FOREWORD

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I

Herbert Marcuse is often approached with nostalgia. The Sixties! Man, change really seemed possible then! He is rightly seen as a key influence on the New Left, but then too often reduced to that influence, obscuring or distorting many of his intellectual contributions. Sometimes he is made a classic and reduced to a place in curricula: Frankfurt School Critical Theory, say, Cultural Marxism, or Critique of Technology. Happily, the exciting range of chapters in this book and the fact that many are by younger authors demonstrate that Marcuse is also being read afresh to understand our historical moment and paths to transcending its limits.

Marcuse was frequently prescient as a social observer. The present volume is full of examples in which his mid-20th-century arguments speak remarkably to today's concerns: the odd pairing of seemingly happy consciousness and public aggression, technologies that offer liberation from toil but are deployed to dominate and dehumanize, threats of fascism growing alongside seeming progress and prosperity.

At the same time, of course, not everyone agreed with Marcuse's observations. Was it really true that the working class was (or could be) so fully integrated into and satisfied by consumer capitalism that it lost all revolutionary potential or that economic contradictions and recurrent crises were no longer crucial (both questions Paul Mattick 1972 asked in what was perhaps the critical review Marcuse appreciated most)? Is automation really the basis for possible utopia (a view from which Raya Dunayevskaya 1960 tried for years to dissuade Marcuse)? Does Marcuse demonstrate that positivism and analytic philosophy are necessarily contrary to revolutionary consciousness (MacIntyre 1970)? These issues all remain debated, not least in this book.

One commentator recently summed up the picture of the 1960s in *One-Dimensional Man*: "Workers had little decision-making power in the face of gigantic corporations, elections were organized spectacle rather than an opportunity to realize the will of the public, and the culture industry utilized techniques of mass manipulation to keep people pacified" (Cohan 2021). This sounds like today as much as 1964. Despite enormous advances in technology and productive capacity, poverty and exploitation persist. Irrationality,

destructiveness, manipulation, and unfreedom are still supported by the media, though those media have changed. They are still driven by capitalism, though it has entered a new neoliberal and intensively financial phase. They are still pushed off the agenda of mainstream politics. But a key question remains, should all these observations fuel pessimism or provoke hope despite the odds?

The present volume is not simply about what Marcuse saw, or how early, or with what political consequences. It is, rather, about Marcuse's mind – his ideas, intellectual capacities, perspectives, inclinations, and ways of thinking. It is these that make his work exciting now and of durable importance to critical theory. To think with Marcuse opens innumerable insights into our contemporary predicament and possibilities (though to treat him as a sole necessary theoretical source or guide to action invites disappointment). Marcuse was a thinker of impressive breadth, but there was also great continuity in his core project. His enduring concern was for emancipation of human beings from limits imposed by inherited political, economic, psychosocial, and cultural structures in order that they could creatively make a better world. This required critical insight into both those limits and the possibility of transcending them and willingness to act on such insight.

The editors and authors of the present book bring out many dimensions of Marcuse's intellectual work: analyses of technology and technological rationality, engagement with aesthetics, critique of authoritarianism, hopes for liberation. They situate Marcuse's contributions in multiple contexts: Marcuse and his Frankfurt colleagues, Marcuse in America, Marcuse and feminism. They show Marcuse in intellectual friendship (and rivalry) and write suggestively about what missed connections with contemporaries might have produced. They demonstrate that Marcuse's ideas help us understand and respond to realities he did not directly address: post-colonial histories, platform postmodernity, artificial intelligence, and the Anthropocene. Not least, they raise questions: what are the limits of a post-work imaginary? Or of combining aesthetics and politics? Or, indeed, of relying on a Marxist idea of revolution without the centrality of the proletariat as the self-moving subject-object to realize it?

Almost all chapters can be read without deep background in Marcuse or critical theory. Some help to fill in necessary background: Marcuse's reading of Kant, for example, his engagement in immanent critique, or his relationship to Erich Fromm. Editorial introductions situate them further. A reader can plunge in anywhere. Go to it!

II

But in the remainder of this foreword, I want to place Marcuse in the context of his earliest intellectual and political formation. In the first place, early 20th-century Germany was distinctive and is distant enough from our contemporary intellectual world to be unfamiliar to most readers. The range of theoretical and political perspectives, schools of thought and brilliant individuals, was enormous. Art, literature, philosophy, politics, and the new social sciences were entwined in ways they haven't been since. It is important not only to grasp that certain thinkers were especially important influences on Marcuse, forming an intellectual lineage, but also to recognize throughout his life Marcuse was engaged with different ideas and ways of thinking that were not fully reconciled with each other.

