Much has changed in psychoanalysis since the 1954 publication of Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*. Object relations theory, which emerged in the 1930s and which has come to dominate psychoanalysis, was apparently unknown to the Frankfurt School, including Marcuse. The choice faced by Marcuse, that between Freud on the one hand and the social-psychological revisionists on the other hand, no longer holds. In addition, new critics have turned to psychoanalysis to support radical social programs, or antiprogams. Psychoanalytic feminists, such as Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow, are the best known in the United States, but a more radical group has emerged in Europe. Influenced by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, as well as postmodernism generally, scholars such as Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray are returning to Freud in an entirely new way. In many respects these women are the true legatees of the Frankfurt School's transformation of psychoanalysis into a medium of radical social criticism. A complete reassessment of Marcuse's appropriation of psychoanalysis would have to include these developments.

My essay is not so ambitious. Instead, I focus on what remains of lasting value in Marcuse's project after its key failure is confronted. That key failure is his insensitivity to human relatedness, to the way in which not eros but relationships fulfill the self—or rather, the way in which eros is always already part of a relationship with another subject. Pleasure, says object relations theorist W. R. D. Fairbairn, is not the object; it is the signpost to a relationship with the object. Is there any way to appreciate this insight, the insight of psychoanalytic object relations theory, while preserving Marcuse's radical, utopian individualism, his "somatization of radical protest, its concentration on the sensibility and feelings of indi-
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If these two insights cannot be wedded in some way, then no reinterpretation of Marcuse's project is possible, only a revision that abandons its core. I believe that a genuine reinterpretation is feasible and that it depends on the recognition that the self that relates to others is first of all a body self—a body ego, as Freud calls it. Mutual recognition supports the psyche, so that it can localize itself in its body rather than finding itself in the commodities and fantasies of one-dimensional society. The core of Marcuse's thinking, what remains of lasting value, is his commitment to the reasons of the body. In a postmodern era in which texts seem to have replaced bodies, Marcuse's work is more important than ever.

_Eros and Civilization_ as Response to Instrumental Reason, to the Proletariat, and to Auschwitz

In their critique of the dialectic of Enlightenment, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Marcuse's Frankfurt School colleagues, involved every aspect of reason in the domination of nature. Man was once weak and ignorant, nature was powerful and mysterious. Man learned to master nature, but only by transforming reason into an instrument of domination and control. Not even idealistic reason escaped this fate: "Idealism as rage" at a world too sparse to be dominated is how Adorno put it. Unfortunately, Horkheimer and Adorno could conceive of no alternative to reason. Adorno wrote of approaching the world "without velleity (_Willekün_ or violence." Velleity, it will be recalled, is the weakest form of desire, one that does not lead to the slightest action, and the term seems an excellent rendering of Adorno's intent. But not Marcuse's! _Eros and Civilization_ may be read as Marcuse's solution to the Frankfurt School's critique of instrumental reason, in which eros, the strongest desire, takes the place of reason—or blends with it.

The "dialectic of civilization," according to Marcuse's interpretation of Freud, stems from the fact that culture demands the repression of eros, so that psychic energy that would otherwise be directed toward gratification can be inhibited and rechanneled into work. The trouble is that in repressing eros, culture represses and weakens the one force that might be able to "bind" aggression. As Marcuse puts it, "Culture demands contin-
uous sublimation; it thereby weakens Eros, the builder of culture. And desexualization, by weakening Eros, unbinds the destructive impulses. Civilization is thus threatened by an instinctual de-fusion, in which the death instinct strives to gain ascendancy over the life instincts. Originating in renunciation . . . civilization tends toward self-destruction.” Eros and Civilization is Marcuse’s intervention into this fatal dialectic, which Horkheimer and Adorno called the dialectic of Enlightenment but which Marcuse, playing off the title of Freud’s Civilization and Its Discontents, calls the dialectic of civilization. Under either rubric the problem is the same: how to contain human aggression against man and nature, even when this aggression masquerades under the title of reason and civilization itself.

