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Marcuse Revisited: An Introduction

“‘Our’ Western Marxist”

The phrase is Martin Jay’s,¹ and it could not be more apt. Not only does it characterize Herbert Marcuse’s (1898–1979) nearly sixty years of work within its proper theoretical tradition, but the possessive also links the fate of that work to a particular generation and a particular era.

It would be foolish, in retrospect, to overestimate the theoretical sophistication of sixties and seventies radicalism. For better and worse, New Left ideas and actions were characterized more by emotion, circumstance, and improvisation than they were by any self-conscious theoretical orientation. Yet it would also be a mistake to dismiss entirely the influence of theory in general and Marcuse in particular. During this period, Marcuse’s lifelong appropriation and synthesis of classical German thought—from Kant, Schiller, and Hegel through Marx and Freud—burst the confines of academia and acquired a striking political resonance.

Marcuse’s books articulated the new discontents within Western liberal capitalism. He attacked the system at its points of strength: economic prosperity, personal contentment, political freedom. In contrast to the self-congratulations of the affluent society, Marcuse’s description of a prosperity based on selective deprivation, the creation of false needs, waste, needless duplication, and weapons production appealed to a generation of radicals who found themselves in economic circumstances far removed from those of Marx’s proletariat. A life scenario of school, work, marriage, and the split-level was the dearly won achievement of their parents’ generation, hardened by depression and world war. New Left discontent with this scenario was verbalized by Marcuse’s condemnation of “comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom,”² even if much of the rest of One-Dimensional Man remained opaque to his young readers. The assumption that relatively prosperous middle-class life fostered happiness and satisfaction was undermined by Marcuse’s Eros and Civilization, in which that life was understood as the product of
the excessive repression of sensuality and sexuality. In this context, advanced technology was not the precondition for the elimination of toil and misery but rather the means of widening and intensifying the worst aspects of late capitalism. Likewise, Marcuse exposed the sham of political liberalism: freedom of choice, but no meaningful alternatives; freedom of speech, but only when the effect of radical speech is negated by the conservative chorus of the ruling majority.

The situation was exacerbated by the theoretical and political bankruptcy of the traditional alternatives to liberal capitalism. Marcuse analyzed the transformation of Soviet-style Marxist theory from a form of critical thinking designed to guide revolutionary practice to an ideological legitimation of the status quo. Emancipation, for Marcuse and his readers, was understood as more than the seizure of state power and the transference of the ownership of the means of production. By the adjective “New,” the radicals declared their independence from the old Leftist conceptions of socialism and communism. “Really existing socialism” was the realm of the proverbial dour men in ill-fitting suits rather than Spartacus reborn.

A chance for emancipation remained. As Marcuse stripped the liberal capitalist view of history of its aura of progress, he provided a vision of liberation that abandoned the notion of historical inevitability. The connection to a flexible, Western Marxism was never completely severed. But instead of sequential stages of capitalism-socialism-communism, Marcuse wrote of the possibilities of liberation, possibilities predicated on the same material and technological achievements that led to one-dimensionality. In the words of Tim Lukes, Marcuse’s “mechanisms of qualitative change, whether psychic or political or cultural, are based consistently on the prospects of an escalating tension between the consciousness of enhanced possibilities and ever more formidable conventional obstacles.” Despite these obstacles, there was the possibility of a “pacification of existence,” in which the economic prosperity and technological achievements of advanced industrial societies would be redirected to the creation of more benign and satisfying forms of life: the liberation of sensuality and sexuality, of animate and inanimate nature.

The New Left received more from Marcuse than particular critical and emancipatory ideas. Marcuse also gave the radicals an intellectual legitimacy and an intellectual tradition. To the mandarins of academia, the
protests and hopes of the New Left were nothing more than the mewlings of spoiled middle-class children. Marcuse, however, armed the radicals for intellectual combat. He provided an alternative understanding of the great thinkers and the great books, an understanding that challenged the ideological props to the status quo. And at the same time, for the theoretically inclined, he opened the doors to previously unknown thinkers. We learned that his ideas were related to those of critical theory and the Frankfurt School: Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, Fromm, Lowenthal, Neumann, and, later, Habermas. We learned that the Frankfurt School itself was but one tendency within a diverse tradition known as Western Marxism: Lukács, Korsch, Bloch, Gramsci, among others. Through Marcuse, we learned how to think politically.

Marcuse’s theoretical work began long before the rise of the New Left, and it continued after its demise. The handful of years of New Left activism gave Marcuse’s ideas a public vibrancy that has rarely been equaled, yet this period also clouds the meaning of Marcuse’s theoretical legacy. Was “our” Western Marxist merely a thinker for a particular generation at a particular point in its development? Are Marcuse’s ideas so tightly tied to the peculiar circumstances of the sixties and seventies that they should be rightly consigned to a place in the history of intellectual fads? To use one of his own favorite epithets, is Marcuse “obsolete?” Or do his ideas address the new-old conditions of the nineties? If it is too soon to tell whether Marcuse will join the philosophic pantheon, it is not too soon to determine whether he is a thinker for our fin de siècle age.

The essays in this book open a new stage of thinking about Marcuse. The heated polemics of the sixties and seventies are long gone, as are the explications of Marcuse’s ideas; we finally do understand One-Dimensional Man. Nor is this book still another analysis of the relation of Marcuse’s ideas to his significant intellectual predecessors and contemporaries. Douglas Kellner’s essay on the Marcuse Archive attests to the need for more research on these subjects, but this research will not be found here. The goal of this collection of commissioned essays is, rather, the reassessment of Marcuse’s themes and ideas in light of contemporary political and intellectual developments.