Second, while in broad terms Marcuse shared this context with his colleagues in the Institute for Social Research, his formation was distinctive *before* he joined the Frankfurt School and this influenced the *later* differences in his relationship to America and to the

politics of the 1960s.[1] Marcuse learned from Horkheimer and Adorno, for example, but he remained committed to an ideal of *praxis* they abandoned.

Third, Marcuse's mind was formed not only in relations to a remarkable inheritance of German thought and civilization and to extraordinary contemporary thinkers. It was also formed in relation to World War I, the suppression of revolution, and the compromises of social democracy. He lived already amid contradictions that would resurface with new intensity in the rise of fascism that he could not escape with emigration and that were partially reproduced in very different circumstances after World War II. I can offer no more than a sketch. This is not so much a proper introduction as an encouragement to recognize the range of influences that shaped Marcuse and that he connected in distinctive ways. These remain significant for understanding his mind and also for analyzing key issues today.

III

At the end of the 19th century, all Germany but especially Berlin bore the impress of an ambitious empire. Only in recent decades had Prussia led Germany to national unification and global stature and Berlin come to rival Paris as the world's most dynamic city. The largely secular, assimilated Jewish community into which Marcuse was born joined in the vision of civilization and the celebration of progress (and looked down on seemingly backward Jews from the East). Culture meant aesthetic achievement and cultivation, an aspiration rather than a common origin. Education was *Bildung*, the making of a distinctive self, rather than just credentials and the channeling into employment and conformity that Marcuse would later criticize in *One-Dimensional Man*. Or at least this was true for the elite.

Culture included study of the ancient classics and excitement over recent discoveries in archaeology. On Berlin's Museum Island these were presented along with the development of German (and to a lesser extent other European) art as a record of civilization itself. Ideas of civilization were shaped by empire and global reach in tension with a growing ideologization of national culture (Marcuse 1937: 94–95). Leading the Berlin Philharmonic, Richard Strauss reached back to Wagner and forward to both modernism and Nazism (each connecting Germany to Austria). Berlin was gripped by a passion for the Orient. Herman Hesse was popular. Germans could take pride in growing global leadership. This was widely seen as testimony to the greatness of its empire. There was dissent and criticism, but industry at home and late colonial adventures abroad inspired optimism. Elite critics charged that material greatness was accompanied by moral bankruptcy and cultural crisis. The Left asserted that greatness was founded on the inequalities and instabilities of capitalism but was split over whether to reject this or claim it as the basis for further, better distributed, progress. Its internal divisions proved enduring and fundamentally disempowering. Business and industry were booming; cities were growing; conservatives styled themselves 'enlightened'.

Like *fin de siècle* France and Austria, late Wilhelmine Germany shared a combination of artistic brilliance and new wealth with political decay. Embrace of historical civilization and the excitement of modernism mingled unstably. Much contemporary art, literature, and indeed science was also a challenge to inherited ideas of civilization. Late Romanticism flourished even as modernism advanced. Schopenhauer's assertion of a will to life was reconfigured in Nietzsche's account of a will to power but still entangled in a tragedy of culture. The influence of this deepened and problematized romanticism was enormous for Max Weber, for the young Georg Lukacs who actively participated in Berlin's cultural

and intellectual life, and for both Marcuse and the Frankfurt School more widely. Thomas Mann built on both. So did Henryk Ibsen, whose major achievements in drama as a form of social criticism came during his years in Germany. Weber (1922) criticized pervasive rationalization and warned that human creativity was closed in a steel case (or in some translations an iron cage). Yet he also joined in the backward-looking elite enthusiasm for dueling and received an obligatory sabre scar.

Then there was the shock of World War I and, indeed, defeat. The war was the product of crises of empire and civilization as well as capitalism. The crises had been growing since the intensified imperialist competition of the late 19th century. They would continue through the Great Depression and World War II, and they would occasion epochal revolutions. The half century of remarkable transformation was, to Marxists and not only Marxists, evidence of deep underlying contradictions, dialectically shaping a new reality. Marcuse saw the contradictions not only in economics and politics but also in culture.