Marcuse turned to eros to solve not merely a profound philosophical problem but a more pressing political one as well. Who or what might become the carrier or agent (Träger) of the revolution, now that the proletariat had so clearly failed its historical task? The answer is not a social class but a biological dimension within us all. It is a dimension Marcuse calls eros, protected but not immune from social pressure. Rarely has such a desperate, implausible answer inspired such a fine work. Perhaps, too, Marcuse turned to eros as an alternative to the despair reflected in Adorno’s famous statement that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” Eros and Civilization is filled with poetry; it is a type of philosophical poetry.

Drawing on the later psychoanalytic theory of Freud, Marcuse argues that men and women are shaped by two primary drives. One is called eros, or erotic energy, or the life instinct—these terms are roughly synonymous. The other primary drive is thanatos: destructive energy, the wish to destroy life, to annihilate it. Developing this scheme under the shadow of the First World War, Freud held that these two drives are basic, inborn, given, and always in conflict, with death always threatening to gain the upper hand. ’ Marcuse’s approach was to recognize that while these drives may be given, the balance between them might depend on the social organization of society and hence be subject to historical modification.

Although Marcuse’s argument is complicated, requiring a deep knowledge of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, its basic structure is fairly simple. When considered broadly, both eros, the drive for greater unities, and thanatos, the drive to return to an inorganic state, are derivative. Both are
manifestations of a more primal drive to eliminate tension, a drive Marcuse calls the nirvana principle. These instincts are not truly dualistic but instead are composed of a displaceable energy that is able to join forces with either the erotic or destructive impulses. “Never before has death been so consistently taken into the essence of life; but never before also has death come so close to Eros.” Since in the advanced industrial world there exist enough resources to satisfy everyone’s basic needs, it is in principle possible to relax repression, Marcuse argues. The repression necessary so that people in the First World might continue to have more consumer goods is really surplus repression: necessary to preserve the unequal distribution of scarcity, but unnecessary to support a decent existence. Under decent social conditions, a nonrepressed eros could triumph over destructiveness as a means to approach nirvana. Culture would be driven and expanded not from the energies of repression but from the energies of sublimation.

Under a social order governed by sublimated eros, Marcuse continues, human alienation from labor would be complete. Individuals would no longer have to find satisfaction in their work, for such satisfaction is always incomplete, in some way always false. Elsewhere I have shown that Marcuse’s formulation leaves no room for satisfaction in a job well done, even for its own sake. Marcuse is not writing of a world in which individuals would be laborers in the morning and poets in the afternoon. He is writing of a world in which even the writing of poetry would be a detour from genuine gratification. Here I shall let Marcuse speak for himself, and we should take him as literally as he intends: “The more complete the alienation of labor, the greater the potential of freedom: total automation would be the optimum. . . . The realm of necessity, of labor, is one of unfreedom. . . . Play and display, as principles of civilization, imply not the transformation of labor but its complete subordination to the freely evolving potentialities of man and nature.”

Eros and Civilization as Rage

“Is our picture in speech any the less beautiful because we can’t show how it can be realized in fact?” asks Socrates when describing his ideal Republic (Republic, 473e). A traditional answer has been “it depends,”
and this applies to Marcuse's erotic ideal as well. It depends on whether this picture, even if impossible to achieve, captures the core issues and dilemmas that humans face as they live in this world. It depends, in other words, on whether this picture captures something important about human nature—a beleaguered but important term, especially when employed as Marcuse does as a virtual oxymoron. "There is no such thing as an immutable human nature," he writes in a last address. Yet, if eros is a creature of history, then it loses its great revolutionary virtue, which is its utter demandingness and its desire for real and genuine fulfillment now and forever. It is these qualities that make eros such a potent and permanent revolutionary force, even in exile, so to speak, deep within the alienated body and one-dimensional mind. I do not believe that Marcuse ever solved this dilemma: To make eros historical, so that it might be liberated by changes in technology, labor, and society, is to risk its emancipatory potential, which rests in its immunity to social influences. Nor do I believe that it is important to solve this conflict. On the contrary, the dilemma misleads, because it is based on assumptions about scarcity and satisfaction far too material. In this regard Marcuse's utopia does not adequately incorporate fundamental forces and facts of human existence.

