

# The Marcusean inheritance as a possibility not yet realized: from a pre- to a post-technological culture and society

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**Abstract.** *The main constrains in heritage of One-Dimensional Man is to leave open the chance for a radical change in the possible continuation of our civilization towards a two-dimensional society, and this may be possible thanks to the level of development reached by current technology. Indeed, there is already a two-dimensional society in our past that Marcuse defines as led by the pre-technological culture. This seems to be a paradox and a contradiction: how to realize a two-dimensional society through and thanks to advanced technology, if the only example we have of such two-dimensionality is given by the pre-technological culture?.*

**Keywords:** *Marcuse, Technology, Society, Culture.*

## Introduction

One-Dimensional Man<sup>1</sup> is the work through which Marcuse carries on the critique of Western society, already begun with *Eros and Civilization*<sup>2</sup> but now stressing new topics in such a way that a possible subtitle for the book could be: technology and civilization. A book that does not absolutely define a hopeless landscape.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes it returns the question of the “pessimism” in *One-Dimensional Man*. Regarding this, I believe simply that the book is realistic. Indeed, in his 1964 book Marcuse traces a dark scenery which is, however, not completely compromised, there are

social cracks in which a new society could take place. Later, he sees the concrete possibilities to realize something completely different, a new phase in Western civilization – this is mainly represented in *An Essay on Liberation* and *The end of utopia*. However, even after, he ascertains the paradox that there are concrete possibilities – this is the emancipatory side of automation – but nobody seems able to grasp them. In fact, his final work, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, is devoted, following a Nietzschean suggestion, as a book for all and none.<sup>4</sup> In other terms, a possible solution for pacifying existence is at our fingertips, but is there someone able to grab it?

It is precisely this condition that opens the intensive search for a new “revolutionary” subject. Even Marcuse’s biography militates against the interpretation of his pessimism: if he had found no chances in the one-dimensional society, why did he decide to stay in it instead of fleeing when, at the end of World War II, he had the opportunity to depart from it coming back to Germany? (Mind you, I do not want to identify the one-dimensional society only with USA society, it was just (still is?) its main emblem).

On the contrary, the book is a harsh criticism of the industrial advanced society that not for this reason is depicted as a black monolith. In fact, inside it, fractures, possible breaking points are identified.<sup>5</sup> To dwell there trying to widen them is precisely the purpose of that criticism. Exactly for this reason a very important *pars construens*, sometimes underestimated, is present in the book, where the Author leaves open the chance for a radical change in the possible future development of our civilization, towards a two-dimensional society. The latter is finally possible thanks to the current level of intellectual and material development reached by the industrial advanced society. Consequently, technology plays a crucial role in this possibility. But there is already a two-dimensional society in our past that Marcuse defines as led by the pre-technological culture. It is

followed by the technological culture, who Marcuse introduces in these terms «our society distinguishes itself by conquering the centrifugal social forces with Technology rather than terror, on the dual basis of an overwhelming efficiency and an increasing standard of living.»<sup>6</sup>

This seems to be a paradox and a contradiction. The two pillars of any Critical Theory of society, as Marcuse characterized them, are «1. The judgment that human life is worth living (...) 2. The judgment that, in a given society, specific possibilities exist for the amelioration of human life and specific ways and means of realizing these possibilities.»<sup>7</sup> Still, how to realize a two-dimensional society through and thanks to advanced technology, if the only example we have of this two-dimensionality is given by the pre-technological culture? Nevertheless, for the American/German philosopher a solution is definitely handy, handy because *historical*: «the “possibilities” must be within the reach of the respective society: they must be definable goals of practice.»<sup>8</sup> The solution lies in the fact that Marcuse points towards and opens to a new kind of two-dimensional society, in which, «by virtue of the rigorously historical character of the transcendence»,<sup>9</sup> art and higher culture guarantee for it and technology permits its concrete realization.

This kind of social setting has its ground in a post-technological

culture. Where post- does not mean a refusing and/or a deleting of technology as such, but its absorption in and subjection to another form of Reason (evidently, not instrumental).

This hermeneutics, besides offering a panel of the *construens* side of the book, definitely subtracts Marcuse to any kind of conservative interpretation, as if he had criticized technology as such instead of a certain kind of relation that individuals are addicted to have with it, showing and confirming the continuous progressivism of his thought. Moreover, throughout this interpretation it is possible to overcome some Marxist-orthodox views, and establish an interesting comparison with the Hegelian master-slave dialectic.<sup>10</sup>

### **Preliminary Issue**

In the following pages I would like to address the core topic of *One-Dimensional Man*, that is the dialectic between the pre- and the post-technological culture, because it opens towards the Marcusean conception of Critical Theory. However, before do that, there are some issues I would like to briefly clarify in order to avoid possible misunderstandings in the continuation of the paper; namely, a rejection of possible objections to the Marcusean discourse on technology.

At first, because for Marcuse liberation requires a constant technological development, as a primary

mean against *Lebensnot*, in the struggle for existence, and because the technological apparatus has developed itself in a repressive way, then an increasing in the technological development would also be an increasing in alienation.<sup>11</sup> In this perspective technology and alienation are unavoidably bound together as directly proportional to each other – this risks to be a very conservative interpretation of the Marcusean question of technology. Still, in Marcuse's thought, technology and alienation are not necessarily but *historically* linked together. Indeed, the fact that until today technological progress has been realized under the mark of repression and domain, does not absolutely mean that another kind of technological development outside the mark of alienation may not be possible.<sup>12</sup> This is precisely the question (that will be addressed in the subsequent pages) of the transition from a technological to a post-technological culture.

Also, though Marcuse writes that «qualitative change seems to presuppose a *quantitative* change in the advanced standard of living, namely, *reduction of overdevelopment*»,<sup>13</sup> this criticism of overdevelopment is not assimilable to that of the so-called “degrowth theories”.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, for Marcuse to militate against overdevelopment does not mean to militate against development as such, but versus a certain kind of development that is nothing but a vehicle of propagation

of the instrumental rationality. Moreover, and especially, the Marcusean criticism of overdevelopment is for sure aimed at a liberation of the human being, but in very different terms from those of most of nowadays degrowth theories: «liberation from the affluent society does not mean return to healthy and robust poverty, moral cleanliness, and simplicity.»<sup>15</sup>

Moreover. The problem we face with *One-Dimensional Man*, and in spite of significant changes which are still outstanding nowadays, is the transformation of the struggle for existence from a natural issue to a political decision.