Germany had entered the war amid nationalist fervor. The 'liberal' Max Weber voiced the sentiment of many in the educated elite when he declared the war "great and wonderful".[2] Such sentiments faded as the war dragged on. Many on Germany's growing Left had criticized the war as imperialist. But the Left did not prevail. As actual conflict opened, dominant figures in the Social Democratic Party (SPD) rallied in support, often with militant enthusiasm.

Germany was a formidable and for the most part self-confident power, its military supported by strong industry. However, its government managed the war poorly. Germany's war effort was promoted and led by generals who thought overwhelmingly of land combat; coordination between army and navy was poor. Mass conscription expanded the army from 800,000 to 3,500,000 soldiers in less than two weeks but created a huge challenge of supply. The cost of sustaining the combat diverted resources from civilians. Poor harvests and both inefficient and inequitable food distribution aggravated the effects of a British blockade and led to some 670,000 civilian deaths from starvation and disease.

Meanwhile, Germany's invasion of Russia helped occasion a revolution – initially social democratic then taken over by communists. German leaders were glad that Russia withdrew from the war, but worried, with some reason, that revolution would spread west. Despite rhetoric of worldwide revolution, the USSR increasingly followed Stalin's call to 'build socialism in one country' and indeed became a negative example of the triumph of statism over socialism for many on the Left. In Germany, the Spartacus League was crucial. It had initially formed on the Left of the SPD in opposition to the war. Its most famous leader, Rosa Luxemburg, wanted to base a democratically participatory revolution in workers' and soldiers' councils. Rooted in Russia's 1905 Revolution, these figured as workers' Soviets early in the 1917 Russian Revolution, but in the view of Luxemburg and others the councils were suppressed as the Communist Party consolidated state power in a bureaucratic state.

Conscripted as a teenager into military service late in the war, Marcuse tended to horses in Berlin and never saw combat. Nonetheless, he credited the war with his politicization. Somewhat surprisingly, he joined the Social Democratic Party (SPD), not the more radical and pacifist Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD). After four years of war, misery and disillusionment spread both among civilians and in the ranks of the decaying military. Germany's November Revolution of 1918–1919 was the result.

Luxemburg, a Polish immigrant who had regarded Berlin as too bourgeois for real radicalism, nonetheless declared the city a Free Socialist Republic. Marcuse was drawn to the movement to establish local democratic participation through workers' and soldiers'

councils. He would always see potential for a democratic and decentralized socialist society. Indeed, he even objected to seizing state power as a revolutionary strategy, fearing it would only intensify domination. However, the actual councils of the German Revolution did not realize the vision of council communism and were not inherently radical. Marcuse was elected to leadership in a Berlin soldiers' council and allowed himself a moment of hopeful enthusiasm before he was dismayed to find that most soldiers wanted stability more than social change and many even voted for leadership from their old officers.

Similarly, Max Weber was elected to a council in Heidelberg and found the workers mostly willing to accept liberal leadership. He had never really expected socialism to work, even if some of its principles were attractive. But he also developed an influential analysis of rationalization and bureaucracy, no less critical for seeing no way out. Still, *having* the experience of practical engagement, however modest, was important and set Marcuse (and Weber) apart from Horkheimer, Adorno, and others in the Frankfurt School who served neither in the military nor in the revolution but remained in their libraries. This pattern would be echoed during World War II when Marcuse and several other critical theorists joined the U.S. war effort while Horkheimer and Adorno stayed aloof in Los Angeles.[3]

The German Empire, weakened by its internal disorder, toppled with defeat. After the war, however, Germany's SPD remained divided and for the most part tried to hold back revolution which it thought was not 'ripe'. Dominant SPD leaders were committed to restoring prosperity more than transforming society. They wanted to be taken seriously as part of a new established order. The Communists also split and lost their most dynamic leaders when Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered. Soviet domination ironically repressed radical action.

Nonetheless, this was an era of passionate activism and exploration. Social movements flourished, especially among German youth and participants in the councils. These exceeded any simple Left–Right continuum or the notion of class struggle, pursuing anarchism, religion, mysticism, and the capacity of art to transform both self and society. One young leader, the future dramatist Ernst Toller, tried unsuccessfully to enlist Max Weber in leadership of a movement dedicated to "Eros and the abolition of poverty" (Thomas 1984: 217).[4] The foreshadowing of Marcuse's mature writings (and the 1960s) is remarkable. But the dominant forces in the Social Democratic Party joined in alliance with the German Supreme Command. The Spartacist uprising and the attempted Soviet were harshly suppressed.

