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This body, this civilization, this repression: An inquiry into Freud and Marcuse

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THIS BODY, THIS CIVILIZATION, THIS REPRESSION: AN INQUIRY INTO FREUD AND MARCUSE

by
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ABSTRACT

Beneath the veil of our affluent, sexually permissive capitalist society, Herbert Marcuse identifies a deep-rooted contradiction concerning how sexuality is made to operate in this system. On his account, our current civilization is characterized by the wholesale incorporation, or "containment," of all dimensions of human life into a system that seeks to control and dominate individuals. With regards to sexuality in particular, Marcuse maintains that the increased liberalization of sexuality represents its effective containment within a system that reduces all human interests and activities to their market value and binds individuals to a market system structured to maximize profit and impoverish human experience. In the following thesis, I explore the development of Marcuse's thought on sexual repression under late capitalism and explicate the connections between his position and that of Sigmund Freud.

For Brenna, Liam, and Gavin

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PROLOGUE

The claim that sexuality has become increasingly liberalized over the past several decades in advanced industrial civilization is hardly controversial. Indeed, it would be virtually impossible to proceed through an ordinary day without confronting various images, advertisements, and products which make use of and appeal to sexuality. Television programs and commercials, billboards and magazines inform us how we might become more attractive, marketable, productive members of society and provide us with the means for completing our otherwise inadequate sexual image. Countless self-help books prescribe various ways to appeal to potential partners and highlight the appropriate techniques with which to complete our sexual transactions. Considering the ubiquity of sexuality both in and outside of the work place, one might conclude that our libidinal drives have been emancipated from the repressive clutches of Puritanism and that the current social order has liberated sexuality to an unprecedented extent.

Throughout much of his work, Herbert Marcuse takes this conclusion to task. In *One-Dimensional Man*, he remarks that "advanced industrial civilization operates with a greater degree of sexual freedom—'operates' in the sense that the latter becomes a market value and a factor of social mores."[1] On his account, late capitalist society is characterized by the wholesale incorporation of all dimensions of human life into a system which seeks to control and dominate individuals in order to maximize profit for a relative few. Marcuse maintains that individuals actively contribute to the reproduction of

[1] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) p. 74.

the capitalist system—the "affluent monster"[2]—due to our instinctual identification with the comforts, commodities, and sexual horizons provided by the establishment. As such, he argues that the liberalization of sexuality within the repressive order of domination actually serves to perpetuate this very system.

Throughout his work on the repression of sexuality under late capitalism, Marcuse proceeds from Sigmund Freud's metapsychology and late theory of "instincts," the "primary 'drives' of the human organism which are subject to *historical* modification."[3] In doing so, he attempts to provide rigorous psychological support for his critical theory of society. As we shall see throughout this essay, Marcuse employs many of Karl Marx's concepts and categories in order to extrapolate the historical and sociological implications of Freud's ambivalent critique of civilization along more resolutely socialist lines.

This is not to suggest, however, that Marcuse attempts to 'add' a sociological or political dimension to Freudian theory. Unlike the Neo-Freudian schools, he wishes to reveal that "Freud's theory is in its very substance 'sociological,' and that no new cultural or sociological orientation is needed to reveal this substance."[4] Furthermore, he is not attempting to improve psychoanalytic theory and practice. Rather, his task "is to contribute to the *philosophy* of psychoanalysis—not to psychoanalysis itself."[5] On this basis, Marcuse levels a thoroughgoing critique of sexual repression under advanced industrial civilization and attempts to account for how and why individuals have

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[2] *Idem, An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) p. 7.
[3] *Idem, Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955) p. 8.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

increasingly come to identify—at the instinctual level—with a system that does not represent their interests.

The task of this essay is to explore the development of Marcuse's thought on the historically specific forms of repression in advanced industrial civilization through a detailed explication of both psychoanalytic theory and Marcuse's critical appropriation of this theory. The essay will be divided into three relatively equal parts. In Chapter 1, I intend to trace the evolution of Freudian theory by offering a thorough explication of several key psychoanalytic concepts. To begin, I shall elucidate Freud's distinction between the "pleasure principle" and the "reality principle." Next, I shall highlight the clinical cases which lead Freud to posit the dualism of "life instincts" and "death instincts" and explain how this new instinctual dynamic alters his earlier theory. Finally, I will discuss Freud's notions of "repression" and "sublimation" and elucidate his reasons for suggesting that civilization depends upon the continuous renunciation and deflection of instinctual energy.

Chapter 2 will focus on Marcuse's early interpretation and critical application of psychoanalytic theory in *Eros and Civilization.* In this chapter, I shall begin by explicating his historical extrapolation of Freud's basic concepts and explain the ways in which he employs these revised terms in order to indict the *unnecessary* modes of sexual repression in advanced industrial civilization. I will then consider his arguments for the historical and theoretical possibilities of reversing the excessive modes of instinctual restraint necessitated by the prevailing social order.

In Chapter 3, I shall return to the contemporary context with which I began by considering Marcuse's argument that the current "liberalization" of sexuality represents

its effective incorporation within a more efficient system of control and domination. I shall highlight Marcuse's claim that the relaxation of sexual taboos, the incorporation of sexual expression and behaviour into the work place, and the mass dissemination of prescribed sexual horizons in the advertising and entertainment industries, bind individuals to a market system structured against the greater potentialities of human beings. These emerging trends reveal the repressive modes of "desublimation" in contemporary civilization, which replace lasting instinctual gratification with immediate libidinal satisfaction in a fundamentally unfree society.

In Freudian terms, this essay might be thought of as a "sublimation" of instinctual and intellectual energy—a "transformation of passion" to the end of articulating certain ideas and arguments that are edifying and perhaps useful. According to Hans W. Loewald, sublimation is often thought of as a process by which the individual is able to "master" reality, "mastery conceived not as domination but as coming to terms—as it brings external and material reality within the compass of psychic reality, and psychic reality within the sweep of external reality."[6] In this light, the present inquiry is intended to "master" the works of Freud and Marcuse by "coming to terms" with their crucial insights and elucidating the connections between these two thinkers.

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[6] Hans W. Loewald, *Sublimation: Inquiries into Theoretical Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) p. 22. Loewald also characterizes his own work as an act of sublimation: "It is a sobering and strangely comforting thought that writing these investigations has been a sublimated way of cleaning and preening myself, like a cat after a meal, or after a frustrating hunt." *Ibid.*, p. ix.

CHAPTER 1

THE *BILDUNGSMÄCHTE*[7] OF MARCUSE'S CRITICAL SEXUAL THEORY: SIGMUND FREUD

A thorough explication of some of Freud's fundamental concepts is necessary in order to lay the groundwork for my treatment of Marcuse's work. In Section 1, I shall begin by elucidating Freud's distinction between the "pleasure principle" and the "reality principle," the "two principles of mental functioning" governing psychical life. These two principles are treated in relation to the conscious and unconscious dimensions of mental life and to the various functions of the ego. In Section 2, I will examine the emergence of the "life instincts" and the "death instincts" in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* before turning to Freud's discussion of aggressiveness as a manifestation of the death instincts in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. On the basis of this discussion of the inherent erotic and aggressive drives of human beings, Section 3 will focus on the notion of "repression" at both the individual (psychical) and social levels. Finally, in Section 4 I shall briefly explicate Freud's concept of "sublimation," which is arguably one of the most important and at the same time enigmatic terms in Freudian theory.

Throughout this chapter, I will offer a fairly standard interpretation of Freud's crucial concepts without relying too heavily upon Marcuse's own characterization of psychoanalytic theory. I should mention, however, that Freud's notions of pleasure and

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[7] When asked to describe the significance of Freud for the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer answered: "We really are deeply indebted to Freud and his first collaborators. His thought is one of the *Bildungsmächte* [foundation stones] without which our own philosophy would not be what it is." Cited in Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995) p. 1.

reality, life and death, repression and sublimation do not comprise a systematic whole; he often relies upon hypothesis, speculation, and conjecture in order to account for certain trends in individual mentation and behaviour that could not be explained using any existing psychological categories. Considering the complexity of the Freudian project and the many alterations it has undergone since Freud's writings, my discussion of these key psychoanalytic concepts will be selective and incomplete.

Furthermore, in order to trace the development of these concepts and dualisms thematically, many of Freud's related concepts—narcissism, Oedipus complex, superego, etc.—will recur and develop in each section. I ask the reader to forgive these unavoidable repetitions. The point of this chapter is to lay the Freudian groundwork from which Marcuse proceeds, striving at all times for the utmost thematic and systematic unity even where the subject matter is not wholly amenable to such treatment.

SECTION 1: PLEASURE AND REALITY

In his essay "On Narcissism," Freud argues that the mental apparatus is "first and foremost a device designed for mastering excitations which would otherwise be felt as distressing or would have pathogenic effects."[8] The individual's mental organization is thus structured to decrease the amount of unpleasurable tensions in the psychical apparatus and to press towards the pleasurable release, or "discharge," of instinctual impulses. First and foremost, then, the mental apparatus is governed by the "pleasure principle." Throughout his work on this "principle of mental functioning," Freud equates

[8] Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 14, tr. James Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957) p. 85.

the pleasure principle with the hypothesis of constancy.[9] In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud argues that "the mental apparatus endeavours to keep the quantity of excitation present in it as low as possible or at least to keep it constant."[10] Accordingly, Freud claims that the psychical structure of the individual seeks to maintain a level of stability which can only be ensured by decreasing the quantity of mental excitations, or at least by keeping them constant.

Under the influence of external pressures and demands, however, a new principle of mental functioning emerges in order to safeguard the demands of the pleasure principle and to ensure that the organism does not destroy itself in its relentless pursuit of immediate gratification. This "reality principle" does not abandon the drive towards instinctual gratification and the lowering of mental excitations. Rather, it "demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure."[11] In this sense, then, the pleasure principle must be superseded by the reality principle in order to secure lasting instinctual gratification under the often constraining limitations of the external world.

As Marcuse argues in *Eros and Civilization*, the distinction between the pleasure principle and the reality principle "corresponds largely (but not entirely) to the distinction between unconscious and conscious processes."[12] On Freud's view, the pleasure principle

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[9] Freud characterizes the principle of constancy thus: "the nervous system is an apparatus which has the function of getting rid of the stimuli that reach it, or of reducing them to the lowest possible level; or which, if it were feasible, would maintain itself in an altogether unstimulated condition." See "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 14, tr. James Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957) p. 120.

[10] *Idem*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, tr. James Strachey, (New York: Liverlight, 1961) p. 1-2.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[12] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 12.

corresponds to the unconscious, or the "primary processes," while the reality principle is bound up with consciousness, or the "secondary processes." In his "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," Freud explains this connection between the pleasure principle and unconscious processes when he claims that the "governing purpose obeyed by these primary processes is easy to recognize; it is described as the pleasure-unpleasure [*Lust-Unlust*] principle, or more shortly the pleasure principle....Our dreams at night and our waking tendency to tear ourselves away from distressing impressions are remnants of the dominance of this principle and proofs of its power."[13] The goal of these unconscious processes is to break through the barrier that separates them from consciousness in order to release unpleasurable tensions through a discharge of instinctual impulses. These processes—represented, in part, by the id—are timeless in the sense that they "are not ordered temporally, that time does not change them in any way and that the idea of time cannot be applied to them."[14] The id operates solely in accordance with "the demands of the pleasure-unpleasure regulation."[15]

While the pleasure principle governs the unconscious realm of the psychical apparatus, or the primary process, Paul Ricoeur reminds us that "in general, reality is the correlate of the function of consciousness."[16] While the unconscious processes attempt to "cathect" certain instinctual demands, ideas, and wishes—that is, to charge these "ideational representatives" of instinct with a store of instinctual energy to achieve

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[13] Freud, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 12, tr. James Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958) pp. 218-219.
[14] *Idem*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* p. 22.
[15] *Idem*, "The Unconscious," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 14, tr. James Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957) p. 187.
[16] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, tr. Denis Savage, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) p. 261.

discharge—the preconscious and conscious systems attempt to prevent these libidinal cathexes from invading consciousness and potentially destroying the organism. When faced with the pressures of external reality, the mature ego develops out of the id in order to meet the demands of the outside world and to prevent the id from recklessly pursuing its discharge of unpleasurable tensions. This process of identifying the demands of the external world and attempting to achieve lasting gratification under these conditions involves "reality-testing," which the id effectively ignores in its pursuit of immediate gratification. The ego repels the id's attempts at libidinal invasion by establishing "anticathexes," by which it continuously prevents certain ideas and wishes from entering consciousness and achieving discharge.

What has been put forth thus far remains within the framework of Freud's early libido theory, in which he distinguishes between the sexual instincts and the ego-instincts.[17] The ego-instincts are the drives towards self-preservation; they uphold the reality principle in order to secure lasting instinctual gratification without destroying the individual.[18] By contrast, the sexual instincts, which constitute the "libido" proper, seek gratification through "object-cathexis," or by channeling instinctual impulses towards objects in the external world.[19] However, Freud explains that the sexual instincts "behave auto-erotically at first; they obtain their satisfaction in the subject's own body and therefore do not find themselves in the situation of frustration which was what

[17] As we shall see in the next section, this opposition is complicated by the introduction of narcissism and the "compulsion to repeat," at which point Freud distinguishes between the life instincts and the death instincts, Eros and Thanatos.

[18] It should be noted here that the "ego-instincts," like the sexual instincts, refer to a group of instinctual drives rather than one overarching drive: "Freud introduced the term 'ego-instincts' and identified these on the one hand with the self-preservative instincts and on the other with the repressive function." See the editor's introduction to "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," p. 115.

[19] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 54.

necessitated the institution of the reality principle." As a result, the sexual instinct "is held up in its psychical development and remains far longer under the dominance of the pleasure principle, from which in many people it is never able to withdraw."[20]

Just as Plato acknowledges that the majority of the population in the republic would be unable to overcome their appetitive drives, Freud argues that the sexual instincts are difficult to "educate" and that the majority of individuals remain largely under their sway. Even in those individuals who have established sufficient mastery over their desires, the sexual instincts retain their dominant role in "phantasy" and in dreams. These insights support our earlier observation that the pleasure principle corresponds to unconscious mental processes while the reality principle is the correlate of consciousness. At this point, we can draw a further connection between "the sexual instinct and phantasy and, on the other hand, between the ego-instincts and the activities of consciousness."[21]

Although the ego-instincts are associated with "the activities of consciousness," Freud reminds us that the ego is merely an offshoot of the id and that "much of the ego is itself unconscious."[22] It is by virtue of its partially unconscious character that the ego can be said to have its own instincts. The dual function of the ego is thus made explicit: in one respect, the ego seeks to satisfy the instinctual demands of the id of which it is merely an outgrowth; in another respect, the ego detaches itself from the internal world of the id, represents the demands of the reality principle, and carries out the satisfaction of its now separate self-preservative instincts. Freud establishes this dual function of the ego by distinguishing between the pleasure-ego and the reality-ego: "[j]ust as the pleasure-

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[20] *Idem*, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," p. 222.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 222.
[22] *Idem*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* p. 13.

ego can do nothing but wish, work for a yield of pleasure, and avoid unpleasure, so the reality-ego need do nothing but strive for what is useful and guard itself against damage."[23] In order for the reality principle to supersede the pleasure principle, the pleasure-ego must be transformed into the reality-ego.

Alongside this transformation of the mental apparatus, Freud argues that "the sexual instincts undergo the changes that lead them from their original auto-eroticism through various intermediate phases to object-love in the service of procreation."[24] This sublation of the pleasure principle by the reality principle—of the pleasure-ego by the reality-ego—does not imply that the pleasure principle is completely abandoned. Rather, Freud makes it quite clear that this substitution "implies no deposing of the pleasure principle, but only a safeguarding of it. A momentary pleasure, uncertain in its results, is given up, but only in order to gain along the new path an assured pleasure at a later time."[25]

While the psychical apparatus tends to progress from auto-eroticism to "object-love in the service of procreation," Freud identifies certain clinical cases in which individuals do not seek instinctual gratification through object-cathexis. Instead, these individuals withdraw their libidinal interest from the external world and direct it toward their own ego, a phenomenon which Freud labels "narcissism." At the earliest stages of psychosexual development, the individual "has originally two sexual objects—himself and the woman who nurses him." At these stages, the child is "polymorphous perverse" in the sense that he is able to achieve gratification through several "zones" of his own

[23] *Idem*, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," p. 223.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 224.
[25] *Ibid.*, p. 223.

body and does not yet rely exclusively upon object-cathexes in order to obtain pleasure. Furthermore, at these stages the sexual instincts and the ego-instincts are virtually indistinguishable in that the child satisfies the demands of both sexual gratification and self-preservation through the mother's breast, from which the child has not yet fully separated himself.[26] In this regard, Freud postulates "a primary narcissism in everyone, which may in some cases manifest itself in a dominating fashion in his object-choice."[27]

After the trials of the Oedipal conflict, the child must direct the libido toward the external world and seek instinctual satisfaction through various objects. However, some individuals find the demands of the reality principle, and the inevitable delays in gratification it necessitates, too difficult to bear and retain their libido in their own ego. Citing Ferenczi, Freud considers the case of an individual "who is tormented by organic pain and discomfort [and] gives up his interest in the things of the external world." This "sick man withdraws his libidinal cathexes back upon his own ego, and sends them out again when he recovers."[28] Freud labels this temporary withdrawal of libido from the external world "secondary narcissism," which denotes "the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated."[29] This "narcissistic withdrawal," which also occurs in the non-pathogenic cases of sleep and dreams, marks an individual's rejection of the harsh demands of the reality principle.