With “significant changes” I mean what I propose to be seen as the completion of a parabola, which, what is more, explains why the Critical Theory of society has no longer a relevant appeal on the new social protest movements. Somewhere,<sup>16</sup> this lack of appeal has been related to the deficiency of a prosperity able to guarantee for the future, which characterized the earlier era. Unlike this, I would suggest to relate this lack of appeal in the completion of the consciousness colonization, a dynamics resumable as follows. Consumerism, as it is arisen in the first phase of the advanced industrial society, was not just an economic, capitalist question. It was a phenomenon of absorption of consciousness into the realm of the established order of things, seductively proposed, through the hedonistic fascination of objects, as

the best possible one. Presently, this dynamics of absorption has definitively happened, the established order of things appears not as the best one but as the only one (not as a possible order, but as the only possible order). Thus, investments that conveyed and supported this order have no longer reason to be maintained, they may be suspended. In other words, in the second half of last century, goods have spread a certain ideology, and now that ideology is definitively absorbed and ossified into individuals, it is possible to overhaul and reset the vehicle of its diffusion. I propose reading the current global economic crisis under this perspective.

This dynamics has resulted in the absorption and the containment of the transcending, of the excess of human being in front of any established situation. To be sure, this does not mean that the one-dimensional society is a totally administered society, completely impermeable to critical thought. There are still possible breaking points. However, if this kind of society works by containing and absorbing the antagonism, the possible transcendence, and if a large part of its population seems to interiorize this mechanism – what Marcuse named as “repressive desublimation” –, this means that the possibilities of liberation present in it can be grabbed only from an already free man. The latter point rises at least two aftermaths, already addressed by Marcuse, but that we have to

update. It is my intention to approach them in the conclusions of this paper.

### **From the Pre- to the Post-Technological Civilization<sup>17</sup>**

According to Marcuse, there was already a two-dimensional society. It was the world of the pre-technological culture, and it was two-dimensional exactly for this. It held values that were other from the established reality, indeed «its authentic works expressed a conscious, methodical alienation from the entire sphere of business and industry, and from its calculable profitable order».<sup>18</sup> That was a kind of second, transcendent reality that in this form took place in the material reality, shaping it. Still, to this pre-technological culture corresponded a pre-technological society. That is to say, a society dominated by suffering and toil, pain and fear, a society under the mark of *Ananke* and *Lebensnot* and into which the struggle for existence was not a problem just for a privileged minority, inasmuch as it was «a world with the good conscience of inequality and toil, in which labor was still a misfortune; but a world in which man and nature were not yet organized as things and instrumentalities [...] It is an outdated and surpassed culture, and only dreams and childlike regression can recapture it. But this culture is, in some of its decisive elements, also a post-technological one».<sup>19</sup>

This was the form of the past phase of our civilization.

Subsequently, another kind of society arose. A society better organized in solving the struggle for existence, thanks to the technological development. So, a technological society, able to guarantee a comfortable life to the large part of its members. Still, this society is<sup>20</sup> able to carry out this task through a particular use of technology and a particular relation man engages with. A relation that stills maintain *Lebensnot*, just through another way: no longer *Ananke* via nature, but *Ananke* via technology.<sup>21</sup> A relationship which promotes instrumental rationality to the best, and so gradually to the only one, form of rationality, that permeates the life of all and all the life, making disappearing the second transcendent reality in the triumph of the established order of things. Thus, to the technological society corresponds the technological culture, synthesized by Marcuse with the word operationalism;<sup>22</sup> shaping in this way the current form of civilization. However, as I wrote, the link between society and culture is never a necessity, but it is ever a historical dialectic. This means that somewhere it should be possible to cut the bond which ties together the advanced technological society and its culture in terms of operationalism.

Therefore, the question that arises is: is the technological society obliged to be led from a techno-

logical culture, namely operationalism? If the answer were yes, this would establish a mechanistic relation between society and culture. Nevertheless, as I said, the relation between them is not necessary but dialectical. This means: there are historical reasons that determined it, therefore there are historical possibilities to break and reconfigure it. Which are the first and which the latter?

The Marcusean thought about it, is known, i.e. the reason why technology affirmed itself in our civilization is nothing but because it is a valid mean, the best one mankind has,<sup>23</sup> in the struggle for existence. However, codifying instrumental rationality more and more in theoretical terms, our civilization determined a unique line of theoretical development from the Aristotelian formal logic to the affirmation of operationalism, passing through, as main stations, Descartes, the birth of exact sciences as autonomous field of knowledge, and positivism.<sup>24</sup>

Though, I would like to point out that maybe Marcuse underestimated another factor which in the advanced industrial society contributes to the affirmation of operationalism: the hedonistic power of fascination by technological advanced objects, the so-called hi-tech.<sup>25</sup>

Anyway, what I would like to emphasize one more time, is that this is not an unavoidable law but a historical possibility that has been realized. Now, because in any

conditions, even in the worst possible society and culture, the human being is always bearer of a possible excess, surplus, which can overflow any *status quo*,<sup>26</sup> it follows that other historical possibilities may always be realized. Precisely here lies the chance for the rising of a post-technological culture applied to a technological society. Permitting so to open a new historical phase in our civilization, nameable as post-technological,<sup>27</sup> in which society is not technophobic but freely uses technology, permitting its further development as instrument to solve the struggle for existence, ameliorating the concrete life conditions towards the pacification of life, nevertheless, subjecting technological rationality to another kind of Reason. Another kind of reason that Marcuse never defines in detail, just because this is (will be) the task of each future generation – maybe the task of this one, is to show why, any kind of reason it will be, may never be the instrumental one. Under this regard, Marcuse enlightened the ambiguity of technology as the reason why people are not free and the reason thanks to which people could be free – in other words, a liberation thanks to technology from any form of slavery, beginning with that new kind of totalitarian slavery promoted even through technology.<sup>28</sup>

Hence, the paradoxical situation described by Marcuse is that, on the one side, mankind has finally, for the first time in the history, a level

of intellectual and material development sufficient to overcome Ananke in a technological society guided by a post-technological culture – where post- does not mean the overtaking of technology as such but that of the instrumental rationality, thus, a reorientation of the whole technological apparatus that is currently set –, still on the other side, it is not possible to clearly find who may be a possible social subject able to grab this historical opportunity, thinking, acting and living in a transcendent way, according to the critical and dialectical thought.

