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Reading Record

Herbert Marcuse

The Closing of the Political Universe

from *One-Dimensional Man*

Response:

Marcuse really stressed the idea that blue-collar workers are becoming instruments and slaves due to the implementation of machines in industry. He also discussed how capitalism controls society by creating needs for new things. As was discussed in the last class, this relates to today’s society as new, better, faster technologies and gadgets are created constantly, quickly making the last gadget completely “irrelevant”.

Discussion Question:

According to Marcuse, the introduction of machines to industry to take the place of workers made the blue-collar workers more machine-like. With the development of more human-like technology (e.g. Watson, Sophia the Robot, other implementations of AI) and its implementation in daily life (e.g. Amazon Alexa/Siri/Google), are all people now (becoming?) more robotic/exploited, in work and/or in existence, like Marcuse described?

Outline of Argument:

* Introduction (19-21):
  + Once separate sectors of society are homogenizing and adapting to “new society” (19)
    - Government
    - Economy
    - Education
    - Social Classes
    - Military
  + Politics: two-party system now just anti-communist party (19)
  + Unions and companies working together (19-20)
    - *Labor Looks at Labor* (1963)
  + European politics dominated by control, either completely pro- or anti-Communism (20
  + Differences between French/Italian Communist parties & Soviet Communism depend on societies (20-21)
  + Economic struggles put aside to fight against communism as cohesive unit (21)
  + Political and economic problems controlled by productivity - temporary? (21)
* Containment of Social Change (22-34):
  + Transition from capitalism to socialism keeps technology in economy but changes politics of society (22)
    - “The History of Technology as a Science and as a Branch of Learning” (1961)
  + Capitalism uses technology irrationally; socialism corrects this irrationality (22-23)
  + Capitalism has a tendency to change itself into socialism (23)
  + Comfortable life keeps people wanting to stay in capitalistic society (23-24)
  + Laborers do the hard work for little pay; others make a profit off of their blood/sweat/tears (24)
    - *Du Mode d’existence des objets techniques* (1958)
  + Technology has sped up productivity and isolated laborers (25)
    - “Workers Battle Automation” (1960)
    - *Toward the Automatic Factory* (1957)
  + Technology brought standardization to work, led to “enslavement”/poverty (25-26)
    - Charles R. Walker
  + Humans become instruments working with machines (26)
  + Xex and work join rhythms (26-27)
    - *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960)
  + Laborers wages decrease while managers/corporations increase (27)
    - *Automation and Technical Change* (1958)
    - *The Decline of the Labor Movement* (1960)
  + Reduced autonomy and freedom in laborers as technology increases (27-28)
  + Technology takes away laborer’s production and value (28-29)
    - *Arguments* (1958)
    - *Automation and Major Technical Change*
  + Technology changes attitudes of workers (positively and negatively (29-30)
    - *Automobile Workers and the American Dream* (1955)
    - *Automation and the Worker. A Study of Social Change in Power Plants* (1960)
    - Walker
  + Industry increasingly bureaucratic, laborers increasingly more like slaves/tools, machines increasingly more necessary (31-33)
    - *La Coexistence pacifique* (1958)
  + Circular dependency between military and industry (33-34)
* Prospects of Containment (34-48):
  + Capitalism has been/is able to coexist with communism despite clashing views (34)
  + Automation sets pace for production (35-36)
    - *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Oekonomie* (1953)
  + Automation jump-started productivity movement (36-37)
  + Labor opposes automation = opposes competition and progress (37)
  + Politics pushes progress of automation (37-38)
    - *Automation and Major Technological Change*
    - *White Collar* (1956)
  + Unable to compare Soviet society with capitalist society (39)
    - *Soviet Marxism* (1958)
  + “Educational Dictatorship” controls how society thinks/performs (40)
    - *The Social Contract*
  + Socialism = consciousness/liberation of people (41)
  + Transitioning from socialism to capitalism = from work to need (41)
  + Industrialization of socialism = less freedom for people (42-43)
  + Controlling people separate from laborers in Soviet society (43)
  + Soviet society socialism contradicts itself in need for class stratification (44)
  + Competition with capitalism drives survival of communism (44)
  + Power of upper class prevents full conversion to true communism/socialism (44-45)
  + Alternative to communism and capitalism (45)
  + Conditions for alternative to occur (46)
  + Less-developed countries more likely to become communist or capitalist (46-47)
  + Big changes, planned and quick, produce alternative society (47)
* The Welfare and Warfare State (48-55):
  + Standard of living contains people in the ways of a society (48)
  + Restrictions of welfare state (49)
  + Rationalize, utilize technology to keep society progressing/controlling (49)
  + Satisfaction of needs = no resistance (50)
  + All sectors have power over individuals (50)
  + Containment works from within a system/society (51)
  + Enemy changes reason/rationality (52)
  + Appearance of freedom = domination of society (52)
  + Circular need/cause in society (e.g. nuclear war) (53)
  + Pacification of capitalism/communism = global economy (53)
  + Capitalism vs. Communism realizes domination in society (55)