

ON ALIENATION AND IMPERIALISM: SYNTHESIZING THE WORK
OF HERBERT MARCUSE AND SAMIR AMIN

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Abstract

This dissertation builds on the idea that there is much to be gained by bringing Western Marxism and Marxist theories of imperialism into engagement with each other through synthesis of the work of two key figures: Herbert Marcuse and Samir Amin. Using Marcuse to supplement Amin (and vice versa) provides for a more complete understanding of capitalist imperialism on a world scale. This lends Marcuse an applicability/relevance currently denied to him while also allowing for an updating of his theory that accounts for changes in the operation of capitalism since his time. It also enhances Amin's work insofar as it can be used to augment his analysis of the capitalist centres and their relation to the periphery. A key objective of the analysis this dissertation undertakes is to produce a more robust theoretical approach capable of increasing our understanding of the world and positioning us to better meet the challenges posed for human emancipation from an exploitative, alienated existence of suffering.

Chapter 1 provides the necessary background for engaging with both Amin's and Marcuse's analyses of alienation by focusing on the work of Marx, Lukács, and Freud. Chapter 2 engages in explicit discussion of Amin's analysis of the world capitalist system and its development. Chapter 3 is concerned with Marcuse's work and begins with discussion of the emergence of "one dimensional thinking" and technological rationality before turning to Marcuse's analysis of alienation. The final chapter demonstrates the compatibility of Amin's and Marcuse's analyses and concludes by pointing toward some possibilities for future research.

Dedication

With the spread of the bourgeois money economy the dark horizon of myth is illuminated by the sun of calculating reason, beneath whose icy rays the seeds of the new barbarism are germinating.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno

It is only for the sake of the hopeless that hope is given to us.

Walter Benjamin

*...play your part creatively in all the struggles
Of men of your time, thereby
Helping, with the seriousness of study and the cheerfulness
of knowledge
To turn the struggle into common experience and
Justice into a passion.*

Bertolt Brecht

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Introduction

In 1959, C. Wright Mills wrote a seminal text in the discipline of sociology: *The Sociological Imagination*. In this work, he argues that the task of social science in general, and sociology in particular, is to develop and utilize the sociological imagination as the foundation of social inquiry. Fundamentally a critique of the positivist turn in social science research, Mills argues that what is needed is the cultivation of the ability to see the relationship between individual experience and the larger social order, to understand, in other words, the “intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities” (2000 [1959]:15). The sociological imagination is a “quality of mind” that recognizes that “...the individual can understand his [sic] own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances” (ibid:5); in other words, we must be able to see the connections between our “personal troubles” and “public issues” (ibid:8-9). Without this imagination, people become “falsely conscious of their social positions” (ibid) and we are left incapable of truly grasping “...the interplay of man [sic] and society, of biography and history, of self and world” (ibid:4).

Mills argues that classical sociological analysis has typically asked three questions: 1) what is the structure of a given society as a whole?; 2) what position does a given society occupy in human history?; and 3) what “varieties” of people have come to

dominate the given society in its particular historical period? (2000 [1959]:6-7). The sociological imagination, he argues, allows us to not only more thoroughly engage with each of these questions taken separately but also, perhaps more importantly, to understand and engage with these questions as fundamentally interconnected. No attempt to answer any one of these questions is complete without an understanding of the other two.

The importance of Mills' call for the cultivation of the sociological imagination is at this dissertation's core; it argues that in order to understand the current situation, we must engage with the questions of how we got here and of what this journey means, and has meant, for human experience. Its hope is that in engaging with these questions, we might be able to more adequately meet the challenges posed for human emancipation from exploitation and suffering. In this dissertation, I bring together the work of Samir Amin and Herbert Marcuse as a means of providing a sociological analysis of the development and organization of the capitalist imperialist world system and its ramifications for people reared in such a system. Amin and Marcuse are representatives of two very different traditions in Marxist thought: in the former case, Marxist theories of imperialism and in the latter, so-called "Western Marxism". Before discussing the specifics of the work of Amin and Marcuse, I discuss the key characteristics of these two Marxist traditions. I do so to demonstrate how and at what point the intellectual roots of the two traditions diverged, in order to situate the synthesis that this dissertation offers.

Marxist Theories of Imperialism

The focus on imperialism has been a central question in Marxist theory since at least Rosa Luxemburg's *Accumulation of Capital* (Anderson 1976:10), and all Marxist approaches focusing on imperialism share two assumptions: imperialism can only be explained in terms of capitalism's development and the evolution of the economic system plays a central role (Brewer 1990:11). These assumptions derive directly from Marx's historical materialist method. That said, there has been a great deal of variation in how different theorists have approached the problem, and it is helpful to further understand Marxist theories of imperialism *generally* as taking either a classical or a dependency theory approach (ibid:16). Roughly speaking, the former "concentrate on the progressive role of capitalism in developing the forces of production" while the latter "...present capitalism as a system of exploitation of one area by another, so development in a few places is at the expense of the 'development of underdevelopment' in most of the world" (ibid:16).¹

Brewer (1990) identifies the main authors of the classical approach as Rudolf Hilferding, Nikolai Bukharin, and Vladimir Lenin (p. 20; see also pp. 88-135). For these

¹ It is important to note that the separation of Marxist theories of imperialism into these two discrete camps is an oversimplification. In many cases there is some overlap, and as we will see in our discussion of Amin, not all theorists fit neatly into one approach or the other. There is, in fact, debate about who should be classified as belonging where (see, for example, Brewer 1990:195). Detailed discussion of the intricacies and nuance of Marxist approaches to imperialism is, however, beyond the scope of this dissertation; for our purposes, it is enough simply to outline the general approaches to the problem.

authors, as well as for all those whose work can be understood as taking a classical approach more generally, imperialism

...meant, primarily, rivalry between major capitalist countries, rivalry expressed in conflict over territory, taking political and military as well as economic forms, and tending, ultimately, to inter-imperialist war. The dominance of stronger countries over weaker is certainly implicit in this conception, but the focus is on the struggle for dominance, a struggle between the strongest in which the less developed countries figure mainly as passive battlegrounds, not as active participants (ibid:89).

The classical theorists saw themselves as direct descendants of Marx and their work as an attempt to update his theories to reflect political and economic developments since his time. In the case of Luxemburg, the main contribution was the recognition of pre-capitalist economic formations as having a role to play in “realizing surplus-value, and therefore the structural necessity of military-imperial expansion by the metropolitan powers” (Anderson 1976:10). Luxemburg insisted that “the mechanisms of primitive accumulation, using force, fraud and state power, were not simply a regrettable aspect of capitalism’s past, but persist throughout the history of capitalism at the margin where capitalist and pre-capitalist economic systems meet” (Brewer 1990:72). Hilferding, Bukharin, and Lenin were all concerned with the rise of monopoly (ibid:89; Anderson 1976:8), and Hilferding’s explanation of the relationship between finance capital and monopolization influenced both Bukharin’s and Lenin’s work (ibid:109; Townshend 1996:53; Anderson 1976:9-10). Hilferding argued that finance capital “consisted of the coalescence of financial, industrial and commercial capital under the control of the banks. The latter, in order to protect their loans and investments, encouraged this form of

monopolization” (Townshend 1996:53). However, since these monopolies “could not yet control the world market, they need[ed] the protection of tariffs” (Brewer 1990:108). They then sought to “extend their protected markets as far as possible” (ibid) through the “expansionist policies of their respective states” (Townshend 1996:53). To Hilferding’s analysis Bukharin and Lenin added examination of the development of the so-called “labour aristocracy”, the relationship between war and imperialism (i.e., inter-imperialist rivalry), and a critique of the notion of “ultra-imperialism”.² Both Bukharin and Lenin argued that “capital export accelerated development in underdeveloped areas, ...[that] workers in imperialist centres gain some (limited) advantages from the success of ‘their’ nations, thus explaining the material basis of working-class nationalism, and...that inter-imperialist rivalry made inter-imperialist war inevitable” (Brewer 1990:134-135). Given that the classical Marxist approach starts from the assumption that capitalism plays a progressive role in the development of the forces of production, these theorists also placed the hope for socialist revolution in the most developed countries and saw this as “the necessary route towards socialism and the precondition for advance in less developed areas” (ibid:89). Unsurprisingly, a frequent criticism of the classical approach is that it is fundamentally Eurocentric in nature (ibid).

² Ultra-imperialism is a concept put forth by both Karl Kautsky and John Atkinson Hobson, though the latter used the term “inter-imperialism” (Brewer 1990:129). It should be noted that Hobson is not a Marxist thinker, however, he was of substantial influence on Marxist theories of imperialism (see Brewer 1990:73-87). The basic argument is that the major imperialist powers “would agree to exploit the world jointly, rather than fighting over the division of the world” (ibid:129). This idea was opposed by both Bukharin and Lenin; the latter was especially vehement (ibid:131; Townshend 1996:54-56).

The classical approach reigned until after the Second World War³; it was Paul Baran's work, particularly his *Political Economy of Growth*, published in 1957, that marked the break between the classical approach and that of dependency theory, which achieved dominance in the 1960s (Brewer 1990:137). This break is marked by Baran's treatment of "the development of capitalism in underdeveloped countries as a different process from that which the advanced countries had gone through earlier" (ibid). In other words, Baran was the first major Marxist theorist to understand underdeveloped countries as worthy of study in and of themselves, rather than incidental to the examination of the advanced capitalist powers (ibid). Indeed,

[t]he classical Marxists, from Marx to Lenin, had expected full capitalist development, in due course, throughout the world. Baran argued that the destiny of the underdeveloped countries was distinctively different from that of areas that developed at an earlier date. ...Monopoly transforms capitalism from a force for development into a cause of stagnation, both in advanced and underdeveloped countries (ibid:21).

The dependency theorists built upon Baran's work and argued that capitalism itself is *the cause* of underdevelopment (ibid:161, 162). These theorists generally retain the emphasis on monopoly discussed by both the classical Marxists and Baran but add the notion that capitalism is a world system whose operation blocks, rather than liberates, productive forces in underdeveloped areas. Therefore, for these theorists, the world is divided into a core/centre and a periphery, the latter being exploited by the former, which ensures its ongoing dependency; this division/relationship is central to their understanding of

³ For further discussion see Anderson 1976:21 and Brewer 1990:136.

imperialism. Brewer identifies both a strong and weak form of this approach; in the strong form, Europe is seen as having “found countries that were developed for the time, and [making] them underdeveloped” while in the weak form, which is less prevalent, Europe simply “prevented underdeveloped countries from developing” (ibid:162). According to Brewer, the central *Marxist* figures in this tradition are Andre Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Samir Amin. It is important to note, however, that Amin is not as easy to locate as Brewer asserts, and Amin himself complains about being categorized in this way (see 2007:65; 1997). Indeed, the question of how Amin’s work can be categorized is a matter of debate, with some treating it instead as a “revival of *classical* Marxist ideas” (Brewer 1990:195 [emphasis added]). Ultimately, however, a preoccupation with the “proper” categorization of Amin’s work as belonging to one approach or the other is not the concern of this dissertation except insofar as it has unfortunately contributed to the ghettoization of his analysis. In other words, what is of concern here is the significance of Amin’s work on imperialism *in general* and the necessity to take it seriously, regardless of how one chooses to locate it; this case is made in further detail below.

Western Marxism

Just as the period following World War II marked a turning point in the development of Marxist theories of imperialism, it was at this time also that Western Marxism was born. Though “[the] scale and force of imperialist expansion of the forces of production in both its Atlantic and Pacific zones presented in its own right a

formidable theoretical challenge to the development of historical materialism, [this] task, in all its dimensions, was never shouldered within the tradition of Western Marxism” (Anderson 1976:47). Its interests were, at least on the surface, different. The history of the emergence of this tradition is multifaceted and the theoretical perspectives falling under this moniker are also varied. That said, it is possible to identify some general tendencies and commonalities that are useful for understanding the tradition as a whole and Marcuse’s place in it.

While the Marxists concerned explicitly with the problem of imperialism focused to a great extent on the economic realm, the Western Marxist tradition “as a whole...came to concentrate overwhelmingly on the study of *superstructures*”, most especially culture and, within the realm of culture, art (Anderson 1976:75-76 [original emphasis]). Indeed, in general, they were largely silent on those questions that had historically been of most concern to the classical traditions in Marxism: namely, “scrutiny of the economic laws of motion of capitalism as a mode of production, analysis of the political machinery of the bourgeois state, [and the] strategy of the class struggle necessary to overthrow it” (ibid:44-45). The reasons for this shift are complicated, however, broadly speaking,

...from 1924 to 1968, Marxism...advanced via an unending detour from any revolutionary political practice. The divorce between the two was determined by the whole historical epoch. At its deepest level, the fate of Marxism in Europe was rooted in the absence of any big revolutionary upsurge after 1920, except in the cultural periphery of Spain, Yugoslavia and Greece. It was also, and inseparably a result of the Stalinization of the Communist Parties, the formal heirs of the October Revolution, which rendered impossible genuine theoretical work within politics even in the

absence of any revolutionary upheavals – which it in turn contributed to prevent. The hidden hallmark of Western Marxism as a whole is thus that it is the product of *defeat*. The failure of the socialist revolution to spread outside Russia, cause and consequence of its corruption inside Russia, is the common background to the entire theoretical tradition of this period. Its major works were, without exception, produced in situations of political isolation and despair (ibid: 42 [original emphasis]; see also Held (1980:17-19).

As a result, their work was both philosophical and academic in a way that classical Marxist theory was not; indeed, unlike the Marxists of the previous periods, many of those working within the Western Marxist tradition were professional philosophers who were integrated into and employed by the university system (ibid:49-50). Another important factor in the shift of Marxism toward philosophy in Western Europe was the discovery of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which had a profound influence on key figures in the tradition, such as Lukács, Lefebvre, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and the members of the Frankfurt School, including Marcuse (ibid:50-52; see also, Feenberg 2014).⁴

Although Western Marxism has been criticized for this “retreat” into philosophy, its distance from actual revolutionary politics or practice, and its consequent alienation from its ostensible audience (i.e., the working class), this tradition has made important contributions to the study and understanding of capitalism, particularly as it exists in so-

⁴ For more detailed discussion of the increasingly philosophical and abstract character of Western Marxist theory, as well as the influence of European idealist philosophy, see Anderson (1976:52-74). For detailed discussion of the influence of Kant, Hegel, and Weber on Lukács and the Frankfurt School, see Feenberg (2014). See also Bronner (2002:11-38), Held (1980:13-40), and Jay (1973:41-85).

called advanced capitalist centres. Indeed, "...the major intellectual systems within Western Marxism have typically...generated specifically new theoretical themes, of wider import to historical materialism as a whole. The mark of these conceptions is their radical novelty to the classical legacy of Marxism" (Anderson 1976:78). Examples of such innovations include engagement with concepts and themes such as hegemony, the relationship between human and nature, ideology, and scarcity (see *ibid*:79-88), as well as the incorporation of seemingly foreign concepts and ideas such as those originating in psychoanalysis. Also unique to Western Marxism is what many identify as an ever-present and profound current of pessimism in their work, which is the mark of the context in which it arose. Nonetheless, as Anderson writes,

[i]n its own chosen fields, this Marxism achieved a sophistication greater than that of any previous phase of historical materialism. Its depth in these was bought at the price of the width of its range. But if there was a drastic narrowing of focus, there was no complete paralysis of energy. Today, the full experience of... imperialism remains a central and unavoidable sum still to be reckoned up by the workers' movement. Western Marxism has been an integral part of that history, and no new generation of revolutionary socialists in the imperialist countries can simply ignore or bypass it (*ibid*: 94).

This dissertation builds on the idea that we have much to gain by bringing these two traditions – Western Marxism and Marxist theories of imperialism – into engagement with each other through synthesis of the work of two key figures: Marcuse and Amin. The rest of this chapter addresses the question: Why these two representatives in particular?

Marcuse and Amin

In the United States, Marcuse's books, especially *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and *One Dimensional Man* (1964), resonated with members of the student movement and he was frequently asked to give lectures at universities and demonstrations. It was through this "sudden popularity" that Marcuse's work, along with the work of the other members of the Frankfurt School, became so significant to the growth of both the American and the international New Left (Jay 1973:5, 284; Wheatland 2009). Indeed, the work of the first-generation members of the Frankfurt School has been highly influential not only to the development of Western Marxism and its analysis of advanced capitalism generally but also, especially in the contemporary period, in the more particular areas of cultural and media studies and the sociology of consumption and leisure (Walsh 2008). Yet, it is for this very reason that the Frankfurt School's work – especially Marcuse's – has arguably become somewhat ghettoized: on the one hand, they are seen as Eurocentric and therefore of only limited relevance for understanding capitalism as a world system. On the other hand, while Marcuse has a comprehensive and far-reaching analysis of advanced capitalism and the consequences of its development for human experience to offer, it is mostly in the particular academic areas listed above that he currently enjoys the most popularity.

This ghettoization is unfortunate, for the analysis Marcuse undertakes is perhaps even more relevant now than it was when first developed. We do ourselves a great disservice by relegating his work to specialized disciplinary subfields or writing him off

as Eurocentric and biased. On the contrary, his thinking as a whole “must be taken seriously” (Amin 1998:104) for he provides an apt and incisive critique of the totalitarian tendencies inherent in the advanced capitalist centres (e.g., North America, Western Europe). How can this analysis be revitalized in the contemporary context? How can its applicability and scope be extended? To answer these questions, I look to the work of Amin, arguably “the greatest living Marxist analyst of imperialism” (see *Monthly Review* Vol. 59:No. 7).⁵

Amin is widely regarded as having pioneered the centre-periphery distinction that is foundational for the World Systems and dependency theories of Wallerstein, Gunder Frank, Arrighi, and others.⁶ Yet, like Marcuse, Amin has become somewhat ghettoized. While he is widely read in Africa and Asia (and to a lesser extent Europe), in North America he is either ignored/treated as a Third World Marxist curiosity or lumped in as one of many dependency theorists.⁷ Nonetheless, Amin’s contribution to the development of the understanding of capitalism as a world system, and the analysis of imperialism this entails, is important for being able to apprehend not only the relation between the advanced capitalist centres and the dependent peripheries but these centres and

⁵ For his part, and despite his criticism of dependency theory, Brewer (1990) also acknowledges the significance of Amin’s work, which he asserts is the “most sophisticated” of the dependency theorists (p. 199), and which he sees, along with Arghiri Emmanuel’s, as “the first serious analysis of international trade in the Marxist tradition” (p. 185).

⁶ Amin asserts that while he uses the terms “centre” and “periphery”, this conceptualization is in fact indebted to Lenin’s work on imperialism (1980: 132).

⁷ Brewer (1990) is exemplary of this tendency, as we saw above, and it bears repeating that this is not how Amin himself sees his work.

peripheries themselves. Though it is clear that Marcuse did little to engage substantively with the issue of imperialism and the Third World, Amin himself acknowledges his work as important for theorizing the centre (see 2007; 1998; 1980). In my view, using Amin to supplement Marcuse (and vice versa) provides for a more complete understanding of capitalist imperialism on a world scale. This lends Marcuse an applicability/relevance currently denied to him while also allowing for an updating of his theory that accounts for changes in the operation of capitalism since his time. It also enhances Amin's work insofar as it can be used to augment his analysis of the capitalist centres and their relation to the periphery.

Amin and Marcuse share an intellectual background influenced to a large extent by the work of both Karl Marx and Georg Lukács; consequently, both share a commitment to historical materialism as the correct method for developing an in depth understanding of the prevailing social order. Following Lukács (1971 [1923]:xxii), for both Amin and Marcuse the Marxian concept of "alienation" is absolutely essential to this approach (Amin 1980:viii; Marcuse 1964; 1955). This dissertation takes "alienation" as both its starting point and its analytical frame; it is a primary means by which Amin's and Marcuse's work is brought into contact.

I begin with an analysis of Marx's particular engagement with this concept and its relation to the development of the notion of "reification" in Lukács' work before dealing with how Amin and Marcuse each address the issue. In Marcuse's analysis, "alienation" is augmented by an engagement with the work of Freud. Marcuse argues that the

progression of alienation in the advanced capitalist context has resulted in a situation in which people are alienated even on the level of their unconscious drives and desires; as a result, they do not experience their alienation (or their fundamental unfreedom) as such. This analysis is tied to his engagement with the issue of the transformation of reason into positivist, technocratic thinking. Both this technological rationality and the technological apparatus that it has produced (and that produces and reproduces it as well) demands conformity and compliance from the individuals subjected to it, which Marcuse argues can be seen in terms of the dominant “one dimensionality” of thought and experience in the advanced capitalist order. Here, Marcuse and Amin have something in common, for the latter argues that the capitalist centres are characterized by an increasing “tendency to homogenization” (1980:3) that is a direct result of the commodity alienation that pervades them. It is at this point that bringing Marcuse and Amin into contact is perhaps most useful: while Marcuse for the most part confines his focus to the centre, Amin argues that this homogenization is in fact less successful in the peripheries (see 1977b:80; 1980), due to the organization of the world capitalist imperialist system and its consequences for the development of alienation.⁸ Our engagement with Amin’s understanding of alienation therefore focuses specifically on his analysis of the imperialistic relationship between the centre and the periphery.

⁸ It is worth noting that Marcuse himself speculates about whether or not, given the situation in the advanced capitalist societies, we might find that resistance is most likely to come from the Third World, but he does not pursue this line of inquiry very far. We return to this in the final chapter, below.

The dissertation is organized into four chapters. The first chapter provides the necessary background for engaging with both Amin's and Marcuse's analyses of alienation by focusing on the work of Marx, Lukács, and Freud. The Marx section focuses on his arguments concerning the development of commodity alienation before turning to the question of how he addresses the problem of human emancipation. The Lukács section focuses on his arguments concerning reification and its consequences for class consciousness. The final section focuses on Freud's work, particularly in relation to the issues of the organization of the "mental apparatus" and how it is affected by the demands of civilization as well as to his conceptualization of the pleasure and reality principles, repression, and sublimation.

Once the stage is set by providing this necessary background, we move to explicit discussion of Amin's understanding of the world capitalist imperialist system and its development. We begin Chapter 2 with discussion of the transition from the tributary to capitalist social formations and how this transition produced the centre-periphery distinction that characterizes the current world system. This analysis includes discussion of the differences between tributary and capitalist ideology and the development of alienation, which Amin argues has a different character in the tributary mode than it does in the capitalist. Special attention is paid to the emergence of what Amin terms "pure economics" and short-term rationality as a means of understanding the world. As we shall see, this analysis has much in common with that of Marcuse. The chapter concludes with discussion of the consequences of Amin's analysis for our understanding of class and

what this means for the possibility of social transformation, both in the centres and the peripheries of the world system.

Chapter 3 is concerned with Marcuse's work. I begin with discussion of the emergence of "one dimensional thinking" and technological rationality before turning to Marcuse's analysis of alienation, which goes beyond Marx to include not "just" people's relations with one another, with nature, and with the products of their labor, nor their *consciousness* of themselves, their experience, and these relations, but rather their *unconscious drives and desires* as well. It is here that I engage with Marcuse's historicization of several of Freud's most important concepts, namely work and its relation to scarcity, repression, sublimation, and the reality principle and with his understanding of the capitalist centres as more or less totalitarian in character. The chapter concludes with discussion of the integration of the central proletariat, the containment of social change, and the possibilities that may remain – despite this containment – for the reactivation of critical thought, the recuperation of human experience, and emancipation.

The final chapter demonstrates the compatibility of Amin's and Marcuse's analyses in order to highlight the ways in which a synthesis of these two highly influential lines of thought can deepen our understanding of capitalist imperialism as well as of alienation as a mode of experience and way of being under the rule of such a system. The chapter revisits the discussion of alienation and the consequences of this analysis for our understanding of the role of class begun in the previous chapters before

turning, once again, to the question of human freedom. The chapter concludes by pointing toward some possibilities for future research.

This project offers a means of both updating and revitalizing Marcuse's analysis of advanced capitalism and of stimulating North American interest in Amin. A synthesis of the work of these two important theorists has not been undertaken up to this point; in this sense this dissertation is breaking 'new' ground and makes an original contribution to literature concerned with critical theory and imperialism. Beyond this, the dissertation recognizes that there is continuity and connection between the struggles we face domestically and the struggles of exploited people everywhere. For those committed to the emancipatory transformation of society, this means developing a sociological imagination that is simultaneously critical in precisely the way that Marcuse describes and internationalist in precisely the way that Amin envisions.