The contributors to this book reflect the catholicity of Marcuse’s interests. Political scientists—always eager for significant if unremunerative tasks—are overrepresented. There are also philosophers, literary scholars,
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a historian, an urbanist, and a sociologist. The contributors selected their own topics and were free to take any critical perspective on Marcuse. Some are still enthusiasts, some are dismissive, and the rest fall somewhere in between. Contributions from scholars who previously worked on Marcuse would seem to bias the book in his favor, but the range of perspectives is surprising.

The first part of this book examines important themes in contemporary theory and philosophy. Ben Agger’s “Marcuse in Postmodernity” and Paul Breines’s “Revisiting Marcuse with Foucault: An Essay on Liberation Meets The History of Sexuality” address the relationship between Marcuse’s theoretical legacy and postmodern theories. Peter Marcuse’s “Herbert Marcuse on Real Existing Socialism: A Hindsight Look at Soviet Marxism” and Terrell Carver’s “Marcuse and Analytical Marxism” explore the implications of Marcuse’s ideas for aspects of contemporary socialism and Marxism.

The second part focuses on feminism and feminist perspectives in psychoanalytic theory. Trudy Steuernagel’s essay, “Marcuse, the Women’s Movement, and Women’s Studies,” traces the relation of Marcuse’s ideas about women to the various stages and trends within the women’s movement. Isaac Balbus’s “The Missing Dimension: Self-Reflexivity and the ‘New Sensibility,’” Gad Horowitz’s “Psychoanalytic Feminism in the Wake of Marcuse,” and Fred Alford’s “Marx, Marcuse, and Psychoanalysis: Do They Still Fit after All These Years?” reconsider the Freudian component of Marcuse’s theories in light of more recent developments in psychoanalytic theory—developments produced by the heightened awareness of women’s issues.

The third part looks at contemporary issues in art and aesthetics. Shierry Weber Nicholsen’s “Persistence of Passionate Subjectivity: Eros and Other in Marcuse, by Way of Adorno,” focuses on The Aesthetic Dimension. Nicholsen proposes a new understanding of the relation between Marcuse’s and Adorno’s works, as well as the renewed relevance for the nineties of Marcuse’s notion of an aesthetic sensibility. Carol Becker’s “Surveying The Aesthetic Dimension at the Death of Postmodernism” also discusses the implications of Marcuse’s last book and analyzes the dilemmas of postmodern and post-postmodern art.

and Ecology,” situates Marcuse’s ideas about nature within the various schools of ecological theory. Andrew Feenberg’s “Critique of Technology: From Dystopia to Interaction” and Tim J. Lukes’s “Mechanical Reproduction in the Age of Art: Herbert Marcuse and the Aesthetic Reduction of Technology” emphasize the more optimistic aspects of Marcuse’s theory of technology.

In the last part, Doug Kellner’s “Marcuse Renaissance?” provides an overview of the unpublished material in the Frankfurt Marcuse Archive. These materials furnish the foundation for a more accurate understanding of the genesis of Marcuse’s ideas and are also the basis for new Marcusean work on contemporary politics.

The contributors dutifully explore the relevance of Marcuse to their chosen subjects, but the net result is something more than a mere collection of discrete and disparate essays. This book is, rather, an intellectual stock taking, a tracing of the trajectory of radical ideas from the sixties and seventies to the present. For veterans of the New Left, this book will subject the Marcusean assumptions of their ideas to self-conscious and critical analysis. And younger scholars—confident that their theoretical approaches are somehow “beyond” Marcuse—will discover some hitherto unsuspected connections.

Part I: From New to Post

A reborn Marcuse would certainly recognize the crucial landmarks of political debate in the nineties. The issues are similar to those of the sixties and seventies, but they are posed from new perspectives. Marcuse discussed the progressive and regressive implications of advanced technology for commodity production. But what is the meaning of Marcuse’s analysis when the burning high-tech questions of the nineties revolve around issues of information rather than production? Marcuse characterized the Marxism of the Soviet Union as fatally flawed, a pseudo-alternative to the liberal-capitalist West. But what are the implications for Marxism, pseudo or not, of the collapse of communism in the USSR and Eastern Europe? Marcuse heralded environmentalism as an essential part of a new revolutionary consciousness that went beyond the traditional economic and political concerns of socialism and communism. But what
is the political content of environmentalism when the recently defeated Republican incumbent could even claim to be "the environmental president?" Marcuse applauded the revolutionary significance of the feminist movement. But what is the relationship between feminism and revolution when a feminist can write of her abhorrence of the "properly masculinist business of revolution?" Marcuse argued for the preferential treatment of progressive ideas in an era of conservative intellectual domination. But what is the status of this recommendation when intellectual debate is constrained by left-liberal notions of political correctness?

In the realms of philosophy and political theory, the intellectual pillars of the New Left—Marcuse, critical theory, and Western Marxism—are alleged to be surpassed by postmodern perspectives: poststructuralism, deconstruction, multiculturalism, semiotics, and various feminisms. Nietzsche and Heidegger are again in fashion, but the Germanic heroes of the New Left have been replaced by thinkers with a decidedly Gallic accent: Foucault is the towering figure, but also prominent are Derrida, Lacan, and Baudrillard.

The relation of Marcuse and Western Marxism to the postmodern theoretical tendencies is subject to radically different interpretations. In the night vision of the conservative culture warriors, where all Leftist cows are gray, a direct line of succession connects Marcuse and postmodern theorists.\(^5\) He is therefore partly responsible for the pernicious attacks of these theorists on the canonical texts of Western philosophy. From this perspective, Marcuse is faulted not so much for his occasional espousal of noncanonical thinkers like Babeuf and Fourier but rather for his irreverent treatment of the core thinkers of the Western philosophical tradition.

