

HERBERT MARCUSE'S CRITIQUE TO TECHNOLOGY

*Jeffrey V. O'cay, M.A.
Silliman University
Dumaguete City*

INTRODUCTION

Human beings want convenience in living, expediency in labor, and security in life. Sometimes, these “wants” do not even suffice since humans always want more—more convenience in living, more expediency in labor, and more security in life.

This want for “more” has always been the pointed object of the person’s struggle in life ever since. The primitive people who used to live in caves dared to break the walls of timidity, crossed the vast valleys and mountains, and built houses conducive for living. The means for survival is not anymore limited to hunting. Planting was soon practiced, machine was invented, and laws were enacted. All of these came into being because of the person’s want for more. And today, persons enjoy the expediency of transportation and communication, the luxury and convenience of living, and security in life as well.

Technology is, indeed, conceived as grace for it brings progress in society, gives convenience to persons, and opens new dimensions in life. Thus, technology is indispensable for without it humans might not have conquered the impediments of civilization. However, the exciting story of technology does not stop here. Technology conceived as “grace,” i.e., as “good” is also the same time a disgrace. It negates itself so that whenever it produces good, it also brings evil effects on man and society. Al Lewis Mumford says: “Technology, as a mode of production, as the totality of instruments, devices and contrivances – which characterize the machine age – is thus at the same time a mode of organizing and perpetuating (or changing) social relationships, a manifestation of prevalent thought and behavior patterns, an instrument for control and domination.”¹ Hence, technology as a mode of production, changes the social relationships among individuals. Indeed, technology – conceived as an instrument for control and domination – promotes chaos rather than harmony, confusion rather than understanding.

While technology promotes abundance in life and progress in society, one cannot deny the fact that it also destroys life. Worst of all, technology snatches the person’s uniqueness and leaves the latter helpless amidst the almost unbearably constant and speedy change in society. In the age of technological advancement humans suffer from terminal uniqueness.²

Marcuse is a political critic and philosopher whose primary concern is to develop a critical theory of society that aims at liberating the individual from any form of social control and domination. He begins his critical theory with an examination of Hegel’s dialectic and proceeds to a critical investigation of Marx’s theory of labor and Freud’s psychoanalysis.

What is significant in Marcuse's interpretation of Hegel is that all things are incessantly becoming; and, negativity is the underlying principle. In Hegel's dialectic, the thesis Being is transformed into its antithesis non-Being through the process of negation, inevitably, the antithesis non-Being (Nothing) which is deduced from the thesis Being is then again negated which leads to the third category, namely, Becoming.³

This Hegelian concept of negativity has become the central theme in Marx's notion of dialectic. To Marx, dialectic is historical and social. He argued that there are five epochs of history, to wit: 1) the primitive communal, 2) slave, 3) feudal, 4) capitalist, and 5) socialist and communist epochs.⁴ In each phase of history, Marx argues that there is an inherent negativity, that is, a conflict between social classes; slaves against masters, serfs against lords, and proletariat against bourgeoisie. In Marx's concept of dialectic, the law of motion is inevitable; thus, the capitalist phase will soon be replaced by the last epoch, namely socialist and communist epochs, just as the primitive communal society is transformed into a slave one, and so on.

Though Marcuse finds in Marx an iota of hope for emancipation, he deviates from the latter's conception of emancipation regarding the transformation from capitalist society to a socialist one. For Marcuse, the transition from capitalism to socialism is necessary only if it contributes to the full development of the individual.⁵ Moreover, Marcuse argues that the transition from capitalism to socialism does not guarantee a radical shift from technological rationality to individual rationality. In this most important work *One-Dimensional Man*, he writes, "The classical Marxian theory envisages the transition from capitalism to socialism as a political revolution: The proletariat destroys the political apparatus of capitalism but retains the technological apparatus, subjecting it to socialization."⁶ Change in Marx's conception therefore is a change only in the social structure – that is, a change in the mode of production wherein private properties are socialized and individual labor is reduced under normal condition thus enhances the satisfaction of individual needs.⁷

Obviously, the ultimate goal of Marxism is the emancipation of the poor from poverty, hunger and suffering. Thus, Marx strongly advocates revolution aimed at overthrowing the capitalist's regime. But there seems to be a problem here. Given that a proletarian revolution had successfully overthrown the bourgeoisie, socialized private properties, answered basic needs, and ended poverty, hunger and suffering, does this mean emancipation in the strictest sense of the word? Marcuse sees differently: the transition from capitalism to socialism does not necessarily imply emancipation.

