The Great Refusal: Liberation from the Facts of Life

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CMNS 857: Critical Theory

Simon Fraser University (fall, 2014)

For Al and Jane Cassidy
I: The Objective (False) Consciousness

The individual has disintegrated into a productive society that sustains itself through false consciousness. Following the rise of fascism in the mid-20th century, the Frankfurt School formed an institute to develop theories that attempt to explain why individuals became susceptible to authoritative domination. To approach the complex social problems that emerged from advanced technological society, the Frankfurt School reexamined the early work of Karl Marx, as well as the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud. This fusion of social critique, philosophy, and psychoanalysis became the tradition of critical theory. Critical theory seeks to emancipate the individual from material and ideological conditions that legitimize the process of domination. Although systems of domination develop historically and technologically, they tend to be mastered through cultural form.

Self-alienation was a primary concern for Marx. His prediction that communism would redeem humankind from the faults of capitalism was never truly realized. The Frankfurt School maintained a position that this was due to the proletariat’s inability to come to class consciousness. Although the Frankfurt school held diverse views on why the proletariat never came to class consciousness, there is a general consensus that it was a problem of cultural form and the decline of individuality in advanced technological society. This essay will draw from the Frankfurt school to examine the ways in which culture has become a means for mediating the individual’s consciousness. It will be argued that advanced technological society has redefined culture as a form, as opposed to a cultivation of values. Furthermore it will be shown that culture has become a pharmacy of false needs that provides anesthetic solutions to the individual’s unhappy consciousness - a process that Herbert Marcuse calls Repressive Desublimation.
The instrumentalization of consciousness is concealed by universal “truth.” The individual’s consciousness orients itself in relation to universal truth and finds expression in culture. Herbert Marcuse offers a historical and dialectical critique of mass culture and conformity. He is successful in developing theories of negation into what would become the great refusal; however he limits the revolutionary praxis of this concept by failing to identify the universalities that maintain the status quo. To strengthen Marcuse’s great refusal this paper will employ Peyman Vahabzadeh’s concept of ultimate referentiality. By establishing concepts of ultimacy we will then be able to use negation, not as a broad refusal of the status quo, but as a strategy for subverting particular universal “truths” that maintain an established method of values. By directing opposition at ultimate referents such as patriarchy or climate change, the established system can be destabilized and new cultural values can be realized. If liberated from abstract administration, science and technology could assist society in the realization of these new values.

The Marxist thought that influences Marcuse is rooted in Hegel’s system of phenomenology. This school of philosophy seeks to understand structures of experience. Karl Marx was the first to see the revolutionary potential of this idea. In his Economic-Philosophic manuscripts written in 1844, Marx analyzes Hegel’s system of phenomenology. After critiquing elements of Hegel’s philosophy, Marx goes on to praise Hegel for recognizing man as a historical process of self-development. He goes on to endorse Hegel’s “dialectic of negativity as [a] moving and productive principle” (Marx, 321). The dialectics of negativity would become the logic of negation that powers Marcuse’s concept of the great refusal. The great refusal is the rejection of unnecessary repression – the liberation of consciousness from the imposed facts of life.
Another important concept that Marcuse borrowed from Marx, was the idea of self-alienation – that is, an objective essence by which the individual learns to mediate his or her consciousness (Marx, 324). For Marx, the externalization of one’s consciousness becomes an objective reality that abstracts the conscious awareness of self. Although human beings have true needs such as hunger, access to these needs have become mediated through an objective process of exchange. For this reason, the individual must orient his or her social behaviour towards an objective method of self-preservation. The object of food becomes obtainable by way of his or her success in the market economy. This transcends self-alienation into a necessary form of existence. The consciousness of the individual internalizes this established fact and structures reality in accordance to universalizing principles that guide the social process. For the individual to have success in such an environment, his or her self-alienated consciousness must appeal to the ultimate referents that structure experience.

