

## Herbert Marcuse's Theory of Domination

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### Abstract

This investigation hopes to make an exposition of a theory of domination that can be found in the writings of the German critical theorist Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse thinks that man as well as human society has been reduced into a one-dimensional system in which needs are manufactured by the state's technical capacity. Domination permeates all walks of life. Beginning with Sigmund Freud, the paper traces how a system of control has found its way into our way of life. Capitalism's dominant values have characterized the nature of modern technology, from our gadgets to social media. The culture industry has reduced people and human relations into the superficial. The meaning of freedom, in this sense, should be found elsewhere. The author proposes a return to ordinary life where happiness is to be described as the freedom from false needs and empty desires.

**Keywords:** Domination, Capitalism, Modern Technology, Culture Industry

### Introduction

The German critical theorist Herbert Marcuse has found in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* a novel approach to understand how emancipation might commence in modern capitalist society. The work of the young Karl Marx served as the basis for Marcuse's concern for social change as may be found in the notion of a radical subject. A radical subject is one who has the will to resist dominant forces in societal structures. Social change can only begin if the individual is oriented towards a radical critique of the unjust economic order in human society. Human work must have been valued as man's way of finding the authentic meaning of his freedom. As postulated by Jeffry Oca, the most prominent critical theorist in the South, "through labor, man is able to transform and appropriate the material objects he encounters to satisfy his needs, a satisfaction necessary for the full realization of his potentialities and his becoming a truly free being."<sup>1</sup> For Marx, creative work is the authentic essence of humanity. Marcuse explains that the young Marx sees the process of production in capitalism as an inversion of man's essence. Marx thinks that labor is that economic activity that wholly determines the meaning of man's freedom. But for Marcuse, the economic dimension of labor is not its final end; rather, through labor, the individual realizes his authentic nature as a free being.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffry Oca, "Heidegger, Hegel, Marx: Marcuse and the Theory of Historicity," in *Kritike*, Volume 2 (Number 2) December 2008: 60.

But what does authenticity mean? Marx taught that capitalism reduces the poor worker into an object.<sup>2</sup> The capitalist organization of society, according to Ocaj, perverts the reality of human work. Since the capitalist controls every mode of production, labor has become a tool for exploitation. For Marx, production is no longer for the satisfaction of needs, but for profit.<sup>3</sup> The dominion of capital over man is completed in man's total alienation from his nature as a species being. When the individual is manipulated as a mere tool in the process of production, man is demeaned into being a mere means-to-an-end, all for the benefit and enjoyment of the capitalist. In alienated labor, Marx writes that man is stripped of his dignity. Man is reduced into the level of a thing. Thus, the alienation of labor itself is that process of objectification.<sup>4</sup> The ubiquitous display of evil in factories using children as slave labor, for instance, is the result of the capitalist's infatuation with unreasonable profit. The whole production process has simply metamorphosed into the unjust accumulation of wealth at the expense of the poor worker. The worker is exploited, his body and soul ruined. In alienated labor, Ocaj says that "the individual is pauperized."<sup>5</sup>

Marcuse puts into question the idea of private property. For Marcuse, private property, when created by means of the exploitation of the workers for the sole benefit of the capitalists, makes the pauperization of human society manifest. Ocaj says that this is what Marcuse seeks to abolish, not labor. Private property shows the evil nature of capital. Capital is created out of the alienating labor process that favors the capitalist. The rejection of private property stems from the estrangement it promotes. For Marcuse, private property is the way capitalists appropriate the notion of ownership and possession. But according to Ocaj, the rejection of private property does not mean that man should not be allowed to enjoy the fruits of his work. What Marx sought to abolish is the private property unjustly owned by the capitalist. The laborer is entitled to that form of private property in which he has labored for since in its true form, as Ocaj explains, private property enriches people too. True private property, for Marcuse, implies that something has become an important component of man as a species being, thereby enabling him to find self-actualization.

The transition from capitalism to socialism as expected by Marcuse and others did not happen. According to Ocaj, what happened instead was "the integration of the proletariat into the status quo, the stabilization of capitalism, and the bureaucratization of socialism."<sup>6</sup> In this line, Ocaj clarifies that Marcuse believes that the capitalist society has found a way that has effectively thwarted opposition to its manipulative ways, thereby reducing human individuals into mere conformists. Marcuse explains, in *One-Dimensional Man*, that "such a society may justly demand acceptance of its principles and institutions, and reduce the opposition to the discussion and promotion of alternative policies within the status quo."<sup>7</sup> This happens because the political apparatus is in control of the technical capacity of society, thus influencing human beings in their way of life, a situation in which the state maintains and secures itself by "mobilizing, organizing, and exploiting the technical, scientific and mechanical productivity of advanced civilization."<sup>8</sup> In