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[26] For a more complete discussion of the undifferentiated unity of mother and child, see Loewald's discussion of the "infant-mother matrix" in *Sublimation*, chapters 2 and 3.
[27] Freud, "On Narcissism," p. 88.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 82.
[29] *Ibid* ., p. 73.

As Marcuse claims in *Eros and Civilization*, "the discovery of primary narcissism meant more than the addition of just another phase to the development of the libido." Indeed, Marcuse finds in primary narcissism "the archetype of another existential relation to *reality*."[30] Although we will have occasion to consider Marcuse's view of primary narcissism in the next chapter, it is necessary here to highlight two crucial alterations of Freudian theory necessitated by this concept. First, Freud's discussion of narcissism challenges the initial dualism of the sexual instincts and the ego-instincts by revealing that the ego also contains libido. In "Anxiety and Instinctual Life," Freud claims that the case of narcissism reveals that "the ego is always the main reservoir of libido, from which libidinal cathexes of objects go out and into which they return again, while the major part of this libido remains permanently in the ego." In this regard, "ego libido is being constantly changed into object libido and object libido into ego libido."[31] These claims challenge Freud's earlier view that the ego-instincts strive exclusively for the self-preservation of the organism and that the sexual instincts constitute the "libido" proper.

Furthermore, the clinical observations of narcissism challenge Freud's first topography of the mental apparatus, in which he divides the psychical structure into unconscious, preconscious, and conscious domains. The narcissistic withdrawal from the demands of the external world involves the establishment of an ego-ideal, "by which [the individual] measures his actual ego."[32] The ego-ideal emerges after the trials of the Oedipus complex, at which time the child abandons the mother as a possible object of

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[30] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 168.
[31] Freud, "Anxiety and Instinctual Life," *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, tr. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards, (New York: Penguin, 1991) pp. 135-6.
[32] *Idem*, "On Narcissism," pp. 93-4.

sexual gratification, identifies with the father, and "internalizes" his paternal authority. This early discussion of the ego-ideal provides the theoretical foundation for what Freud will later call the "superego" in *The Ego and the Id.* As we shall see in the next section, these complications surrounding narcissism clear the way for Freud's second topography of psychical life (id, ego, superego) and the new dualism of the life instincts and the death instincts.

SECTION 2: LIFE AND DEATH

Throughout his "Papers on Metapsychology," Freud maintains his distinction between the sexual instincts and the ego-instincts and reiterates his view that the mental apparatus is initially governed by the pleasure principle. As we have seen, however, the introduction of narcissism complicates Freud's strict disarticulation of ego-instincts and sexual instincts by revealing that the ego is the main "reservoir of libido"—that the ego-instincts, too, are libidinal in character. In *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*, Freud claims that the distinction between the sexual instincts and the ego-instincts "is merely a working hypothesis, to be retained only so long as it proves useful, and it will make little difference to the results of our work of description and classification if it is replaced by another."[33] It is not until 1920 that Freud finds occasion to "replace" his early libido theory on the basis of clinical cases that challenge the dominance of the pleasure principle.

[33] *Idem*, "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," p. 124.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud claims that the task of psychoanalysis is to communicate to the patient certain ideas and experiences that he or she has repressed and to "oblige the patient to confirm the analyst's construction from his own memory."[34] In doing so, the patient is able to come to terms with the repressed desires and traumatic experiences that have resulted in neuroses. However, Freud considers the case of individuals who are unable to corroborate the analyst's interpretation and thus fail to recognize the unconscious repressed material as belonging to past experiences of failure and distress. Accordingly, these individuals are "obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past."[35] In short, such individuals are compelled to bring about the same childhood experiences of frustration that occurred during the Oedipus complex.

Although the ego's resistance to remembering experiences of distress can be attributed, in part, to the pleasure principle—since the ego "seeks to avoid the unpleasure which would be produced by the liberation of the repressed"[36]—the compulsion to repeat these distressing situations causes more unpleasure than if they had emerged as memories or dreams.[37] The patient is compelled to relive "experiences which include no possibility of pleasure, and which can never, even long ago, have brought satisfaction."[38] While Freud observes these tendencies most readily in those suffering from neurosis, he claims that such tendencies can also be observed in "normal" individuals. As Ricoeur explains,

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[34] *Idem*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 12.
[35] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[38] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

the compulsion to repeat is "further evidenced in the strange fate of those persons who seem to call down upon themselves the same misfortunes time and again."[39] On the basis of these observations, Freud believes that he has found tendencies that are "more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle."[40]

Freud attempts to account for these tendencies by describing consciousness as a protective barrier erected against the influx of external stimuli. He claims that what "consciousness yields consists essentially of perceptions of excitations coming from the external world and of feelings of pleasure and unpleasure which can only arise from within the mental apparatus."[41] External stimuli thus penetrate into the psychical apparatus from without and, in turn, the individual experiences either pleasure or unpleasure.

To this notion of consciousness as a "shield" separating the unconscious from the external world, Freud relates Breuer's distinction between "bound" and "freely mobile" cathexis. Whereas freely mobile cathexis can charge certain ideas or desires with instinctual energy for immediate discharge, bound cathexis is that instinctual energy which the ego has mastered and controlled.[42] The task of consciousness *qua* protective shield against stimuli is to "bind" the energy that penetrates the system from without so as to control it and regulate the discharge of instinctual impulses. This barrier takes the form of "anxiety," the state of expecting or preparing for danger, in order to prepare the mental apparatus to bind external stimuli.

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[39] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 287.
[40] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 17.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

In the case of those individuals who compulsively repeat traumatic experiences from early childhood, Freud argues that the protective barrier against stimuli was initially unable to bind the influx of energy coming from outside. Indeed, traumatic experiences are defined precisely as those "excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield."[43] In these early traumatic situations, the protective barrier is temporarily put out of action, anxiety is not aroused to respond to the influx of energy, and the mental apparatus is flooded with unmanageable amounts of stimuli. Those individuals who repeat traumatic situations as fresh experiences, as well as those "normal" individuals who continuously repeat their mistakes, are thus "endeavouring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis."[44] On this basis, Freud argues that the task of binding the energy that flows into the apparatus is "prior to the aim of gaining pleasure and avoiding unpleasure."[45]

This discussion of the compulsion to repeat culminates in a pivotal question, namely, "how is the predicate of being 'instinctual' related to the compulsion to repeat?" Freud claims that he has arrived at a universal attribute of instincts: "*an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces."[46] This newly discovered attribute of instinctual life highlights the conservative nature of the drives, the "inertia inherent in organic life." With the coming to life of inanimate matter,

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[43] *Ibid.*, p. 23.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 26.
[45] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 289.
[46] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 30.

the instincts propel the organism toward a state of rest that is free of unpleasurable excitations—the state of nirvana. Accordingly, rather than arguing that death is caused by forces external to the individual, Freud claims that the human organism proceeds towards death for internal, instinctual reasons. On this reading, the self-preservative instincts are conservative in the sense that they sustain life on the long, circuitous path toward death; at most, they ensure that the organism dies "in its own fashion."[47] The sexual instincts are also conservative in that they are "peculiarly resistant to external influences," and "in that they preserve life itself for a comparatively long period."[48] Ultimately, both the sexual instincts and the ego-instincts attempt to lead the organism back to an earlier state.

It is on the basis of the conservative nature of the drives that the death instinct emerges. Initially, Freud is tempted to equate the ego-instincts with the death instinct, since "they arise from the coming to life of inanimate matter and seek to restore the inanimate state."[49] In contradistinction to these instincts, Freud claims that the sexual instincts are the great exception to the organism's inherent movement towards death. He argues that the sexual instincts seek to "combine organic substances into ever larger unities" through the coalescence of two germ cells.[50] In this regard, the sexual instincts "operate against the purpose of the other instincts, which leads, by reason of their function, to death."[51]

Recalling his earlier arguments surrounding narcissism, however, Freud withdraws his view that the ego-instincts function simply to bring about death. Since the

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[47] *Ibid.*, p. 33.
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 34.
[49] *Ibid.*, p. 38.
[50] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

object-libido of the sexual instincts returns to the ego in narcissism, and since the ego is formed and matures on the basis of this return of libido into the ego,[52] the ego is considered the main reservoir of libido. Insofar as both the ego-instincts and the sexual instincts are libidinal in character, then, Freud subsumes them under the label "Eros" and opposes them to the death instincts.

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud claims that both the life instincts and the death instincts are "active in every particle of living substance, though in unequal proportions."[53] In other words, Eros and Thanatos are almost inevitably "alloyed" in every human drive, each attempting to gain dominance over the other. In opposition to the death instincts, Eros seeks to bring about "a more and more far-reaching combination of the particles into which living substance is dispersed," and "aims at complicating life and at the same time, of course, at preserving it."[54] With this continuous struggle between life and death, the early libido theory is thus transformed into the new dualism of Eros and Thanatos.

As I argued in the previous section, the introduction of narcissism also brought with it the concept of the "ego-ideal," or the superego. We recall that the superego is a direct result of the Oedipus complex, in which the individual identifies with the father's authority and establishes a moral tribunal against which he measures his own ego. By virtue of its genesis in the Oedipus complex, this "superego" contains both erotic and

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[52] Freud explains that "the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes and that it contains the history of those object-choices. It must, of course, be admitted from the outset that there are varying degrees of capacity for resistance, which decide the extent to which a person's character fends off or accepts the influences of the history of his erotic object-choices." *The Ego and the Id*, tr. Joan Riviere, ed. James Strachey, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1960) p. 19.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 31.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

aggressive components. On the one hand, as Marcuse explains, "the superego builds up and protects the unity of the ego, secures its development under the reality principle, and thus works in the service of Eros."[55] In this sense, the superego takes on the protective role of the father and sustains the ego in the face of external pressures.

On the other hand, the superego also takes on the father's punitive and aggressive qualities. Freud argues that the ego manages the destructive rage of the superego by directing it "towards the external world in the form of aggression."[56] The paradigmatic example here is sadism, in which the individual deflects her aggressiveness towards other individuals. The case of sadism is significant in that it reveals the extent to which Eros and the death instincts are "alloyed" with one another in every human drive. In one respect, sadism is driven by the death instincts insofar as it involves harming individuals and objects in the outside world. Yet this outwardly directed destructiveness also prevents the ego from turning its aggression back upon itself; sadism is thus, in part, "pressed into the service of Eros, inasmuch as the organism [destroys] other things, both animate and inanimate, instead of itself."[57] This example supports Freud's view that the manifestations of the life instincts are readily observable, whereas the death instincts are largely a "mute" energy which can only be deciphered through their activities with Eros.[58]

Often times, however, the superego directs its aggression against the ego and "thus works in the service of the antagonist of the life instinct."[59] Freud argues that "the

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[55] *Ibid.*, p. 53.
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 44.
[57] *Idem, Civilization and Its Discontents*, tr. David McLintock, (New York: Penguin Books, 2004) p. 71.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 73.
[59] *Idem, The Ego and the Id*, p. 53.

more a man checks his aggressiveness towards the exterior the more severe—that is aggressive—he becomes in his ego ideal."[60] The individual must either channel her destructive energy towards the outside world or retain this aggression within herself at the risk of self-torment and death. When the death instincts are directed towards the ego, tension is created between the weakened ego and the ego-ideal. The superego establishes the "conscience," which continuously reprimands the ego. Freud argues that the superego is thus charged with destructive rage after the Oedipus complex and, in the extreme case of melancholia, is permeated with "a pure culture of the death instinct."[61]

According to Ricoeur, the connection between the superego and the death instincts in *The Ego and the Id* provides the foundation for Freud's "metacultural" theory of Eros and Thanatos. Initially, Freud claims that the development and maintenance of civilization is the work of Eros. Insofar as the life instincts bind individuals into ever-wider groups by creating strong libidinal ties between them, civilization is sustained and enriched through the efforts of the life instincts. As Ricoeur aptly asserts: "[c]ultural development, like the growth of the individual from infancy to adulthood, is the fruit of Eros and Ananke, of love and work."[62] Thus, civilization is founded upon the necessity of shared work and the power of Eros to bind individuals into tightly knit groups.

Although the development of civilization is largely the work of Eros, Freud also emphasizes that the sexual instincts, "the part of Eros which is directed towards objects,"[63] cannot achieve complete fulfillment if society is to function most efficiently.

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[60] *Ibid.*, p. 44.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 43.
[62] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 303.
[63] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, pp. 54-5.

Left to their own devices, the sexual instincts would drive the organism towards radically individualistic modes of immediate gratification, which could undermine progress and potentially dissolve the libidinal bonds of civilization. Private satisfaction and fulfillment must be subordinated to the advancement of society as a whole—"[i]ndividual liberty is not an asset of civilization."[64] Therefore, the sexual instincts too must be restrained if civilization is to function optimally.

On the basis of his earlier conjectures concerning the death instinct, Freud claims that the work of Eros is now counteracted by an "anti-cultural" instinct. He argues that "human beings are not gentle creatures in need of love, at most able to defend themselves if attacked; on the contrary, they can account a powerful share of aggression among their instinctual endowments."[65] The death instinct thus finds its principal representative in "the hostility of each against all and all against each,"[66] which civilization must control in various ways. Ideally, the life instincts are able to neutralize the death instincts by "fusing" them with erotic components and pressing them into the service of Eros. However, the demands of civilization force the individual to forego instinctual gratification and thus prevent Eros from binding the death instincts. At this point, then, it is necessary to explicate the ways in which the instincts are controlled at both the individual and societal levels by briefly explicating the processes of repression and sublimation.

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[64] *Idem, Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 42.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 60.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

SECTION 3: REPRESSION

As I have argued, the task of the unconscious is to "cathect" certain ideas, desires, and instinctual impulses in order to discharge any unpleasurable excitations within the psychical apparatus. The task of the preconscious—which lies between the unconscious and conscious systems and regulates their interactions—is to establish "anti-cathexes" in order to resist the instinctual energy of the id and to prevent certain unconscious impulses from achieving discharge. Freud refers to this process of rejecting instinctual demands and preventing them from entering consciousness as "repression." According to Freud, "the process of repression lies, not in putting an end to, in annihilating, the idea which represents an instinct, but in preventing it from becoming conscious."[67] In his later work, Freud claims that it is not the instincts themselves that are repressed—since an "instinct can never become an object of consciousness"—but the ideas or impulses which represent the instinct.[68] When such an ideational representative of instinct proves to be incompatible with the reality principle, this idea meets with resistances and remain in an unconscious state. Ultimately, Freud claims that "*the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious.*"[69]

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[67] *Idem*, "The Unconscious," p. 166.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 177. It should be noted, however, that Freud's earlier formulations of the instincts equate the "instinct" and the "psychical representative." In "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," Freud writes: "an 'instinct' appears to us as a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body." pp. 121-122. Thus, since Freud often described the instinct as a "psychical representative," it is possible to suggest that the instinct too can be repressed. This "ambiguity" in Freud's characterization of the instincts is discussed at greater length in the "Editor's Introduction" to "Instincts and their Vicissitudes."

[69] *Idem*, "Repression," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 14, tr. James Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957) p. 147.

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud elucidates this process of repression in terms of his second topography of ego, id, and superego. As we recall, the ego is merely an offshoot of the id which emerges in response to the demands of external reality; it consists of both unconscious and conscious elements. According to Freud, "the ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavours to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns unrestricted in the id."[70] When the id makes an instinctual demand on the ego, the ego will either satisfy this demand by allowing the impulse to achieve discharge or repress the impulse in order to avoid any danger that might arise from its satisfaction. In this regard, the ego represses certain instinctual demands due to "external" obstacles and dangers in the outside world.