Chapter 1: Marx, Lukács, & Freud

The aim of this chapter is to provide necessary background for engaging with both Samir Amin's and Herbert Marcuse's analyses of alienation. Of particular importance to this task is the work of Karl Marx, Georg Lukács, and Sigmund Freud. While each of these thinkers produced a great deal of written work on a range of topics, for our purposes we focus on those elements of their thought that carry the most resonance for Amin and Marcuse. Other figures of importance to Amin and Marcuse's work, such as Mao and Lenin, are raised when relevant and necessary in the chapters below. The current chapter is divided into sections dedicated to each of Marx, Lukács, and Freud respectively; we begin with a brief discussion of some of Marx's arguments concerning alienation.

Marx

Alienation is a cornerstone of Marx's analysis of the capitalist system.¹ Though in his later writings, particularly *Capital*, he is said to move away from the term "alienation" in favour of others such as "commodity fetishism", its elucidation remains central to the understanding of capitalism. This is in part due to the fact that although alienation is present in earlier forms of production (e.g. feudalism), Marx argues that it reaches its height and is most developed in the capitalist mode of production (see 1998 [1845]; 1963

¹ For a more exhaustive discussion of alienation in Marx's work than is possible here, see Meszaros (1970) and Ollman (1976).

[1844]:114). For Marx, capitalism is in fact a system of alienation (1963 [1844]:121; 1973 [1857-1858]:488) and as we shall see in later chapters, this emphasis is carried into both Amin's and especially Marcuse's work. According to Marx, alienation is characterized by an inversion in which the social character of labour appears as a social relationship between objects; this has consequences for human experience, in terms both of our experience of ourselves and of our relationship to others.

Before dealing with the concept of alienation in further detail, however, it is first necessary to begin with a discussion of its origins, which Marx locates primarily in a developed division of labour (1998 [1845]:102; 1983 [1848]:211-212). Further, alienation, he argues, appears in its first form in circulation (1973 [1857-1858]:197). Circulation of course existed in previous epochs, however, it is in the capitalist mode of production that it acquires a particular character in relation to the highly developed division of labour. This is due primarily to two things: 1) the emergence of the commodity and 2) the fact that the capitalist division of labour is based on exchange value (ibid:156). Stated most simply a commodity is anything that is exchanged for something else. However, such an understanding is not altogether adequate. Commodities contain both use value and exchange value; by "use value" is meant the utility of a given product or object and by "exchange value" is meant the "labour time materialized in production" (ibid:160) or "definite quantities of *congealed labour time*" (1977

[1867]:130 [original emphasis]).² To say, then, that commodities are merely things that are exchanged for other things obscures the social relations contained in a given product.

Marx writes,

As use-values, commodities differ above all in quality, while as exchange-values they can only differ in quantity, and therefore do not contain an atom of use-value. ... With the disappearance of the useful character of the products of labour, the useful character of the kinds of labour embodied in them also disappears; this in turn entails the disappearance of the different concrete forms of labour. They can no longer be distinguished, but are all together reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract. ...[W]hen commodities are in the relation of exchange, their exchange-value manifests itself as something totally independent of their use-value. But if we abstract from their use-value, there remains their value, as it has just been defined. ... A use-value, or useful article, therefore, has value only because abstract human labour is objectified or materialized in it (ibid:128-129).

Furthermore,

To have *circulation*, what is essential is that exchange appear as a process, a fluid whole of purchases and sales. Its first presupposition is the circulation of commodities themselves, as a natural, many-sided circulation of those commodities. The preconditions of commodity circulation is that they be produced as *exchange values*, not as *immediate use values*, but as mediated through exchange value. Appropriation through and by means of divestiture and alienation is the fundamental condition. Circulation as the realization of exchange value implies: 1) that my product is a product only in so far as it is for others; hence suspended singularity, generality; 2) that it is a product for me only in so far as it has been alienated; become for

² Underlying this understanding of exchange value is Marx's labour theory of value; in essence, the labour theory of value can be summarized by the assertion that "[w]hat exclusively determines the magnitude of the value of any article is...the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour-time socially necessary for its production" (Marx 1977 [1867]:129). Stated differently, "exchange values are explained and determined by (*labour*) values, where the value of a commodity is defined as the *socially necessary labour time* (measured in hours), directly or indirectly required to reproduce it" (Brewer 1990:26-27 [original emphasis]). The labour theory of value is one of the more controversial aspects of Marx's work and has been the subject of much debate. For a more detailed discussion, see Saad-Filho 2002, 1997; Brewer 1990; Elson 1979; Pilling 1972).

others; 3) that it is for the other only in so far as he himself alienates his product; which already implies 4) that production is not an end in itself for me, but a means. Circulation is the movement in which the general alienation appears as general appropriation and general appropriation as general alienation (1973 [1857-1858]:196 [original emphasis]).

The delineation of the commodity as a mere object exchanged for another object obscures social relations in yet another significant way, one implied in the above excerpts. The worker sells her *labour power* as a commodity to the capitalist. She does not simply sell an object to the capitalist (although the capitalist owns the product of labour as well); rather, she sells her human capacity to labour to him and in return she receives a wage. Such wages do not produce wealth either for the capitalist, who would prefer to pay nothing at all, nor for the worker, whose wages only provide her the bare minimum required in order for her to continue to live (1973 [1857-1858]:294). While the worker can only buy a product, can only consume a commodity, the capitalist forever continues to consume the productive power of labour. In other words, what the capitalist acquires from the exchange of wages for labour power is “a use value: the disposition over alien labour” (ibid:281-282); “The use value which the worker has to offer the capitalist, which he [sic] has to offer to others in general, is not materialized in any product, does not exist apart from him at all, thus exists not really, but only in potentiality, as his capacity” (ibid:267). Capital, as accumulated labour, is what the capitalist gains from his purchase of labour power. This power belongs to him as his property, which he uses to generate more property; in a very real sense the worker sells herself and is no longer a “free social individual” (ibid:197; see also pp. 274-275).

The peculiar nature of the circulation of commodities in the capitalist mode of production is related to the development of a highly differentiated division of labour. The focus on the development of the division of labour is present throughout Marx's work. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (1963 [1844])³, as well as in *The German Ideology* (1998 [1845]) and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (2004 [1852]), significant attention is given to the relationship between the division of labour and the separation of town and country. While towns existed in medieval times, Marx argues that due to the lack of an advanced system of circulation, as well as to restricted communication between towns, there was not at that time a concomitant developed division of labour (1998 [1845]:74). Nonetheless, Marx asserts that the separation of town and country is a precondition of its development. With this separation the stage is set; the town signifies the beginnings of the concentration of the population and of productive forces and, along with this, the need for more specialized labour. He writes,

The most important division of material and mental labour is the separation of town and country...The advent of the town implies, at the same time, the necessity of administration, police, taxes, etc., in short, of the municipality, and thus of politics in general. Here first became manifest the division of the population into two great classes, which is directly based on the division of labour and on the instruments of production. The town is in actual fact already the concentration of the population, of the instruments of production, of capital, of pleasures, of needs, while the country demonstrates just the opposite fact, isolation and separation. The contradiction between town and country can only exist within the framework of private property. It is the most crass expression of the subjection of the individual under the division of labour, under a definite activity forced upon him – a subjection which makes one man into a

³ Also referred to as the *Paris Manuscripts*.

restricted town-animal, another into a restricted country-animal, and daily creates anew the conflict between their interests. Labour is here again the chief thing, power *over* individuals, and as long as this power exists, private property must exist. ...The separation of town and country can also be understood as the separation of capital and landed property, as the beginning of the existence and development of capital independent of landed property – the beginning of property having its basis only in labour and exchange (ibid:72-73 [original emphasis]; see also 2004 [1852]:47-48; 1983 [1848]:208-209; 1973 [1857-1858]:276-277).

There are, according to Marx, three main phases in the development of the division of labour since the Middle Ages. These are first, the separation of town and country and all this entails, mentioned above; second, the separation of production and intercourse⁴, characterized by the increased communication between towns, guild-free manufacture (1998 [1845]:75), the birth of the bourgeoisie (ibid:78-80), and the beginning of the money trade (ibid:80); and finally the emergence of large-scale industry which entails the establishment of communication technologies, a modern world market, the rapid and extensive circulation of capital on this world market, the centralization of capital in a few hands, and the “completed victory of town over country”. This victory is signaled by the firm establishment of the two major classes: bourgeoisie and, against it,

⁴By “intercourse” Marx is referring primarily to the interaction between people in civil society (see 1998 [1845]:57). Civil society both determines, and is determined by, the character of the “existing productive forces” (ibid). Here “separation of production and intercourse” means the development of specialized industry within towns. The consequence of this is that labour begins to lose “all the characteristics of art...it becomes more and more a *purely abstract activity*, a purely mechanical activity...a merely *formal* activity, or, what is the same, a merely *material* activity, activity pure and simple, regardless of its form” (1973 [1857-1858]:297 [original emphasis]). No longer does each town produce everything necessary to satisfy its needs. Instead, “The towns enter into relations *with one another*, new tools are brought from one town into the other, and the separation between production and intercourse soon calls forth a new division of production between the individual towns, each of which is soon exploiting a predominant branch of industry. ...The immediate consequence of the division of labour between the various towns was the rise of manufactures...” (1998 [1845]:75-76 [original emphasis]).

proletariat (ibid:81-82, see also p. 72; 1963 [1844]:111-113). It is important to note that each phase in the development of the division of labour has a corresponding form of property and politics. The conflict between country and town becomes, in many ways, a conflict between feudalism and capitalism, between landed property and capital (i.e., private property), between monarchy and “democratic” republic. Marx writes, “Upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence, rises an entire superstructure of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought and views of life” (2004 [1852]:47). It is clear that the development of the division of labour is much more than merely “economic”. It is connected to political change, to the above discussion of the appearance of the commodity, circulation, and labour, and to alienation generally. It is to explicit discussion of alienation that we now turn.

Marx’s treatment of alienation begins, in the early work “On the Jewish Question”, with the distinction between political and human emancipation. The latter is the goal and ethic of all of Marx’s work and he is clear that “...political emancipation is not the final and absolute form of *human emancipation*” (1963 [1844]:10 [original emphasis]). This is because “[t]he limits of political emancipation appear at once in the fact that the *state* can liberate itself from constraint without man himself [sic] being *really* liberated; that the state may be a *free state* without man himself being a *free man*” (ibid [original emphasis]). Why is this? In some ways, the answer is simple: human beings are

alienated. This alienation has several aspects;⁵ in “On the Jewish Question”, Marx begins by addressing the fact that individuals as citizens are alienated from themselves as private individuals (ibid). While in the political realm, distinctions of education, religion, occupation, etc. are “abolished” in service of the “equality” of citizens, in civil society, all of these distinctions remain significant. In other words,

The perfected political state is, by its nature, the *species-life* of man [sic] as *opposed* to his material life. All the presuppositions of this egoistic life continue to exist in *civil society outside* the political sphere, as qualities of civil society. Where the political state has attained to its full development, man leads, not only in thought, in consciousness, but in *reality*, in *life*, a double existence – celestial and terrestrial. He lives in the *political community*, where he regards himself as a *communal being*, and in *civil society* where he acts simply as a *private individual*, treats other men as means, degrades himself to the role of a mere means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers. The political state, in relation to civil society, is just as spiritual as heaven is to earth. ...Man, in his *most intimate* reality, in civil society, is a profane being. Here, where he appears both to himself and to others as a real individual he is an *illusory* phenomenon. In the state, on the contrary, where he is regarded as a species-being, man is the imaginary member of an imaginary sovereignty, divested of his real, individual life, and infused with unreal universality (ibid:13-14 [original emphasis]; see also ibid [1844]:127; 1998 [1845]:100; 1973 [1857-1858]:83-84).

Human beings are social creatures. For Marx this is fundamental. However, in their everyday lives people live as isolated, egoistic individuals; they are alienated from themselves as social individuals. They are alienated from their species-being and from their species-life (i.e., the community). The irony of this is striking: the political sphere, where people interact as social individuals, as part of a community, becomes seen as the

⁵Some of these were touched upon in the above discussion of labour power as a commodity and are discussed more fully below.

realm of the “abstract” individual, while the private individual in civil society, on the other hand, is “identified with *authentic man* [sic], *man* as distinct from *citizen*...man in his *true* nature” (ibid:30 [original emphasis]; 1973 [1857-1858]:164). Stated differently, this alienation is characterized by an inversion in which fundamentally human qualities become abstractions and vice versa. Again, the source of this alienation is the development of the division of labour; egoistic man and the particular development of the state and citizen have their roots in the dissolution of feudal society and the transition to a new form of economic and political organization (ibid:28-29; 1998 [1845]:85).

In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (1963 [1844]) alienation is fleshed out further and is explicitly tied to the capitalist mode of production and, consequently, to the relationship between labour and capital. We see here a situation that parallels that of the contradiction between citizen and private individual: the capitalist mode of production “perfects the worker and degrades the man [sic]” (1963 [1844]:83). Capitalism is a system in which “the human content appears as a complete emptying-out, this universal objectification as total alienation, and the tearing-down of all limited, one-sided aims as sacrifice of the human end-in-itself to an entirely external end” (1973 [1857-1858]:488). Labour is a social activity, performed by social individuals, in a community. It is fundamentally human to labour; human beings in fact must do so in order to survive. Under capitalism, however, all of this is alienated, and the individual is separated from the very things that mark her humanity. She is alienated from the product of her labour, which does not belong to her, from the labour process, through which she

is forced to sell even her human *capacity* to labour, from herself as a social being, and from those around her. These aspects of alienation are discussed in detail in the section of the *Paris Manuscripts* entitled “Alienated Labour”. Marx terms them: 1) alienation of the thing, 2) self-alienation, 3) alienation from nature and human life, and 4) alienation from other men (1963 [1844]:125-129).

In the first case, the product of labour is objectified; “The worker puts his [sic] life into the object, and his life then belongs no longer to himself but to the object. The greater his activity, therefore, the less he possesses. What is embodied in the product of labour is no longer his own” (1963 [1844]:122). This has serious consequences because essentially, Marx argues, the worker becomes a slave to the object of her labour. This is the case in two ways:

...first, in that he [sic] receives an *object of work*, i.e., receives *work*, and secondly, in that he receives *means of subsistence*. Thus the object enables him to exist, first as a *worker* and secondly, as a *physical subject*. The culmination of this enslavement is that he can only maintain himself as a *physical subject* so far as he is a *worker*, and that it is only as a *physical subject* that he is a worker (ibid:123 [original emphasis]).

The worker receives a wage in exchange for the objects of her labour. This is a concrete way in which the product of her labour is no longer her own. It does not belong to her at all; it belongs to the capitalist. But, again, this is not all. She does not merely receive a wage in exchange for the commodity she produces in the form of an actual object. Labour itself is a commodity. This brings us to the second aspect of alienation: self-alienation. Marx asserts, “if the product of labour is alienation, production itself must be active alienation – the alienation of activity and the activity of alienation” (ibid:124; see also

1998 [1845]:96). Labour itself becomes something separate from the individual; it appears as something outside of, and opposed to, her existence. This is clearly connected to the above discussion of the inversion of human and abstract qualities. Productive activity, which is fundamentally human, is stripped of its human qualities. Marx writes,

...work is *external* to the worker...it is not part of his [sic] nature...consequently, he does not fulfil [sic] himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery rather than wellbeing, does not develop freely his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker, therefore, feels himself at home only during his leisure time, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, *forced labour*. It is not the satisfaction of a need but only a *means* for satisfying other needs. Its alien character is shown by the fact that as soon as there is no physical or other compulsion it is avoided like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Finally, the external character of work for the worker is shown by the fact that it is not his own work but work for someone else, that in work, he does not belong to himself but to another person. ...[T]he activity of the worker is not his own spontaneous activity. It is another's activity and a loss of his own spontaneity. We arrive at the result that man (the worker) feels himself to be freely active only in his animal functions...while in his human functions he is reduced to an animal. The animal becomes human and the human becomes animal (ibid:125 [original emphasis]).

Marx is clear that alienated labour results in the alienation of the individual from nature and from human life generally. This is related, again, to the fact that human beings are a) fundamentally social and b) that they depend on the external world for their sustenance. Human beings must cultivate the land, must exploit nature, in order to live. Nature is intimately connected with human life: "To say that man *lives* from nature means that nature is his [sic] *body* with which he must remain in a continuous interchange in order not to die. The statement that the physical and mental life of man,

and nature, are interdependent means simply that nature is interdependent with itself, for man is a part of nature” (1963 [1844]:127 [original emphasis]). Under conditions in which people are not only alienated from the products of their labour, but from the labour process itself, however, social and natural relations become obscured and appear extraneous (1998 [1845]:88; 1973 [1857-1858]:164). Therefore,

while...alienated labour takes away the object of production from man, it also takes away his [sic] *species-life*, his real objectivity as a species-being, and changes his advantage over animals [i.e. self-consciousness] into a disadvantage in so far as his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him. ...Thus alienated labour turns the *species-life of man*, and also nature as his mental species-property, into an *alien* being and into a *means* for his *individual existence*. It alienates man from his own body, external nature, his mental life and his *human* life (1963 [1844]:128-129 [original emphasis]).

Productive activity, which is social, practical, natural, human activity becomes a means to an end rather than remaining what it actually is: an end in itself. This is connected to the above statement that if given the choice people will avoid work “like the plague”. It is merely something that one is forced to do in order to have the means to acquire something else. One does not feel a human connection to it just as one feels somehow separate from nature and isolated from others (see 1973 [1857-1858]:83-84). We can see here the fourth aspect of alienation, alienation from other people, which Marx argues is,

...[a] direct consequence of the alienation of man from the product of his [sic] labour, from his life activity, and from his species-life...In general, the statement that man is alienated from his species-life means that each man is alienated from others, that each of the others is likewise alienated from human life. Human alienation, and above all the relation of man to himself, is first realized and expressed in the relationship between each man and other men. Thus in the relationship of alienated labour every man regards

other men according to the standards and relationships in which he finds himself placed as a worker (1963 [1844]:129).

If in the capitalist mode of production people experience themselves as “naturally” and “truly” egoistic, isolated individuals, if they are constantly put into the position of having to compete with others for work, then this infects their relationships with one another and with the world around them. How can they relate to one another as free, social individuals when their work is bondage and toil? And yet, what is toil to the worker is a “source of enjoyment and pleasure” to the capitalist (ibid:130) who gains capital from this entire process.⁶ Private property, then, is not only the result of alienated labour but also the means by which labour continues to be alienated; it is the “external relation of the worker to nature and to himself [sic]” (ibid:131; 1973 [1857-1858]:238, 457).

In Marx’s later writings (for example, the *Grundrisse* and especially *Capital*) less *explicit* attention is paid to each of these specific aspects of alienation. Instead, the focus is placed on alienated labour itself, and the relation of this labour to capital. This is due to the fact that these aspects spring forth from alienated labour and are also, of course, contained within it. Another difference between the early and later writings is that Marx for the most part dispenses with the use of terms such as “species-being” and “species-life” and opts instead simply for the word “social” (e.g., “social individuals”, “social connectedness”, etc.). Yet, it is important to note that despite the change in terminology,

⁶ It is now easy to understand why, in, for example, the *Grundrisse*, Marx refers to “capital” as “command over alien labour” (1973 [1857-1858]:330, 238).

there is no point at which he abandons the analysis of alienation above. That said, the analysis of alien labour in the *Grundrisse*, and most certainly in *Capital*, is more technically proficient than in the earlier work. It is in the *Grundrisse* (1973 [1857-1858]) that the precise way in which labour becomes *alien* labour is discussed. Marx writes,

The worker...sells labour as a simple, predetermined exchange value, determined by a previous process – he [sic] sells labour itself as *objectified labour*...capital buys it as living labour, as the general productive force of wealth; activity which increases wealth. It is clear, therefore, that the worker cannot become *rich* in this exchange, since, in exchange for his labour capacity as a fixed, available magnitude, he surrenders its *creative power*...he necessarily impoverishes himself...because the creative power of his labour establishes itself as the power of capital, as an *alien power* confronting him. He *divests* himself of labour as the force productive of wealth; capital appropriates it as such. The separation between labour and property in the product of labour, between labour and wealth, is thus posited in this act of exchange itself. ...[T]he productivity of his labour, his labour in general, in so far as it is not a *capacity* but a motion, *real labour*, comes to confront the worker as an *alien power*; capital, inversely, realizes itself through the *appropriation of alien labour*. ...In this process of exchange, labour is not productive; it becomes so only for capital; it can take out of circulation only what it has thrown into it, a *predetermined* amount of commodities, which is as little its own product as it is its own value (P. 307 [original emphasis]).

The analysis of alienation is further refined in Volume 1 of *Capital*. Here, Marx claims that in order to understand the capitalist mode of production it is necessary to start with an examination of the commodity (see also 1973 [1857-1858]:881). In the section “The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret” Marx asserts,

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists...simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s [sic] own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves...Hence it also reflects the social relation of the producers to the sum total of labour as a social relation between objects, a relation which exists apart from and outside the producers. Through this substitution, the

products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible or social. ...[T]he commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things (1977 [1867]:165; see also 1973 [1857-1858]:157).

Marx is here again referring to the “alienation of the thing” as well as to “self-alienation”.

Within the commodity-form one is able to see the entire relationship between capital and labour discussed above. Again there is the same inversion: here the social character of labour appears as a social relationship between objects. The labour itself, however, retains its appearance as asocial, abstract, and extraneous to the individual. The whole relation assumes a backwardness in which use-value appears to exist separately from the object while exchange-value seems to inhere within it (ibid:176-177). This fetishism of commodities is a product of the “peculiar social character of the labour which produces them” (ibid:165); it is indeed a snapshot of the way in which the alienation that permeates the whole of capitalist society operates.

One of Marx’s greatest concerns is the issue of human emancipation. For Marx, political or religious freedom is not human freedom. The possibility for human emancipation is inextricably bound to the mode of production. In a system based on alienated labour, it is clear that people are not free. How, then, is human emancipation won? The answer for Marx is through revolution and the establishment of a communist society. One cannot, however, achieve this transformation simply by willing it to happen. The proper social conditions have to be present in order for the overthrow of capitalism

to be possible. Marx argues that alienation can only be abolished, and human freedom won, given two practical premises: 1) most people must be propertyless and 2) they must be propertyless despite the fact that the society is both wealthy and culturally developed (1998 [1845]:54). Both of these premises require a highly developed division of labour because, as mentioned above, with it comes intercourse on a world scale. This “produces in *all* nations simultaneously the phenomenon of the ‘propertyless’ mass (universal competition), making each nation dependent on the revolutions of the others, and finally puts *world-historical*, empirically universal individuals in the place of local ones” (ibid:57 [original emphasis]).

Furthermore, according to Marx, capitalism is a system that constantly has to withstand crises of overproduction.⁷ Such crises are “so many mines to explode it” (1973 [1857-1858]:159; 1983 [1848]:210). In *The Communist Manifesto* (1983 [1848]) Marx writes,

...the bourgeoisie...is unfit to rule because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him. Society can no longer live under this bourgeoisie, in other words, its existence is no longer compatible with society. The essential condition for the existence and for the sway of the bourgeois class, is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition of capital is wage labour. Wage labour rests exclusively on competition between the labourers. The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of modern industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the

⁷ Marx’s discussion of specific historical trade crises in France and England can be found in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (2004 [1852]):108-109.

bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable (P. 217).

Marx argues that the proletariat is capable of developing a revolutionary class consciousness as a result of its unique position in relation to capital; the proletarian revolution is “the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority” (ibid:216). There are several stages in the development of the proletariat: first, “individual labourers...in one locality [struggle] against the individual bourgeois who directly exploits them. They direct their attacks not against the bourgeois conditions of production, but against the instruments of production themselves” (ibid:212); as trade develops, the numbers of the working class increases and becomes more concentrated. At this point, the proletariat begins to recognize its own strength. This happens in part as a result of the aforementioned crises, which cause increasing wage fluctuation, and in part as a result of improvements in machinery, which “makes their livelihood more and more precarious” (ibid:213). As a result, workers begin to form unions and other worker’s associations. The proletariat is eventually able to compel “legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers, by taking advantage of the divisions among the bourgeoisie itself” (ibid:214). The development of the proletariat as the revolutionary class is further served by the fact that the bourgeoisie,

...finds itself involved in a constant battle. At first with the aristocracy; later on, with those portions of the bourgeoisie itself, whose interests have become antagonistic to the progress of industry; at all times with the bourgeoisie of foreign countries. In all these battles it sees itself compelled to appeal to the proletariat, to ask for its help, and thus, to drag it into the political arena. The bourgeoisie itself, therefore, supplies the proletariat

with its own elements of political and general education, in other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie (ibid).

