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Reflections on instrumental reason and artistic labor

Craig Howard
The University of Montana

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REFLECTIONS ON INSTRUMENTAL REASON
AND ARTISTIC LABOR

By
Craig Howard
B.A., Montana State University, 1971

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Approved by:

[Signature]
Chairman, Board of Examiners

[Signature]
Dean, Graduate School

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Date
Preface

These papers represent three areas of my interest as a graduate student at the University of Montana: humanities, political theory, and aesthetics. As such they are attempts to restore the mythic unity of instrumental and critical reason, technology, and art through a reformulation of the concept of labor.

The first paper discusses the emergence of instrumental reason in Greek thought, and poses the question for a philosophical reunification of the practical and the moral. It is my contention that within the Western tradition, instrumental reason emerges as controlling, and becomes a normative force through the great Aristotelean tradition.

The second paper posits labor as an ontological category of human existence, and discusses the possibilities of considering labor in its full context as something more than mere economic activity. The historical move from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom is the development of reason from its instrumental footing in economic activity to its critical possibility in art.

The third paper is a search for the ground of critical reason in modern technological society, and is an exposition of the thought of Jurgen Habermas and Walter Benjamin. Habermas argues that the ground of critical theory is
symbolic interaction, rather than the labor process understood as an ontological category of human existence. I argue that authentic and autonomous art is the unspoken paradigm in Habermas' model: human intersubjectivity is the field for its operation.

Expository papers naturally owe a great deal to what they exposit, and I am therefore indebted to the work of Herbert Marcuse, Jurgen Haberams, and Walter Benjamin, to the guidance of Professor Ron Perrin and the Philosophy Department, and to the Intensive Humanities Program for providing the intersubjective fields in which these ideas took root. Naturally any inaccuracies that may be found in these papers are my own.
REFLECTIONS ON GREEK CONSCIOUSNESS
Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the 'beginnings'. In other words, a myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the cosmos, or only a fragment of reality—an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of 'creation'; it relates to how something was produced, began to be. . . . In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred into the World. It is this sudden breakthrough of the sacred that really establishes the World and makes it what it is today. Furthermore, it is as a result of the intervention of supernatural Beings that man himself is what he is today, a mortal, sexed, and cultural being.

Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality

The Poetic Tradition: Homer

Truth emerges out of darkness into light. The emergence happens in time and is lived, perceived, and recorded by those who recognize it and feel its compulsion. At no time is everything revealed to anyone, rather truth reveals itself gradually, throughout human history, such that at any particular moment what is revealed is incomplete. Incomplete, not false. The incompleteness of truth in mythic form has often been called, by those more sure of themselves, "childish anthropomorphism," by which is meant that those more sure of themselves are adult and objective observers, removed from the shadows of time.
Legend has it that Tiresias discovered the secret of opposites by accident one day, while wandering in the woods. He came upon two copulating serpents, separated them by a stroke of his stick, and thus provoked their wrath and was changed from a man to a woman. He lived as a woman for seven years, when he happened upon the two again, and hoping that by again striking them with his stick, he would incur the same punishment. This he did, and was restored to his former gender. Having now experienced both dimensions of human sexuality, Tiresias was called upon to settle a dispute between Zeus and Hera: Zeus contending that women take more joy in sex than men, and Hera the opposite. Because of Tiresias' recent experience with the opposites, he knew the answer and took the part of Zeus, whereupon he was blinded by the angry goddess. As compensation and with irony, Zeus then gave Tiresias the opposite sight, prophecy.

The knowledge of opposites was greater even than the knowledge of Zeus and his queen, and the sight now possessed by Tiresias was itself knowledge of a higher order, for it was knowledge of the unrevealed, of the darkness, "lunar wisdom."^1 Tiresias, from this point, plays an important role in the revelation and articulation of truth in the Greek world. Blind to the physical manifestations of what has already been revealed, he becomes the seer, the one who sees into the future by recognizing truth in darkness, and
shadow in light.

The Homeric world is primarily the world of sunlight, but it is sunlight that shines upon the earth without the brilliance that eliminates shadow. There is shadow in Homer's world, and failure to recognize it is fatal, as is the failure to recognize dissemblance: things are not always what they seem. Dissemblance is Odysseus' great tactic, and one he shares with Athena, the grey-eyed goddess. Great danger is also great power to those who master it, but no mortal power however great can ever master the uncertainties and dangers and shadows of the Greek cosmos.

The recognition of man at the center of sun-drenched Greece is made through the power and clarity of poetic vision:

Sing in me Muse, and through me tell the story of that man skilled in all ways of contending, the wanderer, harried for years on end, after he plundered the stronghold on the proud height of Troy.

The Homeric vision, handed down through centuries of oral tradition, is immediately sensuous, devoid of the corruption of theoretical patter, infused with the blood and smoke of battle. It is the body, not the mind that carries Odysseus on his journey, and the distance between thought and action collapses in the purity of nature where nothing is assumed. The images of that Greek world dance for us more vividly than our own reality, and that through translation from a
"dead language." It is the poetic sensibility, so akin to the state of grace, that defies theoretical circumscription by its elusive vitality, and drives the Homeric pathos to us through all the intervening centuries, that informs the Greek perception of nature.

The perception of nature displayed in the Odyssey is characterized by a remarkable openness to the strange and the mysterious. Nothing here is accidental, and one ignores the omens of the natural world at great peril, as when the assembly of Ithakans foolishly chooses to ignore the eagles launched by Zeus to warn of the impending slaughter:

Old man, go tell the omens for your children at home, and try to keep out of trouble.
I am more fit to interpret this than you are.
Bird life aplenty is found in the sunny air, not all of it significant.  

Unfortunately for Eurymakhos this bird life was most significant, but since he was convinced to the contrary he could not see despite the "sunny air."

The openness to the strange and mysterious extended past receptivity to natural phenomenon to the unusual and foreign in man himself. Perhaps it was because of the geography, or the sea-faring nature of the Greek economy, or simply the "childish wonder" at the dawn of civilization, whatever the reason, the Homeric Greeks institutionalized hospitality. Odysseus was constantly at the mercy of whatever land he found himself in—including his own, yet with
few exceptions was accorded the finest accommodations by his fellow humans. This demonstration of altruism was more than pragmatic, although there was certainly the necessity for reciprocal aid in a sea-faring culture, it was an extension of the Greek sense of life, the respect for the diversity and richness of human experience. One simply does not refuse to recognize and acknowledge reality as it presents itself, and to exalt the diversity of cultures and experience without denigrating one's own roots. Telemakhos speaks well to Menelaos concerning his "islands tilted in the sea,"\(^4\) in obvious reaction to the homesickness that has begun to take its toll, but he notes well the great horse kingdom and benefits from the alliance.

Compare the homecoming given Odysseus as he appears to the swineherd and as he appears at his own home as a beggar. On one hand there is respect for the age and travels of the poor beggar, on the other ridicule and insults. The two reactions are indicative of the two ways of engaging the world: the one with open curiosity and respect; the other with closed hostility and arrogance. Compare also the fate of the swineherd with that of the suitors--both are rewarded accordingly, the one for his openness and respect, the other for their hubris.

The Phiakian attitude toward hospitality is ambiguous, and gives us our first inkling that something might be amiss
in the technological kingdom. Odysseus needs the protection of Pallas Athena to insure his safe passage through the city to the great hall of King Alkinoos and Queen Arêtê:

You must not stare at these people, or be inquisitive. They do not care for strangers in this neighborhood; a foreign man will get no welcome here. The only things they trust are the racing ships Poseidon gave, to sail the deep blue sea like white wings in the sky, or a flashing thought.

Their minds are firmly fixed on the technology of sea-power, and that single-minded concentration has made them truly formidable sailors—concentration, that is, and the blessings of Poseidon. As for the strange and mysterious, they have not so much curiosity, unless it can somehow be harnessed to the technology of sailing, and as for foreign visitors, they offer passage from their land to all who are blown upon it, but entrance into their land, assimilation into their culture is unthinkable.

The technology of Phiakia is marvelous, and Odysseus marks it well before entering the great Queen's mansion. The orchards and vineyards and gardens with their engineered irrigation systems (gifts of heaven to Alkinoos, the muse informs us), the tooled and precious doors to the mansion, and the skillful weaving of the maids-in-waiting indicate to Odysseus a people industrious and yet quite proud of their industry. He abases himself before them in the ashes, this
great warrior skilled in the ways of contending, and thereby wins their hospitality, which is considerable.

Yet there is something wrong here, in this land of industry and techne. Something about the way the society is centered strikes us as all confused, and baleful. They have named themselves for the functions they perform: Beacher, Hullman, Sterman, Shipwrightson, and the infamous Seareach whose hubris invokes Odysseus' anger. It is as if they have no identity apart from the instrumental force they exert in the shipping industry, and they compensate for this lack of substance by staging track and field games and by their dancing. But we notice here a country of spectators and performers, and by far the majority spectate. Passive entertainment, non-engagement characterizes their leisure, as if the effort of being the world's greatest sailors were too much, and no other leisure were possible. This specialized existence is the stuff of which hubris is formed.

When the arrogant Seareach taunts Odysseus into competing in the track and field events, his foolishness is answered:

That was uncalled for, friend, you talk like a fool.
The gods deal out no gift, this one or any--birth, brains, or speech--to every man alike. 6

Indeed, the gods deal out gifts, there is little call for excessive pride in their exercise. Man may properly take pride, but not in what has been given him. And that is precisely
the point, how can a man recognize that which he may properly claim as his own from that which has been given? And if he cannot recognize the difference, prudence dictates modesty. The absence of this attitude, the forgetfulness of the sailors as to the origin of this great gift proves fatal. They "... scud the open sea, with never a thought of going down," and gradually come to believe their gift is their own doing, thus invoking the terrible anger of Poseidon who turns their ship to stone in the midst of the beautiful harbor, an eternal reminder of the follies of false pride.

In nascent form the Phiakian society embodies the theoretical challenge to domination, although Homer refuses to name it, indeed cannot name it yet. The instrumental thinking that characterizes their attitude toward nature foreshadows the later forms of domination that have become so familiar to our modern age.

The Greek gods of the Homeric tradition are poetic expressions of nature and fate, they are not causal explanations for natural phenomenon as some recent scholars would have us believe.* Absent from that world are the modern notions of cause and effect and the theoretical structures of mind that attend the possibilities of changing the world.

*This argument lies outside the scope of this paper, but compare the work of Mircea Eliade, Edith Hamilton, and Joseph Campbell for the flavor of the differences.
to suit human conventions. Poseidon does not cause the sea to rage and the earth to shake, he IS the sea raging and the earth shaking, and man, if he would remain among the living, must listen to his world and recognize his place within it. The grey-eyed goddess speaks frequently and eloquently to Odysseus and Telemakhos, and her messages do not fall quietly in the dust because both men are listening to their world, and hearing its secrets.

