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## ARTYKUŁY

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### Some accelerationist remarks on Marcuse’s drives theory and his dialectics of civilization

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Słowa kluczowe: akceleracjonizm, teoria popędów, dialektyka cywilizacji, postpraca, technologia, ideologia

#### Abstract

Marcuse’s theory of civilization offers a promising Freud-Marx synthesis. His approach, best articulated in *Eros and Civilization*, aims at a thorough reformulation of the Freudian drive doctrine to render it more historical and concatenate it to the problem of structural violence and the institutionalized (and internalized) mechanism of repression. I claim that the said reformulation provides a cornerstone for Marcuse’s highly idiosyncratic variant of a critical theory, which, according to my interpretation, possesses clear proto-accelerationist undertones. The article offers a concise recapitulation of Marcuse’s “dialectics of civilization” and points at the somewhat surprising close convergences with the accelerationist version of post-capitalism in his reflection on politics, technology, and the role of arts and aesthetic imagination in challenging the affirmative (desublimating) character of culture.

Why is it important to think about Marcuse? What type of topicality do his texts and theoretical interventions retain? For many, his version of critical theory seems to be pinned to a certain tumultuous epoch, and seems as iconic

as it does irredeemably obsolete. Marcuse has been subsequently reduced to the status of a half-forgotten prophet of the hippie era, whose once revolutionary clarion call can be summarized in a handful of hackneyed slogans.

Such a framing of Marcuse's philosophy, and treating him as "a museum piece in the West" (Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2013, p. 67) seems both too hasty and unjustified. In an intriguing, recently published volume of lectures by the late Mark Fisher, one of the chapters calls for a rehabilitation of Marcuse and proposes to read him, and in particular his second book, *Eros and Civilization*,<sup>1</sup> anew. According to the author of *Capitalist Realism*, Marcuse can be interpreted as a proto-accelerationist, whose work uncannily predates and anticipates certain developments of the accelerationist, post-capitalist project (Fisher, 2021, p. 87). I decided to take Fisher's remark as a starting point and develop this idea. I will briefly recapitulate Marcuse's version of critical theory and his dialectics of civilization – his claim that civilization can be based on the pleasure principle.<sup>2</sup> My intent is to highlight that Marcuse's insights and his rehashed drive doctrine tie in with an accelerationist trajectory. I shall demonstrate this by scrutinizing his views on politics, technology and art (i.e., the liberated aesthetic imagination) and by showing that Marcuse articulated certain narrative-discursive narrative which offer a vision for a post-capitalist world.

## 1. Dialectics of civilization: Marcuse's theory of the drives

### 1.1. Critical theory at a crossroads

Marcuse's post-war philosophical output may be interpreted as an indirect response to Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, which marked a major theoretical shift in critical theory. The critique of political economy and exchange rationality, still much indebted to Lukács, was now

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<sup>1</sup> List of abbreviations: *Eros and Civilization* = EC, *One-Dimensional Man* = ODM, *Essay on Liberation* = EL, *Counterrevolution And Revolt* = CR, *Aesthetic Dimension* = AD, *Five Lectures* = FL.

<sup>2</sup> I will be mainly focusing here on *Eros and Civilization*. I consider it to be Marcuse's most important book, bolder and more interesting than *One-Dimensional Man*. Moreover, I claim that following the publication of EC Marcuse did not revise his position substantially but clarified and expanded it in a number of essays, lectures and interviews.



seen “in a larger context as the specific, historical form of domination characteristic of the bourgeois era of Western history” (Jay, 1996, p. 256). The critique of capitalism has been “translated into a criticism of instrumental reason: the criticism of instrumental reason replaces the criticism of political economy in terms of trends, and the criticism of political economy becomes a criticism of technical civilization” (Wellmer, 1974, p. 130). The major themes interwoven in the *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, with Weber and Klages serving as major sources of inspiration, can be summarized in the following manner: a) The rationalization of the world is linked to the evolution of humanity as such in its cultural-civilizational dimension, i.e., in regard to development of the means of production, technical progress and the steady implementation of even more effective means of social control; b) Forms of objective rationality (Horkheimer’s “substantial reason”) are being supplanted by instances of subjective (instrumental) reason, anticipated and personified by the mythical figure of Odysseus; c) Subjective reason’s invasion of cultural domains hitherto reserved for the instances of objective reason should be interpreted not as an aberration in the clinical sense, i.e., not as a disfigurement of its original intention, but rather as a derivative of repression mechanisms (both on individual and civilizational levels) which were, so to speak, “inscribed” in the “nature” of reason (*resp.* Enlightenment) itself at the very dawn of civilization; d) The ability to delay gratification (sensual, physiological, erotic, etc.) enabled man to crystallize the sovereignty of the Self, cement the unity of will with cognitive faculties and repurpose the instinctual-affective apparatus towards conquering nature. The process of ego-sedimentation should be conceptualized as a gradual internalization of the social mechanisms of repression and violence, including violence against oneself, after primordial mimetic impulses (which enable a non-violent adaptation to otherness) were effectively suppressed; e) Myth, commonly described as the opposite of reason and Enlightenment, is in fact its reverse, a hidden kernel and shadow which manifests itself in the projection of fear on the outward nature and generalized aggressiveness; f) Enlightenment should thus be viewed as an extension of the Mythical, resulting in the systematic subjugation of nature by abstract (scientific, purely operational) reasoning and the logic of identity, which eliminates transcendence, i.e., any trace of Otherness which attempts to escape the frozen grip of technological Reason. To sum up, “enlightenment had not destroyed myth from outside; rather, myth had been the first



step towards a failed emancipation from nature and had thus prepared the way for self-destructive enlightenment” and civilization as a whole “up to now has consisted of enlightenment trapped in mythic immanence and nipping in the bud every attempt to escape from mythic immanence” (Wiggershaus, 1994, p. 328). Dominant forms of rationality are an embodiment of the Mythical, transmitted through consecutive historical epochs.

