ONE-DIMENSIONAL MAN

Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society

by Herbert Marcuse

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1: The New Forms of Control

A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization, a token of technical progress. Indeed, what could be more rational than the suppression of individuality in the mechanization of socially necessary but painful performances; the concentration of individual enterprises in more effective, more productive corporations; the regulation of free competition among unequally equipped economic subjects; the curtailment of prerogatives and national sovereignties which impede the international organization of resources. That this technological order also involves a political and intellectual coordination may be a regrettable and yet promising development.

The rights and liberties which were such vital factors in the origins and earlier stages of industrial society yield to a higher stage of this society: they are losing their traditional rationale and content. Freedom of thought, speech, and conscience were—just as free enterprise, which they served to promote and protect—essentially critical ideas, designed to replace an obsolescent material and intellectual culture by a more productive and rational one. Once institutionalized, these rights and liberties shared the fate of the society of which they had become an integral part. The achievement cancels the premises.

To the degree to which freedom from want, the concrete substance of all freedom, is becoming a real possibility, the liberties which pertain to a state of lower productivity are losing their former content. Independence of thought, autonomy, and the right to political opposition are being deprived of their basic critical function in a society which seems increasingly capable of satisfying the needs of the individuals through the way in which it is organized. Such
a society may justly demand acceptance of its principles and institutions, and reduce the opposition to the discussion and promotion of alternative policies within the status quo. In this respect, it seems to make little difference whether the increasing satisfaction of needs is accomplished by an authoritarian or a non-authoritarian system. Under the conditions of a rising standard of living, non-conformity with the system itself appears to be socially useless, and the more so when it entails tangible economic and political disadvantages and threatens the smooth operation of the whole. Indeed, at least in so far as the necessities of life are involved, there seems to be no reason why the production and distribution of goods and services should proceed through the competitive concurrence of individual liberties.

Freedom of enterprise was from the beginning not altogether a blessing. As the liberty to work or to starve, it spelled toil, insecurity, and fear for the vast majority of the population. If the individual were no longer compelled to prove himself on the market, as a free economic subject, the disappearance of this kind of freedom would be one of the greatest achievements of civilization. The technological processes of mechanization and standardization might release individual energy into a yet uncharted realm of freedom beyond necessity. The very structure of human existence would be altered; the individual would be liberated from the world's imposing upon him alien needs and alien possibilities. The individual would be free to exert autonomy over a life that would be his own. If the productive apparatus could be organized and directed toward the satisfaction of the vital needs, its control might well be centralized; such control would not prevent individual autonomy, but render it possible.

This is a goal within the capabilities of advanced industrial civilization, the "end" of technological rationality. In actual fact, however, the contrary trend operates: the apparatus imposes its economic and political requirements for defense and expansion on labor time and free time, on the material and intellectual culture. By virtue of the way it has organized its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For "totalitarian" is not only a terroristic political coordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests. It thus precludes the emergence of an effective opposition against the whole. Not only a specific form of government or party rule makes for totalitarianism, but also a specific system of production and distribution which may well be compatible with a "pluralism" of parties, newspapers, "countervailing powers," etc.¹

Today political power asserts itself through its power over the machine process and over the technical organization of the apparatus. The government of advanced and advancing industrial societies can maintain and secure itself only when it succeeds in mobilizing, organizing, and exploiting the technical, scientific, and mechanical productivity available to industrial civilization. And this productivity mobilizes society as a whole, above and beyond any particular individual or group interests. The brute fact that the machine's physical (only physical?) power surpasses that of the individual, and of any particular group of individuals, makes the machine the most effective political instrument in any society whose basic organization is that of the machine process. But the political trend may be reversed; essentially the power of the machine is only the stored-up and projected power of man. To the extent to which the work world is conceived of as a machine and mechanized accordingly, it becomes the potential basis of a new freedom for man.

Contemporary industrial civilization demonstrates that it has reached the stage at which "the free society" can no

¹ See p. 50.
longer be adequately defined in the traditional terms of economic, political, and intellectual liberties, not because these liberties have become insignificant, but because they are too significant to be confined within the traditional forms. New modes of realization are needed, corresponding to the new capabilities of society.

Such new modes can be indicated only in negative terms because they would amount to the negation of the prevailing modes. Thus economic freedom would mean freedom from the economy—from being controlled by economic forces and relationships; freedom from the daily struggle for existence, from earning a living. Political freedom would mean liberation of the individuals from politics over which they have no effective control. Similarly, intellectual freedom would mean the restoration of individual thought now absorbed by mass communication and indoctrination, abolition of “public opinion” together with its makers. The unrealistic sound of these propositions is indicative, not of their utopian character, but of the strength of the forces which prevent their realization. The most effective and enduring form of warfare against liberation is the implanting of material and intellectual needs that perpetuate obsolete forms of the struggle for existence.

The intensity, the satisfaction and even the character of human needs, beyond the biological level, have always been preconditioned. Whether or not the possibility of doing or leaving, enjoying or destroying, possessing or rejecting something is seized as a need depends on whether or not it can be seen as desirable and necessary for the prevailing societal institutions and interests. In this sense, human needs are historical needs and, to the extent to which the society demands the repressive development of the individual, his needs themselves and their claim for satisfaction are subject to overriding critical standards.

We may distinguish both true and false needs. “False” are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice. Their satisfaction might be most gratifying to the individual, but this happiness is not a condition which has to be maintained and protected if it serves to arrest the development of the ability (his own and others) to recognize the disease of the whole and grasp the chances of curing the disease. The result then is euphoria in unhappiness. Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs.

Such needs have a societal content and function which are determined by external powers over which the individual has no control; the development and satisfaction of these needs is heteronomous. No matter how much such needs may have become the individual’s own, reproduced and fortified by the conditions of his existence; no matter how much he identifies himself with them and finds himself in their satisfaction, they continue to be what they were from the beginning—products of a society whose dominant interest demands repression.

The prevalence of repressive needs is an accomplished fact, accepted in ignorance and defeat, but a fact that must be undone in the interest of the happy individual as well as all those whose misery is the price of his satisfaction. The only needs that have an unqualified claim for satisfaction are the vital ones—nourishment, clothing, lodging at the attainable level of culture. The satisfaction of these needs is the prerequisite for the realization of all needs, of the unsublimated as well as the sublimated ones.

For any consciousness and conscience, for any experience which does not accept the prevailing societal interest as the supreme law of thought and behavior, the established universe of needs and satisfactions is a fact to be questioned
—questioned in terms of truth and falsehood. These terms are historical throughout, and their objectivity is historical. The judgment of needs and their satisfaction, under the given conditions, involves standards of priority—standards which refer to the optimal development of the individual, of all individuals, under the optimal utilization of the material and intellectual resources available to man. The resources are calculable. “Truth” and “falsehood” of needs designate objective conditions to the extent to which the universal satisfaction of vital needs and, beyond it, the progressive alleviation of toil and poverty, are universally valid standards. But as historical standards, they do not only vary according to area and stage of development, they also can be defined only in (greater or lesser) contradiction to the prevailing ones. What tribunal can possibly claim the authority of decision?

