

MARCUSE'S REVOLUTIONARY AESTHETICS, TODAY

Introduction

In the late work of Herbert Marcuse, the orderly transition from capitalism to socialism requires an aesthetic dimension that—in addition to politics and morality—shapes society in its entirety, eventually including material production. Radical consciousness, although an essential requirement for human liberation, is not enough. There must be a corresponding change in human needs and aspirations. We must evolve beyond a (physical) toleration for cruelty, ugliness, selfishness. Otherwise, the old Adam (of competition, aggression, and acquisition) will be reproduced on the new economic base, and the historical cycle of domination and rebellion will go on and on. The human agents of change must change themselves fundamentally, not only in their heads, but in their feelings and instincts, and such a transformation of human nature must be achieved prior to an economic revolution that objectively completes the process of human emancipation.

Marcuse argued that the desires and the needs generated by the capitalist system are conservative in that they stabilize and perpetuate this anti-life consumer economy. We are all to some degree infused and infested with these false needs such as the need to possess and consume new gadgets and conveniences, and so on. We fall prey to planned obsolescence. The capitalist economy has created a second nature in human beings such that resistance to change is anchored in our consciousness and unconsciousness, “sinking down” into our biological being. We need to liberate ourselves from ourselves. He often spoke of a “vicious circle”¹ in which we are trapped because we reproduce inside ourselves (in our minds, emotions, and bodies) the very desires and needs that oppress and repress us. Breaking this vicious circle requires that we undergo an aesthetic stage of development.

Could it be that socialism failed in some countries, and didn't succeed in other countries, not only because science and technology (what Marx called the “forces of production”) were insufficiently developed, or because ruthless elites and brutal state governments destroyed such attempts, but also because human nature was inadequately and/or pathologically developed? Consider the current American situation, where there is unprecedented frustration and disappointment with human relationships, where even the slightest offensive gesture or word often leads to confrontation and dislike for one another, and where mounting anger and hatred is isolating people, pitting them against one

¹ Marcuse, Herbert, *An Essay on Liberation*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1969) P. 18

another, and channeling a growing number into radical right political organizations. There is a better chance for socialism to work on a grand scale, given this situation, after we have passed through (and not left behind) an aesthetic stage of human development that gives rise to a new *subject*, a new kind of human being who is qualitatively different than what we have become under capitalism. Then social activities and projects that require a lot of agreement, patience, tolerance, humility and cooperation will flow much easily and enduringly.

Employee ownership and control of the nation's economy, and even worker co-ops on local and regional levels, presuppose sane and rational individuals who are not full of fear and fury, and presently in America there is a shortage of such folks. The psychological and biological damage that prevails throughout this country as a result of the harsh and bitter struggle for existence over hundreds of years has not exactly cultivated the qualities and social skills in Americans that are needed for cooperatively running economic enterprises in the factories, shops, and offices. According to Marcuse, a socialist economic revolution in America prior to an aesthetic transformation of (historical) human nature is premature and unsustainable. A preventive counter-revolution functions inside our heads, and we must dismantle it as a pre-condition for achieving true and lasting socialism.

Humanistic Aesthetics and a Future Free Society

Marcuse made little attempt to depict the specific institutions of a future free society. He thought that no blueprint or greenprint for a socialist society could be determined a priori, beyond the foundation of the collective ownership and control of the forces of production (science and technology). However, he did provide some indications or models for the new type of human being who must precede the emergence of socialism as a qualitatively higher form of human association.

In the mythological-artistic tradition of Orpheus and Narcissus Marcuse finds the (intangible) qualities of a truly liberated and revolutionary human being. He sees Orpheus and Narcissus as "culture heroes"² because they symbolize a mode of living that renounces the Promethean world of toil, conquest, and endless productivity. These cultural heroes inhabit a world of calm, beauty, receptivity, contemplation, joy, sensuousness, song, liberation from (oppressive) linear time, and these qualities or attributes should and must become aspects of real human beings. Orpheus and Narcissus pertain to the future; they recall and preserve possibilities that seem to be utopian possibilities, and they represent truthfully the historical alternative to the dominant social reality. Revolution presupposes that the subjective agents of historical change become a lot more like the myths of Orpheus and Narcissus.

² Marcuse, Herbert, *Eros and Civilization*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1955). P. 161

The domain of authentic art represents for Marcuse a higher dimension of human development that we must approximate prior to the transition to integral socialism. In great works of art the characters speak with less inhibition and shame, are more loyal to their passions, more reflective, lovable, tender, quiet, "more real than reality itself" (a phrase that Marcuse's borrows from Hegel) because they mean what they say and say what they mean. They call humans and things by their rightful names, and they name the otherwise unnamable. In art human relationships and things appear as what they are behind the commodity form: "a landscape is really a landscape, a human is really a human, a thing is really a thing."³ Art reveals human relations, and relations with nature, that are not mediated by the market. It demystifies reality so that humans and things appear as what they are and what they can be.

For example, in *Romeo and Juliet* the death of the young lovers is transcended by the truth of the play as a whole. The liberating truth is in the beauty, tenderness, and passion of the victims, not the oppressive order. In the works of Poe, Kafka, and Beckett the language breaks through the falseness of reality itself. There is no conceivable reconciliation with the world depicted. The message is rebellion: things must change. All authentic works of art tap into the meta-social dimension of human beings, reveal Eros and Thanatos beyond social control, activate the primary erotic-destructive forces in a subterranean revolt against the social order, and this is why Marcuse argued that art can help to change human beings who might then go on to change the world accordingly.

According to Marcuse, the term aesthetic has a dual meaning: "pertaining to art" and "pertaining to the senses."⁴ An aesthetic human being is someone who has internalized the truth value of art as a new system of needs that drive historical practice. Without this material force, without "radical sensibility,"⁵ even the most advanced consciousness remains powerless. The aesthetic condition is an existential stage of human development entailing a liberation of the senses, new needs, the ascent of Eros that must precede the establishment of a free society. The aesthetic dimension unites the highest ideals of art with the life-affirming impulses and tendencies of human nature. Beauty is akin to Eros in that it attracts and appeals to the real needs of human beings; it is the "promise of pleasure," as Stendhal said.

I want to point out that it would be a simplistic misunderstanding of Marcuse's aesthetic theory to think that it is the "content" of a great work of art that contains or reveals revolutionary truth. The core claim of Marcuse's aesthetic theory is that an authentic work of art is inherently subversive of the established society by virtue of its "form." It is the formal properties of a work of art, primarily the subjection of the "content" to the laws of beauty that creates

3 Marcuse, Herbert, *One Dimensional Man* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1964).

4 Marcuse, Herbert, *An Essay on Liberation*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1969). P. 24

5 Marcuse, Herbert, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1972). P. 63

an alternative vision of reality that contradicts what is in favor of what could be. However, the issue is complex: “Aesthetic form is not opposed to content, not even dialectically. In the work of art, form becomes content and vice versa.”⁶ In other words, through the miracle of artistic stylization the form is experienced as content, and the content as form. Not any and all “content” is suitable for a work of art, but even mundane and disturbing material can be turned into a great work of art through the utilization of language (in the case of literature) and through the concentration, exaggeration, and reordering of facts—in short, through the somewhat mysterious processes of artistic formalization.

