Marxism and Totality

The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas

Martin Jay
Anamnestic Totalization: Memory in the Thought of Herbert Marcuse

For none of the major architects of Critical Theory was the lure of totality as intense and seductive as it appears to have been for Herbert Marcuse. More deeply and consistently committed to Marxist Humanism and the activist politics it generated than either Horkheimer or Adorno, Marcuse remained loyal to the holistic vision that had first attracted him to radicalism in the years after World War I when Western Marxism was launched. More resolutely Hegelian than his colleagues, even while expanding Hegel's concept of reason to include sexual and aesthetic dimensions, he stubbornly resisted the detotalizing implications of their work. More doggedly faithful to the utopian potential in Marxism—indeed, like Bloch, sometimes berating it for not being utopian enough—he refused to accept as final the dystopian analysis of the modern world offered by the other Frankfurt School members. In short, however much Marcuse may have emphasized the importance of negative thinking, he never lost his original hope for a dialectic that might have a positive resolution.

That Marcuse did, to be sure, absorb a great deal of his colleagues' pessimistic analysis cannot be denied. In his bleaker moods, as when, for example, he composed his controversial portrayal of One-Dimensional Man in 1964,² Marcuse developed the argument of Dialectic of Enlightenment to claim that the advance of technological rationality and the integration of the proletariat had rendered the opportunities for revolutionary change virtually nugatory. Rather than talking about totality as a normative goal, he joined with Horkheimer and Adorno in bemoaning the oppressive totalization that was contemporary society:

By virtue of the way it has organized its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For "totalitarian" is not only a terrorist 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.³

But unlike Horkheimer and Adorno, he restlessly searched for ways out of this apparent impasse. Quick to identify with the New Left, which drew sustenance from even his most pessimistic works, Marcuse refused to rest content with a politics that dismissed all activism as misplaced instrumental rationalism or self-indulgent psychodrama. Although he soon recognized the inadequacies of the New Left and the accompanying counter-culture of the 1960s, he continued to look for cracks in the facade of one-dimensional "totalitarianism" until the end of his life in 1980 at the age of 81. And in so doing, he insisted on the necessity of a totalistic analysis which would conceptualize society as a whole and demand its complete replacement. For, as he put it in a review of Karl Popper's The Poverty of Historicism in 1959,

Contemporary society is increasingly functioning as a rational whole which over-rides the life of its parts, progresses through planned waste and destruction, and advances with the irresistible force of nature—as if governed by inexorable laws. Insistence on these irrational aspects is not betrayal of the liberalistic tradition, but the attempt to recapture it. The "holism" which has become reality must be met by a "holist" critique of this reality.⁴

In many respects, what Marcuse meant by a "holist" critique remained close to the Hegelian Marxism of Lukács, Korsch, Gramsci and the early Horkheimer. In the first book he wrote in English, Reason and Revolution, which appeared in 1941, he took pains to dissociate Hegel from the right-wing appropriation of him, insisting instead that he was more properly understood as the philosophical inspiration for Marx and Marxism. Stressing Marx's indebtedness to Hegel's idea of determinate negation—the dialectical tension between apparent, positive reality and its essential, negative opposite—Marcuse contended: "For Marx, as for Hegel, 'the truth' lies only in the whole, the 'negative totality.'"⁵ There was only one

3. Ibid., p. 3.
basic difference between the ways in which the two thinkers conceived this whole:

For Hegel, the totality was the totality of reason, a closed ontological system, finally identical with the rational system of history. Hegel's dialectical process was thus a universal ontological one in which history was patterned on the metaphysical process of being. Marx, on the other hand, detached dialectic from this ontological base. In his work, the negativity of reality becomes an historical condition which cannot be hypostatized as a metaphysical state of affairs.6

In other words, for Marcuse the primary, perhaps the sole, distinction between the Hegelian and Marxist views of totality was that the latter historialized the metaphysical viewpoint of the former, substituting class struggle for the clash of ideas. Otherwise, the dialectical method, including its crucial concept of totality, was shared by both men. History for Marx thus operated in Marcuse's eyes very much like Hegel's "notion," which "evolves only by virtue of its contradictory forces."7 History, like the "notion," was "an objective totality in which every particular moment appears as the 'self-differentiation' of the universal (the principle that governs the totality) and was therefore itself universal. That is to say, every particular moment contained in its very content, the whole, and must be interpreted as the whole."8 For Marcuse, at least in Reason and Revolution, the Hegelian and Marxist concepts of totality, aside from the issue of metaphysics versus history, were virtually identical.