However, Marcuse sees this transition as promising. Hence, in his *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse makes a crucial link between Marx's concept of labor and Freud's psychoanalysis. He interprets Freud in the light of Hegel and Marx. For Marcuse, biological repression is not the root cause of domination; rather, domination stems from socially imposed false needs. He states: "The creation of repressive needs has long since become part of socially necessary labor – necessary in the sense that without it, the established mode of production could not be sustained."⁸ Agreeing with Marx in some respects, Marcuse believes that socialism enhances liberation as individuals under the

socialist society have the possibility to become the human individuals who plan and use the instrument of their labor for the realization of their own human needs and faculties.⁹ He also believes that a socialist society is a decisive turning point for emancipation since it can engender non-alienated work, i.e., a non-repressive civilization based on non-repressive sublimation.¹⁰

The triumvirate of Hegelian, Marxian, and Freudian philosophies play very decisive roles in Marcuse's critical theory. However, he subjects them to severe criticisms, makes use of what is best in them, and goes beyond where they stopped. This allows Marcuse to formulate unique ways in interpreting human nature and its relation to the society as a whole via critique of technology.

Marcuse's critical theory deals largely with contemporary industrialized society. It demonstrates how the capitalist ruling class effectively manipulates technology by organizing the productive forces of production, including thoughts, knowledge and skills, in order to extract more profit via the exploitation of humanity and nature. It is important to note that in Marcuse's critical theory, technology, in the hands of capitalism, has become the new form of social control and domination instead of an instrument for tool that promotes life. The old forms of social control are absorbed within the new, smooth and effective one. Marcuse argues that in a capitalist society, technology is so mobilized "to institute new, more effective, and more pleasant forms of social control and social cohesion."¹¹ Thus, once systematized, technology becomes totalitarian as it determines individual needs, aspirations and socially needed occupations, skills, and attitudes.¹²

Technology under capitalism successfully dominates both nature and man. Marcuse argues that there is a contradiction between capitalist productivity and nature, for, hand in hand with the capitalists' quest for higher profits, the exploitation and destruction of nature is inevitable.¹³ In the same way, capitalism has transformed human beings into tools of production and become instrument of destruction. The results are thus one-dimensional thought and one-dimensional society. One-dimensional in the sense that the concept "negativity," as the *raison de' être* in Hegel's dialectic, has been greatly jeopardized when technological rationality reconciles, if not dissolves, the significant opposition between the working class and the administrators of the technical mode of production. Marcuse further argues, "The new technological work-world thus enforces a weakening of the negative position of the working class: the latter no longer appears to be the living contradiction to the established society."¹⁴ Today, workers enjoy the same thing their boss enjoys. If the boss owns hi-tech gadgets such as TV sets, computers, cellular phones, etc.; workers, may also own them though in many respects they differ in quality and brand. The point here, as Marcuse would have had argued, is that the opposition of social classes in the society is removed since the workers see themselves as not alienated for they are led to believe that they can be like their bosses. Hence, there is no more opposition, as there is only one set of needs in which the opposing social classes share.

From the above discussion, it could be noted that Marcuse's critical theory is grounded firmly on his critique of technology. Anyone who attempts to study his critical

theory should first reckon with the philosopher's critique of technology. Thus, the next section will discuss in details Herbert Marcuse's notion of technology.

Marcuse teaches that technology, as a new prevailing form of social control, dehumanizes the human person.¹⁵ However, he does not only conceive technology as a form of domination but also a very decisive mechanism of self-actualization. Hence, from the standpoint of its function, technology is two-fold, namely: (a) as a tool for domination, and (b) as tool for emancipation.