Unlike the conservative culture warriors, Marcuse never viewed Western philosophy as the ahistorical, politically neutral repository of permanent and eternal truth. For Marcuse, Western philosophy was embedded in Western history, and this history was and is nothing less than the history of domination: class over class, West over non-West, mind over body, man over nature, men over women. Marcuse, however, did not reject Western philosophy outright but exposed its hidden presumptions, then mined its legacy for those atypical bits and shards that could provide the foundation for a nondominating, liberating alternative. The culture warriors, for their part, see Marcuse's \textit{Ideologiekritik} as the essential pre-
condition for the withering relativism of poststructuralism and deconstruction.

There is in fact an important element of truth in the assertion of a link between Marcuse and postmodern theories. Neither the deconstruction of the latent forms of domination nor the semiotic analysis of political signs is imaginable without the work of Marcuse and the other Western Marxists. Several essays in this volume attest to this link, albeit in less tendentious and more subtle forms. Postmodern theorists, however, reject or ignore this connection.

The postmoderns emphasize the differences rather than the similarities between their theories and those of Marcuse and Western Marxism. According to postmodern theorists, the ostensible opposition of Marcuse to the dominating tendencies of Western philosophy merely cloaks his “hidden orthodoxy,” as revealed in his inadequate relativism, his continued attachment to the idea of historical development, and his Eurocentrism. Marcuse demystified Western philosophy by dividing it into a manifest tradition of domination and a latent tradition of emancipation, but the postmoderns eschew all truth claims. Philosophy itself is just another form of subjective discourse and narrative. Marcuse detached the idea of emancipation from any connection to an inevitable developmental course of history, but his concepts are said to be tainted by Marxist residues. He may have written about the pacification of existence rather than socialism, about the Great Refusal rather than revolution, but he is still tied to the “metanarrative” of total transformation rather than microlevel moments of resistance. Marcuse lauded the political aspirations of women and other outsiders, but he remains just another “pale penis” person reconfiguring the ideas of a bevy of other pale penis persons. His critique and reinterpretation of Western philosophy try to redeem a tradition irredeemably contaminated by sexism, racism, and heterosexism.

Agger’s “Marcuse in Postmodernity” concurs with the main line of the conservative culture warriors’ thesis: that postmodern theories are the successors to the work of Marcuse and his contemporaries. And he proposes a new synthesis. According to Agger, the theoretical work of Marcuse and the classical critical theorists remains sound, but it is excessively abstract. Although Marcuse put the issues of the lifeworld, discourse, and the body on the theoretical agenda, the postmoderns have explored these themes in concrete studies.
Within Agger’s synthesis, the relationship between Marcuse and postmodern theories is not purely reciprocal, because Marcuse contributes more than the postmoderns. In order to reestablish a connection between scholarly work and radical political practice, studies of the lifeworld, discourse, and the body must restore Marcuse’s sense of history, his critique of ideology, and his vision of totality. Without these elements, postmodern theories are only the sources of “playful frissons,” trendy and ironic studies that are hopelessly disconnected from any possibility of emancipatory political practice. The concepts of lifeworld, discourse, and the body are distinctly postmodern, but Agger’s synthesis recalls the Frankfurt School’s original research program.

Breines’s “Revisiting Marcuse with Foucault: An Essay on Liberation Meets The History of Sexuality” traces the relationship between Marcuse and poststructuralism. Written at the peak of New Left activism, An Essay articulates Marcuse’s most utopian hopes: Foucault’s History, on the other hand, is the critique of these hopes. Yet Breines sees more than opposition linking the two books. In the seventies, the New Philosophers attacked Marcuse and the New Left from the standpoint of hostile theoretical and political principles. Foucault’s critique is different; it is internal, a New Left critique of the New Left. While Breines retains a sympathy for Marcuse, he is also attracted to elements of Foucault’s position: that the argument for sexual emancipation was but another stage in the inherently dominating discourse of sexuality; that the New Left perpetuated the privileged position of theory and theorists; that liberation is the outcome of numerous resistances at the microlevel rather than a grand event; that the New Left—if not Marcuse himself—retained elements of heterosexism and homophobia.

Breines is more ambivalent than Agger about the continued vitality of Marcuse and critical theory in the era of the postmoderns. This ambivalence is the strength of the essay, as it documents the struggle of a New Left intellectual to come to terms with poststructuralism. If Marcuse had lived for another ten years, he would have faced the same task.

Postmodern criticism is but one aspect of the recent assaults on socialism and Marxism. Marcuse and Western Marxism continue to be the subjects of attacks by the conservative culture warriors. And although Marcuse’s vision of pacified existence was never predicated on Soviet socialism, the demise of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Eu-
rope lends an aura of credibility to the latest declarations of the death of socialism.

In “Herbert Marcuse on Real Existing Socialism: A Hindsight Look at Soviet Marxism,” Peter Marcuse uses his father’s writings to analyze first the reform, then the demise of Soviet socialism. First published in 1958, Marcuse’s Soviet Marxism delineated the objective and subjective factors that would incline the Soviet Union toward the reform of the Stalinist system. Objectively, competition with the West necessitated a liberalization of intellectual life in order to facilitate technological innovation. Subjectively, it was in the interest of the Soviet bureaucracy, the stratum that controlled the means of production, to secure its domination by channeling the fruits of technological innovation to the Soviet consumer. Because of intensified international conflict with the West, Khrushchev’s initial attempt to reform Stalinism was abandoned; technological development was once again concentrated on weaponry and space exploration. The second reform effort, Gorbachev’s glasnost and perestroika, was pursued more thoroughly, but with unanticipated results. Lacking ownership of the means of production, the Soviet bureaucracy undermined the reform of Soviet socialism by switching its loyalty to the new “free market” system. “The bureaucracy quickly realized it could as easily exercise its power in the new system as in the old.”