Having established self-alienation as a necessary form of existence in advanced technological society, we must now seek to grasp the social orientation of consciousness. As a particular individual in an objective society, he or she must act in accordance to assumptions that become universal. To articulate how the convergence of assumptions becomes universal “fact,” Vahabzadeh employs the term ultimate referentiality. He distinguishes this term from post-structural essentialism by stating that ultimate referentiality does not “merely identify assumptions about an essence or a ground that elevate phenomenon to the center. Rather, it also constructs and legitimates itself through assumptions about ultimacy” (Vahabzadeh, 2003; 14). This process is the individual’s involuntary consent to become subordinate to hegemonic notions of social and political progress. Progress exists on the individual level as well as the universal. The individual is socialized to pursue self-preservation, but only within the realm of ultimate
referentiality. The efficacy of the objective social system does not require the individual to develop his or her own consciousness; alternatively, the individual is rewarded for suppressing the development of consciousness to fill the objective roles of society. The progress of the individual’s development is therefore subordinate to the progress of society.

The individual’s self-alienated consciousness constructs experience in accordance to ultimate referents. As assumptions establish themselves as fact, the individual looks to ultimate referentiality to find truth in his or her being. Any radical transformation of society must first problematize the legitimacy of what seems universal. For this reason, the environmental activist will locate truth in climate change, the feminist in patriarchy, and the communist in relations of property. All of these political ideologies seek to negate the ultimate referent they view as impeding the progress of the species’ as a whole. By unconsciously complying to universal concepts, self-alienated existence is normalized. Concepts that reinforce themselves on the basis of hegemonic practice develop historically and present themselves culturally. This method of culture is not a cultivation of values, but rather powerful a priori assumptions that consolidate a form. Concepts such as patriarchy develop social tendencies that absorb the individual into its logic. These pre-existing concepts indoctrinate the individual with self-alienating concepts before he or she knows they exist, thus creating a false consciousness.

False consciousness is sustained by the happy consciousness. In One Dimensional Man, Herbert Marcuse (1964) describes the happy consciousness as “the belief that the real is rational and that the system delivers the goods” (84). This myth helps the individual rationalize the system as the best means for satisfying his or her own needs. Through this logic, the individual is susceptible to accepting society as a neutral entity that strives for the common good. As long as the system delivers the goods, the individual will not question the system. This logic tends to
form patterns of thought that repel alternatives, thus allowing ultimate referents to consolidate and become the status quo. The happy consciousness is one that is content with its self-alienation and refuses to be critical of its master – the “facts.” The happy consciousness is a slave to the facts and reduces the individual to an instrumental existence.

As the instrumental role of the individual increases, his or her individuality declines. The individual does not have infinite psychic energy. The longer he or she labours throughout the day, the less time, or energy remains for reflective leisure time. Instead, the individual revels in the opportunity to passively consume images, television, and music that do not challenge the existing assumptions of the mind. Through the anesthesia of entertainment, the individual consumes culture, rather than actively creating it. For culture to develop, a certain degree of repression is necessary. This is best explained by Sigmund Freud’s (1930) concept of *sublimation*. For the purpose of this essay, sublimation will be defined as the displacement of instinctual drives, thus allowing the individual to participate in higher psychic activities (34). Sublimation represses the drives of the individual, and allows man or woman to project self-essence into objects (such as tools), or ideas (such as religion). Civilization requires repression, but the individual longs for liberation.

A civilization becomes much more than a mass of sublimated individuals, it becomes an organized society. Culture is the transcending element that binds the masses together. Civilization represents the operational goals of society, while culture mediates the values and spiritual needs of the individual. The cultivation of higher mental activity creates a realm of discourse in which experience can be created and shared. The advanced technological society uses culture to advance its operational goals, therefore transforming culture into an objective method. As an objective method of values, culture turns the individual into an
instrument of his or her own reason. Although he or she is free to reason, it can be done only within the rationality of the system. For the individual, self-progress becomes a concept that depends on success in the market economy. Marcuse (1964) states that “progress turns reason into submission to the facts of life, and to the dynamic capability of producing more and bigger facts of the same sort of life” (11). As the individual strives for a bigger house, a better automobile, a newer smart phone, personal progress becomes measureable in relation to the commodity. Through this prism, “quality of life” becomes an association to one’s possessions. This “fact” of life turns personal progress into a marketable concept and ignites the spirit of capitalism.