In Marcuse's philosophy, technology is understood as a contrivance, that is, an instrument or device which facilitates social control and domination.¹⁶ Technology means both tools used in the production of goods, and a social process which facilitates control and domination. As a contrivance, it functions primarily as means of material production so that it will serve humanity in the procurement of basic needs for daily survival and promotion of convenient and gratifying existence. In a rice mill industry, for example, the application of technological apparatus such as the milling machine and the practical knowledge and skills in its operation increased the rate of production with a relatively little amount of energy expended, thus, freeing the worker from a time consuming and energy exhausting obsolete and traditional form of milling. On the other hand, technology as a social process refers to the organization of techniques (such as the technical apparatus of industry), knowledge, skills and procedures for the purpose of accumulating capital.¹⁷ According to Marcuse, the effective combination of technology and capital causes overproduction which demands suffocation of liberating needs.¹⁸ In other words, capitalism creates artificial needs in order to justify the capitalists' act of disposing of surplus goods. Simply stated, technology now becomes an end in itself and life becomes a means towards this end. Thus technology under capitalism becomes a type of social control which leads to self-destruction.

Technology is a new form of social control which demands total submission to the prevailing structure. Individuals in highly industrialized society are mere biological machines that respond to the technical processes in life. Goods, for example, cannot be produced without the machine. Unlike the traditional mode of production where the laborers assert themselves over the apparatus, contemporary workers seem to be absorbed with the production process since, as Marcuse argues, modern industry calls for unconditional compliance and coordination.¹⁹ The workers' freedom is totally stripped away since they become an integral part of the whole operation. Thus, instead of manipulating technology for the sake of attaining the "good," they become the controlled ones. Thus, it is technology rules over the lives of humans.

When Marcuse talks about technology as a totality of instruments or devices that facilitate social control and domination, he is not only referring to those tools or apparatus used in the production of goods. Technology also refers to knowledge or mode of thinking which is manipulated to such an extent that it becomes a tool for domination.²⁰ Marcuse begins his *Some Social Implications of Modern Technology* by differentiating technology as a social process and techniques which refers to the technical apparatus of industry, transportation, communication, i.e., tools and devices in general.²¹

However, Marcuse uses interchangeably the terms technology and techniques to mean the totality of instrument and behavior patterns.

In order to understand more about Marcuse's notion of technology, let us discuss "technological rationality" which is the central theme in his *One-Dimensional Man*.

Technology and Technological Rationality. Marcuse's notion of technology as a new form of social control – as a tool for domination – is grounded firmly on his idea of "technological rationality." For him, technological rationality refers primarily to the assigning of mental powers to the apparatus that calls for unconditional compliance and coordination.²² In other words, it is the subordination of thoughts to the machine process so that the individual no longer directs the machine but the other way around. According to Marcuse, "the machine...is no longer dead matter but becomes something like a human being."²³ Furthermore, he argues that reason, under the rule of technological rationality, has lost its role since the thoughts, feelings and actions of men are shaped by the technical requirements of the apparatus.²⁴ Thus, individual rationality is no longer binding upon the individual and becomes the integral part of the modus operandi in the material production, which consequently directs compliance and adjustments to the prevailing social standard.

Hence, the technicalization of work has enslaved the individual both in thoughts and behavior by making himself submit to the apparatus without any form of mental and physical opposition. In *Technology, War and Fascism*, Marcuse writes: "The world has been rationalized to such an extent, and his rationality had become such a social power that the individual could do no better than adjust himself without reservation."²⁵ Workers under the technological milieu are just mere spectators who adjust themselves to the technical process of production. They become passive agent of production whose autonomous thinking is transformed into mere biological impulses.

Marcuse believes that "domination" does not necessarily follow whenever there is technology. In the first place, technology can also be a very decisive tool for emancipation. Only when technology is considered as an end in itself – that is, when the apparatus controls over the lives of the individual – that domination is said to have come to the fore. Hence, it is technological rationality rather than technology itself that defines the inevitable power of domination.