With this Athena left him
as a bird rustles upward, off and gone.
But as she went she put new spirit in him,
a new dream of his father, clearer now,
so that he marveled to himself
divining that a god had been his guest.
Then godlike in his turn he joined the suitors.\(^8\)

To hear the gods when they speak is to become godlike, but to hear one must listen, and to listen one must feel a lack of certainty, a longing for truth and a curiosity for shadow. To be overly concerned with the revealed is to languish in the certainty of ignorance and unfulfillment. Man needs to exceed himself, to wander beyond and beneath his known and comfortable confines, his senses razored to the slightest nuance.

To wander beneath is to know the past poetically; to visit the land of the dead and to converse with the "shades" enfuses history with a sensuous richness and a shadowy reality that is lost in the theoretical visions of modernity. The theoretic historiography treats of the past as impersonal
and abstract—cultural forces that collide and expand and unfold in the eventual present moment. That understanding lacks the existential import of the Homeric vision. Odysseus wanders to the shadow realm of the underworld that he might better see his future, but he sees there not the forces of time, but the faint images of individual personalities, whose reality is diminished through visual imagery. Yet they speak out of the particularity of the human experience, their words have dignity and power and eloquence and, most of all, authority. Homer has not made prostitutes of his ancestors, he has not tried to dominate the past, but has called upon the muse to sing in him and to reveal history as it really happened, and from the point of view of the lived body, the embodied consciousness.

Odysseus' journey through life to eventual fulfillment and resolution includes a sojourn to the realm of the dead. But when he returns to Ithaka he comes to another realm of the dead, the world of the suitors who are dead in life. The highest contempt is reserved for those who remain at home with themselves, passive and indolent, secure in the knowledge of good families and risking nothing. Eurymakhos puts the suitors position succinctly:

It is a long, long time we have been waiting in rivalry for this beauty. We could have gone elsewhere and found ourselves very decent wives. Yet one suspects the "waiting in rivalry" has been a very
different manner of contending than that Odysseus has endured. The suitors have overcome nothing, risked nothing, learned nothing because they already believe themselves to be complete, needing only Penelope to ensure their virility. The gods no longer speak to them because they have stopped listening, and they stopped listening because they believe they already know the message, and that because they have never risked self knowledge before the awesome power of nature. Instead of wandering and searching, they have stagnated in the self-assurant complacency of good breeding and become corpulent on the labor of another, far, far greater strength and understanding, Odysseus.

To Odyssey; to wander, to journey, to exceed the bounds of self-knowledge by challenging the world, to discover one's identity by exceeding it, to gain one's life by losing it. The Homeric understanding of selfhood is perhaps the single most attractive feature of that primitive world. The deepest, darkest and most vile sin one can commit is to BE as a suitor, to refuse self-transcendence, to wait for life to happen. Knowledge is based upon a commitment to the world, a risking of one's private, mortal and fragile self. It cannot be gained vicariously. The electrifying slaughter of the suitors illustrates the point most graphically. The suitors had never engaged in mortal combat and were utterly unprepared for the sudden horrible violence, their realization
crept over them slowly as they fell quivering in the blood soaked dust, pathetically, hopelessly, inexorably.

He drew to his fist the cruel head of an arrow for Antinoos just as the young man leaned to lift his beautiful drinking cup, embossed, two-handled, golden: the cup was in his fingers: the wine was even at his lips: and did he dream of death? How could he? In that revelry amid his throng of friends who would imagine a single foe—though a strong foe indeed—could dare to bring death's pain on him and darkness on his eyes? Odysseus' arrow hit him under the chin and punched up to the feathers through his throat.

Backward and down he went, letting the wine cup fall from his shocked hand. Like pipes his nostrils jetted crimson runnels, a river of mortal red, and one last kick upset his table knocking the bread and meat to soak in dusty blood.10

The suitors sinned not only against themselves, and nature, and the gods, but also against Ithakian society. "The Flower of Ithakian Youth" Odysseus calls them, the hope of the future. They sinned against themselves by their arrogant complacency; against nature and the gods by taking both for granted and refusing to hear and engage their world; and against Ithakian society by their disrespect for Law and the conventions of hospitality. The recognition of human frailty is the root of the conventions of hospitality (one might argue the root of Homeric notions of god and nature
also), and man never seems to need those conventions so long as he has health, strength, and the blessings of the gods, but when the gods abandon us, we suffer terribly, and in that lonely suffering we need each other.

No man should flout the law, but keep in peace what gifts the gods may give. Odysseus refers to The Law here, not laws. To have contempt for law itself is the height of human arrogance and stupidity, the ultimate sin of hubris. To have contempt for Law is to have contempt for the human conditions that make us all humble before fate and the gods, it is to deny our essential humanity and to set oneself above the human condition, to assume a godly posture. That is one sin the world never fails to punish unmercifully.

Odysseus struggles to regain his homeland where peace, based on the natural order and rhythm of the world, reigns over a society of diversity, creativity, nobility, and power. Ithakian society is based upon law, both human and natural, and custom, the most important being the custom of hospitality. The Homeric value that radiates throughout is openness to the world and its unfathomable and mysterious nuances, and respect for the power and violence of nature--society being the human palliative to the unpredictability of individual existence. Man is not yet the political animal he will become in the Athenian polis, but neither is he the instrumental theorist he becomes in the Alexandrian Empire.
Primitive Instrumentalism: Sophocles

The transition from Homeric Kingdom to Athenian Polis is marked by the transition from a poetic understanding of life that is grounded in immediacy and innocent openness, to a primitively theoretical understanding grounded in the problem-solving mentality of Oedipus and characterized by the illusion of control. The plague ravishes Sophocles' Athens as it ravishes Thebes, and the reaction of the Athenian citizenry is recognized in the reaction of the Theban chorus.

Oedipus has saved Thebes from the cruel Sphinx by solving the famous riddle, and is justly rewarded with Kingship—the deification of primitive instrumental thought and its power to control. Primitive theory replaces poetic sensibility; the power to abstract the world into causal relationships replaces the power to hear the world and find one's place within its mysteriousness. Primitive theory becomes concrete practice with the attempt to control nature and the gods. Its purpose is not understanding but power. The questions one asks of the world generally determine the answers one receives, and in the case of Thebes, the question has become one of expediency:

Find us our safety, find us a remedy,
Whether by counsel of the gods or men.
A King of wisdom tested in the past
Can act in a time of troubles, and act well.12
The Priest and the Theban chorus have become dependent upon Oedipus for relief from the terrible realities of life in the doomed city, and beg him to give them peace. They have become as children before the problem-solving power of Oedipus, and can no longer stand alone. They have abdicated their power to the instrumentalism of theoretical thought, and have thereby emasculated themselves.

See, how our lives like birds take wing,
Like sparks that fly when a fire soars,
To the shore of the god of evening.¹³

Even in the primitive stages of its appearance, the logic of instrumental thought is present, its aim is the control of men. In its extreme forms it becomes domination, the end of freedom, the end of poetic existence.

The Thebans have lost touch with themselves and their gods, and offer only prayer to their "Dearest expectancy," speech in lieu of the blood sacrifice that so powerfully tied the Homeric Greek to a revered world.

What is God singing in his profound Delphi of gold and shadow?
What oracle for Thebes, the sunwhipped city?
Fear unjoints me, the roots of my heart tremble.¹⁴

The sunwhipped city basks in the icy brilliance of Oedipal reason, but they are incapable of acknowledging the shadow from which all truth emerges, the shadow that lies at the heart of their own existence. None can be sure of the source of his own engendering, the most fundamental origin of biological existence, and it is curious that the Odyssey
opens with Telemakhos saying similar words to Pallas Athena. Sophocles could hardly have been unaware of the irony he was proposing, of the stark contrast between the sunwhipped mentality of Athens and the poetic consciousness of Homeric Greece. The hubris that treats its ancestors as prostitutes is embodied in the hubris of Oedipus, for all his admirable searching for the truth. Yet Oedipus searches for the truth of his past that he might wield it against his fate, and thereby gain control of destiny itself, surely a sin that will not go unnoticed by the gods. While Athenian Greece saw the legends of Homer as childish superstition, they were amidst the most debilitating consciousness since its rejection. The poetic understanding of the world they saw, rightly, as incomplete, its rejection in favor of its opposite was fatal, for here lies the nascent form of what will become a Dionysian frenzy; the passion for control of passion itself.

Oedipus' excessive pride in his theoretical prowess leads him to believe that possession of the truth will give him control of his fate. But the truth always emerges from shadow, and is at no time fully revealed. Man cannot wield reason against the oracles. No matter how brilliantly the fires of reason burn, they never illuminate their origins; about origins there must always be doubt. Failure to respect the shadowy realm of the past results in defilement

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for Oedipus and the Thebans, and one must say, also for the Athenians themselves (although their's is a very special case, involving defilement of one's ancestors by illuminating their lives with the poverty of the immediate future of one's own reason). It involves the elimination of diversity from the world, for by denying its existence in the past, one necessarily excludes it from the future.

But I say that you, with both your eyes, are blind:
You can not see the wretchedness of your life,
Nor in whose house you live, no, nor with whom.
Who are your father and mother? Can you tell me?
You do not even know the blind wrongs
That you have done them, on earth and in the world below.16

Primitive Theory: Socrates

Oedipus Rex was written at the time when Athenian society was suffering most. The plague was a real biological catastrophe and a pervasive social contagion. The move from polis to empire created a new aristocracy whose moral values and educational needs were at odds with the old ruling aristocracy who held sway prior to the Peloponnesian wars. Political leadership no longer flowed in aristocratic blood as a matter of natural course, but rather depended largely on the powers of persuasion displayed by those whose aristocratic values were rooted in the new commercialism. The highest virtue was to be successful in manipulating the new
democracy, and for that purpose a new educational class arose: the Sophists.

The virtuous and successful life becomes the life that displays maximum control over political, economic and intellectual relationships, and while the Sophists had little in common with each other, they were in agreement on how virtue was to be demonstrated. This situation led to some interesting ethical arrangements since it reduced virtue from its transcendental and universal status to a situational and instrumental ground. The ethical relativism of many of the Sophists led to its contradiction: situational ethics have their own logic, and it is the logic of control. No matter that there is no absolute moral system that is for all people at all times, the guiding principle is to control whatever situation one finds oneself in according to the dictates of self-interest, as in the philosophy of Protagoras, for whom "man is the measure of all things." This in turn tended to create an homogeneity that threatened to eliminate all diversity in Greek society; the destruction of Melos but one demonstration.

In contest against sophistry, Socrates attempts to keep the poetic understanding alive in the face of a burgeoning instrumentalism that threatens to reduce the mysteries of the world to mind-dependency. He most adequately sees what is at stake in the new understanding, and
sees it as hostile to the quality of life in the Athenian polis. He describes it as a form of hubris that assumes theoretical language by itself sufficient to explicate the content of experience and to manipulate that content to suit the conventions of a blind present.