In the last analysis, the question of what are true and false needs must be answered by the individuals themselves, but only in the last analysis; that is, if and when they are free to give their own answer. As long as they are kept incapable of being autonomous, as long as they are indoctrinated and manipulated (down to their very instincts), their answer to this question cannot be taken as their own. By the same token, however, no tribunal can justly arrogate to itself the right to decide which needs should be developed and satisfied. Any such tribunal is reprehensible, although our revulsion does not do away with the question: how can the people who have been the object of effective and productive domination by themselves create the conditions of freedom?  

The more rational, productive, technical, and total the repressive administration of society becomes, the more unimaginable the means and ways by which the administered individuals might break their servitude and seize their own liberation. To be sure, to impose Reason upon an entire society is a paradoxical and scandalous idea—although one might dispute the righteousness of a society which ridicules this idea while making its own population into objects of total administration. All liberation depends on the consciousness of servitude, and the emergence of this consciousness is always hampered by the predominance of needs and satisfactions which, to a great extent, have become the individual’s own. The process always replaces one system of preconditioning by another; the optimal goal is the replacement of false needs by true ones, the abandonment of repressive satisfaction.

The distinguishing feature of advanced industrial society is its effective suffocation of those needs which demand liberation—liberation also from that which is tolerable and rewarding and comfortable—while it sustains and absorbs the destructive power and repressive function of the affluent society. Here, the social controls exact the overwhelming need for the production and consumption of waste; the need for stupefying work where it is no longer a real necessity; the need for modes of relaxation which soothe and prolong this stupefaction; the need for maintaining such deceptive liberties as free competition at administered prices, a free press which censors itself, free choice between brands and gadgets.

Under the rule of a repressive whole, liberty can be made into a powerful instrument of domination. The range of choice open to the individual is not the decisive factor in determining the degree of human freedom, but what can be chosen and what is chosen by the individual. The criterion for free choice can never be an absolute one, but neither is it entirely relative. Free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves. Free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these
goods and services sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear—that is, if they sustain alienation. And the spontaneous reproduction of superimposed needs by the individual does not establish autonomy; it only testifies to the efficacy of the controls.

Our insistence on the depth and efficacy of these controls is open to the objection that we overrate greatly the indoctrinating power of the “media,” and that by themselves the people would feel and satisfy the needs which are now imposed upon them. The objection misses the point. The preconditioning does not start with the mass production of radio and television and with the centralization of their control. The people enter this stage as preconditioned receptacles of long standing; the decisive difference is in the flattening out of the contrast (or conflict) between the given and the possible, between the satisfied and the unsatisfied needs. Here, the so-called equalization of class distinctions reveals its ideological function. If the worker and his boss enjoy the same television program and visit the same resort places, if the typist is as attractively made up as the daughter of her employer, if the Negro owns a Cadillac, if they all read the same newspaper, then this assimilation indicates not the disappearance of classes, but the extent to which the needs and satisfactions that serve the preservation of the Establishment are shared by the underlying population.

Indeed, in the most highly developed areas of contemporary society, the transplantation of social into individual needs is so effective that the difference between them seems to be purely theoretical. Can one really distinguish between the mass media as instruments of information and entertainment, and as agents of manipulation and indoctrination? Between the automobile as nuisance and as convenience? Between the horrors and the comforts of functional architecture? Between the work for national defense and the work for corporate gain? Between the private pleasure and the commercial and political utility involved in increasing the birth rate?

We are again confronted with one of the most vexing aspects of advanced industrial civilization: the rational character of its irrationality. Its productivity and efficiency, its capacity to increase and spread comfort, to turn waste into need, and destruction into construction, the extent to which this civilization transforms the object world into an extension of man’s mind and body makes the very notion of alienation questionable. The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced.

The prevailing forms of social control are technological in a new sense. To be sure, the technical structure and efficacy of the productive and destructive apparatus has been a major instrumentality for subjecting the population to the established social division of labor throughout the modern period. Moreover, such integration has always been accompanied by more obvious forms of compulsion: loss of livelihood, the administration of justice, the police, the armed forces. It still is. But in the contemporary period, the technological controls appear to be the very embodiment of Reason for the benefit of all social groups and interests—to such an extent that all contradiction seems irrational and all counteraction impossible.

No wonder then that, in the most advanced areas of this civilization, the social controls have been introjected to the point where even individual protest is affected at its roots. The intellectual and emotional refusal “to go along” appears autistic and impotent. This is the socio-psychological aspect
of the political event that marks the contemporary period: the passing of the historical forces which, at the preceding stage of industrial society, seemed to represent the possibility of new forms of existence.

But the term "introjection" perhaps no longer describes the way in which the individual by himself reproduces and perpetuates the external controls exercised by his society. Introjection suggests a variety of relatively spontaneous processes by which a Self (Ego) transposes the "outer" into the "inner." Thus introjection implies the existence of an inner dimension distinguished from and even antagonistic to the external exigencies—an individual consciousness and an individual unconscious apart from public opinion and behavior. The idea of "inner freedom" here has its reality: it designates the private space in which man may become and remain "himself."

Today this private space has been invaded and whittled down by technological reality. Mass production and mass distribution claim the entire individual, and industrial psychology has long since ceased to be confined to the factory. The manifold processes of introjection seem to be ossified in almost mechanical reactions. The result is, not adjustment but mimesis: an immediate identification of the individual with his society and, through it, with the society as a whole.

This immediate, automatic identification (which may have been characteristic of primitive forms of association) reappears in high industrial civilization; its new "immediacy," however, is the product of a sophisticated, scientific management and organization. In this process, the "inner" dimension of the mind in which opposition to the status quo can take root is whittled down. The loss of this dimension, in

which the power of negative thinking—the critical power of Reason—is at home, is the ideological counterpart to the very material process in which advanced industrial society silences and reconciles the opposition. The impact of 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. The efficiency of the system blunts the individuals' recognition that it contains no facts which do not communicate the repressive power of the whole. If the individuals find themselves in the things which shape their life, they do so, not by giving, but by accepting the law of things—not the law of physics but the law of their society.

I have just suggested that the concept of alienation seems to become questionable when the individuals identify themselves with the existence which is imposed upon them and have in it their own development and satisfaction. This identification is not illusion but reality. However, the reality constitutes a more progressive stage of alienation. The latter has become entirely objective; the subject which is alienated is swallowed up by its alienated existence. There is only one dimension, and it is everywhere and in all forms. The achievements of progress defy ideological indictment as well as justification; before their tribunal, the "false consciousness" of their rationality becomes the true consciousness.

