

**To cite text:**

Višić, Maroje (2023), "Onwards and Upwards to the Kingdom of Beauty and Love. Herbert Marcuse's Trajectory to Socialism", *Philosophy and Society* 34 (1): 170–194.

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## ONWARDS AND UPWARDS TO THE KINGDOM OF BEAUTY AND LOVE. HERBERT MARCUSE'S TRAJECTORY TO SOCIALISM<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Socialists today can learn from Marcuse. Starting from this premise this paper discusses and elaborates on Herbert Marcuse's trajectory to socialism. Marcuse successfully eluded the trap of "economism", and turned to subjectivity in search of a socialist solution. The transition to socialism is possible through the creation of new anthropology expressed through the concept of "new sensibility". The prototype of a new socialist human is an anti-superman. Peace and beauty are important characteristics of Marcuse's socialism. "Libertarian socialism", "feminist socialism", "integral socialism", "socialist humanism", "socialism as the work of art", and "utopian socialism" are all terms that testify to Marcuse's open and many-faceted understanding of socialism in all of its complexity of meanings. Some of those meanings can inform debates on future prospects of socialism.

### KEYWORDS

Marcuse, critical theory, socialism, communism, feminism, Left, Marxism, USSR

### Introduction – Off the beaten path

A spectre is haunting Marcuse's critical theory – the spectre of socialism yet to come. This perhaps best captures Marcuse's lifelong commitment to the ideals and goals of (future) socialism in which humans, other living beings and nature peacefully coexist and flourish, and where peace, happiness, (libidinal) reason, freedom and a sustainable way of living are the order of the day.

Socialism is a philosophy of authentic human existence and the fulfilment of human needs in which creative freedom in work allows for all-round development of an individual. The transitional goals of socialism require a guaranteed minimum: access to healthcare, childcare, transportation, education, food, housing and work, while the final goal is the transvaluation of values

1 Research for the paper was financed through Libertas International University's project "STATE (IN)STABILITY: Theoretical and empirical insights".



from which human liberation and flourishing flow (Reitz 2018: 172) And from his early writings Marcuse was preoccupied precisely with the possibility of an authentic and happier existence. He thus puts socialism on the agenda of “concrete philosophy” and, later, critical theory. “Concrete philosophy” should encourage individuals to take a revolutionary act of transforming society, to deliver them from “thrownness” and usher them into authentic existence: “Concrete philosophy can thus only approach existence if it seeks out Dasein in the sphere in which its existence is based [...]. Concrete philosophy will exist in the public realm, because only by so doing can it truly approach existence. Only when, in full public view, it grabs hold of existence in its daily being, in the sphere in which it actually exists, can it effect a movement of this existence toward its truth” Marcuse 2005 [1929]: 47). Socialist goals are also outlined in Marcuse’s (2009 [1937a]: 105-106) understanding of critical theory: “[The] situation compels theory anew to a sharper emphasis on its concern with the potentialities of man and with the individual’s freedom, happiness, and rights contained in all its analyses. For the theory, these are exclusively potentialities of the concrete social situation. They become relevant only as economic and political questions and as such bear on human relations in the productive process, the distribution of the product of social labor, and men’s active participation in the economic and political administration of the whole [...]. The transformation of society eliminates the original relation of substructure and superstructure. In a rational reality, the labor process should not determine the general existence of men; to the contrary, their needs should determine the labor process. Not that the labor process is regulated in accordance with a plan, but the interest determining the regulation becomes important: it is rational only if this interest is that of the freedom and happiness of the masses”.

Marcuse’s ideal of socialism remains true to Marx’s: the reduction of time spent labouring, shortening the length of the working day, overcoming the division of labour, redistribution of working and leisure time in favour of the latter, freedom, happiness and peace. But the path to it (slightly) differs. Marcuse abandons the proletariat as the medium for the desired socialist transformation, instead envisioning the transition to socialism as possible by redirecting the technological progress<sup>2</sup>: “Marxist parties and groups are still clinging to notions and goals and strategies developed in the nineteenth century—neglecting to take into account the changes in the structure of capitalism and their impact on class struggle, and equally neglecting the new possibilities and qualities of building socialism at the highest stage of technology and productivity. That is why they are losing relation to reality, why so much of what they say sounds like sectarian jargon, why they are fighting each other rather than the common enemy” (Marcuse 2014 [1962]: 115–116). According to Cohan and Serby (2021) “Socialists today should learn from Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*:

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2 Despite allegedly straying from Marx’s path (see footnote 8), Marcuse was regarded, as one student protester explained, as a “true” Marxist: “We see Marx as the prophet, Marcuse as his interpreter, and Mao as the sword” (Feder 1968: 506).

in particular, its spirit of protest, its materialist social theory, and its warnings about commodified liberation". Their aim is to "critically re-evaluate and [re] introduce *One-Dimensional Man* for today's socialists" (Cohan, Serby 2021). Marcuse's vision of socialism needs to be (re)introduced to contemporary socialist movements (Stevenson 2022). However, *One-Dimensional Man* may serve as an inspiration for socialists today, but it almost certainly doesn't do justice to Marcuse's breadth of vision of socialism.

"Libertarian socialism", "feminist socialism", "integral socialism", "socialist humanism", "socialism as the work of art", and "utopian socialism" are all terms that testify to Marcuse's open and many-faceted understanding of socialism in all of its complexity of meanings. This paper aims to discuss and analyse Marcuse's trajectory to socialism coherently within the framework of his critical theory and in the scope of his works. Marcuse's socialism has "many faces" because he was constantly revising and enhancing it by taking cues from *praxis*<sup>3</sup> to make it more relevant to the specific historical situation. Socialism in Marcuse's brand of critical theory has theoretical and practical meaning. It serves as a critical standpoint against which failings of the existing socialism should be evaluated and future socialism created, and as the point at which goals of critical theory are realised in *praxis*.

## Critique of the Existing Socialism

*Soviet Marxism* (hereafter *SM*) is the only work that is part of Marcuse's mainstream works<sup>4</sup> in which he critically and systematically addresses the issues of the existing socialism.<sup>5</sup> Marcuse's (1958) analysis of the Soviet version of socialism focuses on showing deviations from Marx's theory. The chief difference between the two concerns the problem of transition from capitalism to socialism.<sup>6</sup> In Marx's theory, this transition occurs through revolutionary action

3 Marcuse openly voiced this position in his letter to Adorno: "[...] there are situations, moments, in which theory is pushed on further by praxis" (Adorno, Marcuse 1999 [1969]: 125).

4 *SM* was written under contract, and it was a product of Marcuse's employment at the Columbia and Harvard University Russian research centers (1952-1954). Marcuse never considered *SM* as part of his oeuvre and has told to Kellner 1984: 198 in an interview that he sees it as an "interruption" which is not central to his major concerns. Marcuse's argument can be easily contested. Even he in a letter to Dunayevskaya links *SM* to *One-Dimensional Man*, a piece central to his major concerns: "I may have told you that my new book [...] is some sort of western counterpart of *Soviet Marxism* [...]" (Marcuse 2012 [1960]: 59).

5 Marcuse is the only member of the 1<sup>st</sup> generation of the Frankfurt School who made a systematic theoretical effort of confronting Stalinism (Árnason 1971: 177).

Palmier 1969 describes *SM* as a pessimistic analysis of the contradictions of Soviet Marxism.

