

The Role of Critical Theory in the Pursuit of Revolutionary Praxis

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Introduction

Political philosophy requires a consideration of the relationship between theory and praxis. Theory without praxis can be considered impotent or mere speculation, while praxis without theory risks being unguided. Although Critical Theory gives a considerable amount of attention to the issue of how theory relates to praxis, not all theorists agree about the specifics of this relationship. One instance of such a conflict arose between Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse.

Adorno and Marcuse shared a common history in terms of their intellectual and political lives. Both men grew up in Germany as part of the intelligentsia during the early 20th century. Their lives intersected at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, where they took part in larger research programs and also pursued their own personal projects. Along with many of the other theorists at the Institute, both Adorno and Marcuse based much of their work on the tenets of Critical Theory, which were directed at the emancipation of the individual from repressive powers. Their work touched upon a variety of subjects, from Marxism to Freud to aesthetics. The rise of Nazism forced the Institute and its members to move abroad, eventually settling in the United States. Their work continued with a greater focus on the sociological factors that allowed for the rise of fascism. In 1949 Adorno returned to Frankfurt, while Marcuse remained in the United States.

The disagreement between Adorno and Marcuse developed out of a discussion about the global student movements during the late 1960's. Specifically, the occasion that prompted their debate was Adorno's reaction to the occupation of a building that housed the Institute of Social Research by members of the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (Socialist German Students' Union). Adorno called upon the police and university officials to have the protesters forcibly

removed. In a letter following those events, Marcuse wrote to his colleague expressing his dismay about how the situation was handled, especially in regards to the fact that the police were called on to deal with the students. This difference in opinion about the student activists reflected broader differences that had arisen in the thinking of the two men relating to the proper roles of theory and praxis.

This conflict between Marcuse and Adorno brings to the surface fundamental issues that are at the core of Critical Theory. To what extent can theory direct praxis? When should praxis proceed without theory? What is the role of the Critical Theorist? A fundamental principle of Critical Theory demands that it must always adjust its position to shifting political and economic situation, thus allowing it to always be relevant to the contemporary reality. By examining the past efforts of Critical Theory there may be an opportunity to develop a new understanding for our current society in hopes of encouraging change. However, such an attempt relies upon Critical Theory being not only relevant to the current reality, but also that a revolution is possible. If Critical Theory can serve as a catalyst for change, then it must be understood why it has failed in the past.

This paper will consider the relationship between theory and praxis, and also whether Critical Theory can fulfill its lofty purpose of aiding in the development of a liberated reality. To answer these questions, we need to understand Critical Theory as it developed over the course of the mid-20th century. This paper will explicate both Adorno's and Marcuse's philosophical views by examining some of their critical works in order to properly reflect upon the disagreement that developed between the two men. Thus, the organization of this paper will correspond to the chronological release of the works being discussed.

The first section examines *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

Dialectic of Enlightenment was the first comprehensive work in which the ideas of Critical Theory were laid out. An understanding of this text will serve to show the foundational theory shared by Adorno and Marcuse. The second section addresses Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*. This work demonstrates the profound influence of Freud on the members of the Frankfurt School. It also provides an example of a liberated society that Marcuse envisioned as a real possibility. Section three is concerned with Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, which provides a diagnosis of the capitalist society of the 1960s and sets the stage for Marcuse's views of the student movements. The fourth section will evaluate the correspondence between Adorno and Marcuse alongside contemporaneous writings and interviews. This chapter will also attempt to draw a conclusion about the validity of Critical Theory in regards to its own relationship with praxis.

I. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

Dialectic of Enlightenment has been recognized as one of the most influential works of the Frankfurt School. Written by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno between 1939 and 1944, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* served as a seminal work in the development of Critical Theory. Prior to this book, Critical Theory had been focused on providing a theory that would guide society towards its liberation. In a 1937 article titled "Traditional and Critical Theory" Horkheimer laid out the basic premises of Critical Theory, declaring that "it is the task of the critical theoretician to reduce the tension between his own insight and oppressed humanity in whose service he thinks."¹ As seen in this quote, the relationship between theory and praxis was of primary importance to Critical Theory from the beginning. Critical Theory was founded on the belief that

1 Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Continuum International, 1975), 221.

man could “change reality, and that the necessary conditions for such change already exist[ed].”² During the interwar period there was a sense that a real revolution was possible. Russia proved that a Marxist revolution could be successful, while in Germany the culture of the Weimar Republic allowed for serious consideration of Marxism in Western Europe. However, this feeling of optimism was short-lived as the rise of fascism, the Second World War, the disappointment of the Soviet Union, and the continued success of capitalism all came to cast doubt on the hopes of a future revolution in the West. Critical Theory could no longer operate with its earlier purpose. It now had to confront and explain the failure of reason to guide man to greater freedom.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer took on the task of explaining why the world had become a place in which reason could lead to the irrationality of political and economic totalitarianism. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* takes on multiple tasks, but its main point is to clarify how Enlightenment thinking led to the horrors of modernity. The Enlightenment saw rationality, science, and knowledge emerge as mankind's greatest tools. However, a contradiction arose from man's use of reason as irrationality persisted through the ages. This “dialectic of enlightenment” is well expressed in the opening lines of the book: “Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity.”³ The goal of Enlightenment was fulfilled as man became the master of his domain, but in doing so he pursued rationality to irrational ends. The highest achievements of human reason, such as our knowledge of atoms, were appropriated so as to be used against mankind. The most efficient methods of industrial production could be applied to the systematic destruction of people. Rational thought was shown not to be restricted by any sort of ethics. Adorno and

2 Ibid., 227.

3 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University, 2002), 1.

Horkheimer wrote that “Enlightenment is totalitarian.”⁴ It has reduced the entire world to quantifiable and objective elements. Culture, language, and even human relationships succumbed to the dominating rationality of Enlightenment. It was man's own rationality that has brought about the beginning of his demise.