The significance of the shift from the critique of the political economy to the critique of instrumental reason was immense, but it may be argued that at the same time it drove emancipatory discourse into a theoretical cul-de-sac. This is because the thesis on the unlikely return of the Mythical in the guise of Reason is predicated upon certain sociopolitical observations. Horkheimer and Adorno were alarmed by the disintegration of the microstructure which created the emancipatory agent of the 20th century, i.e., the nuclear bourgeois family. The product of such a family, the individual, was involved in a turbulent relationship with their father and society at large, frequently opposing its stifling realities and inescapably alienating nature. Subjugation of the family members to the will of the father – who admittedly provided material support but exerted his authority through physical dominance – lent weight to the future rebellion of his progeny against the oppressiveness of the patriarch as an embodiment of the broader socio-institutional constellation. The normative ground for the revolt and critique was the individual’s dissent to the institutionalized *rationing* of happiness, which hindered the pursuit of self-actualization beyond the musty confines of the existing socio-familial arrangements (including traditional gender roles). Along with the emergence of mass society and the ever-increasing volatility of the capitalist economy, came the demise of the father-as-superego. Autonomous subjectivity cannot assert itself without confronting his authority, and this very confrontation triggers a dialectical process of individuation and socialization, a simultaneous affirmation of certain values and their contestation. When the ideological authority of the father is replaced by external (extra-familial) socialization agents (the education system, mass propaganda, marketing agencies), the authoritarian (fascist, or simply totalitarian) personality and blind conformism prevail since the individual becomes fully integrated into society and the private sphere of personal autonomy dangerously dwindles (Jay, 1996, pp. 126–127). Ultimately, however, Horkheimer and Adorno have difficulty envisioning the world outside the already-collapsing



socio-economic, political and psychological parameters, which they bequeathed from the 19th century. They straddle the imperative of social critique and resigned pessimism, since, according to their own somber diagnosis, social change can be effectuated only if the continuity of the civilization process is utterly (and apocalyptically) negated. Perhaps unbeknownst to them, they decode both the present and the future as the inevitable regression from the once-opened sphere of emancipatory potential. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* their pessimism leads to a vague glorification of the former forms of “objective reason” and an unspecified yearning for the restoration of the repressed mimetic impulse.

Marcuse's second major work picked up where Adorno and Horkheimer had left off. Whereas in the later stage of their respective academic careers Horkheimer and Adorno had embraced (predictably) a rather estranged stance towards the ideal of emancipation, with Horkheimer succumbing to Schopenhauerian conservative pessimism (Horkheimer, 1978, pp. 115–240; Gmünder, 1985, pp. 43–48) and Adorno to tortured endeavors at developing the negative dialectic as a speculative tool for tracing the vestiges of the “non-identical” (*Nichtidentischen*) in the totally administered world, Marcuse sought to revive the emancipatory energies of critical theory by engaging with Freud's instinct doctrine, or, as Fisher puts it, by “going through it” (Fisher, 2021, p. 81). The result is a thorough reformulation of critical theory which possesses a strong utopian purport. The overall tenor of Marcuse's book is optimistic, since he refused to revel in saturnine diagnosis and laid the groundwork for future society.

## 1.2. Vicissitudes of the drives and their unity

Marcuse's analysis is based on his unorthodox interpretation of psychoanalysis. He exposes hesitations and ambiguities in Freud's own writings, suggesting that he has simply unearthed “a hidden trend” in Freud's *Triebtheorie*, which implies the possibility of a non-repressive civilization. The received view maintains that the creation of the cultured human always entails ultimate self-denial, i.e., repression of the drive, “the methodical sacrifice of libido, its rigidly enforced deflection to socially useful activities and expressions” (EC, p. 22). In order to overcome scarcity, the principle of Ananke, sensuous satisfaction is subordinated to work as a full-time occupation and to the system of law and order to contain sexualized aggression (Marcuse, 2005, p. 33).



Since humans are by nature indolent, civilization must replace the pleasure principle with the reality principle, installing ego and superego as penalizing instances of censorship and control, relegating the promise of bliss to the sphere of mere dreams and fantasy. Marcuse rejects this interpretation and defines the drives as the critical instance *per se*, i.e., the objective benchmark of the fundamental irrationality of contemporary society and its repressive character. Drives represent the critical dimension, “immanent transcendence” of the social: they stem from the social substrate but nevertheless possess subversive potential. The liberation of the drives is predicated on the clear normative claim that “surplus repression” of the drives begets unnecessary suffering and violates humans’ entitlement to full autonomy and happiness, here defined as the possibility of attaining instant gratification. Id becomes a reservoir of repressed memory of unconditional gratification; it is no longer a product of indispensable civilizational self-discipline but evidence of brutal psychic repression. “Unforgetting” the repressed memories necessitates the recuperation of the liberatory power of both drives and the faculty of remembrance: “The reality principle restrains the cognitive function of memory – its commitment to the past experience of happiness which spurns the desire for its conscious re-creation. The psychoanalytic liberation of memory explodes the rationality of the repressed individual” (EC, p. 33; see also Jay, 1982 and AD, p. 64).

While discussing the nature of the drives, Marcuse disregards pessimistic accents in Freud’s work. Counter to the school of neo-Freudians, he accepts the speculative idea “of a fixed quantum of psychic energy and maintains that strengthening the life instincts would increase their mastery of the death instincts” (Kellner, 1984, p. 162). This leads to the rehabilitation of the idea of Thanatos. Initially, there is only one drive with a stable “quantum of psychic energy” which aims at discharging sexual energy and reducing psychosomatic tension. However, the gradual repression of Eros weakens life instincts and strengthens the forces of destruction (EC, p. 52). This amounts to saying that the direct consequence of repression leads to the drive understood as an institutionalized power trip. Hobbes was wrong: primordial human aggressiveness and belligerence is not an anthropological invariable stemming from unbound desires and human vice, but represents a byproduct of “surplus repression”. Libidinally, the human body gravitates toward a reduction in tension, whilst memory (collective and individual) drags it towards the alluring promise of instant gratification.



### 1.3. Historicization of the repression

The fundamental unity of Eros and the death drive provides a keystone of Marcuse's theoretical edifice. The subjugation of instinctual nature channels sexual impulses into self-destructiveness. This leads Marcuse to renounce the reality principle, which he views as a historical (contingent) way of controlling sexuality. Freud's mistake consists in substituting the "specific historical *form* of civilization [for] the *nature* of civilization" (EC, p. 135). "Civilized" Eros undergoes desublimation due to the enforced integration of an individual in a repressive society. "Culture demands continuous sublimation; it thereby weakens Eros, the builder of culture. And desexualization, by weakening Eros, unbinds the destructive impulses" (EC, p. 84).