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. Edited with an introduction by Dirk J. Struik and translated by Martin Milligan. (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 80.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ocaj, "Heidegger, Hegel, Marx: Marcuse and the Theory of Historicity," 61.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Ocaj, "Eroticizing Marx, Revolutionizing Freud: Marcuse's Psychoanalytic Turn." *Kritike*. Volume 3 Number 1 (June 2009): 11.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 7

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this way, Marcuse says that people accept things for what they are not because of the laws of nature, but because these are the laws of society.<sup>9</sup> The commodification of society means that “the commodities of lodging, food, and clothing, the irresistible output of the entertainment and information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits.”<sup>10</sup>

In fact, the dialectic, according to O'Casey, has not resulted in a free society. Marcuse saw the above concern as a problem of method. It is for this reason that the early Frankfurt School looked into Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. O'Casey notes that “Freud's theory of instincts provided Marcuse with a model to think anew the philosophical conditions of emancipation.”<sup>11</sup> Early critical theorists appropriated Freud because the latter provided an explanation, according to O'Casey, with respect to how man has fallen into “the antagonism between the satisfaction of human instincts on one hand, and the development of human civilization on the other.”<sup>12</sup> The objects produced in a capitalist society make manifest that man is tied to a tension between eros and culture. Freud thinks that the repression of human instinct is good for man and that only by way of such can culture and civilization come into being.

#### Freud as Starting Point

Freud enunciates why there is a necessity in controlling the primary instincts of humans – *Eros* and *Thanatos*. Rechanneling *Eros* or life instinct is deemed important in order to preserve life. Repressing *Thanatos* is crucial in order to control those instincts that are destructive to life. The whole point is that the aggressiveness of man's basic instincts should give way to the norms of a civilized society in order to find what is whole. Freud's theory provides us with a subversive way of humanizing the animal in man. Capitalism exploits man by means of attacking the subliminal aspect of man's instincts. It attempts to commoditize human instincts by quantifying human satisfaction. For Marcuse, *Ananke* or man's material reality, has defined scarcity as the basic condition of the world that justifies labor as the process of producing goods in every capitalist society. Barry Katz says that “the libidinal endowment of the population has been diverted from enjoyment into productive labor.”<sup>13</sup> Marcuse believes that this is done by way of eroticizing the products peddled by capitalist society. It is tantamount to some kind of a neurosis where man's fundamental instinct is repressed. Freud, in this regard, provides a critical theory with respect to the irrationality of modern civilization where the systematic manipulation of man distorts the individual's view of reality. Freud is important to critical theory insofar as he holds the key to understanding the psychology of domination. Understanding how and why people succumb to the spell of the culture industry and the magical world it creates is important because, as O'Casey contends, “it will provide Marxism with an anthropological basis by going into the deep dimension of the human psyche.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>11</sup> O'Casey, “Eroticizing Marx, Revolutionizing Freud: Marcuse's Psychoanalytic Turn,” 12.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Barry Katz, *Herbert Marcuse and the Art of Liberation: An Intellectual Biography*. (London: Verso, 1982), 150.

<sup>14</sup> O'Casey, “Eroticizing Marx, Revolutionizing Freud: Marcuse's Psychoanalytic Turn,” 14.

According to O'Casey, "the repression of the human instincts by socially useful norms is precisely what is meant by the inhibition of the pleasure principle by the reality principle."<sup>15</sup> Repression is necessary in the formation of the human subject. The dialectic between the two [pleasure principle and reality principle] is manifested in the formation of the human subject. If human beings are to co-exist, some form of repression, where people mutually limit their freedom and happiness, must commence. This involves the birth or emergence and imposition of social rules and moral norms which are deemed as prohibitions that restrain individuals from causing mutual destruction. In a way, repression of instincts is considered as a matter of virtue. It means the pleasure principle bowing to the reality principle.

O'Casey explains that, on the one hand, "the pleasure principle is the governing principle of the *id*."<sup>16</sup> The *id* belongs to the unconscious. O'Casey adds that on the other hand, "the reality principle is the governing principle of the *ego*."<sup>17</sup> For Freud, the *ego* is human reason whereas the *id* is human passion. The function of the *ego* is to control the *id* from doing anything that is harmful. This can be construed as reason's own way of imposing itself upon our passions. Freud assumes that the erotic instinct of man is deterrent to human progress and the growth of civilizations. It is the subconscious *ego* that thwarts the threatening thoughts of the *id* from becoming real. O'Casey opines, conforming to Freud, there has to be a balance between the happiness of the individual and the requisites of social organization."<sup>18</sup> Freud thinks that the repression of basic instincts is necessary if man were to live. Civilization, in Freud's mind, needs "some form of control and domination." Momentary or tamed pleasure, O'Casey asserts, is the best that "individuals can ever have in terms of happiness."<sup>19</sup>

The final element in the formation of the subject comes with the *superego* or conscience. It refers to the learnt rules and moral notices or prohibitions that a person internalizes. According to O'Casey, the *ego* mediates between the *id* and the *superego*, where it strikes a balance between the selfish desires of the *id* and the stern moral rules of the *superego*. Repression is important for the survival of man. Our humanization comes in the form of "the sublimation of instincts."<sup>20</sup> Moral or social norms, for instance, must be able to control man from thinking about and committing self-destructive activities. Violent thought can be repressed by rechanneling man toward productive work. In this regard, sublimation is seen as indispensable in the achievement of the desirable ends of human civilization.