Facts of life become ultimate referents for the individual's reason. Ultimate referents such as patriarchy, science, race, and nationalism are universal concepts that influence culture hegemonically. These concepts are historically produced and maintain the status quo. They all contribute to ideas that constitute the form of mass culture. When the individual is born into the world, his or her consciousness is socialized by these a priori concepts. The conditions of existence are contained within the framework of past (historical) values. The happy consciousness accepts these values as real and rational because they structure experience in a way that is successful for obtaining needs. Cultural form becomes a cathartic ideology that the happy consciousness refuses to contest.

II- The Culture Industry: A Method of Values

Culture has become entrenched in ideology. Advanced technological society has mastered the consciousness of its human instruments. The emergence of consumer culture has turned individuality into a marketable concept. Rather than merely assisting in the fulfillment of needs, mass culture seeks to create new needs. It does so by using entertainment to manufacture
a realm of utopia and pleasure that seems obtainable through the market economy. This mentality is not new; it is an idea that emerged from bourgeois enlightenment. What is new is the fusion of entertainment and culture is now available to the masses, as opposed to an elite few. Adorno and Horkheimer worry that this new form of culture is the creation of a standardized mode of individuality. To explain the standardization of identity, they provide the example of improvisation in jazz music. The improvisation of the jazz can only occur within the standards of the form. If the musician deviates from the constraints of the time signature or key, the content of the notes will be rejected by the form. In the “Dialectic of Enlightenment” Horkheimer and Adorno (1967) consider the style of syncopation – a style that places rhythmic stress on the offbeat of an arrangement. Rather than disrupting the arrangement, it is included in the form and compliments the overall sound. Adorno and Horkheimer reveal the paradox of syncopation. Although the style attempts to deviate from the norm, the musicians are still identifying “wholeheartedly with the power which beats them” (124). The style is included in the overall arrangement and becomes a tool for many. Culture is the beat that regulates individuality.

The identity of the individual represents itself as whole, but it is fragmented by consciously relating to the universal. The individuals’ tendency to conform to the power that beats him or her constitutes what Adorno and Horkheimer refer to as pseudo-individuality. Pseudo-individuality is the means by which the individual can attach him or herself to mass culture. The individual finds expression in relating his or her consciousness to the individuality of another. Through the massification of culture, locating one’s self in a universal context becomes effortless. Culture becomes a cathartic source of energy for the individual to recognize self-consciousness. For Freud (1930) “a feeling can be a source of energy only if it is itself an
expression of a strong need” (10). The oceanic feeling that is felt in a moment of catharsis is the individual aligning the self to the universal. Mass culture presents the objectification of the self as a need. The famous celebrities, actors, musicians, and politicians that permeate mass media, act as a model of success for the individual to strive toward. The individual departs from his or her self and locates identity in these cultural models. Cultural models are employed to sell an identity and manufacture consumers. Adorno and Horkheimer (1967) reveal the paradox that celebrities “come to fulfill the very individuality they destroy” (16). The culture industry recognizes the power of the individual’s sublimated need to locate a higher identity, and exploits it to create needs that are false.

The technological world has intensified the creation of false needs. The individual’s embrace of a pseudo-identity leaves him or her with a longing that can only be satisfied temporarily. Marcuse (1964) suggests that “the concept of alienation seems to become questionable when the individuals identify themselves with the existence which is imposed upon them” (11). But the system is imposed upon the false consciousness rationally. The individual absorbs the objective world into the self and becomes the ideology of mass culture. This reveals the repressive quality of reason. As opposed to being dominated by an external force, the individual learns to self-dominate. For this to be sustainable, the onslaught of false needs must never cease. The consciousness must remain happy, or it will consider itself a fraud. The culture industry advertises false needs as necessities by appealing to one’s alienated conception of self. In Adorno’s (1975) reconsideration of the culture industry, he stresses that the ideology of mass culture is so powerful that “conformity has replaced consciousness” (14). The technology of the 20th and 21st centuries has produced new mediums that have the double function of
entertainment and communication. This ensnares the individual in the enjoyment of his or her self-domination.