Marcuse subsequently offers a daring restatement of the problem of repression and exploitation. Civilization is marked by the already mentioned "surplus-repression", necessitated by social domination; the "prevailing historical form of the reality principle" is the performance principle (EC, p. 46), i.e., the cult of efficiency, and exploitative productivity. Marcuse distinguishes between "basic" repression – the minimum form of rationality imposed on libidinal energies – and surplus repression (unnecessary and harmful). Phylogenetically, the initial repression of the drives was dictated by the absolute dependence on the vagaries of the natural world. The "performance principle", stemming from initial hardship and scarcity (the imperative to satisfy basic biological needs through enforced work) is essentially applicable to archaic societies, which are characterized by their interactional instability with their natural surroundings and their biological fragility (the imminent threat of starvation or death due to natural causes – diseases, pathogenic germs, etc.). The necessity of work results in the total delibidinalization of work and life: "The basic work in civilization is non-libidinal, is labor; labor is 'unpleasantness' and such unpleasantness has to be enforced" (EC, p. 83; FL, p. 30). In modern societies most of the mandatory, dull and repetitive work could be rendered superfluous due to the widespread automation of production, and technological progress. However, repression is a self-propelling mechanism; once set in motion it perpetuates itself infinitely. The ideologically constructed imperative of hard work is coupled with the imposition of strict laws, demonization and the "guiltification" of pleasure. In this context, Marcuse adduces Freud's famous hypothesis of the primal horde (Freud, 1955, pp. 1–165).



According to it, the primeval father, an omnipotent leader with a monopoly over women and all other provisions, is feared and loathed by his sons, whom he denies the immediacy of instinctual gratification. However, patricide did not result in unrestrained access to “women” (i.e., pleasure, now freed from the father’s “no” as a prototype of law-establishing prohibition) and liberation, but in a collective form of guilt and remorse, for the killing of the father paradoxically leads to his idealization, deification and eternalization. He is transformed into the Big Other, an invisible symbolic order (symbolic function) structuring interhuman relations, thus asserting the patriarchal structure of domination and perpetuating the reality principle, understood as socially rationed access to pleasure, and even then only insofar as it does not undermine the existing socio-political organization.

Ontogenetically, on the instinctual plane, an individual freezes at the infantile stage, internalizing the Father’s stern gaze. Superego becomes corporealized: “adherence to a *status quo ante* is implanted in the instinctual structure” (EC, p. 44). Fixation on this stage results in constant mental self-flagellation for those deeds and thoughts (whether actually committed, imagined or simply fantasized about) which challenge the society of “surplus repression”. The impoverishment and regressiveness of the individual should be linked to the impoverishment of human sexuality (EC, p. 34). Here, Marcuse develops Freud’s intuition that the sexual drive is primordially “polymorphically perverse”. The subject has leeway in directing his autonomous cathexes (*Besetzungen*), i.e., he may seek gratification away from direct genital satisfaction. In one of his earlier texts, titled ‘*Civilized Sexual Morality And Modern Nervous Illness*, Freud had introduced a sharp distinction between animal instinct, directed at purely biological reproduction on the one hand, and sexual drive or partial sexual drives (attached to different parts of the body) on the other, which are characterized by higher intensity levels. A key difference between humans and animals is humans’ ability to change the direction of the drive or to sublimate it: humans have the capacity to modify libidinal cathexes and shift them towards non-procreational goals. Moreover, the sensation of pleasure is not confined to the genital sphere but dispersed across the whole body and can be accessed through its different parts (erogenous zones), thus enabling humans to abstract from the “appropriate objects” of sexual drive. “The nature of the drive in human beings from the beginning is oriented that in man the sexual instinct does not originally serve the purposes of reproduction at all, but has as its aim





the gaining of particular kinds of pleasure” (Freud, 1959, p. 188). Libido is relatively undetermined in regard to its object and evinces far reaching pliability in regard to its aim: “the non-satisfaction of a particular component instinct is compensated for by the satisfaction of another one, or by a sublimation” (Pontalis & Leplanche, 1988, p. 319).

Although in the very same text Freud reverts to a moralizing discussion on “normal” sexual behavior, Marcuse takes his remarks at face value and bypasses the rudiments of Victorian morality. Instinctual (sexually appetitive) specificity forces man out of the dull compulsion of biological repetitivism and socially sanctioned channeling of libidinal energy into the genital area and monogamic marriage. Liberation from drudgery and the imperative of exploitative productivity must therefore go hand in hand with the liberation of sensuality and sexuality, with the rejection of the falsely narrowed form of rationality, where Logos is reduced to the tool of domination. Unfettered sexuality and liberated libidinal energies do not lead to an instinctual regress but make it possible to reach a level of “self-sublimation”, where

sexuality can, under specific conditions, create highly civilized human relations without being subjected to the repressive organization which the established civilization has imposed upon the instinct. Such self-sublimation presupposes historical progress beyond the institutions of the performance principle [...]. For the development of the instinct, this means regression from sexuality in the service of reproduction to sexuality in the “function of obtaining pleasure from zones of the body.” With this restoration of the primary structure of sexuality, the primacy of the genital function is broken. (EC, p. 183)<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Approaching accelerationism

Marcuse's rehashing of the drive doctrine attempted to break off with the theoretical deadlock of the older versions of critical theory. His bold projections of the world beyond the performance principle and yoke of stultifying

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<sup>3</sup> Such a reconstruction of Marcuse's “dialectics of civilization” is necessarily cursory and incomplete, I also decided not to critically discuss Marcuse's reinterpretation of Freud as well as to omit frequently raised objections to the book. Critical discussion on the theses advanced in *Eros and civilization* can be found in Kellner (1984, 193–197), Jay (1982), Mündner (1988, 104–112), Alway (1995, 71–99) and Stirk (1999).



work in conjunction with the liberation of the human creative potential were dismissed by some as a contemporizing of the Cockaigne myth and thinly veiled apology of obscurantism (Kołakowski, 1978, p. 434). However, here I am in accord with Fisher that, seen from the distance, his ideas possess a clear accelerationist undertone and evidently point at a *post-capitalist*, post-workerist future. It is worth elucidating what I actually understand by “accelerationism”. Following Mackay and Avanassian, by accelerationism I understand “a political heresy” which claims that the most radical answer for the suffering, social impasses and economic injustice caused by the performance principle and capitalism – after the “actually existing socialist” alternative fell into disrepute – is neither protest, disruption or critique, nor eager anticipation for capitalism’s self-triggered demise due to its own internal contradictions, but rather *accelerating* its “uprooting, alienating, decoding, abstractive tendencies” (Avanassian & Mackay, 2014, p. 4). Accelerationism tries to revitalize the rational universalistic and modernist agenda by intensification of progressive-liberatory tendencies *within capitalism itself* in order to “push” society into the future which capitalism promises but is *unable to deliver*. Accelerationism thus points out that although capitalism offers glimpses of the future and provides the sociotechnical infrastructure necessary for the qualitative leap, its own secular tendencies and logic of accumulation effectively impede and dash any hope of progress.

