

Herbert Marcuse in 1978: An Interview

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IN the early 1960s when I was a graduate student at Columbia University I attended a series of lectures on Marx given by Herbert Marcuse. I had never read Marcuse previously; inspired by the exceptionally lucid, insightful, and careful quality of his lectures, I went out and bought *Eros and Civilization*. While I was captivated by the argument of the book—it was my first encounter with the “literature of liberation”—I was also perplexed. How could the same person who gave such crystal-clear lectures write in such a difficult, heavy, turgid style?

About seven years later when I moved to La Jolla, California, where I met and became a friend of Marcuse and his wife Inge—he had by then retired from Brandeis and was teaching at the University of California at San Diego—I found myself perplexed once again. While I had read about Marx and others whose conservative personal lives contrasted sharply with their fiery revolutionary tracts, the real-life juxtaposition of Marcuse the conservative, considerate, responsible private person and Marcuse the author of hyperbolic and controversial radical works was nevertheless striking. The contrast between the published and the private Marcuse was a topic that frequently came up among his friends. I still remember some of us being taken aback when the man who was perhaps the main hero of the various counterculture and liberation move-

ments of the 'sixties had many of the same reactions that any bourgeois parent might have when his stepson and daughter-in-law joined a commune.

When in April 1978 I went back to La Jolla to interview Marcuse I found myself surprised by the man once again. I did not expect to hear the author of *One-Dimensional Man* tell me that the United States is one of the freest countries in the world. Nor did I expect him to agree to the suggestion that only about 25 percent or so of the Third World countries' problems are attributable to Western imperialism.

At times I found his interpretations of his works to be considerably milder than my own understanding of them, or that of many if not most of his readers and critics. In private he emphasized qualifications which in his writings would tend to get lost amid the hyperboles.

On the other hand, while I was well aware of the tendency to loosely phrased statements and offhand judgments in his best-known written works, I found this tendency particularly disconcerting in conversation. In discussing *Repressive Tolerance* I was shocked to find Marcuse quite unclear about some of the basic arguments of the essay.

For example he told me that he had not made it clear that "this essay already presupposes at least politically a very different society"—one which has already abolished capitalism. But then he also told me that he was "intentionally provocative" in the essay because he saw the danger of a tendency mainly in Germany "of a new toleration of Nazi and pro-Nazi movements." But clearly he could not have it both ways—if one of his primary concerns was with the toleration of Nazi movements in liberal democracies then the essay could not be exclusively about postrevolutionary society. I also could not help but wonder why, if he believed that "there are certainly refinements not only possible but necessary" in the essay, he had not included these refinements in the 1968 postscript to the second edition. Given the highly provocative nature of the thesis of *Repressive Tolerance* and the fact that many young

people saw it as a justification for the disruption of university classes, it seemed irresponsible not to have clarified his position.

One could simply stop there and say that Marcuse was irresponsible; this would certainly not make him unique among social theorists. What makes his case more perplexing is that, in his day-to-day behavior, he was so very responsible a person. When there were student uprisings at UCSD, "Marcuse was often a calming factor," Herbert York, a professor of physics and government adviser who was the first chancellor of the UCSD campus, told me. This opinion was seconded by William Leiss, a former student of Marcuse's who is now a professor at York University in Toronto, as well as everyone else I spoke to. "In terms of incitement to action, he's probably the most careful person I ever saw," Leiss told me. Leiss wrote his thesis under Marcuse and was one of a circle of UCSD graduate students and young faculty members who were involved in leftist politics in the late 'sixties and were particularly close to Marcuse. He has since gone on to publish two books on themes related to Marcuse's work.

In Marcuse's best known and most influential works, Leiss, like so many others, finds a tendency to "offhand treatment of empirical material," "blanket snap judgments," "loose or careless formulations." But then Leiss states: "At the same time . . . I am enormously impressed with the man . . . enormously grateful for the education I got. I think it's a direct result of Marcuse's way of teaching that I'm able to develop my own approach, including a criticism of his own work." Like the other former students I spoke to, Leiss found Marcuse extremely careful as a teacher ("When we studied Kant and Hegel we did five pages a night for a three-hour seminar. . . . It was thoroughly undogmatic training; he would never refer to his own books in class"), a first-rate scholar ("His first book on Hegel is incredibly tightly reasoned, as is *Reason and Revolution*"), and extremely lucid in his lectures ("His lecture style

is so different from his writings—much clearer, milder, and more open”).

After my interviews with Marcuse, and after hearing Leiss and others speak about the contrasts in the man, I came away with the feeling that there existed two professors Marcuse. One was an exceptionally decent, responsible, lucid, open-minded scholar and teacher. The other Marcuse was a German professor of philosophy who in his writings was given to obscure language and all-encompassing grandiose theories which combined romantic flights of the imagination with a deep underlying faith in human beings' potential for rationality. It was Marcuse the German professor who refused to cater to his audience, who seemed both unaware and unconcerned with how his writings might lend themselves to extreme interpretations. For example, when I questioned him about the wisdom of having used the term “totalitarian” to describe Western societies, I could not help but feel that, behind his refusal to give any acknowledgment to its misleading quality, lay an unrealistic and somewhat haughty assumption that the reader will or should be able to pick up all the fine nuances of the text. But reality is different, especially in the case of very difficult but popular works which only a small percentage of readers will read from cover to cover.

In retrospect it seems a pity that Marcuse the careful scholar and Marcuse the grandiose theorist were unable to come together in his more popular writings. For many of his readers who were alienated by his exaggerations would, I think, have found many of his criticisms of Western society both perceptive and foresightful had he stated them in a more careful and qualified form.

Richard Goodwin once wrote of Marcuse: “This radical philosopher appears at heart to be a deeply conservative man, committed to reason as the only corrective and willing to follow that reason wherever it may lead. . . . Are people indoctrinated?—then we will, for a time, have a dictatorship of

the educated elite. Is human nature too frail for freedom?—then we must create a new man. It is all very logical, but you cannot organize the sea.”¹

This last sentence now strikes me as especially pertinent when applied to Marcuse himself. For I have come to realize that my own futile attempts at making sense of Marcuse’s conflicting facets are based on my mistaken presupposition of his rationality and consistency. In fact the particularly sharp contrasts between Marcuse the private man and the public figure, between the teacher and the writer, are a testimony to just that psychological complexity and irrationality of human beings which Goodman and so many others see as an insuperable obstacle to the creation of the rational society Marcuse outlined.

