

## The Politics of Subjectivity Slogans of the American New Left

The intensive and extensive interest in psychology is too vast to characterize; it includes those who seek relief from a malaise with society as well as disenchanting radicals who seek an alternative to the impoverishment of past political praxis; and this only begins the list. The very size and diversity of the list, however, if it resists characterization, promotes one conclusion: psychology is not a passing fad on the fringes of society; rather it is deeply entangled in the social reality. For this reason any study of psychology must simultaneously study the society and culture of which it is a part. The shift in social attention towards psychology is no accident, it testifies to a shift in the social structure itself. In baldest terms, the individual psyche commands attention exactly because it is undergoing fragmentation and petrification; the living substance known as the individual is hardening. The autonomous ego—always problematic—proves to be no match for the social collectivity which has at its call alternatively brute force, jobs, television, or the local newspaper. This is no conspiracy; rather it is ingrained in the *social* relations which both nourish and poison *human* relations. What haunts

the living is the spectre of individual and psychic suffocation; this is the spectre that a conformist psychology seeks to put to rest.

Within psychology new theories and therapies replace old ones at an accelerating rate. In a dynamic society Freud is too old to be a fashion, too new to be a classic. The phenomenon of the newer replacing the new is not confined to psychology; it is true in all realms of thought. The new not only surpasses the old, but displaces and dislodges it. The ability as well as the desire to remember atrophies. Most of the social sciences turn radically ahistorical; one hardly studies Hegel within philosophy, Freud within psychology, Marx within economics, and so on.

To those who accept the premise of a dynamic society, this is proof of progress and vitality. The truth of such a premise, however, is in doubt. Dynamism can be perpetual motion without movement. In question is whether within the dynamism there does not inhere a static moment: the structure of society. The evident acceleration of production and consumption in the economic sphere, and hysteria and frenzy in life itself, does not preclude that it is the same spinning faster and faster. If this is true, the application of planned obsolescence to thought itself has the same merit as its application to consumer goods; the new is not only shoddier than the old, it fuels an obsolete social system that staves off its replacement by manufacturing the illusion it is perpetually new.

### **The Proper Task of Theory**

The American new left has not been untouched by subjective reductionism. The very effort to think through and back which in different forms belongs to the best of Marxist and psychoanalytic theory is undermined by a crisis of the individual that can only think about itself. Evidence of this is everywhere: on the left as well as in revisionist and conformist psychology. This crisis is no fraud; the chill of the social relations cuts into the core of the individual. The effort to keep psychically warm, to alleviate the coldness that seeps in, shunts aside any time or need for sustained thought or theory. Yet because the left is a left it retains a social analysis of society. The very problem, however, is that this analysis degenerates more and more into slogans, thoughtless finds of the moment. Fetishized subjectivity attracts magnetically fetishized slogans that serve more to sort out ones friends and enemies than figure out the structure of reality. This is a dynamic that keeps bourgeois society rattling along; the very breathing space that could give life to theory is lost in the desperate search for life itself. This search without theory mimics death: reified activity. It grooves along in the ruts of bourgeois society.

The defence of theory, however, if not boring, is suspect: it serves no purpose. Citations from Lenin on the importance of revolutionary theory for a revolutionary movement as a response to this change are insufficient. Rather theory if it is to become a force must comprehend why it is not; it is obliged to study not only a left that has junked theory, but a 'counter-culture'—and culture—that has phased out books and words for images and feelings. Talk of a revolutionary

'counter-culture' is the gab of the culture industry itself—if investigations into the nature of the prevailing culture is foresworn. What is unique to the left is common to the establishment, at least the vanguard of the establishment. The left duplicates as well as negates bourgeois culture. To illuminate the former one must look at the latter.