It is false consciousness that allows culture to manipulate the individual's happiness. False needs are the life support of false consciousness. They give the individual a feeling of euphoria that the consciousness reacts to positively. The false consciousness finds liberation in its escape from the real world. Mass media communications (and its owners) are empowered by this false sense of liberation. The technological reality of the mediated message escapes the reason of the individual, and the content of the source appears as neutral. The sense of liberation and individuality offered by advertisement, appeal to true human needs. An advertisement will make an appeal to a true need, and then present a false solution; the appeal is to a feeling and the solution is a commodity. This transforms culture into a means for controlling human emotion. If the mass population becomes politically dissatisfied, culture can manage feelings and attitudes to suppress revolt.

In part I of this essay, it was established that society is more than a collection of sublimated individuals. The increasing instrumentalization of the individual as a productive force, gives rise to the dissatisfaction of lived experience. This problem is contained by the established powers through what Marcuse (1964) calls desublimation. Desublimation gives elements of sublimated energy back to the individual to create feelings of immediate gratification. The individual's needs and consciousness become manageable. Marcuse goes on to say, “satisfaction in a way generates submission and weakens the rationality of protest” (75). The individual becomes not only comfortable in his or her self-alienation, but satisfied and content. Culture administrates the needs of the individual to suppress opposition to the status
quo. This diffuses the logic of protest and fosters a society of individuals who are complicit of their own repression.

**III: The Logic of Domination**

It has been shown that culture integrates the individual into the rationality of the system, and limits reason to established facts. Mass media has become a source of culture that has the power to promote one’s repression as liberation. Mass media presents culture as an objective reality to be consumed, as opposed to the cultivation of values that occurs through the exchange of experience. The massification of culture is the ideal form for administering an objective agenda. Information can be presented in such a way that the audience can draw a conclusion without making an effort to reflect. The audience’s thoughts or attitudes can be influenced by the form of language, thus becoming what Marcuse refers to as *habits of thought*.

Habits of thought develop from concepts of potential that are contained by reason. These concepts have universal meaning but are subject to a formal bias that develops historically. Concepts such as culture, progress, and democracy evoke a feeling that is generally agreed upon, however historical, material, and ideological conditions shape the reality of their practice. Marcuse (1964) recognizes that the reality imposed by these concepts “contribut[es] to a false order of facts.” The individual's false consciousness “become[s] embodied in the prevailing technical apparatus which in turn reproduces it” (145). Alternatives are negated by the false consciousness of the individual and the systems rationale. False consciousness locks itself into a mind frame of domination and accepts the “facts of life.”

The individual and society’s shared commitment to the abstract notion progress, confirms an objective mode of life. Technology’s ability to organize human beings and nature, gives unprecedented power to the organizer. The liberal democratic society relies on habits of thought
to maintain control of public discourse and labour power. In other words, we embody the system wholly and learn that the “price of progress is destruction” (Marcuse 1964; pg. 145). In advanced technological society, progress is a highly acclaimed value. There is no need to justify progress, because it is promoted as beneficial to the species being. If progress is to obtain a high standard of living, then rationally the order of advanced industrial society is progressive. But by considering the destruction of nature, the domination of workers, and the mutilation, the merit of this progress is challenged. Progress cannot be viewed as a concept that is cumulative. To do that, we would mistakenly have to accept every negative condition of history as a condition of today. That is not possible because values shift with every turning epoch and depend on the individual's relation to the natural and physical world.