Eros and Civilization

Malinovich: You have been criticized for being too extreme and too distorting both in your characterizations of human beings in contemporary capitalist societies—the complete one-dimensionality, total moronization, etc.—and in your description of the “liberated human being” in *Eros and Civilization*. The ensuing contrast between total oppression in the present and the real possibility of total liberation in the future, it has been argued, is misleading to young people.²

Marcuse: Not unless these young people believe, which I do not believe, that revolution is on the agenda. It isn’t, and for years I have pointed out in my books that this is the first thing that we have, as Marxists, to learn, that we are not living in a revolutionary situation and that we need years and years and years of education and enlightenment to get to the point where you can no longer say: this is mere utopia.

Malinovich: In other words you’re saying that we need years

¹ Richard Goodwin, “The Social Theory of Herbert Marcuse,” *Atlantic Monthly* 227 (June 1971): 68ff.

² This is a reference to accusations that Marcuse’s analysis of Western society influenced young people to commit terrorist acts. In the section on terrorism, Marcuse responds at length to this accusation.

and years to get to the point where the kind of society or person you describe in *Eros and Civilization* would be a real possibility.

Marcuse: Yes, well there we have to be careful. A real possibility, in a sense, it is even today. . . . You could have a decent and better society already today were it not for the fact that the whole system is mobilized against it.

Malinovich: You mean it's materially and psychologically possible for this utopia or state that you described in *Eros and Civilization* to exist.

Marcuse: I would say materially; psychologically is doubtful.

Malinovich: The people who criticize you, one of the points they make is that it's more complicated than you claim it to be—

Marcuse: I would not deny that it is complicated. It is an almost desperate task to oppose actively a system that is as strong as can possibly be imagined and that still delivers the goods. At least in the advanced capitalist countries the basic needs of a large majority of the population are satisfied.

Malinovich: I think that what they mean by complicated is that they think that you attribute some of the shortcomings which are due to human nature, or at least where the evidence is unclear, that you attribute these shortcomings almost exclusively to capitalist society.

Marcuse: There is no such thing as an immutable human nature. You can make with human beings whatever you want to, and unfortunately in history we have seen that. There is a natural sphere of human existence, certainly. I mean human beings are also animals, but that does not mean that this is unchangeable. It only means that the development of human beings is inexorably linked with the development of nature and of the natural sphere. The human being is also nature, but nature can be changed.

Malinovich: The criticism that has been made is that you don't sufficiently deal with the possibility that there are aggressive instincts.

Marcuse: Of course there are aggressive instincts, but these aggressive instincts can be put to socially useful purposes. For example, in the development of technology, or in a socialist competition. The instinct is there, but it doesn't have to assume the entirely destructive forms it assumes in an oppressive society. By the way, I do not go terribly much beyond Freud [in *Eros and Civilization*]; I only try to bring out what is in my view implied in Freud's own late theory of instincts. He himself speaks—I think in one of the letters to Einstein or perhaps it is at the end of *Civilization and Its Discontents*—of the possibility that Eros will assert itself again against its immortal adversary.

Malinovich: I want to get your reaction to another criticism that has been made. Your utopian vision as expressed in *Eros and Civilization* has been criticized for being very vague. For example, one of the things that people will say is: What are people going to do in this utopia, how will they occupy their time?

Marcuse: In this kind of criticism you take people as they are today—managed, greatly repressed, and so on and transpose them to a free society which will not only have entirely different institutions, but also entirely different human beings. Today of course it is possible to say: If this man or woman doesn't have a full-time job anymore, all they will do is sit in front of the television set. It may be the case today; it certainly doesn't have to be the case in an entirely different society. They will damn well know what to do. There is such a thing as creative work.

Malinovich: What about the view that your model is very much the artist or the very creative person, and that most people are far more mediocre than you give them credit for.

Marcuse: If they are mediocre this does not exclude that this mediocrity may be remedied. Otherwise you couldn't have a free society. People will have to change, and I think they are in the process of changing.

Malinovich: Brandon³ called you a philosopher of anarchy and said that the Baader-Meinhof scorn all social bonds and family authority; the implication was that they got this from you. I would imagine that he would get this from your position in *Eros and Civilization*—it's so vague and you're for the abolition of all surplus repression and sometimes you talk of the abolition of repression, so it gives the impression of an anarchist quality—everybody is “doing their own thing.”

Marcuse: That's a silly concept of anarchism, but if by anarchism he means that I am against a society geared and governed by a vast bureaucracy which is in reality no longer responsible to the people, he is correct in saying that I am against it. Otherwise I'm not stupid enough to assume that you could really change society without some organization, nor am I stupid enough to assume that in a free society no administration whatsoever would be necessary. That's an idiotic use of the term anarchism.

Malinovich: You never meant that in a free society there would be no form of structured social organization?

Marcuse: Of course not; I'm not feeble-minded. . . . Some things have to remain vague because the theoretician is not a prophet. It's more important to say things in a vague way than not to say them at all.

Malinovich: Any description in the present is going to still be largely within the mental structures that are developed, or are influenced by the present social context, so that it would be very difficult for anyone in the present situation to outline what life would be like for a liberated person?

Marcuse: Certainly.

Malinovich: Here's another question which grows out of the same kind of interpretation of your work. Some of the

³ The interview took place about six months after the deaths in prison of the three remaining Baader-Meinhof terrorist leaders. At the time Henry Brandon, chief North American correspondent for the *Sunday Times* of London, as well as a number of other writers and academics, had attempted to link Marcuse's writings to the activities of the Baader-Meinhof gang.

feminist writers, for example Juliet Mitchell, have advocated the lifting of all incest taboos and the abolition of the family. Now was that in any way in your mind in *Eros and Civilization*, that in order to get rid of the repression involved in the Oedipal complex, the incest taboo should be lifted and the family abolished?