Peter Marcuse’s essay has important implications for the current debate about the death of socialism. He admits that in a purely economic competition, capitalism has certain advantages over Soviet-style socialism. Capitalism has fewer restraints on the exploitation of workers, and it is also able to offer greater material incentives to its innovative managerial and technological elites. At the same time, the triumph of capitalism over Soviet socialism may enhance the prospects for qualitative change within capitalist countries. Whether the alternative is called socialism, the pacification of existence, or something else entirely, the failure to realize a qualitatively better mode of life in capitalist countries can no longer be blamed on the exigencies of the external Soviet threat.

Carver’s “Marcuse and Analytic Marxism” examines a tendency within Marxism that has been remarkably immune—or is it only oblivious?—to contemporary theoretical challenges. Political or theoretical angst is not a characteristic of analytic Marxism, and its practitioners have pursued secure and successful academic careers. Since the midseventies, the analytic
Marxists have distinguished their work "'from the increasingly discredited methods and presuppositions'" of other Marxisms. They combine the substantive themes of Marxism (e.g., class struggle, the transitions between historical stages, the nature of capitalism, etc.) with the methods of non-Marxist social science: analytical philosophy, empiricism, economic modeling. Their assumption is that a Marxism built on these methods will be more scientifically rigorous—if also devoid of the very emancipatory and critical intent that marked the work of both Marx and Marcuse.

The question is whether non-Marxist methods can simply be grafted onto Marxist themes. Returning to Marcuse's critique of non-Marxist social science in *One-Dimensional Man*, Carver shows how the fundamental principles of analytic Marxism are not neutral tools applicable to any subject. These principles—of the behavior of "individuals" abstracted from society, of the "free choices" of these individuals, of a world of scarcity and competition—are charged with a highly political and highly dubious content. With their non-Marxist methods, the analytic Marxists may be able to continue their stream of academic publications, but only by betraying the essence of Marxism. For Carver, the core of both Marx's and Marcuse's thought is not careerism but rather the demystifying critique of ideas and institutions which damage the lives of real people living in real societies. By their ahistorical presumption of freely choosing individuals operating in econometric models of scarcity, the analytic Marxists only remystify these conditions.

Part II: Psychoanalysis and Feminism

In 1947, Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* characterized Odysseus as the prototype of Western man. Domination was his essence. Odysseus used his reason to subdue his body and his sensuousness, to control his men and defeat his enemies, to conquer the mythologized forces of nature. Eight years later, in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse joined his former colleagues in the Freudian reinterpretation of Western culture. Marcuse's prototype was Prometheus, Marx's own culture hero. Prometheus was another rational achiever, but his story was even more telling as an allegory of the fate of Western civilization. The *Odyssey* con-
cludes with the wily Odysseus reunited with his family and restored to his throne, but Prometheus the enlightener was bound and tortured, punished for his own achievements.

As always, Marcuse offered emancipatory alternatives. If Prometheus symbolized the fate of Western man, frustrated and unfulfilled because of his economic and technological achievements, there were other possible culture symbols. There was Narcissus, who was captivated by the contemplation of his own beauty. There was Orpheus, who sang so sweetly that he could charm nature itself. Narcissus and Orpheus were not symbols of reason and domination. Rather, they stood for the cultivation of erotic instinct, sexuality, and sensuousness, for new, nondomining relations between human beings and between human beings and nature. An aura of playfulness, receptivity, and passivity surrounded these models. In contrast to rational achievers like Odysseus and Prometheus, Narcissus and Orpheus represented an alternative set of values.

The reinterpretation of the classical culture symbols had immediate and long-term consequences. The images of Orpheus and Narcissus foretold Marcuse's later calls for a truly revolutionary political theory, one that combined reason with sensuality. His favorite noncanonical thinkers, Babeuf and especially Fourier, suggested an incipient feminism. For the New Left, Marcuse's Freudianism raised the stakes of revolution. True emancipation was now more and other than the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and its state. True emancipation meant the elimination of the excessive, "surplus" repression of erotic instinct, which needlessly blocked the cultivation of sensuality and sexuality in an era of economic abundance.

Working in a more innocent age, Marcuse could still write about the Promethean dilemma and Orphic possibilities of men in the generic sense of humankind. With the eclipse of the New Left and the dispersal of its components into separate theoretical agendas and separate social movements, however, Marcuse's classical images were transvalued by a new "identity politics." Prometheus was now a man in the gendered sense of the term. Moreover, he was not just any member of the male persuasion but rather a particular kind of white, European, heterosexual man.

Marcuse used Prometheus, Orpheus, and Narcissus as suggestive images for the critique of Western philosophy and the formation of an emancipatory alternative. In fully developed identity politics, however,
suggestive images became theoretical and practical *presuppositions*. If the legacy of Prometheus and his ilk was marked by a dominating conception of reason, then the politics of identity dictates censure: It is now time to renounce Prometheus and all his pomp and works. Likewise, the sheer non-Promethean identity of other groups—women, racial and ethnic minorities, homosexuals and lesbians—endowed them with at least a presumption of political virtue.

