Marcuse's Critical Theory of Technical Rationality

Li Yudi

College of Liberal Arts, Sichuan Normal University, Chengdu, China

Abstract: As a representative of the Frankfurt School, Marcuse has repeatedly discussed the relationship between technology and freedom. He attributes human alienation to the fact that technological rationality has become a covered ideology in developed industrial society, thus making people lose negativity, transcendence and criticism, and then become 'one-dimensional people '. This paper takes Marcuse's "comfortable non-freedom" as the starting point, and discusses Marcuse's critical theory of technical rationality from three aspects: loss of freedom, paralysis of freedom and return to freedom. It further analyzes how Marcuse reshapes subject freedom and achieves social liberation from the perspective of aesthetics and art.

1. Introduction

In Marcuse's representative work "One-Dimensional Man," he points out that "in the developed industrial civilization, there is a kind of stable, comfortable, democratic and reasonable infreedom." Here, Marcuse constructs "comfortable" and "infreedom." This strange infreedom refers to the fact that although people live in developed industrial civilization and seem to enjoy free choice, they are in control and lose freedom early. Because this kind of freedom is very comfortable, it is difficult for people to detect, so they are unconsciously trapped in it. In this way, Marcuse further reveals the characteristics of totalitarian society. The so-called totalitarian society does not refer to the society under the shadow of terrorism and terrorist rule, but refers to a new form of capitalist society. In the developed industrial civilization, capitalist society has evolved into a non-terrorist totalitarian society. It implements soft control over people through non-violence, non-coercion and extremely secret characteristics, so that people's minds can be dominated and manipulated in the consumer society. As a result, in a society with rapid technological development, ' freedom ' has not only referred to economic freedom, ideological freedom, and political freedom. Marcuse believes that the subject has faced a crisis of free development in a developed industrial society. In short, Marcuse believes that in addition to the development of science and technology as a tool and productivity, it also replaces the traditional ideology, suppresses people 's dissatisfaction and resistance to society, leads to the whole society becoming a ' one-sided society ', and hinders people from moving towards the road of freedom and liberation.[1]

2. Loss of freedom: One-dimensional people

Marcuse not only explains the alienation of developed industrial society, but also analyzes the root of its formation, that is, how the subject loses its freedom and becomes a ' one-dimensional

person '. In Marx's " Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, " he put forward the theory of " alienated labor, " emphasizing that the oppression of the working class by the capitalist system led to labor becoming an alienated force and extracting the surplus value of workers. [2]The alienation here is a kind of tangible alienation, and Marcuse pointed out a new kind of alienation on this basis, that is,' the power of alienation has been transformed from tangible political power and economic power to intangible cultural power'. As a result, technology has become a hidden force of alienation, resulting in workers' obedience to reality and being enslaved by rulers. After paralysis, they lose their ability to think independently about reality. While judging and criticizing, they cannot reflect on and question technology. Thus losing their own personality. Even if the society is in a rich state at this time, in Marcuse's dimension, human nature has been destroyed, and the whole society has become a morbid society. He pointed out that the biggest crisis is the loss of the negative dimension of "one-sided man" and tends to develop in an integrated way.

In this regard, Marcuse discussed the key word of the loss of negativity from the political field, cultural field and philosophical field, and it is from these aspects that the developed industrial society gradually disintegrated people's will, dispelled subjectivity and constructed the dimension of compliance by means of intangible control. Briefly speaking, in the political, cultural and philosophical fields, it should be composed of dimension factors. First of all, in the political field, the industrial society is becoming increasingly integrated. With the development of technological rationality, the opposition between workers and capitalists has gradually disappeared, and the proletariat has infiltrated the so-called comfortable daily life and lost the impulse of violent revolution. As Marcuse said, with the increase of white-collar workers and non-productive workers, the proletariat gradually lost its negativity and revolutionary. Secondly, in the field of culture, Marcuse pointed out that due to the development of technology, the opposition between high-level culture and reality gradually disappeared,' cultural center has become a commercial center, or an appropriate place for municipal center and government center'. One-dimensional human-developed industrial society ideology research.[3] Marcuse pointed out that the characteristics of art away from society and accusing society have disappeared, replaced by the commercialization of art and knowledge. The original high-level culture is forced to be vulgarized. After the high-level culture, which should be in different dimensions from the public, is merged into a single dimension with the mass culture, the transcendence and repetition no longer exist. Finally, in the field of philosophy, Marcuse criticizes analytic philosophy, believes that the prevalence of analytic philosophy represented by Wittgenstein and Austin marks the victory of one-dimensional philosophy, and opposes the intervention of philosophers in the use of daily language. He believes that the' language cleaning' work done by analytic philosophy will make people lose real thinking. Therefore, due to the one-dimensional pattern presented in the fields of politics, culture and philosophy, Marcuse believes that the subject in it is also alienated into 'one-dimensional man'.

