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ARTÍCULOS
DE INVESTIGACIÓN

Counterrevolution and Revolt, fifty Years later. Kant, Marx, and the Relevance of Herbert Marcuse's *aesthetic Dimension*[*]

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Abstract: Recently, Critical Theory has been revisited due to the relevance of its critique of contemporary forms of alienation. This critique allows the unveiling of structural elements of contemporary ways of life, offering an accurate analysis of the material and subjective causes of the current environmental crisis. An example of this contribution is Herbert Marcuse's book *Counterrevolution and Revolt,* published in 1972. This article addresses the relationship between aesthetics and political ecology established in the main theses of Marcuse's book. The objective is to present how Marcuse employs the German philosophical tradition, more specifically elements of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,* to constitute a conceptual project of emancipation based on what he calls the aesthetic dimension. The article concludes by claiming that Marcuse's critics and formulation entail a double requirement in which the field of Aesthetics has a central role.

Keywords: Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Herbert Marcuse, aesthetics, political ecology, social philosophy, critical theory

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ARTÍCULOS
DE INVESTIGACIÓN

Contrarrevolución y revuelta, cincuenta años después. Kant, Marx y la relevancia de la *dimensión estética* de Herbert Marcuse

Resumen: La Teoría Crítica ha sido revisitada debido a la relevancia de su crítica de las formas contemporáneas de alienación. Esta crítica permite desvelar elementos estructurales de los modos de vida contemporáneos, ofreciendo un análisis preciso de las causas materiales y subjetivas de la actual crisis ecológica. Un ejemplo de esta contribución es el libro de Herbert Marcuse *Contrarrevolución y revuelta*, publicado en 1972. Este artículo aborda la relación entre estética y ecología política establecida en las tesis principales del libro. El objetivo es presentar cómo Marcuse emplea la tradición filosófica alemana, sobretodo elementos de la *Crítica de la facultad de juzgar* de Kant y de los *Manuscritos económicos y filosóficos* de Marx, para constituir un proyecto de emancipación basado en una dimensión estética. El artículo concluye afirmando que la formulación de Marcuse comporta una doble exigencia en la que el campo de la Estética desempeña un papel central.

Palabras clave: Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Herbert Marcuse, estética, ecología política, filosofía social, teoría crítica

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Introduction

Herbert Marcuse's philosophy is a philosophy of emancipation. It is based on a collaborative diagnosis, which cuts across Western Marxism's history, and reveals alienation as the major misfortune of capitalist and industrial societies.[1] With other authors of Critical Theory, Marcuse contributed to developing this diagnosis, showing that the instrumentalization that accompanies industrial capitalism impacts the social and economic sphere and, above all, the subjective sphere of individuals. His merit was to realize, quite early in his path, that the aesthetic experience can be a model and an alternative for emancipation. It challenges the hegemonic epistemic matrix established and stabilized by modern capitalism, revealing the possible production of new horizons of experience.

The book *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, written fifty years ago, offers a privileged conceptual condensation of the functionality of aesthetics within Marcuse's critical work. The shift that took the author from the cognitive to the sensitive sphere of emancipation, built throughout his philosophical itinerary, appears paradigmatically in this book from 1972. Renewed by the ecological concern, it can be understood as a response to the crises unfolded by the capitalist mode of production.[2] Given the permanence of the contradictions pointed out by the work and the vitality of the theses it contains, I will try to trace the intellectual history that makes it possible, thus allowing a genetic understanding of the philosophical project outlined by Marcuse.

In light of the recently completed ephemeris of this work, and given the need to assess how pertinent it remains to reflection within social philosophy, the purpose of this article is to retrace de genealogy of the theses contained in it. To do so, I proceed in three moments: (1) in the first section, I show how aesthetics has been present since the beginning of Marcuse's philosophical thought and how it develops a fundamental role in Marcuse's reading of the young Marx, made possible by the publication, in 1932, of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. (2) In the second section, I offer an interpretation and a possible definition of the concept of the aesthetic dimension. I show how Marcuse's reading of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* was fundamental to the formulation of this concept since it allows Marcuse to think of a philosophical ground for the idea of *purposiveness* in nature. (3) Finally, in the last section, I address Marcuse's mature work, showing how in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*,

1 The critical fortune of this trajectory, focused mainly on the contribution of the authors gathered around the *Institute for Social Research,* both in their stay in Frankfurt and in their American period, began to be synthesized after the end of the 1960s. See the celebrated works: Jay, 1973; Assoun & Raulet, 1978; Wiggerhaus, 1986. For comments about Marcuse's work, see Katz, 1982; Kellner, 1984; Raulet, 1992.

2 For an analysis of the relationship between the theses of critical theory and the environmental issue, see Vogel, 1996. In recent years Marcuse's work has aroused attention, given the conceptual contributions it brings to the ecological debate. See: Loureiro, 2003; Miles, 2016; Stevenson, 2020; Reitz, 2022.

Marcuse operates a fusion between Kant and Marx to think of the constitutive role of aesthetics in the construction of technology engaged with environmental challenges.

1. The *Paris Manuscripts*: Sensibility reencountered

One of the most important references in the constitution of Marcuse's aesthetic project is the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of Marx, written in 1844 during his stay in Paris. Marcuse was one of its first readers, and already in 1932, the year of its publication, he offered a critical reading of the *Manuscripts* (Marcuse, 1932/1978). The theses of the young Marx, which are in close dialogue with the work of Hegel and Feuerbach, mark not only a break in European Marxian reception but also an essential rupture within Marcuse's thinking. On the one hand, they show a Marx concerned with philosophical questions, shedding new light on the economic aspects of his writings and thus transforming the reading that had been made until then of *Capital*, his major work. On the other hand, they contributed to Marcuse's work with the materialist and existential reflections already inscribed in Marx, thus moving Marcuse away from the Heideggerian ontological matrix (Habermas *et al*., 1978). To illustrate the importance and permanence of such theses, I will discuss the main aspects of the *Manuscripts* and their reception in Marcuse's work in this section. First, I will address the centrality of the concept of *species-being* [*Gattungswesen*] and its implication in the notion of self-engendering proper to human nature. Secondly, I revisit the importance of sensibility within Marx's critique, highlighting the main points that Marcuse will take up. This analysis will serve as the basis for understanding the young Marx operated in Marcuse's late work, which I will develop further in the third section of this article.

1.1 Species-being, a central Concept

The *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, written in 1844 in Paris, changed Western Marxism's landscape when published in 1932. Influenced by Hegel and Feuerbach, they analyze the political economy through an anthropological perspective, of which work is the central element. In line with Hegel, the relationship between subject and object, between the individual and his environment, appear to the young Marx as a process. Work appears as the characteristic activity of the human, through which he externalizes and objectifies himself in nature. It is work, as subjective externalization, that produces, and this product of work is part of the subject. It allows subjects to appropriate themselves since it permits that, once their product is objectified before themselves, these creations open the way to self-consciousness and development. Marx's merit was to show that this human characteristic is estranged from humans within the capitalist system. In producing commodities, which feed capital, the human product is alienated

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from its producer, no longer belongs to him, and no longer externalizes their subjectivity. Thus, Marx's critique unveils the productive structure that, by usurping human *work*, transforms it into *labor* and *toil*.