Marcuse: I never said such a thing. I neither advocated the abolition of the family nor the lifting of the incest taboos. On the contrary, I remember quite well that on several occasions I stressed the historical fact that during long periods of development the family was progressive and may well become again progressive if it protects the child and the grown-ups in the family from the oppressive management of their lives by the established society—the sphere of privacy, of intimacy as a protection and perhaps even as a point of departure for opposition. . . . Who destroys the family today? If the family life is confined to watching television, that's the destruction of the family.

Malinovich: . . . Now I did come across a passage in *Eros and Civilization* where you say that “the change in value and scope of libidinal relations would lead to a disintegration of the institutions in which the private interpersonal relations have been organized, particularly the monogamic and patriarchal family.” How would you interpret that?

Marcuse: That is no advocacy; that is an interpretation. I don't advocate it. In addition we should not underrate the other trend that is mainly in Horkheimer, but I subscribe to it, and I wrote it recently again—in many situations the family can also be protective. . . . So you have to formulate that a little dialectically, because both aspects are true. There is the repressive aspect of the patriarchal family and there is a degree to which the family still protects children from the influence of the media, peer groups, and so on.

Malinovich: When you say it was not advocacy, just an interpretation, the point is in the book you do advocate this new kind of society. That's the kind of passage that leads to the accusation that you are against the family.

Marcuse: I wouldn't bother with these accusations. What is going to happen in a free society, I don't know and we don't know and we cannot prophesize.

Malinovich: Does it seem to you that ecological problems have any bearing on your view that advanced technology makes it possible to live by the pleasure principle—the thesis of *Eros and Civilization*?

Marcuse: I never formulated it this way—"to live by the pleasure principle"—because the other principle remains there too.

Malinovich: But don't you say something to the effect that the pleasure principle would become a reality principle?

Marcuse: Well, it would make for a different reality principle, but it wouldn't simply be a realization of the pleasure principle. That I never said.

Malinovich: Let's put it in terms of the thesis you did put forth in *Eros and Civilization*, that because of advances in technology the pleasure principle could play a far greater role in human life. Does that seem at all endangered by present ecological problems? Doesn't it seem that we might be entering a new age of scarcity? You wrote that book 24 years ago.

Marcuse: Yes, well I nowhere say that a free society is a society of abundance. With the available resources, technical as well as natural, we can start the struggle for such a society practically immediately. It does not require abundance. With the argument that there is not enough social wealth one has postponed this task of reconstruction again and again.

Malinovich: But you did say, in *Eros and Civilization*, that the kind of society that is possible at this historical point was not possible before because what makes it possible is technology.

Marcuse: That's correct. That's one of the reasons I gave.

Malinovich: But if that's the case, take the kinds of problems we have with oil, all the energy problems we have.

Marcuse: Well, it's a choice here—do you want a free society or do you want a comfortable and rich society at the expense of freedom? We'll have to learn to do with the available resources instead of wasting as we do now.

Malinovich: What I'm suggesting is that at least part of your thesis in *Eros and Civilization* seems to be that work in the sense of labor as Marx put it could be virtually abolished or diminished to an extreme degree because of technological developments. But if we start to run out of energy sources, doesn't it seem a possibility these ecological dangers could endanger that position?

Marcuse: No doubt there is such a danger. If we run out of natural resources we will have to reduce our standard of living considerably, in the meantime hoping that we find replacements.

Malinovich: Wouldn't it be more than just reducing our standard of living? Isn't it possible that people would simply have to do unpleasant work? That the kind of repression which is necessary in order to get people to do unpleasant work might become historically necessary again?

Marcuse: Why does the work then have to be more unpleasant than the work today on the assembly line? I don't see that.

Malinovich: No, not more unpleasant but just that it would make your utopian vision less likely.

Marcuse: Well, I never said that in a free society alienated labor could be abolished altogether. It can only be reduced, but reduced considerably. I don't think we should speculate on whether it is reduced a little bit more or a little bit less. In any case the fact will remain that alienated labor will have to be done but it could be done on a qualitatively reduced scale.

One-Dimensional Man

Malinovich: A common criticism of *One-Dimensional Man* is that it is too much of an armchair sociology—that you didn't have enough data in the book and that your characterizations are exaggerated. I discussed that criticism at length with Dykstra,⁴ and I have the feeling that probably your answer

⁴ Bram Dykstra is a professor of comparative literature at UCSD and was a friend of Marcuse.

would be along the same lines as his—that the very idea of having to do a sociology on a “scientific model” where you send out questionnaires and do long-range studies is itself an example of a manipulated consciousness.

Marcuse: I would agree to that. As far as the exaggerations are concerned, I would quote, I think it was Adorno who said that in psychoanalysis only the exaggerations are true, and to a certain extent I would like to apply that too to the critique of society.

Malinovich: In terms of the methodology of the book, would you agree with Dykstra that it's a theoretical analysis based on a personal perception which is tested within the social realm?

Marcuse: Not only a personal perception. I mean a helluva lot of people have the same perception. I'm not alone. It's a perception which has been trained and developed in innumerable discussions with others. I wouldn't use the term “personal” unless you explain it in this way.

Malinovich: But to you doesn't it seem a drawback that your characterizations were not supported by extensive data?

Marcuse: What is meant by extensive? Of course I collected enough material. It is not simply taken out of my imagination or whatever.

Malinovich: They mean sociological studies, questionnaires.

Marcuse: I even read sociological studies. That they don't appear quoted in the book is a different story. It doesn't mean that I hadn't read them.

Malinovich: I was thinking with respect to this that a lot of the things you said have been corroborated since then. There have been a lot of studies on the effects of TV violence on children. There's enormous concern now with the effects of television. Now the studies are being done which corroborate a lot of what you said at a much earlier point in time.

Marcuse: That's right.

Malinovich: One of the things Dykstra said was that the idea of having to verify theories on the model of the behavioral sciences—

Marcuse: You have to verify a theory, but that doesn't mean that you have to verify it in terms of behavioral sociology.

Malinovich: What do you mean by verify? Could you say a little more?