In addition, Marcuse clearly pointed out that we live in a new totalitarian society dominated by technological logic. As Marcuse said,' the highlight of our society is to use technology rather than terror to overwhelm those centrifugal social forces on the basis of overwhelming efficiency and increasing living standards.' One-dimensional human-developed industrial society ideology research.[4] Human beings create society in order to use technology to promote the pursuit of individual free will and accelerate the pace of free development, but technology itself restrains human beings and makes the subject a one-dimensional actor under the construction of technical logic. Not only that, in terms of literature and art, when the technical logic conquers the dimension of literature and art, the criticism and transcendence of the latter gradually disappear, replaced by mechanical and replicative, thus depriving the rich, complete and unpredictable core. As Benjamin put forward the' era of mechanical reproduction', he believed that the artistic products in the context of large-scale mechanical production' fell' from the altar, thus' withering' the charm of art.

Works of art in the era of mechanical reproduction[5], the disappearance of light here can also be seen as the disappearance of the core of works of art, that is, the distance between art and the public as Marcuse said. As a result, the transcendence and negativity of historical factors and cultural factors in the past were slowly assimilated under the rule of totalitarianism until their own contradictions and multi-dimensionality were completely eliminated. Seemingly reasonable technology replaces the nature of human beings. It rejects the diverse ideas outside the mainstream ideology and finally completes the unification and one-dimensionalization of all levels of society. Therefore, human beings seem to have great freedom, but they have been enslaved by technology in this repressive civilization, thus losing freedom and becoming' one-dimensional people'.

3. Freedom of paralysis: false truth

Marcuse pointed out that' when a society seems to be more and more able to meet the needs of individuals according to its own organization, the basic critical function of independent thinking, freedom and political opposition has been deprived'. The reason why individuals are gradually paralyzed in this' comfortable freedom' is that the truth is hidden in the illusion of consumerism. The reason why' comfortable not free' is false freedom is mainly because people's needs are false. Marcuse distinguishes between "real needs" and " false needs "in" one-dimensional people. "The so-called" false needs " are " those needs imposed on individuals from the outside for specific social interests, so that hardship, aggression, pain and injustice are eternal needs. Here, Marcuse points out that false needs are imposed from the outside, an illusion created by industry and capital. As a result, consumerism and technology have become an ideology, which is promoted and infiltrated into the daily life of individuals through advertisements and media. Most of the current needs are not independently chosen by individuals, but are imposed on individuals by external forces. Some scholars have pointed out that it is precisely because labor is not free in contemporary capitalist society that the nature of individual pursuit of freedom drives people to turn their attention to the field of consumption in order to obtain compensation.

Such' false demand' is mainly constructed by two aspects, one is the society's bribery to the public, and the other is the public's pursuit of false. First of all, this kind of bribery is to' buy' each other by satisfying the individual's desire to consume, in exchange for the individual's obedience to society. Marcuse's insight lies in this. In addition, social bribery of the masses can be further illustrated by Guy Debord's spectacle society, which refers to' the whole social life as a gathering of a huge spectacle in societies where modern production conditions dominate'. In short, modern people acquire the value of self-existence in a large number of non-authentic needs such as news, propaganda, advertising and entertainment. The true needs of human beings are buried in the alienated needs pointed by the landscape. Like Marcuse, Debord also pointed out that this kind of landscape society has ideological functions. Through a positive representation, the individual's negativity dissipates. In the face of a variety of commodities, fashionable and elegant images, elegant and charming pictures, the individual's deep cognition is replaced by the surface desire, and has fallen into the colorful and attractive landscape. Individuals are lost in the landscape where desire and capital are intertwined. The landscape is only responsible for providing surface sensory stimulation, but its deep meaning is indeed pale and weak. Therefore, the so-called needs of individuals are constructed in such a castle in the air and mistakenly believe that their needs are real.Secondly, the pursuit of false demand by the public can be regarded as a pursuit of symbols. Baudrillard once pointed out that to become the object of consumption, the object must first become a symbol. People's consumption is no longer the object itself, but the symbolic meaning of the object. The value of the commodity reflects the meaning of the individual. [6] In other words, in luxury consumption, individuals prove their personal financial resources through the purchase of