Thus, Marcuse retained the longitudinal concept of totality that we have noted earlier in Hegelian Marxism, without any of its fatalistic or theodicy-promoting residues.9 He was no less certain that the present latitudinal totality should also be understood in holistic terms. As he put it in Reason and Revolution,

Markian theory is of its very nature an integral and integrating theory of society. The economic process of capitalism exercises a totalitarian influence over all theory and all practice, and an economic analysis that shatters the capitalist camouflage and breaks through its 'reification' will get down to the subsoil common to all theory and practice in this society.10

And as his reference to a reification that hides an essential reality "common to all theory and practice in this society" demonstrates, he was also deeply indebted, at least initially, to Lukács' expressive concept of totality, in which a subject-object unity embodied the ultimate goal of socialism.11

Although he came to insist on the "material," that is, erotic and aesthetic dimensions of that unity in ways that married Schiller's ideal of the aesthetic state with Fourier's insistence on the gratification of desire, he nonetheless always relied on a definition of rationality that drew at its deepest level on Hegel's identity theory. However much he may have defended the rights of the concrete individual against the demands of a hypostatized collective, the utopian telos of his thought was reconciliation, harmony, the Aufhebung of contradictions. In ways that would frustrate later Frankfurt School figures like Jürgen Habermas,12 Marcuse continued to think like a Hegelian even when he seemed to be moving as far away as he could from idealism into some ill-defined instinct theory.

Because Marcuse remained so close in these ways to the initial Western Marxism paradigm, it would be redundant to detail all aspects of his variant of Marxist holism. Moreover, the general contours of his intellectual career are more likely to be known to an English-speaking audience than perhaps those of any other figure in this account. For, in a sense, Marcuse was "our" Western Marxist. Although his ideas certainly derived from non-native traditions, they were expressed for the most part initially in the language of his adopted country and thus had a more immediate impact on America and England than did the work of those who needed to be translated before they could be read. In addition, as a teacher at Brandeis University and the University of California, San Diego, during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, Marcuse was a direct participant in the growth of the New Left, and indeed was labeled its "guru" by the popular media.13

Rather than follow his well-known intellectual career, we will concentrate on one somewhat idiosyncratic element in the development of Marcuse's concept of totality, which was nonetheless of considerable importance for his own work and indeed for the Western Marxist discourse on totality as a whole. That element is his theory of remembrance, or what

12. In a conversation recorded in 1978, Habermas chastised Marcuse for his residual Hegelianism:

"I object to the fact that, on the one hand, you base your definition of reason and what is rational on Hegel. You develop that in all your books, even in Eros and Civilization in a peripheral chapter on the Phenomenology of the Mind. On the other hand, knowing full well that Hegelian logic is no longer so readily acceptable, you push Hegel aside. The concept of reason becomes anonymous, so to speak, denies its idealist origins, and is transplanted into the context of Freudian instinct theory."

"("Theory and Politics: A Discussion with Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, Heinz Lukas and Tilman Spengler," Telos 38 [Winter 1978-1979], p. 137.) In response, Marcuse claimed, "No, that's too slick. The concept of reason is inherent in the instinctual drives to the extent that Eros is identical to the efforts to contain destructive energy" (ibid.)."

might be called anamnestic totalization. Many of his earlier commentators have noted its importance. One of the more astute, Fredric Jameson, has gone so far as to claim that the theoretical foundation of Marcuse's philosophy takes the form of a profound and almost platonic valorization of memory, anamnesis, in human existence. Indeed, it is not too much to say that Memosyne occupies something of the same emblematic and mythopoetic position in Marcuse's thinking that the deities of Eros and Thanatos hold in Freud's late metapsychology.

From his earliest writings, beginning with Hegel's Ontologie in 1932, until his very last, The Aesthetic Dimension in 1978, Marcuse returned again and again to what he saw as the liberating power of remembrance. In almost all of his major works, most notably Eros and Civilization, One-Dimensional Man, and Counterrevolution and Revolt, he introduced a virtually identical defense of that power and expressed alarm at its current weakened status. Matched among twentieth-century Marxists perhaps only by Walter Benjamin, Marcuse attempted to harness the energies of recollection for revolutionary purposes.

The sources of his persistent fascination with memory can be traced for analytical purposes to four separate stimuli: his early philosophical training, his adherence to Critical Marxism, his special concern for aesthetics and his radical appropriation of psychology. Although often conflated in his discussions of anamnesia, these different sources contributed distinctive elements to his argument, elements which can be isolated and critically analyzed. In so doing, we can more accurately assess the strengths and weaknesses of Marcuse's theory of remembrance.

From its beginning, Western philosophy has been drawn to the issues raised by present knowledge of past events. From Plato's Memo and Theaetetus through Aristotle's De Memoria et Reminiscentia, Augustine's Confessions, Hume's Treatise on Human Nature, Bergson's Matter and Memory and on up to Russell's The Analysis of Mind and Ryle's The Concept of Mind, the greatest philosophers of the Western tradition have wrestled with the epistemological puzzles presented by memory. Contemporary philosophers such as E. J. Furlong, W. von Leyden, Brian Smith and Norman Malcolm continue to devote long and learned studies to the same, still unresolved issues. Marcuse, however, seems to have paid little attention to this body of work. Instead, as might be expected, he relied on the treatment of the problem in the German idealist and phenomenological traditions.