The progress of scientific method has become a standard of progress for the technological age. Marcuse problematizes this notion of progress by pointing out that “the domination of nature has remained linked to the domination of man – a link which tends to be fatal to the universe as a whole” (166). Technological rationality organizes the individual and nature towards ends that fulfill the prophecy of progress. For the individual to be integrated into the labour process, he or she must become an instrument that is objectively administrated. It is through administration that self-alienation is rationalized, and it is through rationalization that nature, man, and consciousness are dominated.

The administration of progress is the administration of domination. The three relational categories of subordination, oppression, and domination must not be mistaken as synonymous, for they all have different metaphysical qualities. Vahabzadeh (2003) uses Laclau and Mouffe’s distinctions between these three concepts to understand the preconditions of resistance. Subordination is a relation where the uneven dynamic of power is not acknowledged,
therefore there is no antagonism. Subordination becomes a relation of oppression when the subordinate subject creates grounds of antagonism through the realization of rights. The category of domination “designates those relations of subordination that are considered to be oppressive, unjust or illegitimate from the perspective of a third (observing) subject” (Vahabzadeh 2003; page 105). It is therefore best to acknowledge domination as a systemic concept that can only be confronted through reflective experience.

The realm of discourse and rights provides tools to understand the metaphysical relations of these concepts. The divine right of the king provides a concrete example of subordination. This concept of rights applies only to the king, and therefore establishes a logical order of subordinate subjects. In contrast, the articulation of the “rights of man” negates the logic of a divine right (subordination) and demands the recognition of universal man. The creation of new rights provides man with new categorical imaginaries that complicate the logical order of affairs.

In the advanced technological society, rights are administrated by a central apparatus. In the discourse of democratic liberalism, oppression and rights are bound to the same laws and become what Vahabzadeh (2003) calls *systemic oppression*. Since the rights of the individual universally recognized by the liberal constitution, the individual becomes a third party observer of domination (109). Rights then become affirmed or denied to all subjects based on their categorical relation to the central apparatus. Domination can therefore be conceived as systemic subordination – a society that has no articulation of its disadvantage in the order of affairs.

False consciousness uses culture to cope with domination. The happy consciousness finds liberation in false needs and uses reason to repel contradictions that challenge reality. The established reality of the individual moderates itself and the culture industry reassures that reality is true. The only way to escape the logic of domination is to liberate the individual from false
consciousness. To liberate the individual from false consciousness the concepts that maintain its reality must be challenged. Individuals must challenge ultimate referents and release themselves from their own hegemonic assumptions to live the great refusal.

How it is it possible to prevent “business as usual” from absorbing the individual into the cultural form? For a societal transformation to occur, consciousness must be liberated from the established world of facts. It has been shown that mass culture has become an ideological method that absorbs or excludes any alternatives that threaten the establishment. Ideology is consumed by the individual as identity and therefore turns reason into a mechanism that can no longer distinguish between true or false. For reason to become an accurate faculty, consciousness must be liberated from its own ideology. By falsifying the concepts that maintain reality, the logical order of things can be disrupted and allow new values to be realized.

To transform society into a qualitatively different order of affairs, we must aim our critical energy at concepts of ultimacy. Ultimate referents structure experience in accordance to assumptions that restrict reflective thought. In the “Essay on Liberation,” Herbert Marcuse (1969) states that by using “new language to define and communicate new values,” we can work towards a “qualitatively different society” (33). Perhaps the vocabulary is already there.

Domination has always employed patriarchal qualities. The capitalist economic system promotes hegemonically masculine traits such as: competition, violence, and aggressiveness. It is generally accepted that these traits are inherent to human nature and progress. Values are shaped to accommodate this logic. By challenging ultimates such as patriarchy, a new realm of values could be liberated from the established reality that suppresses them.

Feminist movements seek to challenge the ultimate referent of patriarchy. Hegemonically feminine qualities such as compassion, tenderness, and nurture are
not reasoned to be successful traits in the capitalist labour market; these values do however contain the seeds for a qualitatively different society. Women have long struggled for to be accepted into positions of power; however, their success remains dependent on the ability to reproduce masculine values. To demonstrate “strong leadership” she must fulfill the historical conception of a leader and reproduce the rationality of the existing system. Regardless of gender, the leader must demonstrate that he or she is *assertive, competitive, and strong*.