6 Marcuse's analysis received mixed reviews. Left-liberals critiqued him for being apologetic to Soviet socialism (Stern 1958; Lichtheim 1973: 337-348). Kecskemeti (1959: 189) argues that Marcuse's critique "pertains more to social mythology [...] unreal

of the industrial proletariat: “The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves” (Marx 2021 [1875]: 17). Thus, the original theory rules out the emergence of socialism either from a peasant revolution or from the party acting on behalf of the proletariat (Marcuse 1958: 17). Socialist revolution in the industrially underdeveloped pre-revolutionary Russia could not follow Marx’s precepts. But socialism didn’t emerge in the Western hemisphere either where the conditions for it were “ripe”. The reason for this, as Marcuse gives it (1968), is that the working class had been successfully integrated into the “affluent society” mostly because of the advancements in technology. The development of technology made labour less strenuous and mass production and availability of affordable goods improved the standard of living for the working class who traded “revolutionary consciousness” for “happy consciousness”<sup>7</sup>. The law of supply and demand establishes the harmony between the ruling classes and the ruled (Marcuse 1969: 12). However, the un-Marxist unfolding of history in both societies didn’t deter Marcuse from following Marx. He was adamant that Marxism’s core ideas could be preserved despite being altered by historical conditions.<sup>8</sup> As a result, Marcuse

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concepts such as the revolutionary mission of the proletariat or the control of the economy by the ‘immediate producers’ do not seem to me to be helpful”. The sharpest critique comes from Dunayevskaya (2012 [1961]: 222–226) who claims that Marcuse doesn’t differentiate clearly between Marxism, Leninism and Stalinism and thus fails to criticize Stalinism more sharply as a perverse deviation from Marx’s theory. There is some truth in the criticism. Dunayevskaya has right in saying that Marcuse didn’t differentiate between these three approaches, but it is wrong to say that Marcuse went soft on Stalinism. Throughout *SM* Marcuse meticulously demonstrates how Marx’s ideas got twisted in the USSR. He undertakes a critique of Stalinism based on deviations from Marx’s theory and explains it by using his concepts such as “the new rationality” (Višić 2017: 162). The introduction to *SM* clearly states the intention of “immanent critique,” which means clarifying the actual function of Marxism in Soviet society by using Marxism as a conceptual instrument (see pp. 1–2). Marcuse avoided the wholesale criticism of all aspects of Soviet society and focused on the “immanent critique” because the former would have been easily misinterpreted as an overall attack on socialism and a rejection of Marxism (Marcuse 1994: 59). However, Marcuse fails to mention that Stalin’s doctrine of “socialism in one country” proved at first to be better than Trotsky’s “permanent revolution”, (Kellner 1984). Parts of Marcuse’s analysis are deficient in facts about Russia possibly because the study’s focus is on doctrine rather than society (MacIntyre 1970: 55). However, MacIntyre partly misinterprets Marcuse’s intention, for whom Soviet Marxism is something that determines the realities of Soviet development rather than an ideology used to justify policies.

7 “The happy consciousness” describes the conformism of the classes who believe that the system is good because it delivers the goods (Marcuse 1964: 87–88).

8 Marcuse faced harsh criticism for “abandoning” original Marx’s theory, leading to labels like “non-Marxist” or “un-Marxist” (MacIntyre 1970: 21). However, Marcuse’s Marxism is precisely marked by constant revisions and restorations of Marxist theory (such as Marcuse’s turn to Freud) (Alaway 1995: 71; Kellner 1984). Marcuse never gave up on the possibility of radical social change toward socialist society and remained dedicated to the Marxist project even when the project failed to deliver (Kellner 1984; Held 1990; Alaway 1995; Višić 2017). Marcuse perceived the New Left, student movements,

(1958) concentrated his efforts first on analysing the un-Marxian situation and then on finding a way(s) out of it.

The “un-Marxian” situation of Soviet socialism which affects its future development is that it coexists with capitalism and must keep up with it.<sup>9</sup> To strike a balance Soviet socialism must attain the economic and technological level of capitalist society and then surpass it (Marcuse 1958: 76–77). This means skipping through developmental stages. The effort to teleport from the state of backwardness to the level of capitalist society led to the construction of the huge productive apparatus within a system of domination and regulation incompatible with individualistic rationality and freedom (Marcuse 1958: 81–83). Marx’s (2021 [1875]; 1848) concept of socialism calls for direct control of the means of production by the immediate producers who are then supposed to make the transition from work performance redistribution to one based on the satisfaction of needs. Instead of socialisation Soviet socialism introduced nationalisation which Marcuse (1958: 81–82) sees as just another means of domination parallel to industrialization in capitalist societies: “Without initiative and control ‘from below’[...], nationalization is but a technological political device for increasing the productivity of labour, for accelerating the development of the productive forces and for their control from above [...]” Marcuse (1964: 42–46) is aware that the technological and material backwardness of Soviet society explains and even necessitates (self-imposed) repressive measures and total administration. After all, society must first create wealth before it can redistribute it according to Marx’s dictum. This explains why Soviet society postponed the transition to the second phase of socialism.<sup>10</sup> However, Marcuse (1958; 1964) emphasizes that even after attaining the goal of catching up with capitalism, Soviet socialism can still prolong totalitarian controls and deliberately remain stuck in phase one. The international situation of the competitive, hostile coexistence plays right into the Soviet leadership’s hands enabling them to further delay the transition to the second phase and to perpetuate technical progress as the instrument of domination.<sup>11</sup> Nationalization

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and Women’s Liberation Movement as possible new revolutionary subjects with the capacity to create qualitatively different socialist society (Višić 2020: 226).

9 Per Marx (2021 [1875]: 14) a communist society emerges within the framework of the capitalist society and in every respect (economically, morally, and intellectually) is stamped with the birthmarks of the old society.

10 Per Marx (2021 [1875]: 15–16) there are two phases of socialism. Following the overthrow of capitalism, the oppressive subordination of the individual to the division of labour continues in the first phase. Only in the second phase, when the distinction between mental and physical labour has vanished, when productive forces have increased in tandem with individual development, do inequalities cease to exist. This phase sees a socialist shift in redistribution from “each according to his ability” to “each according to his needs”.

11 This also applies vice versa to capitalism for whom “communism has become the doctor by the sickbed of capitalism. If it were not for communism, it would be impossible to explain the political and economic unification of the capitalist world” (Marcuse 2014 [1965c]: 175).

and technical progress alone won't automatically bring liberation. On the contrary, they can be used to tighten the grip over the people smoothly: "The nationalized economy could exploit the productivity of labour and capital without structural resistance while considerably reducing working hours and augmenting the comforts of life. The more the rulers are capable of delivering the goods of consumption, the more firmly will the underlying population be tied to the various ruling bureaucracies" (Marcuse 1964: 46). Marcuse sees both societies as varieties of an industrial society exhibiting the common features – "centralization and regimentation supersede individual enterprise and autonomy; competition is organized and 'rationalized'; there is joint rule of economic and political bureaucracies; the people are coordinated through the 'mass media' of communication, entertainment industry, education" (Marcuse 1958: 81). Hence, domination in Soviet socialism parallels forms of social controls in capitalist societies<sup>12</sup>. To capture the climate in which Soviet socialism develops and under which this system of domination must pave the way for liberation, Marcuse (1958) (re)uses the new-old term of "new rationality"<sup>13</sup>. The "new rationality" builds on the "technological rationality" (a prevailing mode of rationality in capitalism) and Soviet socialism uses technology in the same repressive way as its capitalistic counterpart: "[...] the same mechanization and rationalization generated attitudes of standardized conformity and precise submission to the machine which required adjustment and reaction rather than autonomy and spontaneity. If nationalization and centralization of the industrial apparatus goes hand in hand with [...] the subjugation and enforcement of labour as a fulltime occupation, progress in industrialization is tantamount to progress in domination: attendance to the machine, the scientific work process, becomes totalitarian, affecting all spheres of life" (Marcuse 1958: 84). The "new rationality" as the *conditio sine qua non* for the survival of the Soviet state doesn't promise a greater degree of human freedom nor does it imply socialization of the means of production. Hence, the outcome of the Soviet's development, as Marcuse sees it, is not necessarily socialism, but the reduction of social repression.<sup>14</sup>

12 In *One-Dimensional Man* Marcuse describes how technological rationality numbed revolutionary consciousness: "The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced. The prevailing forms of social control are technological [...]" (Marcuse 1964: 11).

