discussion of pre-technological rationality and its links to a post-technological one is the notion of the Greek concept of *techné* and its role in the process of bringing things forth from nature rather than challenging nature in the processes of making (Marcuse, 1964, p. 238). To the ancients, *techné* was “the right way” of bringing things into existence and closer to their essential forms (Feenberg, 2004, p. 7). *Technai* are the activities and skills of craft work and represent the arts of both mind and hand that act within a mode of “truth revealing” linked to the practical and creative activity of making artifacts – *poiesis* (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 13, 21). Since the concept of *techné* finds art and technique in kinship, it would help Marcuse begin (but only begin) to articulate his proposed post-technological project (Marcuse, 1964, p. 238; also see: Feenberg, 2004, pp. 1-20). While the word *techné* does not appear anywhere in *One-Dimensional Man*,⁵ it is clear that he is discussing this notion of Greek revealing while contrasting it to modern technics in at least two brief passages in *One-Dimensional Man* (see for example: pp. 153-154, 239). Notwithstanding the absence of the term, the appeal of the concept of *techné* for Marcuse implicitly rested in its potentiality for reconciling art and technology within the value judgments that are intrinsic to the concept. What was most promising for Marcuse was that *techné* intimately involved *homo faber* in the movement of things from existence into their essences within a greater *telos*, entrenching human-made things within a greater finality that did not privilege humans but found them co-responsible with nature in the movement towards the essential. Modern technological reason, on the other hand, elides any kind of such finality and bestows on the human sole responsibility for controlling nature.

Pre-Technological Rationality vs. Technological Rationality. Unlike the willful, masculinist forms of modern societal control and the abstractive, congealing tendencies of technical-scientific rationality, the “pre-technological rationality” of the Greeks also showed Marcuse that humans and nature, subjects and objects were all infused with fluid “modes of Being” already-always in “movement” (p. 127). For the Greeks, “[f]inite Being” Marcuse reminds us, was already-always incomplete, “subject to change” (p. 138). Substance for the Greeks was never static but a *Dynamis*, filled with an energy and a striving towards some

higher form of essentialness beyond what merely appears (Feenberg, 2004, p. 86). These movements of Being showed the ancients that subjects and objects were already-always: 1) united in a tension and antagonism between existence and a becoming essence; 2) that objects *and* subjects are possessed by the potentiality to become other than what they appear; 3) that humans are not separate from nature but intimately ensconced within it; and 4) that values and objective meanings that lie outside of subjects are essential aspects of things that can begin to be logically and imaginatively comprehended by subjects. In other words, pre-technological rationality, Marcuse tells us, was grounded in “a philosophic quest [that proceeded] from the finite world to the construction of a reality which is not subject to the painful difference between potentiality and actuality, which has not mastered its negativity” (p. 126). For the ancients, then, the struggle of Being striving towards the essential, which things-as-givens never attain but always aspire towards, was evidenced negatively in experience, in our suffering and our striving (Feenberg, 2004, p. 86). The “is” of things possessed the implicitness of an “ought” in the struggle and movement towards the essential (Marcuse, 1964, p. 138).

The discovery of the tensions of reality between “is” and becoming, Marcuse continues to remind us, was for the ancients “the work of Logos and Eros,” the two principal concepts that assigned the “two modes of negation” to thought (p. 126). These two modes of reason – logic and erotic cognition, what gives order and gathers and what desires and draws us closer to the object desired – served to “break hold of the established reality and strive for a truth incompatible with it” (p. 126). Consideration of reality for the Greeks was thus mediated by these two modes of thought that, together and in tension with each other, revealed those “untrue and unfree” modes of existence that do not aspire to realize their *potentialities*. These “untrue” modes of existence were embodied by individuals that spent their entire life, or a fair part of it, “procuring the prerequisites of existence” (pp. 127-128).

For Marcuse however, the “real dividing line between *pre-technological* and technological rationality” was not one based on freedom and unfreedom. Like our one-dimensional society, ancient Greek society also had social classes whose entire lives were spent procuring a living, blocking the possibilities for a vast number of people from accessing a free human existence and arresting the opportunity for self-

actualization (p. 128). The difference between the projects of pre-technological and technological societies for Marcuse rested rather with “*the manner* in which the subordination to the necessities of life – to ‘earning a living’ – is organized and, in the new modes of freedom and unfreedom, truth and falsehood which correspond to this organization” (p. 128, emphasis added). Thus, as long as there is enslavement of any kind – pre-capitalist slave ownership, capitalist wage-slavery, or our contemporary unhappy euphoria and our enslavement to a closed universe of discourse – thinking about the good and the beautiful, corralled by the privileged few, remains inaccessible to most. Free thought is unfree when it is horded by “the master[s] of pure contemplation” (p. 128). In a world where haves and have-nots exist side-by-side and where the “free” enjoy their freedom off the backs of those that remain captured, freedom is merely an illusion.