The duplications, as with other psychological and social thoughts, take the form of forgetting. This renders discussion of trends in the left doubly irrelevant; not only is such a discussion distant from the immediate needs of the individual, but it is obsolete, discussing political thought and slogans that have already been discarded and forgotten; so rapidly does the left change today. Evidently this is already part of the problem; attending to the emergency of the individual has absorbed sustained political theory; the slogans that replace theory shift with the moment. The shifts are not done through choice and thought, but 'automatically', thoughtlessly and unconsciously. If the latest political opinions are improvements over former ones, they have not surpassed, but more or less forgotten them. They pass as they arose, uncritically—and promise to return. Thinking falls under the spell of fashion: change without change. If ideas such as 'smash monogamy' are not promoted in certain circles with the same vigour as previously, this does not mean they have been subject to criticism and transcended, but simply dropped, to be elsewhere and later recycled and re-used. Inasmuch as this discarding and forgetting appears as a continual or at least continuing process, an examination of slogans and thoughts, even if they are obsolete—which is by no means clear—may indicate the forces that are hardly obsolete; they are as vital as bourgeois society.

Again to be repeated; this analysis is not intended to equate development within the left proper with those outside it, as if the two cancelled each other out, confirming the wisdom that it is best to do nothing. That a left and a non-left participate in the same drive towards subjectivity is only proof of the virulence of bourgeois society, not of the meaninglessness of political distinctions. Further, it need hardly be said, the left itself is more and more fragmented; these thoughts are concerned with *trends*, which tend to exert themselves, but are obviously not evident everywhere; such an analysis does not claim universal validity. Also it should be noted, it is impossible to discuss the left without drawing material from the women's movement, weathermen, etc. It would violate the very spirit and intent to read this as an indictment of specific groups. At best one could say certain groups express with greater clarity trends that are present everywhere. But nothing more; neither that such developments are restricted to particular groups, or more outrageously, that these groups brought them about. Here, as elsewhere, what is in question is society as a whole.

The rejection of theory is grounded explicitly or implicitly in the affirmation of subjectivity. Theory seems politically impotent and personally unreal and irrelevant. Only human subjectivity—the personal—seems real and potent; the personal, it is said, is political, the political personal. The identity of the two eliminates the need to pursue either separately. Theory and objective thought make way for human relations, feelings, intuitions. The immediacy of these cuts to the quick of

the core of theory and thought: mediacy. The presence of the here and now in the form of subjective feelings banishes thoughts to after-thoughts. It instills an immediacy that stills reflection.

The promise that a focus on human subjectivity could harbour is lost if no attention is given to its place within bourgeois society in general. Here the relation of phenomena within and outside a left is at once critical and fluid. For the cult of human subjectivity *per se* is not the negation of bourgeois society but its substance. Yet against a Marxist dogma that proscribed all subjectivity its articulation within the left was progress; but as an exclusive pursuit it courts regression that constitutes bourgeois society's own progress. The fetish of subjectivity and human relationships is progress in fetishism. The rejection of theory seeking insight into objectivity in favour of subjective feelings reconstitutes a suspect Cartesian tradition in the reverse: I feel, therefore I am. The inner drive of bourgeois society was to throw the human subject back on itself. Descartes himself thought no other. 'My third maxim was to endeavour always to conquer myself rather than fortune, and to change my desires rather than the order of the world . . .'<sup>1</sup> Human subjectivity was left to shift for itself: to examine and transform the self, not the universe of the self. To prescribe more subjectivity as aid to the damaged subject is to prescribe the illness as the cure.

The wholesale rejection of theory incurs the constitutional failing of the individual retailer; apparently free to buy and sell he is a victim of objective laws without knowing them. The private individual free to pick and choose was a joke from the beginning; not only the allotments were already picked and chosen, but the contents of the choice followed the dictates of the social not individual world. 'The private interest is already a particular social interest and it is only within the given social conditions and given social means that it can be pursued. It is the interest of the private individual, but its contents, like the form and means of development, are determined by independent social conditions.'<sup>2</sup> The individual as an autonomous being was ideology even as bourgeois society announced it. The unemployed, like the employed, were to think their lack of luck, like their luck, was due to private abilities, and not fated by the social whole. No less are the private hopes, desires, and nightmares cued by public and social forces. The social does not 'influence' the private; it dwells within it. 'It is above all necessary to avoid postulating "society" once again as an abstraction confronting the individual. The individual *is* the *social being*.'<sup>3</sup>

### The Trap of Radical Subjectivity

The fetish of human relations, responses, emotions, perpetuates the myth; abstracted from the social whole they appear as the individualized responses of free men and women to particular situations, and not, as they are, the dehuman responses to a non-human world. A rat

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<sup>1</sup> Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, pt. III.