In another respect, Freud argues that the ego carries out repressions for "internal" reasons. It will be recalled that after the Oedipus complex the child internalizes his father's authority through the formation of the superego. Since paternal authority represents the greatest obstacle to the satisfaction of Oedipal desires, "the ego fortified itself for the carrying out of the repression by erecting this same obstacle within itself."[71] This internal "standard" by which the ego measures itself influences the repressions that the ego exacts upon the id. As Freud claims in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, the "tension between the stern super-ego and the ego that is subject to it is what we call a 'sense of guilt'; this manifests itself as a need for punishment."[72] In order to avoid the experience of guilt, the ego is forced to carry out certain repressions at the behest of its

[70] *Idem, The Ego and the Id*, p. 15.
[71] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[72] *Idem, Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 77.

superego. As such, the ego carries out repressions in order to avoid both external harm and internal punishment.[73]

Despite the individual's efforts to repress certain impulses, Freud makes it clear that the process of repression does not destroy the idea that represents an instinct. Indeed, he claims that "the repressed exercises a continuous pressure in the direction of the conscious, so that this pressure must be balanced by an unceasing counter-pressure."[74] Freud enumerates several ways in which the repressed can penetrate into consciousness. First, the repressed can surface when "the strength of counter-cathexis is diminished by an illness which acts on the Ego." In this instance, the weakness of the ego prevents it from opposing an instinctual demand, thus enabling the impulse to reach consciousness and produce symptoms. This process also occurs in non-pathogenic forms in dreams and phantasy. Second, the repressed can discharge its cathexis when "those instincts attached to the repressed material become strengthened." This often occurs during the process of puberty when the instincts—particularly the sexual instincts—become intensified. Finally, Freud claims that the repressed can emerge when "recent events produce impressions or experiences which are so much like the repressed material that they have the power to awaken it."[75] As I will argue in the next chapter, Marcuse believes that this process of unearthing repressed impulses proves that the demands of the pleasure principle and the repressed desire for freedom can reawaken through the work of memory, imagination, and phantasy.

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[73] These "conscious and unconscious," "external and internal" modes of repression that Freud describes will serve to justify Marcuse's broad definition of repression in *Eros and Civilization*.
[74] *Idem*, "Repression," p. 151.
[75] *Idem*, *Moses and Monotheism*, p. 121.

Freud discusses the "return of the repressed" at the phylogenetic level in relation to his hypothesis of the primal crime. He claims that during the earliest phases of human history—which he does not specify—human beings lived in hordes controlled and regulated by a dominant male. The "strong male was the master and father of the whole horde, unlimited in his power, which he used brutally."[76] This "father" took possession of the women and demanded the instinctual renunciation of the sons. If these sons "excited the father's jealousy" by failing to check their appetitive drives, they were either "killed or castrated or driven out." Spurred by their desire for freedom from the father, the ex-communicated "brothers" came together, killed the father, and consumed his body. Although the brothers initially fought amongst themselves to assume the father's authority, they came to realize the futility of these disputes and established "a sort of social contract."[77] Thus, they established the first form of social organization, "accompanied by renunciation of instinctual gratification; recognition of mutual obligations; institutions declared sacred, which could not be broken—in short, the beginnings of morality and law."[78]

While the brothers carried out their desire for liberation by killing the father and establishing social order, Freud claims that the sons experienced guilt over the primal crime. Although the sons hated the father for demanding instinctual renunciation, the father also provided for and sustained the entire clan and thus served as an example to be revered.[79] Later on, the sons would find a substitute for the father in the form of a totem

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[76] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[77] *Ibid.*, p. 104.
[78] *Ibid.*, p., 104.
[79] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

animal. This animal reflected the sons' ambivalence towards the father: on the one hand, the totem animal was "the corporeal ancestor and protecting spirit of the clan," which they honoured and respected; on the other hand, the sons created a festival where the animal would be killed and eaten, thus reaffirming the murder of the father.[80] The sons' guilt resulted from both the killing of the father who sustained them *and* his reappearance in the totem animal, which represents their failure to overcome him in the end. In order to eliminate their guilt over killing the master, the sons ultimately abandoned their project of liberation by deifying the father and re-instituting his restrictions on instinctual gratification.[81]

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud explicates the cultural modes of repression and guilt-feeling in a way that mirrors the establishment of social order after the primal horde. We recall that, for Freud, unrestrained satisfaction of the drives would lead to purely individualistic modes of gratification and dissolve the bonds of civilization. Accordingly, civilization demands the renunciation of pleasure in order to preserve itself—it requires the subordination of the pleasure principle to the reality principle. According to Freud, "[c]ommunal life becomes possible only when a majority comes together that is stronger than any individual and presents a unified front against every individual."[82] Just as the brother clan banded together against the tyranny of the father, so too must the civilized community pit itself "against the power of the individual." The

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 104.
[81] Freud also discusses the "return of the repressed" in relation to the re-institution of monotheism in Judaism. In the interest of time, and considering that the deification of the father in the brother clan and the resurgence of monotheism in Judaism are structurally identical, I have chosen to focus on the primal horde.
[82] Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 41.

human community thus requires each individual to forego his or her desire for immediate instinctual gratification "by suppression, repression or some other means."[83]

Yet Freud reminds us that the frustration of an instinctual demand cannot occur without risk. By preventing the instincts from achieving full gratification, civilization weakens the power of Eros to neutralize the destructive energies of the death instincts. Recalling his earlier argument that Eros and Thanatos are alloyed with one another in every human drive, Freud claims that "when a drive is repressed, its libidinal elements are converted into symptoms and its aggressive components into a sense of guilt."[84] Elaborating upon his earlier arguments in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud now maintains that civilization *imposes* guilt upon the individual in order to prevent the death instincts from destroying the libidinal bonds upon which civilization depends. In this regard, "guilt is now seen as the instrument which culture uses, no longer against the libido, but against aggressiveness."[85] The superego is thus reinterpreted on the cultural plane; civilization counters the aggressiveness of the individual "by weakening him, disarming him and setting up an internal authority to watch over him, like a garrison in a conquered town."[86] By continuously reproducing the sense of guilt, civilization ensures that individuals will "freely" repress their drives for instinctual gratification, which, in turn, contributes to the "discontents" of civilization.

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[83] *Ibid.*, p. 44.
[84] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[85] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 306.
[86] Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 77.

SECTION 4: SUBLIMATION

As we have seen, repression is a *continuous* process by which certain instinctual impulses are denied discharge through the establishment of anti-cathectic barriers. Since this process deprives the instincts of gratification, Freud emphasizes that repression cannot occur without offering compromise satisfactions, lest it lead to mental illness and widespread "discontent." Accordingly, we turn now to Freud's notion of sublimation, the other principal "vicissitude" of the instincts which shapes human desire and provides satisfaction by diverting a drive towards non-sexual aims and objects. Unlike the other concepts and dualisms I have elucidated thus far, sublimation has not undergone a smooth and identifiable development in Freud's theory—or, perhaps more appropriately, its development has not been as clear as the other concepts. As such, I shall limit myself to a few key characteristics and examples of sublimation in order to lay the foundation for Marcuse's critical application of this term.

In *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*, Freud claims that the sexual instincts can be distinguished from the ego-instincts "by possessing the capacity to act vicariously for one another to a wide extent and by being able to change their objects readily." As such, he argues that the sexual instincts are "capable of functions which are far removed from their original purposive actions—capable, that is, of 'sublimation.'"[87] While the ego's instincts of self-preservation express themselves as needs which must be fulfilled in order to ensure the survival of the organism, the sexual instincts are more "flexible" in that they are able to find various objects of satisfaction. Far from 'damming up' an instinctual

[87] *Idem*, "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," p. 126.

impulse by establishing anti-cathectic barriers and rendering it unconscious, as is the case in repression, sublimation "neutralizes" the sexual energy of an instinctual impulse and 'channels' it "towards higher aims which are no longer sexual."[88] Although this delay in gratification lacks the intensity and pleasure of an immediate discharge, and thus involves a temporary toleration of unpleasure, Freud argues that sublimation is merely a diversion of instinctual strivings in accordance with the reality principle.

As I have argued above, the introduction of narcissism reveals that the ego is the main reservoir of libido. In the case of secondary narcissism, object-cathexes are sent back into the ego and the libidinal energy is converted into "ego-libido." In turn, Freud argues, this narcissistic store of libido can be sent back out to the external world in order to discharge its cathexis toward various objects. *In The Ego and the Id*, Freud explains this conversion of object-libido into ego-libido as a type of sublimation. He argues that this "transformation of object-libido into narcissistic libido which thus takes place obviously implies an abandonment of sexual aims, a desexualization—a kind of sublimation, therefore."[89] In other words, the directly sexual strivings of object-libido are neutralized, freeing up a portion of libido to be diverted along other paths to gratification. Although this process involves the "displacement" of narcissistic libido towards non-sexual aims, Freud claims that this neutral energy, while being desexualized, "would still retain the main purpose of Eros—that of uniting and binding—in so far as it helps towards establishing the unity, or tendency to unity, which is particularly characteristic of

[88] *Idem*, "On Psychoanalysis," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 12, tr. James Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958) p. 209.
[89] *Idem*, *The Ego and the Id*, p. 20.

the ego."[90] Thus, Freud describes the neutralization of object-libido as a sublimation of drive energy which, in turn, provides the store of narcissistic libido required for future sublimations in the form of object-cathexes.

Insofar as sublimation is the work of desexualized ego-libido, the process of sublimating an instinct depends upon the formation of a mature ego. As Hans W. Loewald points out, "in itself, sublimatory transformation of instinct seems indebted to 'civilizing' constraints coming from parents, models, teachers—in short, to educational experiences in the broad sense."[91] In this regard, sublimation presupposes an individual who has undergone certain "basic" maturational developments and, correspondingly, the repression of certain 'immature' modes of gratification.[92] For instance, the "normal" maturation of the individual through the oral, anal, and phallic stages of psychosexual development results in the mature organization of the mind and body under the primacy of "genitality." This process involves both the establishment of a fully developed ego governed by the secondary process and the mature organization of a body capable of "higher" pleasures. This organization of both the psychical and somatic apparatuses enables an individual to divert his or her libido towards non-sexual modes of gratification. Rather than completely repressing certain instinctual impulses, sublimation involves the incorporation of these impulses "within the ego-organization by way of channeling, organizing processes."[93]

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[90] *Ibid.*, p. 35

[91] Loewald, *Sublimation*, p. 7.

[92] As I will argue in the next chapter, this idea that sublimation depends upon certain "basic" forms of repression will help to clarify Marcuse's use of sublimation. Ultimately, Marcuse is calling for the elimination of "surplus-repressive" sublimation, despite the fact that he does not explicitly formulate it in these terms.

[93] Loewald, *Sublimation*, p. 38.

In Freud's essay *Leonardo da Vinci*, which is perhaps his most detailed treatment of sublimation, Freud identifies Leonardo's rejection of directly sexual strivings as a paradigmatic instance of the sublimatory transformation of instinct. On his account, Leonardo was not consumed by the desire for immediate sexual gratification. On the contrary, he "appears to us as a man whose sexual need and activity were extraordinarily low, as if a higher striving had raised him above the common animal need of mankind."[94] Rather than seeking instinctual gratification through overtly sexual activity, Leonardo "transmuted his passion into inquisitiveness" and allowed his tamed sexual energy to "flow off freely like a branch of a stream."[95] Although he underwent various stages of necessary repression in early childhood, "the libido withdraws from the fate of the repression by being sublimated from the outset into curiosity, and by reinforcing the powerful investigation impulse."[96] In this regard, sublimation depends upon the 'reversibility' of certain early childhood repressions which, in turn, liberates ego-libido for non-sexual and socially useful strivings.

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud argues that sublimation enables individuals to overcome the inevitable pain and anxiety experienced under a repressive civilization. He claims that a principal "technique for avoiding suffering makes use of the displacements of the libido that are permitted by our psychical apparatus and lend its functioning so much flexibility." Through this method, the individual attempts to "displace the aims of the drives in such a way that they cannot be frustrated by the

[94] Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci*, tr. A.A. Brill, (New York: Random House, 1947) p. 76.
[95] *Ibid.*, pp. 41-2.
[96] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

external world."[97] In this sense, sublimation allows individuals to seek more "civilized" modes of gratification despite the pressures of the reality principle. Furthermore, Freud seems to equate this vicissitude with the pursuit of "higher" pleasures and activities. "Sublimation of the drives," he writes, "is a particularly striking feature of cultural development, which makes it possible for the higher mental activities—scientific, artistic and ideological—to play such a significant role in civilized life."[98] In contradistinction to non-human animals and our pre-civilized ancestors, human beings have the distinct ability to overcome our basic appetitive desires by channeling our libidinal energy towards "intellectual, scientific and artistic achievements," all of which are indispensable elements of human civilization.[99]

Although Freud does consider sublimation to be a distinctly human ability which distinguishes us from other living beings, he identifies a flaw in the use of sublimation as a means of avoiding suffering and pursuing higher pleasures. While Leonardo was able to sublimate his sexual desire due to special environmental circumstances and favourable predispositions,[100] Freud believes that most individuals have neither the upbringing nor the requisite mental constitution to sublimate their drives. He writes that sublimation "presupposes special aptitudes and gifts that are not exactly common, not common enough to be effective. And even to the few it cannot afford complete protection against suffering; it does not supply them with an armour that is proof against the slings and

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[97] *Idem*, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 21.
[98] *Ibid.*, p. 44.
[99] *Ibid.*, p. 39.
[100] As Joel Whitebook remarks: "Freud argues that, because of the coincidence between an especially affectionate and beautiful young mother, who stimulated his sexual curiosity, on the one hand, and an absent father, who was not present to prohibit it, on the other, Leonardo did not have to repress that curiosity, which is perhaps strongest in 'the most gifted' individuals. Rather, he was able to preserve it for later sublimation into his mature scientific research." *Perversion and Utopia*, p. 227.

arrows of fortune."[101] Accordingly, both the analyst and society itself contribute to individuals' frustration by demanding that they sublimate their drives beyond their capacities.

While this description may sound elitist—since the distinct human ability to sublimate instinctual drives is now attributed to the most gifted individuals—I will argue in the next section that Marcuse clarifies this concept and restores its usefulness through his historicization of Freud's notion of repression. According to Marcuse, it is primarily the unnecessary repressions demanded by a "surplus-repressive" civilization that stifle individuals' ability to channel their instinctual energy in self-affirming ways. By suggesting the possibility of eliminating these "surplus" modes of repression, Marcuse believes that individuals will be able to express themselves more freely in a fundamentally transformed society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the concluding chapter of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud makes it clear that his argument is intended neither as an indictment nor as a defence of civilization.[102] Rather, he claims that he is merely attempting to describe the "essence" of civilization and the inevitable renunciations and delays in instinctual gratification that it demands of its citizens. Considering the brute fact of "Ananke"—understood here in terms of the scarcity of material resources and the necessity of shared work[103]—Freud believes that

[101] Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 21.
[102] *Ibid.*, p. 105.
[103] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

civilized individuals *must* forego their instinctual desires and submit to the demands of the reality principle. At best, those with favourable mental capacities and the proper upbringing will be able to sublimate their libidinal impulses into the socially acceptable channels left open to them. Considering the inevitability of repressive civilization, then, Freud responds to both the "well-behaved and pious believers" who surrender to the necessity of sexual repression *and* to the "wildest revolutionaries" who wish to overcome it, that he "cannot bring them any consolation."[104]

The remainder of this essay will explore the theoretical and historical possibilities of envisaging a "non-repressive" civilization by tracing the development of Marcuse's critical theory of sexuality. Since Marcuse's critique of sexual repression in *Eros and Civilization* oscillates between penetrating explications of psychoanalytic theory and his own critical "extrapolation" of Freud's work, I can now consider Marcuse's unique appropriation of psychoanalysis on its own terms. The point of this chapter has been to elucidate the Freudian *Bildungsmächte* necessary to complete this task.

[104] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

CHAPTER 2

MARCUSE'S CRITICAL APPROPRIATION OF FREUD: *EROS AND CIVILIZATION*

According to Marcuse, "[t]he notion that a non-repressive civilization is impossible is a cornerstone of Freudian theory."[105] Indeed, Freud considers the reality principle to be a "transhistorical" obstacle to the free gratification of human drives.[106] In this regard, Marcuse believes that Freud's theory seems to preclude the possibility of envisaging a society that does not demand painful delays in gratification and the subjugation of the individual's instinctual impulses to the reality principle. Yet Marcuse argues that Freud comes to this conclusion by considering a specific historical form of the reality principle to be the reality principle as such. Insofar as he does this, Freud fails to recognize the extent to which the reality principle, as well as the repressions it demands, can be consciously redirected through human agency.

