

Preface

The publication of this book coincides with the 60th birthday of the *One-Dimensional Man*, which meets both an advantage and a disadvantage.¹ An advantage because enough decades later we can see more clearly what was (and what was not) confirmed by Marcuse's concerns; a disadvantage because the hard core of his critique about one-dimensional society, spirit, and man has unfortunately not yet been overcome. It is true in my opinion that the new orientations of the Social Sciences after the action of the first generation of Critical Theory disguised the problems that prophetically had been posed already from the 1940s by the Frankfurt School rather than solved them. Marcuse in any case was hoping until the end of his life in a positive overcoming of the deadlocks he was analyzing.

In this book, the central concept is the form, a concept that refers traditionally to Aesthetics and Cultural Studies. However, through my research questions concerning the form, I try to open up a new horizon for the interpretation of Marcuse about a positive overcoming of various forms of manipulation that until today infiltrate again in societies with older and newer forms of control. Form in its broad sense, either material or immaterial (especially in the 21st century), is undoubtedly a key point for understanding Marcusean thought between the aesthetic and the political, a point that the philosophical research after Marcuse's death has not insisted on, although Critical Theory (with different ways) has put it in the context of a dialectical openness (at least the utopian work of Herbert Marcuse and Walter Benjamin). On the question concerning form, aesthetics and politics meet no doubt radically, especially in the United States of the 1950s and 1960s that we are analyzing here, where Marcuse was very active. The Counterculture of that epoch, by reading politically art's opposition to the dominance of the form, managed to explore within the framework of a post-Marxist analysis and action a possible overcoming of multiple forms of alienation and manipulation, and it was precisely the point where, through the attack on the "form," aesthetics is politicized.

¹ See also Terry Maley (ed.): *One-Dimensional Man 50 years on: the struggle continues*, Halifax 2017.

The open problem today is the following confirmation: the “revolution” that the political trends of the Counterculture in America (as the New Left) attempted to implement in interaction with Marcuse’s ideas did not succeed. However, a legacy is alive, a paradigm of an unfinished revolution, which makes Marcuse to our days, in the 21st century, a major utopist and a leader for qualitative social change. Nevertheless, if we intend to be clear, the senses were not emancipated, nor did art meet technique upon the vision of a redesigning the society and its needs; the new forms of control stand in opposition to any self-transcendence of rationality, causing just the opposite results. So, why Marcuse and Counterculture?

My answer is very simple. Just about for all of them.

Marcuse translated in his time the German and Continental philosophical (and sociological) tradition —German Idealism, Marxism, Psychoanalysis, and Phenomenology—into an environment of American Pragmatism. The attack on the form, at least in art, was present in Marcuse’s time, already from the 1910s. What he brought with his critique was a radical politicization of the aesthetic, largely co-shaping a new generation of social movements. More specifically, what new philosophical ideas does he bring to the radical thought in the United States and which of them does the New Left seek to implement? According to my analysis, the following three utopian reflections indicate a confluence of the Marcusean thought with the trends of the new social movements: (1) a utopian man–nature intersubjectivity; (2) an also utopian idea for the “Sublation of Art” (*Aufhebung*) blurring the boundary between aesthetic and real; and (3) a hope for a utopian anthropology with neo-sensible subjects. For all of them, to the extent that the new social movements (from the student movement in Berkeley and so on) tried to implement a project for expansion of the social being from the “one-dimensional” to the “multi-dimensional” spirit, Marcuse is present. Ecology, sexual codes, the anti-consumerist movement, and some (until today) radical social counter-institutions, all these are products of the confluence of the Marcusean radical (Marxist) Phenomenology with the advanced radical action of the political Counterculture. If the multidimensional society did not progress as much as he envisioned, this is evidence that his thought, and especially the redesigning of the “form” as a whole, is still alive. The context of technological rational-

ity is much more extended today in comparison to then, a reality that confirms the necessity for social change. To all the aforementioned problems, I try to answer by discussing the transformation of the form as a key point for a positive overcoming of the new forms of social control.