According to O'Casey, what concerns Marcuse about Freud's theory of instincts is its capacity to provide a model for the psychology of domination, resistance and emancipation. O'Casey says that the release of *Eros* from repression of the reality principle will result in the whole or total human being. The reactivation of Freud's explosive theory, O'Casey thinks, unfolds when it is applied to man's concrete socio-historical dimension. Such can be explained by means of surplus repression and the performance principle. In a nutshell, surplus repression refers to some form of domination in order to deal with the scarcity problem. Modern society is organized so that it may be subordinated to a production process meant to address the false demands of every capitalist society.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 16

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Two Short Accounts of Psycho-Analysis*. Translated and edited by James Strachey. (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 111.

Marcuse thinks that with the advance of modern technology, scarcity is no longer a real concern. It is for this reason that he introduced the idea of the performance principle. The performance principle allows man to work less and enjoy more with the advent of technological progress. The one-dimensional purpose of the production process is to create unnecessary needs and false desires. Society as a whole falls into the abyss of a reified reality. The idea of repression has not liberated man, but instead, it has reduced him into a subject with the pretense of reality. Marcuse explains that what emerges thereafter is a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behavior.<sup>21</sup>

### Technology in the Theory of Domination

We live in a civilization that is dominated by technology. The integration of the proletariat into the *status quo* was one big problem for Marcuse. According to Ocaj, “it had something to do with the advancement of technology that contributed to the dawning of the advanced industrial society, a new type of society which reduces individuals into a state of one-dimensionality.”<sup>22</sup> Technology, for Marcuse, is the totality of instruments. By means of using the instruments of modernity, capitalist society takes advantage of its position in continuing its oppressive ways. The prevalence of some social pathologies, which results in inequalities, can be traced to the technological domination of society where everything is reducible to manufactured needs, wants, and desires. The subjection of technology to politics and economics turns technology into an instrument of domination.<sup>23</sup> When the use of a gadget is meant to produce wealth for capitalists, the same instrument becomes nothing but a tool for domination.

Mario Bunge’s definition of technology fits our concern, as proposed by Ocaj. Bunge defines technology as the body of knowledge that “can be employed to control, transform or create things or processes, natural or social, to some practical end deemed to be valuable.”<sup>24</sup> Technology may be understood as the application of pure science into the concrete realm of human activity. Through technology, knowledge becomes a tool for the transformation of nature into something that is useful. However, technology cannot be equated with simple gadgets, because as Marx emphasized, it has a social dimension. Marx argues that capitalism utilizes technology as a means of control. In this sense, machines thwart the autonomy of the individual. For Marcuse, the freedom of the worker is superseded by the power of the machine. In other words, gadgets have become the means to control people.<sup>25</sup>

As a tool for domination, Ocaj argues that for Marx, technology as a maleficent apparatus of production does not only intensify the process but also dominates the whole life of the worker. By pushing workers to their breaking point in terms of production quotas, machines replace the freedom of the worker with the movements of the machine, or “with the idea of compliant efficiency, which results in the individual’s submission to the apparatus without any form of

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<sup>21</sup> Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Jeffrey Ocaj, “Technology, Technological Domination, and the Great Refusal: Marcuse’s Critique of Advanced Industrial Society.” *Kritike*. Volume 4 Number 1 (June 2010): 54.

<sup>23</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 255.

<sup>24</sup> Mario Bunge. “The Philosophical Richness of Technology.” In *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association*. Volume 2 (1976): 154.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “Social Transformation and Online Technology: Situating Herbert Marcuse in Today’s Internet Age.” In *Techne: Research in Philosophy and Technology*, Volume 21, Number 1 (2017): 66.

mental and physical opposition.”<sup>26</sup> This means that under capitalism, the human individual is subordinated to the whole production process, making him a mere cog in the machine. Marcuse understands technological domination as a process that ends up in the control of human lives and the values that people choose in their modern culture. As such, Marcuse explains that “the very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced.”<sup>27</sup> These new needs make up the culture industry,<sup>28</sup> created through TV shows and internet lifestyles that are bereft of substance and meaning.