Throughout *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse offers several arguments for the theoretical and historical possibility of a "non-repressive civilization." To begin with, Marcuse claims that "Freud's own theory provides reasons for rejecting his identification of civilization with repression."[107] On the one hand, Freud believes that there is an "eternal" antagonism between instinctual gratification and the exigencies of reality, between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. However, on Marcuse's account, Freud also reveals the fact that civilization depends upon the continuous reproduction of

[105] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 17.
[106] Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia*, p. 26.
[107] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 4.

specific forms of repression. In the face of a society that could provide for the needs of its citizens and allow a greater degree of gratification, civilization demands the sustained repression of individuals' instinctual demands.

This reveals to Marcuse that the reality principle, far from being eternal and unchanging, is constantly being recreated in the interest of dominating individuals and controlling the scope of their desires. Insofar as Freud exposes the fact that the "highest values and achievements of culture" are perpetuated through historically specific modes of repression, then, Marcuse claims that "he denies the equation of reason with repression on which the ideology of culture is built."[108]

As we recall from the previous chapter, Freud also argues that the demands of the pleasure principle retain their strength in the unconscious and can often penetrate into consciousness despite the pressures of the reality principle.[109] Considering these remarks, Marcuse maintains that the pleasure principle is never completely repressed, but "continues to exist in civilization" in the form of phantasies and dreams.[110] Paraphrasing Freud, he writes that "one mode of thought-activity is 'split off' from the new organization of the mental apparatus and remains free from the rule of the reality principle: *phantasy* is 'protected from cultural alterations' and stays committed to the pleasure principle."[111] As such, Freud's own theory reveals that phantasy resists being "educated" by the reality principle and that the repression of instinctual demands can be

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[108] *Ibid.*, p. 17.
[109] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, p. 121.
[110] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 15.
[111] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

reversed. It is on the basis of this "hidden trend in psychoanalysis" that Marcuse finds the theoretical possibility of envisaging a "non-repressive civilization."

In this chapter, I will attempt to 'come to terms' with Marcuse's historical extrapolation of Freud by critically explicating his central concepts and considering a few key objections to his position. In Section 1, I will focus on Marcuse's notions of "surplus-repression" and the "performance principle," which he employs in order to historicize Freud's concepts of repression and the reality principle, respectively. After explicating these terms, I will explain why Marcuse believes that sublimation perpetuates surplus-repression under advanced industrial society.

In Section 2, I shall begin by briefly distilling Marcuse's arguments concerning phantasy, imagination, and the aesthetic dimension. Although my discussion of these ideas will be selective, my goal is to explain how he employs Freud's notions of phantasy and imagination in order to envisage a new relationship between sensuousness and reason, pleasure and reality. On this basis, I will elucidate his arguments regarding "non-repressive sublimation" as a method by which individuals may channel their instinctual desires in self-affirming ways under a fundamentally improved reality principle.

Lastly, Section 3 will focus on Marcuse's claim that the pursuit of instinctual liberation necessarily involves a struggle against "time." After briefly responding to Whitebook's arguments against Marcuse's interpretation of "primary narcissism," I will attempt to answer Whitebook's question as to what he means when he advocates the rejection of time. In this regard, I will offer two possible meanings of Marcuse's claim that a qualitatively better reality principle necessitates a struggle against time and death.

SECTION 1: SURPLUS REPRESSION AND THE PERFORMANCE PRINCIPLE

In the "Preface" to *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse claims that he "employs psychological categories because they have become political categories."[112] Insofar as individuals are constituted and, in the present context, dominated by the society in which they grow and develop, he believes that psychological processes are influenced by social and political factors. Accordingly, Marcuse argues that "the Freudian terms, which do not adequately differentiate between the biological *and* the socio-historical vicissitudes of the instincts, must be paired with corresponding terms denoting the specific socio-historical component."[113] He thus begins his discussion by extrapolating several of Freud's basic psychoanalytic concepts in a way that reflects the societal influence upon the individual's psychical processes.

Marcuse argues that the instincts undergo certain modifications, repressions, and deflections as a result of the external factors impressed upon them. As we recall, he employs the Freudian notion of "instinct" to refer to the "primary drives" of the individual, which are "subject to *historical* modification; they find mental as well as somatic representation."[114] Based on this definition, it is clear that Marcuse is relying upon Freud's characterization of instinct in "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," in which he claims that the instinct is the "psychical representative" of the bodily "source" of impulses within the individual. Whereas the "aim" of an instinct is in every instance the satisfaction of that impulse, the "object" of the instinct—either within or outside the

[112] *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.
[113] *Ibid.*, p. 35.
[114] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

body—is the "most variable" aspect of the instinct and is subject to change.[115] On Marcuse's account, then, "the reality which shapes the instincts as well as their needs and satisfaction is a socio-historical world."[116] Under advanced industrial civilization, he believes that the instincts are unnecessarily repressed, modified, and deflected towards certain objects in the interests of dominating the individual.

For his purposes, Marcuse defines repression "in the non-technical sense to designate both conscious and unconscious, external and internal processes of restraint, constraint, and suppression."[117] Recalling my explication of repression in the previous chapter, Freud himself seems to provide some justification for Marcuse's broad definition of repression. To begin with, Freud emphasizes the fact that the ego contains both conscious and unconscious elements and that it carries out repressions as a result of both the "internal" demands of the superego and the "external" obstacles in the outside world. Furthermore, Marcuse's description of repression as "restraint, constraint, and suppression," mirrors Freud's often loose descriptions of instinctual renunciation in his later work. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, for instance, Freud claims that civilization "presupposes the non-satisfaction of powerful drives—by suppression, repression or some other means."[118] Thus, Freud's characterization of repression seems to lend itself to Marcuse's revised definition of this term.

On the basis of his more comprehensive definition of repression, Marcuse historicizes this concept further by distinguishing between "basic repression" and

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[115] Freud, "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," p. 122.
[116] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p.12.
[117] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[118] Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 44.

"surplus-repression." Whereas basic repression denotes "the 'modifications' of the instincts necessary for the perpetuation of the human race in civilization," surplus-repression refers to the modes of restraint necessitated by a specific society bent on the domination of human beings and the natural environment.[119] By drawing this initial conceptual distinction, Marcuse is able to differentiate between those modes of repression which are indispensable to the survival of human life and those which unnecessarily deprive individuals of instinctual gratification and material needs.

As Morton Schoolman correctly observes, the distinction between "basic and surplus-repression" is modeled on Marx's distinction between "socially necessary and surplus-labour."[120] To put it briefly, Marx argues that socially necessary labour produces "value," which takes the form of "exchange-value" and "use-value." While the exchange-value of a product refers to "its trading power or ability to relate to other products on the basis of embodied labor-time,"[121] use-value refers to the power of that product to satisfy a human need.[122] When workers produce value over and above what is required to sustain both themselves and the means of production, they are said to produce "surplus-value," which takes the form of profit. However, rather than being returned to the workers on the basis of how much surplus-value they create, this profit is hoarded by the owners of the means of production. Accordingly, Marx refers to the labour required to produce surplus-value as "surplus-labour," which denotes the unpaid labour required to produce additional value for the capitalist alone.

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[119] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 35.
[120] Morton Schoolman, *The Imaginary Witness: The Critical Theory of Herbert Marcuse* (London: The Free Press, 1980) p. 94.
[121] Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) p. 177.
[122] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

On the basis of this brief explication of Marx, it is clear that the notion of "surplus-repression" is inspired by Marx's notion of "surplus-labour." Just as "surplus-labour" is the labour over and above what is required for the workers to sustain themselves, "surplus-repression" involves the socially demanded renunciation of instinctual impulses beyond what is required for the individuals' survival. In both cases, individuals are forced to forego their life-satisfaction unnecessarily and without receiving any additional benefit. Furthermore, "basic repression" is inspired by Marx's notion of "socially necessary labour." Just as "socially necessary labour" refers to the work required to sustain the individual and society itself, "basic repression" refers to the instinctual renunciations necessary to ensure the individual's survival and the survival of society as a whole.

The notion of "basic repression" reveals the extent of Marcuse's agreement with Freud on the issue of instinctual renunciation. Insofar as civilization depends upon the subordination of many instinctual desires to the exigencies of socially necessary labour, a certain degree of "basic" repression will always be required. The crucial issue, however, is whether or not the repression of an instinctual impulse deprives individuals of satisfactions that civilization could grant without compromising its basic social organization or the overall capabilities of individuals. On this point, Marcuse provides the example of a young child who "feels the 'need' to cross the street any time at its will." In this situation, he argues that the "repression of this 'need' is not repressive of human potentialities."[123] In other words, the demand that the child renounce his or her immediate desire to cross the street is not employed in the interest of dominating him or her, but to

[123] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 224.

equip this immature child with the means to survive in the face of external demands. In this regard, Marcuse claims that basic repression is tantamount to the "rational exercise of authority."[124]

Insofar as Marcuse concedes to Freud's view that civilization depends upon the inhibition of certain drives, he also admits the existence of a "basic" reality principle. As Joel Whitebook explains, Marcuse agrees that there is "a transhistorical dimension of the human condition—a basic reality principle, as it were—but construes it in such a way as to minimize its ultimate importance."[125] In other words, he believes that there will always be a "basic" reality principle, but he claims that it is not the most significant cause of the unnecessary renunciation of desire enforced by civilization. While the basic reality principle includes "the renunciation, however minimal, that will always be necessary to negotiate the metabolism between humanity and external nature,"[126] Marcuse argues that the demands of the current reality principle extend beyond this basic minimum and involve the thoroughgoing domination of all aspects of human life. He maintains that "the specific historical institutions of the reality principle and the specific interests of domination introduce *additional* controls over and above those indispensable for civilized human association."[127] These modes of "surplus-repression" fundamentally alter the character of the reality principle itself.

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[124] Marcuse writes that the rational exercise of authority, "which is inherent in any societal division of labor, is derived from knowledge and confined to the administration of functions and arrangements necessary for the advancement of the whole. In contrast, domination is exercised by a particular group or individual in order to sustain and enhance itself in a privileged position." *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[125] Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia*, 26.
[126] *Ibid.*, p. 26.
[127] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 37.

Marcuse labels the current historical form of the reality principle the "performance principle" and argues that "under its rule society is stratified according to the competitive economic performances of its members."[128] Under the capitalist mode of production, he argues, individuals are reduced to the "functions" they perform for an apparatus that they do not control. Considering the fact that individuals spend the majority of their waking lives labouring for a system that does not represent their interests, their work is typically unsatisfying, toilsome, and alienating.[129] As Theodor Adorno so forcefully remarks in *History and Freedom*, which is perfectly appropriate here, even those who have reached the greatest "heights" of the work world "cannot enjoy their positions because even these have been whittled away to the point where they are merely functions of their own function."[130] Under the performance principle, then, individuals come to internalize the demands of the capitalist labour system and accept the "necessity" of unpleasurable labour.

While the technological and scientific achievements of advanced industrial civilization have established the material preconditions for reducing the necessity of toilsome labour, Marcuse claims that this society rationalizes the necessity of such labour by appealing to "scarcity." On this view, the world is too poor in material and social resources to provide for all the needs and capabilities of its citizens. Accordingly, individuals *must* perform toilsome, alienated labour in order to overcome the "natural"

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[128] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[129] On Marx's view, alienation is a state in which the worker confronts his or her own labour, product of labour, fellow workers, and "species-being" as hostile forces operating over and against the individual. Rather than being affirmed in his or her work and social relations, the worker becomes "estranged" from virtually all aspects of his or her life-activity. See Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, tr. Martin Milligan, ed. Dirk J. Struik, (New York: International Publishers, 1964) pp. 106-119.

[130] Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*, tr. Rodney Livingstone, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006) p. 6.

scarcity of resources. In response, Marcuse claims that the material and social inequalities in the advanced societies are "no longer due chiefly to the poverty of human and natural resources but to the manner in which they are distributed and utilized."[131] Indeed, in the face of a society that could qualitatively improve human life on the basis of its existing technological capabilities, the repressive *distribution* of scarcity is made to appear natural and unavoidable. Inasmuch as this "natural" condition has been used to rationalize the surplus-repressive organization of human life, Marcuse claims that "it has become irrational."[132]

In order to ensure that individuals devote the majority of their waking lives to performing their pre-established, alienated functions, Marcuse argues that the surplus-repressive "distribution of time" is also a fundamental element of the performance principle: "[m]an exists only *part*-time, during the working days, as an instrument of alienated performance; the rest of the time he is free for himself."[133] Despite the fact that this individual's free time could potentially be used for the attainment of pleasure, Marcuse believes that the individual is prevented from achieving lasting instinctual gratification by virtue of the sheer length of the working day itself. He claims that the "tiresome and mechanical routine" of individuals' everyday, unfulfilling performances "require that leisure be a passive relaxation and a re-creation of energy for work."[134] If repressed individuals are to derive any pleasure outside of work, these "passive" leisure

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[131] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 92.
[132] *Ibid.*, p. 92.
[133] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[134] *Ibid.*, p. 47-8.

activities are intended to temporarily rejuvenate the workers in order to prepare them for toilsome labour.

Marcuse also emphasizes the extent to which the individual's pleasures and satisfactions are efficiently coordinated with the dictates of the performance principle. Already in the 1950s, Marcuse recognizes the ubiquity of the culture industry: "Not until the late stage of industrial civilization...has the technique of mass manipulation developed an entertainment industry which directly controls leisure time."[135] Accordingly, individuals are indoctrinated to associate pleasure and gratification with the goods and services provided by the establishment. Every moment of the individual's life is to be permeated not only with the beliefs and values of the performance principle, but also with its comforts, commodities, and prescribed aspirations.[136] As Douglas Kellner explains, "if individuals are allowed to experience too much pleasure outside work, or have too much time to question their alienated existence, they might perhaps revolt and cause trouble, or drop out of the system."[137]

Marcuse argues against this temporal reduction of the individual's potential for pleasure by recalling Freud's argument concerning the "timelessness" of the id. As I argued in the last chapter, Freud maintains that the id is "timeless" in the sense that its attempt to satisfy instinctual impulses does not occur in any specific temporal sequence and that temporal constraints do not affect its instinctual demands.[138] At this point, Marcuse adds that "the pleasure principle which governs the id is 'timeless' also in the

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[135] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[136] We are already beginning to see hints of Marcuse's later distinction between true and false needs, which will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter.
[137] Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) p. 170.
[138] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p. 22.

sense that it militates against the temporal dismemberment of pleasure, against its distribution in small separated doses."[139] Under the performance principle, he argues, individuals are trained to forget this demand for timeless gratification as an end in itself. Instead, they are taught to treat pleasure as a mere means to the end of being better prepared for labour.

In addition to the "temporal dismemberment of pleasure," Marcuse also discusses the "spatial" reduction of pleasure through his extrapolation of Freud's notion of "genital primacy." As I discussed briefly in the last chapter, Freud believes that the normal maturation of the individual involves the movement through the oral, anal, and phallic stages before culminating in the centralization of pleasure to the genitals. This is a biological process which contains both psychic as well as somatic aspects: psychically, it involves the maturation of the mental apparatus from the primary process to the secondary process; somatically, it involves biological processes that eventually situate pleasure in the genitals, which would occur in all conceivable civilizations.

Marcuse recognizes this "biological" necessity of the genital orientation of pleasure. He claims that the "'containment' of the partial sexual impulses, the progress to genitality belong to this basic layer of repression which makes possible intensified pleasure," and, therefore, that "the maturation of the organism involves the normal and natural maturation of pleasure."[140] This maturational process enables the individual to master the "partial" sexual impulses, which initially pursue gratification in radically individualistic ways, by "fusing" them under the genital function. Thus, both Freud and

[139] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization,* p. 47.
[140] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Marcuse acknowledge that the maturation of the organism to genital primacy is a necessary process which results in the establishment of a mature mind and body.

Yet Marcuse goes on to claim that throughout the history of civilization, "the normal progress to genitality has been organized in such a way that the partial impulses and their 'zones' were all but desexualized in order to conform to the requirements of a specific social organization of the human existence."[141] In this regard, Marcuse reveals the surplus-repressive aspects of the centralization of pleasure to the genitals. Insofar as the "basic" maturational progression to genitality is *socially* restricted to the "procreative function"—which contains hetero-normative implications—and insofar as *society* "taboos as perversions" virtually all manifestations of the sexual instincts that do not prepare for genital intercourse, he believes that this process is surplus-repressive.