Thus, while the reason of the ancients showed Marcuse the vestiges of a more truthful relation between subject and object, existence and becoming, humanity and nature, they nevertheless also remained unfree because, in Marcuse’s materialist definition, the truthfulness of human existence lies in the degree of “freedom from material necessities” (p.128-129). On the one hand, the Greeks underscore for Marcuse that the quest for truth and the comprehension of reality are two-fold; Being is in constant tension with its becoming, the given with its potentiality. For the Greeks, as for Marcuse, this two-foldedness to reality was our “ontological condition” (pp. 125, 129, 130). On the other hand, any “societal division of labour” made up of inequality and injustice – plaguing us and the ancients – becomes an “historical barrier” blocking our “quest for truth,” arresting the potentiality for “the reduction of toil,” and elevating truth “safely above the historical reality” (p. 129). Hence, within one-dimensional society, the given hierarchical power structures inherent with advanced industrial divisions of labour become barriers for coming to realize their historical contingencies and the possibilities that lay beyond those contingencies. The result: Objective meanings that for the ancients still shaped value judgments now get separated out from reason, and the intimate relationship between reason and objective values are forgotten. To rationalize the world with both Logos and Eros is two-dimensional thought. The rupture of Logos from Eros that takes root with the first articulation of the Western tradition gets us well on our way to one-dimensional thinking.

Why, then, have we been turned into one-dimensional thinkers where a logos of the “universal valid,” abstracted from individual instances and historical conjunctures, was constituted in order to then blanket all particulars, where logical reason won over erotic reason, where “material content” was “neutralized,” where the “principle of identity” was torn away from the “principle of contradiction,” and where contradictions were rendered invalid as a form of “incorrect thinking” (p. 137)? Why was the struggle for truth – for the just, the good, and the beautiful – divorced from “the value of Reason” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 220)? Because, answers Marcuse, the societal divisions of labour of advanced industrial society required a technologically rationalized mind “made susceptible to abstract generalization” (p. 138) and for “truth” to be limited to factual qualities. For the Greeks, truth and falsehood were not merely about propositions as they were to later become for analytic philosophy, one-dimensional society’s grounding philosophy. The true and the false were about the disclosure of Being before statements about Being. On the other hand, the separation of the logical from the erotic, of “is” from “ought,” and the potentiality afforded by the idea of the thing from its given, is rooted in the first days of formal logic where the “distinction was made between the universal, calculable, ‘objective’ and the particular, incalculable, subjective dimension of thought” (p. 138). This sundering began to take its deep roots with Aristotle’s *Organon* and its advocacy of formal universals and a deductively logical world over the substantive Ideas and universals of Plato.⁶

We thus come to Marcuse’s implicit question woven throughout *One-Dimensional Man*: What happens when an entire culture is shaped by formal universals (Feenberg, 2004)? His answer: Things lose their potentiality beyond mere human will and preference. The transition from substantive to formal universals resulted for Marcuse in a shift in the *project* of reason from “‘What is...?’” to ‘How...?’,” establishing a “practical (though by no means absolute) certainty” which pulls reason away from any commitment to the object (Marcuse, 1964, p. 151). Not beholden to any extrinsic meaning in the object besides its mere categorization, operation, and function, matter is freed from any consideration of the social-historical contingencies that also layer into that matter’s reality. Now, with techno-scientific rationality, Marcuse tells us that “the transformation of man and nature has no other objective limits than those offered by the brute factuality of matter” (p. 151); humans and nature lose all other meaningful objective limits”