Before I conclude, I would like to define the two concepts that are very closely related in my analysis. What is “form” in Marcuse’s work and what exactly is the political Counterculture in America? First, in terms of “form,” Marcuse gives its two dimensions in the chapters “The New Sensibility” and “Solidarity” of the *Essay on Liberation* intending to a historical realization of the *Sublation of Art*: “in the aesthetic Form, the content (matter) is assembled, defined, and arranged to obtain a condition in which the immediate, unmastered forces of the matter, of the ‘material,’ are mastered, ‘ordered.’ Form is the negation, the mastery of disorder, violence, and suffering, even when it presents disorder, violence, and suffering. This triumph of art is achieved by subjecting the content to the aesthetic order, which is autonomous in its exigencies”² while, simultaneously, aesthetics mediating between experience and reality is being a part of the historical movement so that it can embody the negation of the real and reflect on it in the new historical context. It is the second point about the form; its turning from the aesthetic to a type of social ontology; in his words: “it would mean the ascent of the Aesthetic Principle as Form of the Reality Principle.”³ Marcuse here refers to a “ruling imagination,” which “sustained by the achievements of science, could turn its productive power to the radical reconstruction of experience and the universe of experience. In this reconstruction, the historical *topos* of the aesthetic would change: it would find expression in the transformation of the *Lebenswelt*—society as a work of art.”⁴

The form that will emerge in the new historical context with the breaking of the boundary between aesthetic and real will be the result of new social meanings that will herald the utopian design of a new pleasure principle for society. In terms of the political Counterculture, we refer here to the paradigm of various social movements that appear in Europe (not only

² Herbert Marcuse: *An Essay on Liberation* (first edition: Boston 1969), p. 34, see the e-book version at: <https://www.marxists.org/>

³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

in America) striking the structure and hierarchy at the root of the political party with well-organized political groups that attempt at least a radical intervention in the public sphere. In America, it is the *New Left*; in Europe, even more militant groups such as the French *Situationists* or the Italian *Autonomia Operaia* are examples of such political countercultures organized from the below. These political currents go hand in hand with the most radical artistic innovations in the 20th century (some of their representatives, after all, started from experimental art). Here arises (particularly in the American case that we examine in this book) the politicization of the aesthetic by merging two great trends of Counterculture: that which is reducible to aesthetics and that which is reducible to politics.

This confluence in the historical environment of the 1960s and the political project that Marcuse envisaged, namely, a social redesigning of the aesthetic, reconstructs a new historical context for the dialectic. When Marcuse refers to the “*Aufhebung* of Art,” he means, among others, the realization of the *Great Refusal* from the new emerging subjectivities that will operate in the revolutionary moment a transcendence of the capitalist technique as a social form and the further aesthetic-utopian redesigning of the social form in a new historical context. The new experience, the new technique (and the new life-world), that will emerge, constitute an anthropological birth linked to the new needs, the new modes of production, and the new intersubjective relations of solidarity between man and nature, in other words, a qualitative leap within the advanced civilization. This is the radical about the encounter between Marcuse and New Left that made important strides in the 1960s and is still a source of inspiration today for an aesthetic redesigning of society.

The structure of this book, in order to connect the above, is divided into three chapters concerning Counterculture, its aesthetics, and its politicization (while Chapter 4 is essentially a commentary on methodological priorities that were chosen). Chapter 1 traces the development of philosophical and aesthetic ideas in the historical context of postwar America in search of the specific constitution of the American type of Counterculture. A phenomenon essentially Euro-American (rather than purely American) in which its novelty lies. Let us note here that the emigration of European theorists to the United States due to Nazism undoubtedly favored the interconnec-

tion of American radical thought with the pioneering European currents that were almost unknown until then in America; a fact that had a decisive influence on the reception of Existentialism and Critical Theory in America and that is clearly linked to the ideological making of the Counterculture. In Chapter 2, we examine the first trend of the Counterculture discussing the question about form (unfolding the aesthetic content of the Counterculture) by beginning to reflect on the form by the aspect of the American avant-garde's "attack" on it. Nevertheless, the experiments with aesthetics are not limited to the avant-gardes; they move on to an overall aesthetic Counterculture that already provides the foundations for a social transformation of the form. Radical theater (and especially *Guerrilla Theatre*) is a key point for the possibility of such a transformation where the aesthetic-real boundary is radically blurred.