13 The "new rationality" expands on the "technological rationality", a term Marcuse (1941: 44–46) first used in 1941 to describe how technology has become an instrument of domination. Thus, in a broader sense, "new rationality" refers to a set for creating social reality: "technological rationality", pragmatic production of desired attitudes, the ideological character of language, and ritualization and magical application of Marx's theory.

14 Marcuse often uses the word 'repression/repressive' throughout his writings. In *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse (1955: 8) uses the terms repression and repressive "[...] in the nontechnical sense to designate both conscious and unconscious, external and internal processes of restraint, constraint, and suppression". Due to the scarcity of food

Technological advancements are hardly identical to development in human freedom or socialism. In *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse was overly optimistic thinking that the essence of technology is anti-oppressive and that it rebels against the repressive organization of society.<sup>15</sup> This led him to dismiss Freud's (1962) conclusion that suppression of instincts is an unavoidable feature of civilization. Marcuse saw technology and its development as a harbinger of socialism: "The technology operates against the repressive utilization of energy in so far as it minimizes the time necessary for the production of the necessities of life, thus saving time for the development of needs beyond the realm of necessity and of necessary waste" (Marcuse 1974: 63). Marcuse's (1958; 1964; 1969) initial optimism dwindled a bit after learning that technology is neither a guarantee of socialism nor anti-oppressive by design, but that its character is determined by its social usage.<sup>16</sup> Although technology fell short of Marcuse's expectations (at least in terms of socialism being realized as a direct consequence

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in general, such restrictions are unavoidable: "Objectively, the need for instinctual inhibition and restraint depends on the need for toil and delayed satisfaction" (Marcuse, 1955: 88). The demand for repression wanes as the productive capability of society rises and the prospect for gratification increases.: "Scope and intensity of instinctual repression obtain their full significance only in relation to the historically possible extent of freedom" (Marcuse 1955: 88). Nevertheless, the degree of freedom and the amount of true instinctual oppression in late capitalist society contradict each other. And thus repression becomes social domination: "Domination differs from the rational exercise of authority. The latter [...] is confined to the administration of functions and arrangements necessary for the advancement of the whole. In contrast, domination is exercised by a particular group or individual in order to sustain and enhance itself in a privileged position (Marcuse 1955: 36). In Marcuse's (1955: 100) view: "[t]he ideology of today lies in that production and consumption reproduce and justify domination". Hence in the form of social control, repression goes beyond that which is objectively necessary and tends toward totalitarian domination in which the disparity between the possible emancipation and factual disempowerment of the individual reaches an unprecedented level. Because both societies exhibited the same type of domination, Marcuse predicts a reduction in social controls as a result of Soviet development.

15 Marcuse's infusion of optimism can be explained by the fact that *Eros and Civilization* was published during the time when pessimistic philosophical views were widespread in intellectual circles, and when philosophers and social scientists declared the "end of ideology" which signalled the end of utopian-revolutionary projects of social reconstruction (Kellner, Pierce, Lewis 2011: 49).

16 Whitfield (2014: 106) points out inconsistencies between Marcuse's two major works: "*Eros and Civilization* envision technology as a catalyst of emancipation, freeing humanity from drudgery and permitting polymorphous sexuality to pervade utopia. [*One-Dimensional Man*] repudiates technocratic bureaucracy [...] and condemns the exploitation of nature that scientific progress is supposed to achieve". Marcuse initially "naively" assumed that technological development would automatically lead to socialism. However, he did not remain a naïve futurist and corrected his position after observing that both societies share the same technological base and use it to contain social change. In the essay *Some Implications of Modern Technology* Marcuse (1941) notes that technology is becoming a new subject of history. This insight remains decisive for Marcuse who was among the first to recognize technology as a new agent of history while others still had high hopes for the proletariat's revolution. Hence, for Marcuse (1964)

of technological development, and at the same pace at which technology was progressing ) he didn't sink into pessimism. Insights gained from analysing Soviet society and advanced capitalism reinforced his belief that transition to socialism is possible through reconstruction and reorganization of societies' technical bases with a view of qualitatively different ends. Thus, socialism as an heir of developed societies must appear as a qualitative change in the direction of progress (Marcuse, 2014 [1965a]: 244). Marcuse realized that technological development and the idea of progress linked to it would not by itself make a leap into socialism, but even after all distortions and constraints from the repressive usage, technological rationality still contains an "element of playfulness" inconsistent with the repressive organization of society. If this creative element could be freed<sup>17</sup> from the pressure of necessity, then it would give a new meaning to technical productivity – one that sets the stage for the emergence of socialist women and men – "all-round individual" who looms so large in Marxian theory" (Marcuse 1958: 257). Technology, thus, can foster the transition to socialism, but this requires a qualitative change in its social usage and adoption of the new regulating principle. The "pacification of existence" as a qualitatively different *logos* of technology alters the relation between technology and nature and harnesses its emancipatory potential for the reduction of misery, violence, and cruelty (Marcuse 1964: 240). Whether the "pacification of existence" would become a regulating principle and technology used for attaining socialist goals is a matter of political decision (Marcuse 1958: 185) of delivering technology from oppressive usage and placing it towards creating a society in which human needs and satisfaction become regulative principles: "The technological transformation is at the same time political transformation, but the political change would turn into qualitative social change only to the degree to which it would alter the direction of technical progress – that is, develop new technology. For the established technology has become an instrument of destructive politics. Such qualitative change would be a transition to a higher stage of civilization if technics were designed and utilized for the pacification of the struggle for existence" (Marcuse 1964a: 232).

### Protosocialism, Surplus Consciousness and Surplus Repression

In *The Alternative: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Socialism*, Bahro (1978) analyses internal developments in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and sees them as a glimpse of hope for the fundamental change in Soviet socialism. The book made a strong impression<sup>18</sup> on Marcuse (2014

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the completion of the historical process that ends in socialism is equivalent to the completion of the technological process.

<sup>17</sup> This element can be set free through a convergence of technology and art. See part *Realm of Beauty and Love*.