<sup>2</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 'Private Property and Communism,' pt. VI (all editions).

psychology befits humans only when a suffocating world has transformed men and women into rats. The endless talk about human relations and responses is Utopian; it assumes what is obsolete or yet to be realized: *human* relations. Today they are inhuman; they partake more of rats than humans, things than people. And not because of bad will but because of an evil world. To forget this is to indulge in the ideology of sensitivity groups that work to de-sensitize by cutting off human relations from the social roots that have made them brutal. More sensitivity today means revolution or madness. The rest is chatter.

The cult of subjectivity is a direct response to its eclipse. The more authentic human experience and relationships disappear, the more they are invoked—for exactly that reason. Autobiographical accounts replace thoughts because autobiographies as the history of a unique individual ceases to exist. ‘To get in touch with one’s feelings’—a slogan picked up by parts of the women’s movement—is to affirm an individual existence already suspect. Self and mutual affirmation and confirmation seek to recall an individualized experience that is a social memory. The atomized particle known as the individual salvages itself as advertising peddles its identical wares: by emphasizing differences that long ago were unreal.

The exclusive pursuit of subjectivity insures its decline. Not against the drive of bourgeois society but in tune with it, it takes a social product as a private woe or Utopia. That parts of the women’s movement made subjectivity programmatic, repudiating all objective theoretical thought, indicates only the extent to which the revolt recapitulates the oppression: women allegedly incapable of thought and systematic thinking but superior in sentiments and feelings repeated this in their very rebellion. Yet the point is not to resuscitate an official orthodoxy that eliminated any role for the subject. Since Lukács and Reich, and others, viable Marxist thought has worked precisely against this orthodoxy; but here it was not a question of advancing pure subjectivity, rather of restoring a subject-object dialectic. The alternatives of pure subjectivity and pure objectivity are the alternatives of bourgeois thought itself. Marxist and radical thought must use another logic, dialectical logic.

The promise of radical subjectivity to escape political and personal irrelevancy is unfulfilled. While it was positive progress against an older ‘objective’ Stalinist orthodoxy—which progress here will simply be noted but not elaborated—it repeated in reverse the same sins: an indifference toward the actual content of bourgeois society that perpetuates this content. ‘The passage to theory-less praxis was motivated by the objective impotence of theory,’ wrote Adorno, ‘and multiplied that impotence by the isolation and fetishization of the subjective moment of the historical movement . . .’<sup>4</sup> Subjectivity that forsakes sustained theory gravitates towards slogans that are not the crystallizations of discussion and thought but secretions of the existing society. Under the sway of immediacy slogans are accepted as coughed up by bourgeois society. As such they do not serve to popularize thought, but replace it. From ‘armed struggle’ to ‘smash monogamy’ they are not

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<sup>4</sup> T. W. Adorno, ‘Marginalien zu Theorie und Praxis,’ *Stichworte*, Frankfurt 1969, p. 177.

wrong in themselves, but wrong in so far as they are blank labels indifferent, or rather antagonistic, toward content. They are to be applied anywhere and everywhere, as if indifference toward the particular content was the hallmark of revolutionary theory and not its negation. Blindness toward content is the social logic of a society that deals in exchange values: how much? The logic of revolution must be another logic—the recognition of the particular and its social context: concrete dialectical thought. No matter their tone blank categories of affirmation or condemnation on armed struggle, the third world, leadership, men, and the rest, repeat not resist the inner mechanism of this society. The preservation of concrete dialectical analysis, even in idealistic form—to follow Lenin—makes it closer to dialectical materialism than vulgar materialism that is blind and indifferent. The former in its loyalty to the particular preserves what a crude materialism deaf, dumb, and blind to distinctions loses.