Technological rationality dissolves critical thinking and replaces it with the idea of compliant efficiency.²⁶ Here, reason becomes static which reduces the individual as mere apparatus. Truly, human beings under the realm of technological rationality are becoming one with the machines in the production process. At the outset of technological rationality, critical thinking is no longer possible. Hence, the individual become robot-like entities who learn to adjust and comply with the prevailing order. Marcuse says:

The idea of compliant efficiency perfectly illustrates the structure of technological rationality. Rationality is being transformed from

critical force into one of adjustment and compliance. Autonomy of reason loses its meaning in the same measure as the thoughts, feelings and actions of men are shaped by the technical requirements of the apparatus which they themselves created. Reason has found its resting place in the system of standardized control, production and consumption. There it reigns through the laws and mechanisms which insure the efficiency, expediency and coherence of this system.²⁷

Furthermore, Marcuse argues that technological rationality creates dullness in the individual since the machine does the thinking for him. Marcuse illustrates:

A man who travels by automobile to a distant place chooses his route from the highway maps. Towns, lakes and mountains appear as obstacle to be bypassed. The countryside is shaped and organized by the highway: what one finds en route is the by-product or annex of the highway. Numerous signs and posters tell the traveler what to do and think; they even request his attention to the beauties of nature or the hallmarks of history. Others have done the thinking for him, and perhaps for the better. Convenient parking spaces have been constructed where the broadest and most surprising view is open. Giant advertisements tell him when to stop and find the pause that refreshes. And all of this is indeed for the benefit, safety and comfort; he receives what he wants. Business, technics, human needs and nature are wielded together into one rational and expedient mechanism. He will fare best who follows its directions, subordinating his spontaneity to the anonymous wisdom which ordered everything for him.²⁸

Technological rationality has become the standard of thought in contemporary industrialized society. It has successfully transformed social needs to personal ones thereby creating attitudes which push the individual to obey the dictates of technology. As a consequence, the individual merely adapts the prevailing rationality. To further clarify this point, a discussion on the nature of “needs” is necessary.

The Nature of Needs. For Marcuse, two kinds of “needs” preoccupy the individual, to wit: (a) false needs and (b) true needs.

“False needs are those which are superimposed upon the individual by the particular interest in his repression.”²⁹ Accordingly, persons who seek this kind of needs begin to associate themselves with the “gadgets” which is the leading rationality in contemporary society. Non-conformity to this rationality would mean indifference and the individual is said to be unsociable. Here, thinking becomes one-dimensional because the individual is forced to behave and function according to the socially imposed rationality. Social needs becomes one’s own; thus, false. In his *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse says:

... people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their souls in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism, which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced.³⁰

Indeed, false needs are always social by nature since they are products of a repressive and dominant technological society. Their satisfaction has always been defined in terms of their conformity with the prevailing social order. No matter how gratifying it is to the individual, Marcuse argues that the happiness one gets from it is not a condition to be maintained and protected since it does not lead to self-fulfillment.³¹ The pleasure of owning a car, for example, is not basically a satisfaction that promotes self-fulfillment. One becomes satisfied because aside from the pleasure he gets in it the individual feels that he has obeyed the command of the time. Owning a car in an industrialized society is conceived as a necessity to function well as an agent of production. However, it is not real necessity since, instead of promoting self-fulfillment, it only perpetuates toil on the part of the individual. In general, owning “gadgets” or luxuries implies more labor and eventually demands more time. Thus, no matter how much satisfaction one gets from his gadgets, as long as these needs are superimposed upon him by the technological society, still, the result is euphoria in unhappiness.³²