The liberal feminist movement “Ban Bossy” has a mandate to bring recognition to the limitations that language discourse places on women in the workplace. The campaign points out that “when a boy asserts himself, he’s called a ‘leader.’ Yet when a little girl does the same, she risks being branded bossy” (Lean In. 2014). The campaign acknowledges the repressive nature of language discourse, then proceeds to commit to the values of a “mans” world. The result is not emancipation, but inclusion in the existing form. This preserves the legitimacy of patriarchal values. As a leader, the woman must accept existing values to be respected; they are therefore unable to change. This movement is positive for social inequality, but ineffective for the realization of new values.

**IV: The Liberation of Consciousness**

The potential of a liberated consciousness is contained within the potentialities of technology. A radical change of consciousness can be only realized through an experience that is not mutilated by objective goals. Technology has liberating features that fulfills human needs; but can also be applied repressively to create them. The liberation of consciousness depends on the liberation of technology, a neutral technology that does not shape culture toward particular ends. Marcuse (1969) claims that a “liberated consciousness would promote the development of a science and technology free to discover and realize the possibilities of things and men in the protection and gratification of life, playing with the potentialities of form and matter for the
attainment of this goal” (24). Contrary to this view, industrial capitalism has embraced science and technology to exploit the productive force of labour. To enhance the human experience, technology must shape a modality of life that fosters the autonomous development of consciousness.

The autonomous development of consciousness is a matter of administration and metaphysics. History is littered with examples of technology that has had emancipatory potential but was administrated for the goals of a central apparatus. The administration of technology prevents the human consciousness from approaching it autonomously. The popular internet forum “Reddit” provides a contemporary example of this problem. The site is divided into many sub forums where users can post topics or contribute to an existing discussion. When a comment is made by a user, other contributors may “up vote” or “down vote” the comment. If the comment receives an up vote it will move to the top of the discussion page; if it is down voted, it will sink to the bottom. This presents a problem. The up and down vote feature favours popular opinion and excludes unpopular contributions that may be valid. This tends to shape discussions toward a consensus that excludes views of opposition. Although it is a democratic value that popular opinion prevails, critical discussion is curtailed and prevents opinions from transgressing their ideological categories.

For technology to liberate the consciousness, it must not be convergent in form. In regards to Reddit, the conversation is mutilated before the reader can exercise the capacity to reason. The up vote and down vote feature of Reddit reveals a human value that prevents consciousness from evolving – the value of convenience. This liberal value embeds itself in the use of the technology. As noted by Vahabzadeh (2003), “it is through the administrative, regulative ‘management’ of the social that reductive rationalism links liberalism to technology”
Rather than allowing conflicting values to synthesize and resolve themselves, they are funneled down particular channels where the opinion is harmless. The management of content creates affirmative sub cultures that self-contain. Although new values may collimate within these sub cultures, they are unable to transcend and be realized in practice.

Science and technology are the dominant ultimate referents of advanced technological society. For consciousness to emancipate itself from rational containment, it must be free to imagine potentials beyond their operational function. When the world becomes a reality of facts, it reduces things to what is, and what is not possible – all else appears utopian. For science and technology to assist culture in the cultivation of values, the desire to dominate would have to subside. The economic goals of advanced technological society require abstract administration. Vahabzadeh (2003) borrows the concept of technological enframing from Heidegger to describe the metaphysical problem with this arrangement. He describes technological enframing as a force that “comes to impose upon us a certain modality of being” (126). Since the form of technology is administrated to us, we are forced to adapt to the arrangement of its goals. Its goals are primarily economic.