Considering his view that the basic progression to genitality is itself a "natural" process, Marcuse maintains that the surplus-repressive "*organization of sexuality*" introduces additional restrictions to this process over and above what is required for the development of a mature individual. The socially imposed demand that sexual activity must occur within the confines of monogamous, heterosexual relationships and the requirement that any pleasure derived from this activity must be an inconsequential result of the primary task of reproduction, are examples of the surplus-repressive organization of sexual pleasure. According to Marcuse, such modes of surplus-repression "are added to the basic (phylogenetic) restrictions of the instincts which mark the development of man from the human animal to the *animal sapiens*."[142] The societal constraints imposed

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[141] *Ibid.*, p. 38.
[142] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

upon the libido are necessitated by the performance principle in order to channel individuals' libidinal energy into "socially useful performances."[143] In this regard, Marcuse argues that surplus-repression "achieves the socially necessary desexualization of the body: the libido becomes concentrated in one part of the body, leaving most of the rest free for use as the instrument of labor."[144]

In response to this discussion of "genital supremacy," Morton Schoolman dismisses Marcuse's argument by offering a "corrected" interpretation of Freudian theory.[145] Although he levels several attacks against Marcuse's interpretation and appropriation of genitality, his principal argument is that Marcuse fails to appreciate the strictly biological nature of Freud's argument. While he agrees that the centralization of pleasure to the genitals "may have been enforced by the repressive mechanisms of the performance principle" at the phylogenetic level, he claims that this historical process eventually becomes "sedimented as biology."[146] If this is the case, then the maturation of the mind and body to genitality is no longer sustained through repression, but becomes "human nature" proper.

On these grounds, Schoolman argues that Marcuse takes his historicization of Freud too far. He claims that by "identifying the genital organization of the instincts with repression, Marcuse means to imply that the maturation process that Freud believed to be biological and irrevocable is actually social and potentially subject to conscious redirection and control."[147] In stating this, Schoolman implies that Marcuse has a problem

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[143] *Ibid.*, p. 199.
[144] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[145] Schoolman, *The Imaginary Witness*, p. 108.
[146] *Ibid.*, p. 99.
[147] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

with the development to genitality *as such* and, furthermore, that he is calling for the complete reversal of genitality. To conclude this point, Schoolman argues that it is "not possible to reverse the genital instinctual maturation and it makes little sense to equate this event with a process of alienation supposedly open to social intervention."[148]

Although Schoolman is correct that the basic maturation of pleasure to the genitals cannot be reversed, he falsely accuses Marcuse of believing that it can. The fundamental error in Schoolman's assessment lies in his failure to appreciate the distinction between basic and surplus repression, which he does not mention in his critique of Marcuse's discussion of genital primacy. Far from arguing that the "basic" repressive modification of the instincts can or should be reversed, Marcuse is claiming that the societal *organization* of this basic maturational process introduces unnecessary repressions into the individual's psychic and somatic development.[149]

When Schoolman does mention surplus-repression—after he has "corrected" Marcuse's interpretation of Freud—his misinterpretation of Marcuse comes into full view. He claims that, according to Marcuse, "genital 'repression,' the historical catastrophe in each life that alters human nature to perform a lifetime of hard labor, is no longer socially necessary and now is to be judged as surplus-repression."[150] Again, at no point does Marcuse suggest that the basic maturation of pleasure to the genitals *as such* is

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[148] *Ibid.*, p. 101.
[149] Freud himself seems to corroborate Marcuse's view of unnecessary repression in *Civilization and Its Discontents*: Civilization imposes limits to sexual gratification. "Taboo, law and custom create further restrictions, affecting both men and women. Not all civilizations go to the same lengths; and the economic structure of society influences the degree of sexual freedom that remains. We already know that in this respect civilization follows the dictates of economic necessity, because it deprives sexuality of much of the mental energy that it consumes. Civilization thus behaves towards sexuality like a tribe or a section of the population that has subjected another and started exploiting it." *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 52.
[150] Schoolman, *The Imaginary Witness*, p. 108.

surplus-repressive. Rather, he believes that the "fusion" of the partial impulses becomes surplus-repressive when their manifestations are completely tabooed by society. As Gad Horowitz puts it: "Marcuse argues that the *total* renunciation of the desire for gratification in non-genital zones of the body, except as 'forepleasure,' a prelude to penis-in-vagina intercourse...is a result of surplus repression."[151]

According to Whitebook, Marcuse appears to be implying that the individual undergoes "something like surplus genitalization," which is "superimposed on the maturational process" by the division of labour and the demands of the patriarchal family. However, Whitebook also claims that the biological nature of this process "tends to drop out of his historicizing analysis, and the weight of his argument shifts almost completely to the socially imposed stratum of repression."[152] Accordingly, Marcuse argues that the "socially necessary desexualization" of the body is a result of the hierarchical division of labour and that the fusion of the partial instincts occurs in order to prepare the individual for alienated labour. Nevertheless, Marcuse allows the basic repressive aspects of genital primacy to "drop out" of his analysis because he has already made it clear that he is only arguing against the surplus-repressive *organization* of sexual pleasure. Although Marcuse is not always clear as to whether he is referring to basic repression or surplus-repression—primarily because he believes they have been "inextricably intertwined" throughout the history of civilization—he does make it clear that he only objects to the surplus-repressive organization of human life and that basic repression is unavoidable.[153]

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[151] Gad Horowitz, *Repression: Basic and Surplus Repression in Psychoanalytic Theory: Freud, Reich, and Marcuse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977) p. 66.
[152] Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia*, p. 31.
[153] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p.38.

As I mentioned, the surplus-repressions imposed on the basic maturation to genitality also involve the "socially necessary desexualization" of the body.[154] Like every other object of Marcuse's critical scrutiny, his sustained indictment of desexualization must also be understood in light of his distinction between basic and surplus-repression. While desexualization may take on basic repressive or non-repressive forms, Marcuse argues that *socially necessary* desexualization, which in this context means the desexualization necessitated by a society governed by the performance principle, is surplus-repressive. With this clarification in mind, we can begin to understand why Marcuse believes that even sublimation can perpetuate surplus-repression under the performance principle.

To begin, Marcuse argues that insofar as sublimation involves the socially necessary desexualization of the sexual instincts, it also prevents Eros from controlling the death instincts. He claims that "desexualization, by weakening Eros, unbinds the destructive impulses. Civilization is thus threatened by an instinctual de-fusion, in which the death instinct strives to gain ascendancy over the life instincts.[155] Yet, as I have argued, Marcuse is not arguing against desexualization as such. Rather, he believes that desexualization must be understood within the framework of the society in which it is demanded. Under the performance principle, socially necessary desexualization results in the *total* subjugation of the partial instincts to genitality, and of genitality to the procreative function. Accordingly, sublimation rooted in this unnecessary desexualization

[154] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[155] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

of Eros prevents the individual's erotic energy from binding the destructive instincts and thus perpetuates surplus-repression.[156]

Furthermore, considering Marcuse's argument that the performance principle is characterized by surplus-repression, he believes that most forms of sublimation under late capitalism are rooted in the unnecessary repression of the pleasure principle and the instinctual drives which seek to satisfy it. He argues that the "repressive 'modification' of the pleasure principle precedes the actual sublimation, and the latter carries the repressive elements over into the socially useful activities."[157] In this sense, although sublimation and repression are two very distinct processes, Marcuse believes that sublimation serves to perpetuate surplus-repression insofar as it is carried out by an unnecessarily repressed individual in a fundamentally unfree society. As Horowitz nicely concludes, sublimation "is surplus-repressive insofar as it is based on renunciation of desires which need not be renounced for the sake of ego development or civilization per se."[158]

SECTION 2: FROM SEXUALITY TO EROS

On the basis of his extrapolation of Freud's theory, Marcuse attempts to reveal the historical and theoretical possibilities of establishing a fundamentally improved relationship between pleasure and reality, sensuousness and reason. By revealing both the socio-historical content of the contemporary reality principle and the specific modes of

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[156] Indeed, as we shall see at the end of this section, Marcuse believes that desexualization under non-repressive conditions is the key to envisaging non-repressive modes of sublimation.
[157] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 206.
[158] Horowitz, *Repression*, p. 52.

surplus-repression that characterize advanced industrial civilization, he attempts to provide support for the possibility of a civilization without unnecessary repression. Although every society will inevitably require a certain degree of "basic" instinctual renunciation, Marcuse argues that the technological and scientific achievements of late capitalism could provide for the increased satisfaction of human needs while substantially reducing the need for unnecessary instinctual restraint. As he remarks: "the very achievements of repressive civilization seem to create the preconditions for the gradual abolition of repression."[159]

Recalling his earlier arguments concerning the power of phantasy to uphold the tabooed aspirations of the pleasure principle, Marcuse now attempts to show how this mental faculty can be effective in pointing to the necessity of a non-repressive reality principle. As we have seen, Freud argues that the conversion of the pleasure ego into the reality ego "splits" the mental apparatus into reality-testing and phantasy. On this basis, Freud draws a distinction between "the sexual instincts and phantasy" and "the ego instincts and the activities of consciousness."[160] By virtue of this separation, Marcuse argues that while the ego interprets, manipulates, and transforms reality, phantasy is relegated to the unconscious and thus becomes unrealistic and powerless.

At this point, Marcuse reveals that phantasy can become a significant source of social change through "the incorporation of phantasy into artistic (and even normal) consciousness."[161] He argues that phantasy can manifest itself consciously through the work of "imagination" while retaining its close affinity with the sexual instincts. In this

[159] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 5.
[160] *Ibid.*, p. 141.
[161] *Ibid.*

respect, "phantasy has a truth value of its own, which corresponds to an experience of its own – namely, the surmounting of the antagonistic human reality."[162] This truth lies in its memory of the original unity between the two divisions of the mind—the integral connection between phantasy and the reality-testing ego before their differentiation. Insofar as it is able to retain this memory and manifest itself in conscious forms through the work of imagination in art, phantasy points to the possibility of a fundamentally new reality principle that unifies integral instinctual gratification with the exigencies of the external world.

Based on the power of the imagination to consciously express the demands of the forgotten pleasure principle, Marcuse attempts to identify the "'culture-heroes' who have persisted in imagination," and who might point beyond the existing reality principle. First, he identifies Prometheus as the culture-hero of the performance principle. He claims that Prometheus "symbolizes productiveness, the unceasing effort to master life; but, in his productivity, blessing and curse, progress and toil are inextricably intertwined."[163] Considering the fact that surplus-repression and alienated labour grow stronger the more unnecessary they become, Prometheus symbolizes this same fateful dialectic of contemporary civilization.

As such, Marcuse looks for the polemical counter-images of this repressive reality principle, which he finds in Orpheus and Narcissus. On the one hand, Orpheus pacifies the animals and trees in the forest through song and, in doing so, unites these living beings through the experience of joy.[164] He thus rejects the repressive organization of

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[162] *Ibid.*, p. 143.
[163] *Ibid.*, p. 161.
[164] *Ibid.*, p. 166.

human life in favour of music and satisfaction. However, the fact that Orpheus is "nothing but a harp player" does not mean that he is incapable of performing work. Rather, as Horowitz explains, "it means that the central meaning and purpose of his life is gratification."[165]

On the other hand, Narcissus becomes captivated by his own image in the stream "in which all forms pass and flee," the river of change and becoming.[166] He attempts to arrest the flow of time and change in order to capture his own beauty, which Marcuse interprets as the rejection of the repressive organization of time. In this regard, Narcissus symbolizes sleep and death, the triumph of the "static" over the "dynamic."[167] Yet this does not suggest that Narcissus abandons Eros in favour of the death instincts; he "lives by an Eros of his own," which establishes an indissoluble bond between himself and the external world.[168]

Both Orpheus and Narcissus represent the "Great Refusal" of the established reality principle: "theirs is the image of joy and fulfillment; the voice which does not command but sings; the gesture which offers and receives; the deed which is peace and ends the labor of conquest; the liberation from time which unites man with god, man with nature."[169] Furthermore, both protest against the repressive organization of pleasure, not by abandoning erotic strivings, but by attempting to achieve a "fuller Eros."[170] This fuller Eros captures dimensions of erotic gratification that have been repressed under the performance principle. Through these images, then, gratification is transformed from a

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[165] Horowitz, *Repression*, p. 180.
[166] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 163.
[167] *Ibid.*, p. 164.
[168] *Ibid.*, p. 167.
[169] *Ibid.*, p. 162.
[170] *Ibid.*, p. 171.

"part-time" leisure activity operating within the confines of surplus-genitality, to integral instinctual fulfillment in an environment of freedom and unity.

On the basis of these two images, Marcuse finds new significance in Freud's notion of primary narcissism. Returning to the first chapter of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, he argues that primary narcissism denotes not only the denial of reality and the infantile auto-eroticism that must be overcome in order to establish a mature ego, but also as a deeper connectedness with the outside world. He reveals the "striking paradox that narcissism, usually understood as egotistic withdrawal from reality, here is connected with oneness with the universe."[171] Although Freud is critical of this "oceanic feeling,"[172] Marcuse finds in primary narcissism and the oceanic feeling the possibility of a new existential relation to reality. He argues that "beyond all immature autoeroticism, narcissism denotes a fundamental relatedness to reality which may generate a comprehensive existential order."[173] Thus, primary narcissism could be the key to establishing a deeper affinity between individuals and the natural and social environment.

After identifying Orpheus and Narcissus as the images of another reality principle, Marcuse returns to the critical role of imagination by recapturing the traditional function of the "aesthetic dimension." To begin, he attempts to invalidate the notion that the aesthetic dimension, like the imagination, refers exclusively to an unrealistic realm that cannot be "lived" in reality. Under the rule of a repressive reality principle, reason comes to prevail over the demands of the senses and the latter are deprived of their

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[171] *Ibid.*, p. 169.
[172] "I can imagine that the oceanic feeling subsequently became connected with religion. Being at one with the universe, which is the intellectual content associated with this feeling, strikes us as an initial attempt at religious consolation, as another way of denying the danger that the ego perceives as a threat from the outside world." Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, p. 11-12.
[173] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 169.

critical function.[174] This radical disarticulation of the "aesthetic" from concrete social life is the result of a "cultural repression" of those "contents and truths that are inimical to the performance principle."[175]

In order to bridge this gap between the "aesthetic" and reality, Marcuse turns to the aesthetic theories of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller. For Kant and Schiller, the "aesthetic aims at a realm which preserves the truth of the senses and reconciles, in the reality of freedom, the 'lower' and the 'higher' faculties of man, sensuousness and intellect, pleasure and reason."[176] On Kant's view, "judgement" mediates between the faculties of sense and knowledge, nature and freedom.[177] The "aesthetic dimension" is the realm in which these two faculties meet and achieve reconciliation through the "imagination."

Schiller, proceeding from Kant, also seeks to unite the demands of the senses and the intellect. He argues that a conflict arises between the "play impulse" and the "form impulse." Whereas the "play impulse" is the demand for sensuous gratification from the external world, the "form impulse" refers to the individual's rational faculty, which establishes scientific and moral laws. Marcuse claims that Schiller's *Aesthetic Education* "aims at basing morality on a sensuous ground; the laws of reason must be reconciled with the interest of the senses."[178] Through this reconciliation, toilsome labour is transformed into "play," the gratification of the individual's sensuous needs, while

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[174] Under the performance principle, "instead of reconciling both impulses by making sensuousness rational and reason sensuous, civilization has subjugated sensuousness to reason in such a manner that the former, if it reasserts itself, does so in destructive and 'savage' forms while the tyranny of reason impoverishes and barbarizes sensuousness." *Ibid.*, p. 186-7.
[175] *Ibid.*, p. 172.
[176] *Ibid.*, p. 172-3.
[177] *Ibid.*, p. 173, 179.
[178] *Ibid.*, p. 190-191.

repressive productivity becomes the free "display" of human faculties.[179] Thus, both Kant and Schiller point to the reconciliation of reason and sensuousness, nature and freedom.

In order to open the horizon for a new reality principle on the basis of this theoretical reconciliation of sensuousness and reason, Marcuse turns to the concrete changes required to create a qualitatively improved civilization. To begin, he argues that the specific social and political institutions of the performance principle must be overcome. As John David Ober puts it, "men living under different social, political, and economic conditions might in turn create freer institutions under which the need for repression would greatly diminish."[180] This depends, first of all, on the reduction of socially necessary labour time to a basic minimum. Since the sheer length of the working day imposes unnecessary restrictions on pleasure, the shortening of the working day is "the first prerequisite of freedom."[181]

Under a new reality principle, Marcuse claims that the standard of living as it is typically conceived would decrease, while the quality of life would improve. Although this society would be able to provide for human needs on an ever-expanding scale, he claims that "many would have to give up manipulated comforts if all were to live a human life."[182] It would thus require a new standard of living that measures social progress and freedom on human need-satisfaction and capability development, as well as on the absence of extraneous modes of libidinal renunciation. Furthermore, this society would require the minimization of waste and over-consumption. Beyond the rule of the

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[179] *Ibid.*, p. 193.
[180] John David Ober, "On Sexuality and Politics in the Work of Herbert Marcuse," *Critical Interruptions: New Left Perspectives on Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Paul Breines, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) p. 113.
[181] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 152.
[182] *Ibid.*, p. 151.

performance principle, Marcuse claims that "the level of living would be measured by other criteria: the universal gratification of the basic human needs, and the freedom from guilt and fear."[183]

This quantitative reduction of labour time, wasteful consumption, and other modes of surplus-repression would lead to a "resexualization" of the body. Again, resexualization here must be understood as the reversal of those surplus-repressive modes of desexualization that confine sexual pleasure to the genitals and reduce sexual activity to the heterosexual, procreative function. "The re-erotization of the body," Horowitz explains, "means a heightened capacity for genital as well as non-genital pleasure, because surplus repression...cripples all the erotogenic zones, including the genitals."[184] Indeed, as we recall, Marcuse accepts the inevitability of the "basic" repressive organization of the body and mind under the genital function, while dismissing only its surplus-repressive aspects.