This absorption of ideology into reality does not, however, signify the "end of ideology." On the contrary, in a specific sense advanced industrial culture is more ideological than its predecessor, insomuch as today the ideology is in the process of production itself. In a provocative form, this proposition reveals the political aspects of the prevailing technological rationality. The productive apparatus and the

3. The change in the function of the family here plays a decisive role; its "socializing" functions are increasingly taken over by outside groups and media. See my Eros and Civilization (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), p. 98 ff.

goods and services which it produces "sell" or impose the social system as a whole. The means of mass transportation and communication, the commodities of lodging, food, and clothing, the irresistible output of the entertainment and information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and, through the latter, to the whole. The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood. And as these beneficial products become available to more individuals in more social classes, the indoctrination they carry ceases to be publicity; it becomes a way of life. It is a good way of life—much better than before—and as a good way of life, it militates against qualitative change. Thus emerges a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behavior in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe. They are redefined by the rationality of the given system and of its quantitative extension.

The trend may be related to a development in scientific method: operationalism in the physical, behaviorism in the social sciences. The common feature is a total empiricism in the treatment of concepts; their meaning is restricted to the representation of particular operations and behavior. The operational point of view is well illustrated by P. W. Bridgman's analysis of the concept of length:

5. P. W. Bridgman, *The Logic of Modern Physics* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), p. 8. The operational doctrine has since been refined and qualified. Bridgman himself has extended the concept of "operation" to include the "paper-and-pencil" operations of the theorist (in Philipp Frank, *The Validation of Scientific Theories* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1954], Chap. II). The main impetus remains the same: it is "desirable" that the paper-and-pencil operations "be capable of eventual contact, although perhaps indirectly, with instrumental operations."

We evidently know what we mean by length if we can tell what the length of any and every object is, and for the physicist nothing more is required. To find the length of an object, we have to perform certain physical operations. The concept of length is therefore fixed when the operations by which length is measured are fixed: that is, the concept of length involves as much and nothing more than the set of operations by which length is determined. In general, we mean by any concept nothing more than a set of operations; the concept is synonymous with the corresponding set of operations.

Bridgman has seen the wide implications of this mode of thought for the society at large:

To adopt the operational point of view involves much more than a mere restriction of the sense in which we understand 'concept,' but means a far-reaching change in all our habits of thought, in that we shall no longer permit ourselves to use as tools in our thinking concepts of which we cannot give an adequate account in terms of operations.

Bridgman's prediction has come true. The new mode of thought is today the predominant tendency in philosophy, psychology, sociology, and other fields. Many of the most seriously troublesome concepts are being "eliminated" by showing that no adequate account of them in terms of operations or behavior can be given. The radical empiricist onslaught (I shall subsequently, in chapters VII and VIII, examine its claim to be empiricist) thus provides the methodological justification for the debunking of the mind by the intellectuals—a positivism which, in its denial of the transcending elements of Reason, forms the academic counterpart of the socially required behavior.

Outside the academic establishment, the "far-reaching change in all our habits of thought" is more serious. It serves to coordinate ideas and goals with those exacted by the

prevailing system, to enclose them in the system, and to repel those which are irreconcilable with the system. The reign of such a one-dimensional reality does not mean that materialism rules, and that the spiritual, metaphysical, and bohemian occupations are petering out. On the contrary, there is a great deal of “Worship together this week.” “Why not try God,” Zen, existentialism, and beat ways of life, etc. But such modes of protest and transcendence are no longer contradictory to the status quo and no longer negative. They are rather the ceremonial part of practical behaviorism, its harmless negation, and are quickly digested by the status quo as part of its healthy diet.

One-dimensional thought is systematically promoted by the makers of politics and their purveyors of mass information. Their universe of discourse is populated by self-validating hypotheses which, incessantly and monopolistically repeated, become hypnotic definitions or dictations. For example, “free” are the institutions which operate (and are operated on) in the countries of the Free World; other transcending modes of freedom are by definition either anarchism, communism, or propaganda. “Socialistic” are all encroachments on private enterprises not undertaken by private enterprise itself (or by government contracts), such as universal and comprehensive health insurance, or the protection of nature from all too sweeping commercialization, or the establishment of public services which may hurt private profit. This totalitarian logic of accomplished facts has its Eastern counterpart. There, freedom is the way of life instituted by a communist regime, and all other transcending modes of freedom are either capitalist, or revisionist, or leftist sectarianism. In both camps, non-operational ideas are non-behavioral and subversive. The movement of thought is stopped at barriers which appear as the limits of Reason itself.

Such limitation of thought is certainly not new. Ascending modern rationalism, in its speculative as well as empirical form, shows a striking contrast between extreme critical radicalism in scientific and philosophic method on the one hand, and an uncritical quietism in the attitude toward established and functioning social institutions. Thus Descartes’ ego cogitans was to leave the “great public bodies” untouched, and Hobbes held that “the present ought always to be preferred, maintained, and accounted best.” Kant agreed with Locke in justifying revolution if and when it has succeeded in organizing the whole and in preventing subversion.

However, these accommodating concepts of Reason were always contradicted by the evident misery and injustice of the “great public bodies” and the effective, more or less conscious rebellion against them. Societal conditions existed which provoked and permitted real dissociation from the established state of affairs; a private as well as political dimension was present in which dissociation could develop into effective opposition, testing its strength and the validity of its objectives.

With the gradual closing of this dimension by the society, the self-limitation of thought assumes a larger significance. The interrelation between scientific-philosophical and societal processes, between theoretical and practical Reason, asserts itself “behind the back” of the scientists and philosophers. The society bars a whole type of oppositional operations and behavior; consequently, the concepts pertaining to them are rendered illusory or meaningless. Historical transcendence appears as metaphysical transcendence, not acceptable to science and scientific thought. The operational and behavioral point of view, practiced as a “habit of thought” at large, becomes the view of the established universe of discourse and action, needs and aspirations. The “cunning of Reason” works, as it so often did, in
the interest of the powers that be. The insistence on operational and behavioral concepts turns against the efforts to free thought and behavior from the given reality and for the suppressed alternatives. Theoretical and practical Reason, academic and social behaviorism meet on common ground: that of an advanced society which makes scientific and technical progress into an instrument of domination.

“Progress” is not a neutral term; it moves toward specific ends, and these ends are defined by the possibilities of ameliorating the human condition. Advanced industrial society is approaching the stage where continued progress would demand the radical subversion of the prevailing direction and organization of progress. This stage would be reached when material production (including the necessary services) becomes automated to the extent that all vital needs can be satisfied while necessary labor time is reduced to marginal time. From this point on, technical progress would transcend the realm of necessity, where it served as the instrument of domination and exploitation which thereby limited its rationality; technology would become subject to the free play of faculties in the struggle for the pacification of nature and of society.

Such a state is envisioned in Marx’s notion of the “abolition of labor.” The term “pacification of existence” seems better suited to designate the historical alternative of a world which—through an international conflict which transforms and suspends the contradictions within the established societies—advances on the brink of a global war. “Pacification of existence” means the development of man’s struggle with man and with nature, under conditions where the competing needs, desires, and aspirations are no longer organized by vested interests in domination and scarcity—an organization which perpetuates the destructive forms of this struggle.