Initially, Marcuse contends that any technology is value-neutral. But since it is used by capitalist society, Ocaj says that it has become a means to dominate the individual by becoming a tool in extracting the surplus value of labor and in intensifying the manufacture of false desires. This results in the rise of what is called technical rationality, in which the progress in science and technology corresponds to an instrumentalist mindset that subjugates the individual. For Ocaj, this means the subordination of human thoughts and feelings to the machine process in which machines and our devices dictate humans how to organize their lives. According to Ocaj, “technological rationality dissolves critical thinking and replaces it with the idea of compliant efficiency, which results in the individual’s submission to the apparatus without any form of mental and physical opposition.”<sup>29</sup> Transmuted into the social realm, this has given rise to a way of life where almost every aspect of human existence has been subverted by consumerism. Ocaj believes that “techno-capitalism” has given rise to a manipulative technological rationality which reduces thinking into instrumentalist thinking. This dissolves the ability of the individual to think in questioning way. People succumb to the false needs, trends, lifestyles, and desires peddled in the consumer market. For Marcuse, these refer to those goods “which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice.”<sup>30</sup>

Marcuse is concerned about the fact that bourgeois mentality uses modern technology to undermine and exploit the human being. Marcuse’s revolutionary thought, in this regard, seeks a return to the authenticity of one’s existence which necessitates emancipating man from his false consciousness of reality. This return is a retrieval of man’s everyday life away from the control and domination of modern instruments is what liberation consists of. This means understanding and resisting by means of a critical awareness how modern bourgeois mentality has packaged reality in order to subjugate the individual through various means of deception. According to Dana Belu, “Marcuse’s critique of technological rationality culminates in the call for the overcoming of the reified split between nature and culture in an aesthetically grounded affirmation of life that would endow life with dignity and respect.”<sup>31</sup>

How can this revolutionary thought be realized? Andrew Feenberg, who was Marcuse’s student, contends that modern technology, through adaptability, contains within it the positive

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<sup>26</sup> Ocaj, “Technology, Technological Domination, and the Great Refusal: Marcuse’s Critique of Advanced Industrial Society,” 58.

<sup>27</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 11.

<sup>28</sup> The idea of the “culture industry” was first introduced by Theodor Adorno.

<sup>29</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Dana Belu, “Thinking Technology, Thinking Nature.” In *Inquiry* 48 Number 6 (December 2005): 581.

aspect of liberating human beings, or what he calls its “redemptive aspect.”<sup>32</sup> Feenberg has expressed its meaning in the concept of adaptability where technology enhances human life. This adaptability refers to the capacity of man to live interdependently with modern devices. By harnessing its power to improve the human condition, modern technology plays a transformative role.<sup>33</sup> It must be noted that for Marcuse, technology becomes a tool for domination when it is employed by capitalists. For Ocasio, human emancipation can commence once we are able to change the purpose of technology so that it becomes an instrument for the attainment of a “kind of rationality that promotes human freedom and happiness.”<sup>34</sup> The television, for instance, can be a tool for the advancement of knowledge or it can be an instrument that reinforces ignorance. But a capitalistic system and the concern for profits from ads leave many people with no real choice. For this reason, mass media has become a tool for powerful media interests.

In the information era, social media is a prime example when it comes to the dominant role played by modern technology in human life. Without the Internet, people would have no access to goods thousands of miles away. But with online market platforms, people are exposed to the influence of Western trends and lifestyles. With the Internet, people have become an easy prey to a culture of consumption. Social media has become a platform for impulsive buying. This has been exploited by capitalists for their own economic gain without real concern for the well-being of consumers, who are sometimes sold defective and overpriced products. The Internet is used to further the selfish ends of the culture industry. Ideally, social media is thought or even expected to create the democratic space for people. But the fact of the matter is that individualistic and superficial interests are reinforced by means of the reified objects of consumer society as dictated by Western culture that social media also promotes. What has happened, hence, is that the idea of an Industrial society has extended from the harsh conditions of the labor factory to society. The practices, values, and behaviors of people are no more than the transformation of human life into a workshop of the whole culture industry where manipulation and domination are taking place.

### **The Culture Industry and the Great Refusal**

Where do we go from here? To be able to proceed, we must identify the problem first. This pathology has not been elaborated by Marcuse. What can be observed is that the difficult conditions in the factory is also apparent in the harsh life of the people. This cruelty is not a matter of physical labor. Rather, it is socio-cultural in nature. Because of the desire to project an image of oneself, people expend their energy to make money. Money is important, but it is not when used to advance a person’s false wants and desires. But the behavior of people in the society created by consumerism is that they become the products they buy. In that way, people are actually buying an image of themselves which they themselves have created. They look up to an idealized version of themselves. The people see perfection in their social media idols who, in fact, are actually less ideal than the real lives that they have. Nevertheless, this situation is exploited by the culture

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<sup>32</sup> Feenberg, Andrew, “From Essentialism to Constructivism: Philosophy of Technology at the Crossroads.” In *Technology and the Good Life?* Edited by Eric Higgs, Andrew Light and David Strong, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 303.