Some workers rebelled against the old and collapsing government, but many remained bound to traditional authority and craved social order. Though Marcuse continued to follow Marx in seeing revolution as necessary to transformation in the long run, he saw it as impotent in the here and now. Trying to understand why became an important focus in his subsequent work (Marcuse 1934, 1936). Marcuse took care not to treat the working class as an undifferentiated mass but to ask which workers rebelled, which remained loyal to authority, and which experienced internal conflicts (see Smith 1998).

Importantly, Marcuse was attentive not only to the social psychology of workers' quiescence, but also to the limits of elite leadership and projects of ostensibly progressive social change. Between the wars, for example, most top German Social Democrats were too committed to affirmative culture and the pursuit of an orderly, prosperous society to really seek radical social change or freedom. Marcuse also questioned conventional, economistic Marxism and the expectation that a declining rate of profit would trigger a crisis leading to the collapse of capitalism. Like many others, Marcuse lost faith in the short-term prospect of

working-class revolution even before the rise of Nazism. As he would through his entire career, he looked to other sources for potentially revolutionary imagination.

In 1919, the National Assembly in Weimar adopted a constitution (which Max Weber helped to write) that declared the country a democratic parliamentary republic. SPD leader Friedrich Ebert became the first president. But the Weimar Republic got off to a rocky start. From the outset, the Right spread the assertion that Germany's failure in WWI was due to defeatism and opposition within rather than 'objective' military factors or incompetent leadership. Political conflicts were sharp and often violent. The costs of fighting WWI, the effects of blockades at its end, and punitive war damages all contributed to growing and eventually extreme inflation. Industrial production plummeted. Only from 1924 was there relative stability, aided by heavy dependence on American capital. Some German capitalists prospered and as elsewhere the late 20s were buoyant for elites. Overall conditions in the Weimar Republic were gloomy.

IV

In this troubled postwar context, Marcuse concluded the time was not ripe for radical action and turned to theory more than practice. Studying first in Berlin and then in Freiburg, he was durably influenced by Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology. Husserl shaped his approach to consciousness as an active engagement with the world – intentional in Husserl's word – not a passive product of received ideas. Husserl also informed his perspective on the potential for liberation as a transformation of human being and relationship to nature. In his late work, Husserl analyzed the (Western) history of Reason, knowledge, and science. At the start, the Greeks held that "man's intellectual faculties are at the same time capable of determining his own life and of determining, defining, and changing the universe" (Marcuse 1965b). But this approach gave rise to the modern scientific constitution of the world as a mathematical system sharply opposed to the concrete particulars of human experience – what he termed the *lebenswelt* or lifeworld.[5] This gave science powerful capacity to dominate nature. But it also produced a crisis because science was unable to reconnect the perspective of the situated observer to its abstract rational universalism. This was an internal problem for science and the basis for failure of morality in relationship to science and its consequences. It also raised "the 'possibility of a radical transformation of humanity,'" and not only a radical transformation of humanity but also a 'liberation' (Husserl quoted in Marcuse 1965b). In his own late work, Marcuse would reiterate this hope – including a widely misunderstood call for transformation of human nature itself and of the human relationship to nature.

Husserl sought this liberation from within philosophy, perhaps pushing the disciplinary category nearly to the breaking point. Remarkable as he thought Husserl's accomplishments were, Marcuse insisted liberation could not be achieved in the realm of theory without praxis, active material engagement in the world. His doctoral thesis focused on *The German Artist-Novel* – novels exploring the development – *Bildung* – of artists. Throughout his life he remained fascinated by the question of how literature and art helped form autonomous personalities capable of radical creativity and resisting authority and convention. This informed Marcuse's emphasis on aesthetics, not as an alternative to politics, still less a retreat, but rather one way of opening a sense of possibility against the limits of purely positive representation. As Marcuse argued later, "art expresses a truth, an experience, a necessity which, although not in the domain of radical praxis, are nevertheless

essential components of revolution" (Marcuse 1978: 1). Art cannot be effective if political content dominates aesthetics. "The political potential of art lies only in its own aesthetic dimension. Its relation to praxis is inexorably indirect, mediated, and frustrating" (ibid., 55).