Although they point to the Enlightenment as being the source of society's current state, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that Western civilization, from its earliest times, has been shaped by tension between reason and irrationality. It was in man's separation from nature that his rational capacity first developed. During some point in man's primitive past he came to recognize himself as a being within the world. At this early stage nature was understood through animistic beliefs because mankind's existence was encompassed by nature. The natural elements and the earliest deities were considered to be one and the same. A flash of lighting was divine in and of itself. It was through myth that mankind began to subject nature to his rational capacity by interpreting it through myth. Myth was used to explain and control the natural elements that threatened man. The feared unknown could thus be brought within man's power. Rituals were ways to exert control over the natural world. As man began to order the world through myth he also began to recognize himself as a subjective individual opposed to an objective nature. Myth, then, served as an early form of Enlightenment due to its dominating tendencies.

Adorno and Horkheimer provide an analysis of the *Odyssey* in order to show that by Homer's time man had departed from his early animistic beliefs. As nature came to be rationalized and controlled, so too could society be organized through reason. “With the end of nomadism the social order is established on the basis of fixed property. Power and labor diverge.”⁵ Horkheimer and Adorno asserted that the beginning of Western civilization began

4 Ibid., 4.

5 Ibid., 9.

with man's awareness of self, the effort to control nature, and the origin of class. Their study traces the development of Enlightenment thought alongside Odysseus's voyage home. Adorno and Horkheimer interpret numerous episodes from the epic in order to illustrate how “all the adventures Odysseus survives are dangerous temptations deflecting the self from the path of logic.”⁶ In the character of Odysseus there can be found the qualities that acted as the foundation of Enlightenment. Odysseus is “already *homo oeconomicus*, whom all reasonable people will one day resemble.”⁷ In each adventure Odysseus formulates a plan to escape and, subsequently, he continues the voyage back to his personal estate. The deaths of his companions become a measured loss in a calculus aimed at his return. For Odysseus “men [appear] only in estranged forms, as enemies or allies, but always instruments, things.”⁸ This existential isolation would later come to define modern society in the form of the market economy.

Homer pits the civilized Odysseus against the remnants of man's primitive past. The Lotus-eaters represent a distant image of man that could sustain himself through idleness. They offer a blissful regression to “the stage of gathering the fruits of the earth and the sea.” However, their idleness is at odds with the productiveness that defines man's rational character. Enlightenment demands a control over nature that can only be achieved through work. “Against them [Odysseus] asserts their own cause, the realization of utopia through historical work, whereas an image of bliss deprives them of their strength.”⁹

Polyphemus, the cyclops, represents a later stage of man, that of barbarism. “For Homer, the definition of barbarism coincides with that of a state in which no systematic agriculture, and therefore no systematic time-managing organization of work and society, has yet to be

6 Ibid., 38.

7 Ibid., 48.

8 Ibid., 49.

9 Ibid., 50.

achieved.”¹⁰ Polyphemus lives a basic life of self-preservation. His simple-mindedness is placed in contrast to Odysseus's cleverness. His defeat is another instance of reason's superiority over man's earlier forms. Later on in the epic, the Sirens and their alluring song illustrate Odysseus's role as a bourgeois figure. In order to pass by the Sirens without being drawn to them by their song, Odysseus plugs the ears of his men with wax and has himself strapped to the mast. Adorno and Horkheimer identify this scene as an allegory of a landowner and his workers. “Workers must look ahead with alert concentration and ignore anything that lays to one side. The urge toward distraction must be grimly sublimated in redoubled exertions. Thus workers are made practical.” Odysseus alone is allowed to hear the beauty of the Sirens' song. Immobile, he is stuck in his privileged role as a leader of men. “In this way the enjoyment of art and manual work diverge as the primitive world is left behind.”¹¹

In the end, Odysseus returns home and takes control of his property. He is reestablished as the ruler of his domain. “The primeval world is secularized as the space he measures out; the old demons only populate the distant margins and islands of the civilized Mediterranean, retreating into the forms of rocks and caves from which they had originally sprung in the face of primal dread.”¹² Asserting himself against nature and the unknown, Odysseus proves the resilience of reason. Western civilization is shown to be centered on the rational individual who creates his own reality.

In their engagement with the *Odyssey*, Adorno and Horkheimer demonstrate the success of the rational individual over nature. Odysseus's ultimate triumph serves as evidence that reason and knowledge can be equated with power. The next subject on which Horkheimer and Adorno choose to focus is how the rational individual would exist in society. In order for a proper society

10 Ibid., 50.

11 Ibid., 26.

12 Ibid., 38.

to exist, the needs of both the individuals as well as the collective must be met. However, there quickly appears the potential conflict between individuals for whom self-preservation serves as their primary interest. Horkheimer and Adorno recognize this need for reconciliation in Kant's attempt to produce an ethical system derived from reason. Kant proposes that there is a moral imperative, a universal law that demands all rational individuals to respect one another. Adorno and Horkheimer, however, claim that “the citizen who renounced a profit out of the Kantian motive of respect for mere form of the law would not be enlightened but superstitious – a fool.”¹³ Rationality had already delivered man from his primitive beliefs in spirits and gods; there can be no return to an immaterial world.

Although no ethical system could be derived from reason, rationality did entail freedom for each individual. This freedom, however, was restrained by the development of the market economy. The market economy developed as a result of Enlightenment's reduction of existence to its material elements. The demands of the market economy inevitably led to the development of a class system. “The bourgeois in the successive forms of the slave-owner, the free entrepreneur, and the administrator is the logical subject of enlightenment.”¹⁴ The degree of freedom allotted by individuals is reflected by the divisions of the class system. Those with greater power, the bourgeoisie, possess greater freedom. The freedom of the proletariat, meanwhile, is limited by the work demanded of them as well as by the laws set in place by those with greater power. With this denial of freedom the Enlightenment betrays its own goals. “The market economy [that bourgeois philosophy] unleashed was at once the prevailing form of reason and the power which ruined reason.” Yet, this system was deemed necessary due to “what the bourgeoisie themselves had realized: that freedom in their world tended toward organized

13 Ibid., 67.

14 Ibid., 65.

anarchy.”¹⁵ This “organized anarchy” is most vividly portrayed in the writings of the Marquis de Sade, where the idea of freedom ultimately implies a fantasy of absolute power. Horkheimer and Adorno cite de Sade's Juliette as an individual who, due to her social position, is able to act with unrestricted freedom. The Enlightenment had shown that there was no law besides that which is imposed by those with power. Juliette is not bound by anything other than her own desires. Her vicious use of her freedom illustrates the furthest extent of Enlightenment thought for “to be free of the stab of conscience is as essential to formalistic reason as to be free of love or hate.”¹⁶