Steuernagel's "Marcuse, the Women's Movement, and Women's Studies" analyzes the relation of Marcuse's ideas to the various stages and tendencies within feminist theory. Abandoning hope in the revolutionary potential of the working class, Marcuse looked to outsiders, to those who were excluded from full participation in the system, as possible revolutionary agents. In the course of his supportive reflections on the revolutionary potential of the Women's Liberation Movement, Steuernagel suggests that he went too far, essentializing women as an inherent "other" to the patriarchal status quo. In this well-intentioned essentializing of women, Marcuse anticipates the theory and practice of feminism as identity politics, the latest and, in some respects, the most self-destructive and politically vulnerable stage of feminism. Separated from other elements of the Left, feminist identity politics becomes an end in itself, a substitute for truly radical politics that is all too prone to flights of rhetorical political correctness. Steuernagel does not address the dogmatic character of political correctness but concentrates instead on its political effects. For Steuernagel, the problem of a politically correct feminist identity politics is the backlash that it engenders. Political correctness makes the feminist movement vulnerable to conservative attack.

Although assigning Marcuse some responsibility for moving feminism to identity politics, Steuernagel turns to another Marcusean idea in her analysis of the current political plight of feminism. The rightist attacks on feminism constitute a "preventive counterrevolution." In practical terms, there has been no feminist revolution. Women have gained very little. The goal of antifeminist counterrevolutionaries is to roll back these few gains, including women's studies programs. Self-destructive bouts of rhetorical political correctness only give aid and comfort to the anti-feminist enemy. In order to overcome the debilitating isolation of feminism, Steuernagel looks beyond the New Left coalition. She recommends a link between feminists and the working class.
Balbus’s “Missing Dimension: Self-Reflexivity and the ‘New Sensibility’” examines Marcuse’s failure to formulate a new, genuinely revolutionary mode of social theory, one that combines Promethean reason with an Orphic concern for emotion, passion, and sensuousness. According to Balbus, Marcuse betrayed this goal by his insistence on the primacy of reason within the new combination of reason and emotion and by his continued demand for the primacy of the radical social theorist within radical social movements. The Orphic aspect of Marcuse cloaks his still-Promethean character.

For Balbus, Habermas and Foucault—the leading lights of contemporary, nonfeminist social theory—fare no better than Marcuse on this issue. Marcuse’s goal of a theoretical synthesis of reason and emotion remains valid, but Balbus finds the means to achieve this goal in a psychoanalytically self-reflexive social theory. The new model for social theory is the therapy session. Here the dichotomy between reason and emotion dissolves in a loop, wherein reason elucidates emotion and emotion elucidates reason. Likewise, the pedagogical domination of the radical social theorist over the radical social actor is negated as theorists learn from the experiences of actors and actors are informed by the reflections of theorists.

Both Horowitz’s “Psychoanalytic Feminism in the Wake of Marcuse” and Alford’s “Marx, Marcuse, and Psychoanalysis: Do They Still Fit after All These Years?” address new developments in psychoanalytic object relations theory. Although object relations theory dates back to the 1930s, the new accounts of it have all been influenced by feminism. Horowitz questions these latest developments. He focuses his critique on Jessica Benjamin’s influential Bonds of Love. Benjamin rejects Freud’s and Marcuse’s insistence on the primacy of sexual instinct as essentially monadological: a preoccupation with the sexual drives of individuals which ignores the fact that sexuality is intersubjective (that it is a relation) whose roots are embedded in child-rearing patterns. These patterns structure roles of patriarchy or gender equality and determine whether adult sexual relations will be based on domination and submission or mutual recognition.

Horowitz admits that Benjamin offers useful insights, but he defends the Freudian-Marcusean emphasis on the primacy of instinct. Gender roles and sexual relations may be intersubjective, but the component
parts of these intersubjective relations are still embodied individuals driven by sexual instinct. More tellingly, Horowitz recruits Marcuse to expose the Achilles heel of object relations theory. This theory purports to be more social, relational, and intersubjective than instinct-oriented psychoanalysis, yet it lacks any concept of the larger social context of primal relations. Do capitalism or socialism or other social formations play no role in the patterns that determine gender roles and adult sexuality? Ultimately, the insights of object relations theory will only be fruitful when they are reintegrated with the two cornerstones of Freud's and Marcuse's metapsychology: a sexually instinctive individual within a sexually repressive social totality.

If Horowitz advocates the incorporation of elements of object relations theory within a still-Marcusean system, Alford proposes a more genuinely reciprocal synthesis. Alford concedes the central point made by Nancy Chodorow and other feminist object-relations theorists: The “key failure” of Marcuse's psychoanalytic theory is its neglect of human relationships. Yet Alford, like Horowitz, is unwilling to give up Marcuse's central point: his concept of an erotically instinctual individual.

Alford finds hints of a possible synthesis in the work of an earlier object relations theorist, D. W. Winnicott. Winnicott argues that the goal of human life was not sexual fulfillment but rather mutual recognition through relationships. The model of this mutual recognition is the relationship between mother and infant. Alford takes Winnicott's ideal relationship and fills it with Marcusean adult bodies driven by erotic instinct. Mutual relations are erotic relations, and societies are to be judged in terms of how they foster or deny these relations.

Part III: Artful Thinking

*Eros and Civilization* implicated the prevailing tradition of Western philosophy in a dominating concept of reason. Marcuse called for a new conception of philosophy that would synthesize reason and sensuousness. Marcuse also anticipated Balbus's suspicion that the very nature of philosophizing would guarantee the hegemony of reason within the new synthesis. The philosopher Marcuse thus questioned the value of the enterprise of philosophy itself. In his questioning of philosophy, Marcuse
never worked himself into the paradoxes of Foucault. Nevertheless, his later works were increasingly preoccupied with the political implications of aesthetics.