Marcuse’s philosophical concepts and ideas support a social movement or a cultural revolution that situates political education and activism in a larger social context that is light, beautiful, sensuous, not so serious, playful, that breaks out of the framework of capitalist work-relations and the “fetishism of the productive forces,” that mixes the barricade with the dance floor, music and poetry with protest and resistance, political discourse and education with friendship and love. This is the aesthetic-political revolution that must precede the economic revolution. The “Great Refusal” entails a new standard of living measured by criteria such as freedom from anxiety, shame, fear, (conscious and unconscious) guilt, and oppressive time. It is a “style” of life that rejects materialism and consumerism in favor of friendship, love, beauty, joy, intelligence—in short, a revolutionary aesthetic.

In opposition to capitalist society that turns everything on earth into a means for profit, we must refuse the commodity form of life, and organize life according to the laws of beauty, not the laws of profit. The aesthetic form, with beauty as its central category, in contrast to the commodity form, subjects human beings to the principles of harmony, proportion, rhythm, equilibrium, and to a totality of qualities that transforms a free association of individuals into a self-contained whole, into another dimension of life that contradicts and subverts the established lifestyle. The aesthetic form does not release passions, desires, and sex in ways that make us less free and happy—repressive desublimation—but rather it shapes and guides erotic-creative energy in ways that make us freer and happier, “non-repressive sublimation.”

Until the end of his life, Marcuse pinned his hope for radical change, especially in America, on the fusion of political rebellion with erotic-artistic rebellion. This is the instinctual foundation of revolution, as he envisioned it. What Marcuse said more than 50 years ago is still true—namely, the “happy consciousness, the belief that the real is rational and that the system delivers the goods,”⁷ cannot be overcome through more and more material production and the better distribution of wealth. The most politically aware people must break entirely with this “euphoria in unhappiness” to which the vast majority

⁶ Marcuse, Herbert, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1978). 41

⁷ Marcuse, Herbert, *One Dimensional Man*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1964). P. 84

of Americans are addicted and are likely to remain addicted for the foreseeable future. The Great Refusal entails turning away from the capitalist economy, creating a counterculture that exists outside, above, and against the capitalist economy. This means existing in a contradictory reality, but a “comprehended contradiction” to be reconciled (eventually) through total revolution.

Even if this tension results in an “unhappy consciousness,” this is better than the “happy consciousness” of a world identified with wasteful and destructive goods and services. A cultural revolution must not compromise its politics or values, but rather remain alienated, estranged, separated from the masses who support and pursue a capitalist standard of living. There is no escape from the merciless world market, but we can create and inhabit a second dimension of life (of “comprehended contradictions”) where the Beauty of an alternative counterculture has the power to strengthen revolutionaries, and to awe and shock the general population, breaking the familiar experience of everyday life, opening up a new dimension of freedom and happiness, that could, in conjunction with political education and leadership, eventually lead to the final collapse or overthrow of capitalism.

These days, many people find political meetings, events, and actions boring, too cognitive, not pleasurable. Here, Marcuse's analysis of, and proposal for, a revolutionary aesthetic could be applied to the internal and external dynamics and dimensions of a movement politics. Without an erotic-aesthetic dimension politics cannot sustain and grow because it is passion, feeling, emotional bonding, not awareness and ideas alone, not self-interest alone, not even long-term self-interest, that holds people together and accomplishes goals. What people fundamentally care about is love, a metaphysical force that unites all human beings in ties of sexual desire, affection, and companionship, eventually embracing all of Life on Earth. If a social cause or movement does not satisfy this most fundamental of all human needs, to make one out of many, then the great majority of people will never care enough to “act” in the world.

This begins on the individual and small group level with people who speak a different language, have different gestures, follow different impulses, anticipate and foreshadow the end toward which they are striving, and that end, according to Marcuse, far surpasses anything hitherto attempted in the history of Western civilization. The possibilities of advanced American society for a convergence of art and technology have brought about “the end of utopia”⁸ by depriving it of its traditional unreal content.

Towards a New Sensibility and Praxis

The idea of “society as a work of art”⁹ separates Marcuse's version of socialism from all others, by which he meant that an emancipated consciousness, imagination, and sensibility will project and design a new economic system that

⁸ Marcuse, Herbert, *Five Lectures*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1979). P. 64

⁹ Marcuse, Herbert, *An Essay on Liberation*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1969) P. 45

achieves the ingression of freedom and pleasure into the realm of necessity. The main point is not to argue about how much unpleasant work (labor) will remain in a socialist society, and who will do it, but to acknowledge a principle: we have reached a turning point in history (more than 50 years ago) such that a post-capitalist society, given the available intellectual and material resources that already exist, can be organized according to an aesthetic ethos in which a new sensibility and scientific intelligence combine to create a life-environment of freedom and beauty.

This is not hubris in the sense that the future is a blank canvass on which post-scarcity humans will paint or write their desires and fantasies, for the gap between art and reality can never be entirely closed, but it can be significantly approximated. Art is recollection, and the authentic utopia is grounded in recollection, not in the sense of remembering some Golden Age (that never existed), but in the sense that art awakens a pre-instrumentalized experience and understanding of reality. The pre-technological landscape of forests, valleys, meadows, streams, together with the people who wandered there, rode carriages, slept in inns, with time to think, contemplate and feel, can be recreated on a new economic base, if we “see” (with the artist’s eye), and feel with our instincts, the landscape as a medium of libidinal experience.

The highest ideas and ideals of humanity can be increasingly materialized. Art can become the “form of reality”¹⁰ because a fully automated economy replaces the need for human labor (unpleasant work) so that humans are no longer enclosed in the production process. We can stand outside the production process and become its “regulators and supervisors,”¹¹ free to discover and play with the hidden potentialities of nature (internal and external). However, such a technological transformation of reality presupposes a political-aesthetic revolution in which the emancipation of consciousness, still the core task, combines with a new sensibility that overcomes the defensive-aggressive ego-structure of Western civilization. In other words, the men and women who make the Revolution must already have established a new identity, new relations with one another, and new feelings and attitudes about external nature, giving rise to a truly radical political practice that pursues a new society according to the laws of beauty.