Such a reversal of surplus-repression would reactivate "polymorphous perversity" in the sense that the surplus-repressive organization of sexuality would be overcome. "This regression," Marcuse writes, "would be psychical as well as social: it would reactivate early stages of the libido which were surpassed in the development of the reality ego, and it would dissolve the institutions of society in which the reality ego exists."[185] Yet this process would not involve a complete regression to infantile forms of psychic and somatic organization. During these early stages, the child is not yet able to differentiate between self and other and, therefore, cannot take the needs and desires of

[183] *Ibid.*, p. 153.
[184] Horowitz, *Repression*, p. 77.
[185] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 198.

others into account. Furthermore, in this phase the sexual instincts strive for gratification in individualistic ways and are not yet fully organized under the genital function. As such, Marcuse wishes to recapture the experience of "polymorphous" modes of gratification in all "zones" of the body, while retaining the mature organization of the mental and somatic apparatuses.

In order to clarify Marcuse's position, I propose that we adopt Horowitz's interpretation of "polymorphous perversity" as "polymorphous genitality." On Horowitz's account, this concept refers to "genitality that combined psychically genital object relations with freedom of expression for the pregenital component instincts within a genital organization of libido."[186] In this way, we can clarify the fact that Marcuse wishes to preserve the "basic" repressive elements of the genital organization—the development of a mature mind and body for the reception of greater pleasures—while eliminating the surplus-repressive "organization" of genitality under the performance principle. Rather than arguing for the complete abolition of the genital function and its ability to "fuse" the sexual instincts, Marcuse believes that the "partial" sexual impulses must be "fused" without precluding their manifestations entirely.

This reactivation of "polymorphous genitality" would lead to higher pleasures for the entire body and "eroticize" social relations more generally. It would activate previously tabooed zones and sexual relations in order to enhance individuals' capacity for libidinal gratification. "However," Marcuse writes, "the process just outlined involves not simply a release but a *transformation* of the libido: from sexuality constrained under

[186] Horowitz, *Repression*, p. 72.

genital supremacy to eroticization of the entire personality."[187] The individual's entire body, as well as the broader material and social relations, would become objects of libidinal cathexis. Individuals would then treat the attainment of pleasure as the central meaning and purpose of their lives, while also being capable of performing the "socially necessary" labour and instinctual restraint needed to preserve society as a whole.

Under improved material and social conditions, sexuality would tend to "grow into Eros": it would progress from "mere sexuality," which is converted into a means to the end of procreation, to the "life instinct" as the unifying force which binds organic life into ever greater unities. Reason would then be shaped by the demands of Eros in the wider sense and give way to a new form of "sensuous rationality." In turn, the natural and social environment would be fashioned in accordance with the demands of the life instincts rather than being constrained, mastered, and dominated by the repressive reason of the performance principle.

With the conversion of "sexuality into Eros" on the basis of fundamentally transformed institutions and social relations, sublimation would no longer serve to perpetuate the surplus-repressive organization of human life. Rather, Marcuse claims that Eros would strive towards life-enhancing modes of "non-repressive sublimation" in an environment of freedom. He argues that "its fully developed form would be sublimation without desexualization." Again, this does not suggest that all desexualization must be abolished in order to achieve non-repressive modes of sublimation. Indeed, recalling Freud's notion of narcissism, Marcuse agrees with Freud that sublimation occurs on the basis of transforming "object-libido" into desexualized "ego-libido," which is then sent

[187] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 202.

out into the external world in order to attain "higher" forms of gratification.[188] On this basis, he argues that an eroticized social environment would eliminate surplus-repressive modes of desexualization and liberate libidinal energy for the pursuit of "activities and relations that are not sexual in the sense of 'organized' genital sexuality," but which are nonetheless "libidinal and erotic."[189]

As we recall, Freud himself believes that sublimation leads to "higher" forms of gratification in the face of the necessary renunciations demanded by civilization. However, Marcuse argues that this type of sublimation operates on an individual who has been preconditioned to achieve limited instinctual gratification on a "part-time" basis, outside the parameters of alienated labour. In this case, individuals are only "free" to pursue instinctual gratification through the pre-established channels left open to them, while leaving the surplus-repressive performance principle intact. Under an improved reality principle, in which the demands of the pleasure principle are reconciled with the exigencies of non-alienated labour, individuals would be able to sublimate their libidinal energy in a non-repressive, "eroticized" environment. Libido would then take the road of "self-sublimation" under "conditions which relate associated individuals to each other in the cultivation of the environment for their developing needs and faculties."[190]

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[188] *Ibid.*, p. 169.
[189] *Ibid.*, p. 208.
[190] *Ibid.*, p. 209-210.

SECTION 3: MARCUSE ON TIME

According to Marcuse, the establishment of a non-repressive reality principle necessitates the "conquest of time in so far as time is destructive of lasting gratification."[191] Under the performance principle, individuals are only able to achieve pleasure outside the demands of alienated labour. Even beyond their work relations, individuals' potential for pleasure is limited by the prescribed enjoyments of the entertainment industry and the mass media. As we recall, Marcuse evokes the image of Narcissus to symbolize the "Great Refusal" against this repressive organization of time and the limitations it places on the attainment of integral instinctual gratification. Narcissus is able to halt the "flux of time" by striving to achieve a "fuller Eros" which establishes an indissoluble bond between himself and the external world. On Marcuse's account, by reducing the amount of socially necessary labour time and improving the quality of work relations on the basis of this deeper connectedness with external reality—a reactivation of "primary narcissism"—individuals will be able to overcome the repressive organization of time.

In response to this argument, Joel Whitebook challenges Marcuse's discussion of time along a number of lines. To put it briefly, he claims that although "narcissism may point to a more connected, less distanced relation to reality in a perhaps overly oedipalized and scientized world," narcissism also involves the omnipotent denial of both the inevitable losses of early childhood *and* of external reality itself. Freud's notion of "Ananke," then, refers not only to "scarcity," but also to the "ineluctable," or the

[191] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

unavoidable passage of time and the necessary losses and frustrations that result from it.[192] It is only by overcoming these inescapable failures and losses in early childhood that the individual is able to master "infantile omnipotence," which involves the inability to distinguish between self and other and to consider the needs of individuals outside oneself. Therefore, by advocating the return to primary narcissism, Whitebook claims that Marcuse's position could potentially lead to the omnipotent denial of time and loss.

Furthermore, Whitebook claims that Marcuse's "casual minimalization" of the Oedipus complex ignores the principal way in which this "infantile omnipotence" is overcome. Since the Oedipus complex results in the establishment of a superego that controls the ego and demands the repression of id impulses, this process is crucial for the development of a mature individual capable of "decentering" infantile omnipotence and dealing with the inevitable frustrations of the external world. Thus, without an "alternative means of taming infantile omnipotence," Marcuse fails to provide an adequate method of ensuring that the individual will develop a strong ego capable of handling frustration and loss.

Although Whitebook is correct that Marcuse does minimize the "dark side" of narcissism, it should be stressed that Marcuse does acknowledge that narcissism is "usually understood as egotistic withdrawal from reality,"[193] and emphasizes that he is not advocating a complete "regression" to infantile omnipotence. Rather, he advocates a return to "primary narcissism" in order to emphasize the need to establish a more vital connection between human beings and the external world. On this point, Horowitz claims

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[192] Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia*, p. 40.
[193] Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 169.

that Marcuse is not describing "a simple regression but a dialectical one, a regression under the control of and in the service of the ego."[194] In this regard, the reactivation of primary narcissism would involve a *cancellation* of the antagonistic relation between individuals and their natural and social environment, a *preservation* of both the mature ego organization and society's technological capabilities, and the establishment of a *higher unity* between human beings and the external world. This experience of "oneness" with reality would then motivate individuals to create both a more enriching natural and social environment and qualitatively better working conditions.

Furthermore, with regards to Whitebook's second point, it is true that Marcuse minimizes the Oedipus complex. However, this is likely due to his observation that the family has lost its traditional role in the socialization process. Indeed, Marcuse recognizes the critical role of the Oedipus complex in forming a fully developed "individual" with a mature ego. Yet he also believes that the socializing function of the family has been replaced by the direct control of individuals by the mass media, schools, and other social groups.[195] In this regard, his minimization of the Oedipus complex results from the historical trends that have rendered this method of decentering infantile omnipotence obsolete, rather than from a denial of its importance.[196]

With these clarifications in mind, we can now begin to understand what Marcuse means by the "conquest of time." First, Marcuse is not advocating the rejection of time as such, but only the repressive *organization* of time under the performance principle. He

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[194] Horowitz, *Repression*, p. 202.
[195] Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, pp. 96-7.
[196] As we shall see in the next chapter, Marcuse returns to this issue in his later work and argues that the critical function of the Oedipus complex must be recaptured in some way in order to ensure that the individual develops a strong ego capable of resisting the demands of the repressive reality principle.

argues that "[i]t is the alliance between time and the order of repression that motivates the efforts to halt the flux of time, and it is this alliance that makes time the deadly enemy of Eros."[197] Since individuals are forced to spend the majority of their waking lives performing alienated labour, they do not have the time and energy to imagine the possibility of achieving more complete forms of gratification beyond the order of repression. In this sense, "the flux of time helps men to forget what was and what can be: it makes them oblivious to the better past and the better future."[198] Although time remains a necessity, Marcuse believes that the reduction of unnecessary labour and the qualitative improvement of working conditions will afford individuals more time for lasting fulfillment in an environment of freedom.

Marcuse's argument against the repressive flux of time is also illuminated by his claim that the life instincts necessarily militate against death, since "death is the final negativity of time."[199] Just as the establishment uses the brute facts of "time" and "scarcity" as a rationalization for their surplus-repressive distribution and organization, he believes that the fact of death serves to justify even the most horrific of deaths: "[w]hether death is feared as constant threat, or glorified as supreme sacrifice, or accepted as fate, the education for the consent to death introduces an element of surrender into life from the beginning – surrender and submission."[200] In this sense, the struggle against death would not seek to deny that it is a necessity, but to make death more tolerable by reducing the amount of unnecessary pain that accompanies it. "Like the other

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[197] *Ibid.*, p. 233.
[198] *Ibid.*, p. 231.
[199] *Ibid.*, p. 231.
[200] *Ibid.*, p. 236.

necessities," he writes, "it can be made rational – painless. Men can die without anxiety if they know that what they love is protected from misery and oblivion."[201] Thus, a fundamentally improved reality principle would seek to bring both time and death into the service of life, rather than allowing life to be controlled and determined by these necessities.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As we have seen, Marcuse ventures beyond the Freudian equation of civilization with repression by revealing the historical and theoretical possibilities of a fundamentally new relationship between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. By releasing the power of Eros to bind life into ever-greater unities through "self-sublimation," he believes that civilization could potentially overcome the surplus-repressive channeling of instinctual impulses and create a qualitatively improved natural and social environment.

Yet Marcuse also begins to recognize the historical trends that counteract the development of this "non-repressive civilization." Although the technological capacities of advanced industrial society have created the conditions for the abolition of poverty, toil, and unnecessary instinctual restraint, they are actually being used to establish more efficient mechanisms of domination. With the rise of the mass media, the advertising industry, and the escalation of commodity production and exchange, the societal controls begin to permeate the private sphere and shape the individual's drives and needs. On the basis of this preconditioning, society is able to grant more sexual "liberties" to its

[201] *Ibid.*, p. 236.

citizens. Recognizing this developing trend, Marcuse argues that "the relaxed sexual morality within the firmly entrenched system of monopolistic controls itself serves the system."[202] By numbing the human faculties through controlled sexual liberties, this society reinforces its power over all dimensions of human life. It is precisely this trend which will characterize Marcuse's later work, to which we turn now.

[202] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONTAINMENT OF SEXUALITY IN ONE-DIMENSIONAL SOCIETY

In *One-Dimensional Man* and throughout his subsequent thought, Marcuse continues his thoroughgoing critique of the repressive affluence of contemporary capitalist society by addressing the emerging social trends that he has briefly discussed in *Eros and Civilization*. Whereas his earlier critique of sexual repression focuses primarily on the repressive sublimation of libidinal energy into socially useful and unpleasurable labour, his later work focuses on a new set of trends: the relaxation of sexual taboos, the incorporation of sexual expression into the work place, and the exploitation of sexuality in advertising and the mass media. Far from liberating the individuals from alienated labour and surplus-repression, this system is now able to tolerate a greater degree of sexual liberty as a concession in order to stifle the individual's capacity "to recognize the disease of the whole and grasp the chances of curing the disease."[203] Accordingly, sublimation has been replaced by "desublimation," the immediate discharge of sexual energy within a system of effective, ubiquitous controls.

In this final chapter, I intend to explicate this notion of "repressive desublimation" through a close examination of *One-Dimensional Man* and *An Essay on Liberation*. In Section 1, I will begin by highlighting several of Marcuse's key concepts. I shall elucidate his argument that the current advanced industrial apparatus is able to "contain" any and all transcendent modes of thought and creativity by neutralizing their oppositional force and pressing them into the service of the established order. This will

[203] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 5.

lead into a discussion of "technological rationality," the dominant "dimension" of thought which serves to delegitimate the other subversive forms of thought and experience under late capitalism. Finally, I will explicate Marcuse's distinction between "false needs" and "vital needs" in order to reveal the ways in which human beings become dependent upon the commodities, services, and prescribed aspirations provided by the establishment.

In Section 2, I will begin by elucidating Marcuse's arguments concerning "repressive desublimation" in the cultural sphere, where previously transgressive works of art are being assimilated to the requirements of capitalist production and consumption. According to Marcuse, this process of containment reveals the extent to which "technological rationality" comes to prevail over all opposition under late capitalism. On this basis, I shall discuss Marcuse's argument that the sexual instincts undergo the process of repressive desublimation through the manipulation of human needs and drives and the incorporation of libidinal components into the work world. Lastly, I will explicate Marcuse's claim that these sexual liberties numb the human faculties and weaken the "rationality of protest."

In Section 3, I will examine Marcuse's "The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man" in order to account for the destructiveness that accompanies repressive desublimation. To begin, I will explain Marcuse's argument that repressive desublimation weakens Eros and, in turn, releases destructive energy. I shall then explicate his reasons for suggesting that the individual no longer undergoes the same processes of maturation as the traditional psychoanalytic subject and why this results in the willingness to conform to the beliefs and values of the current system. On these grounds, I shall argue that both the weakness of the ego to resist the repressive society and the inability of Eros

to bind the destructive instincts, account for the aggression that accompanies repressive desublimation.

SECTION 1: TECHNOLOGICAL RATIONALITY AND CONTAINMENT

Developing his earlier arguments in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse maintains that the technological achievements of advanced industrial civilization have created the conditions for the complete abolition of toil, hunger, and poverty on a global scale. However, in the face of this potential for liberation, society mobilizes itself against the specter of a world where all basic needs could be satisfied for the free play of human faculties and capabilities. He writes: "[f]aced with the possibility of pacification on the grounds of its technical and intellectual achievements, the mature industrial society closes itself against this alternative."[204] Rather than being used to beautify the natural and social environment and to provide for basic human needs, the current technological capacities have been employed to produce superfluous commodities, military weapons, and other mind-numbing and destructive products. In Marcuse's terms, the productive forces are effectively "contained" and pressed into the service of the repressive system.

This notion of "containment" also applies to the individual's potential for critical thought, experience, and action under the capitalist system. As we recall, Marcuse argues that "phantasy" can be expressed consciously through the work of imagination in artistic creation. In this way, artists have the ability to recall the forgotten demands of the pleasure principle and to illuminate the ways in which reality might be improved.

[204] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

However, he now claims that this faculty has been effectively neutralized and impoverished by the advanced civilization: "[t]he order and organization of class society, which have shaped the sensibility and the reason of man, have also shaped the freedom of the imagination."[205] In this regard, the imagination becomes bound to the repressive system and its realization is made to coincide with the dictates and interests of the establishment.