This can best be seen by focusing on Marcuse's difference with Freud on repression. For Marcuse, repression is a consequence of the child's confrontation with the reality principle, as represented by father. Take away the reality principle, expressed in scarcity and labor, and virtually all repression could become surplus. For Freud, on the other hand, repression is a consequence of psychosexual development itself, aimed not so much at preparing the body for labor as at separating the child from his union with mother, a union that would otherwise culminate in incest. Seen from this angle, Norman O. Brown comes closer to the mark in *Life against Death*. For Brown, the "lack of sufficient means and resources" that has always seemed to be the lot of humans on this earth stems not from the way labor, capital, and goods are organized and distributed but from nonmaterial needs so powerful that no conceivable organization of society could meet them. "Scarcity" is not a material lack but an emotional and relational one, a scarcity of undivided mother-love. "It is because the child loves the mother so much that it feels separation from the mother as death," says Brown. All the automation in the world will not overcome this scarcity.
From this perspective, the child seeks a sexual relationship with mother not "only" from sexual desire but from a wish to overcome his own separation and dependence by having a child with his mother and so becoming his own father. The fantasy behind this wish is the desire for absolute self-sufficiency, the causa sui project, as Brown calls it, of becoming father to oneself. Incestuous desire, fear of separation and dependence, fear of castration (a separation from a precious part of oneself), fear of death: all run together to express not so much a fear of loss of pleasure as a fear of what it is to be human in this world, to be separate, vulnerable, and alone. Eros, love in all its manifestations, can provide compensation for this experience of humanness, but it can hardly overcome it. Think, for a moment, of what it means to love and lose a loved one. Love does not so much compensate for the loss as cause the pain. Love is the problem, the source of pain, not the solution to it, even though another love, perhaps a later one, may ease the emptiness. But not fully, and not too soon, or we shall know that something was missing in the original love, or in the new one (because it would be easy to make comparisons to the original love).

If we consider Marcuse's culture heroes, those mythical figures who represent Marcuse's erotic ideal, Orpheus and Narcissus, from this perspective, a troubling point arises. Marcuse seeks not merely freedom from labor so that the entire body might remain libidinally cathected—that is, what he calls polymorphous perversity. Rather, Marcuse seeks an erotic relationship to the self so complete that others are unnecessary and become a burden, their presence reminding us of the pain of separation, incompleteness, loss, and death that accompany us throughout life. To escape this burden is indeed an old philosophical ideal, as old as Plato's Symposium and Phaedrus, in which the eros of the body is supposed to lead young men to a transcendent union with an unchanging beauty that lasts forever. I believe that Marcuse sees, not "idealism as rage," but eros as rage: a rage that humans depend so terribly on unreliable others and our own unreliable bodies.

Marcuse states that the dominant mythic culture heroes are Apollonian figures such as Odysseus and Prometheus. They are clever tricksters who create culture at the price of perpetual pain and at the price of the Dionysian aspiration to transgress boundaries and abandon the self to sleep, paradise, release: death-in-life, life-in-death, nirvana. It is against such culture heroes that Marcuse calls attention to Orpheus and Narcissus. It is
the neglect of the orphic and narcissistic element that leads directly to the
dialectic of Enlightenment, the transformation of reason into an instru­
ment of rage at a nature that demands so much self-sacrifice as the price
of survival. Orpheus and Narcissus, says Marcuse, “have not become the
culture-heroes of the Western world: theirs is the image of joy and fulfill­
ment; the voice which does not command but sings; the gesture which of­
ers and receives; the deed which is peace and ends the labor of conquest;
the liberation from time which unites man with god, man with nature.”