Then, also very influentially, Marcuse studied under Martin Heidegger. Himself a student of Husserl's, Heidegger sought to go beyond the subject-object frame and to situate the development of consciousness more deeply in being or existence.[6] Again, this meant not just experience but active engagement. Heidegger sharply criticized the reduction of being to merely instrumental relations to the world. He thought Descartes had inscribed such instrumentalism into the very idea of epistemology, along with subject-object dualism. This undermined a full sense of belonging to the world. Instead of epistemology, Heidegger insisted on ontology. It was crucial to integrate material and spiritual dimensions of life and to recognize life beyond discrete human subjectivity. This later became important to the environmental movement as it was to Marcuse (see Feenberg 2005).

Heidegger argued that human life is dominated by coping with problems of existence and only rarely a matter of creative or autonomous action. Marcuse asked whether this might be less a constant and more historically variable. Could humans – humanity – develop more capacity for real action as distinct from mere coping? And could this ability to transcend limits be widely shared, not limited to an elite who achieve it simply as a subjective state of heightened consciousness? As Marcuse remarked later, "Heidegger avoids the type of analyses that would reveal systems of oppression and domination from which many human beings suffer" (Marcuse 2005). Marcuse, of courses, insisted on just such analyses.

Marcuse was not the only one of Heidegger's students who had hopes to integrate the older man's thinking with different intellectual projects of their own, and not the only one who saw more liberatory potential in Heidegger's ideas than did Heidegger himself. Still, most were shocked when Heidegger aligned himself with Nazi rule. As Heidegger turned toward Nazism and blocked Marcuse's path to an academic career, Marcuse was happy to secure a job with the Frankfurt School. This came, however, just as the Institute for Social Research went into exile, first in Switzerland and then in the U.S.

V

The Frankfurt Institute was founded as a center for Marxist research and initially focused more on an empirical-scientific agenda than philosophy. Henryk Grossman, for example, tried to make predictions of capitalism's collapse more precise by grounding them in the structural form of accumulation itself (growing investment in physical equipment) and the declining rate of profit. The rise of fascism (and the failure of capitalism to collapse during the Great Depression) upended this agenda. Explaining the absence of revolution and especially the failure of the German working class to resist the Nazis became more pressing. Explorations of 'authoritarian personality' and its psychosocial sources dominated. Later Marcuse would draw on Freud to conceptualize a culture that drew people almost voluntarily into self-imposed 'surplus repression' – more of the 'work ethic' than required by any necessities of production. This diminished life for many without facilitating negativity or rebellion (Marcuse 1955).

From 1930, the new Institute director, Max Horkheimer, encouraged a range of more speculative philosophical inquiries increasingly centered on aesthetics, critique of positivism, and an encompassing critique of Enlightenment and modernity. Marcuse engaged all

of these themes, but more than Horkheimer or Adorno, he continued to see capitalism as fundamentally constitutive of modernity, albeit in shifting ways. He remained more explicitly Marxist even while the Institute became less so. This connected him to the major political economists who remained part of the Institute, notably Friedrich Pollock and Franz Neumann (the latter of whom continued to be one of Marcuse's closest colleagues and friends after migration to the U.S.). Pollock (1941) developed an important account of both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union as state capitalist societies. Neumann (1942) approached fascism as a product of totalitarian monopoly capitalism which failed to tame basic contradictions but instead took them to a higher level.[7]

For Marcuse, capitalism seemed clearly at the center of modernity's contradictions, but never as simple economic determination. In contrast to Grossman, he argued that in Germany between the wars, objectively miserable circumstances were imposed on much of the population not by an inevitably declining rate of profit but by the power of the state acting in support of corporations and the highly unequal private accumulation of wealth. More generally, capitalism worked by means of alienation, affirmative culture that blocked the sense of possibilities, commitments to technical rationality that put economic efficiency ahead of meeting human needs, misleading media, and state repression.