A central concept within the *Manuscripts* is *species-being* [*Gattungswesen*]. This concept is based on Feuerbach's critique of religion, and it inspired Marx because of the constructive aspect it brings to human activity. *Gattung* is the German term that, after Christian Wolff, translates the Latin word *genus*. From early on, the German tradition established the correspondence between *idea* and *Gattung*, given the capacity to the act of thought of reaching the universal aspect of its objects (Toàn, 1971, p. 530). In Marx, to understand the human being as a species-being is to understand it as an organism capable of self-transformation. As Feuerbach's reflections make clear, the divine reference is rejected as the founding place of the origin of the species. It is no longer the figure of God that provides the determining character of humanity but humanity itself. The same dynamic operated in the unveiling of the transference of humanity in the construction of the divine figure shows that the fundamental dimension of the productive human character is inscribed in its nature. Thus, the human can become the object of himself, making his own species an object of his practice and, therefore, the object of self-transformation (Khurana, 2022, pp. 382 ff). The Hegelian rehabilitation operated by Marx's anthropology places *practice* and *work* as the founding elements of human nature.

However, this is not a static human nature. The capacity for self-engendering gives transformation plasticity and a historical character. Historicized, human nature is dynamic, making proper to human nature the possible and constant transformation of itself. As we can see below, in Feuerbach, this transforming capacity originates in the consciousness proper of the human species. For Feuerbach,

> consciousness [*Bewußtsein*] in the strictest sense is present only in a being to whom his species [*Gattung*], his essential nature [*Wesen*], is an object of thought. The animal is indeed conscious of himself as an individual—and he has accordingly the feeling of self as the common centre of successive sensations—but not as a species: hence, he is without that consciousness which in its nature, as in its name, is akin to science. Where there is this consciousness, there is a capability of science. Science is the cognisance of species. In practical life we have to do with individuals; in science, with species. But only a being to whom his own species, his own essentiality [*Wesenheit*], is an object [*Gegenstand*], can make the essential nature of other things or beings an object. (Feuerbach, 1841/2006, p. 28; Feuerbach, 1989, pp. 1–2 [*modified translation*])

This reflexive process that gives the human species the capacity to objectify itself as a product and project gains a new dimension in Marx: it is a process that occurs in time and space. In time, because it constructs history, and it is as a historical process

that human potentialities are realized—which brings Marx into the lineage that ranges from Kant to Hegel and thinks of human destiny through the regulative idea of purposiveness. As for the spatial dimension, it involves the human environment where the work activity takes place. This dimension comprises two fronts: on the one hand, how work relates to nature and, on the other hand, how work relates to collectivity, fostering the social dimension of the human.

Human life is inseparable from nature. It is within nature that work takes place, and it is through nature that the human being becomes objectified. There is a mutual process of metabolic engendering. Nature nourishes, but it is also the place of production and transformation through the agency of work. And it is in it that humanity, as *Gattungswesen*, is realized. For Marx,

> It is just in his work upon the objective world, that man really proves himself to be a species-being [*Gattungswesen*]. This production is his active species-life [*Werktätiges Gattungsleben*]. Through this production, nature appears as his work [*Werk*] and his reality. The object of labour [*Arbeit*] is, therefore, the objectification of man's species-life [*Vergegenständlichung des Gattungslebens des Menschen*]: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he sees himself in a world that he has created. (Marx, 1932/1982, p. 241; Marx, 1975, p. 277)

This objectification also has a social scope. Thus, for Marx, human realization as a species-being "is only possible if he really brings out all his species-powers [*Gattungskräfte*]" collectively and through a "co-operative action [*Gesammtwirken*] of all of mankind" (Marx, 1932/1982, p. 292; Marx, 1975, p. 333). This premise enables the understanding of a central thesis of the *Manuscripts*, namely that the human is realized as a society in real and concrete relation with human otherness (*cf.* Lukács, 1972, 589 ff).

The process of alienation, which in Marx acquires an economic dimension beyond its anthropological base, has a disruptive impact on this social cohesion. This is because the objectification and production of individuals do not imply only their isolated life but is inscribed in a framework of interactions that establish and transform society. Faced with the economic conditions criticized by Marx, the social sphere is also disrupted. The deprivation of the objectified species due to labor that becomes a commodity interrupts the processes of subjectivization and socialization, since it denies the collaborative work that leads to human fulfillment. The alienated labor [*entfremdete Arbeit*], therefore, robs individuals of their agency in the construction of their own species-life, their "real objectivity as a member of the species" (Marx, 1932/1982, p. 241; Marx, 1975, p. 277). In Marx's analysis, the economic system that sustains this process of alienation is based on private property [*Privateigentum*], which disrupts the relationship of individuals to the product of their own objectification and labor. Marx's originality lies in showing

the materiality that shapes this alienation and the subjective and sensible spheres that it affects and conditions. This is the foundation from which Marcuse will develop his aesthetic dimension.

1.2 *Marcuse, first-time Reader of the* Paris Manuscripts

The historicity of human nature and its capacity for self-transformation are central elements in the writings of the young Marx that profoundly marked Marcuse's thought. But there is another essential factor in the *Manuscripts*, namely the importance of the senses and sensibility in understanding the dynamics of the alienation process. I argue that this part of the *Manuscripts* is not only of central importance to Marcuse but that it grounds the aesthetic dimension and the philosophical project of a new sensibility. For Marx, the senses play a fundamental role in constructing freedom. This element will not pass unnoticed in Marcuse's interpretation of the *Manuscripts* in 1932 (Marcuse 1932/1978, p. 525; Marcuse, 2005, p. 98). In the same way, as I will show throughout the final section of this article, Marcuse will recover such theses once again in 1972—forty years later—giving the same prominent place to the senses. Before returning to this point, let us retrace Marx's argument so that in the last section of the article, we can return to it more clearly.

As argued above, Marx understands nature as a "base" [*Grundlage*] on which human existence becomes active and develops. Human organicity and its potentialities are engendered in the natural environment, and as they become objectified, they become objects of further transformation. Likewise, it is in this unfolding that the senses develop. As Marx proposes, it is the entire human sensible apparatus that modifies itself in its generic transformation:

> Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man's essential being is the richness of subjective human sensibility [*Sinnlichkeit*] (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form—in short, senses capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of *man*) either cultivated [*ausgebildet*] or brought into being [*erzeugt*]. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc.), in a word, *human* sense, the human nature of the senses, comes to be by virtue of its object, by virtue of *humanised* nature [*vermenschlichte* Natur] (Marx, 1932/1982, p. 270; Marx, 1975, pp. 301–302).

However, this anthropological feature is subjected to economic reality and to a mode of production in which human beings are alienated from their own activity and the production of their work. This condition has a devastating impact on the formation of the human senses. The primacy of the merchandise and the establishment of its modes

of use and circulation dismantle human possibilities. Nothing is more straightforward than Marx's verdict: "private property has made us so stupid and one-sided [*einseitig*] that an object is only ours when we have it—when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed," that is, "when it is *used* [*gebraucht*] by us." Alienation destroys the objectification of human essence, just as it decimates the multiplicity of relational possibilities it inscribes. The senses are framed and standardized according to the violence of possession, the "category of having [*Habens*]," and do nothing but intensify the "alienation of all senses [*Entfremdung aller Sinnen*]" (Marx, 1932/1982, pp. 268–269; Marx, 1975, p. 300 [*modified translation*]).