luxury goods. In literature and art, individuals prove their personal taste through the pursuit of elegant art.

Indeed, in Marcuse's view, whether it is transcendent literature or' metaphysical' philosophy, in this era of technology and positivism, its romance has disappeared. In the combination with technology, literature and art were' coerced' and gradually disappeared its subversive power. Literature, which was supposed to undertake the task of' big rejection', now obeys business logic and' down' becomes a commodity. In such a situation, the individual has long been paralyzed and cannot transcend reality to imagine another dimension of freedom, can only pursue the so-called truth in the false consumption.

4. Return to freedom beauty leads to freedom

Marcuse is pessimistic, but he also tries to pursue freedom in the absence of freedom, trying to find eternity in the short time caused by the rapid development of technology. He puts forward that the way to enable individuals to move towards the free kingdom is aesthetic art. Only in this way can we liberate people's love and restore people's sensibility. From "one-dimensional man" to " Eros and civilization, " Marcuse has constructed a repressive civilization to us and clarified the alienation of this repressive civilization to human beings, which leads to the suppression of individual life instinct and the one-dimensional development of society. Therefore, in "On Liberation," Marcuse proposed the new sensibility as an important force to liberate people. The so-called new sensibility, that is,' showing the rise of life instincts to aggression and evil, it will be within the reasonable scope of society, nurture the needs of life, to eliminate injustice and suffering ; it will weave' living standards' to a higher level of evolution'.[7] In short, the new sensibility is opposite to the old sensibility. It can make art and reality, freedom and necessity reach the historical unity, and can make the individual move towards a non-repressive sublimation, thus moving towards the realm of freedom.

Marcuse pointed out that the best way to achieve new sensibility is art and aesthetics. First of all, art and aesthetics have a transcendental ability. As a free force, it can liberate people from the repressed reality. Secondly, art can restore the forces that promote life in nature and the perceptual aesthetic performance that cannot exist in the endless competitive activities. Through these aesthetic performances, it can reveal the new nature of freedom, promote the return of aesthetic transformation to nature and life nature, and realize the ultimate liberation of human nature itself. [8] As Marcuse himself said:' The aesthetic dimension is of course a free expression, which allows writers and artists to call people and things by their own names-to name things that others cannot name.' [9] Starting from this dimension, a society no longer dominated by the market and no longer based on competition is constructed.he believes that technology limits human freedom, but aesthetics can be used as a salvation, and then tries to eliminate alienation with aesthetics.

Secondly, Marcu believes that the individual's perceptual ability can be restored through aesthetics and art, and people's internal negative consciousness and critical spirit can be awakened, so as to construct an aesthetic utopia to pin the hope of human freedom and liberation. This is the road of aesthetic redemption proposed by Marcuse and the Frankfurt School.[10] At the same time, Marcuse emphasized that literature and art have great aesthetic redemption potential, creating an aesthetic dimension with critical function while distancing themselves from reality, so as to save modern individuals. Marcuse's Frankfurt School also advocates' aesthetic redemption', and believes that aesthetic culture has a powerful function of saving the secular world, including Weber's use of art to resist the control of instrumental rationality, the feast of Benjamin's popular culture, and Adorno's standing in the elite culture to resist the invasion of popular culture. To a certain extent, it tries to benefit people's self-liberation, purify people's spiritual world, and