<sup>18</sup> Rudolf Bahro was imprisoned for critiquing existing socialism and proposing more emancipatory models of socialism, something that Marcuse went along with. According to Marcuse 2014 [1979]: 395–396 Bahro's key contribution is in abolishing the



[1979]: 396) who described it as “the most important contribution to Marxist theory and practice to appear in several decades”. Marcuse (2014 [1979]) immediately recognises the wider significance of Bahro’s study extending far beyond the borders of the GDR and applies his concepts *mutatis mutandis* to advanced capitalism. Marcuse is impressed by Bahro’s (1978) analysis of “subalternity,”<sup>19</sup> which, in Marcuse’s opinion, explains why the working class exists as a subordinate class in both socialist and capitalist societies and why it is incapable of transforming society. But he is particularly drawn to Bahro’s (1979: 271–314) concept of “surplus consciousness” which Marcuse sees as having transformative power: “[...] [a] free mental capacity which is no longer absorbed by the struggle for means of existence [...] a revolutionary strategy must be based on (...) the balance of forces between this surplus consciousness and the absorbed consciousness”. Bahro makes an important insight into the changes in the relationship between “base” and “superstructure”: the impetus for socialist transformation is shifted from economic necessity to subjectivity. The turn to subjectivity also applies to capitalist society.<sup>20</sup> Marcuse (1955; 1958; 1964; 1972; 1979) has a long time argued that advanced capitalism is producing new subjective conditions for revolution and developing new radical consciousness which is not that of the proletariat.<sup>21</sup> Both Bahro and Marcuse see “surplus consciousness”

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distinction between socialism and communism and demonstrating that from the very beginning socialism is communism: “[...] the entire perspective under which we have so far seen the transition to communism stands in need of correction, and in no way just with respect to the time factor. The dissolution of private property in the means of production on the one hand, and universal human emancipation on the other, are separated by an entire epoch” (Bahro 1978: 21).

<sup>19</sup> See *The Alternative: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Socialism*, pp. 121–251.

<sup>20</sup> Commenting on the reification of the proletariat and applying Bahro’s analysis of the consciousness in existing socialism Marcuse (1979: 21) writes: “The capitalist mode of production, through the increasing mechanization and intellectualization of labour, accumulates an increasing quantity of general ability, skills, knowledge - a human potential which cannot be developed within the established apparatus of production, because it would conflict with the need for full-time de-humanized labour [...] Under these circumstances, a ‘counter-consciousness’ emerges among the dependent population [...], an awareness of the ever more blatant obsolescence of the established social division and organization of work. Rudolf Bahro [...] uses the term surplus-consciousness to designate this (still largely vague and diffused) awareness [...] ‘Surplus Consciousness’ does not describe an ideological entity, signifying a relapse into idealism. Rather, this strange term designates a quality of the mental energy expressed in the actual behaviour of men and women under the impact of the mode of production in late capitalism. This energy is ‘surplus’ over and above the energy spent daily in the alienated performances required by the established production relations. Blocked in finding satisfying ways of effective realisation, it becomes, among the dependent population, consciousness of frustration, humiliation, and waste”.

<sup>21</sup> i.e., the feminist movement which alongside the radical student movement and the Black and Brown militants was in Marcuse’s (1971; 2005 [1974]) view the most radical movement.

as *the* potential catalyst for emancipation.<sup>22</sup> However, the “surplus consciousness” comprises two mutually opposing interests: the compensatory and the emancipatory. The former concerns the sphere of material goods that can be well met within the framework of the existing socialist and capitalist societies. The latter is oriented toward the self-realization of the all-round individual (Bahro 1979: 271–272; Marcuse 1958; 1964; 2014 [1979]: 398). Bahro (1978) like Marcuse (1955; 1969) insists that those compensatory interests can’t be simply re-channelled in the interests of emancipation as they are the product of the demand for happiness and gratification that is deeply rooted in the psyche. Hence, the repression is already present in the needs themselves. What Bahro (1978) implies and Marcuse (1955; 1969) says is that society reaches the human being deeply into the instinctual level where wants and needs are formed. On the psychological level, compensatory interests are strongly intertwined with emancipatory interests which makes them anti-emancipatory: “Compensatory interests concern mainly the sphere of material goods: bigger and better consumption, careers, competition, profit, ‘status symbols,’ etc. They can (at least for the time being!) be satisfied within the framework of the existing system: they compensate for dehumanization” (Marcuse 2014[1979]: 398; cf. Bahro 1979: 272). Compensatory interests work against emancipation in the consumption model of highly developed societies.<sup>23</sup> Marcuse (1964: 11) gives an example of how compensatory interests operate against emancipation: “The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced”. In other words, “surplus consciousness can be bought. Thus, change must go as far as on the instinctual level, where the germs of needs are born. As Marcuse (1972: 16–17) argues: “[W]hat is at stake in the socialist revolution is not merely the extension of satisfaction within the existing universe of needs, nor the shift of satisfaction from one (lower) level to a higher one, but the rupture with this universe, the *qualitative leap*. The revolution involves a radical transformation of the needs and aspirations themselves, cultural as well as material; of consciousness and sensibility; of the work process as well as leisure”.

A reason why Marcuse is so drawn to the concept of “surplus consciousness” is that it complements his concept of “surplus-repression”. By “surplus-repression” Marcuse (1955) distinguishes between basic instinctual repression necessary for the perpetuation of humans from repressions imposed by social domination. The smaller the “surplus-repression” is the less repressive is the society.

22 Kellner concludes: “In effect, Bahro and Marcuse are arguing that critical consciousness and emancipatory needs are being developed by the contradictions in the social conditions of advanced industrial society – capitalist and state socialist” (Kellner 1984: 308–309).

23 For a somehow different take on the emancipatory interests see Habermas 1972: 197–212. For Habermas’ criticism of Marcuse’s concept of emancipatory science and technology see Agger 1976.

Hence, overcoming the “surplus-repression” is a tipping point at which Marcuse sees the transition to socialism as possible. At the heart of this “socialism” is Marcuse’s critical reading of Freud’s drive dynamics. Unlike Freud (1962) who saw *Eros*, the life instinct, permanently shackled to genitals as an ineluctable feature of civilization, Marcuse sees it as historically obsolete pertaining to the pre-technological era.<sup>24</sup> Technological development refutes Freud’s rationalistic view of civilizational progress and makes possible the attainment of Marcuse’s socialist ideal: the reduction of alienated labour by shortening the length of the working day, overcoming the division of labour, redistribution of working and leisure time in favour of the latter, freedom, happiness and peace. Under non-repressive conditions, *Eros* as life energy breaks the shackles and reinvigorates the whole body.<sup>25</sup> The new form of “socialist reason” puts instincts and reason on equal footing and breaks with the primacy of rationality on which Western philosophical tradition has insisted.<sup>26</sup> The “socialist reason” presupposes harmonious cooperation between reason and instincts. Marcuse expresses this through the notion of “libidinal rationality”: “To the degree to which the struggle for existence becomes co-operation for the free development and fulfilment of individual needs, repressive reason gives way to new *rationality of gratification* in which reason and happiness converge. It creates its own division of labor, its own priorities, its own hierarchy.”<sup>27</sup> Hence, the turn toward subjectivity which both Bahro and Marcuse refer to involves taking the subject in its instinctual as well as its rational sphere of existence. Some critics argue that in the “erotic socialism” reason gets the shorter end of the stick. This begs the question of what role the reason plays in the activities of reerotized

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24 Marcuse turns to subjectivity in form of *Eros* as an alternative to history which has failed to see the proletariat carrying out its historical task. That is why Marcuse (1955; 1970) attempts to historicize *Eros* (possible due to technological development) (“there is no such thing as an immutable human nature”) However, Alford (2011: 221) questions whether rendering *Eros* historical would deprive it of its revolutionary potential (*Eros* strives for evermore pleasure and is immune to social influences which makes it ahistorical). Marcuse (1955: 224) is clear that in a new “rationality of gratification” reason and instincts complement each other: reason becomes bodily and erotic, but it also adds a value dimension to instincts by setting its own priorities and hierarchy.