Marcuse: Demonstrate it so that every and any man or woman who is not a half-wit, totally illiterate, can see it. It doesn't mean verify in terms of the natural sciences or psychological experiments.

Malinovich: In other words, if you describe the phenomenon, intelligent people can corroborate it through their own experience. Is that in a sense what you're saying?

Marcuse: Through their own experience and through having understood what is said. Sure. They don't have to agree with it, but at least they have to know what it's all about.

Malinovich: Do you have any regrets about having used the word totalitarian with respect to Western societies?

Marcuse: Well, there are many forms of totalitarianism; it doesn't have to be a fascist and Nazi one. You can build up almost total control over the population, for example, by the new technology, the use of the media or computers, or whatever it is. It's in that sense, not in the fascist and Nazi sense.

Malinovich: So you don't feel that the use of the word totalitarian was misleading.

Marcuse: Not unless you identify it with Nazi and fascist, but you can speak and I think I did of a democratic totalitarianism, or of a totalitarian democracy.

Malinovich: What about the idea that when you speak about moronization and so forth, that you don't show sufficient appreciation of freedom in the West? Do you have any regrets about that?

Marcuse: I certainly do appreciate the freedom we still do have in the West, otherwise I couldn't exist and certainly couldn't write here, so that is wrong. I know perfectly well that as things stand today this country, as well as England, are still probably among the freest—relatively speaking—countries in the world.

Malinovich: And you don't feel that in *One-Dimensional Man* you gave a mistaken impression?

Marcuse: No, I tried to outline tendencies toward authoritarianism and totalitarianism, and I would still stick to it.

Malinovich: In light of your writing about the moronization of the people, how do you explain things like the women's movement—?

Marcuse: These are oppositional movements. That is exactly the opposition which in this country is still permitted and which may become very important if economic conditions continue to deteriorate and there is a radicalization on a larger level.

Malinovich: But the women's movement has affected many women who are not in any sense political radicals.

Marcuse: Which only means that potentially the opposition spreads among the larger population. It affects strata which before—for example, women—were to a large extent unpolitical and submissive.

Malinovich: They're not more political, in the sense of being socialist.

Marcuse: In fact it's also a political movement because the ultimate goals of the feminist movement cannot be achieved within the framework of this society. . . . I speak of a radical transformation of values.

Malinovich: I think it was in that *Psychology Today* interview, when you spoke of moronization, you also spoke of the increasing dehumanization of the society. It seems to me that there are ways in which the society has become more humanized. For example, laws for the handicapped—when I was a student at Berkeley, there were no handicapped students; now Berkeley is swarming with wheelchairs. The handicapped have been totally accommodated. There are laws now that demand that all public buildings be made accessible to the handicapped.

Marcuse: There's absolutely no reason to deny that there are such elements. The decisive question is: Is this tendency going

to prevail because it is embedded in the system, or the opposite? And I would make the point that the opposite tendency is the dominant tendency. For example, the laws against the pollution of the environment, the very poor legislation that has been passed, is rescinded or reduced as soon as they hit the interests of the big corporations, especially nuclear energy.

Malinovich: But it's still true that the United States has the strongest ecological laws, or pharmaceutical laws. For example in Europe you can buy drugs or cosmetics which are far less tested and which are banned here.

Marcuse: I wouldn't deny that. But these tendencies have inherent limits—they are not allowed to violate basic interests of corporations. If it really hurts the corporations, it doesn't have a ghost of a chance.

Malinovich: What do you think of affirmative action? Does that seem like a progressive measure to you?

Marcuse: I'm certainly in favor of that; because it tries at least to undo some of the injustice done for centuries.

Malinovich: Have you in any way changed your views in terms of the highly repressive nature of the society psychologically? Do you still feel as strongly as you did in *One-Dimensional Man*?

Marcuse: I don't think I've changed my mind. As I've said, the only change I can detect is that, after '68, I am a little more optimistic that things are going to change.

Repressive Tolerance

Malinovich: Here's a quote from *Repressive Tolerance*: "While it [tolerance] is more or less quietly and constitutionally withdrawn from the opposition, it is made compulsory behavior with respect to established policies." And then in *Counter-revolution and Revolt*, in the last pages you speak of the intensified repression of rebellion. Doesn't that contradict what you said about this being one of the freest countries?

Marcuse: I said relatively free. There is no such thing as a

free country in the world today. There are societies that come closer to it than others. And compared with Stalinist Russia, and even post-Stalinist Russia, certainly this is a freer society. And the management of the population still proceeds largely with democratic and constitutional means. So this is by no means a fascist or protofascist society. That's nonsense. Those who say that don't know what fascism is—namely, a monolithic society in which they couldn't say this anymore.

Malinovich: If I compare your quote from *Repressive Tolerance* which I just read to you where you seem to be saying something very strong—you're saying that tolerance is "more or less quietly and constitutionally withdrawn from the opposition" and you're speaking, one assumes, about American society—

Marcuse: Alright, you can provide the examples: let's start with the immediate situation—revamping of education. The fact that it is more and more difficult, practically impossible as a Marxist or a so-called Marxist to get an academic position.

Malinovich: It is?

Marcuse: It is. The fact that recent documents have made very clear the extent of FBI and CIA supervision of the entire allegedly suspicious population.

Malinovich: I have the feeling that sometimes when you write, instead of qualifying a statement you're making, you will tend to make almost two opposite statements, thinking of different things. For example, on the one hand, in *Repressive Tolerance* you're saying this society tolerates anything. Every idiot can get on television and say what he thinks, and you seem to be saying that there really is this indiscriminate tolerance. On the other hand, in a statement like this, you seem to be saying that there isn't. Do you see what I mean?

Marcuse: No. If I make that impression that is not what I mean. This society, in this country, still has outlets for opposition. That is why I stress so strongly that it is not by any means a fascist society. But you see, tolerance does become oppressive, and this again you can take as an example—if on the

same screen they have the inmate of a concentration camp talking and then the next hour or the next day someone who tells you that it's all exaggerated or invented. One appearance destroys the other.

Malinovich: Then when in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* you were speaking about the intensified repression of the rebellion, what did you have in mind? Can you give me some more examples?