This is the wall Marcuse could not climb, oscillating amidst various social subjects (from the intellectuals to the students, to the so-called outsiders), to the point that he will dedicate his last book for none and for all.

I rebuilt the basic lines of the Marcusean project in order to introduce the following conclusions, where I would like, at first, to add two remarks to that project as I sketched it above, and also to build a sort of bridge, made by two proposals, able to bind and so integrate the core of the construens side of *One-Dimensional Man* with the particular features of the society of these first decades of the third millennium.

Being in search of a Marcusean inheritance means, at first, to comprehend that, even before the stressed particular topics, the general perspective is neither that of spiritualism, nor that of mere political

activism. It is not spiritualism because the starting point is the concrete real situation in which we are and the arrival is a possible transforming of it. It is not mere political activism because that transforming is essentially transcendence originarily free from any activity, or better, transcendence in itself is already the activity.

It would be too long to follow now the Marcusean argument on this regard. At this moment, I just would like to clarify that when Marcuse criticizes the dynamics of the bourgeois culture that operates «separating “culture” from the everyday world»,<sup>29</sup> thus narrowing art as an object of spiritual contemplation (and so, happiness in the real world, just as an internal form of happiness) detached from the real world that, then, it is no longer able to shape (suppression of the “artistic alienation”), well, his criticism is twofold. On the one side, it is clear the criticism to spiritualism. Yet, on the other, it is inferable a criticism to mere activism (it is a pity he did not develop extensively this side of his argumentation, because exactly here lies the answer to whom see in him a kind of paternalism that simply invite youths to act) meant as the realization of something in the real world in order to escape from mere inconclusive speculation; in Marcuse, indeed, there is not such an issue because «epistemology is itself ethics and ethics is epistemology»,<sup>30</sup> then a dialectical contact between individuality and real world

is precluded so much from the withdrawal from the reality into the interiority (spiritualism), as from the duty of doing something concrete in the reality (activism), a duty completely extraneous to the art, to the higher culture, to the dialectical thought but that, not paradoxically, they realize exactly because this task is extraneous to them.

In other words, if what is at stake here is the transcendence, then, it is denied both from a withdrawal from reality (in this case, there would be nothing left to transcend) and from a permanence in the reality (in this case, there would be no longer transcendence)

### Conclusions

To conclude, I would like to stress two remarks, which appear to me as essential in comprehending Marcusean thought, finally presenting two proposals.

1<sup>st</sup> Remark. To pose the relation between society and culture not in a mechanism but in a dialectical relationship – maybe it is possible to say, an apophantic relation, in which things could be, even in the realm of the historical possibilities, in a certain way or in another for reasons that are not merely mechanistic – means to be far from a certain Marxist orthodoxy that fixes this relation as a necessity elapsing between the so-called structure and superstructure, explaining it in mere materialistic terms. Consequently, political economy becomes the best,

even the only one, theoretical tool to decipher the world.

Differently, without denying the value of political economy, Marcuse introduces in this perspective an element which escapes from any rigid determinism, the role of the consciousness, often defined as excess.<sup>31</sup> So, the passing from political economy to Critical Theory of society in understanding the world. Now I would like to note that this transition from political economy to Critical Theory is not a critique or a refusal of Marxian theory but, on the contrary, it is the accomplishment of such theory until the ultimate aftermaths. Indeed, if producing goods also means producing social relationships and thus the structure of society, we have to observe that nowadays production passes through technology, it is a technological gesture. It follows that «today domination perpetuates and extends itself not only through technology but as technology».<sup>32</sup> The primary issue at stake here is no longer economical, but technological.

Moreover, let me express a kind of petty sub-remark as a possible confirmation of my first remark above. The fact that we are not in front of a mechanism but a historical dialectic is confirmed considering that in mechanistic terms it would be not possible to justify the presence of *differences* in a situation in which all members share among them the same concrete conditions of life (unless using a very rigid sort of atomistic theory, which negates any



kind of freedom to individuals,<sup>33</sup> more or less just like an extreme kind of *clinamen* theory).

2<sup>nd</sup> Remark. *One-Dimensional Man* is entirely crossed by a dialectic Marcuse establishes by capital and technology, until the point that sometimes it has been spoken of techno-capitalism.<sup>34</sup> However, the latter definition risks holding an ambiguity, that, really, not even Marcuse himself solved – and maybe this is the reason why it sometimes comes back amid his scholars. Though he did not clarify it just because fifty years ago the interaction between capital and technology was still confused, in an initial, rough form. At that time a locution as techno-capitalism was in line with the (that) present. But nowadays we are immersed in a social situation never experimented before. In earlier phases of capitalistic development and in historical totalitarianisms, technology was the slave, someone/something else was the master; today, technology, nay instrumental rationality, is the master. Yet, differently from the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, the more competences the slave acquires, the stronger becomes the master, insofar as the first uses the form of rationality of the latter.

Anyway, what I would like to argue, is that techno-capitalism seems to me a good term to express the previous stage of our civilization, more or less the age lived by Marcuse himself: a phase in which capitalism uses technology. Yet,

today, in a register and milieu that of course is foreign to Marcuse and the earlier generation of critical theorists, things have changed. Now technology uses capitalism, and though they are still allied, a possible suppression of the latter does not imply the necessary suppression of the former. Technology nowadays is autonomous, it is the new ideology, applicable to everyone and everything. Its core is efficiency for efficiency, blind efficiency – and this core can work both inside and outside from current virtuality. This is the reason why the locution techno-capitalism seems to be unable to depict the present. Today we are not in front of an element, technology, which impacts society with changes that are relevant economically, politically, sociologically, even anthropologically, but without affecting the essence of society and individual, an essence that would still remain that imposed by capital. On the contrary, the main effect that technological rationality produces is a sensible change in the ontology of society and in the consciousness of individual: a phylogenetic and ontogenetic turn in civilization.