25 Marcuse 1955: xxv proclaims that the fight for [socialism] is “the fight for life, the fight for *Eros*”. He sees the embodiment of this fight for “everyday life” in the New Left and in other rebellious and counter-culture movements that want to “see, hear, feel new things in a new way” (Marcuse 1969a: 37).

Heller (1984; 1999: 31) following the same line of thought advocates a revolution of everyday life instead of a political one: “We don’t need to ‘seize power’ or have a proletarian revolution. We have to change our lives. That was the New Left agenda [...]”

26 Marcuse has discovered true humanity in Freud’s naturalism. In other words, it is about the distinction between concrete humanism which deals with people as they are in given sociohistorical circumstances and abstract humanism which projects their ideal character. This is why Marcuse believed Freud’s biological understanding of instinctual structure is in touch with social reality (Govedarica 2010: 67).

27 Hardt and Negri (2009: 180–181) argue that when people engage in love, they are producing a new world, a new social life.

man (Vivas 1979: 39) and what would people do in this sexually liberated state (MacIntyre 1970: 47). Kołakowski (1978: 405–406) says that Marcuse tacitly calls for a return to pre-social existence, leaving aside the difficult question of how societies could have even emerged when instincts are asocial and if there is no *logos* to lead the way. These are valid questions given that in *E&C* Marcuse fails to elaborate on the reason part of the “libidinal rationality” compound (Brujić 1981: 334). However, since society shapes subjectivity to the instinctual level, Marcuse (1955: 209) knows that simple desublimation of libidinal energies at the personal level would not have an emancipatory outcome. This must occur on the level of society. Hence, Marcuse (1955; 1964) differentiates between non-repressive sublimation and repressive desublimation. By replacing mediated with immediate gratification repressive desublimation removes emancipatory energies otherwise available for social criticism and action and, thus, functions as a compensatory force under the guise of extending freedom (Marcuse, 1964: 75–78). Non-repressive sublimation in its emancipatory form would be sublimation without desexualisation. It would be incongruous with the whole realm of social usefulness, productivity, and performance (Marcuse, 1955: 208–212). Marcuse (1955: 212) sees in the non-repressive desublimation the culture-building and human bonding power of *eros*: “[...] sexuality is neither deflected from nor blocked in its objective; rather, in attaining its objective, it transcends it to others, searching for fuller gratification”. This explains the libidinal part of libidinal rationality. But Marcuse knows that the emancipatory incentive should come from reason, and this is part where Bahro’s “surplus consciousness” fits.

Both Bahro (1978) and Marcuse (1958; 1969; 2014 [1979]) saw this consciousness in its developed form embodied in the intelligentsia, i.e., scientists, technicians, engineers, the “new working class” who take active participation in social processes and technical-scientific development.<sup>28</sup> As the primary bearers of “surplus consciousness”, they would initially play a leading role, the role of enlightened reason, in the transition to socialism.<sup>29</sup> Marcuse (2014 [1979]: 400–402) describes them as a “democratic elite” who would assume the task of socialist education and would articulate the emancipatory interests of the masses.<sup>30</sup> However, Marcuse (1969: 57) is aware that these are catalyst groups with a “preparatory function” whose task is not revolution, but “radical enlightenment”. Lacking a mass character their signal achievement at best could be in questioning the prevailing structure of needs and in inducing changes in

28 For Marcuse this is a broad and expanding category to which the student and feminist movement, counterculture, etc. may be added.

29 If only they could develop “the new sensibility”. Marcuse 2005 [1967]: 84; 2014 [1979]: 401 is not naïve and maintains, like Mannheim 1998 [1929], that these groups are well integrated into society and can’t constitute a revolutionary class. Nevertheless, their social position gives them a leading role in the revolution.

30 Marcuse (2014 [1979]: 401) who is no stranger to the concept, asserts that Bahro’s (1978) analysis calls for a reconsideration of Plato’s 2000 [c. 375 BC] educational dictatorship and Rousseau’s 1994 [1762]: 58 maxim that people must be coerced into freedom.

consciousness.<sup>31</sup> This answers the question about the role of reason and lifts any doubt about the alleged call for regression to a pre-social existence.

Even though existing socialism proved to be an unappealing alternative, Marcuse is firm that socialism remains the only viable alternative. Not the Stalinist or post-Stalinist brand of socialism, but “libertarian socialism,”<sup>32</sup> which has always been the core concept of socialism, in which human needs and faculties, rather than some imposed authority, govern the development of society (Marcuse 2005 [1969b]: 130). Hence, Marcuse continues to seek paths to socialism.

### Socialist Anti-Superman

One such path involves the “transvaluation of values” formulated in Freudian terms as the strengthening of erotic energy, the negation of prevailing morality and new anthropology. The need for socialism must come as an instinctual urge. Instincts must rebel against “surplus repression” and this requires profound changes in the biological dimension in which human vital needs assert themselves: “[...] liberation presupposes changes in this biological dimension [...] different instinctual needs, different reactions of the body as well as the mind” (Marcuse 1969: 17). Hence, socialism requires a new type of human being who got rid of the aggressiveness, brutality and hypocritical morality, a type of man who is biologically incapable of fighting wars<sup>33</sup> and who works for a social and natural environment in which such an existence is possible (Marcuse 2014 [1967]: 82). Socialist human being is a sort of “*negative superman*”<sup>34</sup> whose system of needs and values shows in an instinctual revulsion against aggression and destruction, allergic reaction to the functioning of the body as instrument of alienated labour, in the need for privacy and an autonomous intelligence required for developing one’s all-round being and for creating a humane environment (Marcuse 2014 [1965a]: 247).

Marcuse is implying that today’s men and women are hardly capable of making the leap into socialism because “[...] the construction of such a society

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31 The practice of “great refusal”, which is a protest against surplus repression and a struggle for the ultimate form of freedom, necessitates a mass base. As a result, this task falls not on a specific class but on the wide strata of repressed ones in all parts of the world: “the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable (...) their life is the most immediate and the most real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions. Thus their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not” (Marcuse 1964: 260). Marcuse (2014 [1965a]: 243) puts hope in the butterfly effect assuming that “triumph of the independence movement in one area would mean the signal for revolt in areas closer to home, the global mobilization of the exploited colored races”.

32 Marcuse uses the term “libertarian socialism” interchangeably with socialist humanism to distinguish a qualitatively different socialist society from Soviet socialism.

33 This should not be mistaken for eugenics. For Marcuse it is through aesthetic education humans can cultivate different needs and sensibility. See footnote 44.