De Sade revealed the irrational extremes that the Enlightenment had made possible. He demonstrated that the individual must be restrained and refused the unlimited freedom. These restrictions of the individual can only be enforced by the people as a whole. Enlightenment demands its own denial by denouncing its support of the free individual: “the anarchy and individualism that de Sade proclaimed in the struggle against laws culminate in the absolute rule of the generality, the republic.”¹⁷ The republic maintains the market economy, while leveling each citizen in order to achieve the optimal function of the entire system. Restrictions must be put into place in order to prevent the lawlessness that de Sade portrayed. The individual must submit to the power of the collective in the form of the state. This placement of the individual beneath the generality provides a precedent for totalitarianism. Thus, “the old, undemanding bourgeois state reappears in the violence of the fascist collective.”¹⁸

In the section of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* titled “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the repression of the individual has progressed beyond the political realm. Culture and art, once areas of subjective

15 Ibid., 70.

16 Ibid., 75.

17 Ibid., 92.

18 Ibid., 93.

expression, now serve as tools of instrumental rationality. Adorno and Horkheimer share Kant's view of art as being “purposiveness without purpose”. Art was once able to offer an alternative to the rational world because it refused to be reduced to its utilitarian elements. However, such is the dominating aspect of Enlightenment that art and all of culture were overcome by totality of instrumental reason. Once art came to be recognized as a commodity it became a tool of repression. “The irreconcilable elements of culture, art, and amusement have been subjected equally to the concept of purpose and thus brought under a single false denominator: the totality of the culture industry.”¹⁹ In the United States, Adorno and Horkheimer witnessed the prevalence and influence of the popular culture that was delivered to the masses. At every moment an individual was exposed to some form of entertainment, whether it be radio, television, or comic strips. These mediums of culture were part and parcel of advanced capitalist society. There could be no escape from economic functions in such a society. Culture operated under the principles of the commodity economy and in order to fulfill the demands of the public, culture became a product of industry. The culture industry produces content that is to be consumed just as any other commodity. These cultural products “no longer need to present themselves as art. The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they produce.”²⁰ It is not required for culture to present itself as anything other than a consumer good.

Culture came to offer an illusion of escape by perpetuating the distinction between the realms of work and pleasure. “It is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality.”²¹ At the end of the work day workers look to culture for entertainment. This entertainment, ironically, is itself a product of work. The worker is offered a selection of cultural products as decided upon by heads of the industry. Individual

19 Ibid., 108.

20 Ibid., 95.

21 Ibid., 116.

preference appears only after the cultural commodities are presented to the market. “The advantages and disadvantages debated by enthusiasts serve only to perpetuate the appearance of competition and choice.”²² The products that an individual is allowed to choose from differ only superficially. They all contribute to the promotion and continuation of this current form of reality. The culture industry reproduces endlessly the idea of contentment in contemporary society, while also depriving the subject of actual satisfaction.

As employees people are reminded of the rational organization and must fit into it as common sense requires. As customers they are regaled, whether on the screen or in the press, with human interest stories demonstrating freedom of choice and the charm of not belonging to the system. In both cases they remain objects.²³

This understanding of humans as objects is typical of Enlightenment thought. As seen previously in the *Odyssey* and the works of the Marquis de Sade. Unhindered, rationality has no regard for individuals. They serve only as the means toward an end. In this case, the end is the continued propagating of the commodity economy. Within this system, culture is reduced to a commodity with its purpose being to placate the masses. “Entertainment fosters the resignation which seeks to forget itself in entertainment.”²⁴ Entertainment, like a narcotic, enables the population to endure a life of unending and unfulfilling work.

An individual's willingness to be subjected to this life is based upon a false identification of the universal with the particular. Mass culture projects the illusion that the desires of the individual are the same as those of society. Fooled into such a notion, the individual has no issue with reproducing the world as it is, a world defined by rationality. The false sense of freedom that is implanted in culture is understood as truth by the individual subject. This system can only allow for a sense of “pseudoindividuality”. “Only because individuals are none but mere

22 Ibid., 97.

23 Ibid., 118.

24 Ibid., 113.

intersections of universal tendencies is it possible to reabsorb them smoothly into the universal.”²⁵ Individualism can only continue to a certain extent before it must be reined in by society. Horkheimer and Adorno recognized this characteristic of Enlightenment in the works of de Sade. Mass culture perpetuates the idea that a subject can define himself apart from the rest of society while maintaining his role within it. Pseudoindividuality provides the individual with a notion of freedom, despite his being restricted in every way possible.

Throughout the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno trace rationality's domination of society. Enlightenment proved itself to be regressive and, at its worst, self-destructive. The rational subject is disintegrated within the whole of society. All individuals, from those in the highest positions of power to those at the lowest, are brought together for the single purpose of perpetuating the established reality. “The ability to keep going at all becomes the justification for the blind continuation of the system, indeed, for its immutability.”²⁶ The Enlightenment reduced reality to a set of rational functions that are to be continually and repeatedly performed. The practical efficiency of instrumental rationality allows for it to shake off any element of criticism. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* shows how the development of Western civilization has resulted in a rationality that resists change. The historical evidence and the state of contemporary society show reason to be self-edifying. Effective political praxis appears to be unlikely in light of these findings.

Section II: Marcuse, Freud, and Critical Theory

From its beginnings the Frankfurt School included Freudian psychoanalysis as an essential element of Critical Theory. Psychoanalysis provided an understanding of the subjective experience of the subjective individual that the Frankfurt School found absent in Marxist theory.

25 Ibid., 128.

26 Ibid., 119.

Freud, himself, made the point that we should not “forget that the satisfaction of the individual's happiness cannot be erased from among the aims of our civilization.”²⁷ Psychoanalysis allowed for Critical Theory to penetrate the psyche of the masses in order to further comprehend the contemporary social and political reality. Herbert Marcuse brought psychoanalysis to the forefront of Critical Theory with his book *Eros and Civilization*. Published in 1955, *Eros and Civilization* arrived at a time when psychoanalysis was at the height of its popular influence in the United States. Writing in a less intellectually intimidating manner than Adorno and Horkheimer, Marcuse provided a more approachable understanding of the issues that Critical Theory sought to address. *Eros and Civilization*, like *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, attempted to diagnose the continued stagnation of social progress. Using Freud's psychological and anthropological theories, Marcuse explains how the subjective individual and society both developed so as to be complacent towards the totalitarian aspects of advanced industrial society. Marcuse also uses Freud's concepts of the reality principle, the pleasure principle, and repression to explain how freedom is obstructed by contemporary society. Marcuse, however, goes beyond the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by investigating whether Freud's theories offer the possibility of a non-repressive civilization.