Today’s fight against this historical alternative finds a firm mass basis in the underlying population, and finds its ideology in the rigid orientation of thought and behavior to the given universe of facts. Validated by the accomplishments of science and technology, justified by its growing productivity, the status quo defies all transcendence. Faced with the possibility of pacification on the grounds of its technical and intellectual achievements, the mature industrial society closes itself against this alternative. Operationalism, in theory and practice, becomes the theory and practice of containment. Underneath its obvious dynamics, this society is a thoroughly static system of life: self-propelling in its oppressive productivity and in its beneficial coordination. Containment of technical progress goes hand in hand with its growth in the established direction. In spite of the political fetters imposed by the status quo, the more technology appears capable of creating the conditions for pacification, the more are the minds and bodies of man organized against this alternative.

The most advanced areas of industrial society exhibit throughout these two features: a trend toward consummation of technological rationality, and intensive efforts to contain this trend within the established institutions. Here is the internal contradiction of this civilization: the irrational element in its rationality. It is the token of its achievements. The industrial society which makes technology and science its own is organized for the ever-more-effective domination of man and nature, for the ever-more-effective utilization of its resources. It becomes irrational when the success of these efforts opens new dimensions of human realization. Organization for peace is different from organization for war; the institutions which served the struggle for existence cannot serve the pacification of existence. Life as an end is qualitatively different from life as a means.
Such a qualitatively new mode of existence can never be envisaged as the mere by-product of economic and political changes, as the more or less spontaneous effect of the new institutions which constitute the necessary prerequisite. Qualitative change also involves a change in the technical basis on which this society rests—one which sustains the economic and political institutions through which the "second nature" of man as an aggressive object of administration is stabilized. The techniques of industrialization are political techniques; as such, they prejudge the possibilities of Reason and Freedom.

To be sure, labor must precede the reduction of labor, and industrialization must precede the development of human needs and satisfactions. But as all freedom depends on the conquest of alien necessity, the realization of freedom depends on the techniques of this conquest. The highest productivity of labor can be used for the perpetuation of labor, and the most efficient industrialization can serve the restriction and manipulation of needs.

When this point is reached, domination—in the guise of affluence and liberty—extends to all spheres of private and public existence, integrates all authentic opposition, absorbs all alternatives. Technological rationality reveals its political character as it becomes the great vehicle of better domination, creating a truly totalitarian universe in which society and nature, mind and body are kept in a state of permanent mobilization for the defense of this universe.
they arrive at a false concreteness—a concreteness isolated from the conditions which constitute its reality. In this context, the operational treatment of the concept assumes a political function. The individual and his behavior are analyzed in a therapeutic sense—adjustment to his society. Thought and expression, theory and practice are to be brought in line with the facts of his existence without leaving room for the conceptual critique of these facts.

The therapeutic character of the operational concept shows forth most clearly where conceptual thought is methodically placed into the service of exploring and improving the existing social conditions, within the framework of the existing societal institutions—in industrial sociology, motivation research, marketing and public opinion studies.

If the given form of society is and remains the ultimate frame of reference for theory and practice, there is nothing wrong with this sort of sociology and psychology. It is more human and more productive to have good labor-management relations than bad ones, to have pleasant rather than unpleasant working conditions, to have harmony instead of conflict between the desires of the customers and the needs of business and politics.

But the rationality of this kind of social science appears in a different light if the given society, while remaining the frame of reference, becomes the object of a critical theory which aims at the very structure of this society, present in all particular facts and conditions and determining their place and their function. Then their ideological and political character becomes apparent, and the elaboration of adequately cognitive concepts demands going beyond the fallacious concreteness of positivist empiricism. The therapeutic and operational concept becomes false to the extent to which it insulates and atomizes the facts, stabilizes them within the repressive whole, and accepts the terms of this whole as

The "excess" of meaning over and above the operational concept illuminates the limited and even deceptive form in which the facts are allowed to be experienced. Therefore the tension, the discrepancy, the conflict between the concept and the immediate fact—the thing concrete; between the word that refers to the concept and that which refers to the things. Therefore the notion of the "reality of the universal." Therefore also the uncritical, accommodating character of those modes of thought which treat concepts as mental devices and translate universal concepts into terms with particular, objective referents.

Where these reduced concepts govern the analysis of the human reality, individual or social, mental or material,
the terms of the analysis. The methodological translation of the universal into the operational concept then becomes repressive reduction of thought.  

I shall take as an example a "classic" of industrial sociology: the study of labor relations in the Hawthorne Works of the Western Electric Company.  

It is an old study, undertaken about a quarter of a century ago, and methods have since been much refined. But in my opinion, their substance and function have remained the same. Moreover, this mode of thought has since not only spread into other branches of social science and into philosophy, but it has also helped to shape the human subjects with whom it is concerned. The operational concepts terminate in methods of improved social control: they become part of the science of management, Department of Human Relations. In Labor Looks At Labor are these words of an automobile worker:

The managements "couldn't stop us on the picket line; they couldn't stop us by straight-arm tactics, and so they have been studying 'human relations' in the economic, social, and political fields to find out how to stop unions."

In the theory of functionalism, the therapeutic and ideological character of the analysis does not appear; it is obscured by the abstract generality of the concepts ("system," "part," "unit," "item," "multiple consequences," "function"). They are in principle applicable to whatever "system" the sociologist chooses as object of his analysis—from the smallest group to society as such. Functional analysis is enclosed in the selected system which itself is not subject to a critical analysis transcending the boundaries of the system toward the historical continuum, in which its functions and dysfunctions become what they are. Functional theory thus displays the fallacy of misplaced abstractness. The generality of its concepts is attained by abstracting from the very qualities which make the system an historical one and which give critical-transcendent meaning to its functions and dysfunctions.


27. In investigating the workers' complaints about working conditions and wages, the researchers hit upon the fact that most of these complaints were formulated in statements which contained "vague, indefinite terms," lacked the "objective reference" to "standards which are generally accepted," and had characteristics "essentially different from the properties generally associated with common facts."  

In other words, the complaints were formulated in such general statements as "the washrooms are unsanitary," "the job is dangerous," "rates are too low."

Guided by the principle of operational thinking, the researchers set out to translate or reformulate these statements in such a manner that their vague generality could be reduced to particular referents, terms designating the particular situation in which the complaint originated and thus picturing "accurately the conditions in the company." The general form was dissolved into statements identifying the particular operations and conditions from which the complaint was derived, and the complaint was taken care of by changing these particular operations and conditions.

For example, the statement "the washrooms are unsanitary" was translated into "on such and such occasion I went into this washroom, and the washbowl had some dirt in it." Inquiries then ascertained that this was "largely due to the carelessness of some employees," a campaign against throwing papers, spitting on the floor, and similar practices was instituted, and an attendant was assigned to constant duty in the washrooms. "It was in this way that many of the complaints were re-interpreted and used to effect improvements."