Those who pretend to possess knowledge of such virtues as piety, justice, love, equality, and courage are called into question by Socrates to explain themselves. As usually happens, the defended concepts are vacuous and consequently capable of being juxtaposed in contradiction one to the other. What was originally thought capable of possession proves to be possessed with the intangible character of a relationship, whose vitality is contingent upon maintaining a reciprocity through questioning. This is the Socratic method, pushing constantly deeper into the given in an attempt to find the shadowy adumbrations of distinction, of reality, where words can no longer follow. When Euthyphro, for example, is convinced that he has the answer to the question "what is piety?" he ceases his questioning and rests in assurance that the matter is closed. He, like Oedipus, is ignorant of his ignorance and therefore doubly blinded to the rich mysteriousness of piety. The wise man is the one who knows that he does not know, and who therefore continues to question and allows the world to reveal itself.
Themes of light and dark appear again in the Socratic dialogues, constantly reminding us that all is not revealed, and that much of what can be revealed can only be expressed in mythic and poetic form:

Soon I found that it is not by wisdom that the poets create their works, but by a certain instinctive inspiration, like soothsayers and prophets, who say many fine things, but understand nothing of what they say.¹⁷

The fact that poets may not "understand" what they say does not make what they say false, but rather indicates an inability on their part to see the total context in which what they say has the character of truth; what they say is incomplete. There are varying degrees of completeness, of illumination, yet man seldom meets with the condition of total revelation. Truth emerges from the murky realm of appearance in mysterious ways, and it would seem that Socrates has more sympathy for the poet who still speaks through the world out of existentiality than for the Sophist who manipulates forms without content in an attempt to possess the world abstractly. Present in the poet is a kind of love that does not reduce itself to the desire to possess and manipulate; precisely what the Sophist attempts. Similarly in the Athenian citizenry, as it comes to us through the Theban chorus of Sophocles, is the inverse Sophistic tendency to be possessed by the theoretical knowledge that obviates the insecurity of painful inquiry. Such conceptualizations are empty and amount to a rejection of the world
and the assumption of deafness through pride.

Much more is given us in the erotic character of knowledge in the Symposium than would appear at first blush. If wisdom is love of knowledge, says Socrates, then we would do well to pay attention to the nature of love. If that relationship is characterized by the desire of the lover to possess the beloved, in the process of domination the desired is reduced to an object and is divested of the quality that makes it lovable, namely its power to freely reciprocate. Staleness replaces the freshness that was the first attraction, inertia replaces dynamic reciprocity, the diverse mysteriousness that injects the love relationship with its vitality is given over to deadening homeostasis—boredom. The beloved can now be wielded, but only as something inert in which is hidden the condition of bondage for lover and beloved alike. Bondage for the lover because he is enslaved by the limits of his knowledge and blind to its possibilities; bondage for the beloved because it has been silenced and petrified into one of its many dimensions. If the object of love is knowledge, the implication is not the bondage of the world but its death. The world and its 'gods' no longer speak because we no longer listen, and we no longer listen because there is no such necessity now that we are in possession of the truth. The openness of the Homeric world is closed and hubris reigns as the predominant
mode of consciousness; a hubris most insidiously revealed in Athenian imperialism.

Poetry abounds in the Platonic dialogues, and at no point in Plato's epistemology and metaphysics is it more crucial than in the "Myth of the Cave." The poetic expression of the theory of forms is indicative of Platonic theory, still infused with a sense of the mysterious and grounded in the visual imagery of light and shadow, it characterizes the sun as the power that informs all reality, illuminates it, nourishes it and throws shadows into it, and answers our ultimate questions. Answers our ultimate questions provided, of course, that we ask them, that we recognize the need within ourselves to probe beneath the apparent and utilitarian surface of our lives. We are left with the impression that one must return to the cave to force one's fellows from the realm of darkness and subjectivity.

The richly ambiguous character of the realm of appearances demands a questioning openness through which glimpses of the real world of forms are conceivable. The progress through the world from shadows to the form of the good cannot be accomplished by anything less than a total giving of one's understanding to the world in a relationship of reciprocity that categorically precludes the possession of truth. Respect for the ambiguity of the lived experience
retains the poetic sense of life found in the Homeric experience and lost in the classical age. This loss did not go un lamented, nor was it total; but primitive theory rapidly jettisoned poetry for instrumentality, openness for domination, wisdom for technology. This is apparent in Platonic thought itself, and in the interpretations of Platonic thought that will come.

The realm of forms will come to be seen as static, unchanging and eternal things, a product of the misunderstandings of instrumental thought. The eternal character of the forms resides in the paradigmatic relationships they embody; relationships that more resemble values than objects existing in the nether realm. The unfortunate instrumentalist tendency has been to fix these relations with language, to name them and thus render them objective and manipulable. Nothing could be further from the Socratic spirit of the early Plato.

Thus the two major connections of the Platonic tradition with the Homeric are the attempts to keep the world open and alive through a recognition of the poverty of human understanding, and understanding human knowledge as an erotic relationship that demands a commitment into the world. Both are contrary to the acquisitive character of instrumentalist thought and to the impulse to dominate and control nature by means of which that acquisition is accomplished.
Theoretical Instrumentalism: Aristotle

... It is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen—what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity.

Aristotle, Poetics 1451

The break between the primitive theoretical thought found in the writings of the early Plato and the theoretical instrumentalism of Aristotle becomes most apparent in the later writings of Aristotle, when he has moved far beyond the influences of the Academy. Aristotle remains a Platonist insofar as he continues to concern himself with the epistemological quandry of reality and illusion, the one and the many, and the problem of change; but he abandons the early Socratic spirit in developing his Nicomachean Ethics.

Aristotle took his direction from the most instrumentalist of the Platonic notions, the theory of forms, and sought to solve the "participation problem" by developing a teleological metaphysics that embedded form in matter as that toward which particular matter purposively developed. His theory was an improvement on the Platonic theory of forms only so long as one remained on the level of the mundane, i.e., his theory adequately accounts for biological change only so long as one maintains the Platonic hiatus between matter and value. Aristotle's metaphysics is no improvement
over the dualities of Platonic theory on the level of value because that toward which all matter tends is thought, and the source of all movement is the "unmoved mover"; nature become thoroughly rational.

The spiritual difference implied in Aristotle's metaphysics is at the heart of what is meant by "instrumental thought." Plato thought that reality became more intelligible as one's questions sharpened, as one's ability to interact with nature became more acute. And this acumen could only be acquired by a constant, unremitting attempt to move beyond the apparent and obvious to the ground of being which ultimately revealed the revealing power. Hence Platonic theory was explicitly utopian. Aristotle, on the other hand, felt the compulsion to examine reality in terms of particularity (inductively, if one uses the term advisedly), and to find therein a purpose. His attribution to reality of purposiveness at the outset is the hallmark of all instrumental thought: what is the social meaning of attributing purposiveness to nature when that purposiveness is value? From the point of view of an ordered and well intentioned teleology, nature (and human nature) displays itself as an orderly array of manipulable potentialities, and it remains only to harness them to the services of a higher form. Nature, rather than a mysterious and sacred play of forces and relationships, might now appear as an
ordered hierarchy of values, the major value being the realization of form, and the more inclusive the form, the more cosmic value it has. The four-fold implication for ethics: 1) There is one end (form) for man; 2) That end exists in a hierarchy of other potentialities; 3) It is knowable; 4) It is possible to create conditions favorable to the realization of that form.

These four conditions taken together comprise the definition of domination: the instrumental implications of hubris released from their mythic core. Aristotle does not show that there is only one end for man, and he certainly does not show that it is rational and knowable. Indeed, how could he know the final end of man unless he were god, unless he possessed the most inclusive kind of knowledge imaginable, unless he somehow stood at the end of the hierarchy of value where Plato placed the Form of the Good?

Aristotle's philosophy is the most startling example of hubris in the Greek tradition, and it is made particularly onerous by the fourth point: that it is possible to create conditions favorable to the realization of human potentiality—by manipulating the natural and social environment in which man finds himself.

... He who bids the law rule may be deemed to bid God and Reason alone rule, but he who bids man rule adds an element of the beast; for desire is a wild beast, and passion perverts the minds of rulers, even when they are
the best of men. The Law is reason unaffected by desire. . . . The law has no power to command obedience except that of habit . . . so that a readiness to change from old to new laws enfeebles the power of the law.¹⁸

Here is real evidence of the emergence of the will to control, which contravenes the Homeric tradition by assuming the possession of some form of truth that acts as the basis upon which nature and man might be dominated. In the attempt to purge human consciousness of the disruptive influence of beastly passion, that very passion to control becomes consuming and frenetic—the "control frenzy" in the service of Reason.

Aristotle clearly articulates the consciousness of the coming Alexandrian Empire, the end of hospitality toward the world, and the beginning of control and domination through a classificatory science that seeks to bring an end to ambiguity by naming it. No longer will men perfect themselves by listening to the world and being in touch with the gods as mysterious and unfathomable realities, but rather they habituate themselves and their activities to accepted custom in an attempt to render their activities automatic and predictable, the dawn of instrumental man.

Aristotle lived in a world where it was not difficult to pay homage to one political form while tacitly supporting its contradiction. Alexander was in the process of destroying the foundations of the political state, which served as the basis for Aristotle's Politics, through the most complete
policy of conquest that had been known to that time. Imperialism contradicted the diversity of political units (the polis) that were the social fabric of the greatness of classical Greece. Greece rapidly became stagnant, both politically and intellectually partly because of the new consciousness evidenced by the philosophies of instrumental control, which taken at their word, would have left little room for the further development of the poetic sensibility. The enthronement of the passion for control dethrones the passion for understanding, and the understanding is the most powerful force in the liberation of man from the domination of nature.

Conclusion

The origins of the instrumentalist tradition in Western philosophy lie deep in the Greek tradition, originating in Athenian Greece with the derogation of Homer, and reaching articulate form in the writings of Aristotle. It is important to see this tradition as a long one, present in the intellectualist Greek tradition as it merges with the spiritualist Hebraic to form that singular confluence that is our cultural heritage. One might also find the spiritual permission to dominate nature in the first book of Genesis (Genesis 1:26), and the discussion would lead to similar result: when the world, including man, is seen as something
to be dominated, as the field for the play of instrumental reason, it ceases to be an object of reverence. This loss of reverence characterizes our green age, despite what the poets can do to indicate "the possible."

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.