Besides, we have to note that Marcuse himself seems to be more inclined to consider the issue of technology than that of capitalism:

*Marx held that organization and direction of the productive apparatus by the "immediate producers" would introduce a qualitative change in the technical continuity [...]*

*However, to the degree to which the established technical apparatus engulfs the public and private existence in all spheres of society [...] to that degree would the qualitative change involve a change in the technological structure itself.*<sup>35</sup>

According to what is argued above, it seems to me that it is no longer possible to speak of an equal relation between capital and technology, and the time has come to think about a prosecution of that dialectic, i.e. a new phase of it. Hence, I would like to propose a possible prosecution of the dialectic between capital and technology.

In reality, I admit that my proposal is not so original, still it seems to well fit with the current time. It is nothing but the application to capital and technology of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, if we look to the dynamics of capital we can note that throughout all of its progress it has made use, always and gradually increasing, of technology. The more it enhanced itself the more it enhanced the technology it used. Capital was the master. Technology was the slave (furthermore, a similar dialectic was before established between political power and capital). A slave which finally, as in the Hegelian dialectic, has become the master. This idea finds a confirmation in at least two respects.

At first, under this regard there is confirmation for the Marcusean idea that one of the main changes in the prosecution of the previous ideolo-

gy<sup>37</sup> of domain in the industrial (technological) advanced society, is the fact that the ideology of the latter is impersonal. It is not possible to precisely find in it a leader (or a group of), as instead it was in the past, with the figures of “industries’ captains” and/or political *Führer*. To be sure, political and financial oligarchies still exist, and of course they have a certain decisional autonomy. But to whom they respond if not to the instrumental rationality?

Furthermore, we are used to thinking of the financial markets as the temples of capital. But this is wrong. They are temples of technology. Indeed, where is capital in them if not in data? Who manages data? What would happen if this manager disappeared, for instance due to a black out?

Now, it would seem that, according to the master-slave dialectic, there would be no means to avoid or escape this issue: the triumph of technology, namely instrumental rationality, as new impersonal *Führer* of an ideology without leader(s). Still, one more time, the solution lies in considering that we are not treating fixed mechanisms, but dialectical (i.e. historical). Indeed, in the Hegelian master-slave dialectic there is a fundamental trait we cannot forget to deal with: the will of the slave to become master. One more time, it is not a mechanism, but a human excess we are faced with. Consequently, technology becomes master not because it desires, has the will, to become so,

but just because individuals, consciously or not, let it become such a master, electing and accepting it as impersonal master. A master that is nowhere identifiable, and exactly for this it is everywhere.

Now, before introducing my little proposals arisen from *One-Dimensional Man*, I would like to clarify something, nay, to reject a possible objection, to the Marcusean project about technology and so about the possible transition from a pre- to a post-technological civilization, that if not refuted risks affecting all reasoning about it.

This kind of criticism Marcuse met in the work of Simondon.<sup>38</sup> In short, it affirms that because technics is domain, it is not possible to use it for freeing and saving men (and so the world) which use it, from the issue of domain itself. Such position is very dangerous because it risks being an anti-modern, technophobic, conservative position, that supports a world in which toil, suffering, pain, earning a living, in short Ananke, cannot be overtaken. Very far from this, the Marcusean post-technological civilization inserts technology in another paradigm of thought than the technological one, foreshadowing a society which uses and develops technology as a main tool in the struggle against *Lebensnot*, but at the same time uses another form of rationality to organize itself than the instrumental one.<sup>39</sup> This is possible thanks to the power of transcending, thanks to the excess from the given

situation, that is a permanent faculty of individual (indeed, Marcuse never speaks of deleting of transcendence, but always speaks about its containment).<sup>40</sup>

To confirm how the Marcusean view of a post-technological civilization is immune from such criticism, let me add a personal remark. In any slave society, did the masters have the same kind of *forma mentis* and *modus vivendi* of the slaves? This is precisely the point: enslaving technology, contracting it our struggle for existence, without being affected from the form of rationality of the slave, and this is possible if and when the master preserves his faculty of transcending.

What is more, this project and perspective clearly shows, if it were again needed, that what is at stake here is not an academic issue but nothing less than our lives: in what way technology affects individuals and thus society and, in so doing, determines a whole civilization – because the «whole is not merely a perceived *Gestalt* (as in psychology), nor a metaphysical absolute (as in Hegel), nor a totalitarian state (as in poor political science) – it is the established state of affairs which determines the life of the individuals»<sup>41</sup> – and in which other terms it can (ought to) be replaced.

I can now finally pass to the concluding proposals.

1. The *vexata quaestio* of the new social subject of a possible social change. Marcuse already stressed that it cannot be nothing but a

transversal, inter-classes (in the classical meaning of class) subject. But he did not find it. Indeed, basically, the subject for a social change can be nobody but those who live badly in society itself. However, in the advanced industrial society, namely the one-dimensional society, either nobody lives badly, and this is the ascending phase of consumerism, or those who live badly are by now so integrated into the system to be able to only ask for benefits contained, and so confirming it, into the social, economical, linguistic, cultural order, border of the established society,<sup>42</sup> and this is the current phase of capitalism in an advanced technological society where consumer goods are not anymore necessary to be diffused as representative of the one-dimensional society; that is nothing but a new articulation of the same ideology of domain that crosses all the Western civilization.<sup>43</sup>

Today, 50 years after this original thematization, trying to overpass this issue, I propose considering the subject for a possible change, of which we are still in search of, not directly as a social but primarily as an individual subject. This way of reconfiguring the question, is nothing but the prosecution of what Marcuse already fixed:

*all liberation depends on the consciousness of servitude, and the emergence of this consciousness is always hampered by the predominance of needs and satisfactions which, to a great extent, have become the individual's own.*<sup>44</sup>

This kind of approach would permit both, to underline that the social situation derives from individual (each individual) conscience, and to shift the attention from the individuation of the social subject to the identification of the social aggregative dynamics, in organizing such individuals, that may be immune from the well-known problems of the mass culture, of the society of the spectacle, of the industry of (cultural) entertainment. Therefore, a new question arises: how to socialize a feeling that is, originally, individual? The subsequent point is so introduced.