Marcuse: The increasingly efficient control and supervision of the entire population. You don't have to give examples—all the material that came out on the CIA and FBI espionage in this country is well known.

Malinovich: Have you changed your mind at all about anything you said in *Repressive Tolerance*?

Marcuse: I can only say, certainly not consciously. Definitely no major change.

Malinovich: I have found it difficult to get clear on certain points of what you're saying in *Repressive Tolerance*. Let me give you an example. In the beginning of the essay you state that "indiscriminate tolerance is justified in harmless debate, in conversation, in academic discussion" but later on in the essay you state that "the restoration of freedom of thought may necessitate new and rigid restrictions on teaching and practices in the educational institutions which by their very methods and concepts serve to enclose the mind within the established universe of discourse." Now it seems to me that you're saying two different things here. In the first statement you seem to be saying that on an academic level there should be indiscriminate tolerance.

Marcuse: The second statement refers to the period in which the restoration of freedom of thought is indeed on the way, is a social fact. And the teaching here refers to teaching which is obviously propaganda. There was teaching under Hitler. There's a difference between teaching and teaching.

Malinovich: Doesn't that in many situations become a difficult distinction to make?

Marcuse: Yes, but in these things it is very easy to mention extremely marginal cases in order to throw away the whole thing, so one should not always orient oneself on marginal cases where it is difficult to distinguish. But in reality in a majority of cases it's not so difficult to distinguish.

Malinovich: I'm not sure I get you correctly. When you say indiscriminate tolerance, it sounds like what you're saying is total tolerance of any academic discussion, but what you're saying now is indiscriminate tolerance of an academic discussion which is not propaganda.

Marcuse: Well, I wouldn't call propaganda an academic occupation.

Malinovich: Doesn't it seem quite possible that a person might genuinely hold a position on a subject which is highly conservative, a person might be a sincere and honest conservative economist?

Marcuse: Then it's certainly not under my category of movements which should not be tolerated.

Malinovich: Yes, but later on the same page you say that you advocate "withdrawal of toleration of speech and assembly from groups . . . which promote . . . discrimination on the grounds of race and religion, or which oppose the extension of public services, social security, medical care, etc." That passage is often quoted in attacking you—in *Repressive Tolerance* you make the point that if someone is against socialized medicine then tolerance should be withdrawn!

Marcuse: Tolerance should be withdrawn doesn't mean that the man should be eliminated.

Malinovich: Yes, but that he should not be allowed to express his views. Isn't that what it means? Or then what does it mean if it doesn't mean that?

Marcuse: In the first place let's be clear about that. If somebody in the present situation with over six or seven million unemployed and still great inequality advocates cutting down of the already minimum social services, this is indeed something one should fight.

Malinovich: Yes, but fighting it is different from not tolerating it. When you say it shouldn't be tolerated, don't you mean that a person should not be allowed to express that view?

Marcuse: Yes, or he should express his view but he damn better justify it, and I don't think it can be justified. I know this sentence is constantly quoted and I find it obscene in the present situation to come out against a really effective social-welfare program.

Malinovich: Right now this is a little confusing. . . . Take something like New York City being bankrupt. In order to get money from the federal government there has to be a cutting down of some of the services. They have to balance their budget. If someone in New York says that we have to make conditions more stringent for welfare or we have to cut down on certain public services, or if we have to cut down on public housing—which in fact they've had to do—now are these statements which you believe should not be tolerated? Aren't there a lot of contexts in which statements of that kind can't be interpreted as protofascistic?

Marcuse: Well, if it is a mere academic statement it would fall under the category of situations in which it can be tolerated, but we have to see it in a much larger context, namely, as a general trend toward a cutting down of social services rather than balancing the budget or whatever it is. . . . Under these circumstances the statement that propaganda against social welfare should not be tolerated seems to me to make sense. I think I would stick to it, because this is not an academic situation, this is a very urgent social situation which affects millions and millions of underprivileged.

Malinovich: What if a conservative economics professor wants to argue that we should have cut downs on certain social services?

Marcuse: I would say the same thing. Inasmuch as this worsens the already miserable conditions of millions of underprivileged, the statement is not in order.

Malinovich: So he should not be permitted.

Marcuse: Yes. Again, as an academic teacher yes, but as a propagandist no. That's an important distinction.

Malinovich: I'm really having trouble with this. Can you say more about that distinction?

Marcuse: You know the trouble in this whole discussion is that it is again the question of relatively marginal and harmless cases, which are really not in the center of my discussion. It's a question of movements like the neo-Nazi movement.

Malinovich: But then I don't understand what you mean because there are a lot of conservative economists who would come out and say we have to cut down on welfare.

Marcuse: And if they do it in their lectures and allow a perfectly free criticism and discussion, they can be tolerated.

Malinovich: Even if they were against extended social—

Marcuse: Even if they argue against, yes. . . . You can say that I was intentionally provocative in this essay because I saw the danger of a tendency, not in this country, but mainly in Germany of a new toleration of Nazi and proto-Nazi movements. . . . There are refinements not only possible but necessary, but I had in mind what happened in the Weimar Republic with the toleration of the Nazi movement and other military movements on the right.

Malinovich: That's just what I was wondering about. Whether a lot of what you say in there was influenced by the Weimar Republic and you really have a fascist model in mind.

Marcuse: Yes, because that is the most realistic model.

Malinovich: But the way you state it it doesn't come across that way. It comes across much stronger.

Marcuse: Yes, I know.

Malinovich: Would you say that you didn't really mean it to be that strong?

Marcuse: I certainly agree that refinements and qualifications may be possible or necessary, but I certainly would not give up the position as a whole. . . . You see, another thing that is not clear is that what I say in this essay already presupposes, at least politically, a very different society. Certainly

the present government wouldn't implement anything like that. So it is very definitely a projection into the future. From the beginning to the end it already presupposes a different society.

Malinovich: And the different society would I suppose be what you refer to as the dictatorship of an elite. What you talk about toward the end of the book. Is that the different society?

Marcuse: No, I mean a society which struggles far more to remedy and abolish the basic impediments to human progress today and a society which has to struggle against—that's important—other social systems that threaten it. Like the Weimar Republic.