Another example: a worker B makes the general statement that the piece rates on his job are too low. The inter-

29. Ibid., p. 256.
view reveals that "his wife is in the hospital and that he is worried about the doctor's bills he has incurred. In this case the latent content of the complaint consists of the fact that B's present earnings, due to his wife's illness, are insufficient to meet his current financial obligations." 30

Such translation changes significantly the meaning of the actual proposition. The untranslated statement formulates a general condition in its generality ("wages are too low"). It goes beyond the particular condition in the particular factory and beyond the worker's particular situation. In this generality, and only in this generality, the statement expresses a sweeping indictment which takes the particular case as a manifestation of a universal state of affairs, and insinuates that the latter might not be changed by the improvement of the former.

Thus the untranslated statement established a concrete relation between the particular case and the whole of which it is a case—and this whole includes the conditions outside the respective job, outside the respective plant, outside the respective personal situation. This whole is eliminated in the translation, and it is this operation which makes the cure possible. The worker may not be aware of it, and for him his complaint may indeed have that particular and personal meaning which the translation brings out as its "latent content." But then the language he uses asserts its objective validity against his consciousness—it expresses conditions that are, although they are not "for him." The concreteness of the particular case which the translation achieves is the result of a series of abstractions from its real concreteness, which is in the universal character of the case.

The translation relates the general statement to the personal experience of the worker who makes it, but stops at the point where the individual worker would experience himself as "the worker," and where his job would appear as "the job" of the working class. Is it necessary to point out that, in his translations, the operational researcher merely follows the process of reality, and probably even the worker's own translations? The arrested experience is not his doing, and his function is not to think in terms of a critical theory but to train supervisors "in more human and effective methods of dealing with their workers" 31 (only the term "human" seems non-operational and wanting of analysis).

But as this managerial mode of thought and research spreads into other dimensions of the intellectual effort, the services which it renders become increasingly inseparable from its scientific validity. In this context, functionalization has a truly therapeutic effect. Once the personal discontent is isolated from the general unhappiness, once the universal concepts which militate against functionalization are dissolved into particular referents, the case becomes a treatable and tractable incident.

To be sure, the case remains incident of a universal—no mode of thought can dispense with universals—but of a genus very different from that meant in the untranslated statement. The worker B, once his medical bills have been taken care of, will recognize that, generally speaking, wages are not too low, and that they were a hardship only in his individual situation (which may be similar to other individual situations). His case has been subsumed under another genus—that of personal hardship cases. He is no longer a "worker" or "employee" (member of a class), but the worker or employee B in the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company.

The authors of Management and the Worker were well aware of this implication. They say that one of the fundamental functions to be performed in an industrial organiza-

30. Ibid., p. 267.

31. Loc. cit., p. VIII.
tion is “the specific function of personnel work,” and this function requires that, in dealing with employer-employee relations, one must be “thinking of what is on some particular employee’s mind in terms of a worker who has had a particular personal history,” or “in terms of an employee whose job is in some particular place in the factory which brings him into association with particular persons and groups of people . . . .” In contrast, the authors reject, as incompatible with the “specific function of personnel work,” an attitude addressing itself to the “average” or “typical” employee or “what is on the worker’s mind in general.”

We may summarize these examples by contrasting the original statements with their translation into the functional form. We take the statements in both forms at their face value, leaving aside the problem of their verification.

1) “Wages are too low.” The subject of the proposition is “wages,” not the particular remuneration of a particular worker on a particular job. The man who makes the statement might only think of his individual experience but, in the form he gives his statement, he transcends this individual experience. The predicate “too low” is a relational adjective, requiring a referent which is not designated in the proposition—too low for whom or for what? This referent might again be the individual who makes the statement, or his co-workers on the job, but the general noun (wages) carries the entire movement of thought expressed by the proposition and makes the other propositional elements share the general character. The referent remains indeterminate—“too low, in general,” or “too low for everyone who is a wage-earner like the speaker.” The proposition is abstract. It refers to universal conditions for which no particular case can be substituted; its meaning is “transitive” as against any indivi-

But they also testify to the ambivalent rationality of progress, which is satisfying in its repressive power, and repressive in its satisfactions.

The elimination of transitive meaning has remained a feature of empirical sociology. It characterizes even a large number of studies which are not designed to fulfill a therapeutic function in some particular interest. Result: once the "unrealistic" excess of meaning is abolished, the investigation is locked within the vast confine in which the established society validates and invalidates propositions. By virtue of its methodology, this empiricism is ideological.
The tolerance of positive thinking is enforced tolerance—enforced not by any terroristic agency but by the overwhelming, anonymous power and efficiency of the technological society. As such it permeates the general consciousness—and the consciousness of the critic. The absorption of the negative by the positive is validated in the daily experience, which obfuscates the distinction between rational appearance and irrational reality. Here are some banal examples of this harmonization:

(1) I ride in a new automobile. I experience its beauty, shininess, power, convenience—but then I become aware of the fact that in a relatively short time it will deteriorate and need repair; that its beauty and surface are cheap, its power unnecessary, its size idiotic; and that I will not find a parking place. I come to think of my car as a product of one of the Big Three automobile corporations. The latter determine the appearance of my car and make its beauty as well as its cheapness, its power as well as its shakiness, its working as well as its obsolescence. In a way, I feel cheated. I believe that the car is not what it could be, that better cars could be made for less money. But the other guy has to live, too. Wages and taxes are too high; turnover is necessary; we have it much better than before. The tension between appearance and reality melts away and both merge in one rather pleasant feeling.

(2) I take a walk in the country. Everything is as it should be: Nature at its best. Birds, sun, soft grass, a view through the trees of the mountains; nobody around, no radio, no smell of gasoline. Then the path turns and ends on the highway. I am back among the billboards, service stations, motels, and roadhouses. I was in a National Park, and I now know that this was not reality. It was a “reservation,” something that is being preserved like a species dying out. If it were not for the government, the billboards, hot dog stands, and motels would long since have invaded that piece of Nature. I am grateful to the government; we have it much better than before . . .

(3) The subway during evening rush hour. What I see of the people are tired faces and limbs, hatred and anger. I feel someone might at any moment draw a knife—just so. They read, or rather they are soaked in their newspaper or magazine or paperback. And yet, a couple of hours later, the same people, deodorized, washed, dressed-up or down, may be happy and tender, really smile, and forget (or remember). But most of them will probably have some awful togetherness or aloneness at home.

These examples may illustrate the happy marriage of the positive and the negative—the objective ambiguity which adheres to the data of experience. It is objective ambiguity because the shift in my sensations and reflections responds to the manner in which the experienced facts are actually interrelated. But this interrelation, if comprehended, shatters the harmonizing consciousness and its false realism. Critical thought strives to define the irrational character of the established rationality (which becomes increasingly obvious) and to define the tendencies which cause this rationality to generate its own transformation. "Its own" because, as historical totality, it has developed forces and capabilities which themselves become projects beyond the established totality. They are possibilities of the advancing technological rationality and, as such, they involve the whole of society. The technological transformation is at the same time political transformation, but the political change would turn into qualitative social change only to the degree to which it would alter the direction of technical progress—that is, develop a new technology. For the established technology has become an instrument of destructive politics.

