

Critical Interruptions: New Left Perspectives on Herbert Marcuse edited by Paul Breines

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Paul Breines collects six essays and catches the theory and practice of radical politics mid-Movement. Each contributor identifies something in that particular Marcusean synthesis of Freud and Marx that might counter the growing stagnation of revolutionary fervor among students and youthful street people. Breines and William Leiss say the key is renewed self-criticism, especially as it leads to a deeper understanding of Marcusean philosophy. Shierry M. Weber and John David Ober each propose new activisms designed to escape the "surplus regression" and mass manipulation characteristic of our technocratic society. In the longest and the shortest essays of the volume, Jeremy J. Shapiro and Russell Jacoby present critical extensions of the Marcusean perspective on our increasingly "one-dimensional" reality.

The phenomenon of Herbert Marcuse has its roots in a Marxian revisionism known as the Frankfurt school. During the rise of the Nazis in Germany, three scholars at the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research—Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor Adorno—developed "the critical theory of society." Suppressed in Germany, and largely forgotten after the war, Adorno's major work, *The Authoritarian Personality*, is today treated as a study in abnormal psychology, and Horkheimer's early works remain untranslated. With its tenet of "self-reflexiveness" (i.e., social theorizing is itself a form of social activity and therefore cannot be divorced from "an intensive concern with the ongoing active forms of opposition"), Critical Theory is central to the Marcusean promise of a radical and liberating social science. Thus, the identification and critique of the uses of

the popular media and information technology to manipulate the mass public calls into question the established social sciences of surveys, cost-benefit analyses, etc. And yet, neither Marcuse in America nor Horkheimer in postwar Germany pushed criticism into revolutionary activism. Without that push, the super-generational ties between guru and devotees broke, amidst accusations of bad manners and betrayals.

Although Marcuse was never as important to the American movement as to European students, there is a connection between the disintegration of national radical politics and the estrangement between radicals and Marcuse. If radical sociological theory must be critical, then radical political action must be self-critical. Aside from the rather comic operas surrounding Abbie Hoffman's *Steal This Book* and the S.D.S.-P.L. mutual purge of 1969, the American movement has not been able to address itself to itself. Perhaps because it lacked a significant but self-serving leftist political party such as the Communist Party in France (one can hardly see an American Cohn-Bendit bothering to write *Obsolete Communism* about Gus Hall and the American Communist Party), being Left has implied either "do your own thing" or dogmatism, with little reasoned discourse in between. Unfortunately, the essays by Weber and Ober are doctrinaire.

Shierry Weber nominates the Jungian concept of individuation as the answer to her question, "What is praxis today?" The heretical shift from Freudian to Jungian grounds is made virtually without comment, and the usage of "praxis" achieves a generality of meaning hardly sanctioned by Marx, let alone by its

originator, Aristotle. The dangers of such theoretic legerdemain are implicit in her analogy of "political praxis" to "the psychoanalyst's interpretation to the patient, the therapeutic intervention." Whereas the Freudian analyst aims primarily at the social goal of aiding the patient to conform to the group, the Jungian analyst seeks the individuated goal of developing all the patient's potentialities so that he stands in a creative relationship to the group. The Freudian model is ideological and thus potentially conservative, while the Jungian model is utopian and thus potentially totalitarian. As sketched by Weber, the therapeutic interventions which form her political praxis involve a dissociation of activity from the goal which is necessary to the alienated life of totalitarian societies. Introspection and estrangement become the "experience of praxis" (actually, the proper Greek word here would be *poiesis*, or production), culminating in the "obvious" morality of vegetarianism! While growing an organic garden certainly involves a person more immediately in our ecology, hunting for game, in itself, is no less eufunctional to the environment!

Oddly, both Weber and Ober see the old misogynist D.H. Lawrence as a creditable authority. Similarly, they both protest the secularization of sex at the hands of fashion and the sexual revolution. Ober goes on to attack Hugh Hefner and the "Playboy philosophy." Although *Playboy* has fought censorship and blue laws, Ober states that "the myth of the predominance of Puritan standards of sexual conduct is an important ideological ingredient in the commercialization of sex on and off Broadway and in the market place." Ober fails to mention anachronistic laws dealing with abortions, marriage, the "crimes" of homosexuality, and their very real victims. More significant, social ills are the masochism of drugs, medication [sic], and rock music (here he is joined by Weber again), and the escapisms of Zen, mysticism, and astrology. Ober's failure to treat sexuality and contemporary life in more adequate

terms is a genuine defect, since repressive desublimation as the controlled releasing of libido energies into mass consumerism and away from radical change is one of the keys to the Marcusean theory of the one-dimensional society.