<sup>33</sup> Maboloc, “Social Transformation and Online Technology: Situating Herbert Marcuse in Today’s Internet Age,” 62.

<sup>34</sup> Ocasio, “Technology, Technological Domination, and the Great Refusal: Marcuse’s Critique of Advanced Industrial Society,” 58.

industry in order to profit from the superficiality of modern life. In this process, human consciousness becomes less flexible and spongier to everything thrown in front of it.

Marcuse's the *Great Refusal* refers to the radical resistance of individuals against all forms of domination. It is that type of resistance from being swallowed by corrupt systems that consumer society erroneously nurtures and promotes, thereby making persons one-dimensional. Marcuse does not specify a specific program as to how the *Great Refusal* is to proceed. But the one thing that is certain is that the critique of Industrial Society necessitates liberation from the technological rationality that has crept into consumer society. In order to abdicate ourselves, we have to resist those deceptive ideas and mechanisms which derail us from appreciating the more substantive meaning of human life. According to O'Casey, the surplus repression that is *Ananke* must be totally refused because it is responsible for the maintenance of a society that is governed by false needs and wants. The *Great Refusal* is the face of a counter-revolution against a system that serves no purpose except the perpetuation of the subjection of individuals. For Marcuse, the *Great Refusal* is not just for its own sake, but is above all, as O'Casey argues, a struggle for human emancipation. Its aim is, therefore, the realization of a society that is truly free, just, and humane.

Marcuse tells us that freedom from domination begins with the liberation of the senses from the false images created by capitalism. O'Casey asserts that technological domination exploits the human senses through reification. The human body is the target of consumption-based products that are actually useless and do not without manifest importance to our lives. But beyond the world of consumer culture, we must, as a society, look into the commercialization of education which means that banks rather than the concern for the future of our children control the mindset of some educational leaders, most especially in private schools. Thousands of youths are out of school because of the lack of resource. The elitist nature of education is in itself an impediment to nation building. The idealization of human achievement has actually jeopardized the future of many who are disadvantaged by structural injustices and the bad circumstances that appear to be beyond repair.

In fact, our schools are no more than factories for developing warm bodies for productive work. Human labor for the majority has been backbreaking for millions of people. The lack of protective mechanisms like a security of tenure due to the state-sponsored contractual nature of work make life difficult for millions. Many businessmen underpay their workers too and deprive them of the entitlement to health care insurance in order to save on costs. To liberate the worker, Marcuse believes that the laborer must be freed from the exploitative nature of work. What is problematic, hence, is not labor but how the capitalist takes advantage of the powerlessness of the people in order to exploit them by means of alienated labor. How is this done? It is by means of idealizing professional work. Manual laborers are demeaned, not only by way of their small salary, but also by means of capitalist society's failure to recognize the true value of persons.

According to O'Casey, art is an essential aspect of the *Great Refusal*. Just like Nietzsche, art is important for Marcuse since it allows man to see what is good and beautiful. Human life is ugly but true art gives it meaning and worth. For Marcuse, "the Orphic and Narcissistic images are the apt symbols of the *Great Refusal*."<sup>35</sup> *Orpheus* creates a higher order in the world, an order without repression whereas *Narcissus* is the symbol for beauty and art.<sup>36</sup> According to O'Casey, the images of both are like blending art, human freedom, and culture. For Nietzsche, art enables man to fully

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<sup>35</sup> Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, 138.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*.



celebrate life and enjoy its inner beauty. Such is the power of literature.<sup>37</sup> It makes man dream of a world that is not possible because of the hard nature of life. Writing has the power to bring man into a reality unknown before but while it lies somewhere else, art enables man to see a meaningful world away from the toil of human everyday existence.

Art is that struggle to realize a socialist, non-repressive, free, and happy society where people are freed from technological domination and at the same time enjoying the free play of their faculties.<sup>38</sup> The reason for this is that art has a critical competence in pointing out the ills of a repressive regime. It holds the unique ability to unveil the ills of prevailing social pathologies. For Marcuse, art symbolizes the search for freedom and happiness of the individual. Ocaj thinks that it is by way of man's aesthetic consciousness where one's sensibility is awakened. He says that the importance of art for the politics of change is that it provides politics its new face. Ocaj says "art gives radical politics its form, while radical politics gives art its content."<sup>39</sup> In this dialectical relationship, art cannot become mere propaganda, for instance, like the burning of effigies. There has to be something beyond it. As an artist, man must strive for criticism in order to reveal the ugliness of the prevailing social order. The culture industry, TV in particular, has reversed this by exploiting the life-stories of people through gibberish shows that exploit the condition of the masses.