to the quantitative facts of thing observed. Thus, for Marcuse, formalist thinking begins the extraction of all extrinsic values from cognition's practices. With modern technological rationality, matter is now nothing but a "(hypothetical) system of instrumentalities" predetermining experience by projecting onto nature these instrumentalities and transforming things into abstracted qualities and quantities. At the same time the abstractive instrumentalist move "organizes the whole", framing our entire world-view (p. 154). Scientific-technological reason's abstractive and neutralizing tendencies excuse it from the realm of judgment (ethics) because it shuts out any value-laden understanding of the myriad potentialities of the thing being considered. "Being-as-such" gives way to "Being-instrument" (p. 152). Everything can now be dissected, manipulated, and controlled to our own ends. As Feenberg writes, things are now "simply there, unresistingly available for human use" (Feenberg, 2004, p. 87). This, for Marcuse, is the original violence of modern reason: the "abstention from any judgment as to what is accidental and what essential," placing reason at the service of the status quo while canceling out whatever values and modes of thought that sit outside of neutral, scientific logic as neurotic and irrational (p. 87; see also: Marcuse, 1964, pp. 146, 148). Essentiality gives way to preferentiality, the sacred to the scientific, becoming to totality.

IV. Conclusion: Towards a Post-Technological Rationality

"However," writes Marcuse, "another alternative seems possible" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 47). Marcuse's way out of technological domination and its invalidation of true freedom is to reclaim technological rationality and the means it inscribes onto an entire society for other means and ends rooted in other values. The redemption of technology would for Marcuse begin with a negatively dialectical form of reason. This would give us a new disposition through *a new form of reason* that could also begin to reveal the contradictions inherent within contemporary one-dimensional, technocratic society. Firmly ensconced in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, Marcuse appeals to the subversive power of a negative dialectics to counter the "*scientific* subversion of immediate experience" (p. 140). A negative dialectical mode of reason would reconstitute the concrete and the experiential as oppositional forces (Feenberg, 2004, pp. 89-98). The reclaimed subversive power of reason would in turn drive the development of new concepts "which carry in themselves *the protest and the refusal*" to the established ways of life (Marcuse, 1964, p. 140). For Marcuse,

as for Adorno and Horkheimer, dialectic reason contains “the judgment that condemns the established reality” (p. 140). Scientific-technological reason merely affirms the established reality (p. 140).

Marcuse’s call for a dialectically rationalized “technological logos” (p. 236) is the cornerstone of his “transcendent project.” Such a project would rupture scientific rationality and technologically mediated practices from their dominative projects by reworking the technical in order to place it into the service of the pacification of nature and the eradication of surplus labour. Thus, with the goal of re-materializing the values that uphold life over those that contain and arrest it, values would have to be placed firmly within reason. His “post-technological rationality” (Marcuse, 2004, p. 238) was to be a new logos (p. 236) – a “new direction of technological progress” that would be the “catastrophe of the established direction” of advanced industrial society (p. 228). A post-technological rationality would allow for new “essential potential[ities]” (p. 132) that would blanket the rationality of the technical with new values, now directed towards the reduction of “toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice” (p.5) and the affirmation of self-actualizing modes of life. This new technological rationality was to be redirected towards the perfection of objects rather than their domination (Feenberg, 2004, p. 89), resonating with Adorno’s notion of reconciling the subject with the object by giving the object its due primacy within experience (Adorno, 2002). Most crucially, materialized values ensconced within a post-technological rationality would be focused on the reduction of labour time, the creation of more disposable time, and would strive towards the restructuring of the “productive apparatus” from the logics that administered people (Marcuse, 1964, p. 250).

Marcuse at one point calls post-technological reason “the technological rationality of art” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 238) since post-technological rationality was to also be an aestheticized reason. Experience would now be comprehended by converging the subversive capacities of reason and aesthetic expression (p. 238). For Marcuse, as for Adorno, artful ways of living possessed elements of “determinate negation” (p. 228) whereby the aesthetic dimension would offer an oppositional force to the current forms of instrumentalized control. With the unleashing of “free play and even the folly of the imagination” (p. 228), Marcuse believed that passionate and joyful practices would render the ugliness of contemporary, one-dimensional existence an offense to the “life instincts” (Feenberg, 2004, p. 93). An “aestheticized reduction” would peel away the

immediate contingency of objects and societal conditions that arrest and contain objects and experience (Marcuse, 1964, p. 239). For Feenberg (2004), Marcuse's notion of aesthetic reduction was to help us "[strip] away the contingent aspects of objects...to get at what they could be if released to their free development" (p. 97). The aesthetic reduction thus holds a *translational power* for Marcuse that would, on the one hand, violate the oppressive tendencies of the current "natural" order – which would be the aesthetic reduction's negative dialectical moment – while, at the same time, mapping different potentialities for objects, events, and situations (Marcuse, 1964, pp. 239-240).