Malinovich: You mean threatened from the inside?

Marcuse: From the outside and the inside.

Malinovich: Would it be correct to say that at least one item you had in mind by refinements and qualifications would be what you said before—that, for example, in university lectures where free discussion was possible, that there any position short of an outright fascist position or something like that would be acceptable for discussion?

Marcuse: In what society?

Malinovich: In the different society that you say this presupposes.

Marcuse: Yes, I would say so.

Malinovich: But certainly not a fascist position.

Marcuse: Certainly not.

Malinovich: Again in *Repressive Tolerance* you say: "The conditions under which tolerance can again become a liberating and humanizing force still have to be created." Now are you saying that there's going to be a transition period during which it is necessary to have intolerance?

Marcuse: Exactly.

Malinovich: In order to, so to speak, get rid of reactionary forces, but then once that is done with, then—

Marcuse: Yes, but I don't know that because I'm not a prophet, but that is the general idea. If you have a genuine

socialist society the whole problem wouldn't exist. . . . Because there's no reason for fascism in a socialist society.

Malinovich: It seems at least possible to you that in a genuine socialist society you could have indiscriminate tolerance.

Marcuse: It's not only possible, it belongs to the essence of a socialist society.

Malinovich: And that's based on the premise that in a socialist society you simply would not have fascist—

Marcuse: Neither the economic nor the political conditions are there for fascism. But we are talking about a society that doesn't exist so we cannot go into details.

Malinovich: When toward the end of *Repressive Tolerance* you say, and this is a kind of rhetorical question: "Is there any alternative other than the dictatorship of an elite over the people?", and then you point out that what we have right now is a kind of dictatorship of business and monopolies and so forth, I gather that what you have in mind there is a temporary dictatorship. Right? But doesn't that worry you in terms of being analogous to a dictatorship of the proletariat and then the withering away of the state, except that it doesn't seem to happen that way. Or in terms of what you said yesterday to the effect that the end has to be present already in the means otherwise the end gets destroyed, is lost. Wouldn't it seem that if you had to go through a dictatorship of an elite, you might just end up with nothing more than that?

Marcuse: Well, the way I use the term elite is in a way ironical, but largely it refers to groups and individuals who have already proven their qualifications as possible agents of liberation. The term elite is for me in no way a curse word, on the contrary. We are certainly governed by an elite as you just said—corporate, political, and so on, so it would only be a change from one elite to another.

Malinovich: Except that we do have, as you pointed out, a certain degree of liberal democracy.

Marcuse: Yes, but that doesn't change the fact that it is well

steered and managed by an elite. The elite is not yet in any way handcuffed by the democratic rules.

Malinovich: Well, Nixon was removed.

Marcuse: He was removed precisely because he no longer qualified for the established elite. He was a dangerous parasite or whatever.

Malinovich: So you don't see his removal as in any way a change—

Marcuse: A change in the system, not at all.

Malinovich: But when you speak about the dictatorship of an elite, if you combine that with what you say in *Repressive Tolerance*, then you do end up with an elite governing and you don't have indiscriminate tolerance. They have even more power.

Marcuse: They would have much much less power because they would remain responsible to below, to the people.

Malinovich: This is probably the other major item on which you have been constantly criticized—the fact that you have far too generous a view of human nature, and of intellectuals in particular.

Marcuse: We went through that before, that I don't believe there is a human nature.

Malinovich: In the late 'sixties when you were politically involved, when there was political activism, you said before that you felt that a kind of new consciousness had emerged, and I think you say that in the *Essay on Liberation*. So is it your feeling that some of the people who were involved in the radical movement in the 'sixties were the kind of people whose nature had to some extent been changed, whose consciousness had been raised, and who in a sense, as you just said, proved their qualifications? Some of the student leaders? Some of the radical faculty?

Marcuse: Some certainly, yes, and some simply crawled back into the establishment in one way or another. Or some became just dropouts.

Malinovich: You see, one of the problems you yourself ad-

dressed yourself to is that in order to get this change started you need a new consciousness, but how are you going to get the new consciousness without the change? I think you refer to it as the chicken and the egg problem.

Marcuse: I object to this chicken and the egg business. It is not impossible; it is a fact that you can change within the established system. There is no outside; it's a ridiculous formulation.

Malinovich: You're saying it is possible to have some real changes in human nature within the system.

Marcuse: At least the precondition for that. Yes, certainly. It has to be within the established system. Where do you want to go? Even the moon today belongs to the established system.

Malinovich: If I understand you correctly, you're saying that in the 'sixties at least some of the people who were involved in the movement were the kind of people you would want to look upon as potential elite leaders.

Marcuse: Yes. But I don't want to formulate it in terms of personalities; that wouldn't work.

Malinovich: Then how would you formulate it?

Marcuse: That there were such people. You don't have to go into details. There were enough people who started with experimenting, for example, on nonalienated relationships between the sexes, between the races, whatever it is. We don't have to go into personalities here.

The Student Movement

Malinovich: These are questions about the student movement in the 'sixties.

Marcuse: My evaluation of the student movement you find best in the French text⁵ I gave you.

Malinovich: I ran through that last night. If I understood you correctly, you feel that it has had a long-range effect.

⁵ This is a reference to a text that Marcuse had been asked to write on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the French student and workers uprising. It had been read on French television.

Marcuse: Definitely. I think that is already in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*.

Malinovich: In a debate with Raymond Aron in the *New Statesman*, somewhere around 1971, you said that a radical transformation of values is taking place before your eyes. And you were speaking about an overcoming of aggressive, repressive values. Would you still take that strong a position?

Marcuse: Yes, more than ever before. I insist that a better society, or socialist society, would be qualitatively different from all preceding and present social systems.

Malinovich: But would you agree with the idea that in the late 'sixties and early 'seventies the students had really attained a kind of new consciousness?

Marcuse: Yes, and not only the students. Also women and racial and national minorities, also part of the intelligentsia as a whole.

Malinovich: My feeling was that you were not just speaking of a political consciousness but that you were speaking of a change in the psychological—

Marcuse: A change in the entire mental structure. If you want, you can go back and quote it in Freudian terms—an ascent of Eros in the struggle with aggressiveness and destructiveness.