Accelerationism is a nebulous theoretical movement,<sup>4</sup> but I shall attempt to provide a short synthetic description:

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<sup>4</sup> Accelerationism has thus far created neither a unified research front nor a cohesive theoretical school. I will not elaborate here on the topic but suffice to say that in this article, by “accelerationism” I understand its most recent, “left-leaning” mutation which drew inspiration from Lyotard’s *Économie libidinale* and *Capitalisme et schizophrénie* authored by Deleuze and Guattari (I leave aside both Nick Land/CCRU’s cyber-futuristic libertarian accelerationism developed in the ’90s and its bastardized new version, “right accelerationism”, which promotes the idea of white supremacy). The most important source of texts and comments on accelerationism is a collection titled *#Accelerate*, edited by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanassian (Falmouth, Urbanomic, 2014). Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams’s *#Accelerate: Manifesto for an accelerationist politics* is widely considered the foundation text of this brand of social criticism. Their subsequent monograph, *Inventing the future*, offers a slightly attenuated and expanded version of the manifesto, although the authors decided to drop the term “accelerationism” due to its potentially misleading connotations (Srnicek & Williams, 2015, p. 192).



1. The current state of the progressive political and ideological landscape is bleak. The stagnation and demise of the utopian (future-oriented) political imagination should be linked to the triumph of neo-liberalism on the one hand and to the flourishing of “folk politics”<sup>5</sup> and “horizontalism” on the other. Horizontalism challenges the performance principle with grassroots movements and advocates an idea of “changing the world by changing social relations from below” (Srnicek & Williams, 2015, p. 30). Abandoning vertical change, i.e., the seizure of control over state and capital in favor of direct political action on the local plane (“localism”), renders progressive projects ineffective.
2. The politics of “horizontalism, nostalgia, resistance and withdrawal” (Srnicek & Williams, 2015, pp. 53 and 72) is (in the etymological sense of the word) reactionary: it represents a kind of a defensive knee-jerk reaction, incapable of challenging the political and cultural hegemony of capitalism and its latest neoliberal mutation. In order to challenge it, progressive activism needs to build an *ideological infrastructure* which would set the stage for the hegemonic takeover. It encompasses a revival of the utopian social imagery “since it is precisely the element of imagination that makes utopias essential to any process of political change” (Srnicek & Williams, 2015, p. 142).
3. The response to the secular crisis of capitalism since the end of *Les Trente Glorieuses* and oil shocks of the '70s has been the dismantling of the welfare state, the rise of financial capitalism, the privatization of public goods and services and real subsumption of life

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<sup>5</sup> By “folk politics” Srnicek and Williams understand both a certain attitude and tactical orientation, which has dominated progressive parties since the demise of the USSR. It involves “the fetishization of local spaces, immediate actions, transient gestures, and particularisms of all kinds” (Srnicek & Williams, 2015, p. 15). Folk politics attempts to “bring down the politics to human scale”; thus, rather than embracing increasing socio-technological complexity, it concentrates on opposing the “inhumanity of capitalism” and its “abstraction” by emphasizing the virtue of “immediacy” and “authenticity”. The core objection to folk politics is that it is libidinally pinned to the past (hence the preference for the local, small, organic, rustical, homely, for the already known and tangible), eschews strategic thinking and evinces a strong predilection for the “voluntarist and spontaneous”, thus resisting lasting institutionalization.



under capital (Srniczek, 2016). The casualization of labor, intensive offshoring and automation of simple repetitive labor processes have slowed down the post-2008 crisis job recovery in the West, established precarious work conditions and resulted in existential uncertainty for large swathes of the population.

4. If technological advances, the dominance of the “just-in-time-production” paradigm (Toyotization, lean management) and the increasing automation of production leads to a “surplus population”, then it should be acknowledged that there is an urgent need for a thorough transformation of the labor market, a “commoning” of collectively produced wealth and the articulation of the political demand for full automation, a reduction in the length of the working week, the provision of a basic income and the diminishment of the work ethic (Srniczek & Williams, 2015, p. 130).
5. If the process of hegemonic takeover is to take place, the struggle for the future involves “pluralizing economics, creating utopian narratives and repurposing technology” (Srniczek & Williams, 2015, p. 140). Accelerationism envisions a post-scarcity or post-work society, where dispensing with the *centrality of work in human life* and the rejuvenation of collective imagery aims at reconfiguring the very sense of what is possible (Srniczek & Williams, 2015, p. 135). The progressive movement should develop hegemony not only in the sphere of ideas and ideology but also in the sociotechnical and material infrastructure spheres, thus overcoming the lingering remnants of Heidegger-inspired neurotic technophobia.

To sum up, accelerationism rejects futile attempts at resuscitating superseded forms of progressive politics and strives towards abolishing the regime of enforced work by embracing global techno-socio-political complexity. It can thus be defined as a relentless push forward, toward a Promethean mastery of technology, leading to the radical political transformation and transgression of the boundaries between the human and the non-human. Such a project may, at first glance, seem utterly at odds with Marcuse’s famous call for the “pacification of existence” (ODM, p. 18), scattered images of a prelapsarian (pre-oedipal) idyllic past and his praise for the mythical figures of Orpheus (a symbol of non-repressive sublimation) and Narcissus (non-repressive creativity), contradistinguished to Prometheus’s hectic possessiveness. If the claim that Marcuse’s version of critical theory is



a kind of proto-accelerationist intervention can have any purchase, we need to be more specific. I will elaborate on this topic by examining to what extent Marcuse's views on technology, the future of work, politics, art and liberated aesthetic experience evince a close affinity with the accelerationist program.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Marcuse as protoaccelerationist

#### 3.1. Technology, economics and liberation from work

I have briefly and provisionally sketched the accelerationist stance on technology. When we turn to Marcuse in that regard, we usually encounter one of the most widespread misunderstandings, which consists in categorizing him as a prophet of semi-romantic anarchism who in all seriousness blatantly professes a “feudal contempt for technology” (Kołakowski, 1978, p. 416). Although one can find fragments which smack of a certain Luddite inclination, there is overwhelming evidence that Marcuse was to a much lesser extent critical of technology and science as such than Horkheimer and Adorno. His position on this topic ranges from “standard” Weber and Mumford-inspired objections to bureaucratic reification, the dominance of scientific reason and alienating inertia of a highly rationalized, technology-permeated society (objections typical for the Frankfurt School), to a much more nuanced praise of technology as a necessary prerequisite of liberation.