Such qualitative change would be transition to a higher stage of civilization if technics were designed and utilized for the pacification of the struggle for existence. In order to indicate the disturbing implications of this statement, I submit that such a new direction of technical progress would
be the catastrophe of the established direction, not merely the quantitative evolution of the prevailing (scientific and technological) rationality but rather its catastrophic transformation, the emergence of a new idea of Reason, theoretical and practical.

The new idea of Reason is expressed in Whitehead's proposition: "The function of Reason is to promote the art of life." 1 In view of this end, Reason is the "direction of the attack on the environment" which derives from the "threelfold urge: (1) to live, (2) to live well, (3) to live better." 2

Whitehead's propositions seem to describe the actual development of Reason as well as its failure. Or rather they seem to suggest that Reason is still to be discovered, recognized, and realized, for hitherto the historical function of Reason has also been to repress and even destroy the urge to live, to live well, and to live better—or to postpone and put an exorbitantly high price on the fulfillment of this urge.

In Whitehead's definition of the function of Reason, the term "art" connotes the element of determinate negation. Reason, in its application to society, has thus far been opposed to art, while art was granted the privilege of being rather irrational—not subject to scientific, technological, and operational Reason. The rationality of domination has separated the Reason of science and the Reason of art, or, it has falsified the Reason of art by integrating art into the universe of domination. It was a separation because, from the beginning, science contained the aesthetic Reason, the free play and even the folly of imagination, the fantasy of transformation; science indulged in the rationalization of possibilities. However, this free play retained the commitment to the prevailing unfreedom in which it was born and from which it abstracted; the possibilities with which science played were also those of liberation—of a higher truth.

2. Ibid., p. 8.

Here is the original link (within the universe of domination and scarcity) between science, art, and philosophy. It is the consciousness of the discrepancy between the real and the possible, between the apparent and the authentic truth, and the effort to comprehend and to master this discrepancy. One of the primary forms in which this discrepancy found expression was the distinction between gods and men, finiteness and infinity, change and permanence. 3 Something of this mythological interrelation between the real and the possible survived in scientific thought, and it continued to be directed toward a more rational and true reality. Mathematics was held to be real and "good" in the same sense as Plato's metaphysical Ideas. How then did the development of the former become science, while that of the latter remained metaphysics?

The most obvious answer is that, to a great extent, the scientific abstractions entered and proved their truth in the actual conquest and transformation of nature, while the philosophic abstractions did not—and could not. For the conquest and transformation of nature occurred within a law and order of life which philosophy transcended, subordinating it to the "good life" of a different law and order. And this other order, which presupposed a high degree of freedom from toil, ignorance, and poverty, was unreal, at the origins of philosophic thought and throughout its development, while scientific thought continued to be applicable to an increasingly powerful and universal reality. The final philosophic concepts remained indeed metaphysical; they were not and could not be verified in terms of the established universe of discourse and action.

But if this is the situation, then the case of metaphysics, and especially of the meaningfulness and truth of metaphysical propositions, is a historical case. That is, historical rather than purely epistemological conditions determine the truth,
the cognitive value of such propositions. Like all propositions that claim truth, they must be verifiable; they must stay within the universe of possible experience. This universe is never co-extensive with the established one but extends to the limits of the world which can be created by transforming the established one, with the means which the latter has provided or withheld. The range of verifiability in this sense grows in the course of history. Thus, the speculations about the Good Life, the Good Society, Permanent Peace obtain an increasingly realistic content; on technological grounds, the metaphysical tends to become physical.

Moreover, if the truth of metaphysical propositions is determined by their historical content (i.e., by the degree to which they define historical possibilities), then the relation between metaphysics and science is strictly historical. In our own culture, at least, that part of Saint-Simon's Law of the Three Stages is still taken for granted which stipulates that the metaphysical precedes the scientific stage of civilization. But is this sequence a final one? Or does the scientific transformation of the world contain its own metaphysical transcendence?

At the advanced stage of industrial civilization, scientific rationality, translated into political power, appears to be the decisive factor in the development of historical alternatives. The question then arises: does this power tend toward its own negation—that is, toward the promotion of the "art of life"? Within the established societies, the continued application of scientific rationality would have reached a terminal point with the mechanization of all socially necessary but individually repressive labor ("socially necessary" here includes all performances which can be exercised more effectively by machines, even if these performances produce luxuries and waste rather than necessities). But this stage would also be the end and limit of the scientific rationality in its established structure and direction. Further progress would mean the break, the turn of quantity into quality. It would open the possibility of an essentially new human reality—namely, existence in free time on the basis of fulfilled vital needs. Under such conditions, the scientific project itself would be free for trans-utilitarian ends, and free for the "art of living" beyond the necessities and luxuries of domination. In other words, the completion of the technological reality would be not only the prerequisite, but also the rationale for transcending the technological reality.

This would mean reversal of the traditional relationship between science and metaphysics. The ideas defining reality in terms other than those of the exact or behavioral sciences would lose their metaphysical or emotive character as a result of the scientific transformation of the world; the scientific concepts could project and define the possible realities of a free and pacified existence. The elaboration of such concepts would mean more than the evolution of the prevailing sciences. It would involve the scientific rationality as a whole, which has thus far been committed to an unfree existence and would mean a new idea of science, of Reason.

If the completion of the technological project involves a break with the prevailing technological rationality, the break in turn depends on the continued existence of the technical base itself. For it is this base which has rendered possible the satisfaction of needs and the reduction of toil—it remains the very base of all forms of human freedom. The qualitative change rather lies in the reconstruction of this base—that is, in its development with a view of different ends.

I have stressed that this does not mean the revival of "values," spiritual or other, which are to supplement the scientific and technological transformation of man and nature. On the contrary, the historical achievement of

4. See chapter I, esp. p. 18.
science and technology has rendered possible the translation of values into technical tasks—the materialization of values. Consequently, what is at stake is the redefinition of values in technical terms, as elements in the technological process. The new ends, as technical ends, would then operate in the project and in the construction of the machinery, and not only in its utilization. Moreover, the new ends might assert themselves even in the construction of scientific hypotheses—in pure scientific theory. From the quantification of secondary qualities, science would proceed to the quantification of values.

For example, what is calculable is the minimum of labor with which, and the extent to which, the vital needs of all members of a society could be satisfied—provided the available resources were used for this end, without being restricted by other interests, and without impeding the accumulation of capital necessary for the development of the respective society. In other words; quantifiable is the available range of freedom from want. Or, calculable is the degree to which, under the same conditions, care could be provided for the ill, the infirm, and the aged—that is, quantifiable is the possible reduction of anxiety, the possible freedom from fear.