34 More appropriate term to use would be an “anti-superwoman” as those characteristics Marcuse links to “women qualities” and the feminist movement.

presupposes a type of man with a different sensitivity and consciousness: men who would speak a different language<sup>35</sup>, have different gestures, follow different impulses; men who have developed an instinctual barrier against cruelty, brutality, ugliness” (Marcuse 1969: 21). Only human beings who have emancipated themselves from the aggressive and repressive ways of capitalism can fight for socialism. They must be *free for* socialism (Marcuse [2014] 1962: 115). Hence, they must first develop a “new sensibility” by which Marcuse means developing new needs and ways of satisfying them.<sup>36</sup> The new sensibility requires the cultivation of new forms of subjectivity and new ways of life. It reshapes the relationship between all living beings and nature bringing them into harmony. This is why Marcuse was so drawn to the feminist movement, which he saw as having the potential to initiate processes of redefining subjectivity and cultivating new sensibility. Marcuse’s notion of the “new sensibility” introduces a care perspective. The care must be made universal via humanism, that is, the cultivation of care toward all humanity (Farr 2009: 116). The transition to socialism involves the translation of humanist values into praxis and “new (socialist) humanity” needs to develop a different ethical outlook. In Marcuse’s (2014 [1965b]: 186) view humanism remains an ideology for as long as a society depends on poverty, mass media, prevented birth control, the creation and recreation of masses, of noise and pollution, planned obsolescence and waste and military rearmament. Marcuse is adamant that if loyalty to the idea of socialism is abandoned, humanism will remain a dead letter. Hence, Marcuse (1962; 2014 [1965b]; 2014 [1968]: 278) advocates “socialist humanism”<sup>37</sup>, a humanism of all-inclusive equality where everyone can choose their way of life, their own needs, and the way of satisfying them, and so exist as free human beings. In this kind of humanism equality is understood in non-exclusive terms as equality of *Otherness*: “To the degree that society becomes humane, it makes the equality of all people (as expressed in humanism) into a reality. This means equality of every human face and person, not just among those of a particular nation, race, or tribe, but above and beyond, and in opposition to, the division of humanity into different nations, races, or tribes. Equality,

35 For Marcuse’s analysis on the usage of language in existing socialism and capitalism see *Soviet Marxism* pp. 88–90 and *One-Dimensional Man* pp. 88–107. The new sensibility develops a different language (or better to say re-appropriates the language back), because “the rupture with the continuum of domination must also be a rupture with the vocabulary of domination” (Marcuse 1969: 33).

36 “New sensibility” is another move beyond Marxism, but Marcuse believes that by making it he remains within the framework of Marx’s theory. The reason for this is that the proletariat, aside from the basic ones, could not satisfy the needs by owning more “luxurious” goods, and thus wasn’t able to reproduce the unfreedom contained in the needs themselves: “If Marx saw in the proletariat the revolutionary class, he did so also, and maybe even primarily, because the proletariat was free from the repressive needs of capitalist society, because the new needs for freedom could develop in the proletariat and were not suffocated by the old, dominant ones” (Marcuse 1970: 70).

37 Marcuse employs the terms “socialist humanism” and “Marxist humanism” interchangeably.

because every human being has all the qualities and capacities that define humans as human [...]. Equality in its humanist sense [...] did not involve people being all the same, but rather the direct opposite” (Marcuse 1962:108). Once again Marcuse (2014 [1965b]: 184) emphasizes that a prerequisite for the liberation of the humanistic content of socialism requires a reversal in the direction of technical progress.

### Girl Power and “More than just a Pretty Face” Socialism

Marcuse (2005 [1974]: 165–171) was enthralled by the feminist movement, seeing it not only as “a revolt against decaying capitalism” but also as the potentially most radical force to reckon with. With its feminine qualities of receptivity, sensitivity, non-violence, and tenderness<sup>38</sup>, the movement, in Marcuse’s view (2005 [1974]), embodied the negation of the masculine qualities of

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38 Commenting on Marcuse’s turn to Women’s Liberation Movement Cerullo (1979: 21–22) writes: “[s]o many recurrent Marcusean dreams and themes found their embodiment in the movement [...] that came to be called socialist feminism: his vision in *Eros and Civilization* of love as revolution; his insistence on the possibility of a new reality principle as the promise of a socialism which could no longer be understood as a change in social institutions but had to be deepened to include a vision of a change in consciousness and the very instinctual structures of human beings deformed by exploitation and domination; his understanding of socialism as a qualitative leap to a new system of needs which are sensuous, ethical and rational in one history has revealed the power of eros, of love, which Marcuse invoked against a repressive civilization to be the power of women at work and in the community, a power which found its most concerted and political expression in the women’s liberation movement”. The feminist movement was not monolithic in Marcuse’s times but Cerullo (1979: 22) manages to capture the message Marcuse was trying to convey: “Marcuse saw finally that what was at stake was a new morality, a feminist morality, a reversal of the values of profitable productivity, repression, efficiency, aggression, competitiveness, of an instrumental rationality severed from emotion – all this in the name of receptivity, tenderness, non-violence. It seems to me that remembering our own dream, our own vision, our own morality, whose terms Marcuse had so eloquently anticipated, is of critical importance to our Movement today – in a period in which instrumentality, competitiveness, self-assertion, aggressiveness, individualism are starkly revealed and even cynically embraced as the name of the game [...]”. However, Cerullo (1979: 22–23) makes a valid objection to Marcuse’s “libidinal rationality” understanding it as the feminization of male intellectuals while instead, the feminist project is about creating “space of study and solitude, of intellectual intensity and assertion, of confidence and challenge - and still to think, to act, and to be like women”.

Like Marcuse, early social feminists take a broad approach to social reality assuming that men’s patriarchal interests are monolithic. Later social feminists challenge this depiction of women as powerless victims of patriarchy and capitalism. Recent social feminists contrast Marcuse’s view of the one-dimensional society arguing that modern society is a multidimensional world of oppressive practices and social relations (Calasanti and Zajicek, 1993: 92–94). For further discussion on social feminism and Marcuse see Calasanti and Zajicek 1993 and Holland 2001 who reads *Eros and Civilization* through the lenses of *The Traffic in Women*.

capitalism.<sup>39</sup> The non-destructiveness and non-aggressiveness that Marcuse links to the “women nature”, perfectly fit into the concept of “new sensibility” by which he describes the new anthropology of human beings pre-required to make the transition to socialism. Thus, “socialism, as a *qualitatively* different society, must embody the *antithesis*, the definite negation of the aggressive and repressive needs and values of capitalism as a form of male-dominated culture” (Marcuse 2005 [1974]: 167–168). Marcuse saw the roots of the “new sensibility” in the feminist movement and thus entrusted women with a leading role in the reconstruction of society, considering them capable of practically “transvaluating the values”.<sup>40</sup> In Marcuse’s words: “[...] feminine characteristics would activate aggressive energy against domination and exploitation. They would operate as needs and eventual goals in the socialist organization of production, in the social division of labor, in the setting of priorities once scarcity has been conquered. And thus, entering the reconstruction of society as a whole, the feminine characteristics would cease to be specifically feminine, to the degree to which they would be universalized in socialist culture, material and intellectual” (Marcuse 2005 [1974]: 170).

“More than just a pretty face” socialism represents the necessary modification to Marx’s socialism which was, according to Marcuse (1970: 62; 2005 [1974]: 170), not radical enough. Hence “feminist socialism”, as Marcuse calls it: “[...] transcends [Marx’s] image. Socialism, as a qualitatively different way of life, would use the productive forces not only for the reduction of alienated labor and labor time, but also for making life an end in itself, for the development of the senses and the intellect for pacification of aggressiveness, the enjoyment of being [...] from the rationality of domination: creative receptivity versus repressive productivity” (Marcuse 2005 [1974]: 170). This would imply a free and ecologically sensitive future where nature would be rediscovered as an inorganic part of humans. Socialists with the women’s movement at the forefront were therefore urged to ask whether “the good life [can] be attained without exploitation and brutalization” (Marcuse 2001 [n.d., ca. 1972-1973]: 180; Power 2009; 2013; Stevenson 2022: 87).

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39 The main criticism of Marcuse by feminists is that he simply reinforced gender stereotypes. Power defends Marcuse by arguing that feminine characteristics are social constructs that can be universalized so that all humans can develop a new sensibility: “Feminist socialism would universalize these so-called feminine characteristics so that they were no longer specifically ‘feminine’ at all but would characterize all culture, culminating in androgyny. Residual aggression would be channelled into ‘the destruction of the ugly destructiveness of capitalism,’ in Marcuse’s rather neat phrase. ‘Feminism is a revolt against decaying capitalism’ and will ultimately have to develop its ‘own morality’” (Power 2013: 79).