Dylan Thomas

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Footnotes


3 Ibid., p. 24.

4 Ibid., p. 71.

5 Ibid., p. 112.

6 Ibid., p. 130.

7 Ibid., p. 142.

8 Ibid., p. 11.

9 Ibid., p. 25.

10 Ibid., p. 409.

11 Ibid., p. 340.


13 Ibid., p. 11.

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ON THE ONTOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF LABOR
The union of Logos and Eros led already in Plato to the supremacy of Logos; in Aristotle, the relation between the god and the world moved by him is "erotic" only in terms of analogy. Then the precarious ontological link between Logos and Eros is broken, and scientific rationality emerges as essentially neutral. What nature (including man) may be striving for is scientifically rational only in terms of the general laws of motion—physical, chemical or biological.

Herbert Marcuse
One Dimensional Man

Instrumental Reason and Domination

Instrumental reason reigned supreme in the Aristotelian and medieval worldviews in an ambiguous way: the level of mastery over the natural environment was not yet highly developed, consequently the realm of human needs was not highly articulate and the religious and philosophical systems tended to devalue those dimensions of human activity concerned with the satisfaction of primitive needs. The Renaissance and the revolution in scientific and philosophical thought that attended the decline of Catholic hegemony broke the hold of repression in many spheres of human activity, particularly in the relations between society and nature, and in the relations between species and individual being. The most startling result of these changes was the development of a quantitatively certain and value-
free science, and the diremption of human reality into the Cartesian categories, the dualities of which persist in human consciousness well into the twentieth century.

The development of a "value-free" science is, of course, the product of a value itself—the value of domination, mastery, and power over things in our world. Its major characteristic is the reduction of quality to quantity, the perception of nature as the source of use-values accessible through the language of mathematics. All matter is in motion, and motion is mathematically describable and predictable. The matter and the motion have no value in themselves, apart from that assigned them according to the satisfaction of human needs.

The realm of the mundane, from the point of view of medieval scholasticism, became the primary field for human activity from the sixteenth century on, and the realm of value, the world as object of reverence, became the mundane world of "subjectivity" from the point of view of the new science.² This reversal of human interests is classic in form because it does not recognize itself as dialectically motile until the nineteenth century, and then originally only from the point of view of idealism. All things in the field of human consciousness that do not serve instrumental purpose (the domination of nature) are consequently devalued, and nature is exclusively perceived as the source
of human use-values.

The domination of nature is an ambiguous phrase, made the more so by its original articulation in the book of Genesis (1:26), and its current popularity as descriptive of modern technology. The major problem with the phrase "domination" is, as William Leiss has pointed out, that only other men can, properly speaking, be the object of domination, since domination implies the conscious recognition of the master's authority. Similarly, when we speak of man's domination of nature, we imply by our language a cohesive subject (Man as species-being) that does not exist. The reality is that men dominate each other (internal nature) in their attempt to render nature accessible to the demands of human utility. It is not science nor technology that dominate man, but man himself. Consequently neither science nor technology can accomplish the liberation of Man, although both may be tools in the liberation of men.

When we speak of the domination of nature, we speak of the domination of men by other men; when we speak of the mastery of nature, we speak of the control of nature as source of use-value by men of an historically determinate social class. The reified language of sociology often overlooks this rather obvious and important distinction, thus contributing to the notorious illusion that the mastery of nature is itself somehow mastered. The tension between
species being and individual being that is also found in
the first two books of Genesis as the created beings of
Man and Adam, persists in our time more dangerously than ever
before. It is all too possible for men acting in accordance
with the dictates of their historically determinate needs to
do permanent violence to the larger needs of species sur-
vival, and the consequence of that transgression would be
as momentous as the expulsion from the garden of Eden.

Science represents the interests of eros, technology
the interests of domination and mastery vis-à-vis the nat-
ural world—both internal and external, and for this reason
they are not the same thing. Technology serves as the
"concrete link between the mastery of nature through scien-
tific knowledge and the enlarged disposition over the
resources of the natural environment which supposedly con-
stitutes the mastery of nature in the everyday world."
Technology is thus more immediately connected to the every-
day world of social conflict and repression, and therefore
is more susceptible to the excesses of instrumental reason
than is science.

Instrumental reason in its most virulently one-
dimensional form announces the "demythologization of the
world," the rendering of nature and human experience totally
transparent to rational explanation, and the resultant
derogation of all phenomenon not amenable to reason's
approach. We have seen reason perform this reduction in the Oedipus Cycle, and traced its motion through classical Greece to Aristotle with the same result: with the approach of radically instrumentalist reason, the world shrinks into mathematically manipulable constructions administered by human ingenuity for the apparent good of the species. Mystery and ambiguity, rhythm and reverence exist only insofar as they can present themselves as something controllable and beneficial, and even then their mystery is something to be attacked and reduced to verifiable knowledge. Openness to multi-dimensional reality is not consonant with the project of control and administration that dominates the drive for self-preservation and informs modern technology. If nature is really as Descartes suggests, bodies in lawful motion, then the human project in terms of that nature is to develop mathematically verifiable methods of predicting the motion in order to render the world OURS.

The attempt to control nature through technology takes place in a social and historical context that promotes unreason. Man does not dominate nature, men do. And the domination is of internal nature, of other men as things to be administered and controlled. The object of the technological project, material security, is unattainable given the character of human needs in commodity culture, and the attempt to wield the world becomes increasingly irrational.
and pathological as competition for the planet's resources, both human and material, becomes more fierce. The world no longer appears hospitable:

The sustained effort of demythologizing in modern times ends by stripping the world of all inherent purpose... The consequence of this view is to set the relationship of man and the world inescapably in the context of domination...

The situation we face is one in which the world has become objectless, the competition among individuals for economic security has rendered human intersubjectivity problematic. The tangible sensuousness of the world is superseded by mathematics, the openness and hospitality of social relationships destroyed by an instrumental reason gone mad with the will to domination. The individual human being, still caught in the web of a psychological Cartesianism he cannot fathom cries out in vain:

Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call than on. Can it be that one day, off it goes on, that one day I simply stayed in, in where, instead of going out, in the old way, out to spend day and night as far away as possible, it wasn't far. Perhaps that is how it began. You think you are simply resting, the better to act when the time comes, or for no reason, and you soon find yourself powerless ever to do anything again. No matter how it happened. It, say it, not knowing what. Perhaps I simply assented at last to an old thing. But I did nothing. I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me (emphasis added).
Men are alienated and dominated in technological society, they have turned within, seeking in privatism and narcissism what the "polis" can no longer give them, yet in at least one way men continue to be free: in their labor as artists. Artistic labor continues to offer authenticity and self-fulfillment in a world where there is little offered elsewhere, in a world where the contradictions of the industrial state blind us to the realities of economic imperialism. Art continues to nurture the tension between what is and what ought to be, between form and content, and suggests to us an apotheosis of labor. Labor itself appears as an ontological category of human existence, whether that labor be authentic or alienated, free or exploited, rational or irrational. Through reflection on the character of labor generally, and artistic labor particularly, we find what salvation there may be in the dissolution of post-capitalist technocracy.

Critical Reason and Labor

It seems macabre that the forces the Renaissance heralded as humanly liberating, should, five hundred years after their diffident appearance, be recognized as de-humanizing. We nevertheless live that unfortunate eventuality today, and see only theoretical solutions of dubious practical value. Those incredible powers of nature,
harnessed and unleashed by man's sagacity, now stalk him with inexorable persistence in the shape of nuclear weaponry and the nightmare assembly line. The promised liberation from want, from material scarcity, has not been forthcoming, and does not appear on the horizon of the twentieth century. In the attempt to dominate nature and render it transparent to human needs, the self-domination of man has been effectively accomplished, and our specifically human institutions have lost sight of their generally human functions.

The ordering and consolidation of productive techniques for the purpose of the domination of nature is called by Marcuse technological rationality, to which he posits two further forms of rationality which are not intrinsically contradictory: individual rationality and critical rationality. Individual rationality originally functioned as an attack upon feudal institutions that fettered the free development of human reason in all spheres of human activity, religious, political, economic, and scientific. The object avowed by the bourgeois rationalists was the liberation of man from the established and stagnant status quo, consequently individual rationality was also critical rationality. Individual rationality eventually held sway, however briefly, and for a time during the Renaissance seemed to hold within it the promised liberation. But the
promises of bourgeois liberalism were soon overshadowed by the realities of commodity production, which commodity production was justified in the first instance by the desire to overcome the enslaving life-style demanded by the battle against scarcity. The first steps toward the realm of freedom* were taken self-consciously; the rationality that illuminated this self-consciousness was soon subsumed by the demands of the technology it deemed necessary to the task. As economic units expanded in size, the founding rationality of individual freedom gave way to the necessities of industrial production, i.e., individual rationality was transformed into technological rationality, and performed the further service of an ideological justification of its opposite, the Protestant Ethic. Yet one must emphasize that the two modes of rationality are not, in their pristine and essential forms, mutually exclusive; the extension of nature under the domain of an instrumental reason that includes men as administered energy makes them appear contradictory. However, this moment in the species life of human labor was a necessary moment without which the battle to overcome scarcity could never have been fought.

*The realm of necessity which Marx describes in Capital should have ended with the accumulation phase of capitalist development. Its persistence is not indicative of the impossibility of realizing the realm of freedom, but rather is testimony to the increasing irrationality of capitalism in the dis-accumulation phase.
At work in the transition from a free market economy is the "invisible hand of the market," Adam Smith's euphemism for the mis-guided self interest and historical blindness of eighteenth century intellectuals who sponsored the ideological dimensions of the individual rationality.

Individuals are stripped of their individuality, not by external compulsion, but by the very rationality under which they live. . . . True, the force which transforms human performance into a series of dependable reactions is an external force: the machine process imposes upon men the patterns of a mechanical behavior . . . but man . . . relinquishes his liberty to the dictum of reason itself. The point is that today the apparatus to which the individual is to adjust and adapt himself is so rational that individual protest and liberation appear not only as hopeless but as utterly irrational. The system of life created by modern industry is one of the highest expediency, convenience and efficiency. Reason, once defined in these terms, becomes equivalent to an activity which perpetuates this world. Rational behavior becomes identical with a matter-of-factness which teaches reasonable submissiveness and thus guarantees getting along in the prevailing order.10

Marcuse here indicates the danger of technology in another light, the Marxian notion of reproduction. Through his labor the laborer literally reproduces the conditions of his servitude and subsequently encounters the alienated product of his own labor in the commodity market as something he must purchase again. The further implication of the subjective transformation that occurs in his attendance upon the productive apparatus will be considered later, but at this point we can anticipate the transformation as the
virtual opposite of the transformation that occurs in the labor of the artist (providing that labor is not also alienated by the "art industry"). The stifling of human development within the productive process is not a necessary consequence of that process per se, but is rather a function of a social organization which perpetuates an artificial scarcity and persists in an irrational conquest of nature. Marcuse advocates a revival of critical reason as one means of liberating man from domination by the social order—which domination is accomplished by and through the uncritical affirmation of an unjust and inhuman industrial administration. The truth of the domination of man is revealed by the domination of nature, i.e., its ordering methodology: "... the cunning of unreason is revealed in the persistent illusion that the undertaking known as the 'mastery of nature' is itself mastered."