In 1932, Marx's now-famous 1844 manuscripts were belatedly published after years of languishing in an archive.[8] This gave reinforcement to efforts to articulate a 'humanist' or 'cultural' alternative to 'scientific' Marxism (in which Lukács and others were already prominent). Marcuse was among the first to engage deeply with the ideas of alienation, estrangement, and objectification that Marx articulated; these remained central to his work, and he remained committed to the idea that emancipation or liberation meant achievement of freedom from alienation as well as simply from direct, repressive power. This in turn informed his multidirectional search for insight and motivation to reach beyond capitalism. His hopes for artists, students, Black radicals, and others did not posit them as classes replacing the proletariat in a dialectical necessity to overthrow capitalism. Rather, it recognized that they could reflect new materially grounded but also culturally creative sources for negative and transformative consciousness and action – just as, conversely, events of the early 20th century had shown working-class revolutionary consciousness was at best contingent, not necessary.

Marcuse situated the capitalist economy alongside bureaucracy and the culture of instrumental rationality (drawing on Max Weber as well as Heidegger; Marcuse 1965a). Together capitalism, technology, and bureaucracy produced the "union of growing productivity and growing destruction" (1964: xiii). Not surprisingly, Marx was crucial to Marcuse's developing perspective. Indeed, Marcuse pursued what now seems a surprising effort to integrate Marx and Heidegger as well as Hegel (Marcuse 2005; including introduction by Abromeit and Wolin). Marx had argued that the proletariat would develop an intuitive understanding of the contradictions of capitalism from its experience of the alienated labor process and domination by capitalist production relations. It might require leadership from intellectuals and others to go beyond mere trade union oppositional consciousness to recognition of the full possibilities for revolutionary change. Marcuse's experience of the abortive German revolution made him doubtful. 'Affirmative culture' (1937) and habitual respect for authority (1936) blocked needed insight among intellectuals as well as workers.

Horkheimer (1936) articulated most clearly the Frankfurt School's idea of critical theory. This entailed refusing the self-definition of the familiar, looking more deeply at how the categories of consciousness are shaped, and grasping the existent as one manifestation of

the historically possible, not the whole of reality in a positivist or empiricist sense. After his powerful early critique of what had happened and was happening to reason, Horkheimer grew increasingly pessimistic (see Horkheimer 1947; Horkheimer and Adorno 1944). While Horkheimer helped Marcuse to crystalize his idea of affirmative culture and analysis of the limits of positivism, Marcuse was much more committed to exploring new sources of inspiration and motivation to make a better future. History revealed both material constraints and social limits on human creativity and fulfillment. But it also produced conditions for transcending these.

Marcuse's (1932, 1941) exploration of this theme was informed especially by Hegel and also Nietzsche.[9] At its heart was what Marcuse (in the 1960 preface to a reissue of his 1941 book) called "the power of negative thinking". The concept has confused many English-language readers who think it must refer to negative evaluations or even nihilism. But Hegel's and Marcuse's point is, rather, that thinking itself can open up the possibility of going beyond what is immediately before us. Mere sensory experience does not. Thinking dominated by instrumental use of technology does not. But dialectical thinking does. This starts with reflection on the embeddedness of present reality in history – both the process of change revealed by the past and the possibilities for the future that are embedded in the present. Acting together, human beings can transform the material and social conditions of their lives.

Marcuse thought that insight into the negativity – or incompleteness and contradictions – of present realities could come from experience in a variety of domains. Literature and art might help produce a dialectical consciousness. There were other oppressed groups besides workers whose material conditions of existence and experience in struggle could help nurture more critical consciousness. Marcuse (1964) even suggested that the very boredom of a comfortable but unsatisfying existing might spark a negative consciousness in response. Eros might be sublimated into creativity rather than directly expressed. Prevailing approaches – including much existentialism following Heidegger and even radical offshoots of psychoanalysis imagined this in purely subjective terms – too often individualistic and almost intrinsically elitist. For such insight to be effective it needed a stronger social basis. Marcuse continued to search for movements that might unite personal-existential sources of insight with capacities for collective action, and he continued to think that insights from other sources might help to awaken the working class.

This also shapes his famous hope in *One-Dimensional Man* that automation can turn from oppression to liberation. We may not agree with his vision of a post-work society in place of well-paid and fulfilling work – or think that this is a false binary. But whether or not Marcuse was right about the promise of automation, it is important to see it as part of how material possibilities for liberation expand even in a society that diverts attention from them. Technology is commonly used to enforce domination but potentially able to alleviate it. The actually existing forms structured by capitalist reality do not exhaust its potential.