Although no firm evidence appears in his writings, it is likely that the latter first impressed upon him the importance of remembrance. In particular, his philosophical apprenticeship under Martin Heidegger in the late 1920s should probably be considered decisive in this regard. For in Heidegger's Being and Time of 1927, a work whose influence on his early development Marcuse has freely acknowledged, memory played a central role. To characterize the wayward course of Western philosophy since the pre-Socratics, Heidegger introduced the notion of Seinsvergessenheit, the forgetting of Being. This forgetting, he contended, was so pervasive that language itself had lost the capacity to treat Being as a meaningful reality.
His own philosophy, Heidegger claimed, was an effort to reverse this collective amnesia and restore consciousness of Being to its proper place. Although Marcuse soon came to recognize the vacuous nature of Heidegger's notion of Being, he nonetheless retained his teacher's insistence that something extraordinarily important had been forgotten in the modern world. Because remembrance was a window on this fundamental reality, it had ontological as well as epistemological implications.

What these implications were became clearer to Marcuse in his first prolonged study of Hegel, directed by Heidegger, which appeared as Hegel's Ontologie in 1932. In examining Hegel's Logic with its central category of negativity, Marcuse argued:

This "not," this negativity which Being is, is itself never present in the sphere of immediacy, is itself not and is never present. This "not" is always precisely the other of immediacy and the other of presence, that which is never as present precisely never is and what, however, constitutes its Being. This "not," this negativity, is the immediate present always already past at every moment. The Being of present being resides therefore always already in a past, but in a, to a certain degree, "intemporal" past (Logic, II, 3), in a past which still always is present and out of which precisely Being is. A being is at each moment what it is in its immediate present through memory.... With the phenomenon of memory, Hegel opens the new dimension of Being which constitutes Being as authentic having-beenness (Geisteszeit): the dimension of essence. This “not,” this negativity which Being is, is itself never present in the sphere of immediacy, is itself not and is never present. This “not” is always precisely the other of immediacy and the other of presence, that which is never as present precisely never is and what, however, constitutes its Being. This “not,” this negativity, is the immediate present always already past at every moment. The Being of present being resides therefore always already in a past, but in a, to a certain degree, “intemporal” past (Logic, II, 3), in a past which still always is present and out of which precisely Being is. A being is at each moment what it is in its immediate present through memory.... With the phenomenon of memory, Hegel opens the new dimension of Being which constitutes Being as authentic having-beenness (Geisteszeit): the dimension of essence. This “not,” this negativity which Being is, is itself never present in the sphere of immediacy, is itself not and is never present. This “not” is always precisely the other of immediacy and the other of presence, that which is never as present precisely never is and what, however, constitutes its Being. This “not,” this negativity, is the immediate present always already past at every moment. The Being of present being resides therefore always already in a past, but in a, to a certain degree, “intemporal” past (Logic, II, 3), in a past which still always is present and out of which precisely Being is. A being is at each moment what it is in its immediate present through memory.... With the phenomenon of memory, Hegel opens the new dimension of Being which constitutes Being as authentic having-beenness (Geisteszeit): the dimension of essence.

Memory, Erinnerung, in other words, permits access to an essential, “negative” level of reality, that “intemporal past” preserved on a second ontological plane more basic than that of “positive” and immediate appearance. The German language itself, so Hegel had noted, captured this relationship: “In the verb Sein (to be) language has conserved essence (Wesen) in the past participle of the verb, ‘gewesen.’”

As Alison Pogrebin Brown has perceptively noted, Marcuse's later stress on two-dimensionality was foreshadowed here in his discussion of the temporal aspect of Hegel's doctrine of essence. But whereas in Hegel's Ontologie Marcuse identified essence entirely with the “intemporal past,” in his later work it was ambiguously related to the future as well. In his 1936 essay, “The Concept of Essence,” written after his break with Heidegger and his entrance into the Institute of Social Research, Marcuse linked essence with the Aristotelian notion of potentiality. "All historical struggles," he argued,

23. Ibid., p. 78.
27. Marcuse, Counterrevolution and Revolt, p. 69.
revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to drug themselves concerning their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury the dead.28

Although one might, as Christian Lenhardt has suggested,29 read Marx's labor theory of value as a reminder to see the capital of the present as the coagulated labor power of previous generations, Marx himself never seems to have explicitly drawn the conclusion that remembering of the past was a key to revolutionary consciousness. Instead, he contended, "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."30

It was not really until Georg Lukács introduced the idea of reification in *History and Class Consciousness* that the emancipatory potential of memory was tapped by a Marxist thinker of note. Lukács had, in fact, still earlier pointed to the power of remembrance in his pre-Marxist *The Theory of the Novel* while discussing time in Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*:

> Only in the novel and in certain epic forms resembling the novel does memory occur as a creative force affecting the object and transforming it. The genuinely epic quality of such memory is the affirmative experience of the life process. The duality of interiority and the outside world can be abolished for the subject if he (the subject) glimpses the organic unity of his whole life through the process by which his living present has grown from the stream of his past life damned up within his memory.31

After Lukács' conversion to Marxism in 1918, he no longer stressed the retrospective nature of totalization, as he had in *The Theory of the Novel*. A true totality would be achieved only when the proletariat, the universal class, dereified the objective structures of the social world and recognized them as its own creations. Totalization was thus a practical activity of the future, not a contemplative one directed towards the past. And yet, the concept of dereification implied a certain type of remembering, for what had to be recaptured were the human origins of a social world that had been mystified under capitalism as a kind of "second nature." 28, Karl Marx: Selected Writings, ed. David McLellan (Oxford, 1977), p. 302. 29. Lenhardt, "Anamnesic Solidarity," p. 149. 30. Karl Marx: Selected Writings, p. 300. 31. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), p. 127. It should be noted here that Lukács' epic theory of memory with its assumption that the past could be recovered as a meaningful narrative leading up to the present was implicitly attacked by Benjamin in his "Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian," *New German Critique* 5 (Spring 1975), where he writes: "The historical materialist must abandon the epic element in history. For him history becomes the object of a constructivistic experience (Konstruktion) which is not located in empty time but is constituted in a specific epoch, in a specific life, in a specific work. The historical materialist explores the epoch out of its reified 'historical continuity,' i.e., out of the life out of this epoch and the work out of the life work." (p. 29).

Marx's attitude towards memory seems to have vacillated between these two alternatives.

Marx recognized the link between memory and dereification, at least implicitly, in his 1932 essay "The Foundations of Historical Materialism," where he reviewed Marx's newly published Paris manuscripts. "Because it is dependent on the conditions pre-established by history," he argued,

> the praxis of transcendence must, in order to be genuine transcendence, reveal these conditions and appropriate them. Insight into objectification as insight into the historical and social situation of man reveals the historical conditions of this situation and so achieves the practical force and concrete form through which it can become the level of revolution. We can now also understand how far questions concerning the origin of estrangement and insight into the origin of private property must be an integrating element in a positive theory of revolution.32

The explicit linkage of dereification with remembrance came somewhat later in the work of Marcuse's colleagues at the Institute of Social Research. In an important letter of February 29, 1940, to Walter Benjamin, Adorno responded with considerable enthusiasm to the theory of forgetting propounded in Benjamin's essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire."33

In that essay, Benjamin had introduced his now celebrated contrast between the integrated, meaningful experience he called "Erfahrung" and the atomizing, incoherent alternative he called "Erlebnis." Benjamin tied the former to Proust's idea of "involuntary memory," which he claimed was possible only when men were immersed in an ongoing, communal tradition. In the modern world, such a tradition was lacking; the only experience thus possible was the impoverished disorientation of *Erlebnis*.

In his letter to Benjamin, Adorno asked,

> Wouldn't it be the task to connect the entire opposition between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* to a dialectical theory of forgetting? One could also say: to a theory of dereification. For every reification is a forgetting: objects become thinglike at the moment when they are seized without all their elements being contemporaneous, where something of them is forgotten.34

Although Marcuse did not know of this letter, one of the aphorisms included in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, entitled "Le Prix du Progrès," repeated the key phrase "all reification is a forgetting."35 Significantly, it was linked to the issue of the domination of

nature, one of the Frankfurt School’s central concerns. The lines preceding it read: “Perennial domination over nature, medical and non-medical techniques, are made possible only by the process of oblivion. The loss of memory is a transcendental condition for science.”

In Marcuse’s later work, the same linkages between forgetting, reification, and the domination of nature appear. The passage quoted above from Counterrevolution and Revolt, with its veiled reference to Goethe’s theory of science as the recovery of primary forms, follows directly a discussion of the redemption of nature as a “subject-object” with intrinsic value in its own right. The implication is that forgetting the suffering of men is akin to forgetting the pain caused by nature through the human domination; remembrance somehow permits us to see the connections and honor the subjective side of both nature and man.

“All reification is a forgetting” also served another function in Marcuse’s theory of remembrance: as a reminder of the negative potential in art. The final paragraph of The Aesthetic Dimension begins by quoting the phrase from Dialectic of Enlightenment and continues: “Art fights reification by making the petrified world speak, sing, perhaps dance. Forgetting past suffering and past joy alleviates life under a repressive reality principle. In contrast, remembrance spurs the drive for the conquest of suffering and the permanence of joy.”