The overwhelming condition for human emancipation is the abolition of private property (1963 [1844]:152; 1983 [1848]:221), which is the necessary result of the abolition of alienated labour. Without wage labour, there is no capital and vice versa. The abolition of private property necessitates that individuals “appropriate the existing totality of productive forces, not only to achieve self-activity [i.e., free, social activity], but, also, merely to safeguard their existence” (1998 [1945]:96). Of course, only the proletariat is able to appropriate the productive forces in such a way as to be able to completely transform social relations:

Only the proletarians of the present day, who are completely shut off from all self-activity, are in a position to achieve a complete and no longer restricted self-activity, which consists in the appropriation of a totality of productive forces and in the development of a totality of capacities entailed by this. ...[I]n the appropriation by the proletarians, a mass of instruments of production must be made subject to each individual, and property to all. Modern universal intercourse cannot be controlled by individuals, unless it is controlled by all. This appropriation...can only be effected through a union, which by the character of the proletariat itself can again only be a universal one, and through a revolution... Only at this stage does self-activity coincide with material life, which corresponds to the development of individuals into complete individuals and the casting-off of all natural limitation. The transformation of labour into self-activity corresponds to the transformation of the previously limited intercourse into the intercourse of individuals as such. With the appropriation of the total productive forces by the united individuals, private property comes to an end (ibid:96-97).

While there have been times when it has appeared that a renewed communist revolution was on its way, it has yet to fully materialize. Both Marcuse and Amin have witnessed instances where revolutionary conditions seemed to be arising or to have arisen

but were instead faced with the problem of fascism and the failure of both various workers' revolutions and national liberation struggles. As a result, the development of class consciousness and the possibility of transformative social change are two of the main issues addressed in their work. Indeed, as we shall see, this is the case despite the fact that they approach the analysis of capitalism and the particular alienation it produces from rather different directions. Consequently, the concern with human emancipation, so apparent in Marx's treatment of alienation, is one that we will return to in the following chapters. It is to discussion of Lukács' work on reification and class consciousness that we now turn.

Lukács

Like Marx, Lukács argues that in order to understand capitalist society, one must start with an analysis of commodities (1971 [1923]:83-84). The analysis of the commodity-form generally, and the fetishism of commodities in particular, is foundational to Lukács' theoretical framework because, he argues, the phenomenon of reification has its origins in this fetishism. Lukács, like Marx, argues that alienation, in the form of reification, becomes more complex and pervasive as capitalism develops. In fact, reification is to a large extent resultant when the fetishism first encountered in human beings' relationship to commodities becomes universalized, permeating not only a person's relations with other objective forms in society or her relations with others but

also her relationship to herself.⁸ Again, an understanding of the commodity is crucial to understanding the process of reification as they are inextricably linked.⁹ Furthermore, given the fact that under advanced capitalism the commodity “becomes the universal category of society as a whole” (ibid:86), it is evident that without such understanding any revolutionary project is destined to fail. Lukács alludes to the relationship between the commodity-form, reification, and human emancipation when he writes,

Only in this context does the reification produced by commodity relations assume decisive importance both for the objective evolution of society and for the stance adopted by men [sic] towards it. Only then does the commodity become crucial for the subjugation of men’s consciousness to the forms in which this reification finds expression and for their attempts to comprehend the process or to rebel against its disastrous effects and liberate themselves from servitude to the ‘second nature’ so created (ibid).

The explication of the relationship between commodity-form and reification allows Lukács to illustrate the ways in which their development is tied to increased rationalization and specialization, not only of labour itself, but also of the one who labours, as well as of society as a whole. Lukács accepts Marx’s assertion that the capitalist division of labour is based on exchange-value and he argues that we can see the consequences of this in all aspects of capitalist society. Under reification, quantity increasingly replaces quality; the “qualitative, human and individual attributes of the

⁸ Recall the aspects of alienation discussed above.

⁹ This is evinced by Lukács’ assertion, “Reification requires that a society should learn to satisfy all its needs in terms of commodity exchange” (1971 [1923]:91).

worker” are “progressively eliminated” (1971 [1923]:88) in favour of the quantifiable, the calculable:

...[T]ime sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable ‘things’ (the reified, mechanically objectified ‘performance’ of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality): in short, it becomes space. ...[T]he objectification of their labour-power into something opposed to their total personality (a process already accomplished with the sale of that labour-power as commodity) is now made into the permanent ineluctable reality of their daily life (ibid:90).

The significance of the apparent loss of quality in favour of quantity cannot be overstated. For Lukács, this rationalization and systematization, this quantification of daily life, results in a situation in which various aspects of society (e.g., economics, philosophy, law, science) form partial systems, yet appear as though ruled by unified, “natural laws” (ibid:101). Yet, in reality, these laws are merely formal; concretely, these systems are held together by little more than chance (ibid; see also p. 102). Furthermore, in the reduction of quality to quantity, all ability to recognize the whole is lost. Form is separated from content and bourgeois thought runs into the problem of the “thing-in-itself”. Indeed, for Lukács, this very issue is the “fundamental problem of bourgeois thought” (ibid:150).

Lukács asserts that the attitude toward, and experience of, reality in bourgeois society is fundamentally immediate and contemplative in nature. The world is seen as divided into “ossified antitheses” (1971 [1923]:141) – into binaries – such as form and content, quantity and quality, subject and object, theory and practice/action. As such, and as mentioned previously, true understanding of the totality, of reality as a historical

process, is impossible. The consequences of this are dire, for it is precisely the unification of such antithesis, and the development of true understanding (i.e., imputed consciousness)¹⁰ that point the way out of the problem of reification. For Lukács, then, the concern becomes not only delineation of *how* understanding of the totality is made possible, but also of *who* is capable of acquiring it. In regard to the former, Lukács makes clear that the dialectical method is key:

The dialectical method is distinguished from bourgeois thought not only by the fact that *it alone can lead to a knowledge of totality*; it is also significant that such knowledge is only attainable because the relationship between parts and whole has become fundamentally different from what it is in thought based on the categories of reflection. ...[T]he essence of the dialectical method lies in the fact that in every aspect correctly grasped by the dialectic, *the whole totality is comprehended* and that the whole method can be unravelled [sic] from every single aspect. ...[T]he dialectical process is seen to be identical with the course of history (ibid:170 [emphasis added]).

Further, the dialectical method is related to the issue of praxis as the “essence of praxis consists in annulling *that indifference of form towards content* that we found in the problem of the thing-in-itself. ...In so far as the principle of praxis is the prescription for changing reality, it must be tailored to the concrete material substratum of action if it is to have any effect” (1971 [1923]:126 [original emphasis]). In other words, praxis is the dialectical unity of theory and practice, and can be understood as practical, or revolutionary, action. While the dialectical method allows for the development of a true

¹⁰ Consciousness is discussed in more detail below.

understanding of the totality, it is praxis that is directed toward, and capable of, its transformation (ibid:175).

The question remains as to who is capable of developing both the necessary understanding of the totality as a historical process as well as the capacity to change it. According to Lukács, “For the individual, reification and hence determinism (determinism being the idea that things are necessarily connected) are irremovable” (1971 [1923]:193). Indeed, “The individual can never become the measure of all things. ...Only the class can relate to the whole of reality in a practical revolutionary way” (ibid). Immediately, then, it is apparent that the question of escaping reification can also only be dealt with on the level of class. The individual actor is not in a position to surpass the immediacy of her daily life. Instead, the development of an imputed consciousness is necessarily the development of an imputed *class* consciousness and Lukács, like Marx, argues that the proletariat is the only class capable of its attainment. He writes,

...in capitalist society reality is – immediately – the same for both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat...this same reality employs the motor of class interests to keep the bourgeoisie imprisoned within this immediacy while forcing the proletariat to go beyond it. ...For the proletariat to become aware of the dialectical nature of its existence is a matter of life and death, whereas the bourgeoisie uses the abstract categories of reflection, such as quantity and infinite progression, to conceal the dialectical structure of the historical process in daily life... (ibid:164).

In other words, “while the bourgeoisie remains enmeshed in its immediacy by virtue of its class role, the proletariat is driven by the specific dialectics of its class situation to abandon it” (ibid:171). Only the proletariat has the potential of becoming “the identical subject-object of history whose praxis will change reality” (ibid:197).

It is important to pause here to discuss more fully what is meant by “imputed” class consciousness. This form of consciousness is distinguished from what Lukács calls “actual” class consciousness. The difference between actual and imputed consciousness can be stated, in very simple terms, as the difference between immediate (or false) consciousness and “right” or “true” understanding. Stated differently, for Lukács, this distinction signifies the contrast between “immediate interest” and “ultimate goal” (1971 [1923]:80) in the struggle of the proletariat. The development of such consciousness is complicated, however, by the fact that the proletariat “has been reared in capitalist society under the influence of the bourgeoisie” (ibid:310). Therefore, like the bourgeoisie, the proletariat is trapped in immediacy and though unlike the bourgeoisie the proletariat can escape this trap, the process of doing so is both difficult and far from guaranteed. Lukács writes,

[t]he only question at issue is how much it [the proletariat] has to suffer before it achieves ideological maturity, before it acquires a true understanding of its class situation and a true class consciousness. ...[U]ntil the proletariat has achieved a true class consciousness, and the ability to understand the crisis fully, it cannot go beyond the criticism of reification and so it is only negatively superior to its antagonist. ...[I]f the proletariat finds the economic inhumanity to which it is subjected easier to understand than the political, and the political easier to understand than the cultural, then all these separations point to the extent of the still unconquered power of capitalist forms of life in the proletariat itself (ibid:76).

In the above excerpt, it is clear that the imputed class consciousness of the proletariat entails an accurate understanding of the concrete totality of which the proletariat, as a class, is a part. Again, however, due to the fact that in bourgeois society, “formal, rational, abstract systems” (1971 [1923]:158) reign, it is characteristic of

existing within such a society to view, and indeed experience, “objects of history...as the objects of immutable, eternal laws of nature” (ibid:48). The experience of the world as highly rationalized, mechanistic, and calculable translates into an understanding of reality that is completely immediate in nature. Understanding (and experience) of the world, as well as of one’s place in it, is thus reduced to an “unmediated relationship with reality as it [is] given”; in other words, as it empirically and immediately appears (ibid:156). This not only signifies the character of the actual consciousness of the bourgeoisie, which it cannot escape, but of the proletariat as well. Therefore, it is clear that true class consciousness can be “identical with neither the psychological consciousness of individual members of the proletariat, nor with the (mass-psychological) consciousness of the proletariat as a whole, but it is, on the contrary, *the sense, become conscious, of the historical role of the class*” (ibid:73 [original emphasis]).

Beginning with the immediacy of the proletariat’s social existence is, however, necessary to the development of revolutionary class consciousness. For it is from this immediacy that the proletariat becomes capable of seeing its existence as a result of a “multiplicity of mediations” (1971 [1923]:168). As Lukács writes, “man, who is the foundation and the core of all reified relations, can only be discovered by abolishing the immediacy of those relations. It is always necessary, therefore, to begin from this immediacy and from these reified laws” (ibid:177 [original emphasis]). Since the proletariat must begin from such experience, the dangers of never surpassing its actual consciousness are great. Indeed, “in the centre of proletarian class consciousness [is] an

antagonism between momentary interest and ultimate goal. The outward victory of the proletariat can only be achieved if this antagonism is overcome” (ibid:73). It is for this reason that Lukács comes to place so much emphasis on the problem of organisation, as well as on the difference between contemplative action and practical, revolutionary action, or praxis.

Lukács argues that due to the fact that “[e]very worker who is born into capitalist society and grows up under its influence has to acquire by a more or less arduous process of experience a correct understanding of his own class situation” (1971 [1923]:326), the consciousness of the proletariat *as a class* is stratified. Therefore, imputed class consciousness “does not develop uniformly throughout the whole class” (ibid:304). As such, the role of the Communist Party becomes that of mediator; it is the conscious, “revolutionary vanguard” of the proletariat (ibid:329). Its function, then, is to, “hasten the process by which these distinctions [i.e. stratifications] are smoothed out. ... The Communist Party must exist as an independent organisation so that the proletariat may be able to see its own class consciousness given historical shape” (ibid:326). It must be able to relate the immediate experiences of the proletariat to the totality – in other words, it must represent the “highest objective possibility of proletarian action” (ibid:327). In mediating between immediacy and ultimate goal, the Communist Party, according to Lukács, facilitates the development of imputed class consciousness and, consequently, the capacity for praxis in the class as a whole.

While Marcuse, along with other members of the Frankfurt School, comes to reject Lukács' turn toward the Communist Party as the central means by which the proletariat acquires the "ideological maturity" necessary for the development of imputed class consciousness, praxis, and therefore a way out of reification, it remains the case that Lukács' discussion of these issues is highly influential to his work. Furthermore, as we shall see, Amin's understanding of capitalist ideology and its relationship to alienation is also indebted to Lukács, despite the fact that the former generally aligns himself most strongly with the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist tradition. We turn now to explicit discussion of Freud.

Freud

Because of the immensity of Freud's work, in this section our focus is restricted specifically to discussion of some of the concepts most relevant to the following chapters. These include delineation of Freud's conceptualization of the pleasure and reality principles, repression, and sublimation. In order to be able to adequately address these concepts, however, it is necessary to begin by giving a brief overview of Freud's understanding of the human "mental apparatus" and how it is affected by the demands of civilization.

Freud describes the mental apparatus in two compatible yet not entirely corresponding ways. First, he argues we can understand the human mind

topographically.¹¹ Here the mind is divided into three systems: the unconscious system (*Ucs.*), the preconscious system (*Pcs.*), and the conscious system (*Cs.*). The *Cs.* is the first part of the mind to receive excitatory stimulus and in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (2001 [1900]), Freud argues that it is little more than a “*sense-organ for the perception of psychical qualities*” whose function is “conscious perception” (p. 615 [original emphasis]; see also 2001 [1923]:19). The *Cs.* receives stimuli both from the external world [i.e. through the perceptual system] and from the internal world of the mental apparatus as a whole (ibid:616, 574); in other words, “what we call sensations and feelings...are *Cs.* from the start” (2001 [1923]:19). The *Ucs.*, on the other hand, is the home of the drives; it is the most “primitive” part of the mind, it knows no time and has no direct contact with the external world.¹² Left to its own devices, the *Ucs.* would demand the continuous satisfaction of the unconscious wishes and desires residing within it. As a result, the *Ucs.* finds itself subjected to the censorship of the *Pcs.* (2001 [1923]:540-541); the *Ucs.* “has no access to consciousness *except via the preconscious*, in passing through which its excitatory process is obliged to submit to modifications” (ibid [original emphasis]). This means that the preconscious, for Freud, consists of thoughts that are latent, and therefore in a certain sense “unconscious”, however, unlike the *Ucs.*, that which is preconscious has the potential to be made conscious (2001 [1923]:15, 21;

¹¹ In his later writings, particularly *The Ego and the Id* (2001 [1923]), Freud refers to this as the “descriptive” understanding of the mental apparatus.

¹² These characteristics of the unconscious are mentioned throughout Freud’s work, particularly in *The Ego and the Id* (2001 [1923]), *The Interpretation of Dreams* (2001 [1900]), *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (2001 [1915-1916]), and *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1989 [1949]).

2001 [1900]:615). Topographically speaking, then, the *Pcs.* stands “a great deal closer to the *Cs.* than is the *Ucs.*” (2001 [1923]:15) in the mental apparatus. Indeed, the *Pcs.* is the gatekeeper between the *Cs.* and the *Ucs.* In *The Ego and the Id* (2001 [1923]), Freud argues that unconscious qualities can only become preconscious if we are able to attach a “word-presentation” to them (20; see also 2001 [1900]:574):

...word-presentations are residues of memories; they were at one time perceptions, and...they can become conscious again. ...[O]nly something which has once been a *Cs.* perception can become conscious...anything arising from within (apart from feelings) that seeks to become conscious must try to transform itself into external perceptions: this becomes possible by means of memory-traces. ...The part played by word-presentations now becomes perfectly clear. By their interposition internal thought-processes are made into perceptions...When a hypercathexis of the process of thinking takes place, thoughts are *actually* perceived – as if they came from without – and are consequently held to be true (ibid:21-23 [original emphasis]).

In this sense, the aim of psychoanalysis is technically not to make unconscious processes conscious, but rather to make these processes preconscious so that they may then be granted entry into the *Cs.* This is done by “supplying *Pcs.* intermediate links [i.e. word-presentations] through the work of analysis” (ibid:21).

The second model of the mental apparatus articulated by Freud serves as a supplement to the first and results from Freud’s recognition, through the process of analysis, that the topographical representation of the mind is too limited to be used alone. He therefore introduces the “structural”, or “dynamic”, model of the mental apparatus. In fact, it is probably most accurate to say that these two models supplement each other; while the second model was introduced as a supplement to the topographical one, it came

to be the dominant representation of the mental apparatus used by Freud, particularly in his later works. Therefore, it can just as easily be said that the topographical model is supplementary to the structural model. Indeed, Freud says as much when he argues that the former is descriptive while the latter is dynamic (2001 [1923]:13-18); the two models emphasize different aspects of the same processes within the human mind. They therefore serve as complimentary conceptualizations. In this second, “structural”, model the mind is again split into three: the id, ego, and super-ego. The id, according to Freud, “behaves as though it were *Ucs.*” (2001 [1923]:23); indeed, its “home” is in this system and it shares its characteristics: it does not have direct contact with the external world and instead of being influenced by perceptions stemming from outside of the body, it is subject to the vicissitudes of the drives. The id is the “great reservoir” of libido¹³ and it “feels erotic trends as needs” (ibid:29) demanding satisfaction. In this sense, the “power of the id expresses the true purpose of the individual organism’s life. This consists in the satisfaction of its innate needs. No such purpose as that of keeping itself alive or of protecting itself from dangers...can be attributed to the id” (1989 [1949]:17). Furthermore, the id is “totally non-moral” (2001 [1923]:54). It is worth reiterating that

¹³ In earlier works, such as the *Introductory Lectures* (2001 [1915-1916]), Freud actually asserts that the ego is the “great reservoir” of libido. It seems that by the time he wrote *The Ego and the Id*, he had revised his position on this point. For more information on this, see *The Ego and the Id*, “Appendix B” (2001 [1923]:63-66).

the id has one aim and one aim only: the satisfaction of instinctual¹⁴ needs through the discharge of libidinal energy.

The ego, on the other hand, is the “coherent organization of mental processes” in each individual (Freud, 2001 [1923]:17). Consciousness is “attached” to it and the motility of the individual is under its control (ibid; p. 25). The ego is a part of the *Cs.* and, like it, “starts out...from the system *Pcpt.* [perceptual]... and begins by embracing the *Pcs.*” (ibid:23; p. 40). Because of this, Freud asserts that the ego is fundamentally bodily (ibid:26 n.1; p. 27). Given that we typically attach so much significance to consciousness, it is common to mistakenly assume the ego to be definitive of our personalities as individuals. Furthermore, the assumption is often made that ego and id are rigidly separated from one another. Freud makes a point of arguing against this misconception and asserts that the person is id, not ego; indeed, the ego is but a “specially differentiated part of the id” (ibid:38; see also pp. 24, 25, 40; 2001 [1900]:603; 1989 [1949]:36).¹⁵ He argues that in general,

...the ego is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world through the medium of the *Pcpt-Cs.* ...Moreover, the ego seeks to bring the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies. ...For the ego, perception plays the part which in the id falls to instinct. The ego represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the id, which contains the passions. ...[I]n its relation to the id it is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his [sic] own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces. ...Often a rider,

¹⁴ In both this and the Marcuse chapter below the term “instinct” should be read as connoting “drive”. The two terms are used interchangeably.

¹⁵ This is discussed in more detail in relation to repression below.

if he is not to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go; so in the same way the ego is in the habit of transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own (ibid:25).¹⁶

Finally, the super-ego, according to Freud, arises as a result of two factors: biology and history (2001 [1923]:35). In terms of the former, Freud is referring specifically to the fact that human children are helpless and therefore dependent on their parents for a great length of time. The latter factor refers to the Oedipus complex, which is not only a part of the history of each individual but also of the species as a whole (ibid; see also 2001 [1929]).¹⁷ These factors combine in each person to produce a fear of authority; initially this authority is represented in its entirety by the parents. Later, as the child matures and is socialized by various societal institutions, the authority that the individual submits to is social. The super-ego, then, is this authority internalized (2001 [1929]:125-128).¹⁸ While fear of external authority can be dealt with simply by not doing

¹⁶ The means by which the ego attempts to control the id is further clarified in the discussions of the reality principle, repression, and sublimation below.

¹⁷ The "simple" Oedipus complex arises out of the "first identifications made in earliest childhood" (2001 [1923]:31). The male child develops an "object-cathexis" for his mother; she becomes his first love-object and the boy finds himself in competition with his father for her affections, which he wants all to himself. Initially he "deals with his father by identifying himself with him. For a time these two relationships proceed side by side, until the boy's sexual wishes in regards to his mother become more intense and the father is perceived as an obstacle to them...His identification with his father then takes on a hostile colouring and changes into a wish to get rid of the father in order to take his place with his mother" (ibid:31-32; see also 2001 [1916-1917]:207). In the case of a female child, the situation is reversed: the little girl develops an "object-cathexis" for her father, initially identifies herself with her mother, comes to view her mother as an obstacle, and wishes for her demise so that she may become her father's wife (ibid:32). As the child matures, the Oedipus complex is "demolished" and the child is forced to give up his first love-object. As a result, "its place may be filled by one of two things: either an identification with his mother or an intensification of his identification with his father" (ibid:32). This is contrasted with the "complete" Oedipus complex, which Freud links with the "bisexuality originally present in children" (ibid:33); further discussion of this issue is, for our purposes, unnecessary.

¹⁸ This "fear of authority" is in reality, Freud argues, the fear of the loss of love. Initially the child fears losing the love of her parents, on whom she is completely dependent for protection. Later, this becomes a

something “bad”, the fear of the super-ego cannot. The super-ego, as the representative of the id, sees all (2001 [1923]:36, 34); it knows not just what the individual has done but also what she *wishes* to do, what she wants. Therefore, “bad intentions [i.e. libidinal desires] are equated with bad actions, and hence comes a sense of guilt and a need for punishment” (2001 [1929]:128). The super-ego dominates the ego and it is a cruel master. Like the id, it is never satisfied; “[e]very renunciation of instinct [on the part of the ego] ...becomes a dynamic source of conscience¹⁹ and every fresh renunciation increases the latter’s severity and intolerance” (ibid). We can see, then, that the ego finds itself in a difficult position. It is torn between the demands of the id and of the super-ego, which, for reasons mentioned above, are often anxiety producing. But it is also torn between the demands of these internal agencies and those of civilization.²⁰

In *Civilization and its Discontents* (2001 [1929]), Freud observes that despite the tremendous gains achieved by the acquisition of culture, people are unhappy. This is in part due to the fact that the aims of civilization and those of the individual are often in conflict. As we saw above, for the individual the aim of life is the satisfaction of inherent libidinal needs (2001 [1923]:54). Civilization, on the other hand, serves two main purposes: the protection of individuals from nature and the “adjustment” of people’s relationships with one another (2001 [1929]:89). Both of these aims require the

fear of losing the love of the community. Finally, once the super-ego is fully developed, the ego comes to fear losing the love of the super-ego (2001 [1929]:124-126; p. 136).

¹⁹ Freud often uses the terms “super-ego” and “conscience” interchangeably.

²⁰ Freud uses the terms “civilization” and “culture” interchangeably and in fact “scorns” distinguishing between them (2001 [1927]:6).

renunciation of the drives; indeed, civilization “presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction...of powerful instincts” (ibid:97). This results in “cultural frustration” (ibid) and the individual often experiences this as unpleasurable. The preservation of civilization therefore depends in part on coercion and this can be seen in the fact that people, according to Freud, “are not spontaneously fond of work and...arguments are of no avail against their passions” (2001 [1927]:8). In fact, he argues, work is a “compulsion”, foisted upon us by civilization in response to scarcity (2001 [1929]:101) and in the interest of the domination of nature; people “do not strive after it as they do after other possibilities of satisfaction” (ibid:80 n.1). We have developed defenses against the suffering that this perpetuation of civilization entails, and these include the subjection of the drives to the reality principle, repression, and sublimation.²¹ It is to discussion of these processes that we now turn.