### ‘Smash Monogamy’

The political content of the slogan of ‘smash monogamy’ is of particular interest: to be examined is the extent such a slogan resisted the drive of bourgeois society, or appearances notwithstanding, seconded it. From the start it suggests a violence that is hardly commensurate with its object, as if the forces out to sustain bourgeois monogamy were to do so with cannon and gun. Rather to ‘smash’ monogamy is to smash something weak and frail, already despised and hated, openly or secretly, by many. The popular ridicule that surrounds marriage indicates the historical judgment on an institution that persists illogically in the face of its own refutation. The open scorn and ridicule reveals the profound ambiguity of bourgeois society towards its own product: maintaining marriage as a means of transmitting authority while suspecting it to be obsolete.

In fact, as discussed above, the bourgeois family—and bourgeois monogamy—as instruments of authority are being eclipsed by more efficient means; schools, television, etc, that bypass the family. The father as the wielder of the absolute power of condemnation or inheritance is being phased out. The erosion of the economic content of the family unit ultimately saps its authoritarian structure in favour of complete fragmentation. Important in this context is that the family in its ‘classic’ form was not merely a tool of society, but contained an anti-authoritarian moment. The family as an independent and (relatively) isolated unit preserved a ‘space’ in which the individual could develop *against* the society; as a mediator of authority, and not merely an instrument of it, it resisted as well as complied. It supplied an intellectual, and sometimes physical refuge which is the source of resistance. The notion—practically extinct?—that you can always come home echoes this role of protection offered against the forms of social domination. Within this space, the family relationships not only partook of the prevailing inhumanity, but preserved the possibility of something else and better. ‘In contradiction to public life, in the family where the relations are not mediated through the market and the individuals do not confront each other as competitors, the possibility exists for men and women to act not merely as functions, but as

individuals.’<sup>5</sup> The use of ‘sisters and brothers’ by the new left itself recalled the solidarity that at least for a moment was nurtured in the family.

That the family—and monogamy—was a form of humanity as well as a form of inhumanity is crucial to the Marxist critique. To lose this dialectic was to invite regression; it was to fall behind bourgeois monogamy, not realizing the human moment in monogamy, but eradicating it in favour of a new and repressive equality. It is this notion of equality that fuels and inspires the critique—and hatred—for monogamy, as well as that of privilege and exclusion in general. It belongs to the bourgeoisie’s most progressive *and* regressive programme; progressive in its democratic content against feudal privilege, and regressive in that it is ultimately grounded in the market of ‘equal’ exchange, and works to further the domain of the market. This equality is abstract as money is abstract; knowing neither quality nor content, it registers only numbers. In its indifference toward the actual content of life, a critique sustained by equality signals its bourgeois ideal ‘that tolerates nothing qualitatively different’.<sup>6</sup>

In different guises—always resisted by Marx—it emerged within and outside Marxism, as in critiques of wage-labour, classes, private property—and monogamy. The substance of such critiques was directed towards forms of inequality, and it sought only equalization or democratization. In seeing only privilege and inequalities it worked to level—capitalism’s own task. In losing the dialectical moment, it regressed; not the abolition of classes but their equalization,<sup>7</sup> not the abolition of capitalist property but its democratization, not the abolition of wage-labour but its extension to all, were programmes based on a bourgeois ideal of equality. Equality fixated on forms forgot the content that was inhuman equal or not. A critique of capitalist property inspired solely by equality suggests only an equality of domination, not its end.

Rather bourgeois property contains both human and inhuman moments, as does bourgeois monogamy. Marcuse’s essay on Marx’s *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts* is emphatic on this: Marxism seeks the abolition of *alienated* labour and *class* property, not ‘labour’ and ‘property’ which is the praxis of free men and women.<sup>8</sup>

It rejects both of the abstract alternatives that a critique founded on equality proposes: the abolition of all property—primitive communism—or its extension as wage-labour to all—Utopia as a workgang. Rather Marxism seeks to realize the human and individual moment in labour and property that goes beyond formal equality. Marx ridiculed those who saw communism as the abolition or equalization of all

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<sup>5</sup> M. Horkheimer, ‘Autorität und Familie,’ *Kritische Theorie der Gesellschaft*, Band I, Frankfurt, 1968, p. 346.