Enough has been said in the past few years concerning the machinations of man in the face of alienated labor. Much modern art can be seen as a reflection of that more pervasive alienation, and indeed the consequences of alienated and historically determinate labor have been seen as the futile destiny of Man expanded to ontological proportions. The importance of alienated labor at this point is to note the extent to which we have been pushed back into our subjectivity in a desperate attempt to find there what
has been denied us in the world of our creating. The re-
treat back into ourselves is really the loss of our sub-
jectivity, because we meet there the worm at the core of
our being, a profound lack. What we are does not consist
merely in some internal synthesis, opaque to the 'other',
although there is that too, but also in our inter-subjective
being, in our ability to communicate that hollowness, that
numbing angst, with dignity and grace.

Labor is not essentially economic activity, and the
problem in any consideration of labor is to overcome our
historical prejudice to view it as such. This prejudice is
born of the infatuation with classical and neo-classical
economics, with an overscrupulous concern for the dynamics
of the market place. The market place concerns the vast
majority of Western economics for several obvious reasons:
the implicit assumption that human needs are insatiable and
that the locus for the unceasing satisfaction of those needs
must be controlled; a penchant for quantitative methodol-
gies that must operate on an ex post facto basis in order
to have any 'data' with which to work; a recognition of the
intractability of human motives which defies quantification
and therefore necessitates a focus on the market place; a
shared prejudice for objectivity which also characterizes
the psychology which provides economics with respectable
motivations--the list seems endless. Significant for our
purposes is not so much what neo-classical economics chooses to address, as what it chooses not to address—the labor process.

The long historical prejudice in favor of objectivity and scientific methodology has prepared the way for an uncritical economic theory. It is uncritical because it has not yet come to terms with the truth it describes, being infatuated with its apparent utility in the post-Keynsian world of managed economies, and it is a prejudice because it has become an apology for a politico-economic system the contradictions of which now require a dazzling array of theoretical revisions. We now see the problem in terms of instrumental reason and realize the futility of an "objective" economics in a world where objectivity is the specious result of scientific symbology, mathematics. The methodologies, like the Ptolemaic mathematics which buttressed that structure and were reincorporated into the new, appear no longer capable of bridging the chasm between theory and practice, resulting in considerable embarrassment for the dismal science.

Another Copernican Revolution is needed that will set the question anew. This new formulation of the question needs to be addressed not to the ends of labor as economic activity, but to the means through which these ends are produced. The prejudice for looking at human labor as
exclusively economic activity is anachronistic, part of a cultural preoccupation with material scarcity and security that is deeply embedded in its history, and which must be overcome. It cannot be overcome by the perpetual recapitulation of methodologies which focus on the products of human labor as if they appear magically. The realization of human labor as more than merely economic activity is contingent upon abandoning the fetish for commodities and concerning ourselves with the process in which man becomes Man. The move away from objectivity is not necessarily a move into subjectivity, but a move into an area of being where such dualities are mediated, nothing less than the restoration of mythic unity.

Everywhere we find man we find him at work in the world, we find him laboring. A prior state, where the world is immediately given in its fullness without the mediating activity of human labor is conceivable only in a pre-mythic sense, only in terms familiar to us in the biblical imagery of Eden. The development out of Eden provides us with a two-fold conception of nature as object of reverence and source of use-value. In the latter dimension we find labor as a necessary condition of human existence. As a necessary condition of human existence labor is more than a specific human economic activity, it is a social and historical doing that encompasses man's entire Being and shapes his world.
... Labor is precisely not a specific human 'activity' (for no single activity comprehends and penetrates the totality of human existence ...); rather, labor is that in which every single activity is founded and to which they again return; a doing (Tun). And it is precisely the doing of human beings as the mode of one's being in the world: it is that through which one first becomes "for itself" what one is, comes to one's self. ... Labor here is not determined through the kind of its objects, nor through its goal, content, result, etc. but through what happens to the very human existence in labor.12

In this larger context labor is not exclusively economic in character, rather labor is an ontological category of human experience, characterized by a primordial lack of existence. Marcuse's early essay (Telos 16, pp. 9-37) characterizes labor as having three essential moments: duration, permanence, and 'burdensomeness'. Labor's duration reflects its historical character as a flow of activity superseding any individual labor; its permanence is its character as a universal process, and its essential character of being a burden indicates the tyranny of the intersubjective field in which labor takes place. Man labors because his existence is not passively, i.e., biologically determined, and he must make his world his own through the mediating activity of production and reproduction.

The tyranny of the intersubjective field is most evidently the tyranny of domination in the economic dimension of human production and reproduction, in the necessary fact
of directing and directed labor in the battle with material scarcity. But labor is more than an economic activity taking place in the realm of necessity, it is also a process rooted in the ontological condition of human existence, and this primordial lack persists in the realm of freedom where man still faces the facticity of his history as something other, something not of his own making.

The essential factual content of labor is not grounded in the scarcity of goods, nor in a discontinuity between the world of disposable and utilizable goods and human needs, but, on the contrary, in an essential excess of human existence beyond every possible situation in which it finds itself and the world. Being human is always more than its present existence. It goes beyond every possible situation and precisely because of this there is always an ineliminable discrepancy between the two: a discrepancy that demands constant labor for its overcoming, even though human existence can never rest in possession of itself and its world.  

The goal of the doing that is labor is precisely human existence, self-realization of both the individual and species being that takes place both in the realm of necessity (material production and reproduction) and in the realm of freedom which lies beyond necessity and yet is inextricably reciprocal with it. The possibilities of the realm of freedom open upon man's true possibilities of self-realization only as an expression of the move beyond necessity, and as such what man may become is informed by what he must become. In the realm of freedom man is confronted still with his ontological condition, he must still create himself
as that being who is persistently beyond his present, who always and everywhere lacks his existence. Yet in the realm of freedom man is able to become what he can become, "... praxis in the 'realm of freedom' is the authentic praxis and 'goal' to which all other labor is directed: the free unfolding of existence in its true possibilities."

Labor is man's mode of Being-In-The-World in whatever shape that may take. The shape that it may take is not determined by its specific objects, means, or ends, but rather by what transpires in the process as it is lived, the mutual transformation of both subject and object in the unity of thought and action (praxis). When man labors in the world, he objectifies himself there, "man 'objectifies' himself and the object becomes 'his'; it becomes a human object." But neither man nor his imagined goal, nor his activity nor the object ever leave the world which is already there and given to him as a human world. Nor does the philosopher, still less the artist ever leave the human world in describing it, and his labor is no less transforming.

Authentic labor is the historically conscious realization of individual and species being through the mutual and reciprocal transformation of both subject and object. The realization of individual being implies conscious control over both the means by which the transformation is effected, and the human disposition of the end products. The
realization of species-being implies the conscious affirmation of the historical destiny of the species, freedom. The historically conscious realization of individual being requires the recognition of the context of past labor in which human life subsists, the processes of imagination and creation as well as the machinery and technical apparatus. It requires further a consciousness of the limits of facticity imposed by the given world as something to be embraced or rejected and thus transformed. All human doing that is labor has a social context that is rational or irrational according to the promise of the often occluded destiny of the species. The relation of social context and individual self-realization is a dialectical one in which truth emerges from the amorphous background of human history through the laboring individual—whether or not the individual motives are informed.

Authentic labor is rarely realized at this moment of history, and when labor is seen from this more fundamental perspective it becomes apparent that alienated artistic labor is as prevalent as alienated industrial labor, and for the same reasons. Yet the dialectical tension that holds individual and species being in its dynamic relationship as human history unfolds, must consciously inform the intersubjective field in which the human imagination identifies itself. We can imagine that dimension of existence for
ourselves only so long as we recognize in the realm of necessity those elements which are no longer necessary and are therefore irrational. To the extent that we stand beyond the realm of necessity and recognize it as necessary but not yet sufficient for the satisfaction of our essential humanity, we fuel the flames of critical reason and strive for what we are not yet: free and self-consciously human.

In our commodity culture the characteristics of industrial alienation appear primary, and serve as the foil of artistic labor; but only where there remains critical rationality. This situation presents itself to us as one in which artistic and technological labor appear contradictory both in the labor process and in the end products, but this contradiction is really part of a larger loss of historical consciousness—we are historically lost in an age of discontinuity.

Conclusion: The Intersubjective Field

Let us suppose that we had carried out production as human beings. Each of us would have in two ways affirmed himself and the other person. 1) In my production I would have objectified my individuality, its specific character, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual manifestation of my life during the activity, but also . . . the pleasure of knowing my personality to be objective, visible to the senses and hence a power beyond all doubt. 2) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the direct enjoyment of . . . having satisfied a human need by my work. . . . 3) I would have been for you the mediator between you and the species . . .
recognized and felt by you yourself as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love. 4) In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly confirmed and realised my true nature, my human nature, my communal nature. Our products would be so many mirrors in which we saw reflected our essential nature.16

In this extraordinary passage is reflected the transformed consciousness of the free and self-determining human being. It is utopian only insofar as it presupposes the abolition of private property, the abolition of quantitatively determined measures of value for the quality of human production. The productive process takes on a new and uniquely human meaning, and the prejudice for the object, for the end product of human labor, vanishes before the fascination in the reciprocal interchange between individual and species being, between subjectivity and objectivity, and between individuals--characterized by love.

Qualitative descriptions are not accidental in this passage; there is a conscious move beyond the strictures of quantitative methodology to the heart of the matter concerning human labor. The mystification is stripped away, and what is revealed is human intersubjectivity in all its marvelous complexity. Within the intersubjective field lies the possibility for the re-unification of instrumental and critical reason; for the reconciliation of technology and art.
Art is committed to that perception of the world which alienates individuals from their functional existence and performance in society—it is committed to an emancipation of sensibility, imagination, and reason in all spheres of subjectivity and objectivity.\textsuperscript{17}

Technology is the vehicle which allows the possibility of such an emancipation, for in the realm of necessity where material scarcity predominates, there is no vision of emancipation for species-being, and the emancipation of individual being is contingent upon the domination of individual beings. The alienation of individuals from their functional existence and performance in society allows for the recognition of relationships previously obscured by the productive process. The separation of art from the productive process has allowed for the demystification of the social, historical, and material reality that is the result of that process.

Artistic labor is the apotheosis of all human labor, for while it is not primarily economic activity, the process of artistic production involves more dynamically than any other the critical and instrumental powers of human intelligence. Because art maintains the critical tension between what is and what ought to be, it reflects on a higher level the ontological condition of man. Art, like all authentic labor, generally is the historically conscious realization of individual and species being through the mutual and
reciprocal transformation of both subject and object. However, the function of art, its truth in the intersubjective field "lies in its power to break the monopoly of established reality (i.e., of those who established it) to define what is real." As such art is a very special form of labor, the highest form, because it establishes itself on the frontiers of human consciousness where value meets the void of human possibilities.