For Marx, there is an intricate correlation between the socio-economic and sensitive dimensions. Hence, Marx's diagnosis, perhaps the most compelling of this period, reveals that human possibilities are prevented from flourishing within a society centered on commoditized relations that mutilate the sensibility of individuals. On the horizon of this critical project, "the complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities" requires "the abolition [*Aufhebung*] of private property"[3] (Marx, 1932/1982, p. 269; Marx, 1975, p. 300). Marcuse will say no differently, whether in his first analysis in 1932 or the eco-social retaking of the *Manuscripts* in 1972 (Marcuse 1932/1978, p. 513; Marcuse, 2005, p. 91; Marcuse, 1972, p. 64). But already in Marx, there is the rupture with capitalist modes of production that gives rise to a qualitative and radical transformation at the core of modes of sociability. This rupture also implies a transformation in the modes of production and a change in the attitude toward the environment. From the economic point of view, it is a matter of overcoming the managed scarcity imposed by alienated labor. Only this will allow an alternative to the imposition of *need* [*Bedürfnis*]. The contrast proposed by Marx becomes evident in the face of the comparison he makes—just as Feuerbach had done—with the animal world and its relationship with its own production. This is because, in Marx's industrialized human world, necessity does not come from the inability to satisfy his vital needs but from the productive structure that alienates the human from his own specific means of production and interaction with the environment. Therefore, the material scarcity of the capitalist mode of production implies the and constraint of human sensuous formation. As Marx reminds us,

> the *forming* [*Bildung*] of the five senses [*Sinne*] is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present. The sense caught up in crude practical need has only a *restricted* sense [*bornirten Sinn*]. [...]. The care-burdened, poverty-

3 Based on this thesis of Marx, Marcuse will also mobilize, as we will see further on, the idea that the senses are partly formed by activity. In this regard, the problem with private property is more precisely the context of production in which it takes place, that is, a context in which modes of production are private. The consequence of this is that free activity becomes unviable, and thus work is exercised only as labour in a context of industrial production. According to the thesis expounded by Marx and adopted by Marcuse, the flourishing and development of the senses is jeopardised due to this context of the instrumentality of living labour.

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> stricken man has no sense for the finest play; the dealer in minerals sees only the commercial value but not the beauty and the specific character of the mineral: he has no mineralogical sense. Thus, the objectification of the human essence [*Vergegenständlichung des menschlichen Wesens*], both in its theoretical and practical aspects, is required to make man's *sense human*, as well as to create the *human sense* corresponding to the entire wealth of human and natural substance (Marx, 1932/1982, p. 270; Marx, 1975, p. 302).

What Marx's anthropology proposes is that, far from the scarcity arbitrated by modes of production, the senses will be able to flourish. This implies going beyond the merely receptive function. Naturally, they play a role in the epistemological constitution of reality. However, they are also the foundation from which a transformation and a co-construction of reality are possible. Marcuse will later recover this practical aspect. The sensitive interaction with the environment and with his own activity, that is, with the result of work, gives the human the ability to relate to nature beyond the mere satisfaction of vital needs (Feenberg, 2005, pp. 122 ff). As species-being, humans play with the internal possibilities of each thing in its own environment. In the eyes of the young Marx, this capacity differentiates humans from other living beings. Because he can interact with the potentialities of nature, producing freely beyond the mere satiation of needs, man can produce according to the capacities of beauty. Freedom is displayed there in all its strength, for it can mobilize the totality of human capacities beyond the immediacy of vital demands (Schmidt, 1973, pp. 17–18). This anthropology challenges the one-dimensionality imposed by alienated labor, for it glimpses a free human activity whose mode of interaction with the environment is radically transformed:

> The practical creation [*Erzeugen*] of an objective world, the transformation of inorganic nature, is the proving of man as a conscious species-being, i.e., as a being that treats [*verhält*] the species as its own essential being, or that treats itself as a species-being. Admittedly animals also produce. [...]. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly [*einseitig*], whilst man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need [*Bedürfnisses*], whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom. An animal produces only itself, whilst man reproduces the whole of nature. An animal's product belongs immediately to its physical body, whilst man freely confronts his product. An animal forms objects only in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, whilst man knows how to produce in accordance with the measure [*inhärente Maaβ*] of every species, and knows how to apply everywhere the inherent measure to the object. Man therefore also forms objects in accordance with the laws of beauty [*Gesetzen der Schönheit*] (Marx, 1932/1982, pp. 369–370; Marx, 1975, pp. 276–277 [*modified translation*]).

Therefore, producing according to the laws of nature means establishing with nature an activity that goes beyond necessity and the notion of possession. Hence, Marx emphasizes the attitude [*Verhalten*] established between species-being and nature in free production, guided by beauty and the alienated and possessive attitude of having [*Haben*]. This fundamental thesis of the young Marx's Hegelian retaking has a central place in the analyses made by Marcuse in 1932. Especially because it is emblematic of the new sources (*Neue Quellen*) that Marcuse refers to in the title of his article. This is because this anthropological aspect shed new light, at the time, on the interpretation of Marx's appropriation of the German philosophical tradition, especially the dialectical aspects found in Hegelian reflections on the historical moments of the formation and construction of subjectivity. Hence, the object–subject opposition is disrupted, and its new dialectical configuration refounds, as Marcuse suggests, the relationship between human beings and their physical environment. In this way, producing according to the laws of beauty means that human relations to the beings and objects in their surroundings are not seen "merely as the environment of immediate life activity," nor "merely objects of immediate needs." Rather, for Marcuse, it is a freedom from which "man reproduces 'the whole of nature,'" and through transformation and appropriation furthers it, along with "his own life" (Marcuse 1932/1978, p. 524; Marcuse, 2005, p. 97). At the basis of this resumption is Marcuse's attachment to the naturalist current originated by Feuerbach, and for which the historical development of the human species cannot be separated from the development of the physical environment in which human beings find themselves. "Man is nature," Marcuse will say, for "Nature is his 'expression,' 'his work and his reality.' Wherever we come across nature in human history, it is 'human nature' while man for his part is always 'human nature' too" (Marcuse 1932/1978, p. 524; Marcuse, 2005, p. 97).

Like this first resumption by Marcuse in 1932, this practical anthropological horizon, which allows him an aesthetic and normative interaction with nature, will underlie the resumption of the young Marx operated by Marcuse in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* in 1972. And as I will try to show in the following two sections, this free productive capacity establishes its aesthetic dimension.

2. Aesthetic Dimension

Aesthetics, a field in which Marcuse moved throughout his entire intellectual career, gave him new elements for thinking about the conditions of possibility of an emancipated life and its constitutive aspects. In the 1955 book *Eros and Civilization*, which gave a broader projection of Marcuse's theses, the author undertakes a historical and conceptual analysis of this field of studies. He incorporates it into a project of combining psychoanalysis and historical materialism. This reflection, now known in his work as

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the "Aesthetic Dimension"—given the centrality of a chapter by the same name in the book—re-evaluates the place reserved for aesthetics in Western thought since its appearance in the 18th century. It is, therefore, an effort of reinterpreting its main philosophical aspects, returning to the foundations of this discipline, namely, the realm of *sensibility*. In accordance with his interest in the *Manuscripts of 1844*, Marcuse's research on aesthetics during the 1950s and 1960s aimed to integrate the sensitive field into a project of transforming the relations that individuals maintain, both with their internal characteristics and their natural and social environment. In this section, I offer a review of the way Marcuse elaborates on the idea of an *aesthetic dimension* and a new sensibility, based on articulating the psychological and transcendental apparatuses proposed by Freud and Kant, respectively.