In our time, the power of fantasy can be found in the struggle for recognition of new social movements, marginalized groups, LGBTs, and ethnic communities.<sup>40</sup> Karl Gaspar has been at the forefront in terms of reflecting as to how extractive industries are undermining the way of life of cultural minorities, including their culture and art-forms.<sup>41</sup> Mainstream societal culture is largely unaware of their repression that has been brought about by an imported Western lifestyle. People need to realize that local songs and stories, indigenous artworks, and ethnic dances do celebrate the beauty of human life. These indigenous art forms are the only way to inoculate ourselves from the materialism of the West. We can learn a lesson or two from peasants and ordinary people, for some professionals suffer from the infamy of superficial relationships and the irreparable weakness of the social bond. True happiness can only be rooted in the ordinary but true pleasures one finds in being with real people. This is what characterizes the philosophy that finds its roots in the peripheries of human society.

### Heidegger's Apolitical Ontology

For Marcuse, an apparent flaw in orthodox Marxism may have come into full view. Its proponents have erroneously identified the problem of domination only with one group – the proletariat. But Marcuse thinks that the iniquitous ways of capitalism involve and affect different structural positions within society. The economic class of people, for Marcuse, is just one of such instances. It is not the proletariat alone who suffers from various dehumanizing experiences. Other

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<sup>37</sup> My assessment is partly influenced by the works of Georg Lukacs on contemporary realism as art's true form.

<sup>38</sup> Ocaj, "Technology, Technological Domination, and the Great Refusal: Marcuse's Critique of Advanced Industrial Society," 68.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> The works of Axel Honneth may be credited for the politics of recognition that characterizes an alternative way of doing politics.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Gaspar, "Extractive Industries." In *Ethics in Contemporary Philippine Society*. Edited by CRB Maboloc. Davao City: SMKC Publishing, 2020), 112.

subjects within the social structure have also suffered from various forms of oppression. In this respect, it is not just the working class who wants to change or transform human society, but marginalized peasant groups, women, migrants, homosexuals, and others as well. As human subjects, they, too, are a source of concrete historicity. The suffering of these people also points to the inner history of the individual which manifests the zeal to question the unjust systems operating in society.<sup>42</sup> The margins, in this respect, are not just the ground from which authentic thinking must spring forth. The peripheries are the source of life, neighborhoods are not just slums, but a human society as well with people living and interacting to realize their human potential as authentic individuals.<sup>43</sup>

In order to ground the human subject in his concrete historicity, Marcuse appropriates Martin Heidegger insofar as the former has found in the latter's description of man as a being-in-the-world, an individual who is firmly rooted and attuned to his reality. The position of *Dasein* as a thrown being means that Heidegger has put man in that very unique situation to be able to question being itself. Heidegger's ontology has provided a possibility where man may be able to put to question the everyday scheme of things. Man is able to critically assess his authentic self. But the idea of social action is not present in Heidegger's philosophy. In order to realize man's important role in social change, he must be thrown in the world not only as a witness to being but in a radical way as well. Man needs to be grounded in that which makes manifest the political and social meaning of his existence. So, Marcuse expands Heidegger. According to O'Casey, the ontological investigations on *Dasein* for Marcuse "means that radical action is deeply rooted in *Dasein's* existence and is the hidden disposition of the individual to reshape the world that he is thrown into. This is a clear manifestation that Marcuse socializes Heidegger's notion of care and concern precisely because radical action for Marcuse is simply man's concern for the others and care of the world."<sup>44</sup>

For Heidegger, the fundamental ontological structure of *Dasein* as being is *Care*.<sup>45</sup> The formal structure of *Care* reveals the three dimensions of human existence: facticity (being already in), historicity (being-ahead-of-itself), and falling (being-alongside-entities).<sup>46</sup> These three characterize the situated nature of the existence of *Dasein*. But what is crucial between Heidegger and Marcuse is the former's notion of *Fallenness*. *Fallenness* is the experience of *Dasein* which unveils the inauthentic aspect of the reality of human existence. It can be seen as *Dasein's* entrapment in the attitude of routine where an impersonal crowd unduly influences the behavior of man. Hence, *Fallenness* can be interpreted as man's alienation from his true nature as a human being. It makes man unfree insofar as it is no longer his freedom that determines his actions but the power of the crowd outside of him. This crowd is bereft of truth or authenticity. But while this is the case, Heidegger's ontology is apolitical.

The inauthentic being-in-the-world of *Fallenness* is the human experience of alienation. This can also be linked to the concept of reification which was introduced by Georg Lukacs. The *Fallenness* that is displayed in the attitude of the crowd is characterized by evasion of the true nature of human existence. This is what our false consciousness of reality is all about. Loosely

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<sup>42</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 5.

<sup>43</sup> The work of Fr. Daniel Franklin Pilario is a concrete example both in theory and practice.