If the productive apparatus is taken out of private hands, socialized, and directed by political-aesthetic human beings, then some will freely choose high-tech supervisory and regulatory activities (involving computers and robots) because they enjoy this kind of work, while others will engage in skilled crafts and small farming, regarding these tasks as a kind of love affair with the Earth, while others will undertake old and new forms of socially useful work for the pleasure enclosed in them, and the Earth will become a garden which can grow by making humans grow, while also recognizing that some aspects of

¹⁰ Marcuse, Herbert, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1972). P.108

¹¹ Marcuse, Herbert, *An Essay on Liberation*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1969) P. 49.

nature (wild places and wildlife) do not need to be improved or altered in any way, for they are simply there to be enjoyed “for their own sake,” and the correct human relationship to them is “letting-be.”¹²

Marcuse wanted a beautiful society, which is his distinguishing mark for high socialism, where beauty means peaceful, harmonious, and pleasurable relationships among human beings, and between human beings and external nature. This doesn't mean constant peace or harmony with others or with nature, for nature (including the inherent aggression of human nature) places “limits” on such a goal, but beauty as “a regulative idea of reason” means we can increasingly eliminate surplus-toil, surplus-ugliness, surplus-strife, and surplus-suffering through scientific and technological progress, if we understand that the liberation of nature is the prerequisite or foundation of this progress. It is possible to form, shape, and channel Nature for the satisfaction of human needs (food, water, shelter, energy, and all the great vital needs of civilization) without dominating or destroying the identity, freedom, or character of the natural world by preserving that state or condition, that quality or qualities, that we call Beauty, and a necessary requirement for achieving such a balance and contrast between human activities and nature is the recognition of the Earth as “a cosmos with its own potentialities, necessities, and chances,” not overrun with roads, billboards, restaurants, motels, etc.. “Nature, too, awaits the revolution!”¹³

Marcuse had reservations about the strategy of turning quantitative into qualitative change through radicalization of workers' demands and successes in the capitalist workplace. The primary revolution is political-aesthetic, not economic, in the sense that workers must first free themselves from false needs and false consciousness (internal emancipation) in order to ensure progress all the way to socialism, and this can be achieved only through radical political education that appeals to both mind and body. When all is analyzed and evaluated, he favored the strategy of building semi-autonomous aesthetic communities with the political task of transforming human beings through “utopian” concepts, ideas, values, sounds, and images of a transcending world that is expressed in great works of philosophy and art. There must be a radical rupture with the capitalist workplace, not a gradual evolution out of it.

In spite of this insistence on rupture, Marcuse agreed that direct democracy is an essential demand of Left strategy, and the only acceptable goal of a socialist society, but until the time when the majority of people can think and feel for themselves, free from the indoctrination and propaganda of capitalism, it is the responsibility of those who are politically aware to exercise a non-dominating, non-violent, intellectual leadership within a wider culture of receptivity and empathy, exemplifying and promoting the social capacities to appreciate the economic unproductivity of others and nature.

¹²Marcuse, Herbert, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1972). P 69.

¹³*Ibid.*, P 74.

Marcuse's Legacy

In *One Dimensional Man* (1964) Marcuse spoke of a “unity of opposites” in order to describe a totalitarian society that combines good and bad, right and wrong, false and true in order to overcome all effective opposition to the system as a whole. By the time he wrote *Counterevolution and Revolt* (1972) he saw the ecology movement, the women’s movement, the student movement, the peace movement, the anti-authoritarian movement—to cite some of his favorite examples—as existential revolts of Eros, as intrinsically related manifestations of the life-affirming biological core of human nature (and possibly as revolts of the Earth itself). The counterculture of the 1960s, culminating in 1968, altered the course of history and therefore Marcuse’s political perspective. He never returned to the dark days of *One-Dimensional Man* in which he could find no (sufficient) social tendencies that might lead out of the “vicious circle,” although he never regarded socialism as inevitable. What remains constant in his writings—from his dissertation (1928) to his last book *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978)—is his recommendation that Art is a model for the future because it contains a higher truth (concerning the substance of human freedom and happiness) than what is to be found in psychology, philosophy, sociology, or anywhere else.

We owe Marcuse an intellectual debt for advocating the achievement of a free and happy society, beyond the “enslaving contentment” of greater and greater economic equality and more and more social justice within the capitalist framework. This requires a qualitative leap into an aesthetic universe. The ultimate goal of all revolutions is not only material security, but a human life of beautiful moments, passing from one form of peace and fulfillment to another. Pain, suffering, and death cannot be eliminated or vanquished (Eros and Thanatos are adversaries as well as lovers) but they can be subordinated to a New Reality Principle under which life “tends” to become art. In the conclusion of his last book Marcuse said, “If people were free, then art would be the form and expression of their freedom.”¹⁴

If you want to know what “integral socialism” would look like in 21st Century America, according to Herbert Marcuse, then read the great works of literature (especially), and you will find there the beauty, non-repressive order, truthfulness, depth of personal character, honesty of social interaction, and harmony with the natural world that must significantly define its citizens. In *Eros and Civilization* (1955) he drafted a theoretical construct and philosophical vision (not a technical plan) for a society beyond the Performance Principle, and it remains one of the most inspiring theories of human potentiality ever conceived, rebelling against productivist “time” by rejecting the Promethean dynamic of compulsive productivity in favor of unalienated work, receptivity, contemplation, and direct experi-

¹⁴Marcuse, Herbert, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, (Beacon Press, 1978). P. 72

ence of the rhythms and cycles of life on Earth. In the potentialities of authentic art Marcuse heard, envisioned, and felt the coming Revolution.

Although his aesthetic vision had liberatory potential, important questions about Marcuse's revolutionary project remain. Why liberation from the most affluent society in the history of the world (with all its goods and services)? After all, the benefits provided (or promised) to the population are real enough, and the big TV, big house, smartphone, RV and ATV etc., are fast and fun. Because, according to Marcuse, this society is an unaesthetic reality—nay, it's an anti-aesthetic reality—characterized by noise, traffic, crowding, chaos, frustration, alienation, conflict, stress, ugliness, destruction, hostility, and violence—in short, the production, overstimulation, and manipulation of the capitalist lifeworld amounts to a non-stop assault on the senses together with a full-scale invasion and occupation of the human mind. Marcuse is fully aware of the objective economic crises of late capitalism such as rising unemployment, the tendency of the falling rate of profit, competition among super-powers, resistance in the Third World, environmental disaster, structural tendencies toward class inequality and poverty. In his 1972 book, *Counter Revolution and Revolt*, he noted that poverty is growing among a minority of the population; however, Marcuse's critique of capitalism is ultimately an aesthetic judgement. Despite growing material success, or rather because of it, the calm, gentleness, quiet, harmony, rhythm, reciprocity, proportion, diversity, reconciliation—in short, all those qualities that define an aesthetic whole (Beauty)—recede further from our daily life-environment along with the established rising standard of living. In other words, the qualitatively different social totality that Marcuse exalts is ultimately aesthetic, and his critique and condemnation of capitalism proceeds and is ultimately justified from this lofty perspective.

Free Work and Wild Socialism

The late Marcuse recognized that a new mode of labor/work cannot entirely solve the ongoing and systemic crisis of capitalism, which externalizes its problems by destroying the natural world. This problem was raised by Marcuse along with other legitimate concerns about Marx's Prometheanism found in *Das Kapital*, that is his enthusiasm for unfettered development of the productive forces and the relegation of human freedom and happiness to life beyond the realm of necessity. But it is not widely acknowledged that Marcuse criticized the young Marx (of the Paris Manuscripts, 1844) for not valuing Nature as more than a means for the realization of human activities and projects.