2.1 Freud's contributions

Marcuse takes as his departure ground one of the main theses of Freudian metapsychology. According to this thesis, civilization is founded on a permanent subjugation of human instincts. To Freud, psychic processes [*seelischen Vorgänge*] are regulated by the pleasure principle [*Lustprinzip*] (Freud, 1920/1940, p. 3), that is, by the satisfaction of their primary drives. Faced with this contingent character and pure spontaneity, culture could be nothing but the administration and organization of these pulsional forces. So, according to Freud's metapsychology, culture results from repression and administration of the pleasure principle. The objective of this operation is to reorient the organism's forces towards labor and the overcoming of scarcity. Repression, therefore, imposes an administration capable of organizing human activity. This means that culture is only possible through transforming the pleasure principle into the reality principle, that is, a deviation and a postponement of the fulfillment of desires which, in the face of reality, must find other means of organizing and implementing their satisfaction. An example is the social organization of production, which instrumentalizes and plans human labor to realize organized and large-scale production. Therefore, according to the Freudian model, what paves the way for a social organization is based on establishing a dichotomy. This antagonism between the pleasure principle and the reality principle can be compared to the duality that separates the processes from the unconscious from those from consciousness. In the same way, what happens in the history of human culture is a transformation of the drives by expanding the cognitive and logical mechanisms of consciousness, which tend to supplant the sphere of primary drive spontaneity. According to this comparison, the principle of reality gradually imposes itself on the desire for immediate human pleasure and fulfillment. This process, understood as a repressive process, causes the drive system to change. Marcuse tries to criticize this psychic rupture:

> With the establishment of the reality principle, the human being which, under the pleasure principle, has been hardly more than a bundle of animal drives, has become an organized ego. [...]. Under the reality principle, the human being develops the function of *reason*: it learns to "test" reality, to distinguish between good and bad, true and false, useful and harmful. Man acquires the faculties of attention, memory, and judgment. He becomes a conscious, thinking subject, geared to a rationality which is imposed upon him from outside (Marcuse, 1955, p. 14).

Marcuse agrees with Freud in his diagnosis concerning the psychic rupture and the rationalization process, from which the aesthetic dimension appears as one of the poles of this fragmentation. Moreover, drawing inspiration from Freud's considerations, Marcuse reinforces the argument that the reality principle emerges to face the "eternal primordial struggle for existence" against scarcity, so that "men [are taught] that they cannot freely gratify their instinctual impulses" (Marcuse, 1955, pp. 16–17). Therefore, for Freud, it is instinctual administration and transformation that allows for cultural and material development capable of enabling the satisfaction of human needs.

But the agreement between Marcuse and Freud stops there, and this is where the analytical differentiation between the two begins. Marcuse diverges from Freud by analyzing cultural progress from a dialectical point of view, that is, perceiving that the repression that imposed the pulsional restriction implied, as its consequence, the emergence of the forces necessary to satisfy human needs and, consequently, the possibility for the disappearance of those repressions. More specifically, those categories that, for Freud, were absolute and ontological are historicized by Marcuse. Thus, the fission established by the principle of reality ceases to inhabit humanity's past and, in the light of a materialist understanding, appears only as a historical moment.

The central point of Marcuse's approach is precisely the new reinterpretation of the reality principle, which in Marcuse is relabeled the *performance principle*, that is, "the prevailing historical form of the reality principle" (Marcuse, 1955, p. 35). From the point of view of this new interpretation, the current progress of civilization, as a result of this performance principle, "has attained a level of productivity at which the social demands upon instinctual energy to be spent in alienated labor could be considerably reduced." With this, Marcuse argues that the conditions of possibility for a liberation from alienated labor would be given. In other words, the repression that used to be sustained under the justification of a necessary and absolute "struggle for existence" now appears to have been obsolete. Hence the diagnosis that the current repression is no more than an "interest in domination" (Marcuse, 1955, pp. 129–130) subject to transformation.

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2.2 Kant and the Aesthetics

Marcuse strives, throughout his work, to find spaces of resistance to the impositions of the reality principle. His use of the theoretical framework of psychoanalysis allows him to think of the non-logical sphere of imagination and fantasy as a psychic realm that, after the fragmentation of the mental apparatus, could remain free from repression (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1967, p. 152). This sphere leads Marcuse to a more extended inquiry into the field of aesthetics as it is addressed in Immanuel Kant's work, for in it, one finds an effort to mediate "between sensuousness and reason" that embodies the attempt to reconcile "the two spheres of the human existence which were torn asunder by a repressive reality principle" (Marcuse, 1955, p. 179).

Despite the relative similarity in the way the first-generation authors of the Institut für Sozialforschung read Kant's practical writings, it would be interesting to highlight some important differences in this appropriation. As I try to sustain here, the proper aesthetic use of Kant's work is first made by Marcuse, in *Eros and Civilization*. It is true that Horkheimer had dedicated his doctoral thesis ("Zur Antinomie der teleologischen Urteilskraft", 1922) and habilitation ("Über Kants Kritik der Urteilskraft als Bindeglied zwischen theoretischer und praktischer Philosophie", 1925) to the themes of the *Third Critique*, under the guidance of the neo-Kantian Hans Cornelius (*cf.* Horkheimer, 1987), but the aesthetic aspect will not appear again in his writings. As for Adorno, it is valid to recall his use of the notion of *Naturschönheit* in the monumental *Ästhetische Theorie*. However, fearing to incur an eventual anachronism, this analysis prefers not to express itself regarding its relation to Marcuse's first incursions into Kantian aesthetics, since Adorno's work would only be published posthumously, in 1970, while Marcuse's first incursions into Kantian aesthetics date from 1955. Regardless of these proximities or differences in reading, it seemed important to us to highlight Marcuse's choice of a discussion with Kant since Kant is precisely the consolidation of the aesthetic discussion within the modern philosophical body.

Aesthetics as a subject appears within the German philosophical tradition through the efforts of Alexander Baumgarten in the second half of the 18th century. In the homonymous work, *Ästhetik* (1750), Baumgarten defines this emerging discipline as a *science of sensual knowledge* [*scientia cognitionis sensitivae*] (Baumgarten, 1750/2007, p. 10) and attempts to problematize the Leibnizian-Wolffian metaphysics of the time by incorporating the dimension of human perception, sensation, and sensitivity as a central element in the fabrication of experience (Bäumler, 1923/1967, p. 347). In Baumgarten, the aesthetic dimension (derived from the Greek *aisthesis*, that which belongs to sensibility) was attempting to connect itself to the field of the *noesis* (the conceptual and logical dimension *par excellence*), challenging the isolation of the latter concerning the contribution of the senses (Kangussu, 2008, pp. 153–161).

Kant is a direct heir to this recovery of the *inferior ratio* in constructing a science of the sensuous. More specifically, the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* paradigmatically represents this effort. It is the attempt to mediate between "the lower and the higher faculties of man," which were separated by the "progress of civilization" and "through the subjugation of the sensuous faculties to reason, and through their repressive utilization for social needs" (Marcuse, 1955, p. 179). As Marcuse argues, this mediation of the aesthetic dimension is twofold: while it is mediation "in which the senses and the intellect meet," it is equally "the medium in which nature and freedom meet" (Marcuse, 1955, p. 179; Reitz, 2000, pp. 100 ff).