The third source of Marcuse’s celebration of memory was, in fact, the role it played in his vision of aesthetics. For much Western art, as for Western philosophy, memory has proven to be an object of singular fascination. To the Greeks, Mnemosyne was the mother by Zeus of the nine Muses. Proust, to whom Marcuse himself referred approvingly, also comes immediately to mind in this regard, but he was by no means alone in associating art with remembrance. The Romantics, towards whom Marcuse was always drawn, were intensely interested in the links between memory, personal identity and imagination. In Germany, Schlegel was particu-

larly fascinated with memory as a vehicle for overcoming fragmentation, while in England, Wordsworth sought ways to recapture and render intelligible his personal past in such works as The Prelude. His friend Coleridge defined “the primary imagination” as “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation,” and later Victorian writers, such as Ruskin in The Seven Lamps of Architecture, advocated lighting what he called “the lamp of memory” to escape the dreary present and renew contact with a more beautiful past.

Although after his 1922 dissertation on the Künstlerroman (novels about artists), Marcuse never directly acknowledged the influence of the Romantic tradition on his thought, he was clearly in its debt, as the following passage from Counterrevolution and Revolt demonstrates:

On a primary level, art is recollection: it appeals to a preconceptional experience and understanding which re-emerge in and against the context of the social functioning of experience and understanding—against instrumentalist reasoning and sensibility.

No less Romantic was his privileging of music among all the arts as the most essential repository of recollected truth:

These extreme qualities, the supreme points of art, seem to be the prerogative of music... and within music, of melody. Here the melody—dominant, cantabile, is the basic unit of recollection: recurring through all variations, remaining when it is cut off and no longer carries the composition, it sustains the supreme point: in and against the richness and complexity of the work. It is the voice, beauty, calm of another world here on earth.

In The Aesthetic Dimension, Marcuse introduced memory into the very heart of artistic form itself:

The medium of sensibility also constitutes the paradoxical relation of art to time—paradoxical because what is experienced through the medium of sensibility is present, while art cannot show the present without showing it as past. What has become form in the work of art has happened: it is recalled, re-presented. The mimesis translates reality into memory.

In short, for Marcuse the promise of future happiness embodied in art was dialectically related to its retention of past instances of joy and fulfillment.


42. Marcuse, Counterrevolution and Revolt, p. 99.

43. Ibid., p. 100.

In combating the "affirmative character of culture" as a realm of transcendent values, Marcuse insisted on the sensuous, material, even erotic nature of artistic pleasure. His linkage of art and Eros was abetted by his radical appropriation of psychology into his version of Critical Theory, an appropriation that also strengthened his interest in the liberating power of remembrance. Psychology thus joined philosophy, Critical Marxism and aesthetics as an especially potent source of his theory of memory. In Hegels Ontologie, he had warned against reducing memory to a psychological category, but after his entrance into the Institute of Social Research, where psychology was a subject of considerable interest, he grew increasingly open to the psychological dimension of amnesia. The psychology of memory to which Marcuse was drawn was not, to be sure, that of the experimentalists, such as Hermann Ebbinghaus, whose scientific data on the functioning of memory he chose to ignore. It was instead the psychoanalysis of Freud that provided him with a psychological theory of memory to complement those he had derived from philosophy, Marxism and aesthetics.

Beginning with his 1898 paper, "On the Psychic Mechanism of Forgetfulness" and elaborating in later works such as The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, Freud advanced the now familiar argument that the loss of memory was due to the repression of traumatic experiences or unpleasant thoughts that had engendered pain or anxiety in the past, most of which were sexual or aggressive in nature. One of the fundamental objectives of psychotherapy was thus the amnestic recovery of forgotten and repressed experiences, thoughts, desires or impulses. Once remembered, they could be dealt with in a conscious and responsible fashion, rather than being allowed to fester as the source of unconsciously generated neurotic symptoms.

Marcuse adopted Freud's linkage of forgetting and repression, but drew on an essay on childhood amnesia by his former Institute colleague, Ernst Schachtel, to give it a subtle twist. Instead of emphasizing the forgetfulness of painful or traumatic episodes in the past, he stressed the repression of pleasurable activities that society could not willingly tolerate. The source of forgetting was thus not so much the intrapsychic need of repression as the external demands of a repressive society. Citing Nietzsche's link in The Genealogy of Morals between the training of memory and the origins of morality, Marcuse condemned the one-sidedness of memory-training in civilization: the faculty was chiefly directed toward remembering duties rather than pleasures; memory was linked with bad conscience, guilt and sin. Unhappiness and the threat of punishment, not happiness and the promise of freedom, linger in memory.

What should be remembered by man instead, Marcuse contended, are those promises and potentialities "which had once been fulfilled in his dim past." There was a time, he claimed, in the "archaic" prehistory of the species before socially induced surplus repression, a time controlled largely by the pleasure principle, which remembrance should labor to rescue. As he put it in his later essay, "Freedom and Freud's Theory of Instincts,"

"The notion of "origin" as Freud uses it has simultaneously structural-functional—and temporal, ontogenetic, and phylogenetic significance. The "original" structure of the instincts was the one which dominated in the prehistory of the species. It is transformed during the course of history but continues to be effective as a substratum, preconscious and unconscious, in the history of the individual and the species—most obviously in early childhood. The idea that mankind, in general and in its individuals, is still dominated by "archaic" powers is one of Freud's most profound insights."

