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Reading Record

Herbert Marcuse

The Closing of the Universe of Discourse

from *One-Dimensional Man*

Response:

I liked Marcuse’s discussions about man’s relationship to nature in the penultimate chapter. With the rapid growth of technology, we as a society have lost touch with nature and have become more concerned with how to control it, rather than coexist. I also felt that the conclusion summarized what we have discussed in class very well and wrapped up the book on a slightly hopeful note (or at least relatively hopeful for Marcuse) in discussing the societal outcasts’ potential role in ending this period of one-dimensionality.

Discussion Question:

Marcuse argues that as we have no privacy within our own homes, we are not truly free, which causes a redefinition of needs (p. 245). Though his argument was more about privacy of thought, in recent years, we have lost physical privacy to government surveillance for the price of “protecting our freedom and safety.” How have our needs been redefined in the age of government surveillance through technological gadgets?

Outline of Argument:

* Positive thinking is the opposite of critiquing/negative thinking (225)
  + Negative parts of a concept are “inevitable” (225)
  + Making negative features part of the whole doesn’t allow for changing those factors (225)
  + Positive thinking is enforced (226)
    - Car example (226)
    - National park example (226)
    - People on subway example (227)
  + Relating positive and negative elements of life does not allow for criticizing (227)
* Movement toward positive thinking changes reason to mean creating a higher standard of living (228)
* Art now means negation and reason (228)
* The difference between science, art, and philosophy is a matter of what is real and what could be real (229)
* Science can prove/disprove, but philosophy cannot (229)
* Philosophy proven true by history (230)
* Allowing technology to take over labor = more leisure time in life = less repression (231)
  + Science would govern life (231)
  + Science quantify values of society (232)
    - Example: calculating labor to satisfy needs of all people (232)
  + To be possible, science becomes political (233)
  + To be free to satisfy needs of humans, science must be free from politics (234)
* Industry can turn emotional needs into physical needs = “good” (234)
* Pacified existence = end of technology (235)
  + Don’t make technology for the sake of being new and hip (235)
  + Man loses power through technology (235)
* Technology changes nature to become more human (236)
  + Rationality changes man’s relationship to nature (237)
    - Man wants to take out suffering from nature, even though it is a natural part of life (237)
  + Hell is earth where nature = suffering (237)
  + Civilization transcends nature and brings out the best/happiest parts (238)
  + Art can be functional/rational == technology (238)
  + If society is irrational, art is rational (239)
* Art frees an object from its rational function and allows it to exist in a new way (240)
* Civilization + technology has exploited nature (240)
* Quote about how a person is different in their free time (241)
* Prosperity in industry prevents one from seeing the repression (241)
  + Change: no more overdevelopment/overproduction (242)
* Freedom from wealth is not poverty, but everyone having same means/satisfaction (242)
* Humans trying to escape difficult parts of society (243)
  + Must direct energy to what we want, not what society wants (243)
* Population control (244)
  + The world cannot care for the number of people on this planet (244)
  + Leads to the rich having the space and resources to be satisfied --> have independent thoughts (244)
* No privacy in society == really free? (245)
  + Example: without ads, would man have the same needs/desires/fears? (246)
* Repressive needs allow for sustaining “the system” = domination of society (246)
* Aesthetic still allows for freedom of expression (247)
* Imagination is turning into reality (247)
* Merging of parts of life is oxymoronic but embraced because of “imagination” and the logic of the situation (248)
* Technology reduces gap between reality and imagination (249)
* Pacified existence: imagination becomes rational (250)
* Liberate imagination from repression to express true needs/feelings (250)
* Satisfaction of needs allows for change to rational society (251)
  + Perfect society plans to meet vital needs of all people with minimum pain and suffering (252)
* Man does not recognize contradictions in society = hard to create real change (253)
* Possibilities moving forward in an industrial society (255)
* Changes in society have lead to more stratification (256)
  + People left on outskirts, in opposition to society (256)
  + Only a chance of hope of change left (257)