Another relevant example that haunts the contemporary individual is the “cellular phone” phenomenon. Cellular phones are basically instruments of communication that enhance better relationship among individuals. They allow human beings to reach to their fellowmen in the society and prevent self-isolation. But nowadays, the very purpose of cellular phone seems to be defeated. The need for communication is replaced by the immediate need of identifying with the modern form of communication. Cellular phones, as instrument of communication become an end in themselves so that human life is subordinated to them. Oftentimes, one hears news about a person stabbed by a robber for refusing to give a cell phone. In some cases, individuals get hurt or insulted whenever somebody makes disgusting remarks on their properties. Individuals value their cell phones more than their dignity since they are attached to and find themselves in these gadgets. Today, if individuals do not own a cellular phone, they tend to feel looked down upon and pitied for they are not able to ride the prevailing social trend. As a result, individuals labor eight hours a day plus overtime, seven days a week, and four weeks a month just to meet the standard set by the technologically oriented society. Hence, instead of finding satisfaction in these needs, the individual is locked up in a chain of technological repressions and ends up frustrated and miserable. Here, Marcuse opines:

No matter how much such needs may have become the individual's own, reproduced and fortified by the conditions of his existence; no matter how much he identifies himself with them and finds himself in their satisfaction, they continue to be what they were from the very beginning – products of a society whose dominant interest demand repression.³³

If false needs are imposed by society, true needs on the other hand are determined by the individuals themselves. The satisfaction of these true needs promotes self-fulfillment and autonomy since it releases the individual from the voracious appetite for unnecessary identification with technology. Hence, toil is reduced to the very minimum for which the individual finds more time to actualize his possibilities. True needs therefore are the most basic ones. Marcuse says: “The only needs that have an unqualified claim for satisfaction are the vital ones – nourishment, clothing, lodging at the attainable level of culture.”³⁴

The preceding discussions have clarified that for Marcuse, technology is a very powerful tool for domination. His analysis of technology in the context of the affluent capitalist society does not remain an empty theory. Marcuse’s critique of domination always aims towards the emancipation of humanity. Thus, in an attempt to grasp his whole point, one should always bear in mind that the end of his philosophy is “emancipation.”

In “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology,” Marcuse argues, “Techniques by themselves can promote authoritarianism as well as liberty, scarcity as well as abundance, the extension as well as the abolition of toil.”³⁵ Though Marcuse appears forceful in his conviction that technology is a powerful tool for domination, he insinuates that it is a mistake to account technology as a mere tool for domination; for, its emancipatory tendencies are always side by side with its negative values. Marcuse is thus implying that in order to fully understand the meaning of technology, one needs to approach it dialectically. One needs to be critical in analyzing the social implications of technology so that its emancipatory tendencies would be brought into the open. As Douglas Kellner remarks:

... he (Marcuse) provides substantive insight into the role of technology that challenges us to distinguish between emancipatory and oppressive forces and tendencies, rather than seeing all technology and society as a vast apparatus of domination, or seeing all science, technology and industry as progressive per se.³⁶

But to explicate the emancipatory tendencies of technology is not an easy task. It needs a re-definition of the purpose of technology – that is, a change in the understanding of the end of technology so that human existence would be freed from technological rationality which controls over the life of the individual. Again, in the capitalist society, technology is manipulated to such an extent that it controls the individual by legitimizing the transformation of “wants” into “needs.” Thus to liberate the individual from technological domination would mean freeing himself from the socially imposed false needs. This, however, requires a crucial break with the prevailing system which leads to the material satisfaction of needs. Marcuse writes:

If the completion of the technological project involves a break with the prevailing technological rationality, the break in turn depends on the continued existence of the technical base itself. For it is this base

which has rendered possible the satisfaction of needs and the reduction of toil – it remains the very base of all forms of human freedom. The qualitative change rather lies in the reconstruction with a view of different ends.³⁷

The above quotation suggests that liberation (emancipation) means freedom from the exploitative features of technology through a break with technological rationality or what Marcuse further calls “the turn of quantity to quality,” which results in the free development of the individual on the basis of the satisfaction of needs.³⁸ According to the philosopher, such “break” opens the possibility of a new human reality – namely, existence in free time on the basis of fulfilled vital needs.

Precisely, the concept “freedom” plays an important role in Marcuse’s theory of emancipation. But how does the philosopher view freedom? This question leads the researcher to tackle the issue of freedom.