<sup>6</sup> T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, Frankfurt, 1970, p. 148.

<sup>7</sup> See Marx’s comments on Bakunin’s program, Marx-Engels *Werke*, XVIII (Berlin, 1969), p. 14f.

<sup>8</sup> Herbert Marcuse, ‘The Foundation of Historical Materialism’, *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, London 1972, pp. 1–48.

property. In his piece on the Commune, he wrote, ‘the Commune, they explain, intends to abolish property, the basis of all civilization! Yes, gentlemen, the Commune intended to abolish that class property . . . It wanted to make individual property a truth.’<sup>9</sup> Or in the *Manifesto*: with the end of capitalism ‘personal property is not thereby transformed into social property. It is only the social character of the property that is changed. It loses its class character.’<sup>10</sup>

### The Regressive Critique of Capitalism

A passage in the *Manuscripts* is the fullest discussion of the communism that would not end capitalism, but would universalize it by equalizing it. To Marx it is no accident that the key to such communism is its critique of bourgeois monogamy. The passage is worth citing in full: Primitive communism ‘wants to destroy *everything* which is not capable of being possessed by all as *private property*. It wants to do away by force with talent, etc. For it the sole purpose of life and existence is direct physical *possession*. The task of the labourer is not done away with, but extended to all men . . . Finally the movement of opposing universal property to private property finds expression in the animal form of opposing to *marriage* (certainly a *form of exclusive private property*) the *communism of women*, in which a woman becomes a piece of *communal and common property*. It may be said that this idea of the *communism of women* gives away the *secret* of this as yet completely crude and thoughtless communism. Just as a woman passes from marriage to general prostitution, so the entire world of wealth (that is, of man’s objective substance) passes from the relationships of exclusive marriage with the owner of private property to a state of universal prostitution with the community. In negating the *personality* of man in every sphere, this type of communism is really its negation. General *envy* constituting itself as a power is the disguise in which *greed* re-establishes itself . . . In the form of envy and the urge to reduce things to a common level . . . this . . . even constitutes the essence of competition. The crude communism is only the culmination of this envy and of this leveling-down proceeding.’<sup>11</sup>

The full content of the regressive critique of capitalism is here articulated; founded on the bourgeois notion of equality, and in part driven by envy and resentment, it works to spread capitalism, as opposed to ending it. Blind to content, it registers only privilege and exclusion and seeks formal equality. The denunciation of leadership, theory, talent, relationship between two people or between a man and a woman as forms of exclusion and privilege—participates in this ‘thoughtless’ communism. Privilege seen only as a violation of equality is privilege seen through the eyes of the bourgeoisie. ‘The developed modern state is not based . . . on a society of privileges but on a society in which *privileges are abolished and dissolved*. . . Free industry and free trade abolish privileged exclusivity . . . and set man free from privilege . . . they produce the universal struggle of man against man, individual against

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<sup>9</sup> Marx, *Civil War in France*, New York 1940, p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> cf. Marx, *Capital I*, Moscow 1961, p. 763.

<sup>11</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, ‘Private Property and Communism,’ IV.



individual . . .'<sup>12</sup> The logic of equality that sustains these critiques of exclusion and privilege is the logic of the market itself. It seeks to level—a Utopia of complete pulverization of human relations and interchangeability of individuals. The universalization of alienation, not its abolition, is its unconscious goal; it promises as liberation an equality of domination.