Freud, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, sought to explain through social psychology how civilization developed. In Freudian theory, civilization is characterized by the relationship between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. The pleasure principle describes man's natural inclination to pursue pleasure above all else. Under the pleasure principle, the world is understood in terms of immediate satisfaction. However, the reality of the world is such that immediate gratification must be delayed in order for man to exist beyond a barbaric state. Through a variety of psychological developments the reality principle comes to replace the

27 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 54.

pleasure principle. The reality principle allows for man to ultimately achieve a qualitatively different pleasure than was possible under the pleasure principle. “Under the reality principle, the human being develops the function of reason: it learns to 'test' the reality, to distinguish between good and bad, true and false, useful and harmful.”²⁸ The reality principle operates through organized domination and repression, which restrict the impulses of the pleasure principle and redirects that energy towards progressive endeavors. Freud's theory of civilization “derives the need for repression from the 'natural' and perpetual disproportion between human desires and the environment in which they must be satisfied.”²⁹

Marcuse states that, “repression is an historical phenomenon,”³⁰ and so, by tracing the development of mankind, it can be seen that repression has been necessary for the advancement of civilization. “Left free to pursue their natural objectives, the basic instincts of man would be incompatible with all lasting association and preservation: they would destroy even where they unite.”³¹ This parallels the section of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that traces mankind's development through the *Odyssey*. The lotus eaters and the cyclops were not able to advance beyond barbarism because they lacked the restrictions necessary to have an ordered civilization. Greek society, however, was able to progress due to the development of reason and the implementation of the reality principle. The movement from the pleasure principle to the reality principle involves a shift in values: from immediate satisfaction to delayed satisfaction, from pleasure to restraint of pleasure, from joy (play) to toil (work), from receptiveness to productiveness, from absence of repression to security.³²

Marcuse coins two terms to better describe contemporary society: “surplus repression”

28 Ibid., 13.

29 Ibid., 84.

30 Ibid., 15.

31 Ibid., 11.

32 Ibid., 12.

and “the performance principle.” Surplus repression refers to a level of repression that is greater than that which is necessary for civilization to operate. Marcuse accepts that a certain amount of repression is necessary in order for any civilization to exist outside a state of barbarism; however, when repression exceeds the amount necessary for the continued operation of civilization, it begins to infringe upon freedom. The term “performance principle” is used to denote “the prevailing historical form of the reality principle.”³³ Under the performance principle of 20th century industrial capitalism, surplus repression exists proportionally to economic class. It is the worker who is most heavily repressed, both externally and internally, under late industrial civilization.

Repression comes from without by way of the labor and toil demanded by the market economy. However, “the irreconcilable conflict is not between work (reality principle) and Eros (pleasure principle), but between alienated labor (performance principle) and Eros.”³⁴ According to Freud, erotic energy is transformed through sublimation into energy that can be used for work. The performance principle, however, demands that all erotic energy be dedicated to work. “The basic control of leisure achieved by the length of the working day itself, by the tiresome and mechanical routine of alienated labor; these require that leisure be a passive relaxation and a recreation of energy for work.”³⁵ The overexertion of the worker under the performance principle leads to a deficiency of erotic energy necessary for the pursuit of pleasure. The subjective individual comes to be defined by the objective results of his labor. Marcuse shows that Freudian psychology can express the psychological state of the alienated worker that Marx had described.

Marcuse holds the belief that the current level of technology is such that repressive work should no longer be an issue. The automation of industry can bring human work to a minimum,

33 Ibid., 32.

34 Ibid., 43.

35 Ibid., 43.

thus allowing for a greater amount of free time. Instead, however, people continue to lack necessary resources and are required to spend their days working in order to survive.

The distribution of scarcity as well as the effort of overcoming it, the mode of work, have been imposed upon individuals – first by mere violence, subsequently by a more rational utilization of power. However, no matter how useful this rationalization was for the progress as the whole, it remained the rationality of domination, and the gradual concept of scarcity was inextricably bound up with and shaped by the interest of domination.³⁶

Marcuse asserts that surplus repression is maintained by an artificial poverty of resources that is intentionally upheld by the dominating economic and political forces. It is these forces that are the source of the repression felt by every working individual.

Civilization, however, continues to operate in steady fashion with few complaints.

“Repression disappears in grand objective order of things which rewards more or less adequately the complying individuals and, in doing so, reproduces more or less adequately society as a whole.”³⁷ This remark echoes a passage in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* which states, “The gradations in the standard of living correspond very precisely to the degree by which classes and individuals inwardly adhere to the system.”³⁸ Domination affects all aspects of life through the political and economic institutions that shape society. Eventually, this external repression is replicated in each individual's psychological structure. “The unfree individual introjects his masters and their commands into his own mental apparatus.”³⁹ The performance principle extends itself into perpetuity as each generation undergoes the same development shaped by surplus repression. The rise of rationality and the introduction of repression allowed for mankind to move from barbarism to civilization. However, those keys to civilization have become tools of domination. The dominating forces have imposed a stagnating stability upon the current reality,

36 Ibid., 33.

37 Ibid., 42.

38 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University, 2002), 120.

39 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 15.

and in return “the individual pays by sacrificing his time, his consciousness, his dreams; civilization pays by sacrificing its own promises of liberty, justice, and peace for all.”⁴⁰ The performance principle stymies the subjective individual’s pursuit of happiness and, ultimately, the advancement of civilization due to surplus repression.