In his later articulations of aesthetics as the “science of sensuousness,” Marcuse reversed the Hegelian prioritization of absolute spirit. If the rational, truth-seeking activity of philosophy was inherently tainted by domination, then philosophy was demoted to the second rank, and its place was taken by art. Following Kant, Marcuse argued that art was the product of the imagination, of the synthesis of reason and sensuousness. The essence of art was beauty embodied in form. Broadly and politically conceived, aesthetics thus became the key to finding a genuinely liberating alternative to the prevailing one-dimensionality. Through the apperception of art, the imagination conjured images of a transcending other, more beautiful world. If, in his later works, reason became an uncertain ally on the path to emancipation, Marcuse was now a Schillerist: Beauty was the path to freedom.

The liberating value of an artwork did not lie in its overt political content. Politically tendentious art replicated rather than transcended the tawdriness of the real world. Nor did Marcuse value anti-art. In its assault on form, anti-art attacked the essence of art, which was beauty in form. Rather, Marcuse turned to the masterworks of the Western tradition. These masterworks were conservative in their own eras, glorifying and prettifying the status quo, and continued to play a conservative role in our era, as they provided moments of sheer escape and repose within an otherwise repressive and one-dimensional reality. But in their sensuous beauty and sheer alterity, great artworks also offered glimpses of utopia.

Needless to say, Marcuse’s position was not the last word on the politics of art. Veterans of the New Left criticized Marcuse’s aesthetics as a “flight into inwardness,” a misdirected and escapist substitute for real politics and real political change. The postmodernist art of the eighties contradicted Marcuse’s views on aesthetic form. With its genre mixtures and its blurred distinction between high and popular art, postmodernism eroded artistic form, the foundation of Marcuse’s conception of aesthetic experience. Still later, and inevitably, art too entered the politics of identity. From this perspective, Marcuse’s advocacy of the masterwork tradition was a defense of the hegemonic canon of Western art. In art as in philosophy, the canon ignored the achievements of the diverse outsiders.
Nicholsen's “Persistence of Passionate Subjectivity: Eros and Other in Marcuse, by Way of Adorno,” offers an account of the fate of Marcuse's ideas. For Nicholsen, *The Aesthetic Dimension* is not merely the last book that Marcuse wrote before he died; it is his ultimate book. On the surface, *The Aesthetic Dimension* is only an extended essay on a limited subject: the critique of Marxist aesthetics. Nicholsen, however, invests this book with greater significance. In an era of conservative reaction, *The Aesthetic Dimension* represents Marcuse's deliberate subordination of his theoretical legacy to that of Adorno.

In terms of substance, the ideas of Marcuse and Adorno are congruent. The reason why Marcuse subordinated his project to Adorno's lies in the stylistic and formal differences in the presentation of their shared ideas. In comparison to Marcuse, Adorno's writing is more hermetic, more aphoristic, more reluctant to specify the empirical possibilities of liberation. During the period of New Left activism, Adorno was criticized for these very tendencies. But in a period of renewed conservative ascendancy, these same tendencies foster an interest in Adorno. Adorno's hermeticism, aphoristicism, and reticence thrive “in a postmodern period that is fascinated with form but unable to critically conceive something other.” Through Adorno, elements of Marcuse's ideas survive. Indeed, Nicholsen argues that it may be time for the reemergence of Marcuse himself. In her survey of contemporary work on human needs, environmental philosophy, agroecology, environmental ethics, and animal rights, Nicholsen sees empirical examples of the development of Marcuse's aesthetic sensibility, in which the relationship of human beings to internal, human nature and to external nature is no longer based on domination.

Nicholsen's essay focuses on aesthetics as a mode of consciousness. Becker's “Surveying *The Aesthetic Dimension* at the Death of Postmodernism” looks at the implications of Marcuse's last book for contemporary developments in art. The postmodernist eighties had a dual character. On the one hand, this was a time of “great aesthetic and political demoralization.” Artists were confused “as to what to make work about.” The ironical and form-bending experiments of postmodernist artists were, however, snapped up in the then-lucrative art market. On the other hand, the playful and profitable experimentation of the postmodernists engendered a reaction. With artistic post-postmodernism, art entered into the world of political correctness and identity politics. Once
again art acquired a political seriousness, a didactic purpose: the critique of domination. An essential part of that critique was an emphasis on the works and themes of groups who were outside the prevailing patriarchal system.

Becker has reservations about Marcuse's romanticism and Eurocentrism. But she also sees the continuing usefulness of Marcuse's aesthetics as a corrective to the excesses of both postmodernism and post-postmodernism. If art is the embodiment of beauty in transcendent form, then the formal experiments of postmodernism jeopardize the beautiful essence of art. Likewise, postmodernist mixtures of high and pop culture lose that transcendent quality which can provide an image of a liberating alternative to the status quo. Although their motives are completely different, the politically correct works of post-postmodernist artists also risk the loss of transcendence. In their efforts to put art in the service of oppressed people, post-postmodernist artists simplify both the content and form of art to such a degree that it can be embraced as just another element in the prevailing one-dimensional order.