Yet we should not forget the full story of these antiheroes, a story Mar­
cuse only selectively consults. Narcissus rejects the erotic charms of Echo
for the autocraticism of his own image, finding it so attractive that he
pines away and dies while admiring it in the still water. Orpheus, Mar­
cuse’s other antihero, could charm wild beasts with his lyre. However, af­
ter striking a deal with Pluto to recover his wife Eurydice from Hades, he
could not control his own desire and anxiety sufficiently to lead her back
to this world. Instead, he seeks a reassuring glance of her, and she is
snatched away from him forever. Thereafter Orpheus held himself apart
from women, dwelling on his lost opportunity. Thracian maidens sought
to captivate him, but he resisted their charms, until one day they became
so incensed that they drowned out the music of his lyre with their screams
and tore him to pieces. Is an erotic hero fixated on himself unto death
really an image of fulfillment? Is someone who, through lack of control,
fails to reach a genuinely desirable goal and so spends the rest of his life
in mourning, rejecting eros utterly, an ideal? Surely the balance can be
better struck than this.

In defense of Marcuse it may be argued that he emphasizes that
Orpheus and Narcissus illustrate the isolated deeds of individuals, and as
such they are bound to be neurotic, aiming at death, not life. “As an iso­
lated individual phenomenon, the reactivation of narcissistic libido is not
culture-building but neurotic.” Only when the protest against the reality
principle is shared may eros become a social force, the builder of culture
and communities and a medium of human relationships. It is in this light
that Chodorow’s criticism in “Beyond Drive Theory” should be read: that Marcuse intends, at least, that his erotic utopia be filled with erotic
relationships, even if his theory of how this might come about (nonrepres­
sive sublimation) finds no support in Freud. Chodorow argues that the
narcissistic mode of relating, typical of Marcuse’s erotic utopia, “pre-
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eludes those very intersubjective relationships that should form the core of any social and political vision.” The narcissistic mode described by Marcuse is characterized by a “‘refusal to accept separation from the libidinous object (or subject)’”; thus his “‘union with a whole world of love and pleasure,’ denies the object or external world its own separateness and choice.”

Chodorow concludes that among the “higher values” that Marcuse should include are respect and concern for the needs and autonomy of others.

Radicalism and Revisionism

Although Chodorow’s criticism is trenchant, she is nonetheless a “Neo-Freudian revisionist” in the precise sense of the term employed by Marcuse: one who puts harmonious social relationships first.” For Marcuse it is the pure revolutionary potential of eros, its utter demandingness, even selfishness, that makes it such a potent force. Is there any way to preserve this revolutionary aspect of eros while at the same time acknowledging that the human being is fundamentally relational, that each person finds deepest satisfaction not in pleasure per se but in being recognized by others for who he or she truly is and in recognizing others accordingly? This, I take it, is the fundamental challenge raised not only by Chodorow but by developments in psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic social theory in the last forty years: to make Eros and Civilization an account of human relationships, without diluting its radical, utopian individualism that puts individual happiness first.

There are, I believe, three dimensions of what Marcuse calls eros that are central to his project. Each reflects the importance Marcuse attaches to finding a reliable source of opposition to a totalizing, one-dimensional society.

1. The “somatization of radical protest, its concentration on the sensibility and feelings of individuals,” as the ground of revolution. Not revolutionary ideas but revolutionary needs, rooted in the body’s desire for satisfaction, are the most profound source of radical social thought and action.

2. The search for a source of resistance to repression and false-consciousness that will not be readily coopted, especially by that smooth,
comforting, attractive society Marcuse writes of in *One-Dimensional Man*.