Malinovich: Do you still feel now that that change was a deep one, that it was more than a superficial change?

Marcuse: Yes, I do. It was on a very deep level, but did not come to adequate realization as a political movement.

Malinovich: If that's still your feeling, then how do you explain that the student movement has kind of fizzled out. Recent Gallup polls indicate that students are much more conservative.

Marcuse: I would consider this a temporary relapse. The situation may very well change with a worsening of economic conditions.

Malinovich: How would you explain the fact that it came to an end?

Marcuse: There are many reasons. First, the end of the war in Vietnam, and the end of the draft. Secondly, the stabilization of the capitalist system.

Malinovich: What do you mean by that?

Marcuse: Economically as well as politically a turn to the right, and with that an intensification of repression.

Malinovich: Do you have some specific thing in mind when you speak of intensification of repression? Something like Kent State?

Marcuse: In this country still in a constitutional and democratic way we have no such thing as a *Berufsverbot*. However, I think it is an understatement to say that a Marxist scholar will find it very difficult to get a job or even a promotion.

Malinovich: Could you say something about what your hopes were for the student movement back in the 'sixties? At that time what seemed to you to be the possibilities for the movement? For example, in a lecture in Germany you said: "I see the possibility of an effective revolutionary force only in the combination of what is going on in the Third World with the explosive forces in the centers of the highly developed world." Did you in the 'sixties have hope that somehow the student movement in conjunction with the Third World or the ghetto population could conceivably have led to a real revolution?

Marcuse: Not in this county. The situation was different in France. It was not in itself in this country a revolutionary movement, but one of the catalyst groups which for the first time articulated this transformation of needs and values, with such slogans as "the new sensibility," for example.

Malinovich: When you talk about the new sensibility are you saying that, while the students today are more politically conservative or less politically involved, they still are in some psychological sense on a more advanced level than students before the 'sixties?

Marcuse: Again, it is not so much a psychological question as the changing needs and aspirations, and a skepticism con-

cerning all the competitive needs and values of the capitalist system, and the insistence on the right of sensibility, a sensuousness—that the emancipation of these from the established alienation is a decisive element in the struggle for a better society. This kind of change is still there. Its political expression is largely repressed, but it is certainly there, and not only among the students. That is also in the French text.

Malinovich: You talked about the workers.

Marcuse: And strata of the dependent bourgeoisie.

Malinovich: So what you said about France is at least as true about the United States?

Marcuse: Not everything I say there about France would apply to the United States. You cannot say that it was a revolutionary movement here; in France it may well have been, and in Italy too.

Malinovich: So even in the 'sixties you never believed that the U.S. student movement was a revolutionary movement, but would it be correct to say that you felt it would be a step in the right direction, a consciousness-raising experience?

Marcuse: Even more, I would say the expression of a qualitatively different struggle and qualitatively different aims.

Malinovich: I gather from what you've said so far then that you're not disappointed by what happened.

Marcuse: For me disappointed or not disappointed is much too personal and private. It makes no difference if I'm disappointed or not disappointed, so I wouldn't use this term.

Malinovich: Did you have greater expectations?

Marcuse: I think everyone at that time had greater expectations.

Malinovich: A lot of the critics of the student movement now say that the student movement just fizzled out, so obviously it was a superficial, generational thing.

Marcuse: Not everything that fizzles out owing to repression is thereby refuted in its substance.

Malinovich: You're really attributing the fizzling out mainly

to repression, the end of the Vietnam War, the end of the draft?

Marcuse: Yes.

On Terrorism

Malinovich: Henry Brandon, the head of the London bureau of the *New York Times*, wrote an article right after the Baader-Meinhof incidents saying that "insofar as they have a political outlook it's yours," and referred to you as "a philosopher of anarchy."

Marcuse: Well, I have never advocated anarchism; I have never advocated terror. As a Marxist I know full well that terror is no political weapon, and certainly not a political weapon for socialists. I believe that in the struggle for socialism, the end has to be present in the means. And you cannot possibly in the image of a humane and free society in any way justify terror. I have stated this in a recent issue of *Die Zeit*. . . . I remember at a mass meeting in Frankfurt at the time of the release of Angela Davis I made a statement against terrorism. That was 1970, I think.

Malinovich: What about the last sentences of *Repressive Tolerance*?

Marcuse: There I say—and that is written in connection with the civil rights movements of the 'sixties—that if these black people and their sympathizers use violence it is in order to break the chain of violence and not to perpetuate it. That is a sentence which is constantly quoted. Now in the first place there is a difference between violence and terror. The occupation of a building, the clash with the police can be violent, but it isn't terror unless one simply doesn't know the meaning of words. Terror is a *political* weapon only if supported by the masses, the people themselves, at least a majority of them. For example, the Jacobin terror in the French Revolution. You cannot compare that in any way with Baader-Meinhof, who

are totally isolated, connected only with tiny groups of bourgeois intellectuals who were frustrated.

Malinovich: The point your critics make is that if contemporary advanced capitalist society is really responsible for the total moronization, dehumanization, manipulation of man, then people like Aldo Moro and other political leaders and the governments of the Western capitalist countries are guilty of preventing the realization of what could be almost an immediate utopia.

Marcuse: Well, it is not the leaders and politicians that are responsible. The oppression is germane to the system itself. Capitalism today cannot function without this constant management and steering and repressing of human needs and aspirations. It certainly can satisfy the material and even the cultural needs for a large part of the population, but at what cost. At the cost of alienated labor, a full-time occupation.

Malinovich: But what about the idea that your general theoretical outlook is one which could lead young people to commit such acts? For example the Baader-Meinhof—one of their first activities was the bombing of a Frankfurt department store. They claimed this was a symbolic attack on consumerism.

Marcuse: It doesn't make any difference; it's totally incompatible with what I say, because the Baader-Meinhof were completely isolated from almost the entire population. To derive even theoretically a defense of terrorism is simply malicious, and in addition forgets the difference between violence and terror.

Malinovich: This distinction between violence and terror, let's use a concrete example such as Algeria.