Part IV: Ecofascists and Cyberpunks

For Marcuse, technology meant more than tools and machines. It was a mode of life—the quintessentially Western mode of life. He revived the classical Greek notion of techne as the rational and purposive relation to the natural world. In this broader sense of the term, modern technology embodied the typical Marcusean duality. The material achievements of modern technology were the indispensable precondition for his vision of a pacified existence: for the significant reduction of the amount and types of onerous human labor; for the liberation of an external nature that no longer needed to be feared and conquered. In its present forms and uses, however, modern technology was the key factor in the perpetuation of the very unpacified forms of life in one-dimensional societies. Labor was tied to the production of weaponry and an endless stream of wasteful consumer gadgets. Nature was subjected to ever more efficient forms of depredation and destruction.

Marcuse's ideas helped to put technology on the theoretical and political agenda. Along with Heidegger, Ellul, and a few others, he was widely,
though one-sidedly, characterized as one of the prophets of technological doom. And it was the dystopian aspects of Marcuse's ideas that captured the New Left. The New Left critique of a wasteful and destructive technology was an assault on the proudest achievement of advanced industrial society. Perhaps the development of a one-sided, antitechnological image of Marcuse was unavoidable. Once he had demystified technology, it was easy to see its destructive effects and much harder to imagine a pacified technological alternative.

With the defeat of the New Left, technology was no longer the central concept in a comprehensive vision of liberation. Its components were separated into distinct theoretical and practical tendencies. The purposive relation to nature became the province of ecological studies and the environmental movement, the context in which the old duality of technology persists. Since the task of ecologists and environmentalists was to arrest the damaging effects of modern technology on nature, these groups became the legatees of Marcuse's alleged pessimism about technology. But Nicholson's remarks on agroecology point to a new direction. The solution to environmental problems may lie, not in the restraint of advanced technology, but rather in reconceived and redirected versions of the most advanced achievements in science and technology.

Technology in the narrow sense of tools and techniques became the domain of engineering and information science. Here once again the results were ambiguous. With regard to industrial production, advances in automation reduced the amount of needed labor power. But, as Marcuse observed, automation within a still-repressive social totality was no liberation from onerous labor. Rather than an enhancement of the sheer quantity of time available for pacified life, the automation of labor pushed increasing numbers of workers into the catastrophe of unemployment. Outside of industrial production, prospects in electronics and computers are a little brighter. Once the exclusive instruments of dominating elites, the most recent developments provide for greater control by individual users.

Luke's "Marcuse and Ecology" relates Marcuse's ideas about science, technology, and nature to contemporary ecology and environmentalism. To the extent that they acknowledge them at all, contemporary ecologists and environmentalists find Marcuse's ideas to be either too humanistic or too socialistic. Luke argues that Marcuse's original formulation of the
ecological problem is superior to the later versions. Marcuse links nature to the project of human liberation. His new revolutionary sensibility is aimed at the elimination of the domination of reason over sense, man over man, man over nature. Disconnected from this comprehensive vision, the defenders of nature split into discrete and sometimes warring factions: deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology, soft-path technology, voluntary simplicity, bioregionalism. While Luke has reservations about Marcuse's ideas, he concludes that a linked conception of human and natural liberation is a sure antidote to the “dour green visions” of today's “penitential ecoauthoritarians” and “ecofascist rational choice” environmentalists.

Feenberg's “Critique of Technology: From Dystopia to Interaction” and Lukes's “Mechanical Reproduction in the Age of Art: Herbert Marcuse and the Aesthetic Reduction of Technology” suggest some hopeful, and still Marcusean, changes in the theory and practice of advanced technology. According to Feenberg, there are three stages in the evolution of the theoretical understanding of advanced technology. Instrumental theory followed Weber in viewing advanced technology as a purely neutral tool, amenable to any social purpose. Marcuse's work not only subjects instrumental theory to blistering criticism but also plays an important role in the formulation of the second, substantive stage of technology theory. Although Feenberg is well aware that Marcuse's entire revolutionary project is predicated on the capabilities of advanced technology, he also notes that Marcuse fosters a substantively dystopian vision in which advanced technology structures an entirely new and largely regrettable way of life.

Beyond the instrumental and substantive theories lies social constructivism. Constructivism is implied in Marcuse's call for an “aesthetic reduction” of technology, but its primary inspiration is Foucault. Constructivism breaks down the idea of a monolithic technology in order to focus on the multitude of microlevel interests and relationships that determine the ultimate form and function of new technologies. Feenberg maintains that constructivism is more than just a superior theory of technology. He notes how constructivism has sparked a new interactivist politics of technology, which has important consequences for the environmental movement, public access to information, and medical treatment, including the treatment of AIDS patients.
Lukes articulates the new developments in terms of Marcuse's aesthetic reduction of technology. Marcuse rightly condemns earlier stages of advanced technology for their narcotic, ascetic, and elitist effects. Pong, Nintendo, and the personal computer are every bit as numbing as the assembly line. The antiseptic world of cybernetics represents the most thorough conquest of sense and sensibility. Without an aesthetic reduction, the complexity of advanced technology provides the foundation for the claims to power of New Class technical experts.

The alternative appears in Marcuse's cryptic comments about the aesthetic reduction of technology. According to this idea, the internal imperative of advanced technology will reduce its dominating aspects and instead facilitate user control and communication. Fully reduced, technology reunites with art and thereby becomes a source for the new sensibility, the imaginative fusion of reason and sensuousness. The results are mixed, but Lukes outlines some promising developments. The isolated mesmerization of the PC is giving way to the use of computers as a means of communication. The "wilted libido" of the cybernerds, infatuated with computer war games, is replaced by the high-tech kinkiness of the cyberpunks: Mondo 2000, smart drugs, "Teledildonics," raves, Cybergenics. The alleged elitism of advanced technology is undermined by a new simplicity in use. Simulators, three-dimensional imagers, and acoustic scanners are leading to breakthroughs in environmental protection and medical research. Finally, and by way of confirmation of Marcuse's wildest speculation, technology reunites with art in the works of technoartists.