2. The primary problem any Critical Theory of society faces today, is not theoretical but practical. It is no longer to conceptualize the intellectual and consciousness profile of the antagonistic (in front of any *status quo*) new social subject of a possible change, but to identify new aggregative ways of it, out of the repressive desublimation's dynamics. A problem that is multiplied to nowadays new forms of power and communication, considering the means used to communicate and aggregate already as a vehicle of this repression already and as able to absorb in it (of course, not in the form of rejecting alleged alternatives, but in that of support of a false version of them) any kind of antagonistic value. Will these values survive in a dormant form, or will they be corroded and forgotten until the complete self-consumption of man and society?

Looking for a possible answer to the previous question, I believe we should not be afraid in taking a couple of preliminary steps that, on the one side, could seem illiberal, and on the other, break with a long tradition of thinking – but that are nothing but the creation of circumstances suitable for an authentic reasoning: the deleting of all that is today pro(/im)posed as a token of freedom, but is nothing but the building of an invisible cage in the form of the repressive desublimation, and the breaking with the theory of the liberation “from below” that was undoubtedly a progressive element in the past but is turned into a conservative rhetoric nowadays.<sup>45</sup>

According to this, maybe a possible solution could be to take any critical discourses primarily as a discourse for a narrowed audience,<sup>46</sup> whose first issue is not so much social analysis in itself (already extensively developed), but rather studying how to involve a broader audience into this discourse without turning it in something inauthentic – and this is already a question of social, political and cultural analysis.

In other terms, when people not (entirely) subjected to the repressive desublimation are looking for a collective form of organization, they become unavoidably subjected to the mass-culture and mass-mediatic dynamics, led by technology, and this dynamics progressively increase with this kind of technological development.

On the contrary, if higher culture ever needs for an “elitist” dimension

– «would not an art which rebels against integration into the market [but the same for any kind of integration] necessarily appears as “elitist”?»<sup>47</sup> – the same goes for the organization of the antagonism.

Concluding, the work of Marcuse, from *Eros and Civilization* to *The end of utopia, An Essay of Liberation* and *The Aesthetic Dimension*, passing through the “lintel” of *One-Dimensional Man*, provides a foundation for a Critical Theory of society able to merge together the theoretical side and the empirical data. The theoretical side is to be meant as the permanent commitment for a progressive emancipation from any kind of *Lebensnot*, as biological, so brought from nature, as societal, so brought from the form of the social organization. The empirical data are to be meant as the given form of social organization in a certain, historical, situation.

Exactly for this, *One-Dimensional Man* can still provide such a foundation for Critical Theory. However, it cannot anymore provide the tools to accomplish, concretely realize it – means for which I proposed above two possible reconfigurations, certainly to be improved, if accepted.

All of this, according to an idea that I propose to take as a main point of any Critical Theory: an idea can be progressive only as long as it is not yet realized.

## Note

- <sup>1</sup> H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man. Studies in the Ideology of the Advanced Industrial Society*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964.
- <sup>2</sup> Id., *Eros and Civilization. A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1955.
- <sup>3</sup> To settle this issue it should already be sufficient to remember the information given to the reader: the book «will vacillate throughout between two contradictory hypotheses: (1) that advanced industrial society is capable of containing qualitative change for the foreseeable future; (2) that forces and tendencies exist which may break this containment and explode the society» (H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. xlv). Or, in other words, «rather than conceptualizing contemporary societies as closed monoliths of domination, they should be analyzed as system of contradictions, tensions, and conflicts which oscillate from stasis to change, from oppression and domination to struggle and resistance, and from stability and containment to conflict and crisis» (D. Kellner, *Introduction to the Second Edition*, in H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. xxxiv).
- <sup>4</sup> See: both by H. Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1969, and *The end of utopia*, in Id., *Five Lectures: Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Utopia*, trans. J.J. Shapiro and S.M. Weber, Beacon Press, Boston, 1970, 62-82, and *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward A Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, trans. E. Sherover, Beacon Press, Boston, 1979, 31.
- <sup>5</sup> «Philosophical project [...] pertains to a specific stage and level of the societal development, and the critical philosophic concepts refer (no matter how indirectly!) to alternative possibilities of this development» (H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 222). Years later, in works such as *An Essay on Liberation* and *The end of utopia*, Marcuse tried to expand the liberating and alternative tendencies still present into the one-dimensional society, and even when, at the end of his life, he did not find social forces that seem able to apply for them, as in *The Aesthetic Dimension*, he never negated that, in spite of the absence of a social subject that may realize them, those tendencies still are present.
- <sup>6</sup> H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. xl.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xli.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xlii.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xli-xlii.
- <sup>10</sup> See: G.W.F. Hegel, *The Truth of Self-Certainty*, in Id., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold V. Miller, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1977.
- <sup>11</sup> See: L. Casini, *Eros e utopia. Arte, sensualità e liberazione nel pensiero di Herbert Marcuse*, Carocci, Roma, 1999. Among other places, Marcuse diffusely writes on the fulfillment of the technical reason, and on its transcending, in the chapter *The Catastrophe of Liberation*, in *One-Dimensional Man*.
- <sup>12</sup> An emblematic sample of this is given in his *Eros and Civilization*, cit., p. 216, when Marcuse describes the way of life of Arapesh as an

efficient path in the struggle against *Ananke*, but not for this reason repressive and alienated. Moreover, this differentiation in the way to intend technology, one strictly bound with domination and one (at least quite) free from it, seems to have its roots in the Heideggerian distinction between technics as “Bringing-forth” and as “challenge”. See: M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, in Id., *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt, Garland Publishing, New York and London, 1977.

<sup>13</sup> H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 246.

<sup>14</sup> Emblematic examples from one of the today’s most known authors on this topic: S. Latouche, *Vers une société d’abondance frugale. Contresens et controverses sur la décroissance*, Fayard / Mille et une nuits, Paris, 2011, Id., *De-growth, Inequality and Poverty, in Sustainable development Policies for Minor Deprived Urban Communities*, P. Ventura and E. Calderon and M. Tiboni (eds.), McGraw-Hill, Milano, 2011, pp. 71-79.