Marcuse greatly admired Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, and he presents a creative interpretation of this work by Marx in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. In the second section of this book, speaking of the early Marx, Marcuse further elaborates a critique of Marx's inclination to theorize labor's appropriation and domination of nature: "Marx's notion of a human appro-

priation of nature retains something of the hubris of domination.”¹⁵ Marcuse’s point is that all forms of production, both alienated and non-alienated, exploit external nature. Marcuse came to see the ideal human relationship to nature as “surrender, letting-be, acceptance.” He calls for the recognition of nature as a “Subject in its own right,”¹⁶ and for civilization to make room for wilderness and wild nature (although he does not use these terms), and instead he speaks of nature as a “cosmos with its own potentialities,” and “nature as subject,”¹⁷ to cite two of his favorite concepts. A largely undiscussed dimension of Herbert Marcuse’s revolutionary aesthetic—namely, that in addition to his vision of “society as a work of art,” Marcuse embraces the ideal of “Nature as Subject” that points us in the direction of what I will call Wild Socialism (which transcends ecological socialism as it is widely understood today). I do not claim that Marcuse explicitly developed a concept of Wild Socialism, as I articulate it, but rather I argue that it is suggested and justified by his theoretical concepts, and by the very achievements of repressive civilization that create the preconditions for it. My focus is the extreme “utopian” implications of Marcuse’s concepts of Nature, rather than with a strict interpretation or exegesis of his theory, and I believe my undertaking is very much in keeping with the Marcusean spirit of revealing and extending the hidden radical trends in the work of major thinkers in accordance with changing historical circumstances, as Marcuse did with Kant, Hegel, Freud, Weber, Husserl, and many others.

Perhaps Herbert Marcuse’s most relevant message is that the struggle for existence is over in the sense that Americans do not need to “earn a living” or to dominate nature to survive and prosper. The basic/vital goods of modern society could be and will be available to all unconditionally after we get rid of an obsolete capitalist economy that artificially perpetuates scarcity for the sake of a ruling elite, then people will be free like never before in history to pursue a qualitatively better life, entailing new relationships among humans, and new relationships between humans and nature.

For too long Americans have defined themselves in terms of work, and work has been the center of social existence. Any ideal of socialism that remains tied to this “continuum of progress” is inadequate. Marcuse’s high definition of socialism is that of a society organized around the Pleasure Principle (whose core characteristics are receptivity, contemplation, enjoyment, and play) instead of the Performance Principle (whose core characteristic is productivity). He goes beyond the minimal goal of socialism that makes democratic-rational work the center of human existence, and he argues, instead, for the ingression of the realm of freedom into the realm of necessity, for the emergence of a free Subject within the economy, thereby totally transforming the meaning and

¹⁵Marcuse, Herbert, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1969), P. 49

¹⁶*Ibid.*, P. 25

¹⁷*Ibid.*, P.68-69

purpose of work. "Free work" for Marcuse is work that an individual chooses to do (or not to do) based on the pleasure involved in the activity.

Of course, work in the sense of the metabolic exchange between humans and nature, and work as socially useful activities, cannot be abolished, but in a truly free society there will be no requirements that human beings must "perform" in order to survive and prosper. People will work because they want to work, and they will want to work because of the pleasure involved in the activity. Work will be subordinated to play. Society will be organized around pleasure, not productivity. According to Marcuse, it is the purpose of an activity, not its content, that determines whether it is play or work. If an activity is done for the pleasure it provides, then it is "play," even if it is also socially useful and/or physically engages the body.

The idea that "everyone must work" belongs to an obsolete stage in the development of the forces of production. A fully automated economy will remove living labor from the realm of necessity, elevating human beings to the position of "supervisors and regulators"¹⁸ of the production process. Socialist work, according to Marcuse, is not simply self-conscious and collectively controlled and directed work, not simply activity done for public benefit or for the common good, not simply ecologically responsible activity. It is also spontaneous activity, motivated from within, by the pleasure involved in doing it. The meaning of work, under the pleasure principle, will change so much that it cannot be defined, measured, or discussed in traditional terms, not even in traditional Marxist, socialist terms.

Although Marcuse remained a Marxist his entire life, he thought that the development of the forces of production (mainly science and technology) have raised the possibilities for human freedom beyond what Marx envisioned, and Marcuse gave Fourier's utopian vision a materialist foundation. In the work of Fourier (before Freud) Marcuse uncovered the ideal of libidinal work, which is a cornerstone of his vision of utopian socialism.

The idea of free work is a real historical possibility because wealth (as Marx points out in the *Grundrisse*) no longer depends on human labor power or on human labor time. Today, wealth depends on the totality of instrumentalities, on the power of the instruments and machines set in motion, on the attained level of science and technology, and we have long since reached the point where machines, by themselves, can easily produce enough (vital) goods and services for all. Marcuse is strongly critical of all conceptions of socialism that do not entail a radical rupture with self-propelling productivity and material progress through alienated or unpleasant work. There is no need for a "first stage" of socialism in which people get the goods and services they deserve in

¹⁸Marcuse, Herbert, *An Essay on Liberation*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1969), P. 49

accordance with the amount of work they do. Today, true socialism, in keeping with the historical re-examination of Marxian concepts by Marcuse—which is historically justified by the technological advancement of the real possibilities for freedom—is a kind of society where work (increasingly) becomes play.

Marcuse regards happiness as the satisfaction of real human needs, and freedom as the realization of human potentialities, so that, at bottom, happiness and freedom are identical. A happy society is the free society, where many people will choose to work in a diversity of ways. Some people will enjoy supervising and regulating a high-tech economy, having to do with the production and distribution of goods and services, while others will undertake more traditional forms of gardening, crafts, homecare, and so on. Not every detail of life can be enjoyable, but what matters, for Marcuse, is that the Pleasure Principle govern the overall structure and direction of the economy, increasingly extending its influence into all spheres of society. No more forced work. If some people contribute nothing to society, not even good conversation, friendship, empathy, then they are to be pitied, not punished (not denied vital goods) because they are unaware of the pleasures of human cooperation, sharing, and giving. The appropriate response to those who are not motivated to do anything worthwhile and meaningful in society is political education, not coercion, on the assumption that such people can eventually become aware of their true needs and desires.

On the subject of work, Marcuse moved from Marx to Fourier: the future depends on liberating people from the necessity of work. Rather than concentrating on revolutionizing the workplace to free society, Marcuse favored freeing people from the workplace to revolutionize society. Although Marcuse does not directly speak of what is today called Universal Basic Income (UBI), his utopian socialism, based on the pleasure principle, entails as much (and a great deal more). He lost faith in the Promethean god of productivity in favor of the teachings of Narcissist, Orpheus, and Pandora that exemplify “economic unproductivity.” He broke entirely with the notion of personal identity through work, that a human being is defined by what s/he does for a living, that you are what you earn, that there is even a thread of truth in the Protestant work ethic, and he rejected all forms of asceticism in favor of Eros (the innate life force striving for pleasure).