But not only art had this reductive, oppositional power for Marcuse. So too did the cultural practices of marginalized groups. Marginal practices could also challenge the givens of the status quo and show us ways through to another world because both the aesthetic and the marginal operate on another plane of reason and imagination that place into relief the ugliness of established reality. Like artistic practices, the practices of marginalized groups also make us aware of different horizons to life. For instance, as the May Events of 1968 and the New Left had shown Marcuse, the cultural and political practices of myriad contemporary social justice movements around the world are providing countless examples of how alternative cultural expressions can merge with and uphold rematerialized values of love, joy, resistance, and direct democracy. As such, the "newest social movements" (Day, 2005, p. 8) are beginning to offer viable alternatives to and communal freedom from neoliberal forms of oppression and exclusion (McNally, 2002).

In a post-technologically rationalized universe, logos and eros would once again be reconciled within particular conjunctures and cultural contexts. Immanent needs under an ethics of care for one another would undergird a new rational paradigm. The "Logos of technics" would be guided by values striving for the pacification of existence. The enframing logic of modern technology would be contained via the legislation of these new values. "[B]y virtue of [technology's] own method and concepts" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 166), a liberated society would render to technological apparatuses the technical capacity to reduce the struggle for the provisioning of the necessities for life. This technology already does well. A liberated society would rend technical devices from their dominative projects. At the same time, a "technological eros" would unleash our capacities for redesigning technological existence and the means and ends of technology via the capacities of

our “productive imagination” to choose from an array of possibilities for our own freedom and the promotion of the “art of life” (p. 230) rather than the art of war and domination. In other words, a post-technological existence would ground itself in and aspire towards values focused on the “affirmation of life.”

Endnotes

¹ See, for example: Feenberg, 1999, 2002; Noble, 1977; 1984; Winner, 1986.

² See also: Marcuse, 1964, p. 158.

³ For Marcuse, changing technology's ends while leaving its means untouched would be a futile task given the non-neutrality of technology. Thus, for Marcuse, attempts to reconfigure the direction of technology must always include the consideration of technical means, as well. I will clarify this throughout this paper.

⁴ Crucially for Marcuse, technological rationality's logic – "*techno-logy*" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 156) – is grounded in a project of social domination for the benefit of the private ownership and control of the means of production. Technologically rationalized existence solves in part capital's conundrum of the variable costs of "necessary labour time" that always remains in tension with the capitalist's drive for increasing surplus value (Marx, 1967, pp. 312-321, 359-368, 508-518). As such and at core, the drive of "technological reason...in modern industrial society" presumes for Marcuse "the separation of the workers from the means of production...[as]...a *technical* necessity... [and as a]...*highly* material, historical fact of the private capitalist enterprise" (Marcuse, 1968, p. 212, quoted in Feenberg, 2002, p. 66). Modern industrial society's drive for accumulation is thus an "historical project" that "organizes matter" and its subjects as a "choice" among a "range of possibilities" that "precludes alternative possibilities incompatible with it" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 219). For Marcuse, then, the historical project of techno-logy is the "new rationality" which "projects and responds to a technological reality," a reality whereby scientific practice and discourse is deemed "neutral" and is neither structured toward nor has a *telos* itself (pp. 167, 169). This reality, Marcuse points out throughout *One-Dimensional Man*, carries with it the ideological bias of one-dimensional society. I will be discussing what Marcuse means by the logic of technology in the following pages.

⁵ Perhaps this was because the concept of *techné* was so closely associated with his teacher, Martin Heidegger, with whom he had distanced himself personally after Heidegger's acceptance of the rectorship in 1933 but, in many ways, not philosophically (Feenberg, 2004).

⁶ On the other hand, with the Platonic dialectic, concepts like Being/Non-Being, Movement, the One and the Many, Identity and Contradiction, are kept methodically "open and ambiguous, not fully defined," Marcuse reminds us (1964, p. 131). They have "an open horizon" and a "universe of meaning...which is never closed" (p. 131). The movement towards the truth of forms is a struggle, never fully attained but always palpable within the horizons of the given. In the struggle for truth Platonic propositions are worked out via dialogue where the usually unquestioned aspects of the universe are put in question in order to "go beyond that which is given" to the philosopher (p. 131). Concepts have multifold meanings and their logical unfolding "responds to the process of reality;" that is, reality is processual (p. 131). Truth and falsehood are not merely about propositions as they were to later become for analytic philosophy. The true and the false were about the disclosure of Being before statements about Being.

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