<sup>15</sup> H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 247.

<sup>16</sup> See: M. Forman, “One-Dimensional Man and the Crisis of Neoliberal Capitalism: Revisiting Marcuse in the Occupation”, in «Radical Philosophy Review», n. 2, 2013, pp. 507-528.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that a theory of hedonism of objects, that seems to very well fits with the Marcusean argumentations, was autonomously elaborated by Pier Paolo Pasolini. On this topic, I

permit to report the following paper of mine: F. Sollazzo, *Pasolini e la “mutazione antropologica”*, in E. Pirvu (ed.), *Discorso, identità e cultura nella lingua e nella letteratura italiana*, Universitaria, Craiova, 2013, pp. 419-434.

<sup>17</sup> To approach the question of the building of a post-technological society, it is preliminary helpful to fix the meaning of the main terms I’m going to use – a meaning defined to me according to what Marcuse expresses in *One-Dimensional Man*.

With culture, I mean a system of values. A values’ system that certainly arises from the concrete structure of society and has then significant effects on it, heavily affecting it. But, what I would like to clearly stress is that the dynamics who links together a concrete society’s structure with a values’ system and the latter with a possible new society’s structure and so on, it is not a necessity, a mechanism, but a dialectical bond. It means: not an imperative, but a possibility which becomes real for particular historical reasons. To be sure, in the context of the one-dimensional society the borders of this dialectic becomes more and more tight, and this dynamics seems to be nothing but an automatic mechanism. Still, it remains a dialectic, namely something historical. Precisely here lies the permanent possibility to turn a historical choice (though unconsciously taken) in another historical choice (hopefully aware).

With society, I mean the above concrete social structure, that produces and that is affected by a system of values, even if it happens

in a not necessary, mechanistic, but historical dialectics.

With civilization, I mean the whole kind of world that intellectually (culture) and materially (society) human being (consciously or not) produces.

<sup>18</sup> H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 61-62.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>20</sup> Now we have to use the present form, because we are speaking of the one-dimensional society, that, notwithstanding its updates of the last decades, is still the society in which we live.

<sup>21</sup> Maybe, it is not worthless to underline that Marcuse's thought is in no extent conservative because his criticism is aimed at a certain use (and subjection to it) we made and make of technology, and in no measure towards technology as such.

<sup>22</sup> «Operationalism, in theory and practice, becomes the theory and practice of containment». This is clearly possible to observe in the linguistic tendency according to which «words and concepts tend to coincide, or rather the concepts tends to be absorbed by the word. The former has no other content than that designated by the word in the publicized and standardized usage, and the word is expected to have no other response than the publicized and standardized behavior (reaction). The word becomes *cliché* and, as *cliché*, governs the speech or the writing; the communication thus precludes genuine development of meaning». Also «the noun governs the sentence in an authoritarian and totalitarian fashion, and the sentence becomes a declaration to be accepted – it repels demonstration, qualify-

cation, negation of its codified and declared meaning». Ultimately «the closed language does not demonstrate and explain – it communicates decision, dictum, command» (H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., pp. 19, 90, 91, 105). This seems to be even the fate, whether not already the current state, of the word democracy, reduced to a predefined set of operations not to think about, but just to execute.

<sup>23</sup> Here lies an interesting possible link with that piece of the modern philosophical anthropology that characterizes technics as a necessary anthropological datum. As main reference in this regard: A. Gehlen, *Man in the Age of Technology*, Columbia U.P., New York, 1980.

<sup>24</sup> «Under the rule of formal logic [...] well defined in their scope and function, concepts become instruments of prediction and control. Formal logic is thus the first step of the long road to scientific thought – the first step only, for a much higher degree of abstraction is still required to adjust the modes of thought to technological rationality [...] The scientific concept of a universally controllable nature projected nature as endless matter-in-function, the mere stuff of theory and practice. In this form, the object-world entered the construction of a technological universe – a universe of mental and physical instrumentalities, means in themselves [...] *the process of technological rationality is a political process* [...] Only in the medium of technology, man and nature become fungible objects of organization [...] technology has become the great vehicle of *reification* [...] The world tends to



become the stuff of total administration, which absorbs even the administrators [...] Under these conditions, scientific thought (scientific in the larger sense, as opposed to muddled, metaphysical, emotional, illogical thinking) outside the physical sciences assumes the form of a pure and self-contained formalism (symbolism) on the one hand, and a total empiricism on the other» (H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., pp. 141, 172, 173); the sentence emphasized by me, explains why «epistemology is in itself ethics, and ethics is epistemology» (p. 129). In contrast with formal logic, «dialectical thought is and remains unscientific to the extent to which it is such judgment, and the judgment is imposed upon dialectical thought by the nature of its *object* [...] This object is the reality in its true concreteness [...] Dialectical logic cannot be formal because it is determined by the real, which is concrete» (p. 144).

It is noteworthy that Marcuse was elaborating this thematization since the lectures he gave in the academic year 1958/1959 by the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes of Paris – partially published as “De l’ontologie à la technologie. Les tendances de la société industrielle”, in «Arguments», n. 18, 1960, pp. 54-59. Moreover, this theming, and all the Marcusean thought on technology, clearly brings in itself the legacy of the Heideggerian reflection on technics, with his differentiation between the ancient notion of *aition* and the modern scientific idea of “cause”, and technology as *pōiesis* as bringing-forth, and as challenge.

<sup>25</sup> See: footnote 16.

<sup>26</sup> For the main reflections on society and desire in which lie possible touch points with the Marcusean perspective, see: G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, cit., S. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. J. Strachey, Norton, New York, 1961, G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane, Minnesota U.P., Minneapolis, 1983, J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan VI: Desire and its Interpretation*, trans. C. Gallagher, Karnak, London, 2002, S. Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> As it is known, the main value that make possible the transfiguration of the other ones, is what Marcuse defines as the «Great Refusal – the protest against that which is» (*One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 66), a refusal that is «progressively closed by the advancing technological society» (p. 67), paying its tribute to a *Zeitgeist* resumable in this paraphrase: what is real is rational though what is rational is not yet real. Great Refusal seems to be a possible application of the “apophantic logos/logic”. Now, it is not the aim of these pages to directly approach the issue of the Great Refusal. Nevertheless, I would like to stress that the fact by which «the “other dimension” is absorbed into the prevailing state of affairs» (p. 67), is made possible in virtue of the advancement of the massification and popularization of culture – of course, it is not the cultural diffusion in itself to be a problem, but a

diffusion in banalized forms according to the needs of the entertainment system. In other terms, today it seems to be extremely urgent fix that it is not possible have culture always and in every circumstance. Culture needs for particular times, spaces and conditions that respect its essence – that is to be oriented toward nothing but culture itself; otherwise, it is just the executive of something else.