Basically, one-dimensional society is advanced industrial society which has become governed through the mass application of technology. What distinguishes Marcuse's concept of one-dimensionality from John Kenneth Galbraith's "new industrial state" with its "technostructure" is that such mass coordination of life is not benign but numbing and needlessly repressive. Jeremy Shapiro takes this condition as given, and with Marcuse sees as its consequence the collapse of traditional dichotomies such as subject and object, conscious and unconscious, art and science, as well as the end of the historical dialectic. Shapiro differs, however, from Marcuse's proposal for resolution. While Marcuse has urged the denial of free speech to "anti-life forces" like neo-Nazis in order to restart the dialectic, Shapiro suggests that we take one-dimensionality as "an historically irreversible stage, which we must regard as inevitable." Shapiro criticizes Marcuse for conceiving of "two-dimensionality" as historically normal and rooted in biological/material factors. He welcomes as a progressive step the degeneration of the dialectical orthogonality of traditional oppositions into the obliquity of ordinary life. The challenge today—that is, the nature of the dialectic today—is to formulate and analyze "everyday life" as the medium of experience. Unfortunately, Shapiro and, to an even greater extent, Jacoby, abstract too quickly on the meaning of contemporary existence as experienced by everybody.

In art, Shapiro notes the increasing technomorphization of both subject matter and approach, especially as developed in modern design. However, following the French structuralists, he moves to the rationalized "form as meaning," without acknowledging the mytho-poetic potentials of every day as expressed in Joyce's

Bloom in *Ulysses*. Similarly, Jacoby examines the nature of language and speech and finds that "now the people's language is the language of domination." He criticizes Marcuse for using a language too accessible to the public and media. Better for Marcuse to follow Horkheimer's wartime call "for a language not easily understood: to be understood is to be misunderstood; to be read is to be misread." This pessimism toward vernacular language not only underestimates the value of philosophical studies growing out of Ludwig Wittgenstein's school of ordinary language analysis, which virtually dominates present-day British philosophy, but also has dangerous implications for the relationship between truth and power. If to be protected from exploitation truth must be buried in an intellectual argot, then truth will speak only to itself. Power unchecked by even a whisper of truth will surely speak a language understood by all. These essays collected as "critical interruptions" do their jobs in a mixture of Marcusean jargon and standard American English. As such, they provide perspectives on each other and, aside from an occasional silliness, aid the cause of liberation central to the Marcusean theses.

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Anarchy and Order: Essays in Politics by Herbert Read

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Benjamin R. Barber

Art and politics have never been comfortable in one another's company, which, if it explains why politicians are so often philistines, may also explain why artists are so often anarchists. Authority, order and law, even at their legitimate best, stifle spontaneity and fetter the imagination; as Howard Zinn complains (in his superfluous introduction to the book under review), "politics grates on our sensibilities. It violates the elementary requirements of aesthetics—it is devoid of beauty." But spontaneity and imagination are no less nefarious to social order and public welfare. Both indulge consciousness at the expense of action, disdaining the mundane in the name of aristocratic sensibility, spurning the worldly but critical needs of common men in the quest for the Essential Man.

The customary liberal response to this mutual incompatibility has been to cede to the artist an apolitical sanctuary where creativity can be pursued with reckless abandon, in return for his guarantee of non-intervention in the political arena—a kind of formal separation of Art and State in the interest of both parties. Not all artists have been willing to accommodate themselves to these conditions, however. Arguing that "the work of art is a product of the relationship between an individual and a society," some have rejected the schizophrenic functionalism of liberal pluralism and have insisted on the intrinsically social character of artistic creativity. To Marxists like Gorky and Sholokov, this has meant nothing less than putting art at the disposal of society—a variation with alarmingly infelicitous consequences for artistic autonomy. But one can also insist on putting society at the