It is not surprising, therefore, that Marcuse has operated a return to Kant's *Third Critique*, given that one of its main aspects is its mediating character within Kant's critical system. This is because Kant's first two critical writings can be understood as, on the one hand, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, a construction of the conditions that enable scientific knowledge and the logical ordering of the natural world (Ginsborg, 2006, p. 455). On the other hand, the *Critique of Practical Reason* sought to think about the constitutive aspects of morality and the possibility of realizing human freedom (Bird-Pollan, 2013, pp. 101–103). However, placed side by side, these first two critiques leave between them a gulf. This separation is due to the fact that, on the theoretical side, Kant's transcendental model offers a mechanistic understanding of the realm of nature, suggesting a determinism intelligible only from the logical enchainment of the categories of the understanding. On the contrary, the practical side of his critical project required thinking about the role of freedom as an agentive and transforming element, which implied a certain contradiction with the transcendental formalism established in the first critique. Kant takes up this idea in the § II of the introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in the following terms:

> although there is an incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, so that from the former to the latter (thus by means of the theoretical use of reason) no transition is possible, just as if there were so many different worlds, the first of which can have no influence on the second: yet the latter should have an influence on the former, namely the concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world; and nature must consequently also be able to be conceived in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom (Kant, 1790/1908, pp. 175–176; Kant, 2008, p. 63).

However, the separation between theoretical and practical philosophies and their respective fields of legislation, find a possible connection in the figure of the *reflective judgment*. This is because Kant's project is marked by an idea of systematicity and,

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therefore, by the assumption that there is a predisposition in nature for an order capable of adapting itself to the structures of our cognitive capacities (Lebrun, 1970, p. 266). Reason tends to go beyond the realm of understanding, seeking to apprehend the ultimate end of experience. The faculty of judgment acts in a complementary way in this task. As defined in the introduction to the *Third Critique* (§ IV), judgment is "The power of judgment, in general, is the faculty for thinking of the particular as contained under the universal" (Kant, 1790/1908, p. 179; Kant, 2008, p. 66). This action demonstrates what for Kant is the "principle of purposiveness," that is, the role of the faculty of judgment is to seek a concept of the sensible data apprehended by the imagination in experience, that is, to determine the purposiveness of that experience. But unlike determining judgments, which apply a concept to the particular and determine it, reflective judgments reflect, perceiving the purpose without, however, determining it.

This functional quality of reflective judgment opens two fronts that will be fundamental for Marcuse. On the one hand, in its aesthetic use, the reflective judgment presents itself as an a priori grounding for the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, which implies the free play between imagination and understanding and thus allows—given its non-exhaustive and non-determining play—the experience of beauty in nature. As Kant will say in § 17 of the *Third Critique*, beauty "is the form of the purposiveness [*Zweckmäßigkeit*] of an object, insofar as it is perceived in it without representation of an end" (Kant, 1790/1908, p. 236; Kant, 2008, p. 220; Zammito, 1992, pp. 152 ff). On the other hand—and this will be the point that we will privilege—in its theological use, the reflective judgment allows the perception of purposiveness in nature, as Kant establishes in § VIII of his Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (Kant, 1790/1908, p. 193; Kant, 2008, pp. 78–80).

It goes without saying that this speculation has only a formal aspect within Kant's philosophical project, and the concept of the purposiveness without purpose of nature operates primarily due to a necessity internal to the systematicity of critical philosophy. The famous condition of *als ob* (as if), which in Kant marks the regulative—and therefore only thinkable—aspect of purposiveness as made explicit by the action of the reflective judgment, did not prevent Marcuse from seeing there a philosophical response capable of challenging the epistemological assumptions that marked the science of his time. So that what Marcuse repurposes from the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is the possibility of reevaluating the ways of thinking about nature (Lukes, 1985, pp. 65 ff). By seeking to rediscover pure and free natural forms, Marcuse finds a gap in the transcendental system, which allows escaping from the cognitive dominance of determination in understanding the natural world. The experience of beauty appears as a privileged track since it results from a play between faculties that do not reach the determined stage of the concept. The particular shows itself in its purity without being subsumed into the universal. The reflection judgment operates in such a way as to allow

the pure forms of the natural object to stimulate the imagination. In the grounding of natural beauty, Marcuse finds the elements that can forge a new relationship with nature, challenging the contemporary stage of science and instrumentalization for establishing "a truly non-repressive order" (Marcuse, 1955, p. 177). This evidence is found in Kant's own formulation in § 23 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*:

> The self-sufficient beauty of nature [*Naturschönheit*] reveals to us a technique of nature [*Technik der Natur*], which makes it possible to represent it as a system in accordance with laws the principle of which we do not encounter anywhere in our entire faculty of understanding, namely that of a purposiveness [*Zweckmäßigkeit*] with respect to the use of the power of judgment [*Urteilskraft*] in regard to appearances [*Erscheinungen*], so that this must be judged as belonging not merely to nature in its purposeless mechanism but rather also to the analogy with art. Thus it actually expands not our cognition of natural objects, but our concept of nature, namely as a mere mechanism, into the concept of nature as art: which invites profound investigations into the possibility of such a form. (Kant, 1790/1908, p. 246; Kant, 2008, pp. 129–130)

It is Kant who highlights the change in the understanding of nature caused by the reflective judgment. From being a mere mechanism, it is now possible to see nature as an artistic, technical performance, in which the processes that engender life would not be a contingent enchainment but an arrangement based on purpose.

When Marcuse claims the emergence of a new sensibility, he is referring to a part of the aesthetic dimension, more specifically to the one that transforms the sensitive dimension, also transforming the mode of assimilation of natural phenomena. From the point of view of Kantian philosophy, which supports part of Marcuse's thesis on the aesthetic dimension, this sensibility transformation results from reflective and aesthetic judgments. By perceiving nature as susceptible to purpose, everything happens as if this agency were a symbol of freedom. Therefore, it is no longer about seeing natural phenomena as the work of a mechanical system, but as an expression of freedom (Kangussu, 2008, p. 130).

In order to corroborate the need for transformation in the way of considering and understanding a possible agency of nature, Marcuse turns to another ally, he too, a reader of Kant, namely Friedrich Schiller. Within the critique in relation to the reality principle and the search for the satisfaction of human needs, typical of the psychoanalytic debate perpetrated in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse resorts to Schiller's reflection, also involving pulsional aspects, to think an anthropology capable of contributing to the transformation of exchanges between humans and non-humans. From Schiller's point of view, the deleterious aspect of the reality principle results from the disparity between intellect and sensibility—"the establishment of the repressive tyranny of reason over sensuousness" (Marcuse, 1955, p. 193). In this sense, he too

falls within the tradition begun by Baumgarten, which claims the mastery of sensibility as an equally important component as understanding in the realization of human and social potentialities.

Marcuse brings up Schiller's thought precisely to reinforce the idea of a pacified negotiation between the intentions of the instrumentality of human reason and the characteristics immanent to the agentive multiplicity of nature. This is possible because Schiller, in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), thinks of an anthropological foundation composed of two main impulses, namely, "sensuous impulse"—which projects human volition toward the immediacy and positivity of the physical dimension of existence—and "form impulse"—which tends to get lost in processes of abstraction, forgetting the need for a cooperative confrontation with the materiality of the world (Schiller, 1795/1962; Schiller, 1967). To balance the tension and the imbalance that, according to his diagnosis, is responsible for the rational and violent unleashing of human history, Schiller proposes the idea of a "play impulse", which would characterize precisely the instinctual liberation suggested by Marcuse (*cf.* Schiller, 1795/1962; Schiller, 1967). In this way, the play impulse would design a form of life capable of proposing the reconciliation of the conflicting impulses and "the restoration of the right of sensuousness" (Marcuse, 1955, p. 191). "Schiller's playful freedom is the result of instinctual liberation," Marcuse says, not only because they would allow human liberation from the forces determining it according to a logic of conquest and necessity, but equally because it would mean the liberation of the agentive possibilities of matter, with which the aesthetic dimension seeks to compose the relationship with the world (Marcuse, 1955, pp. 192–193).