Marcuse, however, offers an optimistic glimpse into how civilization could allow itself to progress beyond its current repressive state. Marcuse finds in Freud's theory of civilization a vulnerability to the foundation of the reality principle. According to Freud’s theory, “the reality principle has to be re-established continually in the development of man”, and, as a result, “its triumph over the pleasure principle is never complete and never secure.”⁴¹ A single element of the pleasure principle survives the establishment of the reality principle – fantasy. The reality principle instills reason as the directive of human instincts, while

Fantasy remains pleasant but becomes useless, untrue – a mere play, daydreaming. As such, it continues to speak the language of the pleasure principle, of freedom from repression, uninhibited desire and gratification – but reality proceeds according to the laws of reason, no longer committed to the dream language.⁴²

Fantasy serves as the only connection to a set of values totally distinct from those of the performance principle. Fantasy continues to operate under the laws of the pleasure principle, despite society's being firmly ensconced in the laws of the reality principle. The survival of fantasy makes possible the reassertion of the pleasure principle. Through fantasy, individuals are able to imagine a reality based on the values of the pleasure principle; thus fantasy begins to undermine the structure of the reality principle.

The pleasure principle rests on the pursuit of sensuous gratification, which places it at odds with the demands of the reality principle. Fantasy, then, appears to be irreconcilable with

40 Ibid., 90.

41 Ibid., 15.

42 Ibid., 119.

reason, the cornerstone of the reality principle. However, “the analysis of the cognitive function of fantasy is thus led to aesthetics as the 'science of beauty': behind the aesthetic form lies the repressed harmony of sensuousness and reason.”⁴³ From this claim, Marcuse argues that aesthetics can serve as the basis for a non-repressive civilization. Marcuse draws upon Kant's study of aesthetics in the *Critique of Judgment* in order to justify his argument. Most importantly, Marcuse cites Kant's concepts of “purposiveness without purpose” and “lawfulness without law”. It is these two concepts that Marcuse recognizes as being “the essence of a truly non-repressive order. The first defines the structure of beauty, the second that of freedom. Their common character is gratification in the free play of the released potentialities of man and nature.”⁴⁴ Beauty and law do not direct themselves towards specific ends; they operate according to their own internal logic. They express the ultimate goal of man's internal and external freedom. Fantasy, operating under the rationality of aesthetics, provides an alternative to instrumental rationality and the performance principle. Thus, Marcuse argues, it is possible for a non-repressive society to be based upon fantasy.

Marcuse recognizes that certain conditions must be achieved before mankind can proceed towards creating a civilization based on aesthetics and the values of the pleasure principle. While “utopias are susceptible to unrealistic blueprints, the conditions for a free civilization are not. They are a matter of reason.”⁴⁵ The rise of increasingly efficient automation within industry signifies the potential shift towards a more free civilization. Automation stands to relieve society from alienated labor and to allow for greater time dedicated to leisure. “The reduction of the working day to a point where the mere quantum of labor time no longer arrests human

43 Ibid., 130.

44 Ibid., 162.

45 Ibid., 206.

development is the first prerequisite of freedom.”⁴⁶ Here it becomes clear that Marcuse views that the next stage of civilization will be based upon Marxist thought. As with Marx, Marcuse understands the shift to a liberated society is dependent on industrial society reaching its mature form. Marcuse argues that the historical moment for such a shift is at hand. “The very progress of civilization under the performance principle has attained a level of productivity at which the social demands upon instinctual energy to be spent in alienated labor could be considerably reduced.”⁴⁷ “Non-repressive order is essentially an order of abundance: the necessary constraint is brought about by 'superfluity' rather than need. Only an order of abundance is compatible with freedom. At this point, the idealistic and materialistic critiques of culture meet.”⁴⁸ The freedom provided by the transition to automation would allow for the development of an aesthetic culture. This would involve a complete qualitative change of society from how it is under the performance principle. “Lawfulness without law” could be achieved because “in a truly free civilization, all laws are self-given by the individuals.”⁴⁹ It is only in an aesthetic culture that a non-repressive order can be realized.

In providing a theoretical basis for an alternative reality, Marcuse fulfilled the duties of a Critical Theorist. However, an essential aspect of Critical Theory is that it must always respond to the contemporary situation. In the preface to the mass market edition of *Eros and Civilization*, published seven years after the original publication, Marcuse acknowledges that the proposals in the work could no longer address the society due to political and economic changes. He writes: “The events of the last years refute all optimism. The immense capabilities of the advanced industrial society are increasingly mobilized against the utilization of its own resources for the

46 Ibid., 138.

47 Ibid., 117.

48 Ibid., 177

49 Ibid., 174.

pacification of human existence.”⁵⁰ The dominating forces that thrive under the performance principle proved to be more resilient than Marcuse had previously assumed. The process of achieving liberation through aesthetics no longer appeared to be possible. The conditions that Critical Theory had to act upon had changed as the West continued its course through the Cold War. It became necessary for Marcuse to produce a work that responded to these changes.

III. *One-Dimensional Man*

The conformity and complacency of advanced industrial society serves as the subject of Marcuse's 1963 work *One-Dimensional Man*. This work demonstrates how the performance principle has manifested itself in contemporary society. Marcuse argues that Western civilization has become “one-dimensional,” meaning that it rejects any thought that offers an alternative to the established political and economic reality. Advanced industrial capitalism pervades society to such an extent that Marcuse cannot limit himself to merely the political and economics realms; he extends his critique to the fundamental topics of language and philosophy. *One-Dimensional Man* looks to identify man's psychological, sociological, and metaphysical position within contemporary Western society.

One of the most striking aspects of late industrial society is how it has contained social change and, ultimately, has avoided the proletarian-led revolution which Marx declared to be intrinsic to the dialectical structure of capitalism. “The new technological work-world thus enforces a weakening of the negative position of the working class: the latter no longer appears to be the living contradiction to the established society.”⁵¹ In the post-war United States, Marcuse observed that the tension between social classes had been placated as a result of the high standard of living that was made available to each social class. The worker, provided with

50 Ibid., xi.

51 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 31.

luxuries that are products of the industrial economy in which he works, finds himself without a reason to be opposed against the bourgeois class. Marcuse does not deny that life in an advanced industrial society can be good and pleasurable, but he argues that contentment with such a life may be due to an error in how the one assigns values to needs and satisfaction. Marcuse asserts that in late industrial civilization many values that are taken to be true are, in fact, false. Marcuse recognizes that some needs are “universally valid, such as: “nourishment, clothing, [and] lodging”; while other needs can only be defined by the historical subject himself. “False' [needs] are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice.”⁵² The prevailing value system of advanced industrial society identifies false needs and satisfactions as true needs and satisfactions. The objects that are desired in contemporary society do not contribute to achieving man's true needs. The satisfaction gained through possessing these objects is legitimate, but it differs from the satisfaction that one would experience with the fulfillment of a true need. There is an absurdist rationality that is able to satisfy those false desires which it propagates. This is a continuation of the irrationality Horkheimer and Adorno had charted in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Materialistic desires trump any higher form of satisfaction, whether it be artistic, intellectual, or ethical. The worker, accepting these false needs as truth, finds himself satisfied by the established reality.