The id ultimately strives for the discharge of libidinal energy; a build up of the “tensions” resulting from libidinal excitation is perceived as unpleasure, while the lowering or release of those “tensions” is felt as pleasure (Freud, 1989 [1949]:15).²² Therefore, the mental apparatus at the very least attempts to keep the levels of excitation present within it constant. This is the “principle of constancy” and it is from this that the pleasure principle follows (2001 [1920]:9, 56). The pleasure principle is a “tendency

²¹ Discussion of the full list of defenses can be found in *Civilization and its Discontents* (2001 [1929]:77-83).

²² This is Freud’s “economic view of the mind”. See *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2001 [1920]:8).

operating in the service of a function whose business it is to free the mental apparatus entirely from excitation or to keep the amount of excitation in it constant or to keep it as low as possible” (ibid:62). The pleasure principle, then, “demands a reduction, at bottom an extinction perhaps, of the instinctual needs” (ibid:85; see also 2001 [1916-1917]:356). However, because it is a part of the primary process, because its home is in the *Ucs.*, which has no direct contact with the external reality, “immediate and unheeding satisfaction of the instincts, such as the id demands, would often lead to perilous conflicts with the external world and to extinction” (ibid:84; see also, 2001 [1920]:10). As such, the pleasure principle is hindered or modified by the ego, which operates according to the reality principle in the service of the self-preservation of the individual. This principle “demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure” (2001 [1920]:10; see also 2001 [1916-1917:357]).

The subjection of the drives to the reality principle is able to provide a defense against the experience of unhappiness in civilization due to the fact that “non-satisfaction is not so painfully felt in the case of instincts kept in dependence as in the case of uninhibited ones” (2001 [1929]:79). Even once the ego has “succeeded” in subjugating the id to the reality principle, however, the id’s attempt to adhere to the pleasure principle persists and the two principles often find themselves in conflict. Indeed, the latter is often able to overpower the former and this has potentially dangerous consequences for the

individual (ibid). Despite this, however, Freud argues this kind of conflict accounts for only a small fraction of the experiences we find unpleasurable (ibid). The inhibition of the full expression of the pleasure principle through the repression of the drives is a more significant factor.

Freud distinguishes between two kinds of repression: organic and external. Organic repression is phylogenetic; Freud asserts that as human beings began to walk upright, the dominance of the sense of smell was replaced by that of sight. The development of a taboo against menstruation and the emergence of the feeling of repulsion at excretory processes generally was the result; Freud argues that as civilization developed, the organic repression of excitatory energy linked to smell is evidenced by the extent to which we value hygiene (2001 [1929]:99 n.1; see also ibid:105 n.3). External repression, on the other hand, originates both from the ego's attempt to obey the admonitions of the super-ego and from its attempt to uphold the reality principle (2001 [1923]:52; 2001 [1920]). In both organic and external repression, however, the underlying process is fundamentally the same. Impulses, aims, and desires originating in the *Ucs.* are prevented from entering consciousness by the ego; this occurs when "individual instincts or parts of instincts turn out to be incompatible in their aims or demands with the remaining ones, which are able to combine into the inclusive unity of the ego. The former are then split off from this unity...held back at lower levels of psychical development and cut off...from the possibility of satisfaction" (2001 [1920]:11). In other words, repressions are the ego's "attempts at flight" (1989 [1949]:65)

from instinctual impulses that it perceives as distressing or dangerous. In repression, the ego takes these distressing impulses or aims and replaces them with something else.²³

In order to fully understand this process of repression, it is important to recall that the ego originates from the id and is a “specially differentiated” part of it.²⁴ As a result, a portion of the ego always remains in a certain sense unconscious²⁵ and the forces of repression stem from this unconscious ego (ibid:18; 2001 [1920]:20). In other words, a person is not properly conscious of the fact that repression is taking place; it to some extent occurs behind the back of the coherent (i.e., conscious) ego. In analysis, repression becomes evident through resistance, on the part of the analysand, to treatment. It must be emphasized, however, that these resistances do not come from the dynamic unconscious (i.e., id); in fact, “[t]he unconscious – that is to say, the ‘repressed’ – offers no resistance whatsoever to the efforts of treatment. Indeed, it itself has no other endeavour than to break through the pressure weighing down on it and force its way either to consciousness or to a discharge through some real action” (ibid:19). While on the one hand the ego engages in repression in an effort to submit the id to the reality principle, it *at the same time* puts up resistance, which seeks to maintain that repression, in accordance with the pleasure principle, for the ego perceives the “liberation of the repressed” as unpleasurable (ibid:20).

²³ For example, the manifest content of dreams disguises the latent dream-wish; in neuroses, repression becomes manifest in symptoms.

²⁴ Page 48 above.

²⁵ “Unconscious” is meant here in the descriptive, not dynamic, sense.

Finally, the displacement of libidinal energy is another means we have developed for defending ourselves against the “suffering” entailed by the postponement of satisfaction necessitated by civilization. In general, displacement can be understood as the “shifting of instinctual aims in such a way that they cannot come up against frustration from the external world” (Freud, 2001 [1929]:79). One significant form that such displacement takes is sublimation. Sublimation is constituted by aim-inhibited libidinal energy; in other words, it requires the desexualization of libido (2001 [1923]:30, 45). This desexualized libidinal energy becomes culturally productive energy due to the fact that it can be displaced, or diverted, into non-sexual socially necessary activities. Indeed, “[s]ublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life” (2001 [1929]:97; 2001 [1915-1916]:23). Once again, it is the ego that is responsible for the sublimation of libidinal energy in its mediation between the id and the external world (2001 [1923]:30, 45). Sublimation works in the service of both the reality and pleasure principles; it allows individuals to obtain a certain amount of pleasure from activities that would not otherwise be instinctually appealing. It is important to note, however, that while sublimation is a powerful defense against both cultural frustration and neuroses, it is limited by two significant factors: 1) the pleasure obtained from such activities is not nearly as intense as “the satisfaction of a wild instinctual impulse untamed by ego” (2001 [1929]:79); and 2) “There is a limit to the amount of unsatisfied libido that human beings

on the average can put up with. ...[S]ublimation is never able to deal with more than a certain fraction of libido, quite apart from the fact that many people are gifted with only a small amount of capacity to sublimate” (2001 [1916-1917]:346).

This chapter has provided the necessary background for engaging with both Amin’s and Marcuse’s analyses of alienation, which share much in common. However, while Marcuse’s focus is primarily on analyzing the conditions prevalent within advanced capitalist societies, Amin’s discussion of alienation is situated within an analysis of capitalist imperialism on a *world scale*. Amin’s contribution results less from offering a “new” understanding of alienation – for the most part he retains the analysis of commodity alienation found in Marx’s work – than from his emphasis on this concept in specific relation to an “imperialist world view” which, “...in accordance with the development of capitalism...by its very nature, has always been uneven and polarizing on the world scale” (1998:45).²⁶ In other words, Amin’s concern with the existing and continually emergent global order expands not only the utility of alienation as an analytic concept but also our understanding of it as a phenomenon. By broadening our perspective in the way that Amin requires, we are able to encounter Marcuse’s work as applicable in new and important ways. Chapter 2 therefore begins with discussion of Amin’s analysis of the development of the imperialist world system before explicitly engaging with his conceptualization of both the process and character of alienation.

²⁶ Amin argues that a main failure of “historical Marxism” has been precisely its neglect of these inherent qualities of the global dimension (2011; 2010 [1978]).

Chapter 2: Samir Amin

Following both Marx and Lukács (1971 [1923]:xxii), Samir Amin argues throughout his work that the concept of “alienation” is essential to acquiring a suitable understanding of the capitalist world system (Amin, 2003:59; 1998:46, 54; 1989:118 1980:viii; 1977:76). Amin asserts that in general all human societies have historically moved through three consecutive stages: primitive communism, the tributary form, and capitalism (1980:4, 6; 1976:13) and is separated from the one following it by a “period of transition” (1980:4, 10-11).¹ Primitive communism, according to Amin, delineates the historical stage at which the transition from animality to humanity took place (ibid:10). Little can be known about this stage because it is “irrevocably lost” to the past (ibid:4). Following this stage is the transitional period characterized by the emergence of communal societies. Here neither classes nor states are developed; study of such societies is within the purview of anthropology (ibid:10) and is of little concern to Amin’s work. For Amin, most important for understanding the contemporary world system is the analysis of the tributary and capitalist phases due to the fact that it is with the emergence of the former and the transition to the latter that we begin to see concentrated development of the productive forces, the emergence of unequal development, and,

¹ It is important to note that Amin is not arguing here that the development of a given society can be understood as traveling along some sort of irresistible linear trajectory nor that it *necessarily* and *inevitably* will move from one phase to the next. Rather, he is pointing to what he sees as a general historical tendency and his concern here is with drawing attention especially to the periods of transition between phases, for his commitment is to understanding not just the development of global capitalism but also the possibility for a transition from a capitalist to a communist phase. This possibility is discussed in more detail below.

consequently, the centre-periphery distinction that characterizes the contemporary world scene. It is therefore necessary to discuss the tributary mode (as understood by Amin) in some detail.

The tributary phase is precapitalist and characterized by what Amin terms a “tribute-paying” mode of production (1976:13). There are, in Amin’s formulation, three other precapitalist modes of production: primitive-communal, slave owning, and simple petty-commodity (ibid; see also Brewer 1990:185), however, it is the tributary mode that is by far the most widespread (1989; 1980; 1976). Indeed, Amin argues, “The tribute-paying mode of production is the form that most normally succeeds the communal mode; it is the rule” (1976:15; see also pp. 18-19; 1980:99-100). Whereas communal societies were dominated by kinship relations and a consequent lack of state development (1980:49), it is in the tributary mode that we see the emergence of the state (1980; 1976). State formation is further paralleled by the development of classes (1980:43) and this “corresponds to a level of development of the productive forces which makes the growth of the state both possible and necessary. That is, it necessitates the end of the dominance of kinship (which can continue to exist but only as a vestige dominated by another rationality)” (ibid:49). In the tributary mode the fundamental class distinction is between the peasantry and the ruling class, the latter of which “monopolizes the functions of the given society’s political organization and exacts a tribute (not in commodity form) from the rural communities” (1976:15; see also 1980). Furthermore, the “slaveowning and simple commodity modes are linked with the dominant tribute-paying mode, and occupy

in the given society a place that is of greater or lesser importance depending on the relative importance of the surplus² extracted in the form of tribute” (ibid:19; see also p. 52).³ In general, the main characteristics of the tribute-paying mode of production are:

...first...that the surplus product is extracted by noneconomic [sic] means. This characteristic differentiates this first class mode from the communal modes preceding it. ...The extraction of the surplus product is...like tribute to the profit of the exploiting class. ...The second characteristic of the tributary mode is that the essential organization of production is based on use value and not on exchange value. ...The essence of this tributary mode then is a natural economy, without exchange but not without transfers (tribute is one) and redistributions. ...The third characteristic of the tributary mode is...the dominance of the superstructure. ...[T]his dominance aids in the extraction of the surplus, while the ideology of kinship in the communal mode, where ideology is also dominant, aids in the reproduction of relations of cooperation and domination but not of exploitation. ...[I]n the tributary mode the class struggle takes center stage. ...In fact, the dominance of the superstructure is the first consequence of the dominance of use value in the economic base. The functioning of this dominance of class ideology has an impact on the class struggle in the tributary mode. The exploited class does not generally struggle for the total elimination of exploitation but only for its maintenance within the ‘reasonable’ limits necessary for the reproduction of economic life at a level of development of the productive forces where the surplus product is collectively used. ...The fourth characteristic of the tributary mode is its appearance of stability and even of stagnation, the second consequence of

² Amin defines “surplus” as “an excess of production over the consumption needed in order to ensure the reconstitution of the labor force. This concept of ‘surplus’ assumes different forms in different modes of production – noncommodity forms such as tribute, rent in kind, etc., or commodity forms. In the latter case the term ‘surplus value’ is employed” (1976:18; for further discussion of surplus in the tributary mode, see 2011:44-46).

³ This assertion is in line with Amin’s larger argument that multiple modes can and do exist within precapitalist and capitalist social formations (see also Brewer 1990:186). While the *dominant* precapitalist mode is tributary in nature, within this, other modes persist. The same is true today. While the world system is both capitalist and imperialist in character, tributary modes are still easily found, particularly in the periphery on the national level. As Amin argues, while there is a “variety of immediate reality”, we must always emphasize the “unifying principle”, which is to be “sought on the level of the basic mode of production” (Amin 1980:50). We return to this point in more detail below.

the dominance of use value. ...This characteristic...is a false appearance deriving from the contrast with capitalism (1980:50-53, 56).

Amin's discussion of the nature of the so-called "tributary mode" is particularly important given that according to the common Marxist approach feudalism is often theorized as *the* mode of production directly preceding capitalism. Amin does not reject the concept or existence of feudalism but rather resituates it within this broader discussion of the tributary mode.⁴ Indeed, Amin argues that feudalism is but an incomplete or underdeveloped tributary formation (1980:17, 61-62, 99-101; 1989:8-9; 1976; see also 2011). Complete tributary formations, such as those found in China, India, and Egypt, were characterized by the emergence of state authority as dominant. This had several consequences. First, "...the community survived as a community of families, but lost the *dominium eminens* of the land, which passed to a broader and higher community that soon developed into a nation" (1976:53). Secondly, despite the common assumption in the popular Western imagination that the state authority in these nations was despotic particularly in relation to the peasantry, this was not the case. In fact, the "national state-class...took account of the public interest and organized useful large-scale public works...This class, organized in a state, remained comparatively open, and social mobility in access to it was considerable" (ibid). Thirdly, "...the power of these formations in their developed condition gave the tribute-paying mode a clear dominance

⁴ Amin's attempt here is to articulate an understanding of precapitalist societies that does not fall into the traps of universalizing the European experience of feudalism on the one hand and of Marx's "Asiatic mode of production" on the other (for more on this line of analysis in Amin's work see, for example, 1980:46-70).

within them: long-distance trade, craft production (whether carried on by free men or slaves), production in those sectors where wage labor existed – all were subject to close control by the state, which taxed them” (ibid). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, developed, complete tributary formations are “able to digest the progress achieved by the productive forces. The production relations defined by the tribute-paying mode were compatible with a wide range of levels of development of the productive forces” (ibid:54) and this development favored political centralization (1980:62). Feudal societies, by contrast, were characterized by a relatively weak state, whose power was weakly integrated into the society as a whole. Despite sharing all of the general characteristics of the tributary mode as laid out above, feudal societies were also characterized by the “exercise by the lord of political and jurisdictional prerogatives, which implies political decentralization” (ibid:61; 1989:8). As a result, towns retained an autonomy not seen in complete tributary formations and “feudal landlords, living close to their peasants, were free to oppress them without restriction” (1976:53-54). It is crucial to understand Amin’s fundamental point that feudalism is but an underdeveloped form of the tributary mode because this internal dynamic is one of the primary reasons why the transition to capitalism occurred first in feudal Europe and not elsewhere—the other being the external and dialectically related dynamic of colonial trade (1976:36, 55; 1989:9; 1980:63). Before discussing these issues in more detail, however, it is necessary to understand the ideological dimension of tributary formations. It is to discussion of this that we now turn.

Tributary societies are characterized by the dominance of the superstructure and this is typically religious in nature (Amin 1976:25, 52; 1989:7; 1980:100). Indeed, the “transparency of the relationships of exploitation in these societies demands that the ideological play a predominant role and be regarded as sacred” (1989:22). Given the tendency toward a high degree of internal political and economic organization within tributary societies, the “passage to the tributary form demands a greater degree of coherence and the integration of the elements of abstract knowledge into a global metaphysics. It is not until the modern age that the mystification of social relationships, peculiar to capitalism, can overthrow the domination of this sacred ideology and replace it with the rule of the economic” (ibid). What, then, constitutes this ideology? For Amin, the answer lies in discussion of what he calls “medieval scholastic metaphysics” (ibid:23); this is “the ideology *par excellence* of the tributary mode of production” and takes four successive forms: Hellenistic, Eastern Christian, Islamic, and Western Christian (ibid:23, 30).⁵ The dominance of metaphysics in the tributary mode is not accidental, but rather emerges in order to serve the social reproduction of these societies as a whole (1989; 1976). It helps both to reinforce and to perpetuate the integration of various social institutions into, and under, the dominance of the centralized state by itself providing an integrated worldview in the form of an explanation of the “final principles governing the universe” (1989:28). Furthermore, “[t]he cosmogony that it inspires

⁵ Detailed discussion of each of these forms is beyond the scope of this chapter; for Amin’s discussion of this, see *Eurocentrism* (1989), Chapters 1 and 2.

justifies the social order in a world where inequality of wealth and power has transparent origins” (ibid:31).

Amin argues that the initial development of medieval metaphysics, as characterized by Hellenism, is reliant upon the following propositions: 1) the search for absolute truth, which is completed “through dialectical reason by means of the practice of asceticism” (1989:33-34); 2) the belief in an “individualized and immortal” soul, which is both the subject and object of all moral actions and is by its nature universal; and 3) the search for, and adherence to, a coherent and complete cosmology (ibid). Indeed, these characteristics hold for tributary ideology in general and have significant consequences for the character of this ideology in its complete form. The emergence of the belief in the soul leads to the development of a “universalist humanism that transcends the mythologies and the specifics of peoples” (ibid:35). The preoccupation with the search for absolute truth and its relation to asceticism becomes manifest in the predominance of deductive reason as *the* means by which to obtain knowledge (ibid). Finally, and perhaps paradoxically, “The Hellenistic expression of this initial formulation of medieval scholasticism is secular, in the sense that it is the exclusive product of propositions that neither rely on sacred revelations for their support nor seek to confirm such revelations” (ibid). It is precisely in this last instance that one of the most important contradictions of tributary ideology becomes clear: while on the one hand the propositions of this medieval metaphysics – particularly the assertion of the existence of the soul as universal – paved the way for “the success of religions with a universalist vocation” (ibid), at the same time

these religions' demands for reliance on sacred texts poses a serious challenge both to the secularism of tributary ideology in general and to the "value of tolerance and the demands of scientific curiosity" (ibid; pp. 36-37). Nonetheless, Amin argues,

...in its confrontation with Hellenism, Christianity encountered exactly the same problems that Islam would later experience. ...[I]t was necessary to reconcile beliefs that had become sacred, and the texts upon which these beliefs were based, with reason... In order to do so, the way had to be opened for a figurative, as opposed to literal, interpretation of the texts. ...On the other hand, Hellenistic metaphysics lent itself to a religious reinterpretation, both in a Christian and, later, Islamic context, particularly with respect to the essential matters of immortality of the soul and immanent morality. Reflection about individual responsibility and free will, always in potential conflict with divine omnipotence, and on the nature of the intervention of this power in the world, led...to two solutions that came practically to define the new religious belief: unlimited individual moral responsibility, combined with the demand that the believer have a deep-seated conviction going beyond formal submission to religious rites; and a recognition that creation does not exclude the regulation of the universe by an order of laws which can be discovered by scientific reason and, consequently, the granting of exceptional status to the miracle (divine intervention outside of these laws) (ibid; see also p. 41).

According to Amin, it is this "authoritative synthesis of reason and faith" that comes to represent the "perfected form of tributary ideology" (ibid:38).

Mirroring the aforementioned argument that European feudalism was but an incomplete, underdeveloped tributary formation, Amin argues that it is Islamic metaphysics in particular that "completed the work of Hellenism and Eastern Christianity and perfected the tributary ideology of the region" (1989:54, 58) while "Western Christianity's version of metaphysics...is only a pale, unrefined, and incomplete... reflection of this tributary ideology" (ibid). Indeed,

...medieval Islamic scholasticism inspired to a great extent the rebirth of Christian scholasticism in the West. In the West, semi-barbaric until the eleventh century and, for this reason, incapable of assimilating Hellenistic and Eastern Christian scholasticism (which disappeared as a result of Islamization), the objective conditions that develop from the eleventh and twelfth centuries on impose a transition from the primitive stages of the tributary mode, marked by feudal fragmentation and a dispersal of power, to the advanced form represented by absolute monarchy. During this period, the Christian West is thus ready to comprehend the full significance of Islamic scholasticism, which it adopts without the slightest uneasiness, virtually unchanged.⁶ ...Hellenistic thought was...discovered by the West through the mediation of the Islamic metaphysical construct (ibid:53-54).

Amin's argument here is significant, not only because it underlines his point that the feudal West was an incomplete tributary form on the levels of both base and superstructure but also because this poses a fundamental challenge to the Eurocentric conception of socio-political, economic, and intellectual development. Indeed, it is not the case that science, philosophy, economics, and politics were most developed in the West and that this led to the development and advancement of capitalism in these societies *but rather the very fact that they were underdeveloped*. This underdevelopment rendered the contradictions prevalent in the tributary mode more visible and therefore easier to resolve by transitioning to a new (capitalist) social order whereas in complete tributary forms, "these contradictions were better controlled and therefore developed less quickly" (1980:63, 100-101; see also 1998:61; 1976:54). At the level of the base,

[t]he feudal variant remained weak in comparison with the original, fully developed tribute-paying mode. This weakness...was to become its strength. At the beginning of the feudal order in Europe, it meant a surplus of modest size but also an absence of political, administrative, and economic

⁶ Amin gives examples illustrating this point in *Eurocentrism* (1989:53-56).

centralization, the one going along with the other. This low level of centralizing capacity was to allow freedom to the commercial sectors, as yet only embryonic. Under their stimulus, agriculture made great progress, and the surplus produced by agriculture grew naturally, so that the dialectics of increasing trade and breakup of feudal relations could get under way, leading in turn to the rise of capitalism (1976:55, 203-204; 1980:64-66, 73).

It bears repeating that the incomplete nature of the feudal form gives rise to a similarly incomplete version of tributary ideology for here again Amin argues that the "...poverty of Western scholasticism is precisely what gave Europe its advantage. Necessarily leaving a greater sense of dissatisfaction than Islam's refined version, Western scholasticism could offer only slight resistance to the assault of empiricism...which... initiates a process of development independent of metaphysical discourse" (1989:57). Amin's focus on underdevelopment as a driving force in the transition from one social order to another must be emphasized for two reasons: 1) as mentioned above, these factors, along with the advancement of colonial trade, account for the exceptional character of European development (i.e., the birth of capitalism); and 2) this is foundational to Amin's argument, discussed in more detail below, that the transition beyond capitalism is most likely to begin in the underdeveloped periphery of the imperialist world system.

While I have engaged in some detail with Amin's analysis of the consequences of the internal dynamic of political and economic decentralization and the ways in which this hindered the ability of European feudalism to develop into a complete tributary system, I have not yet addressed the external dynamic of long-distance trade; according to Amin, this dynamic developed alongside the other and exacerbated the tensions

existing within the feudal order. Long-distance trade in general functioned to provide societies with “exotic products whose cost of production they [were] unable to calculate” (Amin, 1976:155), however, its importance within a given society depends to a large extent on how much of a surplus the society in question is itself able to produce (ibid:18). In feudal Europe, the amount of tribute it was able to generate internally was compromised by the very internal dynamic discussed above. The lack of political and economic centralization facilitated the domination of the peasantry by the feudal landowners and over time this in turn precipitated peasant uprisings. This had two important consequences. These revolts served to further limit “...the surplus that the local dominant classes [could] extract from the producers”; consequently, long-distance trade became an indispensable source of external surplus in these societies (ibid:17). Furthermore, this paved the way for the burgeoning mercantilist system; the emerging merchant class was strengthened, as was its influence on the society as a whole.⁷ Amin writes:

The peasants who fled from feudal tyranny, and later those whom the lords themselves evicted in order to modernize the organization of production, formed in the free cities a proletariat that was at the disposal of the merchants who controlled these cities. Commodity production by free craftsmen and by wage labor developed, both being dominated by merchants. The latter were able, therefore, to do more in the field of long distance trade... From the sixteenth century onward, the Atlantic trade in

⁷ Recall Amin’s argument that different formations are composed of several modes of production at a given time, though one mode is dominant. Therefore, “every society actually presents a picture of a complex group of more than two classes” (1976:23). Feudalism, though tributary in nature, was also characterized by the emergence of the mercantilist system, which gained strength as feudal relations began to dissolve under the weight of their own internal dynamics. This breakdown was further facilitated by the increasing importance of long-distance trade, as we shall see presently.

America led to the creation of a periphery for the new mercantilist system. The trade no longer consisted merely in collecting the products that the local societies could offer; these societies were directly subjugated so that they might be organized to produce goods for sale in Europe. ...The influx of new wealth arising from this trade...had an effect in turn upon the feudal sectors of the formation, hastening the breakup of feudal relations. In order to obtain new goods, the feudal lords were obliged to modernize their methods of exploitation, extracting a larger surplus and converting this into money. This modernization led them to drive off the land the excess population as happened in the English enclosures. Rent in kind was gradually replaced by money rent. Feudal agriculture evolved into capitalist agriculture, either by the feudal lords themselves becoming capitalist landowners or by the emancipation of the peasantry, enabling a new 'kulak' class to arise (ibid, p. 34, pp. 63-65; 1980:73, 86-89).