40 Marcuse’s propensity for emancipatory movements developed as early as in his doctoral thesis *Der deutsche Künstlerroman* [*The German Artist Novel*] in which he expresses strong sympathies for liberation movements like *Sturm und Drang* praising them for their “feeling for nature and experience of love” (Marcuse 1978a [1922]). Hippies’ use of language, music (and even drugs) also fit into “the new sensibility” (Marcuse 1969a: 35).



## Realm of Beauty and Love

In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse (1955) offered a vision of a socialist society in which people are bonded through libidinal ties, where pleasure permeates all activity (including work) and where solidarity rests on love.<sup>41</sup> To further expand on this Marcuse turns to art and its role in the radical transformation of society.<sup>42</sup>

41 Marcuse sought to broaden the meaning of love beyond the exclusive nature of couples/families. Thus, by love Marcuse (1955: 197–222) meant productive force that fosters more intense social relations, solidarity, and unity. It is as if Marcuse foresaw that love would become a topic of concern for many Marxist intellectuals. Hardt and Negri's (2009: 180) own definition of love as the process of the production of the common and of subjectivity aptly captures the core meaning of love in Marcuse's theory. Through love people form a relation to a cause and expand joy forming new bodies and minds (Hardt and Negri 2009: 181). However, Hardt and Negri (2009: 182–188) argue that capitalism has altered love from the common to the same and has produced two corrupt forms of love: 1) identitarian love, or love of the same, which means loving persons closest to you, and 2) love as a process of unification which ends in a heterosexual nuclear family that, subsequently by its identitarian love, corrupts the common. Gotby (2023) suggested a radical approach to combat identitarian love by abolishing the heterosexual nuclear family. According to Gotby (2023: 132) “[a]bolition means the end of the repetition of sameness”. Practices of inheritance and the privatisation of kinship, as well as the notion of family as a form of ownership of other people, intertwine the heterosexual nuclear family with capitalist property relations. The capitalist system does not allow for the realisation of non-hierarchical, reciprocal, and non-proprietary modes of kinship, which Marcuse likewise argued for. Thus, the abolishment of the family must go hand in hand with the abolishment of the capital Gotby (2023: 137). For a detailed Gotby's 2023 account of love whose central notion is “emotional reproduction” see her book. Badiou (2012) identifies two threats to love: one is a safety threat, which is like Hardt and Negri's identitarian corruption of love, and the other threat is denying the importance of love, to treat it as a variant of hedonism. In a capitalist society, love is seen as a futile risk and something that must be calculated Badiou (2012: 10). According to Badiou (2012: 21–26) there are three distinct philosophical interpretations of love: one that stresses the bliss of the meeting, a second one which claims love should conclude in a contract, and the third one which is sceptical and sees love as an illusion. Badiou's own philosophical view of love is like Marcuse's. Badiou (2012: 22–26) argues that love cannot be reduced to any of these approximations and that love is a quest for truth: “[...] to construct a world from a decentred point of view other than that of my mere impulse to survive or re-affirm my own identity [...]. Subject of love that views the panorama of the world through the prism of our difference, so this the world can be conceived, be born, and not simply represent what fills my own individual gaze”.

42 In *The German Artist Novel*, Marcuse portrays the emancipatory role of the artist in mediating between reason and sensuality as well as his quest for harmonious community (Marcuse 1922: 78). It is as if Marcuse's (1978a [1922]: 78) demand for a “Kingdom of Beauty and Love” anticipates the aesthetic ethos of socialism. Hence, *The German Artist Novel* represents “programmatically work, which vindicates a growing tendency to acknowledge the centrality of aesthetic theory in the evolution of Marcuse's thought” (Kätz 1979: 176).

However, Marcuse's central piece is *The Affirmative Character of Culture* in which Marcuse (2009 [1937b]) dialectically discloses conservative and emancipatory aspects of culture. By affirmative culture, Marcuse (2009 [1937b]: 70) means the culture of the bourgeois epoch in which culture provides escapism by allowing individuals to *come to*

There are several reasons why art, alongside “new sensibility”, could contribute to the socialist transformation.<sup>43</sup> The aesthetic dimension is an integral building block of the qualitatively different socialist society because “the socialist universe is also a moral and aesthetic universe” (Marcuse 1972: 3). Art is revolutionary because it follows its own logic and artworks hold the “promesse du bonheur” [the promise of joy] that is beyond the reach of any particular regime (Marcuse 1998 [1945]: 204; 1978b). Thus, art is an indictment of the established reality and aesthetic form as such invalidates oppressive norms, needs and values (Marcuse 1978b: xi–8). Art opens the aesthetic dimension which offers an insight into a radically different ethos – the aesthetic ethos. Hence, Marcuse advocates the “permanence of art” and its attachment to *eros* arguing: “... art bears witness to the [...] permanent non-identity between subject and object, individual and individual [...] [art] envisions a concrete universal, humanity (...), Eros and Thanatos cannot be dissolved into problems of class struggle” (Marcuse 1978b: 16–29). Marcuse sees both art and *eros* as allies in striving for socialism by resisting unnecessary “surplus repression”. This means that the ideas expressed in art and contained in *eros* are universal to humans as a species being and can’t be confined to a single historical period. Hence, the aesthetic dimension restores the human species’ essence in its universal aspects (Reitz 2018: 171).

Socialist change, as previously mentioned, is not possible without changes in subjectivity. Marcuse rejects mind-body dualism and at the core of “new sensibility” places the interplay of reason and instincts. However, their relationship needs to be mediated and reason reconstructed in a way in which freedom would mean limiting the “higher’ faculties in favor of the ‘lower’” (Marcuse 1955: 190). Thus, the “new sensibility” can be developed through aesthetic education, which cultivates imagination, phantasy, and senses, fostering a “new rationality (of gratification)” in which reason becomes political, (re)erotized, and bodily.<sup>44</sup> Marcuse believes that the “new sensibility” contains aes-

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*their senses* in a higher, spiritual, realm while leaving existing society unaffected. But the conservative side of culture holds the key to unlocking its emancipatory potential. Art is subversive because the ideas of a better and beautiful life are transposed to it and art reflects what is denied in reality. Art safeguards those ideas regardless of its affirmative character. Marcuse (2009 [1937b]: 84) sums up the emancipatory aspect of art: “... for only in art has bourgeois society tolerated its own ideals and taken them seriously as a general demand. What counts as utopia, phantasy, and rebellion in the world of fact is allowed in art. There affirmative culture has displayed the forgotten truths over which ‘realism’ triumphs in daily life”. Marcuse (1972) later adds that art, despite its feudal and bourgeois use, has managed to remain alienated from established reality.

43 Marcuse, as a “romantic socialist”, recognized the importance of the poetic imagination and the need to tell a relatable story to the public dilemmas of the time (Lemert 2002, as cited in Stevenson 2022: 84). Marcuse grasped what radical romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley referred to as “the poetic principle”, which could be defined as “the capacity to awaken in the imagination the desire for greater beauty and justice” (Blechman 1999: 239, as cited in Stevenson 2002: 84).