3. The search for a dimension of human experience that demands the real thing: not satisfaction in labor, or meaningful work, or even creative pursuits, but satisfaction per se. If civilization and memory are just detours from primitive gratification, then forget both civilization and memory and go directly for the gratification.

A successful reinterpretation of *Eros and Civilization* in light of almost forty years of criticism, as well as almost fifty years of developments in psychoanalysis, most of which Marcuse was unaware, will respect and preserve something of this radicalism—a radicalism that is inseparable, I believe, from Marcuse's utopian individualism. If a reinterpretation does not preserve this aspect of *Eros and Civilization*, then it is no real reinterpretation at all. It is a different story altogether, and a less profound one as well.

The Dialectic of Mutual Recognition: From Hegel to Winnicott

Here I can only sketch the outlines of such a reinterpretation, drawing on the work of psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott, student of Melanie Klein's and perhaps the most well-known of all the British object relations theorists, as they are called. Elsewhere I have traced the development of object relations theory in some detail, relating its development to the Frankfurt School's appropriation of psychoanalysis. In place of what Freud called drives, object relations theory substitutes a focus on the self's relationship with and use of others in order to become a subject. As Fairbairn puts it, pleasure is not the object. Pleasure is a signpost to a relationship with the object. It is this relationship that counts most, but not simply because people want relationships with others. First and foremost, men and women desire themselves: not as objects of narcissistic satisfaction but as subjects of their own selfhood. This requires the recognition of, and relationships with, others. Jacques Lacan makes a similar argument, even if his conclusions are more despairing. I believe that this insight runs deeper than either Freud's or Marcuse's. Behind the desire for pleasure is a desire to be a genuine or true self, able to be its own subject. This insight is also
more profound than Chodorow's; she sees the relationship as fundamen-
tal, yet it is not merely the relationship but the way in which the relation-
ship serves the self that is key. This is why my reinterpretation better cap-
tures Marcuse's project.

To write of the way in which relationships serve the self sounds as if re-
lationships must always be part of a selfish struggle. This recalls Hegel's
dialectic of mutual recognition, in which Ego wishes to affirm himself as
absolute and free, utterly independent of Alter's will. Yet to know oneself
as absolute and free requires the recognition of Alter, who of course also
wishes to be absolute and free, independent of Ego's recognition. Alter
withholds his recognition, so as not to be a mere instrument of Ego's will.
And so the struggle continues, becoming more and more ironic, as Ego
seeks to force Alter to do what Ego should be able to do for himself were
he truly free and independent: to recognize himself. Eventually Ego may
force Alter to recognize him, so that instead of mutually recognizing each
other, Ego becomes Alter's master. However, even this victory must be a
hollow one, as it reveals Ego's dependence on Alter's recognition, quite
the opposite of Ego's intended goal of demonstrating his absolute free-
dom.19

Just as Marcuse returns to "an imaginary temps perdu in the real life of
mankind" in order to discover a utopian alternative to Freud's fatal dia-
lectic of civilization, so too shall I return to the young child's earliest rela-
tionship, generally with its mother, to characterize a utopian version of
Hegel's dialectic. This utopia is a dialectic of perfect recognition, granted
so freely and completely that it is never even noticed. Such a utopia is one
to which only infants have rights, and even then it is an idealization, never
happening quite like this (and perhaps it shouldn't: mothers have needs,
too). But this picture in speech need be no less beautiful simply because it
is impossible, as long as it is in accord with human nature. And that na-
ture includes Norman O. Brown's insight that the fundamental human
scarcity is not material but relational: a scarcity of undivided mother-
love, a scarcity of perfect recognition.