The unity occluded by the excesses of instrumentalism has been preserved throughout human history by the redeeming power of art. The forgotten mythic unity can be reestablished by aligning the productive processes in the realm of necessity with the ontological imperatives of human labor: by recognizing on the mundane level of life (on the level where men work and reproduce themselves) the values of artistic labor as that toward which all life approaches—the free expression of human potentialities, Reason in its highest expression.

Eventually all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs.

I am haunted by waters.

Norman Maclean, A River Runs Through It
Footnotes


3 Ibid., p. 122.

4 Ibid., p. 146.

5 Ibid., p. 145.


10 Ibid., 421.


12 Herbert Marcuse, "On the Philosophical Foundation of the Concept of Labor in Economics," *Telos*, no. 16 (Summer 1973), p. 13. This essay is explicated in part below, and substantially influences what follows.

13 Ibid. p. 22.

14 Ibid., p. 31.

15 Ibid., p. 13


18 Ibid., p. 9.

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THE INTERSUBJECTIVE FIELD
Introduction

The countless dualisms in Western philosophy suggest the tension in human thought prompted by the negating power of reason itself. The tension between reality and appearance, light and dark, fact and value, freedom and necessity array themselves throughout history without final resolution. Our age suggests another dualism, rooted in the Greek tradition and nurtured in the Renaissance, between the material and the ideal. To experience these dualisms is perhaps what it means to be human, it is a function of man's ontological nature to be always in process from what is toward what is not quite yet but ought to be.

The problem for a critical theory of society is to ground criticism in legitimate universality where it is itself free from charges of partiality, ideology, and particularity. It is an open and continuing process that has not been realized, perhaps cannot be completely realized, but nevertheless ought to be. The attempt to ground critical theory might well begin by asking the question as to the object of that theory, i.e., of what is critical theory critical? The answer, as indicated by the preceding papers, is domination. The unspoken ground of critical theory is an interest in human freedom as the ultimate human value.
The dualism that critical theory must overcome is precisely that between fact (domination) and value (freedom). The problem inherent in this dualism involves the entire normative realm, since within a dominated social situation one might expect to have distorted perceptions not only of the material situation but also of that normative realm posited by the dominant culture to sustain itself. Where else can one stand when criticizing the dominating culture but firmly under its thumb? To appeal to history, or culture, is to appeal not only to that which offers the promise of liberation but also to that which has interests in the preservation of the status quo. One's own interests in the future are hopelessly tinged with the interests of the dominating social system that sustains the very notion of the future in the first place. The facticity of modern mass culture is overwhelming, both in terms of its material base and in terms of idealist destiny: both may appear as rational and necessary.

The tension between a materialist theory of history (Marx) and an idealist theory of reason (Hegel) provides much of the fertile ground for critical theory. The attempt of the Frankfurt School to enfuse the Marxian critique of political economy with a critique of culture resulted in a shift of emphasis that many felt did not preserve the unity of the two. Herbert Marcuse's 1933 essay "On the Philosophical
Foundation of the Concept of Labor in Economics\textsuperscript{1} was an attempt to ground critical theory in an analysis of labor as an ontological category, i.e., to expand the notion of labor in a way that would allow for a consideration of culture while maintaining the most fundamental category of historical materialism, labor. This essay has been criticized on various grounds, most notably for its "subjectivism," yet it nevertheless reflects the need for a critique of instrumental Marxism, for a critical theory of society and the individual which develops a philosophical examination of the foundations of historical materialism.

This is also the intention of Jurgen Habermas, whose work involves a linguistic examination of the foundations of historical materialism.\textsuperscript{2} Both Marcuse and Habermas see essentially the same problem in this regard: the need for a philosophical basis for a critical theory of society that overcomes the tension between materialism and idealism without sacrificing one for the other. Habermas replaces labor as the central core of critical theory with symbolic interaction and communication theory, arguing with extraordinary persuasiveness that language is a universal category of human experience (as is labor). The focus of both Marcuse and Habermas is clearly the intersubjective field where resolutions of historical significance unfold through human praxis, and while both acknowledge the importance of material
production and reproduction, both deny its exclusive primacy and reassert the socio-cultural dimension.

The historical moment of the Frankfurt School saw the emergence of a new attention to socio-cultural phenomena, a revived interest in psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, and art. The tremendous productivity of the group overshadowed the political-economic dimensions of life which, though not forgotten, were perhaps neglected in the effort to overcome the excesses of Soviet Marxism. The critique of instrumental reason became the primary task of critical theory, and resulted in the revitalization of the dialectical tension between culture and economics. But obviously the analysis of either side of the problem to the exclusion of the other results in no lasting understanding of the advanced capitalist industrial state. Both spheres of society must be understood as dialectically interdependent, which means the analysis must focus on a ground where idealism and materialism meet.

The thesis of this project is that the ground where culture and economics meet is human labor understood as the historically conscious realization of individual and species being through the mutual and reciprocal transformation of both subject and object—the definition of authentic labor.*

*See page 17, 18 of the second paper, "On the Ontological
It is further suggested that the unacknowledged paradigm in the ideal speech situation described by Habermas is art, the previously described apotheosis of labor. The tremendously subtle analysis of Habermas directs critical theory to a consideration of language, symbolic interaction, as the new focus of an analysis previously directed at consciousness. The magnitude of his critical theory surpasses the narrow focus of this paper, and promises fertile ground for the future of all critical theory. The openness of his analysis promises the rebirth of an optimistic and erotic critical theory firmly grounded in the "intention of the good and true life."³

Jurgen Habermas: Communication Theory

In light of Legitimation Crisis,⁴ the problem of developing a Marxist aesthetic can now be integrated with the totality of the normative sphere which finds its ultimate expression in the communicative ethic:

Only communicative ethics guarantees the generality of admissible norms and the autonomy of acting subjects solely through the discursive redeemability of the validity claims with which norms appear. That is, generality is guaranteed in that the only norms that may claim generality are those on which everyone affected agrees without constraint if they enter into a

Character of Labor." Note that labor in this context is more than mere economic activity.
process of discursive will formation. . . . 5

Only communicative ethics is universal. . . .

In our own century the very possibility of intersubjectivity has come under devastating attack; philosophically in the ontology of Jean-Paul Sartre, and poetically in literature depicting the triumph of the art of failure. We have had our existential moment, thankfully, yet we curiously linger with the aesthetic nostalgia of the old literary forms which hold open for us the mysteriousness of an impenetrable subjectivity as the illusion against which there can be only a mutilated and impoverished reality. We are reminded, with a similar yet possibly less perverse nostalgia, of the strange intercourse between Socrates and Euthyphro concerning the nature of Piety, that most inter-subjective of all the Greek virtues:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socrates:</th>
<th>Have we not also said, Euthyphro, that there are quarrels and disagreements and hatreds among the gods?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Euthyphro:</td>
<td>We have.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socrates:</td>
<td>But what kind of disagreement, my friend, causes hatred and anger? Let us look at the matter thus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euthyphro:</td>
<td>Of course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socrates:</td>
<td>And if we were to disagree as to the relative size of two things, we should measure them and put an end to the disagreement at once, should we not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euthyphro:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socrates:</td>
<td>And should we not settle a question about the relative weight of two things by weighing them?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Euthyphro: Of course.
Socrates: Then what is the question which would make us angry and enemies if we disagreed about it, and could not come to a settlement? Perhaps you have not an answer ready; but listen to mine. Is it not questions of the just and unjust, of the honorable and the dishonorable, of the good and the bad? Is not questions about these matters which make you and me and everyone else quarrel, when we do quarrel, if we differ about them and can reach no satisfactory agreement?

Running beneath all Socratic dialogues is the field of intersubjectivity that is the fertile ground out of which disagreements may grow, a ground that sponsors enough commonality to give rise to the fantastic diversity of classical Greek culture. The profound subtlety of Socrates presents us difference founded upon and rooted in the polis, the arena within which Greek humanity was realized. The dialogue concludes inconclusively, of course, piety at least never gets reified.

But there is an interesting similarity between the ethical power which illuminates and nurtures Socratic wisdom, and the commitment of Habermas to the "good and true life," because it is ultimately that commitment which infuses his theory of communicative competence with truth.

For Habermas language is the peculiarly human medium of socially symbolic interaction which provides the field against and within which human life becomes intelligible. I
use the term 'field' consciously and by doing so invoke the phenomenological notion of a field of perception within and against which intentionality operates, and concomitantly the field of history within which intentionality functions as future oriented motivation. There is both a certain 'given-ness' about language and also a normative openness, as language becomes both solidified as a cultural constant and the vehicle through which all cultural constants can be articulated and reconstituted. There is agreement between subjects as to the use of symbols and features of language which is generative and capable of reconstruction in the case of degeneration (universal pragmatics). Universal pragmatics "exhibit both the normative basis of all communication and the possibility of systematically distorted communication."\(^7\)

The constitution of the field of consensus against which language is operative is contingent upon the mutual recognition of at least four different types of validity claims involved in the exchange of speech acts:

Claims that the utterance is understandable, that its propositional content is true, and that the speaker is sincere in uttering it, and that it is right or appropriate for the speaker to be performing the speech act.\(^8\)

When all of these claims are accepted, as they are in normal speech, communication occurs; when they are not they may be restored through metacommunication which seeks to remove the disturbance and reestablish the original or a new background
consensus. The form of metacommunication in which the truth or correctness of an opinion or norm is established is called discourse—which differs from normal speech acts because it requires suspension of judgment as to the empirical context of the speech act, suspension of action and action oriented motivation which may occlude understanding and suspension of judgment as to the correctness of certain norms. Normal communication, "context of interaction," naively accepts what in discourse is suspended, yet it always assumes that in event of a breakdown resort to metacommunication is always possible to reestablish mutual understanding. That this suppositional accountability is counter-factual, that pure communicative action rarely occurs, is acknowledged by Habermas, while he simultaneously holds that the expectation can be explained in a theory of systematically distorted communication. Language and the communicative field are not transcendental disembodiments of cultural experience, but are sustained through consensus garnered in the existential social milieu through intersubjective reciprocity. This reciprocity is impaired by relations of inequality and domination, usually taking the form of repression which denies the possibility of consensus, or at least makes problematic the cognizance of apparent and real forms of consensus. In other words, the ontological duality here is not absolute between two subjects since it is mediated by the intersubjectivity constituted
communication process, yet equal access to the process, access which would absolutely ensure authentic communication is in turn compromised by the inequalities of class, education, motivation, and other factors. It becomes a matter of second nature to operate within a distorted language field, i.e., within a field where consensus is acknowledged as illusory.