In Chapter 3, we move, then, from the description to the philosophical interpretation following Herbert Marcuse, in other words, to the second direction of the Counterculture as a political trend. The transformation of the form passes from the aesthetic to the political and here is where the Marcusean (Marxist) Phenomenology plays a decisive role in the understanding of the transformative dynamics of the form. The form is politicized in the American 1960s by following the aesthetic experiments of the previous decade while, simultaneously, overcoming the ontology of the aesthetic as such. Here a possibility for a "self-transcendence of the form" under a social transformation arises. If the new social movements under their encounter with Marcuse take this step, then the foundation of such an evolution also gives us answers for our time where the social form remains in bondage to technique and indeed at a much more advanced level than in the 1960s. If the new needs that will emerge under a process of a social transformation of the aesthetic through the intersubjective reconstruction of man–nature relation, if this process requires a new ontological restructuring, then Marcuse discusses very seriously the question of a positive transcendence of the alienation. Marcuse's phenomenological interpretation of early Marx has very clearly ontological depth while the term "pacified existence" projects to describe ontologically this direction. If here, it is posed further a demand for a "beyond the established form of civilization" (not only for the structuring of society but also for the social subject itself)

then Marcuse managed to transfer a philosophical anthropology project to the movements of his time, even if they implemented his vision incompletely. It is here a strong legacy for a restart of movements also in today's very pressive social conditions.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the postwar Counterculture is, of course, a postmodern current, either aesthetically or politically. I should add that Marcuse managed to be read very creatively by the movements of his time because, apart from his fundamental differences with central aspects of postmodern thought, there were also important common starting points⁵ which were widespread then as well as today. Nevertheless, in my own philosophical analysis (in Chapter 3), I follow the methodological analysis of Critical Theory rather than postmodern thought. Moreover, I follow some aspects of Andrew Feenberg in his attempt to read phenomenologically Marcuse, a point where conflicting views are also raised.⁶ I follow additionally the interpretative framework of Douglas Kellner about a radical subjectivity and his overall approach to the utopian moment of Marcuse.

The neo-Marxist context of the pioneers of the Frankfurt School was influenced from the beginning by both Marxist and Phenomenological interpretations about the social subject. Nevertheless, Marcuse's phenomenological background—considered in broader terms in our time—cannot be in conflict with the analytical tools of the first generation of Critical Theory, nor can it be reduced to a unilateral interpretation that overrides his interdisciplinary framework. It remains essential for us, particularly in the 21st century—which is marked by contradictory interpretations of the great philosophical traditions—to always keep in mind the richness of the German-speaking intellectual tradition (Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Phenomenology) as

⁵ See Ben Agger: "Marcuse in Postmodernity," in: David Rasmussen and James Swindal (eds.), *Critical Theory*, Vol. 4 ("The Future of Critical Theory"), London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi 2004, pp. 181–191.

⁶ Marcuse's philosophical legacy, and in particular his relation to Phenomenology, has sparked ongoing and constructive debate over the past two decades. See John Abromeit: "Left Heideggerianism or Phenomenological Marxism? Reconsidering Herbert Marcuse's Critical Theory of Technology," *Constellations* Vol. 17, No. 1 (2010), pp. 87–106; Andrew Feenberg: "Marcuse's Phenomenology: Reading Chapter Six of *One-Dimensional Man*," *Constellations*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2013), pp. 604–615.

well as the European historical environment of the early 20th century, both of which decisively shaped Marcuse's philosophical paradigm.

So, my aim is to read Marcuse not only in the context of the 1960s but also today and this is the main reason to keep the Marcusean philosophical project open to interdisciplinary interpretations. His late work of a radical Phenomenology as an interpretative model for the Social Sciences keeps a balance between Postmodernism and Marxism, a point that methodologically responds to today's problems about technological rationality and world-being. I have added Chapter 4 due to my intention to explain more adequately my methodological choice in favor of Critical Theory during a time of crisis of ideologies such as the 1960s and, moreover, today.

That said, I hope the reader will find in my research interesting positions and interpretative explanations on issues that have been active philosophically for more than half a century although the philosophical research of the last few decades has not given them the attention they deserve.

Christos Nedelkopoulos
Leipzig, November 2024

Chapter 1

The making of the American Counterculture as a Euro-American phenomenon

That whole itself is not, as the famous sentence from the *Phenomenology* would have it, the true...
—Th. Adorno, *The Experiential Content of Hegel's Philosophy*

I. European Nihilism: on the groundings of a radical aesthetics

Madame,

I needed all the prodigious presumption of a poet to dare to trouble your Majesty and bring to her attention a case as petty as my own. I have had the misfortune to be condemned for a collection of poems entitled *The Flowers of Evil*, whose horribly frank title was not sufficient to protect me.⁷

On the above passage of this famous letter that Charles Baudelaire would send to the empress herself (November 6, 1857), few months after the first edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* (June 1857) and having already been sentenced together with his publisher, for *offense against common decency and moral virtues*, we come across from the outset to the “discreet” self-sarcasm of the poet. We are dealing at first sight with a literary virtue that, among other things, will infuse the worldwide artistic firmament while Baudelaire’s work certainly followed an especially adventurous course that ended up being officially censored,⁸ which was, of course, sanctioned by a court decision. In such a (seemingly insignificant) incident (not of course the only