Marcuse maintained that the technological apparatus in an advanced industrial state became a powerful means of control in a “totally administered world” due to its subordination to capitalist rationality. Capitalist society fosters “calculable efficiency” and maximization of profit which “takes place within the private enterprise system and is geared towards the profit of the individual entrepreneur” (Kellner, 1984, p. 263). The Marxist contradiction between the possibilities attained through the unprecedented development of the means of production as a result of technological improvement on the one hand and the exploitative nature of social relations (class domination) on the other is translated into conflict between the liberatory

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<sup>6</sup> Again, I will not provide a thorough overview of the “left” branch of accelerationism nor discuss their specific practical recommendations, but rather draw attention to the major points of convergence between accelerationism and Marcuse's reformulation of critical theory.



potential of technology (which is able to reduce necessary labor time to a bare minimum) and the motive of private gain, which increases consumption through the inculcation of artificial needs, planned obsolescence and the production of waste. On the face of it, some of Marcuse's diatribes against technological reason or Bridgman's operationalism (ODM, pp. 14–15) suggest a close affinity with the proponents of the "autonomous technology" thesis, such as Ellul or Heidegger. Heidegger famously treated "technologization" as an "enframing" device, i.e., the epitome of the Western onto-theological reductive approach to being where all entities are transformed into intrinsically meaningless resources. Indeed, Marcuse occasionally wrote of technology (for example in ODM) as "the great vehicle of *reification*" (ODM, p. 172); however, he later expressed regret for his unfortunate phrasing (Kellner, 1984, p. 266). Technology simply needs to be unchained from the voracious appetite for surplus value, the vested interests of the commercial sector and the military-industrial complex: "Is it still necessary to repeat that science and technology are the great vehicles of liberation, and that it is only their use and restriction in the repressive society which makes them into vehicles of domination?" (EL, p. 12). Paradoxically, the very technification of domination could undermine its foundation (FL, p. 66); therefore, he repeatedly and staunchly denied that he was ever a technophobe. Nowhere was he more clear about it than in his conversation with Sam Keen:

I have been criticized for being against science and technology. This is utter nonsense. A decent human society can only be founded on the achievements of science and technology. The mere fact that in a free society all alienated labor must be reduced to a minimum presupposes a high degree of scientific and technical progress. The possibility of an aesthetic, joyful transformation of the environment depends upon continuing technical advance. How can you speak of a return? This vision anticipates the future, it does not yearn for the past. (Marcuse, 1971, p. 196)

It should be clear from the first part of the article that in EC, just as in accelerationism, a radical reconfiguration of existing social arrangements implicates an idea of a post-scarcity world, i.e., a conviction that due to increased productivity, material conditions are fulfilled to abolish poverty, and that, for the first time in history, abundance for all is a real possibility. Marx had already prophesized that the transition to a post-capitalist society, in conjunction with advances in automation, would allow for significant reductions



in labor, eventually reaching a point where people would have enough leisure time to pursue whatever activity they desire: “the measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labor time, but rather disposable time” (Marx, 2014, p. 65). This called for a revision of the foundational axiom of neoclassical economics. According to Robbins's famous definition, “Economics is the science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses” (Robbins, 1984, p. 16). But if primordial scarcity and lack are introduced as an initial economic premise, then it entails acknowledging the “objective necessity” of unequal distribution and acceptance of the imperative of constant growth as the only way to fight poverty. Marcuse sticks to the tenet of the primacy of exploitation and power relations in that regard, emphasizing the importance of property rights, class-based control over the means of production, the ideologically skewed distribution of goods, managerial supervision of the production process etc. Scarcity is contemporarily just an excuse which “has justified institutionalized repression” and any trace of its rationality “weakens as man's knowledge and control over nature enhances the means for fulfilling human needs with a minimum of toil” (EC, p. 91). This clearly foreshadows pre-accelerationist analyses known from *Anti-Oedipus*, where economic scarcity is artificially produced through the production of desire (lack). For Deleuze and Guattari scarcity

is never primary; production is never organized on the basis of a pre-existing need or lack (*manque*). It is lack that infiltrates itself, creates empty spaces or vacuoles, and propagates itself in accordance with the organization of an already existing organization of production. The deliberate creation of lack as a function of market economy is the art of a dominant class. This involves deliberately organizing wants and needs (*manque*) amid an abundance of production; making all of desire teeter and fall victim to the great fear of not having one's needs satisfied; and making the object dependent upon a real production that is supposedly exterior to desire (the demands of rationality), while at the same time the production of desire is categorized as fantasy and nothing but fantasy. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 28)

Capitalist economy was never a way of managing lack, but a deliberate desire-production that sustains the lack masquerading as necessity. Economics based on the “reality principle” (scarcity) could be replaced by a theory of distributive justice and welfare economics. Moreover, if enforced



labor as a necessary expenditure of energy is no longer needed, then the way to surpass alienation is not a return to “de-alienated” artisanal work, but to go through maximum alienation and bid farewell to the “ethos of work” and the deindividualized grind devoid of any libidinal charge once and for all. A shortening of the working day would “release erotic energies that would render obsolete restrictions on sexuality” (Kellner, 1984, p. 181).