The consequences of this conclusion for Marcuse's work are countless. The first, and perhaps the most important, is establishing the aesthetic dimension as the foundation of a new praxis, a new ethical position. A transformation of science and technology characterizes this new practical stance—in other words, of human epistemological and productive foundations—to establish a relationship of freedom with nature, thus countering the conditioned experience of instrumental reason. This practical transformation is grounded in the concept of a *new sensibility*.

The concept appears for the first time in the book *An Essay on Liberation* (1969) as an effort to develop Marcuse's aesthetic dimension. One can understand it as a broader role of the senses in contributing to and constructing epistemological experience. It is worth remembering that in *Eros and Civilization*, the German term *Sinnlichkeit* was presented as the cognitive dimension where Marcuse's aesthetic project was based, that is, "sensations plus affections"—"the 'lower cognitive' faculties" and the "feeling of pain and pleasure" made possible by the aesthetic judgment (Marcuse, 1955, p. 182). Just like in the early formulation of the aesthetic dimension in the 1950s, sensibility reappears as a combination of the sensuous and the instinctive realms. Only through a return to individuals' "biological foundation" can an alternative to instrumentality and

the establishment be found. As Marcuse's diagnosis shows, the society of advanced capitalism, maintained by the *status quo*, operates through two strategies: the "socially engineered arrest of consciousness" but also the "development and satisfaction of needs which perpetuate the servitude of the exploited" (Marcuse, 1969, p. 16). It is not enough to face productive irrationality, it is necessary to free the instinctive forces imprisoned by the new forms of pulsional administration.

Here is fundamental to understanding the two possible conditions of Marcuse's emancipation project. On the one hand, as seen above, it involves a transformation in the modes of perception, allowing the intrinsic potentialities of objects to be revealed; on the other hand, it involves a "remembrance," a liberation of individuals through the rejection of the manipulations of desires, as if it were a return to the pre-repressive phase (Marcuse, 1969, p. 17). This rejection, this refusal of instinctive determination, becomes a "productive social force" [*gesellschaftliche Produktivkraft*] of the new ways of conceiving technology in Marcuse's project of emancipation (Marcuse, 1969, p. 26). Hence, the new sensibility is a fundamental dimension of his philosophy's proposed radical transformation of epistemological, ethical, and productive spheres. In other words, the critique of the industrial society of his time does not make Marcuse a romantic whose project of emancipation rejects scientific and technological advancement. On the contrary, according to Marcuse, science and technology are the vehicles of freedom, but on the condition of "changing their present direction and goals" (Marcuse, 1969, p. 19). The key to this transformation is instinctual liberation. As I argued before, the *continuum* of domination is responsible for repressing life instincts. But the instinctual liberation, according to the scheme proposed by Marcuse, would mean the absorption of these life instincts into the project of emancipation:

> The life instincts would find rational expression (sublimation) in planning the distribution of the socially necessary labor time within and among the various branches of production, thus setting priorities of goals and choices: not only what to produce but also the "form" of the product. The liberated consciousness would promote the development of a science and technology free to discover and realize the possibilities of things and men in the protection and gratification of life, playing with the potentialities of form and matter for the attainment of this goal. Technique would then tend to become art, and art would tend to form reality: the opposition between imagination and reason, higher and lower faculties, poetic and scientific thought, would be invalidated. Emergence of a new Reality Principle: under which a new sensibility and a desublimated scientific intelligence would combine in the creation of an *aesthetic ethos*. (Marcuse, 1969, p. 24)

It is clear from these writings of the 1950s and 1960s that by appealing to the aesthetic dispositions of human subjectivity and by arguing for a transformation of

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sensibility itself, Marcuse is, in fact, attempting to find directions for the negation of capitalism. If Marcuse's outlined horizon is not *per se* the transformative element of the capitalist system, it at least provides the broad figure of a free subjectivity. This is because his project intends to consider alternatives to the relations involved in the current mode of production, negating it at its vital point: capitalism's capacity to transform its modes of extraction and exploitation of surplus value. And the subjective facet of this negation implies a radical change in the ways of interacting, creating, producing, and consuming.

Considering this analysis, it is possible to offer two preliminary considerations regarding Marcuse's project. The first is that his emancipation project explicitly states that science and technology are vehicles of liberation (Marcuse, 1969, pp. 11–12). That is, it is not a matter of criticizing technological advance, but the class structure and the modes of exploitation that are in the domain of science and technology;[4] The second is that technological transformation, and consequently effective productive transformation, have as a premise the radical transformation of human sensibility. This requirement, which some commentators characterize as an "anthropological break" (Bundschuh, 1992; Bronner, 1994), is a condition without which a mere rupture with traditional modes of production would become incomplete. In the next section, I will seek to illustrate how these two hypotheses reappear in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* and how they are reaffirmed as fundamental elements of Marcuse's project in this work.

3. "Nature and Revolution", fifty Years later

Counterrevolution and Revolt is a collection of three texts published in 1972. In addition to the resumption and actualization of the theses built throughout Marcuse's lifetime, this work presents a prolonged and systematic analysis of the ecological problem. It marks the author's entry into a discussion that only took shape in the 1960s and 1970s, thus inaugurating the centrality of the ecological dimension within his philosophical thought.[5] More specifically, in the text "Nature and Revolution," the central part of the book, Marcuse will develop the foundations of his critique of the relationship between the mode of production and environmental impact. These reflections appear as a necessary continuity in the path taken by Marcuse's thought. As we have seen in previous sections, they take up again, from another angle, the themes that were, until then, the focus of the author's writings. More specifically, we see the reappearance

4 The critique of one-dimensional society and its technocratic aspects, advanced by Marcuse in the 1960s, was found in Habermas, an early interlocutor (Alford, 1985; Habermas, 1968). For a contemporary discussion, which reassesses the contributions of critical theory in science and technology reflection, see Delanty, 2021.

5 Marcuse's interlocution with the philosopher and precursor of ecological thought André Gorz is particularly interesting. For a detailed study of this relationship, as well as their conceptual exchanges, see Fourel & Ruault, 2022.

of Kant and Marx as influences on the ecological formulations advanced by Marcuse. Thus, in this section, I show the centrality of the aesthetic dimension to the constitution and understanding of environmental critique by presenting how Marcuse takes up the works of the young Marx and the advances of Kant's *Third Critique*.

Before resuming Marcuse's analysis of these authors, it is crucial to show how the author rearticulates the foundations of the aesthetics he had worked on during the 1950s and 1960s. Marcuse again insists on the importance of transforming sensibility to raise awareness about the structure of the political economy and its environmental damage. This enables the ecological impact to be understood in its unfolding concerning external nature and the internal nature of individuals. This awareness takes place based on the new sensibility and is organized around three principles: the liberation of nature as a condition for human liberation, the need to reactivate the repressed natural forces, liberating the potentialities inscribed in nature—which refers to the remembrance thesis indicated above; and the historical character of nature, both the nature within individuals and the nature that surrounds them. This historicity is what allows us to foresee the possibilities of transformation inherent to both.