⁷ Napoleon.org: “Letter from Charles Baudelaire to empress Eugenie”, trans. by Rebecca Young and Peter Hicks (2017), <https://www.napoleon.org/en/history-of-the-two-empires/objects/letter-charles-baudelaire-empress-eugenie/>

⁸ Initially, *Le Figaro* in July 1857 questioned the poet’s mental health. This was followed by the censorship of *Les Fleurs du Mal* [The Flowers of Evil] in its 1861 edition, where 6 poems were omitted.

one in the history of ideas), the thread of the American Counterculture can be sought through the course from the *bohème* artist to the newer *Beatnik*. This is the path that historically justifies the damnation of *Les Fleurs du Mal* for what they really were, namely, something much greater than the condemnation of an annoying poet. The real vindication in the United States will come 100 years later, when Allen Ginsberg publishes the *Howl*⁹ and an entire (postwar) generation in another continent attempts to compose the political embodiments of Baudelaire's "accursed" dualistic antitheses: evil and beauty, pleasure and violence, through the messages which are inherited (silently from the self-destructive hipster and noisily from the Beatnik-explorer) to the American Counterculture during the postwar period. The beginnings of the Counterculture can be traced here, in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, through a quite complex route.

Of course, since then, a lot of water has flowed under the bridge in the United States over the next 100 years (from the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal* to the Vietnam War) into the aesthetic-philosophical field (Surrealism – Existentialism – Postmodernism) but the American Counterculture primarily from here—from the intellectual life of France—draws on its material. The American activist of the 1950s walks on the tracks of a political Baudelaire to make his own antitheses: the transformation of the evil and beauty duality, sometimes into mysticism and sometimes into psychedelia. In a sense, the reference to Baudelaire involves here a paradigm shift. From the point of view of social and political philosophy, Baudelaire, although a contemporary of Marx (in fact he lived and wrote during the same historical events), will almost escape its notice "inexcusably" until Walter Benjamin highlights the sociocultural perspectives of his work. According to Benjamin's analysis, it is incorrect to see Baudelaire exclusively as an artist. It is also incorrect—respectively—to see in the Counterculture only the cultural phenomenon (as the predominant postmodern interpretation dictates).

So, we are called upon to unfold the yarn of the American Counterculture from Baudelaire and the revolted Paris of the mid-19th century. Postwar American radicalism cannot be comprehended aesthetically and socially with-

⁹ See Allen Ginsberg: *Howl and other poems*, introduction by William Carlos Williams, San Francisco 1994.

out Baudelaire's apperceptions and lived experience, that is to say, without Paris' atmosphere of the *French Second Republic*. Here we are faced with the interpretative challenge to approach the aesthetic into political and vice versa. Baudelaire (and his environment) is the turning point for an inter-continental understanding of the American novelty in the 1960s, which is traced between these two poles: that of the political and that of the aesthetic.

1. Uprising of June 1848 and Paris of the “Second Republic”: the beginnings

At the end of the 18th century, France was under the status of a social crucible. The power of Louis XVI was confronted with the “reactionary” middle class that did not want to give in to the tax demands of the nobles and the result was the National Assembly's proclamation by the so-called “Third Estate.” The Storming of the Bastille (July 1789) urged the enemies of the feudal regime to rally around political clubs (*clubs politiques*),¹⁰ especially under Robespierre and Danton. The aristocrats, of course, were not willing to let the people's wrath take over Paris without a fight. Thus, they began a conspiratorial circle of discussions to organize the counterrevolution. The great fortune of the French metropolis could not be left to the “sans-cullotes” who were gathered in large numbers in the political clubs and around *Le Père Duchesne*. From now on the *sans-cullotes* (the term refers to the army “without breeches”) will join with thousands of volunteers who flock from the French periphery to enlist the Parisian army that aims to prepare the bloody overthrow of counterrevolution. This outcome would be a milestone for French and, in general, for European modern history. This new page of French history constitutes the temporary end of monarchy and the establishment of the French Republic.

In the coming years, Paris is in the spotlight again. In 1848, the government, behind its democratic smokescreen, did not seem to be able to avoid the crisis anew. Under the influence of the conspiratorial tradition exerted

¹⁰ The tradition of the political clubs as a “historical phenomenon” and their connection with Parisian political life extends to three different periods: the years of the French Revolution, the uprising of 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1870–1871.