The human energies which sustained the performance principle are becoming increasingly dispensable. The automatization of necessity and waste, of labor and entertainment, precludes the realization of individual potentialities in this realm. It repels libidinal cathexis. The ideology of scarcity, of the productivity of toil, domination, and renunciation, is dislodged from its instinctual as well as rational ground. The theory of alienation demonstrated the fact that man does not realize himself in his labor, that his life has become an instrument of labor, that his work and its products have assumed a form and power independent of him as an individual. But the liberation from this state seems to require, *not the arrest of alienation* [emphasis added – AK], but its consummation, not the reactivation of the repressed and productive personality but its abolition. The elimination of human potentialities from the world of (alienated) labor creates the preconditions for the elimination of labor from the world of *human potentialities* [emphasis added – AK]. (EC, p. 147)

### 3.2. Marxism, revolution and political change

Marcuse anticipates accelerationism not only in his insistence on the crucial role of science and technology in establishing a post-scarcity world. He also tried to rewrite the theory of the subject of emancipation and reconceptualize the problem of ideology as a foreclosing of the political imaginary. This necessarily implicated an engagement with Marxism. Although on numerous occasions he expressed his unwavering belief in the explanatory potential of Marx’s theory, he was nevertheless aware of its deficiencies and revised several crucial aspects. Firstly, he conclusively rejected the view that Soviet communism represented any alternative of sorts to capitalism. The bureaucratized Communist totalitarian state remained committed to the rule of relentless productivity, assertiveness and competitiveness, to the idea of developing the means of production (not through commodification, but through enforced industrialization) and to





militaristic confrontation with the West. Marcuse was also deeply disturbed by Stalinist purges, prison camps, the Soviet pact with Nazi Germany and overall suppression of any form of workers' self-management in communist countries (Kellner, 1984, p. 7; Marcuse, 1968, p. 104). The cultural and libidinal shift envisaged in EC and EL may be dubbed "socialist" only if

socialism is defined [in] its most utopian terms: [it involves], among others, the abolition of labor, the termination of the struggle for existence [...] and the liberation of human sensibility and sensitivity [...] [free society] presupposes a type of man who rejects the performance principles governing the established societies, a type of man who has rid himself of the aggressiveness and brutality that are inherent in the organization of established society. (Marcuse, 1967b, pp. 81–82)

Secondly, Marcuse's idea of "transvaluation" entails a rejection of the naïve idea of the privileged subject of emancipation, i.e., the proletariat. The smooth adaptation of the working class both to the fascist dictatorships of the 1930s and to the conditions of monopoly capitalism after WWII robbed traditional Marxian theory of its revolutionary agent (Marcuse, 1978, p. 392; FL, p. 70; Kellner, 1984, p. 303). Such an agent should be defined in much broader terms and aim at a more fundamental transformation than simply seizing political power and abolishing plutocratic elites. Thirdly, Marcuse rejected the view that political, libidinal and cultural transformation could be achieved through spontaneous militant uprising.

The road to emancipation was inextricably bound with a "long march through the institutions" and the development of "counterinstitutions", such as "counter-psychology", "counter-sociology" or "counter-education", establishing hegemonic blocks which would foster dissent and sow revolutionary ferment (CR, p. 30; see also Kellner, 1984, p. 306). Such a view was quite common among members of the New Left. Here, what is more important is that Marcuse ceased looking for a unitary revolutionary subject<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Around the time of publication of ODM and EL, Marcuse toyed with the idea that the "Great Refusal" could be initiated by an unassimilable underclass vegetating at the margins of democratic society, "the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable" (ODM, 260) or radical students. Later on he stressed that the political struggle requires not the patronizing "Marxist education" of the workers by militant minorities or radical students (it leads to the negative estrangements of both groups due



Passage to a society “without anxiety” would not be accomplished by the mythical “working class” alone, although any transformation without it is absolutely unimaginable (Marcuse, 1969, p. 196). The subject of liberation has to be universalized and it recruits from the growing number of oppressed or psychologically mutilated (a loose group which encompasses industrial laborers, tertiary sector workers, functional intelligentsia, victimized minorities etc.), who fell for the promise of personal gratification and fulfillment of an affluent society, but inevitably became disenchanting. Cultural and political change will be initiated not because of the immiseration of the growing number of unemployed, starving proletarian masses (the Marxist “determinate negation”, the revolutionary agent created by capital but nevertheless external to it), but due to the *growing frustration* of the middle classes who occupy a central position “in the creation and realization of surplus value while being separated from control of the means of production” (CR, p. 9). Capitalism itself creates the needs that brings about its transformation since its “consumerist ideologies” cannot be fully realized (Kellner, 1984, p. 294).

Similarly, accelerationism attempts to go beyond the “left melancholia” and longing for the unspecified “revolutionary act”. Following the *Communist Manifesto*, its strategy is to “accelerate” the processes *imminent to capitalism itself*, in order to prey on its dynamics, deterritorializing and decoding tendencies, and its destruction of traditional values and hierarchies etc. If capital *per se* is an embodiment of a Deleuzian deterritorializing impulse, then, as Italian Operaism was already maintaining by the 1960s, “the process of liberation can only happen by accelerating capitalist development” (Negri, 2014, p. 367). Accelerationism abandons the futile search for an outside to capitalism and rejects the belief that “revolutionary possibilities must be linked to the revival of the working class” as comical (Negri, 2014, p. 367). The task is instead to develop different strategies of “commoning”. For example, capitalism nowadays feeds off the new source of surplus value: it monetizes collectively produced information (Srnicek, 2016, p. 29).

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to the incompatibility of their political goals) but rather tactical cooperation, based on separately articulated demands. Only then could a “juncture” be created, propelling “the process of social change in which the two groups act each from its own base and in terms of its own consciousness, grievances, and goals” (RC, 40). Marcuse found the strategy of the Italian group *Sinistra Proletaria* or the French *Base-Ouvrière* at the Renault-Flin factory especially fruitful and promising in that regard.



This particular phenomenon indicates a far reaching absorption of human cognitive and affective capacities by algorithmic technology, exploited in capital's valorization process (see Terranova, 2014). Now, the point is not to abandon the new technologies of dispersed control and the exploitative production of exchange value (in the shape of networked "content-creation"), but rather "seize on the wealth of opportunities already produced by capitalism [...] in the form of hardware and software platforms" and "break the loop whereby this wealth is reabsorbed into the cycles of exchange value" (Avanassian & Mackay, 2014, p. 26; Terranova, 2014, p. 387).