Moreover, in line with the aims envisaged by the Great Refusal it is possible analyze the current social protest movements (from Occupy to the so-called Arab Spring, as main samples). But the aim I have in such an investigation is not to discuss if and how much such movements are ideological and radical – this is one of the main topics of the correspondence between Marcuse and Löwenthal here published: H. Marcuse and L. Löwenthal, “The Dialectics of Liberation and Radical Activism: An Exchange of Letters between Herbert Marcuse and Leo Löwenthal”, trans. Ch. Reitz, in «Radical Philosophy Review», n. 1, 2013, pp. 21-23. The source of these movements can be located in the legitimation crises of the advanced capitalist society – see: L. Langman, “Capitalism, Crises, and ‘Great Refusals’: Critical Theory, Social Movements, and Utopian Visions,” in «Radical Philosophy Review», n. 1, 2013, pp. 349-374 – however, the crucial point is to investigate if they have a kernel of authentic criticism toward to established society, or whether they represent a form of criticism *a priori* already contained in the realm of the established order of things (about which, they just

would ask to take their part) and, in the latter case, if and how would be possible imagine new escape lines; on this topic: F. Sollazzo, “Through Sartre and Marcuse: For a Realistic Utopia”, in «Analele Universității din Craiova, Seria: Filosofie», n. 32, 2013, pp. 90-100,

[http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/analele\\_universitatii/filosofie/2013/Anale31.pdf](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/analele_universitatii/filosofie/2013/Anale31.pdf), accessed on 30 September 2016.

(Moreover, among many university activities held during 2014 to acknowledge and push forward Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*, I permit myself to report the lecture I held in English the October 9, 2014 by the Faculty of Arts of the University of Szeged, titled “Herbert Marcuse: *Az egydimenziós ember – 50 évvel később*” (Herbert Marcuse: *One-Dimensional Man – 50 years later*); also, in the 1<sup>st</sup> semester 2014/2015 I devoted to this topic one of my courses by the Dept. of Philosophy of the University of Szeged, in the form of a commented reading of the book, and in the 1<sup>st</sup> semester 2016/2017, another course on comparison between the socio-political philosophical perspectives of Marcuse and those of Pasolini.)

<sup>28</sup> «Automation indeed appears to be the great catalyst of the industrial advanced society [...] the technical instrument of the turn from quantity to quality [...] Complete automation in the realm of necessity would open the dimension of free time as the one in which man’s private *and* societal existence would constitute itself. This would be the historical transcendence toward a new civilization» (H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 40). Still, though Marcuse writes that «automation is

- more than quantitative growth of mechanization» (*One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 38), he intends automation just like an accumulation of resources. However, fixing the qualitative leap only in a quantitative accumulation of something (automation) there is the risk to underestimate the social impact of non-quantitative social forces. In fact, it is absolutely possible to imagine a society completely automatized but not for this reason necessarily free from instrumental.
- <sup>29</sup> H. Marcuse, *The Affirmative Character of Culture*, in *Art and Liberation: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, D. Kellner (ed.), Routledge, London and New York, 2007, vol. 4, pp. 82-112
- <sup>30</sup> Id., *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 129.
- <sup>31</sup> This seems to be exactly what he was in searching for, associating Marx, on the one side, with Hegel, Husserl, Freud and Heidegger, on the other.
- <sup>32</sup> H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 162.
- <sup>33</sup> It is easy to imagine how much Marcuse could be far from this view, considering that the basilar point of all his work is the protest against the continuous annihilation of individuality throughout Western civilization.
- <sup>34</sup> As main reference, see the famous work of D. Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity*, Polity, Cambridge, UK, 1989, in which the chapter 7<sup>th</sup> is indeed titled *Techno-Capitalism*. See also S. Best and D. Kellner, *The Postmodern Adventure: Science, Technology and Cultural Studies at the Third Millennium*, Guilford Press, New York, 2001.
- For safety sake, I clarify that I'm not negating that there exists a phenomenon definable as techno-capitalism. But I argue that capital (as political power) is just the historical current form of an issue that is metaphysical: instrumental rationality as social ontology – see: H. Marcuse, *From Ontology to Technology*, trans. M. Ishay, in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, S.E. Bronner and D. Kellner (eds.), Routledge, New York, 1989, reprinted in H. Marcuse, *Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, D. Kellner and C. Pierce (eds.), Routledge, London and New York, 2011, vol. 5, pp. 132-140, H. Marcuse, “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology” in *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, n. 3, 1941, pp. 414-439, reprinted in H. Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, D. Kellner (ed.), Routledge, London and New York, 1998, vol. 1, pp. 39-66, H. Marcuse, *The problem of Social Change in the Technological Society*, in *Towards a Critical Theory of Society: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, D. Kellner (ed.), Routledge, London and New York, 2001, vol. 2, pp. 35-58. Indeed, it is also possible to imagine a world without capitalism (and/or the current forms of political power), in which, however, instrumental rationality still continues to work.
- <sup>35</sup> H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 25.
- <sup>36</sup> Marcuse already uses the Hegelian master-slave dialectic to describe how everybody in the industrial civilization based on technical

progress has become servants, in the form of instruments (*One-Dimensional Man*, cit., esp. pp. 35-36). This poses a very interesting comparison with the Gehlenian figure of the “job holder” (see: A. Gehlen, *Man in the Age of Technology*, trans. P. Lipscomb, Columbia U.P., New York, 1980), with the Arendtian analysis on Eichmann (see: H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Penguin, New York, 2006), and with the Horkheimerean depiction of manager (see: M Horkheimer, “The Authoritarian State”, in *Telos*, n. 15, Spring 1973).