<sup>44</sup> O'Casey, "Heidegger, Hegel, Marx: Marcuse and the Theory of Historicity," 52.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Translated by Joan Stambaugh, (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

translated, it is the human subject lured in the phantasmagoria that is Hollywood, Facebook, and *Instagram*. Marcuse believes that radical action begins with the individual's critical awareness of his true condition. As such, for Marcuse, freedom from domination begins with the competence of *Dasein* to reject an inauthentic mode of being-in-the-world.<sup>47</sup> Heidegger has explained how man has been caught up in the limiting attribute of modern technology which has reduced all thinking into the calculative, a result of the manipulative bourgeois worldview.

Marcuse breaks away from his teacher insofar as the latter's elucidation of the being of man has been apolitical.<sup>48</sup> Heidegger's philosophy is simply silent about the political struggles of *Dasein*. Heidegger inoculates *Dasein* from the reality of oppression. For Marcuse, "Heidegger's concreteness was to a great extent a phony, false concreteness."<sup>49</sup> The reason is that Heidegger does not account for systemic oppression and domination that humans have been subjected into.<sup>50</sup> Marcuse thinks that Heidegger's *Dasein* is a neutral category.<sup>51</sup> Heidegger is silent on the cry of man as he struggles in life. Heidegger's ontology in this regard is naïve.<sup>52</sup> He has failed to account for the manipulative powers of techno-politics that tends to subjugate the individual and confine him to a life of slavery and domination. In a way, it can be said that Heidegger's philosophy suffers from being too abstract where the actual stories of the historical and political struggles of man are apparently absent. For Marcuse, it can be said that Heidegger's *Dasein* is an anonymous human being who comes short in situating himself to social reality.<sup>53</sup>

### The Importance of Hegel

G.W.F. Hegel understood being or reality in terms of a contradiction. For Hegel, it is the nature of being to negate itself. The truth for Hegel, in its incarnation, is reason that is always trying to negate itself in order to attain self-realization. Contradiction is present in every being. The self is present in the non-self.<sup>54</sup> Since being undergoes the constant process of becoming, in Hegel's dialectical theory, it can be implied that being actualizes itself by turning into its opposite. The dialectic of the self and non-self or of identity and difference, indicates that negation is present in every manifestation of being.<sup>55</sup> As such, tension is immanent in being itself. This means that every force negates another. Now, the negation of being is not something that is to be found beyond; rather, it is contained inside each being as part of its reality. Thus, Hegel's theory suggests that reality is not immutable or permanent. Every substance is undergoing the process of change. In this regard, where sameness or identity is found, difference makes itself manifest at the very same time. It is only in negation that the truth may be fully understood. But the logic of opposites is not binary. Rather, it is dialectical.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *The New Left and the 1960s: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, Volume 3, Edited by Douglas Kellner, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 166.

<sup>50</sup> Maboloc, "Social Transformation and Online Technology: Situating Herbert Marcuse in Today's Internet Age," 59.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Marcuse, *The New Left and the 1960s: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, 169.

<sup>54</sup> Maboloc, "Social Transformation and Online Technology: Situating Herbert Marcuse in Today's Internet Age," 64.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

Marcuse appropriates Hegel and applies the idea of the dialectic to the socio-political realm. For Marcuse, industrial societies hide the very contradiction immanent to it: great wealth amidst massive human poverty. The purpose of critical thinking in this regard is to be able to expose the domination that happens in the unjust systems of the consumerist world. While production, for example, produces wealth for the capitalist, its negative consequence is the fact that the poor worker is alienated from his true nature as a species being. While capitalism portrays scandalous images of prosperity through high rise buildings, it also hides the suffering of workers who toil in miserable conditions in decrepit and dangerous factories as slave labor. Capitalism, thus, suffers from hypocrisy. While it shows material prosperity, it conceals at the very same time the despondency of human beings whose lives are sacrificed for the benefit of a few. The lifestyle of the elite is actually subsidized by the unending pain, blood, and sweat of poor workers.

The theory of Hegel's dialectic is applied by Marcuse to the reality of capitalist self-destruction. For Marcuse, the evolution of human societies is not just some form of revision or correction, but a total systemic change on its part. He argues that the absurd capitalist system of overproduction is viewed as incapable of satisfying insatiable individuals whose excessive and irrational consumption will result in the disintegration of the capitalist order.<sup>56</sup> As an example of the manifestation of capitalistic self-destruction, the concern for profit making, which is at the heart of capitalism, has seen the need for radical changes in the global markets. The US recession, for instance, was brought about by greed in Wall Street. High ranking executives received huge bonuses that are both unsustainable and immoral, which meant that firm and strict government regulations and stiff rules are necessary. In the past decade, Europe had seen the near collapse of the Spanish and Greek economy, as WB-IMF dictated programs have stifled growth rather than sustain it. Massive unemployment and severe austerity measures have ensued as sovereign debt payments have become very difficult to pay. With the recent Covid-19 pandemic, the world has stopped as globalization grounds to a halt.<sup>57</sup> A moral high ground under capitalism is wanting if countries must recover post-pandemic.