There is no need to compel people to work (either through the external threat of poverty and starvation or through the introjection of a repressive work ethic) because Eros is the builder of culture, which means that the erotic nature of human beings self-sublimates, that is to say, the biological sexual instinct of human nature, free from domination, becomes a cultural drive that presses for greater forms of individual and social happiness, including pleasurable work. Eros is inherently “non-repressive sublimation.” The instinct to bring one’s

genitals into contact with the genitals of another is a shrunken, restricted drive. Originally, the sexual instinct aims at higher and higher levels of complexity, integration, and satisfaction. The telos of human nature is not production and reproduction, but adventure and ever higher social forms of satisfaction.

Marcuse revives the ancient Greek Ideal where contemplation and conversation are core features of everyday existence by placing modern society on an advanced scientific and technological basis that abolishes all forms of slavery including wage-labor or coerced work of any kind. In a socialist society work will no longer be the essence of socially active humans, no longer the most crucial aspect of our lives, but instead it becomes only one (pleasurable) dimension of life within a multidimensional social existence where song, dance, receptivity, friendship, love (of human and non-human lives), and intellectual development define the all-around individual. In a recently discovered essay by Marcuse entitled, "The Rationality of Philosophy," written in 1966, Marcuse links back to the basic definition of the human being that has guided philosophy from the Ancient Greeks, and he says: "Man in the thing that thinks,"¹⁹ not the thing that works. He advocated a culture of contemplation and receptivity.

To understand the extent to which Marcuse's political philosophy transcends Marxism (without leaving it behind), it is necessary to examine an underlying ontology that Marx borrowed from Hegel, and that Marcuse ultimately rejected. In the famous section of the *Phenomenology of Mind*, entitled "Lordship and Bondage," Hegel argued that work is the most important activity in the development of self-consciousness: "It is through work that one discovers who one truly is." By work Hegel makes it perfectly clear that he means the "formative activity" of shaping and forming objects in the world. For Hegel, this process of "objectivization" (of the human spirit) is identical with self-realization and the march of human freedom.

Marx argued that objectivization under capitalism becomes alienation, reification, and estrangement, and he rejected Hegel's claim that the historical process toward the identity of subject and object is complete, that otherness has been overcome, that the unity of subject and object has been achieved, but he agreed with Hegel that the process of labor determines the development of consciousness, that labor is the path to self freedom and revolution, and this perspective remains deeply entrenched in socialist and Marxist literature, and it underlies almost all of Western political and economic theory at least since Adam Smith's labor theory of value. Marcuse challenges it.

¹⁹ Marcuse, Herbert, *Transvaluation of Values and Radical Change*, ed. Perter-Erwin Jansen, Sarah Surak, and Charles Reitz (York University, Toronto, 2017) p. 11

Marcuse, reflecting on the failure of the Russian revolution and the failure of revolution in the Western industrial societies, came to see the workers movement, labor-based opposition to capitalism, as trapped within capitalist society, and not the revolutionary subject of history. After these disappointing historical developments, he never again saw the labor process as the fundamental path to radical consciousness and social freedom. In-itself, in terms of its power to stop the process of production, the laboring class remains the major transitioning force in history, but for-itself, in terms of its awareness and needs, it depends on outside agents and forces of education and emancipation in order to bring about socialism.

Marcuse turned to Freud in search of an ontology of liberation that might provide a way out of the vicious circle in which the working class reproduces its own enslavement. He found an ontology of hope and freedom in Freud's concept of Eros, which is the idea of a life force that springs from deep within human beings, expressing itself powerfully, according to the late Marcuse, in the ecology movement, and it's not too far of a stretch of Marcuse's political philosophy to see the labor movement in the way Marcuse saw the ecology movement, the women's movement, the anti-authoritarian movement, the peace movement, and the student movement—namely, as intrinsically related embodiments of life-affirming energy for radical change.

It is true that Marcuse, especially in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, saw signs or tendencies for a counter-consciousness emerging within the (new) working class, but he never saw the labor movement as the definitive or decisive agent of social change. It's a potentiality for radical change, but tendencies in this direction are "ambivalent", and Marcuse concludes his discussion of worker absenteeism, sabotage, wildcat strikes, factory occupations, and the rebellious attitudes and demands of workers with this comment: "I have stressed the unpolitical, diffuse, unorganized character of this discontent. The potential mass basis for social change may well become the mass basis for fascism."²⁰ Marcuse's warning is highly relevant today, and let's not forget that shortly after his death the American people elected Ronald Reagan (with a good portion of the blue-collar vote), and I don't think Marcuse would have been surprised, as many were, by the election of Donald Trump.

The expanded working class, with its rising expectations and new needs for a qualitatively better life is real enough, according to Marcuse, but it's not a revolutionary force in advanced society until these expectations and needs get translated into radical political consciousness, and such a historical potentiality is not on the horizon, yet many socialists continue to insist that the most immediate-pressing task for the Left is to build a working-class movement. According to Marcuse, the gap between the working class and the radical left

²⁰Marcuse, Herbert, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1969), P. 65

cannot and should not be bridged by an optimistic ontology (rooted in Hegel and Marx) that elevates labor to the front and center of radical strategy and goals. Trade union consciousness must become radical political consciousness, and the juncture between these two social forces, which is (admittedly) a precondition for socialism, will only happen if the Far Left stays true to its own consciousness, ideas, and goals, upon which the labor force or working class ultimately relies for its own radical transformation. A working-class movement will not get beyond trade union consciousness exclusively by its own efforts. According to Marcuse, the immediate revolutionary task is the organization and strengthening of radical consciousness among all accessible members of the “dependent population,” especially young people, environmentalists, women, anti-authoritarians, artists, intellectuals.

The notion (still dominating much of socialist, Marxist theory and practice) that building a working class movement should be the immediate focus of radical change defies the evidence clearly showing that much of the working class in the advanced industrial societies is highly addicted and integrated into the ethos of self-destructive capitalism. The unfounded optimistic perspective that the organization and mobilization of the labor force is, in the present historical circumstances, the most effective path to revolutionary consciousness can be traced back to the theoretical perspective (shared by Hegel and Marx) that essential humanity is to be fulfilled through its interactions with nature in production. This perspective has contributed to the near total exploitation of the Earth, often times blocking a helpful way of addressing the ecological crisis—namely, a Universal Basic Income (UBI) in which people would receive subsistence without working, thereby significantly reducing the stress and strain on the planet, and setting people free in an historically unprecedented way. However, to this day some socialists and Marxists resist this idea because it runs counter to the unquestioned assumption that the transformation of nature through labor is the path to radical political consciousness.

UBI subverts the Protestant work-ethic that strongly supports capitalist culture. It undermines the ethos of productivity, the false notion that better work is the key to freedom and happiness, and it points us beyond the Performance Principle to the Pleasure Principle because it rests on the notion that people want to work and will work, if they are free to pursue meaningful and creative work. Establishing and extending UBI within the capitalist framework has revolutionary potential because it breaks down the work-incentive structure of capitalism, pointing us in the direction of non-coercive work, free work, and work as play. A powerful argument in favor of UBI is that it would economically empower marginalized individuals and groups—for example, young non-conformists and rebels—who Marcuse saw as an emerging force for real change in advanced technological civilization. UBI would economically sup-

port those (outsiders) who refuse, or would like to refuse, jobs and careers that are killing all of life on Earth.