promote people's comprehensive and free development.[11] In addition to the Frankfurt School where Marcuse is located, the functions of aesthetic redemption, artistic redemption and aesthetic salvation have been proposed or involved in Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Schiller, Kant and even Heidegger. Schiller said in the' aesthetic education book':' The political problems that people need to solve in experience must be based on aesthetic problems, because it is through beauty that people can move towards freedom.'[12] In short, Marcuse believes that art can establish a harmonious society through self-discipline, which eliminates alienation, morbid, one-dimensional individual and whole, desire and reality, happiness and rationality, that is, to' freedom'. In addition, although Marcuse tried to reshape individual freedom from the perspective of aesthetics and art, and criticized the society of human alienation caused by capitalist instrumental rationality from the perspective of perceptual knowledge, it did alleviate the spiritual dilemma of human beings. The path of resisting materialized reality with elegant art is a poetic improvement of reality on the surface, but fundamentally speaking, emphasizing the transcendence of art to reality is actually an escape from reality from another level, and the two are always the reconciliation of sensibility and rationality. Marcuse did not discuss this issue clearly.

5. Conclusions

Throughout Marcuse's critical theory of technological rationality, its critical attitude seems to be different from that of modern society, but its reflection on the nature of technology is not outdated at present. First of all, Marcuse has always paid close attention to the relationship between technology and social development. He believes that' technology, as a mode of production, as a totality of tools, devices and instruments, marks the era of machines. It is also a way to organize and maintain (or change) social relations. It embodies the dominant mode of thinking and behavior, and is a tool for control and domination.'[13] He not only found the technical control of ideology in the guise of rationalization, taking science and technology as a false ideology of enslavement, but also demonstrated the abnormal development of human beings under the conditions of industrial society from different aspects, showing us a materialistic society. Secondly, Marcuse clearly pointed out that people only pay attention to the application of technology in life, ignoring the questioning of human value, making society increasingly become a one-way society, people have become one-way, instrumental people. Thirdly, Marcuse puts forward the idea of aesthetic redemption in view of the reality of the animalization of human instinct caused by the alienation of technology, and leads people to freedom from the aesthetic dimension. In addition to the above enthusiasm, we should also realize that Marcuse's aesthetic redemption thought is dubbed "Utopian" and "aesthetic utopian" because of its focus on the theory of art form and its self-aesthetic redemption proposition that hopes to realize the individual's survival dilemma in the context of the technological era through the liberation of new sensibility. And Marcuse believes that the return to the pre-technological era is the best destination, and its aesthetic redemption thought obviously has the romantic characteristics of utopia and has a certain illusory nature.

References

[1] Li Guihua, Zhang Yuanyuan. Beyond the one-dimensional man-on Marcuse's critical theory of technological alienation [J].Social Science Front, 2012, No.205 (07): 30-32.
[2] Marx. Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 [M]. Beijing: People 's Publishing House, 2014 : 45.
[3] Marcuse. A one-dimensional study of human-developed industrial society ideology [M]. Translated by Liu Ji, Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2014: 56.
[4] Marcuse. A one-dimensional study of human-developed industrial society ideology [M]. Translated by Liu Ji, Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2014: 2.

[5] Benjamin. Works of art in the era of mechanical reproduction [M].Beijing: China City Press, 2001: 13.

[6] Jean Baudrillard. Material system [M], translated by Lin Zhiming. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2019: 212.

[7] Yang Xiaolian. Consumption Era and the Construction of Modern New Sensibility - From Marcuse's New Sensibility Theory [J]. Journal of Central China Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences), 2006 (04) : 68-73.

[8] Zhang Zhicang. On Marcuse's Liberation Aesthetics [J].Marxism and Reality, 2007, (05): 34-40.

[9] Marcuse. A one-dimensional study of human-developed industrial society ideology [M]. Translated by Liu Ji, Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2014: 207.

[10] Shu Kaizhi. Aesthetic Justice: Aesthetic Issues in the Era of Aesthetic Capitalism [J].Study of Marxist Aesthetics, 2017, 20 (02): 107-119 + 5-6.

[11] Yang Lan, Zhang Rui. The enlightenment significance and lost path of aesthetic redemption [J].Guizhou Social Sciences, 2016, No. 313 (01): 20-25.

[12] Schiller. Aesthetic Education Letters [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 1985: 14.

[13] Wang Haoran. Reflection and exploration on the critique of instrumental rationality [J].Theory, 2015, (18): 35-36.