Marcuse (1964) portrays a nearly totally administered society in which evanescent consumer and sexual pleasures secure conformity, compliance with the work ethic (performance principle), and a veneer of contentment. It was a surprise that his bleak presentation of one-dimensionality should help inspire such an optimistic attempt to escape it. But even if Marcuse's diagnostic style was almost always to exaggerate the completeness of closure, he always insisted on the possibility to reach beyond. Both external material conditions and social conditions like capitalist political economy impose limits on human creativity and autonomy. Human history also produces capacities to transcend these.

My intention here is not to attempt a general account of the roots of Marcuse's thought (see, e.g., Kellner 1984, Feenberg 2023). Rather, I have tried (a) to suggest just a little of the extraordinary intellectual world in which Marcuse's mind was formed, emphasizing his remarkable contemporaries and the array of different intellectual connections he explored, (b) to call attention to some continuities between Marcuse's early intellectual and political formation and themes prominent throughout his career, and (c) to point to the significance of his lived experience as well as intellectual and his political engagements with a contradictory world.

Notes

1 The Frankfurt School is commonly rendered in group portraits that center on Horkheimer, Adorno, and even Walter Benjamin (who was never entirely a member). Some of the best include Buck-Morss (1979), Jay (1986), Wiggershaus (1995), and Jeffries (2017). These typically center on Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and even Walter Benjamin (though he both died early and was not in all senses a member). This is not just a matter of celebrating some individuals more than others but of emphasizing certain themes and styles. It affects not only how Marcuse is seen, but also what sense is made of the relationship to and rupture with Erich Fromm, and perhaps most of all, how the Institute's political economists are understood (or neglected).

2 See Mayer (1956). This was true not just of German cultural elites but those of France and other belligerents as well. See Stromberg (1973).

3 Horkheimer and Adorno were in no sense neutral towards Nazism, of course; rather, they were overwhelmingly focused on maintaining their intellectual autonomy. Income from the Institute's endowment helped, but this was also a matter of refusing distractions. After moving to the US, they did not become fluent in English, and despite attempts to earn extra money from the Hollywood culture industry, stayed mostly in the 'Little Weimar' community of German-speaking émigrés. They tried, in essence, to be what Weber's student Karl Mannheim (1929) called "free-floating intellectuals" (despite the irony that this meant relying on money made in capitalism by their parents' generation or income from writing for pay). Mannheim in a sense operationalized Weber's own notion of the political independence needed for an intellectual career. But while Weber did not become a politician as such, he was ambivalent about this and drawn by a strong sense of responsibility to recurrent engagement in politics. Thomas Mann, perhaps the most important figure in the Little Weimar of LA and a friend of Adorno's, had likewise subscribed to a writerly ideal of living outside of politics, but saw this as an untenable position in the face of fascism, among other things launching an influential series of radio broadcasts, not just to win the war but to save the ideal of democracy (see discussion in Jeffries, 2017 and Goldman, 1991).

4 See also Adair-Toteff (2007). Toller was a crucial leader in the short-lived and ill-fated Bavarian Soviet Republic, product of what he called the "Bavarian Revolution of Love". More than 1000 participants were executed; Toller received a five-year prison sentence after Max Weber and Thomas Mann testified to his character. He went on to become one of the most influential dramatists of Germany's interwar years. Nazi attack made his Jewish descent as well as his politics an issue. He immigrated to the US, attempted a career as a screenwriter, and committed suicide in despair. See Ellis (2013) and Toller (1933).

5 This is the root of a distinction of lifeworld from system influential for Alfred Schutz and others and perhaps most famously Jürgen Habermas (1984), the key thinker in the next generation of Frankfurt School critical theorists. Where Marcuse wanted to transcend the very distinction, Habermas suggested it was necessary to settle for resistance to the continued colonization of lifeworld by system.

6 In work written in the 1930s, during the first phase of his exile, Adorno (1956) would also criticize Husserl for remaining Cartesian and thus limited by a search for an absolute foundation for philosophy; see also O'Connor (2008).

7 The work of Pollock and Neumann is appropriately receiving renewed attention. See interesting recent discussion in Harcourt (2020). It puts that of Marcuse (including his 1958 *Soviet Marxism* as well as *One-Dimensional Man*) in a useful perspective.

8 Publication was a joint project of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow and the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, which undertook preparation of the first complete edition of Marx's and Engels' work.
9 Marcuse's appropriation of Hegel for a positive revolutionary story stands in contrast with Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1966), where Hegel is criticized for harnessing his dialectical reasoning too much to the idea of progress.

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