What most socialists and Marxists, before and after Marcuse, do not yet understand is that the ontology of self-realization through productive exchange with external nature is false and obsolete, which is why Marcuse rejected it in favor of an ontology of Eros, the builder of culture, in which the striving for pleasure becomes the governing principle of society, and work is transformed into play, which means work is no longer regarded as a civic responsibility or moral obligation, but rather it becomes just another aspect of a multidimensional joyful social existence. This is Marcuse's qualitative definition of utopian socialism that continues to transcend the imagination of most of today's reformers and "revolutionaries." According to Marcuse, the defining characteristic of utopian socialism is playful relationships among human beings, and between human beings and external nature, not (simply) a new mode of production entailing better work relations and better forces of production.

A Return to Kant's Aesthetics

Beyond the metabolic exchange between humans and nature, and even beyond the artistic shaping of nature in accordance with the laws of beauty, Marcuse speaks of external nature "as a manifestation of subjectivity,"²¹ where the proper human relationship to nature is sensuous receptivity and contemplation, and the intellectual roots for such a relationship he finds not in the early Marx's philosophical naturalism and humanism, but in Kant's Third Critique, "The Critique of Judgement," where the realm of freedom and that of necessity is conceived "not as bending nature to the purposes of man but as attributing to nature an ideal purposiveness of its own, a purposiveness without purpose."

According to Kant, apart from all human appropriation and utilization of nature, a "disinterested" relationship is neither an uninterested relationship nor an interested relationship, but rather it is a relationship that joins or unites humans and nature in a way that does not disturb or alter nature's freedom to form itself. Such an "indeterminate" relationship between humans and nature is, according to Kant, the experience of the Beautiful. This idea of Beauty pertains to nature as well as to art. It is an "an objective quality" (not an objective property) of the human as well as the natural world, and in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* Marcuse said: "The aesthetic form in art has the aesthetic form in nature as its correlate, or rather as its desideratum."²²

Kant's notions of "nature as purposiveness without purpose," and "nature as subject without teleology" have been eclipsed by Marx's concept of a human appropriation of nature, but Marcuse believes: "The most advanced concepts

²¹ *Ibid.*, P. 67

²² *Ibid.*, P. 66-67

of the Third Critique have not yet been explored in their truly revolutionary significance,"²³ and Marcuse suggests that the aesthetic enjoyment of nature as an end in itself is the most perfect, the highest kind of relationship to nature that human beings are capable of. His intent is not to minimize the difference between alienated and non-alienated work, or between reckless utilization of nature and its rational appropriation, but rather Marcuse is highlighting a dimension of freedom and happiness between humans and nature—namely, the experience of natural beauty—that has been undervalued in Marxist literature, and that he regards as an integral part of “utopian” socialism, both as strategy and goal.

Marcuse goes back to Kant because the Hegel-Marx ontology (that continues to dominate socialist literature) is unable to explain the necessary and universal relationship between humans and nature that is essential for the pacification of life on earth. In Kant's Third Critique, an aesthetic relationship to nature rests on the human capacity to enjoy nature's freedom to form and display itself apart from human utilization and appropriation, which produces a feeling of harmony within human beings, and the special pleasure associated with this feeling of harmony within ourselves is what we mean when we call nature “beautiful.” According to Kant, this inner harmony and feeling that we call “beautiful” is due to the agreement or free play of the two sides of human nature, sensibility and intellect, or sensuousness and cognition.

Kant argues that the aesthetic judgement is not based on “concepts,” by which he means that it does not involve any restraint by human rules or laws. Rather, the mind is in a state of restful contemplation, merely reflecting on nature without determining it, not even conceptually. The senses and imagination freely apprehend nature, and reason is engaged and satisfied by merely reflecting on nature's own order and harmony. The aesthetic judgement does not alter or shape nature, but allows the senses to relish and absorb what is “directly given,” and the natural environment is experienced “as if” it was designed by human reason (although it is not). The harmony “out there” is felt inside us. All we have to do is suspend our ideas and urges to alter or re-make nature, engage our senses, and contemplate nature's independent order and design. Then, we can discover a world that satisfies and pleases us “as if” it was made for human ends or purposes (although it is not).

Moreover, we insist that everyone acknowledge the beauty of nature. The aesthetic judgement is necessary and universal, according to Kant. Anyone who does not see the beauty of free nature has not adopted the proper perspective, has not adopted the aesthetic attitude of “disinterestedness.” Kant's main argument is simple (despite all the mumbo jumbo that has been written about it): when we appreciate and experience the harmony of external nature, then we

²³Marcuse, Herbert, *An Essay on Liberation*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1969) P.27

feel the harmony of human nature, and if a person doesn't feel this inner-harmony then it's because that person is either not paying attention to nature (not properly interested in nature, not interested in a completely non-violent manner), or because that person is thinking or planning to appropriate nature (interested in using nature), instead of relating to nature for its own sake, for the delightful manifestations or displays of its harmony and freedom.

For example, when we walk through an old growth forest with an aesthetic perspective, we feel that everything is as it should be. We feel no desire or need to change it or improve it. We experience the place "as if it were" arranged for our satisfaction and well-being. Marcuse notes Kant's question of "whether there is not a hidden connection between Beauty and Perfection."²⁴—and despite Kant's explicit claim to the contrary there is a case to be made in this regard within Kant's overall aesthetic theory. We instinctively feel that a wild place is perfect, that it cannot be improved, not through human conception or construction. The senses are flooded by images, sounds, touch, smells that group and re-group themselves into a seamless order and harmony that is independent of us, yet suits us, fits us, pleases us. The senses are alive, and reason is active but not instrumentalized, not seeking anything beyond the pure joy of reflective knowledge and contemplative awareness of what is "given" prior to and independently of human determination.

An aesthetic attitude where we relate to nature "for its own sake," for its ability to form and evolve itself, apart from human utilization and appropriation, increasingly became for Marcuse a feature of "a radical character structure," of a harmonious self that cannot tolerate toil, brutality, and ugliness. Following Friedrich Schiller, who took his clues from Kant, Marcuse saw the roots of "barbarian civilization" in an excessive activity of the "form impulse." Schiller argued that a primary urge of human beings is to alter, shape, form, and use everything on Earth in one way or another, and this unchecked human tendency to manipulate and control everything is the basic disease of civilization. In order to restore balance to human nature and to the planet it is necessary, according to Schiller, to restrain the form-impulse (instead of encouraging and enflaming it as he saw happening in the early days of industrial capitalism in Europe).