A common accusation leveled at accelerationism suggests that it is a covert apology for a civilizational death drive which steamrolls any alternative to it, thus ignoring the irrationality of industrial growth and the intrinsically exploitative nature of capitalism (leading to "metabolic rift" and ecological catastrophe), something that critics in the vein of Marcuse were always acutely aware of. The term "accelerationism" proves to be problematic to some in that regard. It is claimed that it hints at accelerating the thanatotropic tendencies inherent to hyper capitalism, such as hysteric productivity fueling a consumerist frenzy, with all its devastating consequences. According to Srnicek and Williams, though, such critical opinion is thoroughly misguided since it

confuses *speed* with *acceleration* [emphasis added – AK]. We may be moving fast, but only within a strictly defined set of capitalist parameters that themselves never waver. We experience only the increasing speed of a local horizon, a simple brain-dead onrush rather than an acceleration which is also navigational, an experimental process of discovery within a universal space of possibility. It is the latter mode of acceleration which we hold as essential. (Srnicek & Williams, 2013, p. 352)

In physics, acceleration is a first order derivative of velocity and implies a qualitative modification of the hitherto linear steady trajectory. Likewise, political accelerationism rejects both the idea of the ultimate goal of history and existence of some predetermined parameters treated as undisputed desirable "facts" (such as saliency of economic growth or GDP rise at any cost, for example through an increased level of consumer or military spending, etc.) and asks for a qualitative change in the parameters themselves, for a commoning of the collectively produced abundance: capitalism can create abundance but immediately subjects it to the logic of class division



and structural (economic) violence<sup>8</sup>. Accelerationism on the other hand demands collective self-mastery. In this context, again, Marcuse's stance and accelerationist strategy, clearly coincide: public ownership of socially produced wealth should be the revolutionary starting point. The major problem now is how to accomplish libidinal uncoupling in the current ideological landscape. But how does contemporary ideology function?

### 3.3. Challenging the ideological cocoon: the revolutionary role of liberated aesthetic imagination, art and utopian thinking

Contemporary ideology no longer represents an epistemological cognitive barrier, "distorted knowledge" or "false consciousness" clandestinely functionalized to the interests of the dominant class. It rather denotes (cynical) subordination to the essentialized and naturalized "performance principle", established as the only viable variant of reality: ideology is materialized, "retreats from the superstructure [...] and becomes incorporated in the goods and services of the consumer society" (CR, p. 85). Such a form of ideology is linked to the emergence of the one-dimensional society. One-dimensionality should be understood as a form of political and cultural inertia, where the alternatives to the existing sociopolitical arrangements are relegated to the sphere of the unthinkable. Politically, it denotes a state of the maximum ontologization of ideology, a blockage of political imagination through the "closure of the universe of discourse" (semiotic neutering, the absorption or neutralization of potentially subversive contents, setting the limits of the sayable and representable). Sociologically, it marks the adaptation of the middle and lower strata of society to the conditions of monopolistic capitalism through the implanting of bogus needs and

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<sup>8</sup> Capitalism simultaneously deterritorializes and reterritorializes: it creates opportunity for abundance and the flourishing of human freedom (the modernist promise of an egalitarian, democratic and free society), but at the same time brings misery by imposing ancient-old class divisions and unequal access to all provisions (the logic of class hierarchy). Capitalism cannot make use of its own creative-destructive energies without immediately containing them by returning to what is already familiar. Accelerationism, Srnicek and Williams argue, demands "a future that is more modern – an alternative modernity that neoliberalism is inherently unable to generate. The future must be cracked open once again, unfastening our horizons towards the universal possibilities of the Outside" (Srnicek & Williams, 2013, p. 362).



wants. The accommodation results in a strict control of individual libidinal response and a widespread reluctance to the project of radical transformation. Philosophically, it refers to the systemic obsolescence to the elements which transcend the affirmative character of society. Critical thinking thrives on the constant tension between “is” and “ought”, discloses a rupture between the actualization of a given idea/concept and its essence/ideal reference (for example, between the idea of freedom and its particular – historical – realization). Dialectical philosophy grasps the possibilities inscribed in the very ontic structure of reality and projects an ideal state which has not yet materialized. Philosophical assertion is tantamount to desideratum: it is a desire, a wish, the passionate languishment for the ideal beyond the realm of oppressive mundanity. For the one-dimensional consciousness, empirical reality coincides seamlessly with what “actually exists”. The dialectical distinction between essence and appearance, between concepts and reality, has thus been permanently eliminated. The hollowed-out mandatory “happy consciousness” cherishes the collective illusion that “the real is rational and that the system delivers the goods” (ODM, p. 87). Here, Marcuse follows Gramsci: ideology *is* hegemony, i.e., institutionalized common sense. It stabilizes a politically non-neutral worldview, rendering invisible relations of dominance which take the form of a *quasi*-spontaneous instinctual (unreflected) convergence of the interests of the workers with the capitalist system as a whole. The reprogramming of a one-dimensional consciousness then requires a thorough *libidinal reorientation* or *instinctual reprogramming*.

This is exactly the role of the *arts and aesthetic imagination*, understood as a reservoir of utopian potentialities. The powerful passage from EC unambiguously reveals Marcuse's romantic stance: the Great Refusal represents “the protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom — ‘to live without anxiety.’ But this idea could be formulated without punishment only in the language of art” (EC, p. 137). In classical liberalism, freedom was understood as the non-existence of external constraints, protection from the arbitrary exercise of authority and the unauthorized interference of third parties. In Marcuse's parlance, freedom means self-determination, involving the pursuit of goals for their own sake (autotelic values), and autonomous self-mastery. People are free when they are capable of determining their own goals and needs, outside the regime of work, beyond the sphere of simulated consumer satisfaction engineered by “hidden persuaders”. This implicates that free people achieve their autonomy in



the creation of their subjective-objective universe, i.e., through their imagination, whose “products” are manifestations of freedom. Moreover, “phantasy (imagination) retains the structure and the tendencies of the psyche prior to its organization by the reality” (EC, p. 132), drawing from resources undistorted by the formation of the ego and the repressive organization of experience (the reality principle). It thus surpasses the antinomy of reality and happiness, offering full instinctual gratification. Libidinal liberation involves the fusion of the lower (sensuousness) and higher (reason) faculties of the mind, sensory receptiveness (percept) and intellectual spontaneity (concept), transgressing the false dichotomies of the “pragmatic” and the “playful”, “reality” and “mere fancy”. If the gap between the two heretofore opposed mental faculties is superseded, art becomes inseparable from life and the instinctual deadlock leading to the artificial paradise of affluent society may be abandoned: “Behind the aesthetic form lies the repressed harmony of sensuousness and reason – the eternal protest against the organization of life by the logic of domination, the critique of the performance principle” (EC, p. 133).