Under the technological rationality of advanced industrial society, the worker's role in the work process has been redefined. He is understood in operational terms, which allows for his behavior to be understood objectively. Any issue that may inhibit a worker's performance can be addressed with a scientific method, thus ensuring the stability of the industrial apparatus as a whole. “Complaints about working conditions and wages” can be translated by researchers from

⁵² Ibid., 5.

general statements into “terms designating the particular situation in which the complaint originated.”⁵³ Marcuse provides a telling case study: “worker B makes the general statement that the piece rates on his job are too low. The interview reveals that 'his wife is in the hospital and that he is worried about the doctor's bills he has incurred'.”⁵⁴ The worker's issue is translated from a general statement into a statement which reflects the precise reasons that prompted his original statement. His complaint can then be dealt with in a way which addresses the source of the problem.

Although such linguistic analysis does provide a solution to the worker's particular problem, Marcuse asserts that it does not address the full content of the worker's initial statement. The worker's statement that 'wages are too low' “goes beyond the particular condition in the particular factory and beyond the worker's particular situation”. The “real concreteness” of the statement is in its “universal character.”⁵⁵ This universal character expresses the social context in which the statement was made. “Wages are too low” contains within it an expression that relates to the working class as a whole. There is an historical dimension to the statement which relates it to the class tensions found within capitalism. The translation of this statement into operational terms removes this universal content and silences the dialectical discourse. “Once the unrealistic excess of meaning is abolished, the investigation is locked within the vast confine in which the established society validates and invalidates propositions.”⁵⁶

Marcuse argues that the denial of concepts in favor of immediate objects demonstrates linguistic analysis's influence on society. Words come to be restricted to their operational function within the established reality and the negative, transcendent power of language is lost.

53 Ibid., 109.

54 Ibid., 110.

55 Ibid., 110.

56 Ibid., 114.

Language becomes one-dimensional and is thus denied its liberating transcendent qualities.

Discourse is deprived of the mediations which are the stages of the process of cognition and cognitive evaluation. The concepts which comprehend the facts and thereby transcend the facts are losing their authentic linguistic representation. Without these mediations, language tends to express and promote the identification of reason and fact, truth and established truth, essence and existence, the thing and its function.⁵⁷

Linguistic analysis's deformation of language results in language becoming a tool of domination.

Technological rationality can only address that which can be dominated and used as a means. It demands that language be rooted in objectivity. The abstract content of concepts exists outside the realm of exploitation and thus must be expurgated from this operational language.

The defining elements of linguistic analysis are to be found in analytic philosophy, which views reality solely in positive and operational terms. Analytic philosophy concerns itself only with objective content, which can be organized within a defined system. Just as linguistic analysis rejects concepts, universals are rejected in analytic philosophy because they lack the positive qualities that can be comprehended in operational terms. Nature no longer threatens man, but rather it becomes subject to man's intellect. "Modern scientific philosophy may well begin with the notion of two substances, *res cogitans* and *res extensa* – but as the extended matter becomes comprehensible in mathematical equations which, translated into technology, 'remake' this matter, the *res extensa* loses its character as independent substance."⁵⁸ The project of enlightenment rationality finds its fulfillment in positive and operational thought.

Analytic philosophy reduces the world to objective qualities and in doing so, Marcuse argues, it "reveals its ideological nature."⁵⁹ It is not so much that contemporary philosophy has achieved truth, but rather it has merely interpreted reality so that everything can be viewed as objects of domination. The denial of critical and negative thought denies the possibility of an

57 Ibid., 85.

58 Ibid., 152.

59 Ibid., 169.

alternative to the established reality, for accepting such a possibility would jeopardize the project of advanced industrial society. Contemporary “philosophic thought turns into affirmative thought; the philosophic critique criticizes *within* the societal framework and stigmatizes non-positive notions as mere speculation, dreams or fantasies.”⁶⁰ “What is involved is the spread of a new ideology which undertakes to describe what is happening (and meant) by eliminating the concepts capable of understanding what is happening (and meant).”⁶¹

It begins to become clear that advanced industrial society's resistance to change stems, in part, from the particular modes of thought that have become increasingly more prevalent. This objective understanding of reality reduces subject and society to primary qualities, yet doing so reveals “the progressive enslavement of man by a productive apparatus which perpetuates the struggle for existence.”⁶² The irrationality of the entire project becomes apparent as the system is shown to *create*, rather than *alleviate*, toil and pain. The lack of ethical values within this operational reality demonstrates its dominating and totalitarian qualities. “Values may have a higher dignity (morally or spiritually), but they are not *real* and thus count less in the real business of life – the less so the higher they are elevated *above* reality.”⁶³ One-dimensional society, by its own fundamental principles, allows for the continued domination of man and nature.

Marcuse views the rejection of concepts as the fundamental flaw of one-dimensional thought. Despite technological rationality's refutation of universals and concepts, they continue to exist in our language despite their vague nature. Critical Theory views concepts as necessary objects of thought, because only concepts can convey man's position in society. It recognizes that

60 Ibid., 172.

61 Ibid., 178.

62 Ibid., 144.

63 Ibid., 147.

“the object of analysis, withdrawn from the larger and denser context in which the speaker speaks and lives, is removed from the universal medium in which concepts are formed and become words.”⁶⁴ There is a historical dimension to thoughts and words that technological rationality is unconcerned with. Concepts invoke this historical dimension and all the tension that is contained within it. As demonstrated above by the worker's statement about inadequate wages, words contain greater meaning than what operational rationality allots to them. Critical Theory, by comparison, believes that “the real universe of language is that of the struggle for existence.”⁶⁵ It is this struggle for existence that is embodied in the abstract content of universals. The limits of technological rationality appear in its inability to effectively translate these universals into operational terms. Marcuse states that, “it seems that the persistence of these untranslatable universals as nodal points of thought reflects the unhappy consciousness of divided world in which 'that which is' falls short of, and even denies, 'that which can be.’”⁶⁶

Operationalism and related modes of thought were able to establish themselves due to their ability to be effectively applied in practical matters. “One does not 'believe' the statement of an operational concept but it justifies itself in action – in getting the job done, in selling and buying, in refusal to listen to others, etc.”⁶⁷ Technological rationality may be able to exert itself over nature but it finds itself incapable of completely dominating the mind and thought.