An undisciplined form-impulse on the part of more than 330 million citizens to subdivide their property, build sheds, driveways, gardens, guesthouses, and so on, as well as to pressure the landscape (private and public) for more houses, lodges, farms, ranches, resorts, vineyards, campgrounds, RVs and ATVs is what contributes to the underlying disease and discontent that is threatening all of Life on Earth—namely, the domination of nature by the excessive formative activity of human beings. The antidote to this is, according to Marcuse, the cultivation of sensuous receptivity, the ability to appreciate nature for

²⁴*Ibid.*, P. 90

its own sake, for its harmonious being and becoming, and for the feeling of beauty that it produces within us—assuming the diagnosis of the sickness has not already reached a terminal stage.

Marcuse saw the ecology movement in terms of basic psychoanalytic concepts developed by Freud (a preponderance of life instincts over the death instinct) and in terms of classic philosophical concepts developed by Schiller (an ascendency of the sensuous-impulse over the form-impulse). His utopian vision, once unpacked, recognizes that the long and difficult process of withdrawal from materialism and consumerism to which we are so pitifully and devastatingly addicted (thanks to the evil genius of capitalism) requires respecting, protecting, and enjoying the autonomy of the natural world. Extending Marcuse's theoretical perspective, we can say that a 21st Century radical ecology movement responds to the crisis of advanced industrial-technological civilization with a Great Refusal to sacrifice any more of the wild earth to development, production, or extraction, regardless of why it is done or how it is done, in full knowledge that so much wilderness has already been lost that massive restoration is required by "creating areas of withdrawal"²⁵ because there is more than enough work to be undone. "There's isn't much wilderness left to preserve, but we will still try nonetheless,"²⁶ said Marcuse to a young American audience in one of his lectures entitled, "Ecology and the Critique of Modern Society," delivered shortly before his death in 1979 to a wilderness class in California.

Marcuse's theoretical framework and concepts suggest that if human beings do not stop the obsessive working and re-working of the Earth, this one-dimensional behavior of constantly making things stuff, then ecocide is inevitable, due to an escalating aggressive-formative tendency to control and dominate everything including human beings. We must "begin to stop" because we cannot solve the ecological crisis, and the resulting crisis of civilization, through a new mode of labor or production alone. It is our unceasing exertions that have called into existence the civilization that blocks us from utopia. The form-impulse cannot correct itself. We cannot work or produce our way out of the crisis. An aesthetic appreciation of the natural world (free from any kind of utilization or appropriation) is required. Marcuse's revolutionary aesthetic increasingly leads us to the political philosophy that the enjoyment of "nature as a subject in its own right," the erotic need for harmonious union with external nature, is the deep source of a radical social movement that is the subjective precondition for achieving integral socialism.

The fundamental human need, the sensuous-receptive impulse, to experience nature as "Subject" to be appreciated and enjoyed for its beauty, freedom, and diversity is, for Marcuse, the ontological-anthropological basis for the emergence of a revolutionary movement against the established civilization's

²⁵Marcuse, Herbert, "Ecology and the Critique of Modern Society," in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, P. 29-48

²⁶Marcuse, Herbert, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1972), P.67

compulsion toward the determination and domination of everything. Marcuse contrasts such a radical ecology movement, grounded in the human need for direct contact and communication with nature on its own terms, for what it is intrinsically, with “reformist environmentalism” that concerns itself only with better extraction and distribution of resources, and a beautification (artistic enhancement) of a post-industrial wasteland.

The innate sensuous drive of human nature is an erotic drive that aims to unite human beings with the non-human world in harmonious oneness. It contradicts and subverts the inherent logic of *Capital* that necessitates the creation of adequate surplus value through unending wasteful and destructive investments in nature. A completely non-violent aesthetic relationship to external nature is beyond the capacity of the capitalist economy that always has, and always will, treat nature as raw material for the extraction of profit. Capitalism sustains itself by externalizing its contradictions, which means that nature unavoidably pays the price for keeping the economy going, and for raising the standard of living, until there is either total ecological collapse, or the emergence of an ecology movement that is grounded in an aesthetics of liberation that not only sees art but also wild nature as allies in the struggle for human emancipation.

In a speculative hypothesis on the inherent qualities of external nature (that is discussed in a lecture he gave in 1970, entitled “The New Sensibility,” now available on YouTube) Marcuse uncovers the ancient Western philosophical concept of nature as “objective freedom,” which is “a striving in matter, perhaps also in inorganic matter to show, to display its inherent qualities, its own potentialities to become what it can become without violence, without distortion, without being oppressed, without being smashed.” According to Marcuse this philosophy of nature survives in the Manichean and Hedonistic traditions and into the Enlightenment and is found in Hegel’s concept of nature as “objective spirit,” and in the early Marx’s notion of “matter for the sake of the thing and not only for my own sake.” (Marcuse’s criticism of Hegel that I previously adumbrated does not prevent him from acknowledging this great insight in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature*, nor from noting Marx’s appreciation of it).

It is, however, Kant’s Third Critique that increasingly inspired Marcuse because he saw the revolutionary potential of personal experience and appreciation for nature’s “capacity to form itself in its freedom,” to which Kant attributes the beautiful in nature. The personal experience of natural beauty (in addition to the experience of the beauty of art) is a prerequisite, a path, a subjective precondition for moving from the “oppressive familiarity” of the established world to a truly moral and satisfying new kind of civilization. The transcending power of the aesthetic consciousness, rooted in sensuous-instinctive human nature, is a force for qualitative change, and although this power is active and organized

in only a small minority of people at this historical period, most notably in the youth-based environmental/ecology movement, Marcuse always believed, following Kant and Schiller, that it is through Beauty that we arrive at freedom, not only the experience of the beauty of art, but also the experience of the beauty of nature that is arts' "desideratum."²⁷

Marcuse did not live to see the colossal onslaught against the American landscape (and the globe) accelerated by Ronald Reagan and James Watt that is picked up speed toward the abyss under Donald Trump, but his revolutionary aesthetic foreshadows and requires an ecology movement that demands a preservation and restoration of a wild earth as the deepest and most promising path to socialism, thereby bridging Critical Theory with the American intellectual-activist tradition of Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, John Muir, Sigurd Olson, Robert Marshall, Edward Abbey, E. O. Wilson, and many others (which remains an unexplored undertaking). If human beings cannot see and feel the value of what is already there in the inherent achievements of the natural world, and balance ourselves and civilization accordingly, then there is no way to stop the collective madness that is raging today in the name of Reason (which is actually the form-alization of Reason). What is needed is "radical sensibility" to see and feel what has been damaged and lost through civilization's obsessive-compulsive activity against external nature.

The Radical Erotic towards Eco-Socialism

According to Marcuse, the senses have their own 'synthesis' to which they subject the data of experience: "Our world emerges not only in the pure forms of space and time, but also, and simultaneously, as a totality of sensuous qualities."²⁸ It is this primary relationship to the world that must change if social change is to be revolutionary change. The term "aesthetic" according to its original meaning "as pertaining to the senses," captures Marcuse's intent to uncover the inherent truth value of the senses and the essential role they play as sources of a new rationality. According to Marcuse, socialist reason has its roots in an "aesthetic morality," which means that the senses by themselves register a primary distinction between good and bad, beautiful and ugly. Free sensibility is "constitutive" of reality, which means that the senses have a share in producing images of freedom, that they are "productive in their receptivity." According to Marcuse, overcoming the present economic structure in which profit determines social life requires mobilizing the deep emotional-receptive dimension of human existence.