According to Amin, we must therefore view mercantilism as constituting a transitional period between the tributary and capitalist modes (1976:31, 67; 1980:81).⁸ This period is marked by three especially significant developments, alluded to above: the proletarianization of the peasantry; the accumulation of money capital (i.e., the concentration of wealth in the hands of the merchant class); and the emergence of the modern centre-periphery distinction. The former two are, Amin argues, necessary to the development of modern capitalism (1976:31, 64, 67, 157, 336) while the latter is crucial to our ability to understand the contemporary imperialist world system. It is therefore necessary to briefly discuss each before moving on to more explicit engagement with the imperialist system as we now know it.

⁸ This issue of the transition from feudalism to capitalism is contentious. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this project to engage with this debate in any detail. For discussion of this issue in Amin see 1980: 82-91. For a detailed analysis of this issue in general see Anderson (1978), Brenner (2003; 1982; 1978), Cox (1964), Dobb (1967), Frank (1978), Hilton (1978; 1967), Polanyi (1944), Sweezy (1984), Wallerstein (1974), and Wood (2002; 1995). For an overview of the debate as a whole see Mooers (1991).

As we have seen, the underdeveloped character of feudal society lent it a greater flexibility, which "...made for its more rapid transcendence through the early growth within it of embryonic forms of the capitalist mode. The class groups present during the mercantilist period were therefore three: the peasants, the feudal lords, and the [early, merchant] bourgeois. The tripartite class struggle involved shifting blocs of two against one" (Amin 1980:87, 103). The movement of the peasantry into the cities – a consequence of the breakdown of feudal relations – had the effect of separating "...producers from their means of production so that the way to a free labor market was opened" (1976:33, 203). This meant the creation, in the cities, of a fresh supply of "free and available labor power" (ibid:31, 64), which could be exploited by the rising bourgeois class. It is precisely this tendency that Amin terms "proletarianization". Amin argues that while abstractly speaking we could account for the development of capitalism by looking at the internal dynamic of the breakdown of feudal relations alone, this would be a mistake. Rather, it is necessary to examine the "transition as it really took place" (1980:184) if we are to understand the actually existing capitalist order. This requires acknowledgement of, and engagement with, the interrelationship between internal and external factors.⁹ He writes, "In the concrete, historical formation of capitalism, Europe created and subjected a periphery as early as the mercantilist period, the exploitation of

⁹ Amin's insistence on this point is indicative of the influence of Mao, who argues, "...materialist dialectics...holds that external causes are the condition of change and internal causes are the basis of change, and that external causes become operative through internal causes. In a suitable temperature an egg changes into a chicken, but no temperature can change a stone into a chicken, because each has a different basis" (1971 [1937]:89).

which both quickened the pace of its own development and arrested and then distorted that of the subject regions” (ibid). In other words, the proletarianization of the peasantry occurred alongside the accumulation of money-wealth in the hands of the merchant class and this was facilitated by colonial trade.

Insofar as the external dynamic of long-distance trade is concerned, it is not merely the fact that it operated as a source of external surplus *per se* that strengthened the position of the merchant class in Europe but also the particular way in which this trade was organized. In fact, the ability of merchants to accumulate wealth can be traced in large part to the organization of monopolies that began at this time. While, on the one hand, merchants were able to increasingly accumulate internal surplus as a result of the proletarianization of the peasantry, at the same time,

The precapitalist merchant drew *his* [sic] profit from his possession of a monopoly. In long-distance trade this monopoly made it possible to transfer a surplus from one society to another. ...This monopoly was the completer in proportion to the distance over which the trade was carried on and to the rarity of the goods involved. If there were commodity exchanges within the formation that were effected through specialized traders, the latter also tended to organize themselves in monopolies, but these were precarious, and failed to bring in the enormous profits obtainable through long-distance trade. This trade always brought about a concentration of wealth in money form (Amin 1976:32-33 [original emphasis], 67).

The existence of monopolies in this period must be acknowledged not only because doing so enhances our understanding of how the concentration of money-wealth took place but also because their emergence in the mercantilist period is a precursor to the development

of monopoly capitalism.¹⁰ Most crucial for our purposes at this point, however, is understanding how these factors, taken together, result in the centre-periphery distinction that characterizes the modern world system (1976:155).

At the most basic level, the distinction between the centre and the periphery emergent in the mercantilist era is a result of the subjugation of Africa and the Americas by Western Europe. As we have seen, this subjugation came to play an increasingly important role as a consequence of the reliance on colonial trade not only in order to maintain, but also to promote, European wealth and power. Furthermore, the “trade relations between the center in process of formation (Western Europe) and the new periphery that it was forming for itself in the mercantilist era constituted a fundamental element in the capitalist system that was taking shape” (Amin 1976:155). Amin argues, however, that the primary distinction necessary for understanding the difference between centre and periphery in the world system is whether a particular society is “autocentred” or “extraverted”. The former is, in Amin’s view, a fundamental characteristic of the centres of the world system (of whatever type), while the latter characterizes the periphery. In general, in autocratic societies the economy is relatively “closed”, or self-sustaining (1978:598-599). This is not to say that external relations with other societies are not important; indeed, as has been emphasized, these relations played an important role in the establishment of the mercantilist system and, by extension, capitalism. Rather,

¹⁰ This is discussed in more detail below.

what Amin is pointing to is the ability of central societies to satisfy their own needs both internally and, when necessary, through the subjugation of societies external to them. He writes:

...the division of the capitalist world took place during the mercantilist period. The industrial centers (through the growth of their manufactures and the flourishing of petty rural and craft capitalism) satisfied their own needs (and in that were autocentric) and thus acquired a decisive capacity for external aggression. The peripheries, created as incomplete, extraverted economies complementary to those of the centers, furnished wheat, sugar, and precious metals. The wheat, sugar, and metals were produced within modes that were precapitalist in form (serfdom or slavery) but were new in the sense of having been established directly by or for the metropolises because this made possible the superexploitation of labor power (1980:90-91).

In other words, "...the subjection of external (economic and political) relations to the needs of internal accumulation...gradually created the world capitalist system. This system emerged as a group of autocentered and interdependent (although unequally advanced) central formations and of peripheral formations subject to the logic of accumulation in the centers that dominated them" (ibid:133). Incomplete, peripheral formations can be described as "extraverted" due to the fact that rather than being able to accumulate surplus in order to satisfy their own needs, they are, instead, tasked with performing specific functions that meet the accumulation requirements of the centres of the world system; the latter "...impose a type of unequal international specialization for their own benefit" (1976:191, 193; 1980:99). It bears repeating that while, abstractly-speaking, autocentric formations can be described as self-reliant, in the reality of the actually-existing transition to capitalism, the internal dynamics of the breakdown of

feudal relations and the subsequent emergence of the mercantilist system led to a situation in which the external dynamic of colonial trade services the demands of the autocentred capitalist development of Western Europe.

It is important to recall Amin's arguments concerning the importance of unequal development for this further enhances our understanding of the centre-periphery dynamic. Not only is the periphery of the system underdeveloped in relation to the centre but unequal development also occurs within the centre and the periphery respectively. In other words, central nations compete with one another and are more or less successful depending primarily upon their own internal dynamics. Insofar as the periphery is concerned, some countries are more peripheralized than others as a result both of "their own inner dynamism" and the extent to which their development is blocked or distorted by their relationship with the central formations (Amin 1976:58, 133). Although by the end of the mercantilist period, large portions of the world were still not wholly integrated into the centre-periphery system taking shape, after the Industrial Revolution, as capitalism became firmly entrenched, this changed (1980:91).¹¹ In order to understand why this is the case, it is necessary to discuss, briefly, how autocentric accumulation functions in the specifically capitalist context.

¹¹ This emphasis on the interrelationships between the countries of the centre and the periphery of the world system is indebted to Mao, who argues, "In the era of capitalism, and especially in the era of imperialism and proletarian revolution, the interaction and mutual impact of different countries in the political, economic and cultural spheres are extremely great" (1971 [1937]:89). These relations are discussed in more detail below.

Amin argues that autocentric accumulation in its fully capitalist form operates in three primary ways: first, in autocentric formations, external expansion of the system is *theoretically* unnecessary in order to compensate for real wages not increasing at a given, calculable rate (1976:76). Amin asserts, "...the immanent tendency of the system is to maintain constant the level of real wages" which do not increase except as a consequence of the struggle of exploited classes through, for example, the organization of trade unions (ibid); in such cases, accumulation requires "a steady *external* expansion of the market. This is what underlies the necessary expansionism of the capitalist mode" (ibid [original emphasis]). As has been mentioned, this expansionism confers particular functions on the periphery in order to maintain the accumulation requirements of the centre (ibid; p. 292). Second, "...autocentric accumulation gives the capitalist mode at the center of the system a tendency to become exclusive, that is, to destroy all the precapitalist modes. ...[T]he central capitalist social formation tends to become identical with the mode of production that dominates it, whereas all previous formations were stable combinations of different modes" (ibid:77). Finally, "autocentric accumulation is the condition necessary for manifestation of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Monopolies and imperialism are the system's response to this tendency, putting an end to the equalization of profit. ...The way in which the system overcomes [the problem of how to absorb excess capital] is through state monopoly capitalism, which organizes the absorption of the surplus" (ibid).

For our purposes, detailed exposition of the economic principles underlying each of these factors is unnecessary.¹² Most important is to grasp the fundamental point that autocentric accumulation as it actually exists forms the basis for: 1) the development of monopoly capitalism and imperialism; 2) the unceasing expansionism of capitalist imperialism; and 3) the homogenizing tendency inherent in the capitalist mode. Each of these tendencies can be seen, in their embryonic form, within the mercantilist system. Furthermore, taken together, these factors function as a means of perpetuating both autocentric accumulation itself and the capitalist system as a whole. It is therefore necessary to discuss these issues in more detail.

Amin argues that until approximately 1900 capitalism could still be understood as competitive, despite the fact that “relations with the periphery were frequently monopolistic” (Brewer 1990:187).¹³ He writes:

Between the Industrial Revolution and the complete conquest of the world (1880-1900), a century elapsed that was in the nature of a pause: the old forms (slave trade, plundering of the New World) gradually faded away; the new forms (the *économie de traite* and the exploitation of mineral wealth) took shape only slowly. We get the impression that Europe and the United States withdrew into themselves in this period, in order to accomplish the transition from the prehistoric forms of capitalism to its finished industrial form. During this period, products were exchanged at their...price of production; the rewards of labor at the center were very low, tending to be kept down to subsistence level; the terms of trade...evolved in the direction conforming to the rule of equal exchange. ...Imperialism...made its appearance when the possibilities of capitalist development on the old basis had been exhausted, through the completion of the first Industrial

¹² For this discussion see especially Chapters 3 and 4 in Amin’s *Unequal Development* (1976) and Amin 2011; 2010 [1978].

¹³ This tendency has its origins in the mercantilist period; recall pages 69-70.

Revolution in Europe and North America. A fresh geographical extension of capitalism's domain then became necessary. The periphery as we know it today was created by way of colonial conquest (Amin 1976:186-187; 1998:20-21; see also Lenin (1987 [1939]):203-204, 214).

Again, the role of autocentric accumulation here is central, for Amin argues,

This conquest brought different social formations again into mutual contact, but in new forms; those of central capitalism and those of peripheral capitalism in process of constitution. The mechanism of primitive accumulation for the benefit of the center reappeared in new form. The characteristic feature of primitive accumulation...is unequal exchange, that is, the exchange of products whose prices of production...are unequal. This new international specialization was to provide the basis for both the exchange of commodities...and the movement of capital, since exhaustion of the possibilities of the first Industrial Revolution coincided with the formation of monopolies, which made this export of capital possible. At every stage in the development of the world capitalist system the commercial and financial relations between the center and periphery thus serve the same twofold function: on the one hand, to facilitate, by extending the capitalist market at the expense of the precapitalist systems, the absorption of the surplus, and, on the other, to increase the average rate of profit (ibid:187-188).

Following Lenin, Amin sees this "imperialist break" as fundamental (1980:187; 1977:8) not only because at this stage monopoly (in the form of the transnational firm) becomes a central feature of the world system (1976:174-175, 189; 2003:8; Lenin 1987 [1939]:181-182) but also because here unequal development is apparent in the extreme: namely, the ever-increasing *polarization* characteristic of the imperialist world system (1998:45, 24, 63; see also Mao 1971 [1937]:102-103). Indeed, according to Amin, this "polarization on a world scale is the most violent permanent manifestation of the capital-labor

contradiction in the history of the expansion of capitalism...” (2003:25-26; 1989:75; 1980:6, 199).¹⁴

These two tendencies – toward monopoly and polarization – have been present since before capitalism became fully entrenched. Indeed, “...polarization is inherent in capitalism as it has developed historically and cannot be overcome within a capitalist framework” (Amin 1998:24, 127; 2003:57-59; 1989:75). This polarization, as we have seen, has its roots in the unequal development of the tributary phase and the development of the centre-periphery division in the mercantilist transition to capitalism resulted in this unequal development becoming increasingly extreme. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, monopolies were important in the transitionary period as a means both of centralizing money-wealth and of extracting surplus via long-distance trade. It is in the imperialist phase, however, that these tendencies reach their height. Indeed, Amin, like Lenin, asserts that at the moment “Cartels become one of the foundations of the whole of economic life” capitalism “has been transformed into imperialism” (Lenin 1987 [1939]:183, 180-190; Amin 1998:20-26). In other words, imperialism *is* monopoly capitalism. Monopoly

¹⁴ It is important to point out, once again, the influence of Mao’s *On Contradiction* (1971 [1937]:109-117 especially) here for, following Mao, Amin argues that one must keep in mind the distinction between principal and basic contradictions when analyzing the capitalist system. Amin argues, “...the contradiction between centres and peripheries is the principal contradiction in the actually existing world capitalist system. I say ‘the *principal* contradiction’, as the fundamental contradiction is the one between capital and labour, whose relationship defines the capitalist mode of production dominating the system as a whole. But every fundamental contradiction manifests itself only through principal contradictions; these are the concrete forms of its manifestation” (2003:25 [original emphasis]).

and polarization, the two fundamental components of capitalism as we now know it, reinforce and sustain one another.¹⁵

Amin argues that in the contemporary period, we can identify five monopolies as dominant. Furthermore, Amin asserts that there is a triad of countries in particular that control these monopolies: the United States, Germany, and Japan (see 2011; 2003); these countries constitute the “center of the center” of the imperialist world system.¹⁶ The monopolies over which the Triad maintains control are: 1) technologies, 2) financial systems, 3) worldwide access to natural resources, 4) media and information systems, and 5) weapons of mass destruction (2011:60, 62; 2004:23; 2003:13, 63-65; 1998:26). It is through the Triad’s control of these monopolies in order both to expand the capitalist market and, relatedly, to service autocentred accumulation, that the polarization of the world system is maintained and intensified (1998:127; 2003:62). Indeed, Amin argues,

These five monopolies together define the framework within which the global law of value operates. Far from being the expression of a ‘pure’ economic rationality detached from its social and political setting, the law of value is the condensed expression of all these monopolistic determinants, which restrict industrialization in the peripheries, devalue the productive labour incorporated in their products, and overstate the value supposedly added through activities corresponding to the new central monopolies. The monopolies therefore produce a new global hierarchy of income distribution, more unequal than ever, and reduce the industries of the

¹⁵ As we shall see, however, it is precisely this relationship – and the inter-imperialist rivalries it has historically entailed – that constitutes the crisis of capitalism, a crisis which becomes manifest particularly in the periphery of the world system.

¹⁶ It is important to note that the Triad, more properly speaking, is composed of the United States, Japan and the European Union (see, for example, 2003:7, 19, 80), however, Amin asserts that Germany has been – and continues to be – most representative of EU power/wealth.

peripheries to the status of subcontractors. This is the new basis of polarization that is destined to shape its future forms (2003:64).

Amin is clear that the Triad's control over these monopolies is "sustained by the political and military hegemonism of the United States" (ibid:65). This hegemonism has important consequences insofar as the prevailing ideology of the capitalist form is concerned, however, it also serves to keep inter-imperialist rivalries within the Triad in particular -- and the centre more generally -- in check, at least for the time being.

This polarization, along with the hegemony of the United States, is linked with the tendency toward homogenization that further characterizes the capitalist world system. One consequence of autocentred accumulation is the tendency for the capitalist mode to become exclusive, particularly in the centre (Amin 1980:7). Nonetheless, the homogenizing tendency extends beyond the centres – though it is strongest there – throughout the system as a whole. Indeed, abstractly speaking, "...if the process of capital accumulation could be indefinitely extended, it would lead to the imposition of capitalist relations of production on all the world's societies through the suppression of all other forms of productive relations and thus to the homogenization of the whole of the planet" (ibid:240). The fact that the centre-periphery contradiction is fundamental, however, means that this total homogenization cannot occur; this would require a completely different form of actually existing capitalism, one not reared on the division of the world as it currently stands. In other words, though the necessity of capitalist markets to continually expand forms the "material basis" for capitalism's homogenizing tendency – a tendency that, he argues, also envelopes "all aspects" of social life and

culture – it is *at the same time* “held in check by the effects of unequal accumulation”, i.e., by the very polarization inherent in the world capitalist imperialist system (ibid:30-32).¹⁷ In fact,

The...unfolding of the history of the capitalist conquest of the world showed that this conquest was not going to bring about a homogenization of the societies of the planet on the basis of the European model. On the contrary, this conquest progressively created a growing polarization at the heart of the system, crystallizing the capitalist world into fully developed centers and peripheries incapable of closing the ever widening gap, making this contradiction within “actually existing” capitalism – a contradiction insurmountable within the framework of the capitalist system – the major and most explosive contradiction of our time (1989:75, 122).

In other words, “In its polarizing worldwide expansion, capitalism has proposed a homogenization of the world that it cannot achieve” (ibid:77). Nevertheless, the fact that capitalism has this inherent tendency itself “has powerful ideological effects” (1980:3). Indeed, within the centre, where such homogenization does in fact occur, where all pre-capitalist modes are destroyed, where homogenization is in fact *accelerated* as a result of the dynamics of “imperialist development” (ibid:32), we see the emergence of “social-democratic ideological hegemony over the working class” (1977:8). This ideology is then put in service of the continued autocentric accumulation of the centre and is, at the same

¹⁷ It is worth taking note of the fact that in his discussion of homogenization, Amin explicitly references Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man* (1964). He writes, “In a totally homogenized world where capitalism would already have suppressed nations and national inequalities, the class struggle would finally acquire that purity dreamed of by certain people – unless in this science-fiction world it was too late, unless the regime of ‘one-dimensional man’ had nullified the laws discovered by historical materialism” (1980:199, 217). We return to this connection presently in our discussion of ideology in the capitalist mode as well as in Chapter 4.

time, exported to the periphery.¹⁸ It is crucial that we are able to acquire a more thorough understanding of the ideology of the capitalist mode, not only because it is central to our understanding of imperialism on a world scale but also because it is fundamental to the understanding of alienation in this system. Furthermore, it is, as we shall see in Chapter 4, a main site of continuity between the work of Amin and Marcuse. It is to explicit discussion of this ideology that we now turn.

As we saw above, the tributary mode is characterized by the dominance of ideology. This is manifest in the fact that politics occupies a superordinate role in societies of this type while economics is subordinated to political interests. According to Amin, with the transition to capitalism, this relationship becomes inverted; we are faced with a situation in which “politics becomes subordinate to economics” (1998:31; 2011:70, 159, 186; 1989:71-72). In other words, it is only in the capitalist context that the economic emerges as an “autonomous factor” (1998:51); the ideology of the capitalist formation is that of economic determinism (ibid:30; 1989:71-72; see also 2011, 2004, 1980). Nonetheless, it is important not to view the ideology of capitalism as completely discrete from that which preceded it. Indeed, Amin argues that the ideology of the capitalist mode is reliant upon rationality and universalism, both of which emerged with the metaphysics of the (complete) tributary formations, as we have seen. Despite this, however, “...universalism had remained only a potential before the development of

¹⁸ One of the key means by which this exportation occurs is through the spread of what Amin terms “homogenizing American mass culture” (1989:93).

European capitalism, because no society had succeeded in imposing itself and its values on a worldwide scale” (1989:72, 73, 103; 1980:x). Furthermore, the rationality invoked in the capitalist era is one that “attributes to the capitalist system...a transhistorical legitimacy, making it the ‘end of history’” (2004:15). The consequences of this become apparent in more detailed engagement with the ideological development and character of capitalist formations.

The ideology accompanying the capitalist mode of production has developed, broadly speaking, over the course of the following historical periods.¹⁹ The first phase, which Amin terms the reign of “monopolistic nationalist liberalism” characterized the period from 1880-1945 (1998:37). He argues that this particular form of liberalism served both to support “the predominant role of markets (oligopolistic markets, to be sure) in a self-regulating economy within the structure of appropriate public policies applied during this period, and...of bourgeois democratic political practices” (ibid). Furthermore,

Nationalism was a regulating fact within this liberal model able to legitimize the public policies underlying competition within the global system. Those policies hinged on local hegemonic coalitions (alliances with middle-class and aristocratic strata) that backed up the dominant power of capitalist monopolies and kept the industrial working class in political isolation. ...[T]hese alliances were generally rounded out and reinforced through colonial privileges. Electoral democracy, based on these alliances, allowed ongoing flexible adjustment of the terms for their maintenance. ...The state was needed for management of the hegemonic coalition by organizing and regulating markets appropriately (for example, by subsidizing agriculture) and for directing its international competitive strategy (through protective tariffs and monetary regulation). Its active intervention in this sense was

¹⁹ Amin also refers to these periods as “waves” (see, for example, 2011:51-77). Amin argues that a long transition to socialism would likewise also occur in waves; this is discussed further below.

considered perfectly legitimate, even necessary. ...During this period...freedom was supposed to need laws and a law-based state in order to flourish properly. Nevertheless, the notion of democracy remained limited: the rights of the individual were those guaranteeing formal juridical equality, freedom of expression, and, up to a certain point, freedom of association (ibid:37-38).

In the era of monopolistic nationalist liberalism, markets were believed to be self-regulating and were purported to “maintain a harmoniously working society” (ibid:38, 39; 2004:13-15). This particular manifestation of bourgeois thought enters its crisis with the First World War; the promises of societal harmony were unfulfilled (ibid) and this could be seen most clearly in the fact that political-economic competition devolved into out-and-out war. Nonetheless, this form of liberalism persisted for another thirty years, due in part, Amin argues, to the weakness and isolation of the working class at this time (1998:39).²⁰

With the advent of the Second World War, this changed, for this was a period “which upset the balance of social forces in favor of the working classes and oppressed peoples” (Amin 1998:39, 40), in part due to the defeat of fascism in Europe. The ideology of the period 1945-1980 was built partly upon the critique of liberalism, seen most clearly in the Keynesianism (or neo-Keynesianism) of the period. According to Amin, this ideology operated “within the framework of a controlled globalization”²¹

²⁰ For a more detailed analysis of this period, see especially Polanyi (1944), whom Amin asserts is the first to “understand the nature and bearing of the crystallization of this...thought” (1998:40).

²¹ Amin cites “the Marshall Plan, the expansion of multinational corporations, UNCTAD, GATT, and the organization of collective North-South discussions within the UN framework” as illustrations of this (1998:41). We could perhaps think of the World Bank and the IMF, both established at the end of World War II, as further examples.

(ibid:40, 41) and though it stemmed from the critique of liberalism, rather than leave liberal tenets behind, it instead “rearranged them incompletely” (ibid:41). Consequently, it was fundamentally reformist. Indeed,

Labor was still treated as a commodity, but the severity of its treatment was mitigated through the three principles of collective bargaining, social insurance, and wage increases proportional to productivity increases. Contrariwise, natural resources remained the object of systematic and aggravated wastage, which is the inescapable consequence of the absurd “discounting of the future” characteristic of “rational” short-run economic calculation...²² Money, on the other hand, was...subject to political control at both governmental and global levels. (The purpose of Bretton Woods was to maintain stable exchange rates). ...The essential political objectives operative during this period, and consequently, the methods employed for those purposes...held that solidarity – which was expressed in a remarkable stability of income distribution, in full employment, and in continual increases in social expenditures – needed to be maintained on the national level through policies of systematic state intervention... The basic aims of these welfare state practices were analogous to those of modernization and industrialization for the newly independent countries of the third world... We can thus characterize this single thought as dominant on a global scale, excluding only the zone of Sovietism. ...Thus, the single thought of the 1945-1980 phase was not merely an “economic theory” (that of Keynesianism and the macroeconomic management flowing from it) but was likewise the expression of a true corporate project which, though capitalist, was also “social” (ibid:41-42; 1976:70-72).