The point is not the mindless defence of bourgeois monogamy, bourgeois property, leadership, etc. Rather it is to understand their dialectical content which will make their abolition not regressive but progressive; it is to understand their human as well as inhuman content; monogamy not simply as mutual oppression, but the attempt at a sustained relationship between two people; theory not simply as elitism, but as necessary insight into objective reality; leadership not simply as manipulation but as a rational form of organization. The inability or refusal to grasp the dialectical content makes talk about their abolition suspect, and the more so, the open resentment; it expresses the desire to break down privilege and exclusion not so as to liberate but to share the spoils. The envy which would destroy in the name of freedom is too often apparent, e.g. communal groups which systematically set out to destroy exclusive relationships as threats to their own. The endless talk about human relations within the insular group works to promote group domination; it flushes out the last hiding place.

#### De Sade and the Logic of Total Equality

The critique of unique and exclusive relationships as crimes against democracy and equality has been formulated by bourgeois society's own advanced representatives, notably de Sade. The human individual—and body—is rendered totally functional, subject to all and everything. The progressive and regressive elements of bourgeois society have rarely been so clearly articulated: equality and democracy serve as a critique of privilege so as to make way for mutual and equal domination. The indifference towards the actual human content of relationships makes de Sade's programme at one with the bourgeoisie's own dream of liberation: liberation as a spree in the bargain-basement of human sexuality. In *Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans*, he proposed: 'Never may an act of possession be exercised upon a free being; the exclusive possession of a woman is no less unjust than the possession of slaves; all men are born free; all have equal rights; never should we lose sight of those principles; according to which never may there be granted to one sex the legitimate right to lay monopolizing hands upon the other, and never may one of these sexes or classes arbitrarily possess the other . . . Love which may be termed the *soul's madness*, is no more than a trifle by which their constancy may be justified: Love, satisfying two persons only, the beloved and the loving, cannot serve the happiness of others, and it is for the sake of the happiness of everyone, and not for egotistical and privileged happiness that women have been given to us. All men therefore have an equal right of enjoyment of all women . . .'

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<sup>12</sup> Marx, Engels, *The Holy Family*, Moscow 1956, p. 156–7.

That this is not just an equality of women for men, but all for all is clear: 'If we admit . . . that all women ought to be subjugated to our desires we may certainly allow them ample satisfaction of theirs . . . I would have them accorded the enjoyment of all sexes, and, as in the case of men, the enjoyment of all parts of the body; and under the special clause prescribing their surrender to all who desire them, there must be subjoined another guaranteeing them a similar freedom to enjoy all they seem worthy to satisfy them.'<sup>13</sup>

This is the full content of the bourgeois equality and democracy unfolded: a Utopia of total fragmentation and mutual exploitation. The rights championed are the rights of money that has been doled out to all; alienation is transcended by universalizing it. As such, these rights, like equality, are informed by the market—and forget it; focusing on the abstract, they leave to one side the concrete economic content. 'Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society . . .'<sup>14</sup> The rights advanced of late by parts of the left—rights of homosexuals, of control over one's body, etc—participate in the same dialectic of bourgeois equality and rights; they are both progress in freedom and progress in domination. The right to free labour was the right to wage-slavery. The right of freedom of speech is the right to read a mass-produced newspaper. Their essential content was dictated by the economic-social structure of society, not by the formal and abstract rights and equalities. And yet they were progress—against serf labour and state-run newspapers. So too were the newer rights championed.

This is not to argue that they are not worth struggling for; they are—just as wage-labour and freedom of speech were, and are. Yet not to be forgotten is the content; rights do not negate the prevailing society, but extend it. The right to free labour as that to free sex is ironic. It is the freedom of individuality which has already been killed in its substance. It is the gloss of freedom under conditions of its denial. When this content is ignored, then the relationship of these reforms and rights as part of a revolutionary process, but distinct from a revolution that would revolutionize the content itself, is mystified. Where these rights are billed as ends in themselves, the democratization of reification is dubbed its dissolution. The glorification of control over one's own body, group relations, masturbation and the rest confuse equality within alienation with liberation. To romanticize masturbation is to hawk the quintessence of bourgeois society for its negation. The systematic eradication of human relationships has left the decimated subject only with itself. The concept of freedom lies elsewhere; it is anchored in the sustained relation between two individuals; it can transcend and go beyond this—and ultimately must—but cannot bypass it.