Although in this essay Marcuse acknowledged that freedom from certain of these archaic powers, most notably those associated with the death phous perversity." Marcuse went beyond Schachtel in linking childhood amnesia with the repression of the species "childhood," which Freud had discussed in his speculations about the "archaic heritage." Marcuse felt both were forgotten for social reasons, and argued, as Schachtel did not, that a different social order would allow the repressed to return in a healthy way.


52. Ibid., p. 18.


54. Ibid., p. 29.
instinct, would be itself a liberation, the burden of his argument was that remembering still others was a precondition for a utopian future.

With the psychological component introduced in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse's theory of remembrance was essentially complete. It provided him with a potent weapon in his attempt to find an Archimedean point for a Critical Theory no longer able to rely on the praxis of a revolutionary proletariat as its ground. For insofar as recollecting a different past prevents men from eternalizing the status quo, memory subverts one-dimensional consciousness and opens up the possibility of an alternative future. Moreover, it does so in a way that avoids the traditional bourgeois and social democratic ideology of history as evolutionary progress. As Benjamin often pointed out, the link between stopping ongoing temporality and achieving revolution provided him with a potent weapon. It is necessarily linked with the principle of remembrance—it is essentially complete. In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse approvingly quoted Benjamin's observation that clocks were shot at during the July Revolution as evidence of the link between stopping ongoing temporality and achieving revolutionary change. And in *One-Dimensional Man*, he cited Adorno's similar insight that "the spectre of man without memory . . . is more than an aspect of decline—it is necessarily linked with the principle of progress in bourgeois society." By depreciating the past to mere preparation for the future and seeing that future as an extrapolation of tendencies in the present, the ideology of progress justified the suffering of past generations. It also made it impossible to recapture past moments of happiness and fulfillment which memory preserved as beacons for the future. In fact, so Marcuse argued, the very notion of progress with its never-ending dissatisfaction with the present and impatient yearning for an improved tomorrow was one of the earmarks of a repressive society. In a true utopia, "time would not seem linear, as a perpetual line or rising curve, but cyclical, as the return in Nietzsche's idea of the "perpetuity of pleasure." Memory, by restoring the forgotten past, was thus a model of the utopian temporality of the future. In other words, it was not merely the content of what is remembered that constitutes the liberating power of memory, but also the very fact of memory's ability to reverse the flow of time that makes it a utopian faculty. If there is to be a true human totality in the future, anamnesis in the present is one of its prefigurations.

The claims Marcuse made for the liberating power of remembrance were obviously very large ones. What can be said about their validity? Any answer to this question must begin with a consideration of precisely what Marcuse thought should be remembered. For it is clear that emancipatory remembrance was far more than that indiscriminate preservation of everything in the past condemned by Nietzsche in his "Use and Abuse of History" and by Benjamin in his "Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian." If memory has been trained by civilization to preserve duties and guilt, it must be retrained to recover something else.

Marcuse's notion of that alternative contained, however, a certain ambiguity. At times, the Marxist in him protested the ontologization of the content of memory; the dialectical concept of essence, we have seen him argue in his 1937 essay, contains only the historical struggles of past generations. In *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, he protested in a similar vein that recollection "is not remembrance of a Golden Past (which never existed), of childhood innocence, primitive man, et cetera." In contrast, what must be remembered are the real historical experiences and desires of our actual ancestors, not some imagined prehistorical era of perfect bliss. Indeed, as Benjamin once noted, revolutionary motivation may well stem more from outrage over the indignities suffered by our fathers than hope for the comfort of our children.

But despite the historical intentions of these passages, at other times in his work Marcuse fell back on what must be called an ontological theory of anamnesis. Although he abandoned Heidegger's notion of a Being that had to be recollected and criticized Hegel's idea of essence as an "intemporal past," in his appropriation of psychoanalysis he retained their ontological biases. Freud's archaic heritage meant that an individual's promises and potentialities "had once been fulfilled in his dim past," or as he put it elsewhere, the sensuous form of beauty preserved "the memory of happiness that once was." Jameson captures this aspect of Marcuse's theory of remembrance when he writes:

It is because we have known, at the beginning of life, a plenitude of psychic gratification, because we have known a time before all repression, a time in which, as in Schiller's nature, the elaborate specializations of later, more sophisticated consciousness had not yet taken place, a time that preceded the very separation of subject from its object, that memory, even the obscured and unconscious memory

---

59. Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p. 70.
Anamnestic Totalization: Marcuse

of that prehistoric paradise in the individual psyche, can fulfill its profound therapeutic, epistemological, and even political role. . . . The primary energy of revolutionary activity derives from this memory of prehistoric happiness which the individual can regain only through its externalization, through its re-establishment for society as a whole.63