In other words, the focus on social and economic welfare, as well as on “controlled globalization” still operates in the service of capitalist interests, particularly the continued autocentric accumulation of the centres of the world system. The increasing role of multinational organizations serves to protect the interests of monopoly, though this aim

²² We return to this issue of short-term rationality as a particularly destructive characteristic of capitalist ideology below.

continues to be hidden behind “rhetoric about the virtue of competition” (ibid:44).

Nonetheless, though this phase lasted for approximately 35 years, it too fell into a crisis resultant from the inability to deliver on the promise of continual market growth; by 1990, this culminated in the “generalized collapse” of 1) the welfare state, 2) the project of modernization and industrialization for the Third World, and 3) the Soviet system (ibid:42-43; see also 2011).

Amin argues that the contemporary period is marked by an intensification of the reliance on so-called “pure economics” as a means of understanding the world. It is a time of “crisis management” borne of the attempt to manage the collapse of the former period through a return to the dogma of self-regulating markets, privatization, free-trade, international competition, and the like (1998:43, 46; 2003:16-17). For this reason, Amin describes it as a “globalized” or “social” neoliberalism” (ibid).²³ Yet, despite this rhetoric, in the current period American hegemonism is central and is maintained by a U.S. global strategy based on three main principles: 1) “the rapid substitution of NATO for the UN as the means of running the international order”; 2) “the alignment of Europe with Washington’s strategic objectives, through a return to the traditional principle prior to the creation of the UN...(that is, war as a means of solving political disputes)”; and 3) “a choice of military methods that strengthen American hegemony (risk-free bombing and use of European troops as possible auxiliaries on the ground)” (2003:81; see also

²³ Indeed, Amin also refers to this period as one characterized by “globalization gone wild” (see, for example, 2004:43; 1998:43).

2004:75-99). Indeed, underlying the current neoliberal global order is this American hegemony, which can be seen as the manifestation *par excellence* of the militarization of “liberal economic governance”;²⁴ this in turn facilitates “Triad hegemony over the world system” provided that the other Triad members fall into step with the United States (ibid:101, 112).²⁵ Furthermore, the turn toward a “globalized neoliberalism” both results from, and in turn perpetuates, the decreasing strength of the working and oppressed classes that characterized the preceding period. Indeed, the policies and practices dominant in the contemporary period are

...applied in a way that at times flagrantly contradicts the dogmas from which they stem. The vaunted globalization remains curtailed to the detriment of labor markets and, to an ever-increasing extent, by strengthened restrictions against immigration; rhetoric about the virtue of competition barely hides how in practice monopolies are systematically defended (as is visible in the dealings of the...World Trade Organization...); and insistence on discounting the future reduces to zero the significance of environmentalist discourse. Finally, belying their affirmation of internationalist principles, the Great Powers (conspicuously the United States) continually apply raw power in all domains, whether military...or economic. ...The new single thought and the policies following from it are directed at systematically dismantling the specific rights that had been achieved by the workers and lower classes. Given this, all its discourse about democracy is exposed as empty rhetoric, unrelated to reality” (1998:44-45; see also 2004:25; 2003:1, 99-100).

²⁴ For more on militarization and the tendency toward “permanent war” characterizing the current world system see Amin 2011:1-18, 72, 138, 155, 159, 185; this discussion will be relevant to the arguments presented in Chapter 4.

²⁵ It is important to note, however, that this American hegemony is never secure due to the fact that it is 1) “always under threat from the evolving relationship of forces among the partners in the world system” (Amin 2003:78) and 2) based on the “parasitic character of the U.S. economy and society – a parasitism that makes it highly vulnerable” (ibid:80; 2004:105).

I raise the above not in an attempt to provide a thorough or exhaustive discussion of the domestic and transnational circumstances prevalent in each of these periods but, rather, in order to present the *general* context in which to situate our understanding of the dominant ideological perspective of the capitalist epoch as a whole. Indeed, the periods that Amin identifies are not discrete; he argues that taken together they are a manifestation of an

...imperialist world view, in accord with the development of capitalism which, by its very nature, has always been uneven and polarizing on a world scale. During the monopolistic nationalist liberal phase...imperialism was (or rather imperialisms were) synonymous with conflict among imperialist powers... In contrast, the social and national postwar phase...was characterized on the one hand by the strategic convergence of national imperialisms under the discipline of a hegemonic United States, and on the other by a retreat of imperialism, which was forced to withdraw from the regions of “real socialism” (the U.S.S.R, Eastern Europe, China) and to bargain with national liberation movements over the terms under which it would maintain its position in its Asian, African, and Latin American peripheries. Now that “really existing socialism” and third world radical populism have met their ruin, imperialism is once again on the offensive. The “globalization” thesis proclaimed so arrogantly by the current ideology is nothing but a new way in which the inherently imperialist nature of the system asserts itself. In this sense, it can be said that “globalization” is a euphemism for that forbidden word, imperialism (1998:45-46; 2011).

Stated differently, these periods are all characterized by the same fundamental rationality, a rationality that is both economistic and shortsighted in nature and the imperialist project is itself reliant upon this rationality. As we have seen, this has an effect on policy and practice, both military and economic. But the consequences of this can be seen on the “purely” superstructural level as well, in two apparently contradictory trends: 1) the aforementioned reliance on “pure economics” – and one of its manifestations, positivism

– as the means by which to understand the world and 2) the increasing popularity of post-modernism. Indeed, the latter, Amin argues, has emerged as the dominant form of liberal discourse today. In order to engage with these issues in more detail, however, it is first necessary to discuss briefly Amin’s arguments concerning Enlightenment thought.

As we will see, like Marcuse, Amin argues that in order to understand the emergence of capitalist ideology, instrumental rationality, and the particular character of alienation in this period, we must look specifically at the changes brought about by the Enlightenment (1989:80).²⁶ These changes did not develop in a vacuum, however.

Rather,

...society, transformed by the nascent capitalist relationships of production, was forced to call the tributary ideological construct, the construct of medieval scholasticism, into question. It was therefore real social change that brought about transformation in the field of ideas... It took two or three centuries before the new dominant ideology crystallized, the period of transition from mercantilism to fully developed capitalism, extending from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. The decisive step is the development of English political economy, at the moment when the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution brought about the triumph of bourgeois power and the beginnings of the generalization of wage labor. The center of gravity shifts from metaphysics to economics, and economism becomes the content of the dominant ideology (ibid:87).

According to Amin, the thought emerging from these conditions “...is founded on a tradition of mechanistic materialism that posits chains of causal determinations. Principal among these is that science and technology determine by their autonomous progress the

²⁶ Marcuse’s arguments on this issue are discussed in detail in Chapter 3 while the connection between Amin and Marcuse on this subject is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

advance of all spheres of life. Class struggle is removed from history and replaced by a mechanistic determination that imposes itself as an external force, a law of nature” (ibid:80). In other words, with the emergence of this philosophy, the metaphysics that dominated tributary formations gives way to the preoccupation with the pursuit of scientific knowledge through empirical experimentation and the belief that the whole of social and political life can be explained by the discovery of the “laws” governing them.²⁷ Indeed, “...entire areas of social life are henceforth conceivable independently of one another. The need to satisfy metaphysical yearnings is left to individual conscience” (ibid:82). Rather than seeing the prevailing order as made up of, and resultant from, complex interrelationships between, for example, history, the struggle of oppressed classes, the state, and so on, this thought treats each – insofar as it recognizes them at all – as an autonomous factor, an independent object of analysis. Even the relation between various fields of human knowledge is destroyed by the turn away from a metaphysical concern with cosmogony toward positivistic science; as a result, so-called “natural science” henceforth exists independently from “social science” and the disciplines they contain subsist as autonomous, as partial systems (2004:54, 72). Furthermore, at a more basic level, Enlightenment thought affirms “a separation – in fact, opposition – between humankind and nature” and “opens the way to treating nature as a thing, even to

²⁷ Here the influence of Lukács’ arguments concerning reification (recall Chapter 1) is especially evident.

destroying it, thereby threatening the very survival of humanity” (ibid:81; 2003:64).²⁸

According to Amin, all of this is indicative of the “generalization of market relationships” which “penetrate all aspects of social life and subject them to their logic” (1989:81; 1997:136). Stated differently, while on the one hand each aspect of society acquires autonomy, they are at the same time held together by an overarching, chiefly ideological, project: the ostensible “understanding” and therefore management of the new capitalist order (1989:82, 86).²⁹

In the contemporary context, the outcome of this is a situation in which the rhetoric and practices employed in order to apprehend the dominant order in fact serve capitalist ideology by *obscuring* the understanding of the operation and character of actually-existing capitalism, thus perpetuating it. For example, appeals to the importance of “deregulation” in fact hide “...a reality that dare not speak its name: one-sided regulation of markets by capital” (Amin 2003:16), specifically and especially through the strengthening and spread of monopoly. This concept, like others propagated by neo-liberal discourse (e.g., competition, free trade, privatization) in fact has no basis in reality (2004:13). Economism, which asserts the primacy of so-called “pure economics” as *the* means by which to comprehend the prevailing system, is problematic due to the fact that

²⁸ Indeed, in Amin’s most recent writings (for example, 2011:33-35), he argues that this threat has become a real possibility and is only heightened by the short-term rationality that prevails in contemporary oligopolistic capitalism.

²⁹ As is perhaps apparent, Amin’s arguments here are intimately related to his conceptualization of alienation, which he argues takes a different form in capitalist, as opposed to tributary, formations. This is discussed in more detail below.

rather than enhance our comprehension of the actually-existing capitalist imperialist order it instead offers only “the theory of an imaginary world” (ibid:15, 16; 1998:30-31); it takes the individual, specifically constructed as *Homo oeconomicus*, not only as its starting point but as its basis (1998:133-134) and from this foundation, claims to discover – through the use of complex formulas and models, which it terms “scientific” and hence “objective, neutral and unavoidable” (2004:15) – the rational “laws” governing individual behaviour and by extension the social order as a whole. Furthermore, as mentioned above, pure economics is borne out of and in turn perpetuates a rationality that, in its characteristic shortsightedness, not only facilitates the belief in capitalism as the “end of history” but in fact discounts historical memory entirely. As Amin argues,

...pure economics is conceived as totally ahistorical, blind to every past or present dimension of social reality, blind to all possibilities of future evolution. It recognizes only “the individual” ... Its preferred fable is of Crusoe on his island – the timeless, placeless individual human. It is separated from the scientific spirit by a full 180 degrees. ...[B]ourgeois economics...and, a fortiori, its distillation “pure economics”...is exclusively based on a single preoccupation, a preoccupation with showing that “the market” rules with the force of natural law, producing not merely a “general equilibrium” but the best of all possible equilibria, guaranteeing full employment in freedom, the “social optimum”. And this preoccupation is nothing but the expression of a fundamental ideological need, the need to legitimize capitalism by making it synonymous with rationality – which, in conformity with bourgeois ideology, is seen as nothing more than the use of technically rational means for the individual pursuit of mercantile profit. ...The discourse of pure economics has no real aim other than to legitimize the unrestricted predations of capital (1998:143, 135-136; 1989:76-77; 1980:23; 1977:79).³⁰

³⁰ Amin emphasizes this point in *The Liberal Virus* (2004). Here, taking the United States as emblematic of this way of orienting to the world, he argues, “...one of the major weaknesses of American thought,

Enlightenment thought, in its turn away from metaphysics, represents the secularization of the world (1989:81-82; 1998:95; 1980:34-35). Yet, in its attempt to liquidate myth it has instead, over time, replaced the old myths with that of pure economics. Amin writes, "...there is no realism at all about pure economics, which abstracts from reality (classes, states, the global system) so that its discourse, emptied of reality, is left a mythical fable" (1998:144).³¹ This fable, however, is accompanied and enhanced by another story, one that further serves as an "ideological accessory to liberalism" (2004:19): postmodernism.

For Amin, the emergence of postmodernism as the dominant means of orienting toward and theorizing the social and political world does not contain transformative or emancipatory potential, nor is it benign. This approach is dangerous precisely because it serves to bolster liberalism more generally, regardless of any claims to the contrary. But how does it do this? Stated simply, as liberalism's dominant ideological manifestation, it exacerbates a culturalist approach to history; the story that it tells is one of histories (individual, cultural, etc.) that are fundamentally unrelated to one another. Indeed, in this view, human history appears

resulting from its history and its ideology, is that it has no long-term vision. This thought is embedded in the immediate about which it collects an alarmingly large quantity of data... The future, in these conditions, is always conceived as the simple projection of the immediate. ...This is why American imperialism will be infinitely more barbaric than were earlier forms of European imperialism" (p. 80).

³¹ Indeed, Amin argues that so-called pure economics is the "witchcraft of the contemporary world" (2011:156). His analysis of Enlightenment in general, and "pure economics" in particular, has much in common with both Marcuse's thought as well as that of Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (2002 [1944]). This connection is explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

as if it were composed of a succession of particular trajectories and evolutions, without any connections with each other, except by chance. Each of these successions can only be explained by particular causalities and sequences of events. This method reinforces the tendency towards “culturalisms”, that is, the idea that each people is identified by the specifics of its culture, which are mostly “transhistoric”, in the sense that they persist in spite of change (Amin, 2011:40).

Furthermore, according to postmodernist discourse, “nations and classes have already left the scene and ceded political space to the individual, who is now the active subject of social transformation” (ibid:14; 2004:57-58; 1998:33-35). While it is true that postmodern analysis has succeeded in providing some important insights into the nature of, for example, oppression and power, for Amin, the approach as a whole is irredeemable insofar as it actually

...methodically lays out, without concern for overall coherence, one argument after another encouraging suspicion towards the concepts of progress and universalism. But far from deepening the serious critique of these expressions of Enlightenment culture and bourgeois history, far from analyzing their actual contradictions...this discourse is satisfied with substituting the impoverished propositions of liberal American ideology for a true critique...[It] abstain[s] from reflecting on the nature of the system, and particularly from calling into question its choices of the moment. The praise for inherited diversities proposed in place of the necessary effort to transcend the limits of bourgeois universalism thus functions in perfect accord with the requirements of contemporary imperialism’s project of globalization, a project that can produce only an organized system of apartheid on a world scale, sustained as it is by reactionary “communitarian” ideologies in the North American tradition (2004:20; 2011:192).

Postmodern discourse is unable to account for the realities of the imperialist world system. It offers little insight into the way in which contemporary capitalism is characterized by globalized “accumulation through dispossession” (i.e., by the

autocentred accumulation of the centres at the expense of the vast majority of the world's population) (Amin 2011:19, 112; 2004; 1980:225-230). In this sense, the analysis of capitalist social, political, and economic relations is "outside of history" (2004:23) and is blind to the reality of uneven, polarizing imperialist expansion. Furthermore, the new "Empire" that much postmodern analysis takes as its focus (or at the very least takes for granted) is "defined naively as a 'network of powers' whose centre is everywhere and nowhere, which thus dilutes the importance of the national state...[which is] simply evaded by the gratuitous affirmation that the state has almost ceased to exist" (ibid:25). The reality, however, is that the Triad states do in fact impose "collective domination over the whole of the planet's peripheries by means of institutions put into place and under its management for that purpose" (ibid). As a consequence, rather than illuminating the current conjuncture, postmodernism obscures it, and in much the same way as economism it functions to reinforce a fundamentally alienated orientation to the world.³²

The culturalist tendency that postmodernism intentionally or unintentionally promotes has serious consequences for the actual struggles on the ground in both the periphery of the world system and the centre. In the peripheries, the culturalist turn often becomes manifest in religious or ethnic fundamentalisms (Amin 2004:21; 2011:78-99; 1980:177-178). In the centres, demonstrations for change often centre on identity issues

³² Because of this, Amin also refers to postmodernism as a "negative utopia", arguing that it "expresses capitulation to the demands of capitalist political economy in its current phase, in the hope – the utopian hope – of 'humanely' managing the system. This position is untenable. ...What the postmodernists refuse to see is that modernity can progress further only by going beyond capitalism" (1998:101-103; 1997:137; 2003:151).

or, particularly after the financial crisis of 2008, “anti-corporatism”. Neither perspective is able to actually get at the *root cause* of oppression and exploitation. Further, with the “abandonment of Marxism” and the rise of postmodern discourse “...after the waning of the first wave of struggles for the emancipation of workers and of peoples in the 20th century” we saw not “an increased consciousness of the need of the dominated and exploited for internationalism, but a retreat to positions of charity and humanitarianism” (2011:130). But the “catching up” of the dominated peripheries through international “aid” and “development” schemes is an impossibility; it is abrogated by the very nature of the system itself, a system that is, again, inherently polarizing and uneven on a world scale and operates according to a logic that “...is no longer able to ensure the simple survival of humanity” (2011:106).³³

For Amin the current ideological orientation has consequences not just for foreign policy (military, economic, and “humanitarian”), but for domestic civil society as well.

³³ Here Amin is referring both to climate change and general environmental destruction as well as to the expansionist requirements of the system. The latter cannot “resolve the peasant question: the only prospects it can offer are a planet full of slums and billions of ‘too many’ human beings” (2011:105-106; see also 2003:92-100). The capitalist modernization of agriculture in the Third World is impossible. As Amin writes, “...if some 50 million more modern farms were given access to the large areas of land which would be necessary (taking it from the peasant economy and of course choosing the best soils) and if they had access to the capital markets, enabling them to equip themselves, they could produce the essential of what the creditworthy urban consumers still currently obtain from peasant agriculture. But what would happen to the billions of non-competitive peasant producers? They would be inexorably eliminated in a short period of time, a few decades. What would happen to these billions of human beings, most of them already the poorest of the poor, but who feed themselves, for better and for worse (and for a third of them, it is for the worse)? Within 50 years, no industrial development, more or less competitive, even in a far-fetched hypothesis of a continual yearly growth of 7 percent for three-quarters of humanity, could absorb even a third of this labor reserve” (ibid: 105). In other words, “Capitalism has reached the stage where the pursuit of profit requires ‘enclosure’ policies at the world level, like the enclosures that took place in England in the first stage of its (modern) development. Now, however, the destruction of the peasant reserves of cheap labour at the world level will result in nothing less than the genocide of half of humanity” (ibid:124).

According to the dominant ideological discourse, the state is seen as less significant than the more abstract “network of powers” and as an outmoded enemy of freedom (2011:134), particularly insofar as it is framed as simply beholden to, for example, “big business”. Amin argues that the consequence of this is a focus on corporate interest as the locus of power and through its critique of this state of affairs, the ideology in fact “legitimize[s] the ‘jungle of business’, as is illustrated by the ongoing financial crisis” (ibid). Again, rather than illuminating the social, political, and economic relations that define the capitalist imperialist reality, they remain opaque and civil society, too, becomes

...the collection of neighbourhood assemblies, of communities (the concept cannot be separated from the communitarian ideology), of local interests (school, hospital, green spaces) which are themselves inseparable from ideologies that are split up, separated from one another (gender understood in its narrow sense, respect for nature, which is also made into an object that is separable from the others). Even if the defence of the demands of these assemblies that constitute the so-called civil society is often legitimate...in these conditions, this civil society does not offer an adequate framework for overall alternative projects, by definition consistent and political to take form. ...All together, civil society, good governance, social justice and the war on poverty constitute a perfectly functional ideology; what is essential – the real power of the capitalist oligarchy – is eliminated from the debate (ibid:134-135).

Importantly, the organizations that comprise contemporary civil society (neighborhood assemblies, social justice groups, non-governmental organizations), while still important and necessary at least in the immediate, are insufficient insofar as they miss the real (i.e., fundamental) target, which has been and remains the exploitation of labour by capital, both domestically and on a global scale. These organizations are “interclass organizations

by nature, able to mobilize the middle classes, but they are much less successful with the popular classes [i.e., working/under classes]” (ibid:134).

The inability of central civil society to address more than the symptoms of capitalist and imperialist exploitation is, again, the direct result of the economic alienation that characterizes the system as a whole. For Amin, like Marcuse, the understanding of capitalism cannot be reduced to the understanding of its economic dimension nor to its specific productive relations. Rather, “[i]ts ideological dimensions – the uniqueness of economic alienation and, with it, the affirmation of economic activity as both autonomous and dominant over other social determinants...stand as integral elements in the concept of a capitalistic mode of production” (1998:58-59, 46; 2003:1, 22). Further, no emancipatory transformation of society is possible unless this form of alienation is overcome. It is therefore crucial that we understand just what Amin means when he refers to economic alienation in his writings.³⁴ This form of alienation is, he argues, unique to capitalism and did not exist in pre-capitalist social formations. Indeed, though Amin’s conceptualization of economic alienation is for the most part the same as that of Marx (and of Marcuse as well, as we shall see), his particular contribution comes from his emphasis on the world capitalist system and its historical development.

³⁴ The content and consequences of this form of alienation have already been discussed in the preceding analysis of the ideology dominant in both the tributary and capitalist modes, however, the attempt here is to provide a concise rearticulation of what characterizes this concept so that we can be sure that its overall meaning is clear.

Amin argues that in general there are two levels of alienation: one that is the outcome of the “permanence of the humanity-nature relation” (1980:ix; 2011:182), which Amin terms “anthropological alienation” and another which Amin describes as “social alienation” (ibid). In the former case, alienation results from the fact that the relation between human beings and nature “transcends social modes, defines human nature in its permanent dimension but does not have a direct role in the evolution of social history” (ibid). It is an alienation that stems from our experience of ourselves as separate from the natural world and is present simply by virtue of our being human; it is therefore “supra-historical” (ibid). For this reason, this form of alienation is of little concern to Amin’s analysis; his focus remains the social alienation that characterizes the capitalist imperialist system.

For Amin, though the “economic instance is the determining one in the last analysis, if we accept the fact that material life conditions all other aspects of social life” it is “[n]evertheless...important to distinguish between this determination *in the last analysis* and the question of whether the economic or the politico-ideological instance is the dominant one in a given case” (1976:24-25 [original emphasis]). As we saw in our earlier discussion, in the tributary mode the political is superordinate to the economic and the ideology is constructed along these lines. Furthermore, the economic relationships in the precapitalist modes are, for the most, part transparent. It is only logical then that the social alienation in operation in precapitalist, tributary formations is not the same as that of capitalism. Indeed, its “characteristics derive, on the one hand from the transparency of

the economic relations of exploitations and, on the other hand, from the limited degree of mastery over nature at the corresponding levels of development of the productive forces.” (1980:ix; 1976:70). Therefore, “[t]he producers can...agree to levy from themselves this surplus that they produce, and know that they produce, only if they are ‘alienated,’ and believe such a levy to be necessary for the survival of the social and ‘natural’ order. The politico-ideological instance thus necessarily assumes religious form and dominates social life” (1976:25; 1989:5, 22). It is for this reason that Amin terms the alienation of the tributary form “religious” or “metaphysical” alienation (2011:180, 182; 1998:54-55; 1980:ix; 1977:76-77, 84; 1976:70-71).³⁵

In the capitalist mode, as we have seen, this relationship is inverted and the political becomes subordinated to the economic. Indeed, Amin argues that capitalism is defined by this inversion (2011:70, 74, 186; 2004:46-47, 54, 72; 2003:1, 59, 149; 1998:13-14, 31; 1989:71-72; 1976:69) so that under this system wealth is the source of power whereas in the tributary formations, power was the source of wealth (2011:186-187; 1998:14). He writes, “...the economic base does not become dominant, or directly dominant, except under capitalism. In the previous systems, it was the political power that constituted the directly dominant authority. ...The dominant political power needed an ideology that suited its reproduction – the state religion; that of capital was economism – commodity alienation” (ibid). Again, Amin’s understanding of economic alienation

³⁵ For more on the ideological content and development of this form of alienation, see the discussion of the tributary form, above.

closely follows that of Marx, particularly as formulated in *Capital*.³⁶ It is worth quoting the following passage at some length, for it offers a relatively concise encapsulation of his position:

Economistic alienation is necessary to the functioning of the system. ...Social life is...compartmentalized, economic activity being distinct from other activities. But at the same time, the unity of this social life is reestablished by the dominance of its economic sector; all aspects of life are subject to the fundamental requirement that labor power be reproduced as a commodity. This is the condition of the dominance of exchange-value of commodities over the use of things. Commodities and noncommodities [sic] appear as two distinct categories. But the noncommodity exists only through its opposite, the commodity, and the former is dominated by the latter. Social time is split into non-working time and working time. But here too the former exists only to serve the latter. It is not leisure time, as it is called in the false consciousness of alienation, but recuperation time. It is functional recuperation that is socially organized and not left up to the individual, despite certain appearances. Here again the image reverses the reality: the closed and secret world of the free individual belongs to the heaven of ideas; here on earth, in the realm of realities, it is invaded by the demands of society. ...At the same time, social life loses the notion of the durability of time. Exchange-value, command by profit, is embodied only in objects that are useful in the most functional sense of the term. The replacement of things is not only, or even chiefly, the result of real progress in the productive forces; it is also, and above all, necessary to the system of extracting surplus value. It is therefore, in the true sense of the word, waste. This waste has a profound effect on the relationship between people and things. Things come to have only one dimension: the dimension of immediate use. Individuals, too, no longer fearing nature, no longer believe in eternity. They have gotten rid of eternity, but only to deliver themselves up to the demands of the short term (1977:78-79; 1976:25-26, 72; see also 1980:217-218).³⁷

³⁶ Recall Chapter 1.