44 Marcuse embraces Schiller’s concept of aesthetic education and his position that the political problem of organization of society can be solved through aesthetics, “since

thetic-erotic aspects that constitute a qualitatively different personality structure (Kellner 2007: 47). The “new sensibility” replaces consumer needs with aesthetic ones. Their radical content is clear in their determination to put an end to the technological exploitation of nature and their drive to create a less stressful, pleasing, and beautiful environment<sup>45</sup> (Marcuse 1969a: 28) For Marcuse (1969a: 31) “the aesthetic universe is the *Lebenswelt* on which the needs and faculties of freedom depend for their liberation.

Finally, Marcuse envisions society as a work of art and calls for the merger of art and technology in the construction of the new socialist society. Aesthetics is the form of a socialist society in which beauty is an essential characteristic of human freedom. Socialist society “ought to be light, pretty, playful [as] these qualities are essential elements of freedom” (Marcuse 1969a: 26). Cooperation between art and technology is possible because both contain ideas for a better and more beautiful world: “The rationality of art, its ability to ‘project’ existence, to define yet unrealized possibilities could then be envisaged as validated by and functioning in the scientific-technological transformation of the world” (Marcuse 1964: 243–244). This opens the route for transcending “technological rationality” into some form of socialist “post-technological rationality” in which the principle of beauty merges with the principle of social organization: “Technique, assuming the features of art, would translate subjective sensibility into objective form, into reality. This would be the sensibility of men and women who do not have to be ashamed of themselves anymore because they have overcome their sense of guilt” (Marcuse 1969a: 24). The union of art and technology would alter them both. The art would inspire and affect the form and construction of the machines while at the same time art would appropriate more technical characteristics: “In the reconstruction of society [...] art would have changed its traditional locus and function in society: it would have become a productive force in the material as well as cultural transformation. And as such force, art would be an integral factor in shaping the quality and the ‘appearance’ of things, in shaping the reality, the way of life [...]. Art would recapture some of its more primitive ‘technical’ connotations: as the art of preparing [...] cultivating, growing things, giving them a

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it is through Beauty that we arrive at Freedom” (Schiller 2004 [1795]: 19; Cf. Marcuse 2009 [1937b]: 87). Unlike Schiller (2004 [1795]) who acknowledges the duality of the worlds of labour and culture and thus claims that beauty can never be the organizing principle of society, Marcuse takes a more radical stance. For Marcuse (1955: 187), the outcome of Schiller’s idea has broader implications: “...the liberation of man from in-human existential conditions”. It also indicates changes in the nature of labour, with labour becoming a free activity for developing human capabilities. In Marcuse’s view, the technological basis of society creates the conditions for the realization of Schiller’s (2004 [1795]) aesthetic culture and its governing principle the “play impulse”.

<sup>45</sup> For Marcuse (1972: 17) the New Left “emphasizes the struggle for the restoration of nature, for public parks and beaches, for spaces of tranquillity and beauty”. Soper (1995: 169; 2020: 124) advocates less materially and eco-friendly consumption that involves “conviviality, neighbourliness and relaxation, freedom from noise, stench and ugliness”.

form which neither violates their matter nor the sensitivity” (Marcuse 1969a: 31–32). With the convergence of art and technology Marcuse (1969a: 45) portrays the “aesthetic ethos of socialism” which is also to figure as a productive force<sup>46</sup>: “Released from the bondage to exploitation, the imagination, sustained by the achievements of science, could turn its productive power to the 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”.

### Conclusion: Ways to Go

Marcuse’s trajectory to socialism reveals the breadth of his vision and a strong commitment to the realization of the goals of critical theory. He went the extra mile not only to save socialism when it became an unappealing alternative but also to make it the only relevant and desirable alternative by constantly readjusting and broadening the meaning of socialism, always staying in close touch with the *praxis* and concrete historical situation. Marcuse’s socialism is aesthetic, green, all-inclusive, and feminine. Production is governed not only by the satisfaction of needs but also under the principles of beauty. Socialist anti-superhumans are brothers and sisters who, tied through a web of libidinal ties, live peacefully and harmoniously with each other. Their activities are determined not by the time they spend at work, but by the time they spend pursuing their own interests. Labour has lost its burdensome character and acquired an element of playfulness (work has become play). They are “genetically predisposed” to non-violence and non-aggressiveness towards each other, other living beings and especially nature. Nature is viewed not as a force to reckon with, but as a force that sustains all life, as an inorganic part of humans. Hence, the synergy of art and technology marks a turn in using technology in a way that preserves nature as a human habitat. Although parts of this description may seem like socialists’ daydreaming, Marcuse holds that, by redirecting technology and technological progress toward socialist ideals, they can become (socialist) reality.

Socialists today could learn from Marcuse. Of course, a return to Marcuse can’t offer ready-made solutions to the present problems of socialism and socialist practice. However, re-engagement with Marcuse may contribute to the current debates on the future of socialism. His paths to socialism demonstrate that socialism is an ever-evolving system and, as such, it should be left open to inputs from *praxis*. Marcuse successfully eluded the trap of economism, the belief that the transition to socialism follows (only) the economic track. For Marcuse, the new anthropology is required to make a leap into socialism. People need to develop different needs that would make them predisposed to socialism. Marcuse’s argument that human flourishing depends on the provision

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46 Marx (1988 [1844]: 77) highlights that humans also produce things in accordance with the laws of beauty.

of green spaces prophetically anticipated the problems of contemporary societies. Struggle over parks, forest and nature are one of the socialists' struggles. Marcuse saw in feminism and in other counter-culture and radical movements a revolt against capitalism and immediately refreshed the concept of socialism by picking cues from those movements. This is a valuable lesson for modern-day socialists: every radical movement has its own *raison-d'être* that can enrich socialist struggles, ideals, and goals. But what stands out the most is Marcuse's "socialist humanism" – true equality among people that can only exist in a socialist society.

Kingdom awaits. The struggle for socialism, the struggle "to live without anxiety" (Adorno), continues. There are paths to socialism to be explored and probed. Herbert Marcuse mapped some of them as still worth exploring.

## Acknowledgements

I am thankful to the reviewers for identifying sections in the text that required more clarification and recommending how to refine them.

I have presented parts of this paper at the 16<sup>th</sup> Serbian Political Science Association Annual International Conference "Social Justice in Post-Communist Societies". I am thankful to my friend and colleague professor Bojan Vranić for the invitation to participate.

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## Maroje Višić

### Napred, ne posustajući, prema kraljevstvu lepote i ljubavi. Put do socijalizma Herberta Markuzea

#### Apstrakt

Današnji socijalisti mogu nešto naučiti od Markuzea. Polazeći od ovog stajališta, u ovom radu se raspravlja i elaborira Markuzeov put prema socijalizmu. Tragajući za socijalističkim rešenjem, Markuze je uspešno izbegao zamku ekonomizma i okrenuo se subjektivnosti. Prelaz u socijalizam moguć je stvaranjem nove antropologije izražene pojmom „nove osetilnosti“. Prototip novog socijalističkog čoveka je anti-supermen. Mir i lepota važne su karakteristike Markuzeovog socijalizma. „Libertarijanski socijalizam“, „feministički socijalizam“, „integralni socijalizam“, „socijalistički humanizam“, „socijalizam kao umetničko delo“ i „utopijski socijalizam“ pojmovi su koji svedoče o Markuzeovom otvorenom i mnogostranom razumevanju socijalizma u svojoj njegovoj kompleksnosti značenja. Neka od tih značenja mogu nadahnuti savremene rasprave o izgledima socijalizma.

Ključne reči: Markuze, kritička teorija, socijalizam, komunizam, feminizam, levica, marksizam, SSSR