Although on the surface, this type of remembrance seems to be historical in the sense that it recaptures a reality that allegedly existed in the past, a closer look at Marcuse's use of the archaic heritage shows it to be something else. For when confronted with the anthropological evidence that Freud's theories cannot be corroborated, he retreated into the explanation that "We use Freud's anthropological speculation only in this sense: for its symbolic value. The archaic events that the hypothesis stipulates may forever be beyond the realm of anthropological verification: the alleged consequences of these events are historical facts."64 What this admission implies, as he put it in An Essay on Liberation, is "not regression to a previous stage of civilization, but return to an imaginary temps perdu in the real life of mankind."65

But if the plenitude "remembered" is only symbolic and the temps perdu merely "imaginary," can one really talk of memory in the same way one does when recalling the actual defeats and struggles of our historical predecessors? How, in fact, can we distinguish a true memory from what Brian Smith calls a "mnemic hallucination,"66 if the reality remembered never actually occurred? What Marcuse was obviously doing here was introducing a myth of original wholeness, of perfect presence, of the "remembering"67 of what had been dismembered, whose roots, if in memory at all, were in remembered desire rather than remembered fulfillment. Very much in the spirit of his problematic call for a "biological foundation for socialism,"68 Marcuse's exhortation to remember an "imaginary temps perdu" allowed him to smuggle an a priori philosophical anthropology into Critical Theory.

His symbolic adoption of Freud's archaic heritage also allowed him to sidestep another troubling aspect of his theory of remembrance: its defended identification of individual and collective memory. "Individual psychology," he wrote in Eros and Civilization, "is thus in itself group psychology insofar as the individual itself still is in archaic identity with the species. This archaic heritage bridges the 'gap between individual and mass psychology.'"69 But precisely how far the individual was in fact in archaic identity with the species Marcuse did not say. For all of Marcuse's contempt for Jung, a certain affinity can perhaps be discerned here. Assuming too quickly that individual and collective memory were virtually the same, he never conducted those experiments in personal recollection so painstakingly attempted by Benjamin. Marcuse's own Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnten Jahrhundert remained unwritten. Nor did he rigorously investigate the differences between personal memory of an actual event or thought in a person's life and the collective historical memory of events antedating all living persons. Because the latter is preserved in the archival records of past men and the often opaque processes of collective behavior and belief, rather than in the living memories of present ones, the hermeneutic process of recovery is different in each case. The dialectic of restitution between the present and past is more than mere remembrance of things past. As Benjamin understood,70 there is both a destructive and a constructive move necessary to explode a previous epoch out of the continuum of history and make it active in the present. At times—when, for example, he linked memory to imagination as a synthetic epistemological faculty "reassembling the bits and fragments which can be found in the distorted humanity and distorted nature"71—Marcuse seemed to sense this. But he never adequately developed the dynamics of mnemonic praxis.

One final difficulty in Marcuse's appropriation of anamnesis for revolutionary purposes was the problem of accounting for the new in history. Although Marcuse was firm in insisting that remembrance did not simply mean retrogression—a mistake for which Jung was chastened in Eros and Civilization72—he did not entirely escape the reproach that recollection is too close to repetition. The inadequacies of anamnestic totalization were perhaps nowhere as clearly perceived as in the work of Ernst Bloch, who preferred another Greek term, anagnorisis, or recognition. In an interview given at the 1968 Korcula summer school, which Marcuse also attended, Bloch spelled out his reasons:

The doctrine of anamnesis claims that we have knowledge only because we formerly knew. But then there could be no fundamentally new knowledge, no future knowledge. The soul merely meets in reality now what it always already knew as

63. Jameson, Marxism and Form, p. 113.
64. Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, pp. 54–55.
67. In a translator's footnote in Negations (p. 177), Jeremy J. Shapiro points out: "Sich erinnern,' the word for 'to remember' or 'to recollect,' literally means 'to go into oneself! That is, in remembering, one is re-membered or re-collected by returning to oneself from a state of externality, dispersion, or alienation."
71. Marcuse, Counterrevolution and Revolt, p. 70.
idea. That is a circle within a circle and just as inaccurate as the other theory (anagnorisis) is revealing: that the new is never completely new for us because we bring something with us to measure by it. ... Anamnesis provides the reassuring evidence of complete similarity; anagnorisis, however, is linked with reality by only a thin thread; it is therefore alarming. Anamnesis has an element of attenuation about it; it makes everything a gigantic déjà vu, as if everything had already been, nil novi subanamnesi. But anagnorisis is a shock. 73

Based on Bloch's idiosyncratic ontology of the “not-yet,” anagnorisis meant that one could recognize figural traces of the future in the past, but the past itself contained no archaic heritage of plenitude.