³⁷ It is worth bearing this passage in mind as we engage with Marcuse in the following chapter, for on this point the two thinkers' positions overlap. Furthermore, like Marcuse, Amin asserts that this economic alienation results in "the internalized totalitarianism of advanced Western society" (1980:217), which "...empties democracy of its emancipatory potential. When democracy exists at all under these conditions – which means, in practice, in the centres of the system, the only areas to benefit from the development of the

We have already discussed the particular ways in which this form of alienation becomes manifest in capitalist ideology: economism and its expression in liberalism and postmodernism together serve to obscure the real source of surplus (1980:ix; 1977:78; 1976:25) – and therefore of exploitation – in the capitalist mode, hiding instead behind the rhetoric of the autonomous and self-regulating market, various culturalisms, and the like. Under this system, “...the hell of reality is compensated for by the heaven of ideas” (1977:78) and these ideas are truly heavenly insofar as they do not have grounding in the concrete, historical, and material conditions.

Amin’s conceptualization of alienation, however, goes beyond Marx insofar as he situates it within a global context that takes its imperialistic character into account. In doing so, Amin is further able to assert that a “pyramid of alienations” (2011:189) operates within the world system, due to the fact that as we have seen in our previous discussion, multiple modes of production can and do exist concurrently: though the dominant mode of production today is capitalist, tributary modes can also still be found, particularly in the periphery. Therefore, while the centres are dominated by economic alienation, in the peripheries there is a conflict between the economic alienation that results from the capitalist nature of the system as a whole and the religious alienation that still persists as a result of its retention of tributary features. In other words, “the

productive forces – it suffers degradation and loss of meaning. Genuine politics, expressing the capacity of the inventive imagination, is replaced by the hollow consensus of low-intensity democracy, a media spectacle constructed and manipulated by the capital dominant within the economic system” (2003:149). In fact, Amin raises Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man* (1964) in connection with these discussions; we return to this in Chapter 4.

development of capitalism in the periphery remains the development of a dependent and incomplete capitalism” (1980:188). It is for this reason that Amin argues that the emancipatory transformation of the world (i.e., the “long transition” to socialism) is more likely to begin in the periphery of the world system (2011; 1980:188, 200-203, 244, 253, 256; 1977:14, 83; 1976:360, 383). Indeed, this is the logical conclusion of the analysis of the historical dynamics and tendencies of the world system Amin has developed thus far: as we recall, capitalism as we now know it developed first in Europe as a result of the fact that it was an incomplete (i.e., underdeveloped) tributary formation. So too Amin argues that the transition to socialism is most likely to occur in the incomplete capitalist formations, and for similar reasons. Here, unlike in the centres, the homogenizing tendency of capitalism has not won out and it is the very underdevelopment of the peripheral societies that makes the contradictions of capitalism (at least potentially) more visible (1977:80, 83). As Amin argues, “It is while capitalism is still young that it shows its true face. Later it may be too late: people have forgotten the very existence of use-values, they do not ask themselves any more questions about the meaning of alienated work, they are conditioned, they have become one-dimensional” (ibid).³⁸

Furthermore, though it is still the case that the fundamental contradiction of capitalism remains that between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, unlike in Marx’s

³⁸ For more on the development and character of this one-dimensionality, see Chapter 3.

time, “the main nucleus” of the latter is no longer in the centre (Amin 1976:360; 2011: 191) due to the fact that

...capitalism has become a world system. The contradiction is not between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat of each country considered in isolation, but between the world bourgeoisie and the world proletariat. But this world bourgeoisie and this world proletariat do not fit into the framework of the capitalist mode of production – they belong to a system of capitalist formations, central and peripheral. ...The main increasing contradiction of the system is expressed in the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. There is only one way to combat this on the world scale: raise the level of the rate of surplus value. The nature of the formations at the periphery makes it possible to raise this rate to a much higher degree there than at the center. Consequently the proletariat at the periphery is being more severely exploited than the proletariat at the center (ibid:360, 196-197; see also 1998:77).

Therefore, in the contemporary context the bourgeoisie and the proletariat must be further subdivided into 1) the imperialist bourgeoisie, “which dominates the system as a whole and concentrates to its own advantage a substantial proportion of the surplus labor generated on the world scale”; 2) the central proletariat, “which enjoys increases in real wages...parallel to increases in the productivity of labor, and, on the whole, accepts the hegemony of social democracy (these two phenomena are interlinked, resulting from the historically completed structure of capitalism with self-centered accumulation, and are bound up with imperialism)”; 3) the peripheral bourgeoisie, which is dependent on that of the centre and “whose place is defined by the international division of labor and whose anti-imperialist activity modifies this division”; and 4) the peripheral proletariat, “subjected to super-exploitation by virtue of the incomplete character of the capitalist structure, its historical subordination...and the disconnection derived from this between

the price of its labor-power and the productivity of its labor – and which, consequently, is the spearhead of the revolutionary forces on a world scale” (2010 [1978]:92). For Amin, this peripheral proletariat includes, or potentially includes, the peasant population, who is also super-exploited not just by capital but also by the remaining precapitalist forms (ibid; 1976:361; 2011:120).

We are therefore faced with a situation in which the working class within the centre of capitalism is integrated into the imperialist system in such a way so as to *benefit* from autocentred accumulation and the super-profits and access to natural resources that this entails; these benefits are all derived from the super-exploitation of the proletariat of the periphery.³⁹ This super-exploitation is further manifested in the “social imperialism” that characterizes the centre of the world system. By this Amin means that the many strides forward that the working class has been able to make in its national contexts (for example, unionization and the implementation of the welfare state, itself a result of a compromise between capital and labour after World War II) have only been possible as a result of imperialist rent (2011:168, 163). Stated differently, it is the privileged position that the central proletariat occupies in the world system that makes possible these advances (ibid:91), advances which are impossible in the peripheries due to the polarization inherent in the capitalist system, a polarization that enables the continued

³⁹ Amin terms this dynamic “imperialist rent” (see, for example, 2010 [1978]:11, 13, 110-111; 2011:1-3, 35, 163) and argues that this is inseparable from the monopolies the centre also enjoys over technology, communications, and the military (2010 [1978]:110). In this argument Amin is indebted to Lenin and his theorization of the labour aristocracy (see, for example, Lenin 1987 [1939]; 1964 [1916]).

autocentred accumulation of the centres. The assimilation of the working class is then further exacerbated by the hegemonic economic alienation to which they are subjected. Taken together, the central proletariat, again, “no longer appears to be the living contradiction to the established society”, to borrow a line from Marcuse (1964:32; see also Amin 1976:378-379).⁴⁰

Given all of this, Amin argues we must look to the periphery as the main locus of the potential for revolutionary change. Though Amin is somewhat ambivalent about whether this change will take place or whether capitalism will instead continue to develop into something increasingly barbaric and destructive, not only of human lives but of the planet (2011; 1977), he does provide concrete indications of what is required.⁴¹ Most important, he argues, is for the periphery to “delink” from the centre due to the fact that “[e]xtrication from capitalist/imperialist globalization and extrication from capitalism cannot be dissociated” (2011:72). In other words, the periphery must become autocentred (2003:160; 2011:37, 58). Amin writes:

The strategy of a long transition to world socialism...implies delinking the system of criteria of economic rationality from the system of criteria derived from submission to the globalized law of value. ...[This involves] the construction of a national-popular society and the associated construction of a self-reliant national economy. Every aspect of this is contradictory: it combines criteria, institutions and procedures of a capitalist nature with social aspirations and reforms that conflict with the logic of world capitalism; it combines a certain openness to the outside (as controlled as

⁴⁰ We return to discussion of the integration of the working class in Chapters 3 and 4.

⁴¹ Amin shares this ambivalence with Marcuse, however, it can be argued that he is more optimistic than the latter as a result of his understanding of the world system. This understanding is something that Marcuse, and the Frankfurt school more generally, lacks. We return to this connection between the two thinkers in Chapter 4.

possible) with demands for progressive social changes that conflict with the dominant capitalist interests. The ruling classes, by their historical nature, fit their visions and aspirations into the perspective of actually existing capitalism, and willy-nilly keep their strategies within the constraints of the global expansion of capitalism. This is why they cannot really imagine delinking. For the popular classes, however, delinking becomes a necessity as soon as they try to use political power to transform their conditions and to free themselves from the inhuman consequences of the polarizing global expansion of capitalism (2003:159-160).

Delinking requires that peripheral societies are able to have national control over their own labour power and its reproduction, surplus, monetary and financial markets, natural resources, and technologies (ibid:160-161; 2011:36). It also means a development strategy that does not aim at “catching up” to the centre but rather “a national and popular alternative that associates the democratization of society with social progress, that is, with a perspective of development that integrates – and does not exclude – the popular classes, [and] requires a political strategy of rural development based on the guarantee of access to land for all peasants” (2011:37, 117-125). Clearly, and for reasons discussed above, increased or better humanitarian aid from the centre will not do the job. What is required is a new wave of national liberation movements, which are by their nature anti-imperialist (2011:162; 1980:252-253; 1976:382-383) and the strategies for delinking from the imperialist system that these movements develop and employ must come from the peripheries themselves as a result of their specific historical and material circumstances (2011:58).

In the more immediate term, the move toward delinking further requires that the nations of the periphery form alliances with each other with the aim of developing these

strategies and against their continued domination by the centre. Such a project should begin, Amin argues, with an emphasis on food sovereignty:

At the national and regional levels...regulations, specific and adapted to local conditions, must protect national production, thus ensuring the indispensable food sovereignty of nations – in other words, the regulations must delink the internal prices from those of the so-called world market. A gradual increase in the productivity of peasant agriculture, which will doubtless be slow but continuous, would make it possible to control the exodus of rural populations to the towns. At the level of what is called the world market, the desirable regulations can probably be applied through inter-regional agreements that meet the requirements of a development that integrates them rather than excludes them (2011:106, 124, 141).

There is no alternative to the fight for food sovereignty according to Amin and the current emphasis on food security only serves to perpetuate the domination of the peripheries (ibid:107-108) by, ironically, keeping these nations food insecure insofar as it requires that they “rely on international trade to cover the deficit – however large – in their food requirements” (ibid:107). In addition to this, structural adjustment and other foreign policies dictate what food can be produced, under what conditions, and for whom, which further exacerbates the problem (ibid). The move toward food sovereignty requires significant and wide-reaching land tenure (i.e., agrarian) reforms in the peripheries. This means “putting in place a land tenure system that is not based on private ownership (at least not dominated by it)” and reforming the state in such a way so as to “actively involve it in setting up a management system for access to land that is modernised,

efficient (economically) and democratic (to avoid, or at least to reduce, inequalities)”
(ibid:120).⁴²

For Amin, human emancipation, and the “de-alienation” that this requires, is only possible if we are able to overcome capitalism, though in his view this project requires a long view and will not be resolved in the immediate. This why he places such an emphasis on alliance-building in the Third World, as well as on reforming state policies to begin the long process of delinking. In the centres of capitalism, it remains important to fight for progress in the national context, however, this fight cannot remain oriented to the national context only. Social movements must acquire a truly internationalist perspective; they must be solidarity movements in a real sense. In other words, these movements must work to fully understand the imperialist nature of the world system and the benefits they themselves enjoy as a result of imperialist rent; they must therefore be fundamentally anti-imperialist in orientation. There is no alternative to this fight, except a capitalist and imperialist reality that grows increasingly barbaric and genocidal.

The analyses of alienation undertaken by Amin and Marcuse have much in common, though they arrive at this common understanding along different paths. While Amin, as we have seen, situates his discussion of alienation in the context of the development and character of the imperialist world system, Marcuse’s focus is on alienation as it exists specifically in the advanced capitalist centres, where, he argues,

⁴² It is unfortunately beyond the scope of this project to engage with these reforms in more detail. For more on this issue see especially Amin 2011.

“the reality...constitutes a more progressive stage of alienation” (1964:11) and we have reached a point where “the alienation of labor is almost complete” (1955:102). Our engagement with Amin’s work ended with discussion of the ideological perspective dominant in the capitalist epoch, the very point at which our discussion of Marcuse must start. As Amin himself asserts, the analysis of the “ideological absolutism” of the centres of advanced capitalism (specifically as manifested in its one-dimensionality) began with the work of the Frankfurt School (1980:217) and with that of Marcuse and Adorno in particular. By engaging with Marcuse’s work in detail, we are able to further the understanding of economic alienation we have acquired thus far, and this will shed further light on the challenges posed by the imperialist nature of the world system for those committed to an emancipatory project of social change.

Chapter 3: Herbert Marcuse¹

Like Amin, and following Lukács and Marx, Marcuse argues that the concept of alienation is essential for understanding the prevailing order. Marcuse has little concern with engaging in the transition debate or discussing the importance of long-distance trade. Instead, Marcuse is concerned with the consequences of the transformation of reason (and the concomitant progress of alienation) for both the nature of advanced capitalist society as well as the experience of individuals existing within such societies. This chapter begins with a discussion of the emergence of what Marcuse terms “technological rationality” and its relationship to alienation.

Throughout his work, though especially in *One Dimensional Man* (1964), “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology” (1998 [1941]), and *Reason and Revolution* (1960), Marcuse argues that in the course of the development of the prevailing social order a “new” form of rationality has emerged. This rationality can be distinguished from “traditional”, “pre-technological” rationality in several ways; most importantly, it is characterized by the transformation of negative, two-dimensional into positive, one-dimensional thought.² The reason that had informed the Western tradition was, for

¹ Elements of the following chapter were first published in Hornstein, Sarah, “On Totalitarianism: The Continuing Relevance of Herbert Marcuse” Pp. 87-99 in *1968 in Retrospect: History, Theory, Alterity*, edited by G.K. Bhambra and I. Demir, 2009, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, reproduced here with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

² It is important to understand, however, that these modes of thought “...developed within the historical continuum of domination to which they pay tribute” (Marcuse, 1964:168; see also pp. 123, 128, 138). In other words, Marcuse argues that thought and social history cannot be separated; the two must be

Marcuse, characterized by its fundamentally dialectical nature. Its logic was “the mode of thought appropriate for comprehending the real as rational” (1964:123) and its primary concern was the discovery of truth (ibid:125). Crucially, however, the delineation of the true versus the false reflected “the experience of a world antagonistic in itself” (ibid) due to the fact that philosophy, and thinking more generally, was traditionally concerned with the difference between “appearance and reality” (ibid). Things cannot be taken as they immediately appear, and pre-technological, negative rationality understood this fact. Indeed, characteristic of two-dimensional thought is its ability to think through the difference between “essential” and “apparent” truths (ibid:135); its “[l]ogic centers on judgments which are, as demonstrative propositions, imperatives – the predicative ‘is’ implies an ‘*ought*’” (ibid:132 [original emphasis]; see also pp. 133 n. 3, 140-142, 167). The importance of this cannot be overstated, for to understand that despite how things *are* they perhaps *ought to be different* involves “critical judgment” and this judgment is inherent in two-dimensional thinking itself. Indeed “is” and “ought” *are* the two dimensions of this mode of thought. In being able to think alternatives, in recognizing that what appears to be true could be the manifestation of a deeper truth (if not something else entirely), dialectical thinking is intrinsically subversive; this is its negative quality (see ibid:123-143, 171). As Marcuse argues,

considered together. This is important if we are to avoid romanticizing “pre-technological” rationality. Nonetheless, as we will see, Marcuse argues that it is the recuperation of negative, critical thought that points the way toward real freedom.

The laws of thought are laws of reality, or rather *become* the laws of reality if thought understands the truth of immediate experience as the appearance of another truth... Thus there is the contradiction rather than correspondence between dialectical thought and the given reality; the true judgment judges this reality not in its own terms, but in terms which envisage its subversion. And in this subversion, reality comes into its own truth. ...The truth envisaged by thought is the Idea. As such it is, in terms of the given reality, “mere” Idea, “mere” essence – potentiality. But the essential potentiality is not like the many possibilities which are contained in the given universe of discourse and action; the essential potentiality is of a very different order. Its realization involves subversion of the established order, for thinking in accordance with truth is the commitment to exist in accordance with truth (ibid:131-132).

The dialectical character of two-dimensional thinking, its ability to (at least attempt to) think through both the immediate and the potential reality, requires a certain degree of abstraction. Marcuse argues that abstraction in and of itself is not a “bad” thing; indeed “[a]bstractness is the very life of thought” (1964:134). However, there are “false and true abstractions” due to the fact that abstraction “is a historical event in a historical continuum. It proceeds on historical grounds, and it remains related to the very basis from which it moves away: the established societal universe” (ibid). As negative rationality emerged in the socio-historical context of a widespread separation between intellectual and manual labor (ibid), its philosophy was not concerned with those “who bore the brunt of the untrue reality and who, therefore, seemed to be most in need of attaining its subversion... It abstracted from them and continued to abstract from them. In this sense ‘idealism’ was germane to philosophic thought” (ibid:135, 139). This constitutes the socio-historical “paradox” of negative thinking, for in abstracting from the concrete social conditions in this way, in attempting to critically re-imagine existence, “the

philosophic critique finds itself blocked by the reality from which it dissociates itself, and proceeds to construct a realm of Reason purged from empirical contingency. The two dimensions of thought – that of the essential and that of the apparent truths – no longer interfere with each other and the concrete dialectical relation becomes an abstract epistemological or ontological relation” (ibid). We have here the beginning of the transition from negative to positive, one-dimensional thinking. With the idealist turn in philosophy the stage was set for the emergence of formal logic.

Formal logic is, for Marcuse, connected to the desire to “understand”, order, and control the world in an entirely “reasonable” way. What is false about the abstraction required by formal logic and positive, technological thinking more generally, is that in it “...the conflict between essence and appearance is expendable if not meaningless; the material content is neutralized; the principle of identity is separated from the principle of contradiction... Well defined in their scope and function, concepts become instruments of prediction and control” (1964:137). What is crucial here is that these modes of thought “share the radical opposition to dialectical logic” (ibid). If what sets *truly* dialectical thought apart is the fact that it critically judges, and therefore subverts, the prevailing order, and that it understands this order as fundamentally antagonistic, then opposition to this comes to mean conformity with and justification for the world as immediately given, for the “is” (ibid:140-141; see also 1998 [1941]:49-50). Two-dimensional thought is opposed both to an idealism that fails to grasp the material reality and to a science or way of thinking that fails to see beyond that reality, for the latter finds its “truth” in the

“concreteness of immediate experience” and fails to free itself “from the deceptive objectivity which conceals the factors behind the facts” (ibid:141, 182). This is indeed the defining characteristic of one-dimensional thinking and is a major contributor to what Marcuse comes to argue is its “totalitarian” quality.³ It is to explicit discussion of this quality of essentially affirmative thought that we now turn.

Positive, one-dimensional thinking is characterized by the “radical acceptance of the empirical” and, according to Marcuse, this in fact “violates the empirical, for in it speaks the mutilated, ‘abstract’ individual who experiences (and expresses) only that which is *given* to him (given in a literal sense), who has only the facts and not the factors, whose behavior is one-dimensional and manipulated. ...[T]he positivist cleaning of the mind brings the mind in line with the restricted experience” (1964:182). We see here that one-dimensional thinking is reflective of one-dimensional existence and vice versa. What makes this rationality and this existence not only dangerous but actually totalitarian is the fact that in both cases, “Subjection to the established facts is total” (ibid:178; see also 2001 [1961]:55); positive thinking, and its manifestation in positivism proper, mathematization, standardization, and scientific method, seeks exactness and calculability (ibid:184). Indeed, positive thinking is in fact always concerned with liquidating anything it views as “unscientific”, “incalculable”, *qualitative*, which it views

³ The totalitarian character of advanced capitalist centres is discussed in detail below.

as mere mystification. Yet, as Marcuse argues, it is this rationality itself that is truly and *completely* mystifying. He writes:

...in this society, the rational rather than the irrational becomes the most effective vehicle of mystification. It was the total mobilization of the material and mental machinery which did the job and installed its mystifying power over the society. It served to make individuals incapable of seeing “behind” the machinery those who used it, those who profited from it, and those who paid for it. Today the mystifying elements are mastered and employed in productive publicity, propaganda, and politics. Magic, witchcraft, and ecstatic surrender are practiced in the daily routine of the home, the shop, and the office, and the rational accomplishments conceal the irrationality of the whole. For example, the scientific approach to the vexing problem of mutual annihilation – the mathematics and calculations of kill and over-kill ...–is mystifying to the extent to which it promotes (and even demands) behavior which accepts the insanity. It thus counteracts a truly rational behavior – namely, the refusal to go along, and the effort to do away with the conditions which produce the insanity. ...The trouble is that the statistics, measurements, and field studies of empirical sociology and political science are not rational enough (ibid:189-190, see also 1960).

For Marcuse, as well as for Amin,⁴ the emergence of one-dimensional rationality is clearly related to the mode of production according to which society is organized. The two inform, perpetuate, and solidify each other. In Marcuse’s work, the focus in articulating this connection is centred, to a large extent, on the understanding of our social order as a “technological society”. In other words, while the “totalitarian universe of technological rationality is the latest transmutation of Reason” (ibid:123), it is not just that. Indeed, positive, technological thinking arose “in the course of the technological

⁴ Recall the discussion of capitalist ideology in Chapter 2, above. This connection is further elaborated in Chapter 4.

process” (1998 [1941]):42) and with it new forms of individuality and experience also emerged.⁵

Marcuse differentiates between “technics” and “technology” arguing that while the former refers to the “technical apparatus of industry, communication, transportation” the latter is the social process in which “technics is but a partial factor” (1998 [1941]:41; see also 2001 [1961]:45). The mode of production operating in advanced capitalist society is a *technological* mode of production (ibid), requiring efficiency, standardization, and mechanization on a mass scale (ibid:63; 1998:73-77). While the technological achievements of the prevailing social order could be used to combat both toil and scarcity (i.e., to fundamentally change the prevailing social relationships), in the contemporary period, for the most part, technology instead is “a manifestation of prevalent thought and behavior patterns, an instrument for control and domination” (ibid:41, see also pp. 47-49).⁶ As the prevailing form of thinking in the technological society of the capitalist centres is one-dimensional and therefore essentially affirmative in nature, the technology itself manifests this both in its organization and in its use. For

⁵ The issue of individual experience in advanced capitalist centres as well as further aspects of the relationship between the transformation of reason and the organization of labor in advanced capitalism – specifically what Marcuse refers to as the “assimilation of the proletariat” – are discussed in more detail below.

⁶ It is important to note, however, that Marcuse nonetheless argues that technological progress, and the increasing automation this entails, still has emancipatory potential. For more on the liberatory potential of technology see 2001 [1965]:84-85, 88; 1964; 2001 [1961]:37, 42-43, 46-47, 50, 56; 1998 [1941]:63-64. This possibility is explored more fully in the discussion of freedom at the end of this chapter.

Marcuse, the notion of “compliant efficiency...perfectly illustrates the structure of technological rationality” due to the fact that,

Autonomy of reason loses its meaning in the same measure as the thoughts, feelings and actions of men [sic] are shaped by the technical requirements of the apparatus which they have 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. As the laws and mechanisms of technological rationality spread over the whole society, they develop a set of truth values of their own which hold good for the functioning of the apparatus – and for that alone. ...Rationality here calls for unconditional compliance and coordination, and consequently, the truth values related to this rationality imply the subordination of thought to pre-given external standards. We may call this set of truth values the technological truth, technological in the twofold sense that it is an instrument of expediency rather than an end in itself, and that it follows the pattern of technological behavior (ibid:49-50).