Marcuse's intent in his critique of modern capitalist society is to find the locus where true social transformation can be realized through the self-conscious individual. For Marcuse, social change requires a form of critical awareness that is oriented toward radical action. On the one hand, Hegel's concept of life in the *Logic* has been construed as abstract.<sup>58</sup> According to Oca, this is because the idea of life in Hegel's *Logic* remains in the realm of ontology where "the dialectical process starts from the absolute or the original unity of subjectivity and objectivity, which then manifests itself from itself and negates itself through bifurcation, and then transforms itself by way of regression, and finally reaches a completion in the Absolute Idea is nothing than the "history of beings."<sup>59</sup> On this level, reason is undergoing the process of self-realization. Marcuse thinks that there is no concrete self-realization if the dialectic is limited to Hegel's ontological process of becoming. On the other hand, Hegel's dialectic in the *Phenomenology* expresses the dynamic possibility for transforming society. Marcuse thinks that the life of the

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<sup>56</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. (London: The Penguin Press, 1972), 16.

<sup>57</sup> Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "Globalization and Consumer Culture: Social Costs and Political Implications of the Covid 19 Pandemic," In *Eubios Journal of Asian and International Bioethics*, Volume 30, Number 3 (2020): 77-80.

<sup>58</sup> Maboloc, "Social Transformation and Online Technology: Situating Herbert Marcuse in Today's Internet Age," 65.

<sup>59</sup> Oca, "Heidegger, Hegel, Marx: Marcuse and the Theory of Historicity," 56.

individual is the subject of this possibility. Ocaj says that “the abstract notion of historicity becomes concrete with Hegel’s idea of self-consciousness.”<sup>60</sup> Self-consciousness comes into fruition when man becomes truly aware of his possibilities for becoming, thus, a completion of a process.

Hegel’s concept of life in the *Phenomenology*, according to Ocaj, “appears as the first basic form of self-consciousness.”<sup>61</sup> Self-consciousness begins as that desire for real objects and the attempt to desire its own self-realization as a being-for-itself. It refers to self-consciousness as being free. For Marcuse, self-consciousness assumes a “we”, which means that it finds itself free only in the struggle for self-recognition as an “I”. This is manifest in Hegel’s master-servant dialectic, where the freedom of the master is a false sense of freedom since it has not recognized the independence of the slave. Ocaj opines that Hans-Georg Gadamer makes this quite clear by explaining that through his labor power, the slave realizes his true essence as a free being insofar as it is the master who depends on him by means of the fruits of former’s work. Marcuse thinks that social change is possible only through the active dynamism of the radical individual. Hegel’s dialectic in the *Phenomenology*, in this respect, can be interpreted as an elucidation of the concrete life struggles of the individual where a critique of the prevailing unjust order can commence.

### Conclusion

Domination permeates all of human existence. By appropriating Marcuse’s thoughts, we pave the way for unmasking the reduction of society into one-dimensionality. The problem of domination can be seen in technical rationality and the culture industry. The true reason is that capitalist society, through a psychology of repression, now defines human life scarcely on the basis of one’s manufactured or false wants. In the past, factories reduce workers into mere instruments, but today, it is consumer society that creates superficial subjects and a life that is bereft of meaning. A one-dimensional society, aided by technology, wrongly measures the lives of people through the attribute of being a consumer who desires satisfaction or pleasure from goods. The most evil result of the usurpation of workers is the fact that they are stripped of the true value of their creative functions; the consequence of the culture industry is the reduction of the meaning and value of life itself into the gibberish. Exploitation is not just a question of means and ends. The problem is more fundamental. It is rooted in the reality of domination. The bias against those in the margins of society is intentional. It is meant to promote an idealized lifestyle as opposed to the ordinary. In fact, its most dominant exemplification can be observed in social media. Technology and modern gadgets contribute to the ways in which the value of human life is reduced into mere conformity.

Domination is about the control of human consciousness. A philosophy in the margins is the only way to overcome this form of control. Human beings lose their freedom because of the manipulative ways that characterize a capitalist society as such. The way forward, the one that is offered by Marcuse, is the idea of the Great Refusal and the assertion of Ocaj that the importance of resistance is to truly find the authentic value of one’s being. Life, as explained by Hegel, is about going into the roots of human freedom where we see the unfolding of the great potential of each man. Going back to the ordinariness of life means escaping from the shallowness of a modern consumer lifestyle. Heidegger is crucial insofar as he reminds people of the distinction between

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

what is authentic and inauthentic. Every true human relationship is an attempt to fight the dominant power of false needs over the meaning of human existence. Thus, a philosophy that is search of the truth must begin with the recognition of the real meaning of happiness, which is a life that is free from false needs, in contrast to the contemptuous lifestyle promoted by the culture industry.

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