“Scientific abstractions entered and proved their truth in the actual conquest and transformation of nature, while the philosophic abstractions did not – and could not.”⁶⁸ Metaphysics, Marcuse argues, can only be defined through its historical content, which includes positive and negative elements. Metaphysics and science do exert an influence on each other, though, “if the truth of

64 Ibid., 180.

65 Ibid., 199.

66 Ibid., 209.

67 Ibid., 103.

68 Ibid., 229.

metaphysical propositions is determined by their historical content (i.e., by the degree to which they define historical possibilities), then the relation between metaphysics and science is strictly historical.”⁶⁹ The established reality and its operating rationality are the way they are as the result of specific historical circumstances. An understanding of history can provide an explanation for why, in contemporary thought, “the object-world (including the subjects) is experienced as a world of instrumentalities.”⁷⁰ Analytic philosophy's reductionist claims do not reflect the true nature of reality, but rather they reflect a historical project that has its origins in the Enlightenment, if not prior. Given that positivism, operationalism, and functionalism are the results of the fulfillment of certain historical possibilities, then it can be reasoned that other modes of thought also exist as valid and feasible historical possibilities. It is the consideration of such alternative historical possibilities that distinguishes Critical Theory from one-dimensional modes of thought. “Confronted with the given society as object of its reflection, critical thought becomes historical consciousness; as such it is essentially judgement.”⁷¹ Critical Theory looks to the negative dimension of thought in order to highlight unfulfilled potentialities that may lead to a better life for man. For instance, technological progress does not require the extensive domination of nature and society that it has historically maintained. Instead of being a tool of a warfare focused society, technology can be used for global pacification and the fulfillment of vital needs. A shift of this sort would require a complete reversal of current political and economic institutions, and yet it is these institutions that reinforce the established reality which rejects such substantial change.

One-dimensional society defends itself against ideas that threaten change, even when the change aims itself at liberating man from repression. Although technological progress is

69 Ibid., 230.

70 Ibid., 218.

71 Ibid., 99.

approaching a point that allows for the potential realization of liberation, there lacks the political power necessary for such a qualitative shift. Confronted with this established reality, the limits of Critical Theory's negative position become ever more apparent. Theory's perplexing relationship with praxis places Critical Theory at a disadvantage in a reality that has become defined by modes of thought which correspond to positive existence. Ultimately,

dialectical theory is not refuted, but it cannot offer the remedy. It cannot be positive. To be sure, the dialectical concept, in comprehending the given facts, transcends the given facts. This is the very token of its truth. It defines the historic possibilities, even necessities; but their realization can only be in practice which responds to theory, and, at present, the practice gives no such response.⁷²

The very fact that Critical Theory cannot be positive means that it cannot be expressed through operational language. Positivism denies Critical Theory of any legitimacy. The notion of there being negative content is fundamentally rejected by positivism. The empirical grounds that serve as the basis of Marxist theory no longer exist, thus rendering impossible the inherent dialectical possibility of a class-based revolution. Marcuse can only hope that some other antagonist force will arise and liberate man from the repressive forces of advanced industrial society. Until there is a group for it to guide, Critical Theory remains an abstract and speculative assessment of society.

Section IV: On Theory and Praxis

By the late 1960s both Adorno and Marcuse had become public intellectuals in their own right, though their influence in society differed significantly. Adorno had become a well-known voice in post-war Germany as a result of numerous radio speeches and published essays. The German student movement initially looked to Adorno for guidance, but he refused to lend them support, let alone provide direction. Adorno's refusal to align with the student movement led to claims that he was resigned to the established reality. The students believed that he had

⁷² Ibid., 253.

abandoned the struggle against the repressive forces of capitalism.

Marcuse, in contrast, took on a much different relationship with the student movements. *One-Dimensional Man* was widely read by student activists, as it seemed to validate their political feelings due to its critique of imperialism, military intervention, and social conformity. Like Adorno, Marcuse gave many speeches, though his were more typically at student rallies rather than on the radio. However, he was careful not to attribute to the student activists a greater role than the one he believed they served. Although they were acting in opposition to the established reality, the student movement lacked the support of the masses. Describing the circumstances that the New Left found itself in, Marcuse said, “We are not in a revolutionary, perhaps not even in a pre-revolutionary, situation. Under these conditions, the only opportunity can be preparatory work.” According to Marcuse's view, the New Left and the student movements were to aid in the transformation of the greater political consciousness. Marcuse “allot[ed] to the students an important task: to bring the 'true' consciousness (which they [were] more likely to possess than others) to the masses, who [were] still captives of the 'false' consciousness, and thus help the masses understand their 'true' needs.”⁷³

Adorno's and Marcuse's contrasting opinions about the student movements entered into their personal correspondence when, in 1969, a group of members of the German student group SDS occupied a room in a building of the Institute for Social Research. Adorno, unable to get the students to leave and with the belief that they would cause damage, called the police, which resulted in the arrest of all the students involved. In a letter to Marcuse, Adorno recounted this experience, while expressing his frustration and unhappiness over the entire situation. Adorno described the event as a “stunt” that only had the purpose of “hold[ing] together the

73 Douglas Kellner, introduction to *One-Dimensional Man* by Herbert Marcuse. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), xxxvi.

disintegrating Frankfurt SDS group.”⁷⁴ However, Marcuse, in his response, made it known that he strongly disagreed with Adorno's decision to involve the police. “To put it brutally: if the alternative is the police of left-wing students, then I am with the students.”⁷⁵ Marcuse's letters capture a sense of dread that provides an explanation for his strong position. The years since *One-Dimensional Man* seemed to have reaffirmed his belief that society was at the whim of the dominating forces of capitalism. The New Left appeared to Marcuse as one of the few sources of resistance against the repressive and imperialistic tendencies of capitalism, which produced a situation that was “so terrible, so suffocating and demeaning, that rebellion against it forces a biological, physiological reaction.”⁷⁶ Support of the student movements was necessary because to not support them would mean to “appear to be on the side of a world that supports mass murder in Vietnam, or says nothing about it, and which makes a hell of any realms that are outside the reach of its own repressive power.”