Freedom as the Condition of Self-Actualization. Freedom for Marcuse does not mean freedom of choice. In other words, the mere act of choosing from what is given (by the society) does not necessarily entail freedom. Marcuse argues: “Free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over the life of toil and fear – that is, if they sustain alienation.”³⁹ Hence, for him, the criterion for determining the degree of human freedom is not the spontaneous discharge of decisions, but those that are decided upon and chosen by the individual.⁴⁰

As long as the individual is forced to consume the goods and services imposed upon by him by the society, and is made to submit to the overwhelming power of technology, the individual remains preconditioned; and, the possibility to become free and autonomous is zero. Marcuse continues: “... the spontaneous reproduction of superimposed needs by the individual does not establish autonomy; it only testifies to the efficacy of controls.”⁴¹ For Marcuse, freedom means the ability of the individual to exert autonomy over a life that would be his own, that is, liberation from the overwhelming power of technology that imposes upon false needs.⁴² Such is the case when the individual is no longer the bondage of technological control.

Now, freedom from all forms of control, whether they are economic, political, or intellectual, is the primordial requisite of self-actualization. In other words, the moment the individual asserts himself over the system that produces and imposes false needs upon him, freedom is unveiled and brought into the open, and thus becomes the all-encompassing condition of self-actualization. Marcuse contends:

...economic freedom would mean freedom from the economy – from being controlled by economic forces and relationships; freedom from the daily struggles for existence, from earning a living. Political freedom would mean liberation of the individuals from politics over which they have no control. Similarly, intellectual freedom would

mean the restoration of individual thought now absorbed by mass communication and indoctrination, abolition of 'public opinions' together with its makers.⁴³

Freedom, for sure (i.e., freedom from all forms of social control) is the ultimate condition of self-realization. However, in the age of science and technology, human freedom has been greatly jeopardized. The individual who becomes an integral part of the whole mode of production in highly industrialized society cannot anymore escape from the standardized set of control inherent within the system itself. Marcuse argues that "by virtue of the way it has organized its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to become totalitarian."⁴⁴ Thus, in a society which combines capital and technology as mechanisms of production, individuals have become powerless and have been reduced as mere tools and instruments. Hence, once absorbed within the system, they automatically become one with the society together with its false ideologies. Consequently, the possibility to negate the prevailing mode of control is replaced by the logic of tolerance since it seems that the most logical way the individual can do is to adjust and comply with this system. In this way, what is supposedly negated is being tolerated, that is, the destructive aspect of technology is being perpetuated through the acceptance of the seemingly unquestionable promise of progress and development. Thus, the result is the inability of the individual to grasp domination.

Critical Thinking and the Restoration of the Self. Freedom is the ultimate condition of self-actualization. However, in the age of science and technology, individuals become unfree. Technological rationality dissolves the power of creative thinking. As a result, individuals lose their objective understanding of the negative and positive aspects of technology. They are no longer able to distinguish the oppressive side of technology from its emancipatory power. Thus, Marcuse calls for the re-interpretation of technology in the light of critical theory to free humanity from technological domination and excessive toil.

Influenced by Marx's theory of labor, Marcuse claims that technology tends to become totalitarian at the outset of capitalism.⁴⁵ This means that originally, technology is a useful tool to satisfy human needs. In the case of communication, for example, technology appears to be necessary. Information can be easily disseminated through the use of telephones, cellular phones, computers, and other modern gadgets. The postal "air mail" system becomes obsolete since it requires more time and energy. Furthermore, the interactive communication in the Internet enables one to easily reach his friends, relatives, family, or even colleagues in the office. Ideally, technology should be pursued as it offers the self growth and development.

In relative manner, the invention of hi-fi and TV sets offers new forms of enjoyment to a person. Through these gadgets, the human person is able to appreciate higher forms of art. They also provide information vital to the enrichment of knowledge such as current events where an individual is able to know what are happening in his society; geography as shown in the National Geographic Channel; and, physical sciences

shown in the Discovery Channel. These are but some advantages that one can get from the technology on hi-fi stereo and TV sets.