Differently, I use here the Hegelian master-slave dialectic not to describe “anthropological” social figures but for describing social tendencies.

<sup>37</sup> This also means, by the way, that contrarily to the idea of the end of all ideologies, diagnosed by J.-F. Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984, the «absorption of ideology into reality does not, however, signify the “end of ideology”. On the contrary, in a specific sense advanced industrial culture is *more* ideological than its predecessor, inasmuch as today the ideology is in the process of production itself» (H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 13).

<sup>38</sup> See: G. Simondon, *On the Way of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. N. Mellaphy, University of Western Ontario, London, 1980 (see: Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 163f.).

<sup>39</sup> «Such qualitative change would be transition to a higher stage of civilization if technics were designed and utilized for the pacification of the struggle for existence [...] I submit that such a new direction of technical progress would be the catastrophe of the established direction, not merely the quantitative evolution of the prevailing (scientific and technological) rationality but rather its catastrophic transformation, the emergence of a new idea of Reason, theoretical and practical» (H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 232).

<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the process by Marcuse codified with the formula “repressive desublimation”, it is not a phenomenon of desertification of transcendence but rather of containment of it. This is the reason why perspective as that of F. Lang’s movie *Metropolis* does not capture our present and our foreseeable future: human beings are (will be) never just like robots, pure objects, but are (will be?) controlled and contained in desires which are (will be?) brought back to the established order of things. What happened is indeed the conquering of the innermost dimension of man not through its deleting but through its containing (“repressive desublimation”). E.g., the dynamics of the sexual liberation described in chapter ten, *The Transformation of Sexuality into Eros*, of his *Eros and Civilization*, and the turn in the acceptance of some social figures previously socially refused, like that described on chapter three, *The Conquest of the Unhappy Consciousness: Repressive Desublimation*, of *One-Dimensional Man*.

<sup>41</sup> H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 212.

<sup>42</sup> In this context, the view of Habermas according to which it is possible to open a crisis of legitimation of the social system, presenting to it claims that it is not able to satisfy, seems to be absolutely valid. «A legitimation crisis can be predicted only if expectations that cannot be fulfilled either with the available quantity of value or, generally, with rewards conforming to the system are systematically produced. A legitimation crisis then, must be based on a motivation crisis – that is, a discrepancy between the need for motives declared by the state, the educational system and the occupational system on the one hand, and the motivation supplied by the socio-cultural system on the other» (J. Habermas, trans. Thomas McCarthy, *Legitimation Crisis*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1975, pp. 74-75). Therefore, to trigger a social crisis should be advanced to system expectations it is not able to satisfy. Still, because Habermas seems to overestimate the formalistic framework of human interaction and to underestimate the content of individuality, a double problem here arises. Who can advance these radically nonconforming expectations, if the largest part of individuals are conformed to the system? (And this is the basilar problem of the late Marcuse). How a possible expectation like this can avoid to being absorbed in the system, as part of it, through the dynamics of repressive desublimation? (And this is the currently problem of the elaboration of a

strategy appropriated with the time we are living.)

<sup>43</sup> See: M. Horkheimer and Th.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. E. Jephcott, Stanford U.P., Stanford, 2002.

<sup>44</sup> H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 9. This establishes a parallelism with the book of É. de La Boétie, *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*, trans. J.B. Atkinson and D. Sices, Hackett, Indianapolis, 2012. Though the matching point lies in the fact that the power of Power is given only if individuals accept, recognize and legitimate it, the irreducible difference is the role of the consciousness: the split between individuals who voluntarily give their servitude to Power, and individuals not aware of their subjection in front of the apparatus, into the so-called system.

<sup>45</sup> As for the first step: «rational is the imagination which can become the *a priori* of the reconstruction and redirection of the productive apparatus toward a pacified existence, a life without fear. And this can never be the imagination of those who are possessed by the images of domination and death. To liberate the imagination so that it can be given all its means of expression *presupposes the repression of much that is now free and that perpetuates a repressive society*» (my second emphasis). As for the second step: «“control from below” [...] This notion was valid, and still is valid, where the laborers [individuals] were and still are, the living denial and indictment of the established society. However, where these classes have become a prop of the established way of life, their ascent

to control would prolong this way in a different setting» (H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, cit., p. 254-256). Namely, Marcuse himself had already envisaged the danger to idealize a past golden age of oppositional social movements.

- <sup>46</sup> It seems to be a rejection of Feenberg's theory of instrumentalization, of a dialectical technological rationality. But it is rather an extension of it. In fact, if Feenberg himself says that «only through an approach that is both critical and empirically oriented is it possible to make sense of what is going on around us now» and «Critical Theory was above all dedicated to interpreting the world in the light of its potentialities» (A. Feenberg, "Critical Theory of Technology: An Overview", in *Tailoring Biotechnologies*, n. 2, 2005, pp. 47-64, <https://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/books/critbio.pdf>, accessed on 1 September 2016 – the Feenberg's main publication about is the well-known book *Critical Theory of Technology*, Oxford U.P., New York, 1991), we have to take vision that such an empirical analysis reveals as nowadays such societal and individual potentialities appear to be, quantitatively and qualitatively narrowed. In other terms, whether «the degree of repression must be measured not

only against the present and the past, but against the *possibilities* available to the individual and to society» (H. Marcuse, *The Containment of Social Change in Industrial Society*, in Id., *Towards a Critical Theory of Society: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, D. Kellner (ed.), Routledge, London and New York, 2001, vol. 2, pp. 81-93); the yardstick of any Critical Theory is the concreteness, the feasibility, of those possibilities which today seem to be limited, even more and more, to a restricted audience.

- <sup>47</sup> H. Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, cit., p. 52. Obviously, a term such as elitist, here is not to be taken as something "snobbish". Indeed, a possible liberation turns around something nameable as excess: a force that is working inside every human being, aware of it or not, and that is the innate capability to overpass the (any) given situation (maybe this is one of the fundamental differences between man and animals), and in fact, the kind of domain which we are subjected to in the advanced technological society is not the disappearance but the containment of this excess, that generates distorted forms of it. Therefore, elitist is a way to name those whose excess is contained and those that are in some extent (more) free in the use of it.

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