3.1 Liberation of Nature as the Foundation of human Liberation

The liberation of nature as the foundation of human freedom is central to Marcuse's thesis. This premise is taken from Marx within the project of a new sensibility. It is about shifting the centrality of emancipation to modes of interaction with nature, seeking a "new relation between man and nature—his own, and external nature" (Marcuse, 1972, p. 59; Seel, 1992). This displacement sets the new sensibility demanded by the author as the medium through which the individual drive for liberation becomes a cooperative force in transforming the social world. Thus, it is a rearrangement in the emancipation project, implying a

> discovery (or rather, rediscovery) of nature as an ally in the struggle against exploitative societies in which the violation of nature aggravates the violation of man. The discovery of the liberating forces of nature and their vital role in the construction of a free society becomes a new force in social change (Marcuse, 1972, p. 59).

The idea of a reunion or a recovery marks the central features of what in Marcuse can be seen as the remembrance thesis. It can be defined as the recovery of a non-repressive state or to a stage where human and social potentialities could be realized. The idea of recollection, however, should not be understood as a metaphysical or Platonic opening within Marcuse's work. The concept of anamnesis, which appears in

the Platonic dialogues, is directly related to Plato's theory of forms and therefore implies an idea of what knowledge is entirely distinct from what is seen operating in "Nature and Revolution." Instead, for Marcuse, it is a matter of seeking an alternative to the historically imposed principle of reality so that the liberation of nature would be "the recovery of the life-enhancing forces in nature, the sensuous aesthetic qualities" that, with the establishment of the performance principle, have been drained and wasted to supply the capitalist material and cultural production. Science would then appear as "the rediscovery of the true Forms of things, distorted and denied in the established reality" (Marcuse, 1972, pp. 69–70).

The idea here is far less metaphysical and much more of a historical order. Neither the historicity of the concept is concerned with the past nor signifies a romantic return to a kind of "pre-technological stage." The historicity argued by Marcuse seeks to unveil the fact that what was considered a metaphysical *a priori*—that is, the mere mechanistic determinism of the physical nature—can be reformed. If this is so, it means that nature can be moved from being a mere "value-free matter" to a "totality of life to be protected and 'cultivated'" (Marcuse, 1972, p. 61). Based on these principles, this new sensibility intends to show the need to transform the way political and ecological thinking has been conducted until now. It is thus a matter of fostering the establishment of institutions capable of implementing the flourishing of human faculties. One must not forget—and this is essential to Marcuse—that the "roots of liberation in individuals" are "the roots of social relationships there where individuals most directly and profoundly experience their world and themselves: in their sensibility, in their instinctual needs" (Marcuse, 1972, p. 62). The new sensibility would thus be the recognition of "the active, constitutive role of the senses in shaping reason," that is, "in shaping the categories under which the world is ordered, experienced, changed," entailing a "break with the familiar experience of the world (Marcuse, 1972, pp. 62–63).

3.2 Kant and Marx, once again

In the 1969 book *An Essay on Liberation*, this project of transforming sensibility appears systematically in Marcuse's work. The book, written before the events of May 1968, captures well the aesthetic claims that accompanied the student revolts. It is a book marked by the context of the late 1960s. In an attempt to continue the aesthetic project begun with *Eros and Civilization*, the book relies on analyses of the literary tradition and avant-garde art movements. It marks the effort to conceptually unite the proposition of a new sensibility with the aesthetic dimension. The book *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, written in 1972, also continues the aesthetic scheme. In this sense, it can be interpreted as continuing this path within Marcuse's writings. Nevertheless, one should note the

significant effort to insert a nascent ecological concern within this aesthetic project. For Marcuse, a radical change in the human's sensitive apparatus must accompany the productive system's transformation. Once again, it is in the young Marx that Marcuse looks to for inspiration.

By invoking the *Paris Manuscripts* for a second time—forty years after his first essay in 1932—, Marcuse clarifies why the young Marx resonated so strongly within Western Marxism: it represented a response to Soviet dogmatism, and it allowed for an image, for a glimpse of an effectively liberating socialism. Thus, the revelations of the young Marx, instead of seeming a pre-scientific and romantic regression, were, in Marcuse's eyes, the design of an effectively radical and integral version of the socialist idea (Marcuse, 1972, p. 64). The reason for this radicality is the establishment of new modes of relationship between humanity and nature. In Marx's thesis, as I illustrated above, this is represented by the emancipation of the senses. Marx foresaw the importance of the sensitive dimension in the metabolic relationship between society and its environment. So, at the heart of Marcuse's recovery, his interest continues to be in thinking about the mutual engendering of man and nature. This transformation in the modes of relationship finds its motivation in the emancipation of the senses, as the following passage makes clear:

> The emancipated senses would repel the instrumentalist rationality of capitalism while preserving and developing its achievements. They would attain this goal in two ways: *negatively*—inasmuch as the Ego, the other, and the object world would no longer be experienced in the context of aggressive acquisition, competition, and defensive possession; *positively*—through the "human appropriation of nature," i.e., through the transformation of nature into an environment (medium) for the human being as "species being"; free to develop the specifically human faculties: the creative, aesthetic faculties (Marcuse, 1972, p. 64).

At the end of the first section, I emphasized that this qualitative transformation in the relationship [*Verhältnis*]—which moves from violent possession to appropriation[6]—is fundamental to Marcuse. It is the central point of his thesis. Moreover, the argument rests on mutual and necessary cooperation and engendering between nature and humanity. Human intersubjective experience in nature is primarily an experience whose a priori emanates from the human practice itself. The "nature" with which one interacts is a humanized nature, to which the human gives form by engaging it in his existence. In this way, the quality of this nature is subordinated to the human practice imposed upon it. Marcuse seems willing to show

6 Appropriation can be compared, within the process of consciousness, to a reabsorption of subjectivity, once it is externalized. For an in-depth study of how appropriation [*Aneignung]* opposes alienation *[Entfremdung]* in the *Manuscripts*, *see* Franck Fischbach's introduction to his French translation (2007, pp. 60–63).

that a change in human practice over nature would equally imply an experience over a non-aggressive nature—a radical social change implying a radical natural change, as well as from the science of nature. Human labor and species, in general, are catalysts but equally receptors of the practice's effect on nature. Hence, as Marcuse proposes, the transformation of practice must guide it to the gesture of liberation from the possibilities inherent to nature and inscribed in it. By doing so, human practice receives possibilities that will continue to enrich it.

> In sharp contrast to the capitalist exploitation of nature, its "human appropriation" would be nonviolent, nondestructive: oriented on the life-enhancing, sensuous, aesthetic qualities inherent in nature. Thus transformed, "humanized," nature would respond to man's striving for fulfillment, nay, the latter would not be possible without the former. Things have their "inherent measure" (*inhärentes Mass*): this measure is *in* them, is the potential enclosed in them; only man can free it and, in doing so, free his own human potential. Man is the only being who can "form things in accordance with the laws of beauty" (Marcuse, 1972, p. 67).