### Love and the Damaged Subject

It was this moment which was saved in the Marxist 'abolition' of bourgeois monogamy, and why Marx and Engels spoke of monogamy

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<sup>13</sup> De Sade, *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom*, New York 1966, p. 318–19; 321.

<sup>14</sup> Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, New York 1966, p. 10.

being realized, not eradicated. The relation of two individuals, of loved and lover, belongs to the core of human freedom.<sup>15</sup> The positive content of this is unclear, as it must be till the liberated society has arrived.<sup>16</sup> Yet from Marx through the Frankfurt School to the Surrealists and Freud, unique and individual love and relationships have been seen as an element of freedom, of the rejection of bourgeois civilization.

The drive to level, to reduce all to identical monads efficient and adept at shifting relationships with anyone or anything is the form of love of late capitalism. Unique love harbours a threat to this indifferent and collective form, be it fabricated by bourgeois society or accepted by parts of the left. Eros is lethal for the repressive collective, and ultimately lethal for the lovers. The etymological link between (love) potion and poison indicates the psychological and historical one. Two people in love in excluding society incite its wrath. 'Two people coming together for the purpose of sexual satisfaction, in so far as they seek solitude are making a demonstration against the herd instinct, the group feeling . . .' wrote Freud.<sup>17</sup> Or elsewhere, 'the antithesis between civilization and sexuality' is derived 'from the circumstances that sexual love is a relationship between two individuals in which a third can only be superfluous or disturbing, whereas civilization depends on relationships between a considerable number of individuals.'<sup>18</sup> With Max Horkheimer, the unique relationship between two individuals is the hallmark of freedom against a society that sells sexuality like patent medicine. 'Realistic science has objectified sex till it is manipulative . . . In the mass society the sexes are levelled so that they both relate to their sex as a thing, over which they control coldly and without illusion.' Resistance is elsewhere. 'The lovers are those which preserve neither themselves nor the collective. In disregarding themselves, they earn its anger. Romeo and Juliet die against a society for that which it itself proclaims. In so far as they unreasonably sacrifice themselves, they assert the freedom of the individual against the domination of property.'<sup>19</sup>

If the intensification of subjectivity is a direct response to its actual decline, it ultimately works to further this demise. It accepts the damaged subject as its own doing, and proposes more of the same. The objective loss of human relationships and experience is eased by their endless pursuit. A cult of subjectivity—complete with drugs—dopes the discontented into taking their own death—figuratively and in fact—for life itself. The immediacy of it all drives out mediacy of any of it.

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<sup>15</sup> See the letter of Marx to Jenny Marx cited in Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, London 1971, p. 133. 'But the love not for Feuerbachian Man, not for Moleschottian Stoffwechsel, not for the proletariat, but the love for a lover, and particularly for you, makes a man again a man.'

<sup>16</sup> Yet if Utopian thought is in order there is nowhere better to turn than to the most determined foe of bourgeois monogamy and civilization, Fourier, and especially his long suppressed work, *Le Nouveau Monde Amoureux*, Paris 1967. Of particular interest in his notion of 'pivotal love', p. 290f: a love relation that is neither 'simple fidelity' nor indifferent and brutal inter-changeability.

<sup>17</sup> Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, New York 1960, p. 93.

<sup>18</sup> Freud, *Civilization and its Discontent* (New York 1961), p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> M. Horkheimer, 'Vernunft und Selbsterhaltung,' *Autoritärer Staat*, Amsterdam 1968, pp. 111, 113.

Sustained political and theoretical thought is not simply rejected, but forgotten. The slogans and rhetoric that replace it are necessarily abstract and formal, like the society that tossed them up.