The individual’s metaphysical relationship to the world remains instrumental as long as he or she is dominated by the powers that be. Although science and technology hold the key to a free society, the door is slammed shut by the objective arrangement of things. For science and technology to provide servitude to the people, it must be removed from the context of capitalist progress. A “higher standard of living” must be re-defined to release humanity from the self-perpetuating cycle of false needs and domination. Marcuse (1969) recognizes that “in order to become vehicles of freedom, science and technology would have to change their present direction and goals; they would have to be reconstructed in accord with a new sensibility – the
demands of life instincts” (19). Technology could be harnessed to create clean energy alternatives or solve the problem of food scarcity; instead, it is employed for the wasteful goals of capital gain. Technology could be used to develop solutions to global problems, but instead we are enframed in a modality that produces waste for false needs.

The individual can only be liberated from his or her false consciousness when it is realized as such. When he or she can distinguish between needs that are instinctual and administrated, new values can be cultivated. When science and technology can assist society in the pursuit of true needs, domination will be replaced by freedom. When culture can define itself through the exchange of experience as opposed to the exchange of the commodity, consciousness will be liberated. The liberation of consciousness prepares the soil for a human experience that refuses to be mutilated by the objective goals of capital.

V: The Great Refusal

Marcuse does not offer a definition of the great refusal because he wants us to live it. Emancipation from false consciousness is the first step problematizing the ultimate referents that prevent society from realizing concealed potential. Concepts such as patriarchy, climate change, and private property provide ultimate grounds for the oppressed society to create antagonism. In his Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, Karl Marx (1843) famously said, that “to be radical is to grasp thing by the root. But for man the root is man himself” (Simon 1994; page 34). Marx understood that emancipation must begin at human consciousness, and for it be free it must be shown to be false. Politically motivated acts of revolt must take this into account. New values and methods of social organization must not emerge from utopian ideals, but through material conditions that require new modes of thought.
Occupy Wall Street is a global movement that provided conditions to live *the great refusal*. It aimed its negation at the ultimate referent of capitalism and provided a worldwide stage for critical debate. More importantly the 2011 uprising allowed creative action to reveal social potentials that were previously concealed – most notably the method of “mic check.” When the movement became a threat to the established social order, sound amplification was banned from public spaces. This ban did not discourage rallies. To amplify the voice of a speaker without amplification, the crowd unified to repeat each line. This became the “peoples’ mic” (Costanza-Chock 2012; page 381). Although technology was denied to the demonstrators, they employed its logic socially. This concretely proves that technology unconceals new streams of consciousness. Despite the state’s administration of technology, it could not prevent demonstrators from recreating its function. The liberation of technology can therefore be seen as imperative to the liberation of consciousness.

The Occupy demonstrators refused to be administrated. Technology provided a social function, as opposed to a mechanical function. This provided a new sensibility that could become a social and political force in the evolution of society. In 1969 Marcuse had already recognized this potential in what he called the *aesthetic ethos*. He described this new ethos as an emerging reality that would “translate subjective sensibility into objective form, into reality” (24). Mic check fused creativity and science together to create a realm practicality in the realm of beauty. It expressed the true needs of society – an authentic cultivation of values that is impossible to administrate. It provided a form in which the consciousness could be liberated from domination and reflective experience could prevail.

The movement was cathartic, but took root in the true needs of society. In this context, consciousness could not be manipulated by market value and could therefore develop
autonomously. It was a great refusal of capital’s material and ideological goals and its reality of facts. For a moment experience was not mutilated by objectivity and could emerge from free individuals. Although the Occupy movement eclipsed from reality, it demonstrated the potential of an ethos that refused to be instrumentalized for the ends of abstract goals.

Liberation from the facts of life begins at human consciousness. The current form of the culture industry administrates the needs of objective society, as opposed to the true needs of each individual. To be liberated from false consciousness, society must be willing to question the ultimate referents that establish the world of facts. Reason is a useful faculty, but only when it is free from the rationality of domination. For culture become a cultivation of values, the culture industry must be exposed for its inability to fulfill needs authentically. When the human consciousness can reflect and develop from within, it will be free from its servitude to the destructive progress of capital. Technology holds the key to liberating the human consciousness, but it must be liberated first.
References


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