Habermas' problem, in terms of the above-mentioned Socratic analogy, is to illustrate those possibilities for pure communicative action within a social situation where what is being measured is tinged with human interest—the agreement between Socrates and Euthyphro as to what measures to employ in matters of weight and volume, is of a qualitatively different kind than the agreement as to the nature of piety. Euthyphro, after all, is about to testify against his father in a murder trial. Which criteria of consensus are really true within a systematically distorted communication field, and how can discursively realized agreement be distinguished from the mere appearance of agreement?

In Knowledge and Human Interests Habermas maintains himself faithful to the core of the classical tradition of philosophy; to the insight that the truth of statements is linked in the last analysis to the intention of the "good and true life." Argumentation is the means by which truth claims can become discursively justified or discursively
redeemed. What is to be found in the notion of truth must be approached through an analysis of discursive justification, which for Habermas is a normative concept: "Truth is not the fact that a consensus is realized, but rather that at all times and in any place, if we enter into a discourse a consensus can be realized under conditions that identify it as a justified consensus. Truth means 'warranted assertability'."¹⁰

The speech act carries with it the supposition that communication is possible. Discourse into the truth or falsity of a statement or the correctness of a norm similarly assumes the possibility of agreement—indeed the denial of this is tantamount to the denial of speech per se, and condemns itself as soon as it is uttered. The logic is the same whether we speak of speaking qua speaking or of an art which has as its object the abolition of itself. The irony of Samuel Beckett, for example, is that his novel that was to destroy the novel as an art form (The Trilogy) is an eminently successful novel. So it is with metacommunication: the fact that we engage in it presupposes a belief on our part that the issue will be decided according to the rules of logic and the force of the better argument, and not by the contingencies of fetters on our communication. Our communication is unfettered:

... When for all participants there is a symmetrical distribution of chances to select and
employ speech acts, when there is an effective equality of chances to assume dialogue roles . . . (when) all participants . . . have the same chance to initiate and perpetuate discourse, to put forward, call into question, and give reasons for or against statements, explanations, interpretations, and justifications . . . (and) have the same chance to express attitudes, feelings, intentions . . . and to command, to oppose, to permit, to forbid, etc. ¹¹

These are the conditions of the ideal speech situation, and are identical with the conditions for an ideal form of life; "they include linguistic conceptualizations of the traditional ideals of freedom and justice. 'Truth', therefore, cannot be analyzed independently of 'freedom' and justice."¹²

Art, if it is to be authentic communication, has ideally the same requirements as pure communicative interaction. Not only can art be seen within this model of intersubjective communication, but can also be as paradigmatical and can take itself as the object of its expression and thereby become a form of metacommunication of meta-art. When this happens, the result is often the destructing of a traditional field of aesthetic intentionality, and the speech with which art transforms itself often exceeds the communicative competence of linguistic expression per se. Yet what is presupposed in the 'beautiful illusion' is precisely what is presupposed in normal communication, i.e., the ideal conditions for an ideal form of life, the ideas of freedom and justice. These ideal conditions rarely, if ever, exist for
art anymore than for actual speech, but as for actual speech they may serve as the ground from which systematic distortions of aesthetic communication are critiqued. That ground assumes the inseparability of truth and goodness and beauty, of facts, theory, and practice, and is the ground for a critical theory of society.

Freedom is inherent in the notion of truth and is anticipated in every act of communication--linguistic, practical, or aesthetic. All social relations must be accepted and legitimated by its members and as such the legitimation has a democratic character. When the democratic character of cultural affirmation is denied, it must be denied from the ground of an ideology that claims the impossibility of rational consensus, or the inappropriateness of discursive will formation; in short the ideology must be rooted in psychic repression and manifest itself in distorted communication (fascist art). Such communication abounds in modern capitalism, but its prevalence does not represent, even on the level of metacommunication, the ultimate ontological nature of human existence and interaction.*

*One of the problems such writers as Beckett and Sartre pose is how bad faith can be overcome when bad faith postures become internalized in a rapidly changing environment such that the original is irretrievably occluded. In such an instance we have Nietzsche's philological problem: the original is annihilated, so why pretend it exists?
Habermas discusses the role of bourgeois art in terms of its autonomy in the face of demands extrinsic to art and in terms of its ability to strengthen the antagonisms between the values offered by the socio-cultural system and those demanded by the political and economic systems. Bourgeois art operates as a form of critical rationality which stands over against and provides refuge from the technological rationality of the productive process and the political ideology which gives it motivational credence. Against such technological rationality the artistic refusal often takes the form of un-reason (and indeed is frequently irrational), but generally only has the appearance of unreasonableness to a motivational system defined by an efficiency rationale. Habermas mentions the three main human and generalizable needs or interests thus served by bourgeois art in this capacity: 1) the need for a mimetic relation with nature, 2) the need for living together in solidarity outside the group egoism of the immediate family, 3) the longing for the happiness of a communicative experience exempt from the imperatives of purposive rationality. This latter need also reflects the deeply human and profoundly revolutionary drive for creative spontaneity. This characterization of art has it fulfilling human needs which can find no satisfaction within privatized religion, scientistic philosophy, or utilitarian morality. "Thus, along with moral
universalism, art and aesthetics (from Schiller to Marcuse) are explosive ingredients built into the bourgeois ideology.¹³

But modern art for Habermas is post-Auratic art, art created under those conditions described by Walter Benjamin in his famous 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."¹⁴ A consideration of this essay is necessary for a fuller understanding of Habermas' inadequately brief analysis.

Walter Benjamin: Mechanical Reproduction of Art

Benjamin argues that although works of art have always been in principle reproducible by imitation, the mechanical reproduction of the work of art represents something new. Beginning with Greek founding and stamping, through the development of the woodcut, printing, engraving to the 19th century discovery of lithography, works of art were variously reproduced for various motives including profit. With lithography, it became possible to portray everyday life on a much more prolific scale, on a scale soon equivalent to printing. Lithography was soon replaced with photography, which for the first time made the mediating labor of the hand superfluous, reducing its function to that of the eye looking through a lens. Photography implied the film just as surely as lithography implied the illustrated newspaper. By 1900 all works of art could be mechanically reproduced, and the
reproductive process itself became an art form. This had profound repercussions on the ways in which the public was to come to 'consume' art.

But all reproduction of a work of art lacks the "presence in time and space" of the original, i.e., the whole "sphere of authenticity" lies outside the possibility of reproduction (both manual and mechanical). Furthermore, the process of mechanical reproduction captures aspects of the original inaccessible to natural vision (for example enlargement and slow motion) while at the same time putting the copy of the original into situations which would be impossible for the original (for example listening to opera in the shower). The problem, and it is a significant one, is that the integrity of the original, its "quality of presence" is always depreciated:

In the case of the art object, a most sensitive nucleus—namely, its authenticity—is interfered with. . . . The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term 'aura' and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. 15

Consequently, the work of art is wrenched from its
traditional field, and in place of the unique object and the powerful experiences it exudes is substituted an uncontrolled number of 'faded' copies. (Again the Nietzschean analogy is apropos.) The copies now encounter the beholder in his own unique situation, reactivating themselves there and serving to shatter tradition. The implications in 1936 were obvious: "... the liquidation of the traditional value of cultural heritage." The example Benjamin naturally seizes upon is the phenomena of the great historical film; an "invitation to a far reaching liquidation."¹⁶

Modes of human sense perception change over long periods of time and in accordance with changes in modes of human existence. Benjamin argues that changes in the contemporary mode of perception can be understood as the decay of the aura caused not only by the mechanical reproduction of art objects, but further by the tremendous popularity of mass media. His worst fears would be confirmed by television.

Benjamin draws the familiar analogy of the concept of aura to natural objects: "We define the aura of (natural objects) as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch."¹⁷ The social basis of the decay of the aura rests on two habits of mind
characteristic of the contemporary masses: the desire to bring things spatially and humanly closer, and to reduce the uniqueness of all art objects and situations to banality by accepting their mechanical reproduction. Benjamin saw this burgeoning penchant for the acquisition of close range likenesses multiplied everywhere; in magazines, newsreels, and films, and everywhere it demonstrated for him a preference for transitoriness and reproducibility over uniqueness and permanence. "To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction. Thus is manifested in the field of perception what in the theoretical sphere is noticeable in the increasing importance of statistics."  

The transition from the uniqueness of the work of art which retains its aura to the total reversal of the function of art in the age of mechanical reproduction is the transition from ritual to politics. Since the original contextual tradition of art was expressive of the cult, and the work first appeared in the service of magical then religious ritual, the existence of the work of art is never entirely separated from its ritual function. The advent of photography roughly coincides with the advent of socialism, and the response of art is to become theological in defense
of its aura which is now clearly threatened, i.e., art
denies its social function and its categorization by subject
matter and becomes 'pure'.

The consequent age of mechanical reproduction heralds
the emancipation of the work from its dependence upon ritual,
and becomes an object destined from its inception to be
reproduced. This means that authenticity is no longer an
ingredient of artistic creation which amounts to a total
reversal of the function of art. "Instead of being based on
ritual, it begins to be based on another practice--politics." 19

The two polar types of art distinguished according to
value are works with cult value (ceremonial, cave drawings,
religious statues, etc.) and works with exhibition value.
For the cave man the art work's importance was not contin­
genent upon its being exhibited; and today the cult value of
a work seems to demand that it remain hidden. King Tut's
tomb seems a classic example: with the liberation of most
art practices goes the increasing opportunity for them to
be exhibited in settings other than the original, in the
case of Tut it is impossible to send the entire pyramid
around the world. One is also reminded of the obelisks in
the center of Paris, brought there by Napoleon from Egypt.
Obviously the same holds for a visual work done on canvas as
opposed to one more permanently affixed to its setting, as
a fresco. The increase in fitness for exhibition which is
consequent upon increased capacities for technical reproduction has resulted in a qualitative transformation of the work's nature. Today the emphasis is exclusively on its exhibition, which means it now has entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function. We may well wonder at what point that artistic function will be transformed into an incidental function just as the cave drawing has now become 'artistic'.

Photography and the film are the obvious bearers of this new function, but with them, or at least with photography, there is a retrenchment to the cult value in portraiture. The portrait was the obvious focal point of early photography, and the aura of those early portraits still clings to the photograph long after it has been removed from its historical circumstance. But as soon as man absents himself from the photographic image the exhibition value manifests itself. Benjamin reminds us of the haunting uneasiness of photographs of empty streets, "taken as evidence at the scene of a crime." As photographs become the standard evidence of historical occurrences they begin to acquire a hidden political significance in which the viewer is challenged forth out of "free-floating contemplation" to another, more appropriate vision.