Winnicott writes that the child's self is most endangered by precocious
adaptation to the environment. The child has a natural right to use the
mother ruthlessly for the recognition and gratification that its develop-
ment demands.20 Creativity, Winnicott states, stems from an original
stage of unconcern or ruthlessness, in which the infant's spontaneous im-
pulse rules the world. This impulse initially stems from fantasy: the fantasy of an infinite supply of food, warmth, and comfort, offered freely even before its absence is noted. The caretaker’s job, at first, is to support the illusion by means of an exquisite sensitivity to the infant’s needs, so that the infant might be sustained for a little while in its illusion of omnipotence, along the lines of “I am hungry, and milk appears.” Gradually, of course, the infant must be disillusioned, painfully so. If, however, the infant has once experienced this illusion, and if it is withdrawn carefully, the infant will have a lifelong source of strength and creativity from which to draw. This is the core of the true self. If, on the other hand, the mother cannot adapt herself to the infant’s needs, intrusively demanding that it comply with her needs and demands, the child will develop what Winnicott calls a false self in order to protect the true self, the self that would take it for granted that every need and gesture will be recognized and reciprocated.

Winnicott’s formulation is a reversal of Darwin’s. For Darwin, survival (of the species) is assured by adaptation to the environment. For Winnicott, human development is a struggle against adaptation: to be spontaneous, genuine, and free, willfully ignorant of the constraints of the environment. Winnicott, though, is not just writing about freedom, even if much of what he says is remarkably similar to some of Marcuse’s early works on freedom. Winnicott is writing about what it is to feel fully real and alive, which is not precisely the same as writing about eros. Eros is the life force, and Winnicott is writing about what it means to experience it most fully. Winnicott answers that to be fully alive means “the localization of self in one’s body,” and he uses a term from Heidegger, “in-dwelling,” to characterize how psyche should reside in soma. Not an easy task, it requires that the mind not be constantly preoccupied with adapting itself to a changing, intrusive, and unpredictable environment. Rather, the psyche should take its environment for granted, being held by it so that the body-self that is the first self, the source of spontaneity and vitality, can come to freely inhabit its mind and so experience “the imaginative elaboration of somatic parts, feelings and functions, that is, of physical aliveness.” Winnicott considered artistic expression to be one of the most important ways in which adults could experience and express this imaginative elaboration of the body. The alternative, suggests Winnicott, is the repression of soma by a psyche constantly attuned to adapta-
tion, as though the psyche had to “mind” its body as if it were some dan-
ggerous natural object.

The connection between this formulation and the Frankfurt School’s
critique of the dialectic of Enlightenment should not be overlooked. For
both, humanity survives only by coming to mimic the harsh, scarce, and
unrelenting aspects of nature, imposing on itself an order and discipline
as harsh as the one it inflicts on nature: adaptation as mimesis.26 To this
Winnicott adds that when the environment is experienced as unduly se-
vere the psyche attempts to disown the body; because of the pain and ne-
glect it has suffered (again, all experience is originally body-experience),
the body is regarded as a persecutor of the self, of the psyche.27 More
fully than the Frankfurt School does, this explains why reason so often
approaches the body, particularly those bodies perceived as somehow
more natural (those of women, so-called primitive peoples, and the like),
as one last piece of unconquered nature. For Winnicott, mind-body dual-
ism is not so much a philosophical problem as a psychological one, a fail-
ure of development, a reaction to the pain and insecurity of experience.
Unfortunately, one way this “philosophical” problem is experienced is
for the psyche of one group to impose the pains and desires of its mem-
bers’ bodies on other groups. Postmoderns have written of this exten-
sively but have not always explained the connection between philosophy
and psychology.28 Between philosophy and psychology Marcuse inter-
poses the body, making both disciplines more real. In an intellectual
world in which the aesthetics of language has driven out the aesthetics
of the body, Marcuse’s interjection is more important today than ever be-
fore.