The obstacles that stand in the way of materialization are definable political obstacles. Industrial civilization has reached the point where, with respect to the aspirations of man for a human existence, the scientific abstraction from final causes becomes obsolete in science’s own terms. Science itself has rendered it possible to make final causes the proper domain of science. Society,

“par une élévation et un élargissement du domaine technique, doit remettre à leur place, comme techniques, les problèmes de finalité, considérés à tort comme éthiques et parfois comme religieux. L’inachèvement des techniques sacralise les problèmes de

finalité et asservit l’homme au respect de fins qu’il se représente comme des absolus.”

Under this aspect, “neutral” scientific method and technology become the science and technology of a historical phase which is being surpassed by its own achievements—which has reached its determinate negation. Instead of being separated from science and scientific method, and left to subjective preference and irrational, transcendental sanction, formerly metaphysical ideas of liberation may become the proper object of science. But this development confronts science with the unpleasant task of becoming political—of recognizing scientific consciousness as political consciousness, and the scientific enterprise as political enterprise. For the transformation of values into needs, of final causes into technical possibilities is a new stage in the conquest of oppressive, unmastered forces in society as well as in nature. It is an act of liberation:

“L’homme se libère de sa situation d’être asservi par la finalité du tout en apprenant à faire de la finalité, à organiser un tout finalisé qu’il juge et apprécie, pour n’avoir pas à subir passivement une intégration de fait.” . . . “L’homme dépasse l’asservissement en organisant consciemment la finalité . . .”

However, in constituting themselves methodically as political enterprise, science and technology would pass beyond the stage at which they were, because of their neutrality, subjected to politics and against their intent func-

5. “through a raising and enlarging of the technical sphere, must treat as technical problems, questions of finality considered wrongly as ethical and sometimes religious. The incompleteness of techniques makes a fetish of problems of finality and enslaves man to ends which he thinks of as absolutes.” Gilbert Simondon, loc. cit. p. 151; my italics.

6. “Man liberates himself from his situation of being subjected to the finality of everything by learning to create finality, to organise a ‘finalised’ whole, which he judges and evaluates. Man overcomes enslavement by organising consciously finality.” ibid., p. 103.
tioning as political instrumentalities. For the technological redefinition and the technical mastery of final causes is the construction, development, and utilization of resources (material and intellectual) freed from all particular interests which impede the satisfaction of human needs and the evolution of human faculties. In other words, it is the rational enterprise of man as man, of mankind. Technology thus may provide the historical correction of the premature identification of Reason and Freedom, according to which man can become and remain free in the progress of self-perpetuating productivity on the basis of oppression. To the extent to which technology has developed on this basis, the correction can never be the result of technical progress per se. It involves a political reversal.

Industrial society possesses the instrumentalities for transforming the metaphysical into the physical, the inner into the outer, the adventures of the mind into adventures of technology. The terrible phrases (and realities of) “engineers of the soul,” “head shrinkers,” “scientific management,” “science of consumption,” epitomize (in a miserable form) the progressing rationalization of the irrational, of the “spiritual”—the denial of the idealistic culture. But the consumption of technological rationality, while translating ideology into reality, would also transcend the materialistic antithesis to this culture. For the translation of values into needs is the twofold process of (1) material satisfaction (materialization of freedom) and (2) the free development of needs on the basis of satisfaction (non-repressive sublimation). In this process, the relation between the material and intellectual faculties and needs undergoes a fundamental change. The free play of thought and imagination assumes a rational and directing function in the realization of a pacified existence of man and nature. And the ideas of justice, freedom, and humanity then obtain their truth and good conscience on the sole ground on which they could ever have truth and good conscience—the satisfaction of man’s material needs, the rational organization of the realm of necessity.

“Pacified existence.” The phrase conveys poorly enough the intent to sum up, in one guiding idea, the tabooed and ridiculed end of technology, the repressed final cause behind the scientific enterprise. If this final cause were to materialize and become effective, the Logos of technics would open a universe of qualitatively different relations between man and man, and man and nature.

But at this point, a strong caveat must be stated—a warning against all technological fetishism. Such fetishism has recently been exhibited mainly among Marxist critics of contemporary industrial society—ideas of the future omnipotence of technological man, of a “technological Eros,” etc. The hard kernel of truth in these ideas demands an emphatic denunciation of the mystification which they express. Technics, as a universe of instrumentalities, may increase the weakness as well as the power of man. At the present stage, he is perhaps more powerless over his own apparatus than he ever was before.

The mystification is not removed by transferring technological omnipotence from particular groups to the new state and the central plan. Technology retains throughout its dependence on other than technological ends. The more technological rationality, freed from its exploitative features, determines social production, the more will it become dependent on political direction—on the collective effort to attain a pacified existence, with the goals which the free individuals may set for themselves.

“Pacification of existence” does not suggest an accumulation of power but rather the opposite. Peace and power, freedom and power, Eros and power may well be contraries! I shall presently try to show that the reconstruction of the
material base of society with a view to pacification may involve a qualitative as well as quantitative reduction of power, in order to create the space and time for the development of productivity under self-determined incentives. The notion of such a reversal of power is a strong motive in dialectical theory.
Imagination has not remained immune to the process of reification. We are possessed by our images, suffer our own images. Psychoanalysis knew it well, and knew the consequences. However, "to give to the imagination all the means of expression" would be regression. The mutilated individuals (mutilated also in their faculty of imagination) would organize and destroy even more than they are now permitted to do. Such release would be the unmitigated horror—not the catastrophe of culture, but the free sweep of its most repressive tendencies. Rational is the imagination which can become the a priori of the reconstruction and redirection of the productive apparatus toward a pacified existence, a life without fear. And this can never be the imagination of those who are possessed by the images of domination and death.

To liberate the imagination so that it can be given all its means of expression presupposes the repression of much that is now free and that perpetuates a repressive society. And such reversal is not a matter of psychology or ethics but of politics, in the sense in which this term has here been used throughout: the practice in which the basic societal institutions are developed, defined, sustained, and changed. It is the practice of individuals, no matter how organized they may be. Thus the question once again must be faced: how can the administered individuals—who have made their mutilation into their own liberties and satisfactions, and thus reproduce it on an enlarged scale—liberate themselves from themselves as well as from their masters? How is it even thinkable that the vicious circle be broken?

Paradoxically, it seems that it is not the notion of the new societal institutions which presents the greatest difficulty in the attempt to answer this question. The established societies themselves are changing, or have already changed the basic institutions in the direction of increased planning. Since the development and utilization of all available resources for the universal satisfaction of vital needs is the prerequisite of pacification, it is incompatible with the prevalence of particular interests which stand in the way of attaining this goal. Qualitative change is conditional upon planning for the whole against these interests, and a free and rational society can emerge only on this basis.

The institutions within which pacification can be envisaged thus defy the traditional classification into authoritarian and democratic, centralized and liberal administration. Today, the opposition to central planning in the name of a liberal democracy which is denied in reality serves as an ideological prop for repressive interests. The goal of authentic self-determination by the individuals depends on effective social control over the production and distribution of the necessities (in terms of the achieved level of culture, material and intellectual).