At the same time picture magazines begin to put up sign posts for him, right ones or wrong ones, no matter. For the first time captions have
become obligatory. And it is clear that they have an altogether different character than the title of a painting. The directives which captions give . . . soon become even more explicit and more imperative in the film where the meaning of each single picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence of all preceding ones.21

All of this amounts to the destruction of the autonomy of art caused by the separation of art from its basis in cult: photography and the film have radically transformed the entire nature of art, which can be seen nowhere as clearly as in the comparison of the stage actor to the screen actor. The screen actor's performance is presented not to the audience, but to the camera, to a camera that need not intuit the performance as a whole, and to a camera that constantly shifts its perspective, to a camera that does not establish intersubjectivity between actor and audience. Similarly, of course, the audience can no longer maintain the intersubjective symbiosis with the performers—which has powerful ramifications within the intersubjective field of the audience itself, i.e., it can totally abolish it. The audience identifies with the camera, or the cameraman, who remains forever anonymous.22

The actor for the first time creates for a mechanical contrivance with his whole living person, while that contrivance has no respect for the actor's aura. The aura, as we have already seen, cannot be reproduced, since it is rooted in the actor's presence. The aura of Othello and the aura

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of Sir Lawrence Olivier on the stage cannot be separated, but when that performance is viewed by the camera of Polansky, both the auras vanish: art has left the realm of the "beautiful semblance." It is called mirror estrangement; the estrangement of seeing before a mirror is compounded by the transportability of the mirrored image. The implications for politics are even more ominous than for art. How does the film industry, for whom these alienations are marketing problems, respond? By reconstituting the aura by artificially building the actor's or the candidate's personality outside of the performance, by packaging the commodity.

The extent to which the mechanical reproduction of art has changed the reactions of the masses toward art is nowhere as evident as in the film, where the immediate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment acquires tremendous social significance. The reluctance to adapt to innovations in painting is starkly contrasted with the immediate acceptance of innovation in the cinema:

The greater the decrease in the social significance of an art form, the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment. The conventional is uncritically enjoyed, and the truly new is criticized with aversion. With regard to the screen, the critical and the receptive attitudes of the public coincide. The decisive reason for this is that individual reactions are predetermined by the mass audience response they are about to produce, and this is nowhere more pronounced than in the film. The moment these responses become manifest they control each other.23
The dark intersubjectivity of the theatre is the breeding ground for a universal critical aesthetic consciousness that is an impossibility even in the largest gallery. The single Picasso can be viewed simultaneously by a relatively small number of people (Benjamin sees the large numbers flocking to galleries at the end of the 19th century as a crisis in painting!), and was intended as such. It simply is not an object for a large simultaneous collective experience. Indeed the crisis in painting is related to the fact that insofar as painting is now an object of mass consumption, it is so in a radically different manner than ever before. Today there is no opportunity to approach painting gradually, through a period of lived experience in which meaning emerges distinctly, rather one encompasses "French Impressionism" at the Chicago Art Institute in a single afternoon. "There is no way for the masses to organize and control themselves in their reception. Thus the same public which responds in a progressive manner toward a grotesque film is bound to respond in a reactionary manner to surrealism." 

Benjamin's essay is considerably more positive in its anticipation of the human uses of the film and other mechanical reproductions than was the response of Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt School who felt that the traditionally political function of art as providing the beautiful illusion of the "other" society was being abrogated.
by the new mass art. They feared the new political function of mass art was to be the reconciliation of the masses to the status quo. Benjamin disagreed. He lamented the loss of the aura while simultaneously holding out the hope for the progressive potential of politicized, collectivized art. He does this by being more open to the positive character of what is undeniably a negative feature of the film, distraction. His analysis recognizes the impossibility of solving the problem of class consciousness by contemplation alone. Many of history's problems are mastered gradually, by living them through in accordance with a reasonable faith in human perception itself.

The return to Habermas is a return to the mainstreams of the Frankfurt School's aesthetic theory and critique of mass culture, but for us with the additional tool of his theory of communicative competence. His treatment of post-auratic art is cast in the social and cultural context of the 1960s and 1970s, which means that post-auratic art finds at least partial expression in the counter-culture.

In the 19th century bourgeois art came to achieve a brilliant autonomy in terms of other contexts of interaction and employment external to it. Its values were characteristically Bohemian, and as such grew directly out of the center of bourgeois culture as a radical negation of its motivational presuppositions: possessive individualism, the
Protestant ethic, etc. The bourgeois work of art originally functioned as a kind of alter ego to the 19th century commodity owner, a corrective to the excesses of the productive process which characterized his intersubjective relations as relations of domination and repression and distorted communication. In the pristine environment of the drawing room and the gallery the bourgeois could, through solitary contemplation reestablish contact with sublime humanity, with the species being which lurked behind his world on the side of its reverential nature. This original aura came to embody a critical attitude toward bourgeois values—a noisy and hostile howling against the pretentions of repressively distorted communication. Art became avant garde, seductive, and unalterably alienated itself from its patron. The bourgeoisie could no longer find in the artistically beautiful its own redemption and happiness; that happiness was not simply suspended in everyday life, but was in fact crushed by it:

In the aura of the bourgeois work of art—that is, in the cultist emjoyment of the already secularized, museum-ripe shrine—was mirrored a belief in the reality of the beautiful illusion. This belief crumbled along with the aura.26

The truth is that bourgeois society cannot produce an art that would express the realization of human freedom through the apotheosis of technological rationality, because that rationality has stifled the possibility of its critical
self-consciousness by forcing the ground of that self-consciousness out into the cold night of unreason.

It is within the amorphous arena of 'modern art' that bourgeois art is transubstantiated into the counter-culture. Surrealism is the specific historical moment in which the transubstantiation is affected, in which the "no-longer-beautiful illusion" passes desublimated over into life. This destruction of aesthetic distance was not produced by the techniques of mechanical reproduction as Benjamin has argued, but rather was already accomplished by the transformation of the art work into a commodity relation with its consumer and producer. Mechanical reproduction certainly accelerated that process, but the break was already present at the point at which modern art made the process of production evident by presenting itself as something that was produced, i.e., that has a use-value and has therefore surrendered its autonomy. The point seems to be that both are correct, and that the relationship between modern ritualism (at least insofar as it reflects itself within the religious tradition) and politics is both discontinuous and at the same time anchored in an anti-human subjectivism that is counter-revolutionary. Whether or not art concerns itself with the former, it can no longer refuse its political dimension. By presenting itself as something produced for consumption, art implicates itself in the commodity culture regardless of
whether the initial art work was intended for mass production. All art is now potentially reproducible, if by no other means than its recorded passage by the press and news media; and it is precisely this recorded and interpreted passage and its mass distribution that gives art its tremendous political use-value. The work of art now no longer conforms to one of the essential features of authentic labor, i.e., the artist no longer has control over the means of its production and reproduction and eventual distribution. This is the context in which an alienated and distorted art must somehow find itself.

Conclusion

Renunciation of the aesthetic form does not cancel the difference between art and life—but it does cancel that between essence and appearance, in which the truth of art has its home and which determines the political value of art. . . . A subversive counterculture today is conceivable only in contradiction to the prevailing art industry and its heteronomous art. That is to say, a real counterculture would have to insist on the autonomy of art, on its own autonomous art.28

Critical theory remains a critique of domination, but of domination understood in all of its forms economic, political, cultural, and artistic. As such it implies a human interest in the free expression of individual and species being. That expression occurs through authentic human labor now understood as an ontological category of
human existence. Just as critical theory requires the balance of a critique of culture as well as a critique of political economy, so too does Marxist aesthetics require a critique of artistic form as well as a critique of political content. A consistent feature of Marcuse's thought is his insistence on maintaining the dialectical tension between materialism and idealism in all dimensions of critical theory. Habermas also seeks the ground of critical theory in human intersubjectivity, in 'symbolic interaction'. The significant force of Habermas' theory of communication lies in his description of the ideal speech situation, the unspoken paradigm of which is authentic artistic labor.

It is significant that Marcuse, at the end of a long and productive philosophical life, turns to the aesthetic dimension, where art and radical praxis display such a bewildering affinity and opposition. Both envision a world where individuals are liberated from repression and domination; both acknowledge their roots in the given world of domination. Yet in the presumed utopia there will be art.

The institutions of a socialist society, even in their most democratic form, could never resolve all the conflicts between the universal and the particular, between human beings and nature, between individual and individual. Socialism does not and cannot liberate Eros from Thanatos. Here is the limit which drives the revolution beyond any accomplished stage of freedom; it is the struggle for the impossible, against the unconquerable whose domain can nevertheless be reduced. . . . If people were free, their art would be the form and expression of their freedom.\(^\text{29}\)
Of course, people are not free, artists no less than the rest of us; the ways in which we symbolically interact and labor are pre-determined by the medium of that interaction. The ideal speech situation, the ideal form of artistic labor exist only as values we might long for. We might long for them not as something lost in the 19th century, but as something found in the changed communicative circumstances, of the 20th century. The age of instantaneous mass communication systems has altered forever the way we view ourselves and our human potentialities, and the artist must find new ways to ground himself and his work in these changed circumstances. The problem remains open and a solution, a resolution seems distant. We can only imagine what art might be in the "good utopia," in the realm of freedom. We can be as certain in our imaginings that there is an image as we can be when we enter tinot speech that there is communication, however inadequate. We can be just as certain that our symbolic interactions will be garbled and distorted in their present context, i.e., in the context of a dominated and repressed commodity culture, and we might suppose that art would take notice of the fact.

Artistic labor as defined in these papers is ideal only insofar as it evokes the memory what was in order to ground the image of what might be, of what ought to be. Labor generally and art particularly will take radically different forms in our future history, if we have one, than
it has in our recent past. It is difficult to find embodi-
ments of this future in our present—difficult but not im-
possible. There are artists who affirm Eros, who affirm the 
life force. As long as there are, art lives.
Footnotes

1 Herbert Marcuse, "On the Philosophical Foundation of the Concept of Labor in Economics," Telos, no. 16 (Summer, 1973).

2 Jurgen Habermas, Legitimation Crisis, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, 1975). This paper relies heavily on the translator's introduction for those aspects of Habermas' theory that are unavailable.

3 Jurgen Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston, 1971), appendix.

4 Habermas, Legitimation Crisis.

5 Ibid., p. 89.


7 Habermas, Legitimation Crisis, pp. xxiii, 27.

8 Ibid., p. xiii.

9 Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, appendix.

10 Habermas, Legitimation Crisis, p. xvi.

11 Ibid., p. xvii.

12 Ibid., p. xviii.

13 Ibid., p. 78.


15 Ibid., p. 221

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., p. 223.

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., p. 224.
20 Ibid., p. 226.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., p. 228.
23 Ibid., p. 234.
24 Ibid., p. 235.
26 Habermas, Legitimation Crisis, p. 85.
27 Ibid., p. 85.
29 Ibid., p. 72.
Bibliography