Winnicott’s ideal is appropriate only for infants. Adults who contin-
ually expect or demand such perfect responsiveness would no doubt be
monsters. Nevertheless, Winnicott’s ideal can help us rethink the specifi-
cations of social relationships that support the true self. Infants and chil-
dren must grow up, which means recognizing that they live in a world
with other selves who also make a legitimate claim to recognition. Cho-
dorow seems correct in observing that Marcuse does not fully appreciate
this fact. Or rather, she is correct that his theory does not al-
low him to grant recognition of others the importance it deserves. This,
however, does not mean that the ideal of the true self is irrelevant, or that
Hegel's dialectic of mutual recognition is the only way to formulate relationships among adult selves.

On the contrary, society is best judged by how well its members cooperate to foster and protect each other's true self. Here is a standard of social development, justice, and legitimacy as fundamental as any other proposed by Marcuse (such as his pacification of existence). Are the culture, economy, and politics of a society organized to promote the true selves of its members, or to repress and distort them? What more important question can be asked about a society than this? In practice, of course, this will be a difficult judgment. Certainly this formulation does not avoid many of the most difficult questions of distributive justice raised by Aristotle and debated for over two millennia. As Norman O. Brown implies, even recognition of one's self is a scarce resource, perhaps the ultimate one. It too will have to be institutionally distributed, at least when questions of access to the means of self-development are at stake, for example. And this means politics, not just the administration of selves! Nevertheless, there are generalizations and principles readily available, and as far as Marcuse is concerned, most are found in *One-Dimensional Man*, the book that introduced the Frankfurt School to a new generation and a new culture. (I bought my first copy in an airport bookstore on my way back to college after my freshman year.) One-dimensional man is the false self, the self that finds its soul in its possessions and its reason in its insistence that things cannot be different from the way they are now. One-dimensional society is the society that preserves and extends itself at the expense of the true self. This thesis thrilled and shocked me when I first read it, even if I hardly understood it. Now I understand it a little better, and it still has the same effect.

Preserving Marcuse's Radicalism

Reinterpreting *Eros and Civilization* in terms of a utopian dialectic of perfect recognition preserves the radicalism of Marcuse's project while overcoming its key defect, its inability to find a place for human relatedness. Doing so in terms of Winnicott's theory possesses the great advantage of continuing to make the body central, so that the true self is its body, imaginatively elaborated as though it were a work of art. To ask of
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society that it support, not exploit, the true selves of its members is no small demand. It is as radical a standard as anything Marcuse ever proposed. Finally, a focus on the self and its vicissitudes, to use a favorite Freudian word, draws attention to Marcuse's psychoanalytic studies of society undertaken after Eros, particularly "The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man." Nothing to rejoice about, the obsolescence of this concept means that now not even the presumably most antisocial (and hence potentially radical) elements of the psyche are immune to social exploitation and control. Although a focus on the true and false self obviously does not solve this problem, it allows its more precise formulation, and it holds out a hope: that no matter how deeply hidden and suppressed, the true self will continue to wait for recognition. This is, of course, precisely what Marcuse hoped for from eros in the first place.

That the self is not just a fiction, not merely one more metanarrative, not just one more symptom of the endlessly desiring subject, as Lacan would put it; all this is assumed by any program that takes Marcuse seriously. That the self is a value, so that a true self is more valuable than a false one, is an implication of this assumption, one not widely shared by postmodern thought. In the end it is Marcuse's great contribution to have turned to the body: not to texts about bodies, though Eros is certainly a text about bodies, but to the suffering and desiring body. Mine is not the only way to draw on Marcuse's marriage of psychoanalysis and radical social criticism. There is no doct Marcusian approach. However, any approach that takes his teachings seriously will stay close to the body—which means, I believe, staying close not merely to its sufferings and desires but to individual bodies. History, philosophy, and political theory, as well as psychoanalysis, are properly stories of the almost infinite suffering and desire of individual men and women. Texts are the medium of this passion play, not its object and certainly not its subject. It is a simple and obvious point, perhaps, but one frequently forgotten in the academy today. Marcuse was not an academic writer in this sense, and that is his great virtue.

Notes


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15. Ibid., 209.