Here, technological rationality, stripped of its exploitative features, is the sole standard and guide in planning and developing the available resources for all. Self-determination in the production and distribution of vital goods and services would be wasteful. The job is a technical one, and as a truly technical job, it makes for the reduction of physical and mental toil. In this realm, centralized control is rational if it establishes the precenditions for meaningful self-determination. The latter can then become effective in its
own realm—in the decisions which involve the production and distribution of the economic surplus, and in the individual existence.

In any case, the combination of centralized authority and direct democracy is subject to infinite variations, according to the degree of development. Self-determination will be real to the extent to which the masses have been dissolved into individuals liberated from all propaganda, indoctrination, and manipulation, capable of knowing and comprehending the facts and of evaluating the alternatives. In other words, society would be rational and free to the extent to which it is organized, sustained, and reproduced by an essentially new historical Subject.

At the present stage of development of the advanced industrial societies, the material as well as the cultural system denies this exigency. The power and efficiency of this system, the thorough assimilation of mind with fact, of thought with required behavior, of aspirations with reality, militate against the emergence of a new Subject. They also militate against the notion that the replacement of the prevailing control over the productive process by “control from below” would mean the advent of qualitative change. This notion was valid, and still is valid, where the laborers were, and still are, the living denial and indictment of the established society. However, where these classes have become a prop of the established way of life, their ascent to control would prolong this way in a different setting.

And yet, the facts are all there which validate the critical theory of this society and of its fatal development: the increasing irrationality of the whole; waste and restriction of productivity; the need for aggressive expansion; the constant threat of war; intensified exploitation; dehumanization. And they all point to the historical alternative: the planned utilization of resources for the satisfaction of vital needs with a minimum of toil, the transformation of leisure into free time, the pacification of the struggle for existence.

But the facts and the alternatives are there like fragments which do not connect, or like a world of mute objects without a subject, without the practice which would move these objects in the new direction. Dialectical theory is not refuted, but it cannot offer the remedy. It cannot be positive. To be sure, the dialectical concept, in comprehending the given facts, transcends the given facts. This is the very token of its truth. It defines the historical possibilities, even necessities; but their realization can only be in the practice which responds to the theory, and, at present, the practice gives no such response.

On theoretical as well as empirical grounds, the dialectical concept pronounces its own hopelessness. The human reality is its history and, in it, contradictions do not explode by themselves. The conflict between streamlined, rewarding domination on the one hand, and its achievements that make for self-determination and pacification on the other, may become blatant beyond any possible denial, but it may well continue to be a manageable and even productive conflict, for with the growth in the technological conquest of nature grows the conquest of man by man. And this conquest reduces the freedom which is a necessary a priori of liberation. This is freedom of thought in the only sense in which thought can be free in the administered world—as the consciousness of its repressive productivity, and as the absolute need for breaking out of this whole. But precisely this absolute need does not prevail where it could become the driving force of a historical practice, the effective cause of qualitative change. Without this material force, even the most acute consciousness remains powerless.

No matter how obvious the irrational character of the whole may manifest itself and, with it, the necessity of
change, insight into necessity has never sufficed for seizing the possible alternatives. Confronted with the omnipresent efficiency of the given system of life, its alternatives have always appeared utopian. And insight into necessity, the consciousness of the evil state, will not suffice even at the stage where the accomplishments of science and the level of productivity have eliminated the utopian features of the alternatives—where the established reality rather than its opposite is utopian.

Does this mean that the critical theory of society abdicates and leaves the field to an empirical sociology which, freed from all theoretical guidance except a methodological one, succumbs to the fallacies of misplaced concreteness, thus performing an ideological service while proclaiming the elimination of value judgments? Or do the dialectical concepts once again testify to their truth—by comprehending their own situation as that of the society which they analyze? A response might suggest itself if one considers the critical theory precisely at the point of its greatest weakness—its inability to demonstrate the liberating tendencies within the established society.

The critical theory of society, was, at the time of its origin, confronted with the presence of real forces (objective and subjective) in the established society which moved (or could be guided to move) toward more rational and freer institutions by abolishing the existing ones which had become obstacles to progress. These were the empirical grounds on which the theory was erected, and from these empirical grounds derived the idea of the liberation of inherent possibilities—the development, otherwise blocked and distorted, of material and intellectual productivity, faculties, and needs. Without the demonstration of such forces, the critique of society would still be valid and rational, but it would be incapable of translating its rationality into terms of historical practice. The conclusion? "Liberation of inherent possibilities" no longer adequately expresses the historical alternative.

The enchaincd possibilities of advanced industrial societies are: development of the productive forces on an enlarged scale, extension of the conquest of nature, growing satisfaction of needs for a growing number of people, creation of new needs and faculties. But these possibilities are gradually being realized through means and institutions which cancel their liberating potential, and this process affects not only the means but also the ends. The instruments of productivity and progress, organized into a totalitarian system, determine not only the actual but also the possible utilizations.

At its most advanced stage, domination functions as administration, and in the overdeveloped areas of mass consumption, the administered life becomes the good life of the whole, in the defense of which the opposites are united. This is the pure form of domination. Conversely, its negation appears to be the pure form of negation. All content seems reduced to the one abstract demand for the end of domination—the only truly revolutionary exigency, and the event that would validate the achievements of industrial civilization. In the face of its efficient denial by the established system, this negation appears in the politically impotent form of the "absolute refusal"—a refusal which seems the more unreasonable the more the established system develops its productivity and alleviates the burden of life. In the words of Maurice Blanchot:

"Ce que nous refusons n'est pas sans valeur ni sans importance. C'est bien à cause de cela que le refus est nécessaire. Il y a une raison que nous n'accepterons plus, il y a une apparence de sagesse qui nous fait horreur, il y a une offre d'accord et de
and is therefore not deflected by the system; it is an elementary force which violates the rules of the game and, in doing so, reveals it as a rigged game. When they get together and go out into the streets, without arms, without protection, in order to ask for the most primitive civil rights, they know that they face dogs, stones, and bombs, jail, concentration camps, even death. Their force is behind every political demonstration for the victims of law and order. The fact that they start refusing to play the game may be the fact which marks the beginning of the end of a period.

Nothing indicates that it will be a good end. The economic and technical capabilities of the established societies are sufficiently vast to allow for adjustments and concessions to the underdog, and their armed forces sufficiently trained and equipped to take care of emergency situations. However, the spectre is there again, inside and outside the frontiers of the advanced societies. The facile historical parallel with the barbarians threatening the empire of civilization prejudices the issue; the second period of barbarism may well be the continued empire of civilization itself. But the chance is that, in this period, the historical extremes may meet again: the most advanced consciousness of humanity, and its most exploited force. It is nothing but a chance. The critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and its future; holding no promise and showing no success, it remains negative. Thus it wants to remain loyal to those who, without hope, have given and give their life to the Great Refusal.

At the beginning of the fascist era, Walter Benjamin wrote:

* Nur um der Hoffnungslosen willen ist uns die Hoffnung gegeben. 
It is only for the sake of those without hope that hope is given to us. 