The tone of the slogans notwithstanding, their complicity with bourgeois society is barely hidden: indifference toward content. Blank non-dialectical concepts too often fired by resentment and envy perpetuate the essential content of this society. A critique of monogamy, theory, leadership, relationships between two people, as forms of exclusion and privilege is a critique that falls behind bourgeois society, not advances over it; it is akin to the 'thoughtless' communism outlined by Marx. What is perpetually lost under the sway of immediacy is a dialectical analysis: monogamy as both human and inhuman—as the bad refuge from a worse world and a bad solution for a better world; theory as insight into objectivity as well as elitism. To see only one moment is to gain the worse for the bad: no theory instead of elitist theory, inhuman fragmented relations for damaged human ones. The dialectical path is elsewhere.

The depletion of political concepts in favour of psychological and subjective ones is a by-product of the scramble for the remnants of human experience. Yet the subjectivization of objective concepts is not the repudiation of the loss of human experience but forms its prehistory. The reduction of the Marxist theory of alienation to a subjective state by bourgeois sociologists has its counterpart on the left in the reduction of oppression to a whim of the individual. Alienation becomes a headache and oppression annoyance. 'I'm oppressed,' announces someone, and that's that.

Inside and outside the left radical subjectivity announces its own end; it resists reification by intensifying it. Hence its totalitarian urge to control everything. Endless talk on human relationships within the closed group promotes domination. Bad subjectivity seeks the bad collective that secures it by annihilating it. 'Collectivism and individualism complete each other in the false.'<sup>20</sup> The bourgeois individual whittled down to identical monads pursues its last fragment in and for a public only too anxious to share its remains. The late individual in feeding off each other gains nourishment at the cost of self-destruction. Blank and vacant affirmations or condemnations of the women's movement, men, armed struggle, recent political and personal events serve as tools of interpersonal relations. Thought is reduced to slogans and slogans to symbols of mutuality and self-confirmation.

Rampant narcissism surfaces as the final form of bourgeois individualism; it at once negates the ego and perpetuates its mangled form. Lax conceptions of guilt, of the universal oppression of women by men, of one's 'own' oppression, function as instruments of an ego that is regressing in the face of a disintegrating society. That men too have suffered and died in the massacre of history is affirmed or arrogantly denied, but is in any case irrelevant. What counts is the immediate and here: an economism-turned-feminism is promoted as if the blind

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<sup>20</sup> T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, p. 278.

endorsement of what every worker did or thought is improved when it is as blindly applied to women. Social analysis decays into group loyalty. The jealousy with which the oppression of women, children, homosexuals, etc, is defended as a private preserve off-limits to others expresses an urge to corner the market of oppression akin to the bourgeoisie's own parcelling of it.

Again the point here is not to argue for a return to a 'scientific' objective theory that proscribed any role for the subject; and again: the alternatives of pure subjectivity and pure objectivity is the either/or of bourgeois culture itself. Nor are the practical and communal attempts to overcome the deadly privacy and coldness of bourgeois existence to be rejected. Rather they are to be advanced; but advanced not by a mode of thought and action that damns them to be more of the same. The political and personal praxis that is sustained by bad subjectivity and abstract slogans issues into the very prison that is the bourgeois world. What is to be sought is a concrete subject/object dialectic that reconstructs the new out of the decay; only the praxis that shuns the fetish can hope for liberation. There are no guarantees nor tried-and-tested methods. Mistakes have and will be made; but the efforts must remain continually alive to the tension between the 'personal' and the 'political' without abdicating either nor reducing one to the other.

The line that inspired the Weatherman name suggested one metaphor for the path of theory and praxis; you don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind is blowing. In classical Marxist theory this metaphor indicates opportunism, that is subjectivism or the lack of principles; the willingness to swim with the current be what it may. Obviously Weatherman was a direct repudiation of social-democratic opportunism; not only by their actions and program, but by their courage and dedication. And yet, as argued here they as others unwittingly collapsed into subjectivity and abstract sloganeering that is part and parcel of bourgeois society itself. The Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* suggested another metaphor for revolutionary theory and praxis; he wrote there of the sailor. The sailor, like the weatherman, takes exact readings from the wind—but with a decisive difference, 'without letting the wind determine his direction, on the contrary, he defies and exploits it so as to hold fast to his original course.'<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, London 1971, p. 262.