For instance, the individual's imaginative capacities are now used to find more creative ways of exploiting the masses through advertising and the mass media. Furthermore, rather than being employed to envisage a better life for all individuals, the imagination becomes a valuable asset for the creation of bigger and better weapons and military strategies. The established society now appreciates imagination and creativity only insofar as they can be manipulated and employed in the interests of dominating human beings and nature in more effective ways. Thus, the imagination is "free to become practical, i.e., to transform reality only within the general framework of repression."[206]

It should be stressed, however, that Marcuse does observe counter-tendencies to the repression of imagination. With the emergence of strong radical groups in the 1960s, he begins to identify many forms of political protest and refusal that attempt to articulate the values and truths of the "negative," oppositional dimension of thought and experience. For instance, he argues that the black radical movements in the United States represent a "Great Refusal" against the established system by redefining various words

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[205] *Idem*, *An Essay on Liberation*, p. 29.
[206] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

and images that had previously expressed the interests and beliefs of the dominant social groups. The term "soul" no longer refers to the "lily-white" soul of the established system, but becomes "black, violent, orgiastic," thus representing the struggle of the marginalized.[207] Similarly, the nonconformist youth and student radicals use "flower power" as a method of resistance against the oppressive forces of the establishment, converting a beautiful image into a symbol of opposition. These rebellious groups protest not only against the ugliness, persecution, and destructiveness of this society, but also against its notions of beauty, imagination, and freedom.[208] Thus, Marcuse turns to the marginalized and oppressed as a possible site of opposition against the established order.

Yet even these movements are made to "operate" in the service of the establishment through the "containment" of their images and symbols within the framework of commodity production and consumption: subversive art is sold by transnational corporations; clothing and accessories containing images of revolutionary political figures are manufactured and distributed in order to make a profit; and previously tabooed sexual activities are encouraged and exploited. Under the advanced industrial apparatus, "transcendent" modes of thought and activity are made ineffectual by being assimilated to the totalizing system of domination. On Marcuse's account, this society can afford to tolerate virtually any transgressions, including those in the sexual sphere, by neutralizing their ability to pose a real threat to the repressive social order. This incorporation of the "negative," oppositional dimension of thought and experience

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[207] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[208] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

results in a "one-dimensional" society dominated by what Marcuse labels "technological rationality."

On Marcuse's account, "technological rationality" denotes a "dimension" of thought by which the establishment operationalizes all aspects of material and social life; human relations are reduced to calculated exchanges between alienated labourer-consumers and the value of any idea or practice is determined by its ability to contribute to the continued functioning of the apparatus. Although human beings have been able to control the forces of nature to an unprecedented extent by employing this form of scientific, operational thinking, technological rationality eventually functions as the paradigmatic mode of thought. Accordingly, the establishment that employs it either incorporates dissent and opposition or, if they are perceived as a threat to the system, dismisses them as irrational. In this regard, technological rationality "becomes the great vehicle of better domination, creating a truly totalitarian universe in which society and nature, mind and body are kept in a state of permanent mobilization for the defense of this universe."[209]

In order to ensure that the individual's critical capacities are effectively "contained," Marcuse argues that this society also produces and endorses the consumption of superfluous commodities, which individuals come to internalize as their own needs. On this basis, he now distinguishes between "false needs" and "vital needs." Vital needs refer the material and social resources indispensable to the sustained functioning of the individual and society as such. According to Marcuse, the "only needs that have an unqualified claim for satisfaction are the vital ones—nourishment, clothing,

[209] *Idem, One-Dimensional Man*, p. 18.

lodging at the attainable level of culture."[210] Thus, "vital needs" are the "basic" requirements needed to sustain human life.

This is not to suggest, however, that these basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter are the only needs human beings have. Indeed, the early Marx also reminds us of the "spiritual," or distinctly human needs that separate human beings from other animals. For instance, Marx describes the "objects of art" as the human being's "spiritual inorganic nature, spiritual nourishment which he must first prepare to make palatable and digestible."[211] Likewise, while Marcuse believes that vital needs are the only needs with an *unqualified* claim for fulfillment—that is, they *must* be satisfied in order to ensure our survival and thus require no further justification for their satisfaction—their fulfillment is also "the prerequisite for the realization of all needs."[212]

False needs, on the other hand, are "those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice."[213] These include the "need" for mindless comforts, gadgets, and leisure activities created by the culture industry, the "need" to consume wasteful products, and so on.[214] Although they might afford the individual some degree of pleasure, Marcuse argues that these "needs" should not be preserved if they

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[210] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[211] Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 111.
[212] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 5.
[213] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[214] *Ibid.*, p. 7. I recognize here that many "false needs" are very often rooted in "vital needs." For instance, water is a need, but a particular brand of bottled water is not. This is not to suggest that Marcuse's criticism is intended to deny the importance of creating luxury, but to reveal the repressive character of both the commodities individuals consume and the system that produces them.

numb individuals' mental faculties and prevent them from recognizing the repressive character of their society.[215]

Furthermore, these needs are considered "false" when they are promoted in the interest of limiting the greater potentialities and freedoms of human beings. In *An Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse argues that under the influence of these administered needs, individual autonomy "asserts itself in the right to race his automobile, to handle his power tools, to buy a gun, to communicate to mass audiences his opinion, no matter how ignorant, how aggressive, it may be."[216] Again, some of these activities might be enjoyable to a certain degree, but they become "false" if they are the sole means of expressing individual autonomy. By identifying themselves with these prescribed needs, individuals become dependent upon the goods and services that promote conformity and submission to the repressive system. In turn, the interests of the establishment become the innermost drives and aspirations of the individuals.

SECTION 2: REPRESSIVE DESUBLIMATION

Considering both the mass dissemination of prescribed needs and the power of containment to neutralize the individual's critical and subversive capacities, Marcuse argues that the cultural and sexual spheres are now put to work in the service of the established order. The needs and aspirations promoted by the advanced industrial system shape the desires and life horizons of its citizens, thus establishing the preconditions for

[215] Marcuse makes a similar claim in *Eros and Civilization* with regard to the standard of living. As we recall, he claims that the standard of living, understood in terms of possessing what he now calls "false needs," would have to be measured by different criteria in a free society.

conformity to this system. By manipulating and controlling the desires of its citizens and rendering all oppositional elements ineffectual, the establishment is able to grant more liberties than ever before. The formerly "explosive" power of the sexual instincts is rendered harmless by being "contained" within a system of effective controls. Thus, whereas Marcuse's previous work focuses on the repressive "sublimation" of the drives, by which instinctual aims are diverted towards non-sexual, unsatisfying labour, he now focuses on the ways in which the establishment enables individuals to achieve immediate release of instinctual urges on the basis of these new modes of manipulation and control. He refers to this controlled release of unrestrained sexual desires as "repressive desublimation."

In "The Conquest of the Unhappy Consciousness: Repressive Desublimation," Marcuse illustrates his conception of "repressive desublimation" through a comparison of the traditional and contemporary functions of art. He turns to the "high culture" of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Gustave Flaubert, and Thomas Mann. According to Marcuse, these great figures were once able to achieve "artistic alienation" vis-à-vis the established bourgeois order. However, "artistic alienation" is not to be confused with Marx's use of this term. On Marx's account, alienation is a state in which the worker confronts virtually all aspects of his or her life activity as hostile forces operating over and against him or her. In this condition, the labourer is unable to achieve fulfillment from his or her labour and functions merely as a tool to be manipulated and employed in the interests of maximizing profit for a relative few.

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[216] *Idem, An Essay on Liberation*, p. 12.

Through traditional forms of oppositional art, on the other hand, the artist is able to recognize the prevailing unfreedom of the given society and achieve a critical distance from it. "Artistic alienation," he writes, "is sublimation. It creates the images of conditions which are irreconcilable with the established Reality Principle but which, as cultural images, become tolerable, even edifying and useful."[217] Although this period was also characterized by toilsome labour, misery, and inequality, these artists were able to transcend the oppressive order by offering images that represented the antithesis of alienated social life: "such disruptive characters as the artist, the prostitute, the adulteress, the great criminal and outcast," and so on.[218] These images pointed beyond the established society and represented a rebellion against the prevailing alienation that characterized these times.

Under the advanced industrial apparatus, artistic creation loses its power to negate the established reality principle by virtue of its containment within this system. The previously antagonistic artistic images are transformed into "the national hero, the beatnik, the neurotic housewife, the gangster, the star," none of which point beyond the current civilization.[219] These images no longer pose a threat to the established society because their previously antagonistic elements have been assimilated to the system in which they are manufactured and sold. Indeed, the fact that these images often

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[217] *Idem*, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 72. Cf. *Eros and Civilization,* pp. 84-5: "...artistic work, where it is genuine, seems to grow out of a non-repressive instinctual constellation and to envisage non-repressive aims—so much so that the term sublimation seems to require considerable modification if applied to this kind of work." I shall return to the critical role of sublimation in *One-Dimensional Man* at the end of this section.

[218] *Idem*, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 59.

[219] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

"contradict the society which sells them does not count," since they have been made to operate in the service of the established order.[220]

On Marcuse's account, the oppositional elements in the "higher culture" are succumbing to the "process of *desublimation* which prevails in the advanced regions of contemporary society."[221] Most of its images no longer evoke forgotten truths and higher ideals, but express the immediate ideals and interests of the prevailing social forces. Whereas previous artistic creation demanded time, energy, and critical thought in order to apprehend the underlying truths and messages conveyed in the work, contemporary art is largely transformed into entertainment and treated as a "passive" leisure activity. We can observe these tendencies even more clearly in the present age, where film is being converted into big-budget Hollywood movies endorsing conformity and the pursuit of money and power. The mass media also displays images of substance-abusing teenage celebrities on magazine covers and entertainment television programs, thus promoting ignorance and self-destructiveness. Cultural images no longer point to another realm beyond the present, but become the very ideals of the society to which they were originally opposed. According to Marcuse, the "assimilation of the ideal with reality testifies to the extent to which the ideal has been surpassed."[222]

Marcuse argues that this process of repressive desublimation, "replacing mediated by immediate gratification," also occurs in the "sexual sphere."[223] Within this sexual sphere, as in the realm of higher culture, Marcuse claims that repressive desublimaton

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[220] *Ibid.*, p. 57.
[221] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[222] *Ibid.*, p. 57-8.
[223] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

"operates as the by-product of the social controls of technological reality, which extend liberty while intensifying domination."[224] On the one hand, he argues that the technological capacities of advanced industrial society have created improved working conditions, shortened working days, and a greater amount of "free" time in which the worker might achieve instinctual gratification. On the other hand, the manipulation of the individual's socio-cultural life ensures that this worker's instinctual drives are efficiently coordinated and determined by the prevailing interests in domination. As a result, this society can "grant more than before because its interests have become the innermost drives of its citizens, and because the joys which it grants promote social cohesion and contentment."[225] Thus, sexuality becomes "liberalized" in the sense that it has been made amenable to social and political manipulation and can express itself "freely" only on this basis.

As I argued in the last chapter, Marcuse attempts to envisage a world in which sexuality would be transformed into Eros. Rather than being pressed exclusively into the service of procreation and "part-time" fulfillment, the life instincts would create an order of gratification in which individuals would be able to achieve lasting instinctual satisfaction in all aspects of their lives. Under fundamentally improved social conditions, he claims that sexuality would undergo the process of "non-repressive sublimation," which would lead to higher pleasures for all zones of the body in an environment of freedom. Already in *Eros and Civilization*, however, Marcuse begins to anticipate the current modes of repressive desublimation that would become the subject of his later

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[224] *Ibid.*, p. 72.
[225] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

thought. He writes: "the free development of transformed libido *beyond* the institutions of the performance principle differs essentially from the release of constrained sexuality *within* the dominion of these institutions."[226] In the latter case, the manifestations of "mere sexuality" are not only rendered harmless by this society, but actually prevent the individual from seeking "polymorphous" modes of instinctual gratification in a fundamentally "eroticized" social and natural environment.

In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse develops these earlier arguments concerning the environment in which the "saved" libido is able to achieve gratification.[227] Again, he invokes past experiences of pleasure and compares them with those under present conditions. While he acknowledges that the pre-technological world contained "misery, toil, and filth," he claims that there was still "a 'landscape,' a medium of libidinal experience which no longer exists."[228] On this point, he compares the act of making love in a meadow to making love in an automobile. In the former instance, "the environment partakes of and invites libidinal cathexis and tends to be eroticized. Libido transcends beyond the immediate erotogenic zones—a process of nonrepressive sublimation."[229] Although this might seem to be an uncritical portrayal of life in the pre-technological world, Marcuse is emphasizing the point that our technological capabilities are "contained" within this system. While these technological forces could serve to beautify the natural and social environment and intensify the overall experience of pleasure, they are increasingly pressed into the service of wasteful production and the destruction of the

[226] *Idem, Eros and Civilization*, p. 202.
[227] *Idem, One-Dimensional Man*, p. 72.
[228] *Ibid.*, p. 73.
[229] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

natural world. Thus contained, these technical capacities create a "mechanized environment" that precludes the "self-transcendence of libido."[230]

Furthermore, Marcuse suggests that a crucial dimension of erotic experience is lost in a mechanized society in which commodities mediate virtually every human interaction. In *An Essay on Liberation*, he argues that automobiles, televisions, "household gadgets," and other products are not necessarily repressive in and of themselves. Rather, they are repressive when they are "produced in accordance with the requirements of profitable exchange," and, in turn, "become part and parcel of the people's own existence, own 'actualization.'"[231] Under the present conditions of production and consumption, these products are created in order to maximize profit for corporate stockholders and bind individuals to the system of repressive satisfaction. In turn, he concludes that individuals must now "buy part and parcel of their own existence on the market."[232]

By purchasing the commodities necessary to complete their sexual image, individuals also become more efficient, attractive commodities in the labour force. In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse claims that "only in exceptional cases, and with a high degree of sublimation, are libidinal relations allowed to enter into the sphere of work."[233] At this point, he extends his critique to the methods of containment and repressive sexual liberty within the work world itself. "Without ceasing to be an instrument of labor," he writes, "the body is allowed to exhibit its sexual features in the everyday work world and

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[230] *Ibid.*, p. 73.
[231] *Idem, An Essay on Liberation*, p. 12.
[232] *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[233] *Idem, Eros and Civilization*, p. 199.

in work relations."[234] Indeed, sex-appeal is often considered to be a prerequisite for job success, particularly in the service industry, the mass media, and certainly in the sex trade. However, this "body" is only allowed to express its sexual features in work relations after the beauty industry and other societal apparatuses have moulded the individual to conform to prevailing standards of attractiveness.

Insofar as individuals conduct their labour for an apparatus that they do not control, their work remains alienating. However, since the work world now consists of a more attractive, marketable labour force, the work relations themselves appear to be more gratifying.[235] Since the repressive character of this labour is masked by its attractive appearance, the workers come to identify themselves with their alienated performances. Marcuse recognizes that "no matter how much it may serve as a prop for the status quo," this labour "is also gratifying to the managed individuals, just as racing the outboard motor, pushing the power lawn mower, and speeding the automobile are fun."[236] The worker is thus preconditioned to accept the necessity of this labour despite the fact that it is still carried out in the interests of the system of repressive satisfaction. Accordingly, the individual develops what Marcuse labels a "happy consciousness."

This notion of the "happy consciousness" is inspired by G.W.F. Hegel's conception of the "unhappy consciousness." In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes the unhappy consciousness as self-consciousness divided into two contradictory parts. On the one hand, it is "a merely empirical, confused, and transient self," bound up

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[234] *Idem* , *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 74.
[235] Paul A. Robinson writes: "Work is still work, but it has been made to appear more attractive." Robinson, *The Sexual Radicals: Wilhelm Reich, Geza Roheim, Herbert Marcuse* (London: Temple Smith, 1969) p. 240.
[236] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 75.

with a world of changeable objects and individuals. On the other hand, it is "an eternal, rational, *real* self."[237] It is thus both a "changeable and inessential" being of this world and an "unchangeable and essential" being connected to divine truth.[238] In general terms, then, the unhappy consciousness is consciousness aware of its own self-contradictory nature: it realizes that there is divine truth and fulfillment, but it also realizes that it is severed from this truth and will not be able to attain it.