Out of this disagreement over Adorno's actions their correspondence developed into the simultaneous discussion of two issues: the acts of student activists, and the relation between theory and praxis. Marcuse viewed the existing societal conditions as being so dire he found it necessary to close the distance between theory and praxis. In a 1969 interview with *Der Spiegel*, Marcuse commented on the relation between theory and praxis, stating:

I am of the opinion that today the theoretician – and I am speaking of the Marxist theoretician – participates in practice at least to the extent that he takes a clear position on political question, that he participates in demonstrations and in certain cases in the occupation of buildings, etc.⁷⁷

In the same interview, Marcuse goes on to clarify his position as being distinct from that of

74 Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, “Correspondence on the German Student Movement,” trans. Esther Leslie *New Left Review* 233, (1999): 124.

75 *Ibid.*, 125.

76 *Ibid.*, 125.

77 Herbert Marcuse, interview by *Die Spiegel*, trans. Henry Zimmerman. *Australian New Left Review* 1, no. 22 (1969): 36.

Adorno:

I see the difference between Adorno and the Horkheimer group on the one hand and myself on the other that for me today the inner content of the theory itself requires a practical taking of position, or to put it another way, that the content itself is falsified if such a taking of position does not result. The concept of mediations must not be used as an excuse.⁷⁸

This disagreement between Adorno and Marcuse leads to an ethical question. Can a theorist limit himself to the development of theory, with the ultimate hope of its fulfillment, when the suffering caused by the established reality is such that it provokes “a biological, physiological reaction”? Adorno addresses this matter succinctly with the statement, “Desperation that, because it finds the exits blocked, blindly leaps into praxis, with the purest of intentions joins forces with catastrophe.”⁷⁹ Pursuing praxis based on one's own emotion sentiments without the clarity provided by theory is a mistake. Engaging in such practical action, as he viewed it, is a rejection of the rationality which serves as man's best instrument for achieving a better life.

As theorists, Adorno and Marcuse must, to some degree, be more than mere participants in the direct action of the student movements; however, their theoretical positions entail, to varying degrees, an interest and advocacy for certain concrete political positions. This is more obviously seen in how Marcuse's assessment of Western civilization as a totalitarian repressive reality influenced his views. However, the complicated negotiation between theory and praxis does not allow for a simple transition from the realm of thought to the realm of action. The issue of spontaneity appears as a primary element in this conflict between Adorno and Marcuse. In a letter to Adorno dated April 5, 1969, Marcuse further clarified his views on theory and praxis, stating:

You know me well enough to know that I reject the unmediated translation of theory into praxis just as emphatically as you do. But I do believe that there are situations, moments,

78 Ibid., 37.

79 Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia, 1998), 265.

in which theory is pushed on further by praxis – situations and moments in which theory that is kept separate from praxis becomes untrue to itself.⁸⁰

Adorno, however, saw this fetishization of praxis by student activists a sign that they ultimately would be ineffective: without theory, praxis remains limited to the objective reality and is unable to transcend it. In the moment of its occurrence praxis can refer only to itself. Theory can only provide influence up until the moment when praxis is fulfilled. If theory is discounted, then praxis becomes completely self-referential and becomes an end to its own means.

In regards to the historical element of this debate between Adorno and Marcuse, it appears that the two men were in agreement in their theoretical positions. Their disagreement appears to stem more from their views on the contemporary political situation and the proper means for addressing it. Adorno's refusal to support the students was not a matter of his desire to deal solely with theory, but rather it due to the fact that he did not believe that the student movements were capable of effective praxis. Adorno's and Marcuse's writings, both public and private, reflect the contemporary circumstances in which they were produced. While their political disagreements are left to history, their discussion of theory and praxis remain relevant. Reading their works years after they were written allows a more objective assessment. It is historical fact that the New Left failed to achieve many of their aspiration and that the student movement collapsed, with rogue elements descending to terrorism. In hindsight, Marcuse's support of the New Left is overly optimistic while Adorno's position that theory and thought should precede action seems to be more correct. However, it was never the purpose of Critical Theory to predict the future, but rather to present alternative possibilities.

Adorno claims that the indistinct separation between theory and praxis reflects “the

80 Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, “Correspondence on the German Student Movement,” trans. Esther Leslie *New Left Review* 233, (1999): 129.

illusion of the absolute division of subject and object.”⁸¹ Critical Theory's synthesis of Marx and Freud provided an emphasis on the relationship between the subjective individual and society. According to the thinking of both Adorno and Marcuse the totalitarianism of capitalism removes the individual from control over his own existence, the source of power ultimately remains in the hands of the subject. It is this removal from control over one's own life that drives much of Critical Theory's post-war work. Both would agree that a mediation between theory and praxis is necessary for the subject to achieve the fullest expression of his needs within the existing objective conditions. Prior to the events of the 1960s, Critical Theory had never explicitly concerned itself with praxis. The works discussed in this paper trace the development of Critical Theory's response to social, political, and economic changes. The demand to simultaneously consider theory and praxis developed as Critical Theory found itself facing a rapidly changing world.

Real political praxis requires the precondition of “a reasoned analysis of the situation,” which theory provides. However, in the time that this analysis is conducted the situation continues. Reflecting on this issue, Adorno writes that “an analysis of the situation is not tantamount to conformity to that situation.”⁸² Based on his writings, Marcuse could be expected to retort that the correct analysis is delivered too late is without practical value.

The work of the Frankfurt School should not be viewed as having been done in vain. Although the specifics of their writings may have lost their relevance over the time, the main themes developed by Critical Theory remain as applicable as when they were conceived. Adorno noted that his theoretical writings were themselves a form of praxis and thus they were acts of opposition. Although Marcuse may have considered writing secondary to action, his words are

81 Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia, 1998), 261.

82 *Ibid.*, 264.

that which remain. Critical Theory continues to survive as a challenge to and a negation of the existing social order. Any idea that has not been realized remains a possibility.

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