Whether or not Bloch's alternative seems superior to Marcuse's depends on one's confidence in his highly speculative philosophy of hope, whose difficulties we have already encountered. His criticism of anamnesis makes an important point, however, which is clarified still further if we turn to Paul Ricoeur's well-known dichotomy, applied to hermeneutics as a whole, 74 between mnemonics as a recollection of meaning and mnemonics as an exercise of suspicion. Ricoeur placed Freud, Nietzsche and Marx as the great exemplars of the interpretative art of suspicious demystification. The recollectors of meaning were mainly men of religion, for the opposite of suspicion was faith, faith in a primal word that could be recovered. In Bloch's terms, anamnesis is a doctrine that derives from the belief in an original meaning that can be recollected, whereas anagnorisis, while holding out hope for a plenitude in the future, is suspicious of claims that it existed in the past.

If one were to survey the Frankfurt School as a whole, one would conclude that its attitude towards these alternatives was mixed. In Benjamin's search for an Ursprache, a perfect language in which words and things are one, there is an elegiac impulse for recollected meaning. But in his stress on the constructive and destructive aspects of memory properly applied there was an awareness that simple recollection does not suffice. Similarly, in Adorno's warning against a philosophy of origins, in his stubborn insistence on a negative dialectic of non-identity, and in his acceptance of the inevitability of some reification, the mnemonics of suspicion were paramount. When Horkheimer speculated on religion and concluded that no matter how utopian the future might be, the pain of past generations could never be redeemed through remembrance, 75 he too questioned the possibility of recovering a primal wholeness. Especially in his more Schoenhamerian moods, he despaired of mankind ever fully awakening from the “nightmare” weighing on the brain of the living which Marx had seen as the legacy of the past.

Marcuse seems to have been attracted to both types of mnemonics. The philosophical legacy he inherited from Heidegger and Hegel led him to argue that something essential had been forgotten, whose content he thought he saw in Freud's archaic heritage. But his tenure at the Institute of Social Research, where the critique of ideology was a far more frequent practice than the postulating of utopian alternatives, seems to have tempered his search for recollected meaning with a suspicion that it might never be found. At the very end of the main argument of Eros and Civilization, his most utopian book, he borrowed Horkheimer's argument against memory as redemption:

But even the ultimate advent of freedom cannot redeem those who died in pain. It is the remembrance of them, and the accumulated guilt of mankind against its victims, that darken the prospect of a civilization without repression. 76

Remembrance must, in other words, always retain its demystifying critical impulse, bearing sober witness to the sufferings of the past, even as it offers up images of utopian fulfillment as models for the future.

For Marcuse, then, anamnestic totalization was never quite as complete a source of normative wholeness as his philosophical forebears had intimated. And, a fortiori, harnessed to a political practice in the present it could never lead to a perfectly harmonious totality in the future. For as he admitted in one of his last works when considering the possibility of transforming life into an organic work of art, “no matter in what form, art can never eliminate the tension between art and reality. Elimination of this tension would be the impossible final unity of subject and object: the materialist version of absolute idealism.” 77 Indeed, as he warned his more utopian friend Norman O. Brown a few years earlier, “Tension can be made nonantagonistic, nondestructive, but it can never be eliminated, because (Freud knew it well) its elimination would be death—not in any symbolic but in a very real sense.” 78

But if Marcuse did admit, however grudgingly, the necessity of some tension even under Communism, he nonetheless held out real hope for the reduction of its unnecessary—or what he would call its “surplus”—manifestations. For his Frankfurt School colleague Theodor Adorno, however,

76. Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 216.
77. Marcuse, Counterrevolution and Revolt, p. 108.
a certain kind of tension was less a regrettable necessity than a positive virtue. In so arguing, Adorno called into question the fundamental premises of the Western Marxist tradition, which still nurtured Marcuse’s thought, and, most notably, its essentially Hegelian concept of totality. Indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter, Adorno’s critique of Lukács’ original paradigm was sufficiently powerful to render it no longer truly viable. In surprising concord with the scientific Marxist contentions of Althusser and the Della Volpeans, which we will examine later, Adorno’s arguments against the holistic assumptions we have traced in earlier chapters marked a critical watershed in the development of Western Marxism.

The dawning sense of freedom feeds upon the memory of the archaic impulse not yet steered by any solid... Without an anamnesis of the untamed impulse that precedes the ego—an impulse later banished to the zone of unfree bondage to nature—it would be impossible to derive the idea of freedom, although that idea in turn ends up reinforcing the ego.\(^1\)

This argument, so reminiscent of those we have just been examining, did not flow from the pen of Herbert Marcuse. Instead, it was expressed by his former colleague at the Institute of Social Research, Theodor W. Adorno, in the work that is often seen as the bleakest expression of his “melancholy science,”\(^2\) _Negative Dialectics_, written three years before his death in 1969. “As a sense of nonidentity through identity,” he wrote elsewhere in that work,

...dialectics is not only an advancing process but a retrograde one at the same time. To this extent, the picture of the circle describes it correctly. The concept’s unfold-

---