It is no accident that Marcuse's last public lecture was delivered to a wilderness class. Wilderness is the only environment on Earth where it is possible to be entirely free from the human (theoretical and practical) construction of the world. We need wilderness to escape the total objectivization of reality, to

²⁷ *Ibid.*, P. 63

²⁸ *Ibid.*, P. 62

experience Otherness, to be free from a (pathological) narcissist humanism that is engulfing us and the planet. The historical project to make all of reality serve human interests, to recognize ourselves everywhere, to externalize ourselves everywhere, to achieve the identity of subject and object, to permit nothing to remain outside the Subject, to expand the Subject to totality, has nearly eradicated wilderness from the globe, and along with it, our existential opportunity to regain a proper feeling and understanding of human nature and our place in the universe. When we experience external nature free from buildings, roads, livestock, agriculture, dams, fences, pipelines, and so on, free from human concepts of what it could be and should be, and instead, we enjoy nature for its independent contours, shapes, forms, smells, tastes, sounds and colors, and the living forms of non-human lives, then there is a profound heightening of the senses, a dethroning of instrumental reason (as reigning over the senses). This suspension of instrumental reason that comes through an aesthetic perspective is vital to the development of human self-consciousness and a balanced, sane, and moral civilization.

Western civilization hitherto has been blind to wilderness. From the beginning, the seeds of social ecocide were planted in our one-sided productive rampage against nature, against our own nature as sensuous creatures and against external nature as a cosmos with its own potentialities and objective qualities. Through the production and reproduction of material life we have not transformed ourselves into rational, universal individuals, and we will not do so by pushing further and further along this path, unless the other pole of human existence re-asserts itself, “radical sensibility,” restoring balance and sanity to human life on earth. Real change requires lifting the repressive controls imposed on sensuousness, refusal of the repressive tyranny of the form-impulse. A radical environmental/ecological movement mobilizes the sensuous-receptive power of human nature against its adversary, the form-impulse, not to abolish the form-impulse, but to limit it, balance it, contain it. It is a life and death struggle that underlies the entire history of civilization, and the upper hand of capitalism is now guiding us to total annihilation. First and foremost, we must learn to leave what’s left of wild nature alone, and to respect and enjoy it for its own sake.

Global climate warming is the single greatest threat to life on earth that humans have faced, but it is only the most egregious symptom of the underlying disease to build, develop, construct, and produce non-stop, everywhere. Solving the ecological crisis means not only stabilizing and regulating the temperature of the earth, and managing it through better economic practices, it also requires saving the sovereignty of the earth, its wildness, so that all creatures may survive and flourish, including wide-ranging predators and other creatures that need big wilderness. One such creature is the human being, who needs wilderness not as predator or prey, but as an aesthetic being, for whom

a “disinterested” experience of nature, a non-violent enjoyment of its freedom, is required for human harmony and well-being, without which there is no path to socialism. In *Counterrevolution and Revolt* Marcuse rhetorically asks: “Is nature only a productive force—or does it also exist for its own sake and, in this mode of existence, for man?”²⁹

As early as *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse interpreted the Orphic and Narcissistic worldview to mean that “Nature, the objective world, would then be experienced primarily, neither as dominating man (as in the primitive society), nor as being dominated by man (as in the established civilization), but rather as an object of contemplation.”³⁰ This ideal is a distinguishing mark of Marcuse’s utopia: a human life of rest, receptivity, reflection, and “free play” that is not work in any sense, based on enough productivity and affluency. The goal is a kind of socialism where contemplation and communication with nature is one of the great ends of human existence, on a par with peaceful and loving human relationships from which it is inseparable. The pacification and satisfaction of human life requires a completely non-violent relationship with external nature that sustains a wild earth.

The role of the imagination in achieving utopian socialism can hardly be overstated. So much of wilderness has been destroyed and diminished that it must be re-assembled, remembered, from the bits and pieces that remain. The imagination allows us to feel and see what was (the past). Imagine, perhaps with the help of science and computerized models, what New York City looked like in the 17th Century, or just look at the place where you live with its mountains, deserts, canyons, rivers, lakes, etc., and visualize a wild undisturbed landscape, then you will have begun the aesthetic journey of the ecological imagination. The imagination, according to Kant, Schiller, and Marcuse, mediates between the sensual presence of what is and the intellectual awareness of what could be. According to Marcuse, “The great conception which animates Kant’s critical philosophy shatters the philosophical framework in which it is kept. The imagination, unifying sensibility and reason, becomes “productive” as it becomes practical: a guiding force in the reconstruction of reality.”³¹

Through the restoration of memory, accompanied by the ecological imagination, there is a possible awakening of the general population to the political awareness of their own essential nature, which is the subjective prerequisite for moving beyond capitalism. However, the fact that so many people, including many intellectuals, artists, activists, do not understand the vital need for real wilderness is a testimony to how oblivious Americans are to the true ontology of the human condition. Perhaps one day in America there will only remain the awareness, feelings, instincts, creative imagination, and memories of those

²⁹Marcuse, Herbert, *Eros and Civilization*, (Beacon Press, Boston), P. 189

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 166

³¹Marcuse, Herbert, *An Essay on Liberation*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1969), P. 30/31

who value and need a wild earth. My speculative interpretation of Marcuse's utopian society emphasizes that a free and happy civilization requires an aesthetic appreciation and enjoyment of true wilderness.

I believe that Marcuse's revolutionary aesthetic points in the direction of what is perhaps best described as Wild Socialism, which is a new kind or type of civilization whose internal organization is governed by the regulative idea of artistic beauty, and whose relationship to external nature is governed, at the highest cultural level, by the ideal of re-wilding the Earth, at least enough of it to sustain biodiversity and wild beauty.

The central concept of Marcuse's revolutionary aesthetic is beauty. It both guides our conception and construction of a future free society (as a work of art) and it leads us to the deepest and highest meaning of ecological socialism which is not only proper management of the Earth through gardens, parks, green urbanism, regenerative agriculture, and new high-tech versions of the pastoral ideal, but it also requires the preservation and restoration of wilderness (nature as Subject). Marcuse's philosophy of human fulfilment entails both continuous development of high civilization toward the ideal of "society as a work of art," and limits on the human alteration of the Earth so that real wilderness exists, enabling human beings to find peace, freedom, and happiness by satisfying the duality of human nature through a dialectical revolutionary aesthetics of reconciliation and wholeness.

If ecological socialism means democratic economic planning, a secure and sustainable future, and a reorganization of the productive system away from quantitative growth towards an alternative mode of life entailing high quality human experiences, then Wild Socialism, suggested by Marcuse, accents an "aesthetic morality" of biodiversity plus beauty that rejects the ongoing (Promethean) humanization of the planet.