On this basis, we can now begin to understand the differences between the unhappy consciousness and the happy consciousness. According to Marcuse, traditional works of literature and art reflected the unhappy consciousness of their time. Those artists who achieved a certain degree of critical distance from the established society were able to recognize the unactualized possibilities of this world and articulate those possibilities through their work. Prior to their containment within the advanced industrial capitalist system, art and literature reflected "the unhappy consciousness of the divided world, the defeated possibilities, the hopes unfulfilled, and the promises betrayed."[239] In the sexual sphere, those individuals who were forced to sublimate their drives in accordance with the surplus-repressive performance principle were better able to recognize the contradiction that this society refused to pacify human life despite its ability to drastically reduce scarcity and want. In both cases, individuals were able to grasp the contradictory nature of their society.

The happy consciousness, on the other hand, fails to recognize the fact that the potentialities in this society have been contained. The individual feels content with the

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[237] Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 465.
[238] *Ibid.*, p. 468.
[239] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 61.

satisfactions he or she is granted and cannot imagine any possibilities beyond these satisfactions. According to Marcuse, the happy consciousness "reflects the belief that the real is rational, and that the established system, in spite of everything, delivers the goods."[240] The emergence of this happy consciousness reveals the extent to which the established order is able to conquer all transcendent, oppositional modes of thought, experience, and action. In short, individuals become content in their unfreedom.

At this point, Marcuse reveals the critical force of sublimation. When compared to the prevailing forms of desublimation characteristic of advanced industrial civilization, the "sublimated drives and objectives contain more deviation, more freedom, and more refusal to heed the social taboos."[241] While it seems obvious that Marcuse would consider "non-repressive sublimation" more gratifying, life-enhancing, and oppositional when compared to desublimation, even the case of "repressive sublimation" seems to be more thoroughly oppositional than desublimation. Both of these types of sublimation would involve the recognition of the barriers—whether basic repressive or surplus-repressive—to the complete gratification of immediate instinctual strivings. "To be sure," Marcuse writes, "all sublimation is enforced by the power of society, but the unhappy consciousness of this power already breaks through alienation."[242] Regardless of whether or not the individual is able to break through this alienation in practice, she would still *recognize* this alienation and potentially seek to overcome it. Thus, sublimation in its

[240] *Ibid.*, p. 79.
[241] *Ibid.*, p. 72.
[242] *Ibid.*, pp. 75-6.

ideal form "becomes the cognitive power which defeats suppression while bowing to it."[243]

Considering the fact that individuals believe themselves to be perfectly free in a fundamentally unfree society, they no longer feel the need to sublimate their sexual energy. By "diminishing erotic and intensifying sexual energy," he argues, "the technological reality *limits the scope of sublimation.* It also reduces the *need* for sublimation."[244] The individual's ability to achieve gratification both in and outside of the work place is limited to the raw, immediate satisfaction of the sexual instincts rather than the "fuller Eros" that Marcuse endorses. This gratification is offered as a concession in order to appease the masses and to keep them satisfied under alienated conditions. The system of controlled gratification thus *appears* to require less repression of the individual. As a result, "the tension between that which is desired and that which is permitted seems considerably lowered," and the worker feels affirmed in her "free" choices, desires, and aspirations.

Since this society appears to "deliver the goods," Marcuse argues that it subsequently weakens the individual's capacity to resist the "cruel affluence" of the apparatus and to rebel against it. The entire realm of prescribed aspirations and needs "kills in its citizens the very disposition, the organs for the alternative: freedom without exploitation."[245] Although the individual does achieve a certain degree of satisfaction from his or her gadgets, leisure activities, and work relations, these concessions serve to mask the prevailing unfreedom both within and beyond the advanced industrial societies.

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[243] *Ibid.*, p. 76.
[244] *Ibid.*, p. 73.
[245] *Idem, An Essay on Liberation*, p. 17.

Through various modes of relaxation and controlled satisfaction, the individual is trained to ignore the widespread poverty, genocides, and other systemic social problems that occur throughout the world. The "Great Refusal" required to challenge and overcome these issues is blocked through "compensation which seems more satisfying than the refusal."[246] Thus, the controlled sexual liberties granted by the establishment conquer all transcendent modes of thought and action, providing "satisfaction in a way which generates submission and weakens the rationality of protest."[247]

SECTION 3: SEXUAL LIBERALIZATION AND DESTRUCTIVENESS

As we have seen, Marcuse believes that the desublimation of sexual energy within a system of effective controls does not enhance the greater potentialities of human beings. Rather, it limits their capacity to experience lasting instinctual gratification in an environment of freedom. Far from liberating the life instincts to bring about ever-greater unities between individuals through "self-sublimation," repressive desublimation liberates the unrestrained sexual instincts to pursue immediate gratification without regard for the well-being and fulfillment of others. Competition, aggression, and the individualistic pursuit of pleasure thus replace the sublimated bonds of affection, tenderness, and solidarity. Therefore, Marcuse argues that "we are faced with the contradiction that the liberalization of sexuality provides an instinctual basis for the repressive and aggressive power of the affluent society."[248]

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[246] *Idem*, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 71.
[247] *Ibid.*, p. 75.
[248] *Idem*, *An Essay on Liberation*, p. 9.

This correlation between the release of sexual energy *and* the heightening of aggression is a "contradiction" because it seems to challenge Freud's notion that the liberation of the sexual instincts would necessarily neutralize the death instincts. However, Marcuse argues that since the "socially permitted and encouraged release of libido" is that of "partial and localized sexuality, it would be tantamount to an actual compression of erotic energy, and this desublimation would be compatible with the growth of unsublimated as well as sublimated forms of aggressiveness."[249] In other words, strengthening the "partial" sexual instincts does not liberate the power of Eros to bind the destructive energy of the death instincts. As such, he claims that repressive desublimation "would imply the possibility of a simultaneous release of repressed sexuality *and* aggressiveness."[250]

On this view, society is now in a better position to satisfy the demands of the death instincts by channelling this aggressive energy for the purposes of dominating human beings and the natural world. It should be noted, however, that not all manifestations of destructiveness are detrimental to the material and social environment. Indeed, the productive achievements of human civilization rely heavily on the use of such energy to master the powers of nature and to construct parks, houses, buildings, and other life-serving products.[251] Yet rather than bringing the death instincts into the service of life-sustaining production, the current establishment mobilizes the collective aggressive impulses against foreign nations, outsiders, and other group enemies. As long as the

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[249] *Idem*, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 78.
[250] *Ibid.*, p. 78.
[251] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

establishment continues to "deliver the goods," Marcuse believes that the majority will passively accept "the misdeeds of this society."[252]

In "The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man," Marcuse attempts to identify the emerging social trends that account for the weakening of individual autonomy and the widespread acceptance of the destructiveness of the advanced industrial system. Elaborating upon his earlier observations in *Eros and Civilization*,[253] he argues that the individual no longer undergoes the same process of socialization and development as the traditional Freudian subject. On Freud's account, the family is the initial site of socialization. Through the trials of the Oedipus complex, the child develops a superego, which influences the repressions that he or she carries out and establishes a mature ego. This private familial process thus equips the child with the requisite mental tools to handle the pressures and demands of the outside world and to eventually survive under the reality principle.

Through this socialization process, "the younger generation entered societal life with impulses, ideas, and needs which were largely *their own*."[254] On the basis of this *private* process of development and maturation, children develop a mature ego and superego which are largely independent of the societal norms and values that they will later confront. As such, these mature "individuals" become aware of the "irreconcilable conflict" between themselves and their society.[255] According to Marcuse, the "individual remains unhappy with an unhappy consciousness," but he or she is also able to recognize

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[252] *Ibid.*, p. 76.
[253] *Idem*, *Eros and Civilization*, pp. 96-7.
[254] *Ibid.*, p. 96.
[255] *Idem*, "The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man," *Five Lectures: Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Utopia*, trs. Jeremy J. Shapiro and Shierry M. Weber, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970) p. 45.

the authority of the given society and the need to reach compromise satisfactions in the face of its demands. Thus, the mature individual is able to achieve "relative autonomy" from the established system insofar as he or she recognizes the rift between self and other—individual and society—and attempts to negotiate between external demands and private fulfillment.

Marcuse believes that current trends have rendered this "relatively autonomous" subject obsolete. On his account, the formerly private socialization of the child is now "being invalidated by society's direct management of the nascent ego through the mass media, school and sport teams, gangs, etc."[256] Considering the establishment's ubiquitous controls over all dimensions of human life, the child is not able to develop an independent ego and superego outside of the established system. As such, the immature ego is unable to distinguish between self and other, between private fulfillment and social requirements. Marcuse claims that "the ego ideal is rather brought to bear on the ego directly and 'from outside,' *before* the ego is actually formed as the personal and (relatively) autonomous subject of mediation between him-*self* and others."[257] Accordingly, the individual does not develop his or her own ego ideal and "conscience" but internalizes the societal superego directly. This process leads to the weakening of the individual ego, the immediate identification with group ideals, and the numbing of the individual's private, critical faculties of "consciousness and conscience."[258]

Considering the above, both the weakness of the "individual" as an autonomous subject *and* the inability of the unrestrained sexual instincts to counteract the death

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[256] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[257] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[258] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

instincts account for citizens' acceptance and perpetuation of destructiveness in the sexually "liberated" societies. By identifying immediately with the cultural ego-ideal, the individual is trained to embrace the repressive satisfaction of the sexual instincts which, in turn, releases destructive energy to be manipulated and employed by the establishment. In order to sustain itself, the prevailing system directs this aggression towards outsiders and enemies of the group. The societal ego-ideal "does not drive the conscience as the moral judge of the ego, but rather directs aggression toward the external enemies of the ego ideal."[259] Since the demands of the "externalized," collective ego-ideal become the innermost drives and needs of the individual, even acts of war and genocide meet "not only with helpless acceptance, but also with instinctual approval on the part of the victims."[260]

These changes in socialization and development also serve to diminish the individual's experience of "guilt" over the aggressive acts of his or her society. As I explained in Chapter 1, the sense of guilt results from a tension between the ego and the superego. The superego establishes "conscience," which continuously reprimands the ego if it does not conform to the demands of its ego-ideal. According to Marcuse, the direct imposition of the cultural ego-ideal upon the immature ego now weakens personal autonomy and diminishes the tension between the individual and society. As long as individuals do not transgress the demands of the cultural "fathers," they are free to commit destructive acts against others without experiencing guilt or remorse.[261] As

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[259] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[260] *Ibid.*, p. 79.
[261] To be sure, this is not to suggest that Marcuse is lamenting the decline of guilt feeling in general. Rather, he is highlighting the fact that individuals no longer experience any tension between themselves and the destructive, repressive society of which they are a part.

Marcuse so forcefully asserts: "[o]ne man can give the signal that liquidates hundreds and thousands of people, then declare himself free from all pangs of conscience, and live happily ever after."[262] Thus, conscience is absolved so long as the individual conforms to the demands of the repressive society.

[262] *Idem*, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 79.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the "obsolescence" of the Freudian subject, Marcuse argues that the crucial insights of psychoanalysis are not invalidated. Rather, he argues that "psychoanalysis draws its strength from its obsolescence: from its insistence on individual needs and individual potentialities which have become outdated in the social and political development."[263] This is not to suggest, however, that Marcuse uncritically accepts the historical rights of the patriarchal family or the traditional formation of the ego-ideal. As we recall from the last chapter, Marcuse minimizes the significance of the Oedipus complex and refrains from offering a method of decentering infantile omnipotence and developing a strong superego. Yet Marcuse also argues that, for better or worse, the traditional family produced "individuals" capable of distinguishing between their own needs and desires and the repressive demands of their society. Insofar as the Freudian conception of the individual preserves the importance of individual autonomy and the development of those critical capacities necessary to question and challenge the established reality principle, his theory points to a lost dimension of human experience that must be recaptured.

Furthermore, the prevailing "containment" of Eros and the release of unmitigated sexual and aggressive energy strengthens Marcuse's earlier position that a non-repressive civilization requires the "self-sublimation" of the life instincts. Since the "repressive desublimation" of "mere sexuality" prevents individuals from developing their own unique, life-affirming faculties and capabilities, the need to release the life instincts

[263] *Idem*, "The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man," p. 60.

becomes more pressing than ever before. Despite their containment in advanced industrial society, the radical movements of the 1960s reveal the possibility of activating "the elementary, organic foundation of morality in the human being," which is "perhaps rooted in the erotic drive to counter aggressiveness, to create and preserve 'ever greater unities' of life."[264] In this regard, Marcuse retains his hope that the life instincts could potentially provide a "biological foundation for socialism," thus establishing a "sensuous order" wherein individuals with different needs and desires would be free to express themselves under fundamentally different material and social conditions.[265]

[264] *Idem*, *An Essay on Liberation*, p. 10.
[265] For a complete discussion of this "biological," or instinctual, foundation for socialism, see Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, pp. 7-22. In his later work, Marcuse also emphasizes the critical role that transgressive art can play in exposing the repressive and oppressive character of the given reality and pointing to qualitatively different modes of thought and experience through the "aesthetic form." See Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977).

CONCLUSION

In his polemical attack against Marcuse, Alasdair MacIntyre attempts to invalidate his critical sexual theory on the grounds that he does not provide any positive "content" for a fundamentally liberated society. MacIntyre sums up this criticism in one crucial question, namely, "[w]hat will we actually *do* in this sexually liberated state?"[266] Furthermore, he claims that Marcuse's criticisms of the "monogamic, genital sexual culture" are meaningless unless "some contrast with what is possible but unrealized has been effectively delineated."[267] Since he fails to address these issues, MacIntyre claims, Marcuse's argument is nonsensical and ineffectual.

It is my contention that this criticism ignores the purpose and force of Marcuse's position by demanding that he provide "positive" content for a truly liberated society. Considering his commitment to radical democracy, he avoids venturing exact prescriptions for creating a fundamentally better world in order to open the horizon for collectively decided social change. What we should take from Marcuse is the value and critical force of what he calls "negative thinking," and the role that philosophy as "critique" can play in diagnosing exigent social problems with the view of overcoming the repressive organization of human life.

In the final pages of *An Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse claims that "[n]egative thinking draws whatever force it may have from its empirical basis: the actual human condition in the 'given' society, and the 'given' possibilities to transcend this condition,

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[266] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marcuse* (London: Fontana, 1970) p. 47.
[267] *Ibid.*

to enlarge the realm of freedom."[268] By critically reflecting upon material and social life, philosophy as "critique" has the power to identify "the actual human condition" as it is lived and felt in our civilization, while also recognizing the "damaged" conditions under which human beings are forced to live. It is on the basis of this recognition of unfreedom, injustice, and unhappiness that "emphatic" counter-concepts such as freedom, justice, and happiness can be formulated, even if we do not yet know the precise form our freedom and happiness will take. This formation of emphatic concepts—which arise as the antithesis of the given reality—constitutes the properly critical dimension of philosophy as critique.

Marcuse recognizes both the prevailing unfreedom associated with the current liberalization of sexuality, as well as the inherent possibility within this society to drastically reduce material scarcity, to minimize painful physical labour, and to enable individuals to determine their own erotic horizons beyond the system of repressive satisfaction. Yet, against MacIntyre, it is not necessarily the task of critique to offer an exact map of a better world. With regards to such demands that all criticism be "constructive," or positive, Adorno writes: "The insinuation is that only someone can practice critique who can propose something better than what is being criticized....By making the positive a condition for it, critique is tamed from the beginning and loses its vehemence."[269] The task of critique is to identify contradictions and falsities within material and social life in order to open the horizon for collectively organized social change. In this light, Adorno concludes his essay "Critique" with the claim that "the

[268] Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, p. 87.
[269] Adorno, "Critique," *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, tr. Henry W. Pickford, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) p. 287.

false, once determinately known and precisely expressed, is already an index of what is right and better."[270]

In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse echoes Adorno's focus on the power of "negative thinking" when he claims that universal, "emphatic" concepts "conceptualize the stuff of which the experienced world consists, and they conceptualize it with a view of its possibilities, in the light of their actual limitation, suppression, and denial."[271] Far from prescribing acceptable desires, aspirations, or precise courses of political action, Marcuse's diagnosis of the repression of sexuality under advanced industrial civilization is intended to create the opening for a new social consciousness which will lead to more autonomous, pleasurable forms of thought and experience.

This non-repressive civilization would consist of individuals who are able to think critically about their instinctual needs and desires with a view of what they could become if the "damaged" conditions under which they have been repressed were fundamentally changed.[272] Marcuse's critique seeks to indict the repressive affluence of late capitalism in order to envisage a world in which free individuals determine their own pleasures, and "really exist as individuals, each shaping his [or her] own life; they would face each other with truly different needs and truly different modes of satisfaction—with their own refusals and their own selections."[273]

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[270] *Ibid.*, p. 288.
[271] Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 215.
[272] On this point, we should recall Marcuse's appropriation of Paul Valéry's characterization of thought as "le travail qui fait vivre en nous ce qui n'existe pas." See *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 68.
[273] *Idem*, *Eros and Civilization*, pp. 227-8.

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