Contemporary work on ecology and technology has engendered a wealth of neologisms. That in itself may be a sign of a Marcusean sensibility, as it indicates a new playfulness with language.

Part V: Revisiting Marcuse

This book is just one of several revisits with Marcuse in the nineties. There is more Marcuse beyond the Marcuse we know. Kellner's "Marcuse Renaissance?" provides an overview of the unpublished materials in the Frankfurt Marcuse Archive. According to Kellner, these manuscripts offer a new view of the development of Marcuse's ideas, as well as a new in-
terpretation of the intellectual relationship between Marcuse and his Frankfurt School colleagues. The archive materials reveal a Marcuse who was deeply politicized long before he became "ours." They also show how Marcuse and Neumann represented a political tendency within the Frankfurt School that coexisted with the more apolitical orientation of Horkheimer and Adorno.

Kellner maintains that there are pieces in the archive that shed new light on such contemporary political events as the ecocide and genocide of the Gulf War. However, the archive materials also confirm what Kellner considers to be the chief weakness in Marcuse's work: Marcuse's lack of interest in political democracy. Whatever their contents, the planned publication of the archive materials in a series of books will put Marcuse back on the agenda. In addition to his greater appeal to postmoderns, the continued interest in Adorno is partly due to the steady reissue of his works in new English translations.

In most respects, this particular revisit, this collection of scholarly essays on the history of ideas, is quite similar to other collections. Scholars cite ideas, essays, and books in the construction of their own particular perspective on a subject. And, like many collections of essays, the coverage of the subject is uneven. Despite the wide range of topics included in this book, gaps remain. There is an essay on Foucault and poststructuralism, but none on Derrida, Lacan, or deconstruction. Many of the essays mention Habermas, but there is no systematic treatment of the relation of Marcuse to this most prominent figure in the second generation of the Frankfurt School. Marcuse's wariness of popular culture is noted, but there is no confrontation with contemporary culture studies, which reject his cherished distinction between the historical transcendence of high art and the historical determination of pop art. There is a piece on Marcuse and environmentalism, but the relation of his ideas to the animal rights movement merits separate coverage.

In one important sense, however, this book is very different. It is not just a collection of scholarly essays with a purely intellectual interest; more is at stake here than the nuances of seventeenth-century social contract theories or the subtleties of eighteenth-century sonata form. It is also an exercise in memory: the remembrance of a thinker in his era of revolutionary hope.

In comparison to the nineties, this thinker and his era recall a time of
unified political action and grand political goals. To revisit Marcuse is to remember a time when antiwar protesters, environmentalists, sexual liberationists, free speech advocates, racial and ethnic minorities, and feminists were confident in their common purpose, not paralyzed by their different identities. It is to remember a time when Monterey Pop, the Chicago Democratic Convention, and Earth Day were manifestations of the same struggle for a qualitatively new form of life, not the piecemeal resistance to this or that adversary. To revisit Marcuse is to remember the philosopher who assured the various segments of the New Left of the commonality of their purpose and who shared his vision of what the new life might be like. The remembrance of lost revolutionary hope gives this book a pathos that is lacking in most scholarly works.

But remembrance is not nostalgia. Marcuse revisited is not Brideshead Revisited, whatever the delights of the latter. The “remembered plenitude” of the philosopher and the era is merely the point of departure for an assessment of the intellectual and political tasks of the present. In this respect, the book is not so much an account of ideas in two different eras as it is an account of the transition between these eras.

The New Left was defeated. This book provides a forum for the examination of the theoretical conditions and consequences of that defeat, which is generally interpreted in one of two ways. Some of the essays in this volume concur with the postmodern interpretation that this defeat was the outcome of the fundamentally flawed project of Marcuse and the New Left. The whole idea of the Great Refusal, of the erotic revolution led by students and the outsiders, was always just a fiction. In the still-conservative nineties, with the segments of the New Left riven by internal factionalism, the postmodern preference for microlevel moments of resistance appears to be sober political reasoning.

Many of the essays in this book also suggest a different interpretation. Marcuse and the New Left were defeated, not refuted. Marcuse’s idea of a qualitatively new and pacified mode of life remains a possibility of advanced industrial societies. If the advocates of this new, pacified mode of life now find themselves divided and in disarray, this historical condition should not be raised to permanent status. Rather, it is necessary to assemble the components of the Next Left. Likewise, the project of the sixties and early seventies should not be abandoned, but it does need to be refined: to learn from its defeat, to correct its mistakes, to redefine itself in
the new context of the nineties. The political experiences and theoretical insights of the postmoderns will be important parts of this process, but they will not define it. For in the last analysis, the modest resistance politics of the postmoderns is but another lingering symptom of defeat. Postmodern realism and sobriety is a political failure of nerve.

Is Marcuse a thinker for the nineties? For conservative culture warriors, he remains a vital theoretical adversary. For postmoderns, he epitomizes the illusions of the New Left. But for those who still believe in the possibility of a liberated existence, he continues to be what he was in life: a significant theoretical guide. More than this, in the fifteen years after his death he begins to take on a symbolic quality. Subjected to the unwarranted charge of pessimism during his lifetime, Marcuse now represents revolutionary optimism—a symbol of the waiting

till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates.\textsuperscript{12}

Notes


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butions in Women’s Studies, no. 115 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1990), 179–81.


10. Indeed, a recent issue of New German Critique, no. 56 (Spring–Summer 1992), is devoted to the place of Adorno within postmodern theory.