Marcuse: In Algeria you had both violence and terror. Violence is much more general—if students or workers resist force, that is violence and not terror.

Malinovich: Bombing a department store in Algeria would be terror, but it would be terror supported by the masses?

Marcuse: That's correct. But again you should be aware that you don't present it in such a way that I justify or approve of

it. . . . I want to make the difference clear, but I certainly wouldn't say that I recommend the bombing of department stores.

Malinovich: But in Algeria it's a different situation.

Marcuse: It was open warfare.

Malinovich: So that the bombing of a department store there would have a different political meaning from the Baader-Meinhof bombing of a department store.

Marcuse: I think you can say that.

Malinovich: But you don't want to be put on record as saying that you think the Algerian bombing of a department store is morally OK.

Marcuse: No, I don't want to be put on record as saying that. Definitely not. Victims are still mostly innocent persons.

Malinovich: Are there any conditions under which terrorism would be morally justifiable—for example, Hitler or Franco or some situation like that?

Marcuse: . . . Personally, I would say yes. . . . You can put it this way. There are moral and political reasons overriding the established morality. For example, work in the illegal resistance. To disobey orders to kill Jews is in terms of the established regime illegal, the whole civil disobedience is in terms of the established morality illegal.

Malinovich: But I gather from what you've said and from the article in *Die Zeit* that you would consider any of the contemporary acts of terrorism, whether it be Palestinians or Irish or the Moluccans in Holland, as being counterproductive.

Marcuse: Yes.

Miscellaneous

Malinovich: Do you consider that Third World economic and social problems are caused to a very large extent by colonialism or Western imperialism?

Marcuse: Not exclusively, but to a considerable extent, yes. I would not, for example, in any way put what is going on today in Uganda on the account of colonialism. That's ridiculous.

Malinovich: A political-scientist friend of mine estimates that the contribution of colonialism has been in the area of 25 percent. His analysis is that about 75 percent of the troubles of the Third World would have been there anyway.

Marcuse: I think I agree to, that. I don't know if its 25 percent or 35 percent, but essentially I agree.

Malinovich: You've spoken of a "new consciousness" of ghetto people and Third World people. Now it's often been said that what ghetto or Third World people want is just a bigger share of the pie. They don't really have a new consciousness.

Marcuse: Well, as far as I can see, there are very few groups in this country among the blacks which are revolutionary in the sense that their aim would be the abolition of the entire system. I would rather formulate it this way—not with "a bigger slice of the pie." That refers to this country, not to the Third World. There it's different.

Malinovich: You think that there's more evidence of a new consciousness there?

Marcuse: Yes, and revolutionary aims.

Marcuse: I am very definitely in favor of the protection and integrity of Israel as a state, but I certainly don't agree with its present policy, because it seems to me self-defeating. In my view the greatest justification for Israel is to create conditions under which the Holocaust will not be repeated. But I'm afraid much of the present policy may precisely lead to a repetition, although not on that scale perhaps of the concentration camps.

Marcuse: Have you seen the TV film, "Holocaust"? It was excellent. And I would like to say, as a long-standing critic of the mass media and without compromise, that the showing of this film was a great service to the people of this country and a proof that the mass media can also be a hopefully effective means of countereducation, enlightenment, and so on. They even go into the I. G. Farben business, that the German industry simply requested Jews from the concentration camps as

cheap laborers. They even got in that the British didn't do anything about it, because possibly they were secretly in sympathy with what the Nazis were doing. That is something!

*With Erica Sherover*⁶

Malinovich: Were you especially interested in the 'sixties in the development of communes?

Marcuse: Yes I was—as an experiment in nonalienated living. Communes, collectives, cooperatives, all these were experiments within capitalist society to create islands of nonalienation. . . . In a funny way you can add that it seems that in some cases nonalienated living is infinitely more complex and difficult than alienated living.

Sherover: That's stolen from his wife!

Marcuse: Yes. That is what she says, but I agree with her entirely—it's infinitely more nerve-racking and energy-consuming and whatever than a good juicy alienated life.

Malinovich: Why not stay alienated then?

Marcuse: Because in the last analysis it is more than a question of one or two or twelve persons; it is a question of society as a whole. In order to make the nonalienation experiments really meaningful and enduring, you have to create in the large context a better society.

Sherover: In the present situation a so-called nonalienated existence reeks of concern with the self; one retires to the country and experiments on the back of the laboring population, and since one isn't doing anything except discovering oneself therefore it's more complicated, endless discovery of self.

Marcuse: That's very good, the way she just formulated it. It has an escapist quality.

Sherover: It seems to me that the difficulties the left had in the 'sixties and also in the 'thirties are precisely because there

⁶ Marcuse married Erica Sherover a few years before his death. She had been a student of his both at Brandeis and at UCSD. Inge Marcuse died of cancer in 1973.

wasn't in the Marxist tradition a theory of the development of subjectivity. . . . It didn't deal with how do you transform people's consciousness? How do we actually transform our own consciousness? And it seems to me that that is the weakness of the Frankfurt School, that they didn't really devote any attention to this problematic. I've been at many gatherings where students will say to Herbert, "But what shall we do?" and Herbert says, "You know what to do."

Marcuse: That's not the way I left it, by simply saying, "You know what to do."

Sherover: You often say, "You know what to do; do political education." But what constitutes political education is always left vague. It isn't just reading *Kapital*. It's something that happens in, I would call, consciousness-raising groups, and things like that. . . . I'm talking about a practice which would think about how people actually do get rid of unaware racism, unaware sexism, and unintentional classism and things like that. . . . That's the general topic of my dissertation and my work—that's what I do. I teach a radical kind of counseling.

Malinovich: It seems to me that a lot of the people who were involved in leftist movements in the 'sixties had a very old consciousness.

Marcuse: Exactly.

Malinovich: What do you think about what Ricky is doing? Do you like it?

Marcuse: Yes.

Sherover: But . . . you have this notion that (for example) women can do it by themselves. If she doesn't like it why does she stay with it is the notion here, and it's real individualist. It's not that women together need support, and actually to work through things in common. . . .

Marcuse: I never objected to that. I never criticized that. What I criticized was overoccupation with one's soul or the other's soul.