The first section of this article sought to establish the freedom represented by this creation according to beauty. In Marx's anthropology, it means a capacity for creation beyond the mere satisfaction of primary vital needs. Therefore, this implies a differentiation in the way of approaching nature and a change in how it deals with it. Marcuse takes up the idea of a new mode, of "appropriation," which was already present in the young Marx. "Appropriate" sounds aggressive, but it is worth paying attention to its polysemy, for it holds a specific gesture of which Marcuse is fully aware. As he states, it is not a matter of reproducing the old relationship of exploitation and violence. Given this conceptual resumption and throughout the construction of my hypothesis, I argue that this new non-violent form of appropriation of nature refers much more to the idea of "adaptation" contained in the verb "to appropriate." That is an adaptation that refers to the adequacy of a particular purpose, an *accommodation* (to accommodate), or *conformity* (to conform). This meaning is far from the idea of possession. To be sure, the sensitive transformation proposed by Marcuse should understand nature no longer as a raw material but as an active element in constructing a new science. It thus occupies a prominent place in Marcuse's technological project. From the point of view of human practice, this sensibility would be the first moment in the cycle of mutual engendering proposed by Marcuse's analysis. That is, the humanization of nature, as objectification of subjectivity, transforms the natural environment and then is again recovered by subjects: "nature as a universe which becomes the congenial medium for human gratification to the degree to which nature's own gratifying forces and qualities are recovered and released" (Marcuse, 1972, p. 67). So that appropriation appears, in Marcuse, as an "assistance," as a cooperation in solidarity, capable of

bringing to the surface of phenomena creative potentialities of nature that can be incorporated into the new conception of science.[7]

In Marcuse's project, this cooperation can only occur if nature is understood as a source of agency. At this point in the argument, Marcuse again turns to Kant's *Third Critique* to place it alongside the young Marx. The notion of *teleology* and purposiveness appear once again. As argued in the previous section, the aesthetic dimension and aesthetic judgment provide a beauty experience. Thus, the symbolization of nature is again established as pillar of Marcuse's argument: "the aesthetic form" appears as "a token of freedom" (Marcuse, 1972, p. 67), for beauty manifests nature's capacity to form itself, consequently manifesting its freedom.

Kant's transcendental viewpoint and Marx's historical concept of nature meet through Marcuse's hands at two specific points: first, insofar as the former supports the idea of teleology, while the latter understands nature as "a cosmos with its own potentialities," essential for "the enhancement and fulfillment of life" (Marcuse, 1972, p. 69). Therefore, it is unsurprising that this anthropological break signifying the transformation of sensibility can resemble the notion of recollection. For the "liberating power of remembrance" (Jay, 1982, p. 7) implies the opening of a new horizon of experience, composed by "reassembling the bits and fragments which can be found in the distorted humanity and distorted nature" (Marcuse, 1972, p. 70).

Conclusion

As an overview, I proposed throughout this text to offer a layout of how Marcuse's theses develop and intertwine throughout his work. I claimed that they culminate in his work *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, which, fifty years after its publication, still has a crucial analytical relevance for considering the challenges of our historical time. Knowing how to create a dialogue between authors such as Kant and Marx, extracting from them a fruitful conceptual ground, seems one of the most important contributions of Marcuse's aesthetic dimension. Hence, I tried to show how Marcuse operates a link between Kant's notion of purpose—which projects reason into the freedom of nature—and Marx's emancipation of sensibility (Kangussu, Kovacevic, Lamas, 2017, pp. 137 ff). Thus, Kant's aesthetic universality offers a new perspective on nature, allowing one to think of it as a source of agency and purpose. The same happens with Marcuse's Marx, which opens new forms of

7 To corroborate his argument, Marcuse recalls, in this passage, Adorno's reflection inscribed in the chapter "Natural Beauty" [*Das Naturschöne],* from his posthumous book *Aesthetic Theory.* Adorno shares the idea of a cooperative interaction between science and nature: "technique is said to have ravished nature, yet under transformed relations of production it would just as easily be able to assist nature and on this sad earth help it to attain what perhaps it wants" (Adorno, 1970, p. 107; Adorno 1970/2002, p. 68 [emphasis added]).

natural relationship and interaction from the analysis of sensibility. One glimpse from this encounter is new forms of behavior (*Verhalten*), of mutual adequacy that challenge the practice of possession and exploitation normalized by the modes of production of our societies.[8]

Certainly, Marcuse took risks in his conceptual project. Undoubtedly, a possible philosophical critique of Marcuse's project could question him regarding the philosophical allies he chose to have accompanied him in his analyses. As for his use of Kant, this distrust could be aggravated in the face of the transcendental nature that runs through critical philosophy, and that tends to take aesthetic discussion away from the everyday domain within which Marcuse wanted to insert it. As for the option of mobilizing concepts from the young Marx, we could ask ourselves about its foundation, still too Hegelian, and therefore based on a model of figures of subjective development that do not match today's social challenges without serious intellectual effort. Faced with these choices, it would not be strange to wonder about Marcuse's motives, especially in the composition of a work that takes place during the second half of the 20th century and that seeks to respond to the concreteness of problems that society has not yet faced, such as those of the false idea of unlimited progress, or of the social and industrial contradictions that beckoned, already during the 1960s, the environmental crisis we live in today. Similarly, and this time from a technical point of view, it would be possible to say that the crossing of conceptual fields as distinct as Kant's and Marx's, and the dialogue between the aesthetic dimension and ecological practice still seem far from being accepted by contemporary science.

However, if we consider that science is currently facing an impasse in thinking about the environmental challenges of the present, the abstraction of Marcuse's thought and the radical nature of his allies, will not seem entirely nonsensical. Currently, science seems to hesitate between the abandonment of the productive forces and the "sustainable" reshaping of the established order. If the analysis presented here is accurate, it is not dishonest to say that these two options would appear as a false dilemma in Marcuse's eyes. This is because, on the one hand, the abandonment of technical and productive advances would not only not solve any problem from the point of view of the historical impact of human production, but would also require a regression within the modes of social orgnization. On the other hand, simply greenwashing the current state of affairs would tolerate a productive structure that will take humanity nowhere else but the total and irremediable collapse of its ways of living.

8 An interesting critique of Marcuse's proposition was made by Pierre Charbonnier, in his book *Abondance et liberté* (2020, pp. 297–305). The author judges the new technology approach, which is based on Marcuse's aesthetic analyses, as being a mere proposal for the acceleration and intensification of the productive forces. He seems to ignore, however, that Marcuse's project includes a double requirement, without which, his proposal is doomed to incomprehension.

Faced with this impasse, Marcuse's bet is an anthropological refounding, which puts the problem of human productivity in another level of questioning. Thus, the issue is not to promote the maintenance of a productive society as it is or not, but to reform it based on its possible regimes of experience and its priorities for collective action. This means, in other words, questioning, from a diagnosis of alienation and catastrophe, the physical and political models of interaction that have so far shaped modern adventure. That is why Marcuse seeks a dialogue with two authors who, in their own way, aim to challenge the epistemological, aesthetic and political structure of human presence in the world, in whose reflections an environmental thought can come to be sustained.

In light of this, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* remain relevant in its philosophical vitality. Not only for Marcuse's intuition, who was able to see in the contradictions of his present the conditions for the appearance of the social and environmental problem that is ours, but above all for the sensitivity of knowing how to operate with authors and ideas that enabled him to think negatively in relation to the unidimensionality of instrumental thinking that crystallized in contemporary society during the last century. The moral and epistemic transformation that passes through aesthetic investigation is not mere escape from the challenges of the ways of life imposed by the univocal advance of the modes of production—it is, instead, a path of social transformation that opens before the irrational impasse that, attached to its past and frozen in relation to its future, sees nothing more than the dichotomy that opposes, on one side, the negation of itself and, on the other, the deepening of its contradictions. Since the writing of Marcuse's *Couterrevolution and Revolt*, the impasses that social philosophy attempts to resolve have only deepened. Fifty years later, the reconfiguration of the contradictions against which Marcuse had opposed himself, instead of contradicting the philosopher's wager, has done nothing but highlight the sharpness and perspicacity of the analysis he supports.

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