More importantly, progresses in the medical technology and agriculture have transformed human life into the better. Health problems are gradually solved and the possibility of physical suffering is reduced. For example, one who is suffering from kidney disease could be saved by a simply operation. Also, modern farm tools, milling machines, equipment help counter food problems. Through these modern apparatus and techniques, considerably large production reduces the problem of food shortage.

Indeed, modern technology has many things to offer to humanity. It promotes self-development and self-fulfillment. Thus technology can be a powerful tool for emancipation. As Albert Borgmann says, technology liberates human beings from toil, hunger, and disease; and provides opportunities for education, travel, communications and entertainment.⁴⁶ However, through manipulation of technology in the service of capital, technological domination comes to the fore.

For Marcuse, emancipation requires critical thinking, i.e., the power to negate the prevailing social order characterized by technological domination. By critical thinking, this means the rejection or reversal of that which strongly prevails.

Technological rationality is the dominant rationality in contemporary industrialized society. Under this prevailing rationality, there is no place for reflection or autonomy since people are only given tasks to perform in accordance with the dictates of the apparatus.

Eventually, liberation will lead to the reversal of the prioritization of needs. Marcuse argues that if “true needs,” which are suppressed within the individuals themselves by the administrators of capitalism, are given the chance to prevail, then it will lead to liberation. Hence, one needs to reject technological rationality in the act of liberation, not technology in itself for it can promote the possibility of real freedom. He writes:

The attainment of autonomy demands conditions in which the repressed dimensions of experience can come to life again; their liberation demands repression of the heteronomous needs and satisfaction which organize life in his society.⁴⁷

Unlike Karl Marx who advocated social revolution to destroy capitalism, Marcuse, on the other hand, remains theoretically suggestive. He offers substantive insights on how the individual might be liberated from social control or technological domination by emphasizing on the importance of “negative thinking.” This is what the individual can do in this modern age: to negate the all-encompassing technologically administered society.

How can the power of critical thinking liberate the individuals from technological domination? The answer to this query is found in Marcuse's notion of radical subjectivity. According to Marcuse, critical thinking enables the individuals to transform their present needs, sensibility, consciousness, values, and behavior into a new radical subjectivity.⁴⁸ This radical subjectivity practices the "Great Refusal." In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse defines the great refusal as the protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom – in general, to live without anxiety.⁴⁹ Kellner says that in *One-Dimensional Man*, the great refusal is fundamentally political. It is a refusal to repression and injustice, a saying no, an opposition to a system of oppression, a non-compliance with the rules of a rigged game, a form of radical resistance and struggle.⁵⁰

Generally speaking, the great refusal is a subjectivity that does not tolerate injustice and that which engages in resistance and opposition to all forms of control and domination. Here critical thinking causes the emergence of a "new sensibility" which negates needs that perpetuate domination. The individuals who practice the great refusal find gratification in their works. Thus, under this condition, technology is no longer conceived as a tool for domination but a necessity which opens the dimension of free time in which individuals are liberated or freed from excessive toil. Therefore, the Great Refusal is the only way individuals can liberate themselves from technological domination.

In sum, as a tool for domination, technology controls, manipulates and directs human beings by making themselves submit to the prevailing repressive social order. It becomes a tool for domination when it is organized or manipulated by the capitalist ruling class in order to extract profit via the exploitation of humanity and nature. Thus, technology conceived as a tool for domination is hostile to individuals since they are reduced to mere biological machines that respond to the technical processes.

On the other hand, technology as a tool for emancipation releases humanity from the dictates of the apparatus. Here, the individual finds meaning and fulfillment in his life since he is no longer forced to behave in accordance with the repressive system. Thus the emancipated individual is one who has attained autonomy from all forms of social control and domination.

Furthermore, technology has transformed individual rationality into technological rationality. The individual's ability to think essentially is lost since technology makes him talk of efficiency and expediency. For Marcuse, efficiency and expediency are concrete illustrations of technological rationality.