This function of rehabilitated sensibility and playful imagination as the autonomous and unfettered *creation of new reality* is crucial for understanding the revolutionary role of art in Marcuse’s thought. His take on art is obviously premised on Adorno’s aesthetical theory but goes in a slightly different direction. Adorno placed the ultimate value of art in its ability to challenge the totalizing logic of identity, to be a voice and a gleam of the “Otherworldly”: “Aesthetic identity seeks to aid the nonidentical, which in reality is repressed by reality’s compulsion to identity” (Adorno, 1997, p. 4). Marcuse perceived the function of true art either in the negation of the ideological appearance (*Schein*) of the “happy consciousness” of the one-dimensional society or in the expression of radical discord with the existing reality and regime of alienated work. “Art is committed to that perception of the world which alienates individuals from their functional existence and performance in society – it is committed to an emancipation of sensibility, imagination and reason” (AD, p. 9). This means that art, on the one hand, excavates repressed memories. Memory contains faded mental engrams of past joys and sufferings, historical experiences and desires which, by the mere fact of being able to be again brought to mind (thus reversing the implacable linearity of time), possess utopian if not utterly subversive potential. Presentification of the past lures us with a blissful image of a return to



“the plenitude of psychic gratification”, before the repression and division of labor. As Jay comments, it is “the very fact of memory’s ability to reverse the flow of time that makes it a utopian faculty. If there is to be a true human totality in the future, anamnestic totalization in the present is one of its prefigurations” (Jay, 1982, p. 9). Art, then, is a vehicle for utopian potentiality, a potent tool for the creation of the images of the other, which is “transhistorical inasmuch as it transcends any and every specific historical situation” (AD, p. 56). Such art searches for a “beautiful and pleasurable Form as the possible mode of existence of men and things” and could realize itself “only by remaining illusion and by creating illusions” (Marcuse, 1967a, p. 116).

On the other hand – and here, again, Marcuse’s critical theory clearly converges with accelerationism – art’s role is similar to dialectical thought in a one-dimensional society. It exposes the fractures and blocked potentialities of the human spirit (failed cathexes, a romantic mishap, a flagrant example of social injustice etc.), catalyzes and opens up new ways of experiencing reality by sublimating its conflicts. It is a necessary step in the development of imagination which transgresses the limitations imposed by the performance principle and the commodified – desublimating – character of the cultural industry. Hence, even if there is no distinct “accelerationist” reflection on art and aesthetics which would represent a well-developed and theoretically elaborated position (with the notable exception of Mark Fisher), accelerationism clearly follows Marcuse by claiming that the *wilt of futuristic orientation* which facilitated the neoliberal hegemonization of the political unconscious was directly a consequence of the withering away of the *utopian dimension of culture* and *decay of political imagination*: “[O]ne of the most pervasive and subtle aspects of hegemony is the limitations it imposes upon our collective imagination. [...] This marks a significant change from the long twentieth century, when utopian imaginaries and grandiose plans for the future flourished. Images of space flight, for instance, were constant ciphers for humanity’s desire to control its destiny” (Srnicek & Williams, 2015, p. 140). The culture of “produced entertainment” manufactures consent through a curbing and blocking of the utopian imagination.

For Fisher, neoliberal hegemony goes hand in hand with stifling the creative energy of “popular modernism”, avantgarde-modernist impulses transmitted via channels of popular culture. The subversive potential of culture and artistic expression lies in its power of the negation of the given. Art opens



up new possibilities through its formal and stylistic innovation, its ability to alienate people from their unreflecting ideological carapace and ritualized behavioral automatisms. Art's radicalism stems from formal experimentalism, from the ability to deconstruct the ideological contours of daily life and to sublimate the irreconcilable conflicts arising within the given social formation. For Marcuse, it is formal mastery, the form "by virtue of which art transcends the given reality, works in the established reality against the established reality" (EL, p. 40). For Fisher, art's revolutionary potential lies in puncturing and rupturing the ideological tissue of reality. When writing on the postpunk wave in Great Britain, Fisher emphasized the disruptive energy of the music: "The puncture would produce a portal – an escape route from the second-nature habits of everyday life into a new labyrinth of associations and connections, where politics would connect with art and theory in unexpected ways" (Fisher, 2010, p. 383). Artistic imagination produces the images of another world, interrupting the ritualistic reiteration of late-capitalist subjectivity and waging a struggle on the level of cultural-artistic representation, on the level of the nervous system. Artistic forms transcend the reality (and performance) principle and anticipate future possibilities and directions of development. The "specter of the world which could be free" always finds its first expression in culture, which creates the "images of another way of life" (Fisher, 2018, p. 755).

## Conclusion

In my opinion, Marcuse's critical theory, here interpreted as a kind of a proto-accelerationist intervention, retains much of its critical-progressive panache. I have attempted to demonstrate that Marcuse's reformulation of the drive doctrine lays the ground for both his "mature" interpretation of advanced capitalism and ways out of it, surprisingly anticipating important threads in accelerationist post-capitalist discourse. Firstly, he thinks less in terms of class revolt, more in term of an all-encompassing liberation from the hitherto dominating modes of psycho-social repression and the cult of productivity. Secondly, his theoretical edifice is predicated upon the repurposing of science and technology (the elimination of the technological *a priori* of domination) and at the same time on the universalization of the subject of emancipation, conceived in general as a liberation of the drives, emancipation from





toil and drudgery, *from* (alienated) work, not *through* work. This involves the effective surmounting of the powerful assimilating ideological mechanisms of the one-dimensional society, which enforces repressive desublimation and implicates Eros into the deadly treadmill of productivity and fetishization of growth. Lastly, in order to disconnect technology and desire from capital, any progressive post-capitalist thought has to nurture radical (transcending) consciousness, either in the form of progressive utopian thinking or art. For Marcuse, a true work of art expresses either yearning for beauty and harmony beyond this world or violent protest and denial, thus transgressing the *status quo*. For accelerationism, embracing radical utopian thinking was a way of “disconnecting” from the past in an attempt to “invent the future”. The political-libidinal component of art, culture and utopian imagination enables us to reach beyond and to encounter the Outside.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> It has to be said that the orientation towards the future is typical for accelerationism; such an obsession is shared by Marcuse to a much lesser extent. Accelerationism emphasizes its “futuristic” orientation in an attempt to radically break with the politically fruitless “compulsion to repeat”. According to that line of reasoning, any progressive politics which dares to speak its name should abandon the compulsive-regressive instinctual investment in the mythologized past – be it communist, socialist or welfarist – and embrace the fact of instinctual instability propelled by human desire. If a human being is essentially a desiring creature, destabilizing and disrupting all hitherto developed types of socio-political organization, the accelerationist gambit is to cease clinging to the remnants of the heroic past, “to leave behind the logics of failed revolts” (Fisher, 2012, p. 346) – since their programs are now libidinally disconnected from the contemporary political terrain – and risk leaping into the unknown, i.e., the future.



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