



Book Reviews

Towards a Critical Theory of Society: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Volume 2

Herbert Marcuse and Douglas Kellner (eds.)

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This very welcome second volume of the collected papers of Herbert Marcuse contains almost all of his unpublished manuscripts, mostly written during the Vietnam War. In the *Foreword*, Marcuse's son Peter admits that it is unlikely that his father would have wanted these papers published, as many of them are not final drafts. Yet Peter Marcuse defends his decision to publish on the basis that his father has become such an important figure as a critic of contemporary society that the working through of his ideas is of very real interest and should therefore be in the public domain. Indeed, in his excellent Introduction, Douglas Kellner also quite rightly emphasizes the importance of Marcuse for critically assessing contemporary society, and additionally emphasizes the importance of these papers for highlighting how Marcuse was constantly updating and revising his critical theory in response to political and historical change.

The volume contains nine papers, a selection of correspondence between Marcuse and, among others, Adorno, Horkheimer, Lowenthal, and Dunayevskaya and an *Afterword* by Jürgen Habermas. The first paper, 'The Problem of Social Change in the Technological Society' (1962), and the third paper, 'The Containment of Social Change in Industrial Society' (1965) reflect Marcuse's persistent interest in social change and the negation of freedom brought about by 'advanced industrial society'. In the 'Problem of Social Change', presaging the theme of *One Dimensional Man* (1964), Marcuse notes how advanced industrial society promotes 'one-dimensional' thought and integrates any forces of opposition into the system. The 'Containment' essay continues this theme by again emphasizing that forces of domination are the primary feature of advanced industrial societies. After this paper, however, Marcuse begins to increasingly emphasize the agents who could overcome this domination, such as the emerging New Left and new social movements. This identification of possible agents for social change is reflected in papers four, five and six: 'Political Preface to *Eros and Civilization* (1966)', 'Beyond One Dimensional Man' (1968) and 'Cultural Revolution' (n.d., circa 1970). In the 'Preface' and 'Beyond', Marcuse emphasizes the importance of aesthetics and eroticism in forms of social rebellion as a way of asserting freedom. In



'Cultural Revolution', a previously unknown text, Marcuse critically considers the social forces that oppose existing society and in doing so emphasizes how cultural revolution is crucial for social transformation. Indeed, similar sentiments appear in the final paper, 'A Revolution in Values' (1973), where Marcuse calls for a transformation in the norms and aspirations that motivate social groups. He understands these values dialectically in that as norms and aspirations are repressed, it is in their very repression that the possibility of their transformation is possible.

The second paper, 'The Individual in the Great Society' (1966), is a critique of US President Lyndon B. Johnson's mid-1960s programme entitled a 'Great Society'. Marcuse subverts this idea by using it to critique the economic system and foreign policy of American capitalism. Moreover, he utilizes the very notion of the 'great society' himself to show how its full realization would mean going beyond, rather than preserving, the existing capitalist system.

In the seventh paper, 'The Historical Fate of Bourgeois Democracy' (1972), and another previously unknown text, Marcuse's renowned pessimism becomes evident. Written after the anti-war candidate George McGovern had been defeated by Nixon, who escalated intervention in the Vietnam war, Marcuse offers an incisive critique of bourgeois democracy. He depicts American democracy as transforming into a 'police and warfare state' in which neo-fascist forces are gaining great power. This theme continued, as is evinced in the eighth paper, 'Watergate: When Law and Morality Stand in the Way' (1973), which was a letter Marcuse sent to the *New York Times* nearly a fortnight after the downfall of Nixon. Marcuse argued that Watergate was not some anomaly of an otherwise just democratic system, but was instead a clear example of the corrupt nature of government and the system as a whole. Watergate, then, was an ordinary rather than extraordinary event. Indeed, in a statement that could easily be applied to today, Marcuse notes how American capitalism itself 'cannot function, cannot grow anymore without the use of illegal, illegitimate means, without the practice of violence'. Such is the continued relevance of Marcuse's writings in the seeming triumph of liberal-democratic capitalism of the present.

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