Lastly, for Marcuse, the individuals can be emancipated by opposing or saying "no" to the repressive system, that is, by refusing to obey the dictates of technology. Of course, in doing so, one needs to have critical thinking, which characterizes what Marcuse calls the Great Refusal.

ENDNOTES

¹Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Herder 1936) quoted in Herbert Marcuse, "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology," *Technology, War and Facism*, ed. Douglas Kellner, Vol.1 (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 39.

²The world is becoming more and more corporate. For this reason, humans no longer care about their obligation towards their fellow humans. Instead, they exhaust all possible means in order to satisfy their personal interests. This attitude of humans towards technology is termed by Lewis Mumford as an "objective personality," i.e., when one who has learned to transfer all subjective spontaneity to the machinery which he serves. See Marcuse, *Technology*, 44.

³Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 333.

⁴*Ibid.*, 407.

⁵Herbert Marcuse, "Reason and Revolution," [article – online]; available from <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/reason/>; 18 August 2004.

⁶Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 22.

⁷This does not mean that labor is to be eliminated. Marx argues that labor is a substantial element in human life. Through labor, the human person actualizes himself. See Dr. Eddie R. Babor, *The Human Person: Not Real But Existing* (Manila: C & E Publishing, 2001), 106. However, it is also the same labor that the capitalists manipulate for the purpose of accumulating profit. Labor then in the capitalist society becomes excessive; thus, instead of enhancing self-actualization it alienates the workers.

⁸*Ibid.*, 246

⁹*Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁰Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization, A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud*, [Book On-line]; available from <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/eros-civilization/index.htm>; 19 September 2004.

¹¹*Ibid.*, XV.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Herbert Marcuse, "Ecology and the Critique of Society," in Douglas Kellner, "Marcuse, Liberation and Radical Ecology," [article-online]; available from <http://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell11.htm>; 19 September 2004.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶Herbert Marcuse, *Technology, War, and Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 41.

¹⁷Christian Fuchs, "On the Topicality of Selected Aspects of Herbert Marcuse's Works," [article-online]; available from <http://www.cartoon.iguw.tuwien.ac.at/christian/marcuseENG.html>; 16 March 2004.

¹⁸Marcuse, *One-Dimensional*, 7.

¹⁹Marcuse, *Technology*, 49.

²⁰As Stanley R. Carpenter argues, technology may refer to those “patterns of action,” in a sense mode of thinking, “by which man transforms knowledge of his environment into an instrument of control for the purpose of meeting human needs.” Thus, as a pattern of action, technology means the “know-how” of producing or attaining something. That which is produced or attained is what the writer calls “technology-as-product.” See Stanley R. Carpenter, “Modes of Knowing and Technological Action.” *Philosophy Today* (Summer 1974):162.

²¹Marcuse, *Technology*, 41.

²²*Ibid.*, 47.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁹Marcuse, *One-Dimensional*, 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

³¹Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 5.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Marcuse, *Technology*, 41.

³⁶Douglas Kellner, “Introduction to Herbert Marcuse,” *Technology, War and Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 37.

³⁷Marcuse, *One-Dimensional*, 231.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴³Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ This is what Borgmann calls “disburdenment” – that is, the liberation and enrichment of human life. Devices or machineries disburden persons such that it will enhance human happiness. See Albert Borgmann, quoted in Drew Leder, “The Role of the Device,” 20.

⁴⁷Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 245.

⁴⁸Herbert Marcuse, *Essay on Liberation*, in Douglas Kellner, “The New Sensibility, Emancipation, and Revolution: The Late Marcuse,” available from <http://www.dogma.free.fr/txt/Kellner-Marcuse01.htm>. 03 August 2004.

⁴⁹Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, [book-online]; available from <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/marcuse/works/eros-civilization/index.htm>; 19 September 2004.

⁵⁰Douglas Kellner, “The New Sensibility, Emancipation, and Revolution: The Late Marcuse,” available from <http://www.dogma.free.fr/txt/Kellner-Marcuse01.htm>; 03 August 2004.