It is not only technological rationality that demands conformity and compliance from individuals but the technological apparatus that it has produced (and that produces and reproduces it) as well. Indeed, in Marcuse’s view, this is due to the fact that technological rationality itself has a specific *political* character and “operates as political rationality” (2001 [1961]:47). The three major factors that contribute to this political character *in general* are: 1) the fact that advanced capitalist society maintains and reproduces itself through mass production (2001 [1961]:47); 2) the fact that its technical apparatus “consists not only of the machinery employed in material production but also of that which fills the offices and stores and streets and, not least, the private homes and apartments” (ibid: 48); and 3) the fact that “in the functioning of the productive and distributive apparatus, technical and political operations, technical and political controls

are inexorably intertwined” (ibid:49). The mass production of goods requires a concomitant system of mass distribution and consumption and this demands the extensive coordination of all realms of social life:

Under these circumstances, mass production takes place through an omnipresent, huge technical apparatus which integrates all spheres of the private and public existence, and integrates them in accordance with the interests which control the apparatus. But the decisive fact is that this integration does not appear as *political* act – it asserts itself as, and indeed it *is* technological integration, spreading the rationality of convenience and efficiency, the terrifying comforts and the terrifying power of the “affluent society”. Producing and consuming its benefits, the individuals to whom these benefits are administered behave perfectly rationally... And in acting rationally, in conforming to the technical conquest of nature which they have achieved, they support the quantitative growth and the oppressive weight of the apparatus over them. ...The technological division of labor: scientific management and scientific rationalization intensify rather than alleviate the subjection of free labor and free relaxation to those who determine the use of labor and relaxation: intensify subjection precisely because the technological form of the organization and its ability to “deliver the goods” lets the masters disappear behind the objective technical structure (ibid:48-49 [original emphasis], 53; 1998:77-78).

The discussion of the transformation of reason and of its relationship to the development of the technical apparatus is, to a large extent, a continuation of the analysis of alienation laid out by Marx and further elaborated by Lukács.⁷ The two-fold integration of the technical apparatus and technological rationality into every realm of social life – including individual experience – serves to obscure the actual relations of domination and exploitation upon which advanced capitalist society is based and is one of the main insights leading Marcuse to conclude that “the reality [of advanced

⁷ Recall Chapter 1.

capitalism] constitutes a more progressive stage of alienation” (1964:11) in which “the alienation of labor is almost complete” (1955:102). Yet, it must be emphasized that the form that this alienation takes can no longer be explained solely in terms of its four main aspects as laid out by Marx. It is no longer “just” people’s relations with one another, with nature, and with the products of their labor that are characterized by alienation, nor can it be said to characterize “only” people’s *consciousness*⁸ of themselves, their experience, and these relations. Instead, Marcuse argues, alienation has reached a stage where people are affected even on the level of their *unconscious drives and desires* as well (1964:6, 32, 72; 1955:46, 89, 102-103, 129); “Mass production and mass distribution claim the *entire* individual... [alienation] has become entirely objective; the subject which is alienated is swallowed up by its alienated existence” (1964:10-11 [original emphasis], see also pp. 23-24, 27, 32-33). Because in the centres of capitalism alienation has become almost total, Marcuse has to explain how the individual *psyche* is affected by capitalist culture and he therefore must begin by reconceptualizing some of Freud’s most basic terms.

There are four main places where Marcuse’s attempt to rework Freudian concepts in an effort to better understand the effects of alienation on individuals (particularly those in the advanced capitalist centres) becomes most clear: first, the issue of scarcity and its relation to work; second, repression; third, the reality principle; and fourth, sublimation.

⁸ This issue, particularly the distinction between “true” and “false” consciousness, and its relation to the possibility of freedom is discussed further below.

In each of these cases, Marcuse argues that Freud's terminology does not "adequately differentiate between the biological *and* the socio-historical vicissitudes of the instincts" and must therefore "be paired with corresponding terms denoting the specific socio-historical component" (1955:35 [original emphasis]).⁹ Freud, unlike Marx, asserts that humans have a "natural aversion" to work; it is "normally without satisfaction in itself...it is unpleasurable, painful" (ibid:81; Freud 2001 [1929]:80 n. 1). Furthermore, work is necessary because scarcity is a "brute fact" and therefore unavoidable. People *have* to work because people *have* to procure scarce resources in order to live (ibid:35; Freud 2001 [1929]:101). Work therefore becomes *labour* (ibid:82); it is toil and misery, and this is naturally and unavoidably the case. Furthermore, labour, as unpleasurable activity, requires that "energy...be 'withdrawn' from the primary instincts...the work impulses are thus fed by aim-inhibited sexuality" (ibid; Freud 2001 [1929]:104). Marcuse points out that there are moments where it appears that Freud recognizes that satisfaction in work may be possible (for example, ibid:85, 212), however, Freud just as quickly turns away from this possibility due to the fact that he views it as the exception rather than the rule.¹⁰ Freud cannot or does not see that his perspective is located in a particular historical moment. While it may be the case that labour is based upon "aim-inhibited sexuality" and that it is unpleasurable, Marcuse argues that this is not a quality inhering

⁹ For an overview of the Frankfurt School's arguments on this issue see, for example, Žižek (2005 [1994]), Jacoby (1975), and Jay (1973).

¹⁰ For an example of this see Freud 2001 [1929]:80 n.1.

in work itself nor is the aversion to work “natural” (ibid:85). Rather, both scarcity and labour are organized in specific ways and acquire their particular character depending upon the historical development of a given society. Freud, according to Marcuse, does not distinguish between alienated and non-alienated work (ibid); this distinction is important because when Freud discusses work, he is in reality discussing the former (alienated labour). Furthermore, in calling for this distinction, Marcuse opens up the possibility for an organization of work and scarcity that is satisfying, free, and no longer based on domination. He calls this the “transformation of work into play” (see ibid:213-218) and this becomes an important part of his argument concerning freedom.¹¹

Marcuse argues that it is also necessary to introduce a socio-historical distinction into Freud’s conceptualization of repression.¹² While *basic* repression is universal and necessary for the survival and “perpetuation of the human race in civilization” (1955:35), surplus-repression is used by Marcuse to designate the repressive “restrictions necessitated by social domination” (ibid). Unlike basic repression, surplus-repression is reflective of the “historical sources of human suffering” (ibid:88); it is repression above and beyond what is absolutely necessary to ensure the survival of society (ibid:37) and is the result of “specific societal conditions sustained in the specific interest of domination” (ibid:88). The extent of surplus-repression will vary according to the relations of

¹¹ We return to this discussion in more detail below.

¹² For a detailed discussion specifically focused on the issue of repression in Marcuse’s work, see Horowitz (1977).

production and the “specific historical institutions” dominating a given society (ibid:37).

Marcuse argues that as society develops, the actual *need* for labour¹³ is reduced due to technological and intellectual progress (ibid:88); the advanced capitalist centres “could actually afford a considerable release of instinctual energy expended for domination and toil” (ibid). Despite this, however, the degree of surplus-repression actually appears to *increase* as society matures and develops. This is the dialectic of civilization: as the potential for human emancipation increases, so too does the degree of surplus-repression.¹⁴ In other words, surplus-repression operates in service of the status quo:

...the closer the real possibility of liberating the individual from the constraints once justified by scarcity and immaturity, the greater the need for maintaining and streamlining these constraints lest the established order of domination dissolve... The rationality of domination has progressed to the point where it threatens to invalidate its foundations; therefore it must be reaffirmed more effectively than ever before (ibid:93, 88).

One of the primary ways in which surplus-repression is able to serve domination stems from its relation to the reality principle prevalent in advanced capitalist society. It is to discussion of this that we now turn.

For Freud the reality principle is *always* based on the “repressive organization of the instincts” (Marcuse 1955:34); repression is the price we pay for civilization regardless

¹³ From this point on, we follow Marcuse’s distinction and use the term “labour” to refer to alienated labour specifically.

¹⁴ Marcuse argues that ultimately this dialectic becomes “fatal”: “...the perpetual restrictions on Eros ultimately weaken the life instincts and thus strengthen the release of the very forces against which they were ‘called up’ – those of destruction” (1955:44; see also p. 54). This argument is in many ways similar to Marx’s claim that capitalist relations ultimately produce the conditions of their own end; we return to this issue in the discussion of freedom below.

of its type. Therefore, for Freud, the reality principle operating in human societies always takes fundamentally the same form and as such is ahistorical. Just as with the issues of work and repression, however, Marcuse argues that the development of the reality principle is deeply historical and its content is dependent on the form of social organization in which it is developed (ibid:37). A *particular* reality principle comes to dominate a *particular* civilization as a result of the *particular* social and historical development of said civilization. The reality principle dominating advanced capitalist society, then, is necessarily reflective of the alienation that pervades the relation of human beings to themselves, each other, and their work. Furthermore, it both relies upon and perpetuates social institutions and practices that are characterized by a high degree of surplus-repression (ibid:44). Marcuse gives the name “performance principle” to the reality he sees governing advanced capitalist society and argues,

...under its rule society is stratified according to the competitive performances of its members. It is clearly not the only historical reality principle: other modes of societal organization not merely prevailed in primitive [sic] cultures but also survived into the modern period.¹⁵ The performance principle...presupposes a long development during which domination has been increasingly rationalized: control over social labor now reproduces society on an enlarged scale and under improving conditions. ...For the vast majority of the population...their labor is work for an apparatus which they do not control, which operates as an independent power to which individuals must submit if they want to live. And it becomes the more alien the more specialized the division of labor becomes. Men [sic] do not live their own lives but perform pre-established functions. While they work, they do not fulfill their own needs and faculties but work in *alienation*. Work has now become *general*, and so have the

¹⁵ While Marcuse does not pursue this particular point in any detail, it is central to Amin’s understanding of the imperialist world system, as we have seen (Chapter 2).

restrictions placed upon the libido: labor time, which is the largest part of the individual's life time, is painful time, for alienated labor is absence of gratification, negation of the pleasure principle. ...Under the rule of the performance principle, body and mind are made into instruments of alienated labor; they can function as such instruments only if they renounce the freedom of the libidinal subject-object which the human organism primarily is and desires (ibid:44-46 [original emphasis]).

Again, Marcuse points out that there are moments in Freud's work where he appears to recognize the importance of history in the development of the reality principle (for example, ibid:40), but he dismisses this in favour of the argument that the nature of this principle is for all intents and purposes universal, unavoidable, and fixed.¹⁶ For Marcuse, this is problematic due to the fact that such an argument precludes any discussion that human life could be fundamentally different and that freedom from labour, the performance principle, and surplus-repression may be possible. Marcuse's claim that the development of the reality principle is determined by the historical and material social conditions under which people live opens up the possibility for the development of a new reality principle, one that is no longer based on, or perpetuating of, alienated existence.

For Marcuse, the development of labour, surplus-repression, and the performance principle is tied to what he terms the "repressive organization of sexuality." According to Freud, the transformation of polymorphous sexuality into that characterized by the

¹⁶ Some examples of places where Freud appears to acknowledge the importance of social history can be found in *Civilization and its Discontents* (2001 [1929]:86, 89, 96, 144) and *The Ego and the Id* (2001 [1923]:35).

primacy of the genitals is part of natural human sexual development; the libido and the reproductive function become paired in part out of the need to perpetuate the species and in part in order to "...divert their [people's] energies from sexual activity to work" (Freud 2001 [1916]:312). People cannot run around obtaining pleasure from everything; they must have the discipline to complete unpleasant tasks and this requires the postponement of satisfaction. As we saw above, for Freud work is unpleasurable but it is the necessary solution to the problem of scarcity. The id must submit to the demands of the ego and its reality principle. The libido must be tamed. That said, gratification is of course still possible; libidinal desires find satisfaction in socially acceptable forms (e.g., sexual intercourse, sublimation). Marcuse does not disagree with this element of Freud's argument and in fact argues that, "The 'containment' of the partial sexual impulses, the progress to genitality belong to [the] basic layer of repression which makes possible intensified pleasure: the maturation of the organism involves normal and natural maturation of pleasure" (1955:38). However, we are again faced with the fact that thanks to the intellectual and material progress of human civilization, real scarcity,¹⁷ and the actual need for toil and the delayed satisfaction this entails, has decreased. As a result, Marcuse argues that it is also possible that

...the mastery of the instinctual drives may...be used *against* gratification; in the history of civilization, basic repression and surplus-repression have been inextricably intertwined, and the normal progress to genitality has been organized in such a way that the partial impulses and their "zones"

¹⁷ As opposed to the scarcity of advanced capitalist society, which is manufactured in the interest of domination and exploitation and perpetuates the status quo.

were all but desexualized in order to conform to the requirements of a specific social organization of the human existence (ibid [original emphasis]; see also 1964:73).

Therefore,

The organization of sexuality reflects the basic features of the performance principle and its organization of society. ...It is especially operative in the “unification” of the various objects of the partial instincts into one libidinal object of the opposite sex, and in the establishment of genital supremacy. In both cases, the unifying process is repressive – that is to say, the partial instincts do not develop freely into a “higher” stage of gratification which preserves their objectives, but are cut off and reduced to subservient functions. This process achieves the socially necessary desexualization of the body: the libido becomes concentrated in one part of the body, leaving most of the rest free for use as the instrument of labor. The temporal reduction of the libido is thus supplemented by its spatial reduction (ibid:48; 1964:72-73).

Again, Marcuse is not arguing that the delay of satisfaction and the basic repression that this sometimes requires is harmful in and of itself. What he argues is that in advanced capitalist society, we are repressed far more than is necessary *and we do not even realize it*. Our bodies are desexualized in accordance with the performance principle in order to perpetuate our alienated existence and vice versa. As mentioned earlier, people’s compliance with this system does not exist “merely” on the level of consciousness; at this point, even their unconscious has been subjugated:

The restrictions imposed upon the libido appear as the more rational, the more universal they become, the more they permeate the whole of society. They operate on the individual as external objective laws and as internalized force: the societal authority is absorbed into the “conscience” and into the unconscious of the individual and works as his [sic] own desire, morality, and fulfillment. In the “normal” development, the individual lives his repression “freely” as his own life: he desires what he is supposed to desire; his gratifications are profitable to him and to others; he is reasonably and often exuberantly happy. This happiness...enables him to continue his

performance, which in turn perpetuates his labor and that of the others. His erotic performance is brought in line with his societal performance. Repression disappears in the grand objective order of things which rewards more or less adequately the complying individuals and, in doing so, reproduces more or less adequately the society as a whole (ibid:46).

This process of desexualization in the repressive organization of the drives is tied to sublimation; the latter requires the former. Here again, however, we run into another situation in which Freud does not sufficiently distinguish between the “natural” and the socio-historical aspects of his terminology. For Freud, sublimation in general occurs when libidinal energy is diverted from its overtly sexual aim to a related, but non-sexual (what he terms “social” or “higher”) one instead (2001 [1916-1917]:345; see also page 55, above). Freud argues that sublimation operates as a protective measure against the neurosis that can result from the frustration of desire and is a necessary factor in the development of the ego (ibid; Marcuse, 1955:75). Now, while it may be the case that “[c]ulture demands continuous sublimation” (Marcuse 1955:83), it is important to understand that the sublimation advanced capitalist culture requires takes a particular form and cannot be separated from the socio-historical context in which it arises.¹⁸ This is indeed what Marcuse argues; sublimation refers to, and is fundamentally affected by, “...the fate of sexuality under a repressive reality principle” (ibid:206). As a result,

¹⁸ This stands in opposition to Freud’s conceptualization insofar as he tends to take the development of this form of human civilization for granted and therefore also the content of his concepts as well when, as we have emphasized previously, it is contingent on the *particular* social and historical development of *this* culture. That said, it is important to note that there are moments where Freud seems to imply the possibility of a very different form of civilization, one “evolving from and satisfied by free libidinal relations” (Marcuse 1955:207) but in general, as in the cases of his conceptualization of work, repression, and the reality principle, he does not follow this line of thought very far.

This mode of sublimation is to a high degree dictated by specific societal requirements and cannot be automatically extended to other and less repressive forms of civilization with different “social values”. Under the performance principle, the diversion of libido into useful cultural activities takes place after the period of early childhood. Sublimation then operates on a preconditioned instinctual structure, which includes the functional and temporal restraints of sexuality, its channeling into monogamic reproduction, and the desexualization of most of the body. Sublimation works with the thus preconditioned libido and its possessive, exploitative, aggressive force. The repressive “modification” of the pleasure principle precedes the actual sublimation, and the latter carries the repressive elements over into the socially useful activities (ibid).

In other words, Freud’s conceptualization actually refers to what Marcuse calls “repressive sublimation” and must therefore be distinguished from the possibility of a sublimation that is non-repressive¹⁹ in character. For Marcuse, non-repressive sublimation can only exist in its full form in non-repressive civilization (ibid:208). For this reason, he raises it as part of a larger discussion of the possibility for human freedom and the concomitant “transformation of work into play”. We will therefore encounter this concept again below. At this point, however, it is sufficient to briefly mention its defining characteristic. According to Marcuse, in non-repressive sublimation “...sexuality is neither deflected from nor blocked in its objective; rather, in attaining its objective, it transcends it to others, searching for a fuller gratification” (ibid:211); in other words, it is “sublimation without desexualization” (ibid:208; 1964:73).

¹⁹ It is important to note that when Marcuse uses the term “non-repressive” he is referring not to the absence of basic repression but rather to the absence of surplus-repression. “Non-repressive” should therefore be read as “non-surplus-repressive”.

Just as the distinction between repressive and non-repressive sublimation is necessary, so too is there a need to distinguish between non-repressive and repressive *desublimation*. “Desublimation” is characterized by the replacement of “...mediated by immediate gratification” (Marcuse 1955:72). In its non-repressive form, the libido is free to find this gratification and the object it chooses for said gratification is freely chosen. In contrast, the immediate gratification experienced through repressive desublimation is “...‘practiced from a position of strength’ on the part of society...[S]exuality is liberated (or rather liberalized) in socially constructive forms. ...[I]t operates as the by-product of the social controls of technological reality, which extend liberty while intensifying domination” (ibid). Repressive desublimation bears the mark of the repressive society in which it operates. It is institutionalized, adjusted, and controlled desublimation²⁰ and it works in the service of “social cohesion and contentment” (ibid). While people may feel as though they are freely choosing the objects which satisfy their desires, as we saw in the above discussion of sublimation, the reality is that these desires have been preconditioned; individuals have been trained to seek their gratification in particular objects (i.e., commodities) at particular times in particular ways. Furthermore, sexuality itself has been commodified,

...thereby eliminating and subduing most of those forces and features which, according to Freud, made sexuality and Eros a really liberating and socially dangerous force. In the affluent society [i.e., centres] sex is used as a salable commodity, as a publicity stunt, as even a status symbol; this

²⁰ Marcuse in fact uses the terms “institutionalized desublimation” (1955:74), “adjusted desublimation” (ibid:75), and “controlled desublimation” (ibid:77) as synonyms for “repressive desublimation”.

liberalization of sex is practiced by individuals who remain alienated. Sexual liberalization remains defined by alienation. Moreover, and perhaps even more important, socially facilitated sexual satisfaction becomes a vehicle of adjustment. ...[D]esublimation, liberalization of sexual morality, is accompanied by a release of destructive and aggressive energy on a scale hitherto unknown. This means that sexuality is confined to sexuality as a partial drive, satisfied in a local zone of the organism, and that the erotic transcendence, the cathexis of the entire organism, and the drive to form its own peaceful and pleasurable environment, is cut off. Desublimated satisfaction remains a temporary outlet which leaves social repression unchanged (2001 [1965]:90-91; 1998 [1941]:47).

In other words, advanced capitalism provides many opportunities for desublimation, however, it is always desublimation on its own terms, in service of its own aims. This is what makes the desublimation repressive. Furthermore, repressive desublimation militates against qualitative social change; this is discussed in more detail below.

According to Marcuse, repressive desublimation is one of the clearest symptoms of what he terms the “matter-of-fact” or “technological” attitude.²¹ Furthermore, this attitude is part and parcel of what Marcuse calls an overall “psychological neutrality”. With the emergence and development of technological rationality, the individual has found herself in a situation in which unquestioning, obedient adjustment to the prevailing social order is not only required but almost a matter of *reflex*. The technological attitude, as the outcome of the totalizing force of technological rationality, is characterized by (sometimes extreme) rationalization on the part of the individual. Wars, scarcity, toil – injustices of all kinds – are seen as reasonable and/or pragmatic and this leads to a

²¹ Marcuse uses these terms synonymously (see, for example, 1998 [1941]: 48).

standpoint of detachment and resignation (see 2001 [1961]:49; 1998a:187-188; 1998 [1941]:44-48). Marcuse argues, “The pragmatic matter-of-factness of everyday life which characterizes the behavior of men [sic] in the technological era tends to interpret the concrete issues, the fate of every single individual which is actually at stake, in terms of objective forces, machines, and institutions” (1998a:187) and this tendency itself becomes an integral part of the “mechanics of conformity” in technological society (1998 [1941]:48). The result is not only that the attitude serves the self-preservation of the whole but, perhaps even more troubling, it becomes perceived by the individuals themselves as necessary to their own survival (ibid:44-48):

Business, technics, human needs and nature are welded together into one rational and expedient mechanism. He [sic] will fare best who follows its directions, subordinating his spontaneity to the anonymous wisdom which ordered everything for him. The decisive point is that this attitude – which dissolves all actions into a sequence of semi-spontaneous reactions to prescribed mechanical norms – is not only perfectly rational but also perfectly reasonable. All protest is senseless, and the individual who would insist on his freedom of action would become a crank. There is no personal escape from the apparatus which has mechanized and standardized the world. It is a rational apparatus, combining utmost expediency with utmost convenience, saving time and energy, removing waste, adapting all means to the end, anticipating consequences, sustaining calculability and security. In manipulating the machine, man learns that obedience to the directions is the only way to obtain desired results. Getting along is identical with adjustment to the apparatus. There is no room for autonomy. Individualistic rationality has developed into efficient compliance with the pre-given continuum of means and ends. The latter absorbs the liberating effort of thought, and the various functions of reason converge upon the unconditional maintenance of the apparatus. ...Everything cooperates to turn human instincts, desires and thoughts into channels that feed the apparatus (ibid:46-47).

Marcuse is constructing an analysis of the capitalist centres that understands them as more or less totalitarian in character. Indeed, as we have mentioned previously, the totalitarian character of advanced capitalist societies is in fact seen in the two-fold integration of the technical apparatus and technological rationality into not just all of social, political, and economic life but also into the actual psyches of each individual as well. In order to make this point, Marcuse's analysis turns toward an examination of fascism, for in his view this serves to further enhance our understanding of the totalitarianism of the ostensibly democratic centres. It is therefore important to discuss this issue further.

In contradistinction to commonsense understanding – and worth repeating for this reason – Marcuse argues that what separates the overtly fascist from the democratic society is not so much that the former is totalitarian while the latter is not. In fact, Marcuse is clear that in any case,

By virtue of the way in which it has organized its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For totalitarian is not only a terroristic political co-ordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical co-ordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests and thus precludes the emergence of an effective opposition against the whole organized by these interests. Not only a specific form of government or party rule makes for totalitarianism, but also a specific system of production and distribution which may well be compatible with “pluralism” of parties, newspapers, “countervailing” forces, etc. In the contemporary period, political power asserts itself through the power of the machine process, which moves the technical ensemble of the productive apparatus. The government of advanced and advancing industrial societies can maintain and secure itself only when it succeeds in mobilizing, organizing, and exploiting the technical, scientific, and mechanical productivity available to industrial civilization – and this productivity tends to involve society as a whole,

above and beyond any particular individual or group interests (2001 [1961]:50-51).

In a certain sense, then, what separates the “democratic” from the fascist regime is that the former is a non-terroristic technocracy while the latter is a terroristic one (1998 [1941]:42) and that consequently in the one case a non-terroristic “unfreedom” prevails while in the other this unfreedom has taken an openly terroristic form (2001 [1965]:88-89; 2001 [1961]:37, 43, 52; 1998; 1998a). In other words, the advanced industrial organization of both fascist and democratic systems is ruled by the same technological rationality; under fascism, however, the totalitarian element finds its extreme manifestation. The crucial distinction is whether the totalitarianism of a given social order is terroristic or not as this obviously has consequences for the ways in which technocratic organization manifests itself.

Under National Socialism (the terroristic technocracy *par excellence*) the focus on efficiency, calculability, standardization, and the like is taken to its most extreme point; technological rationality, with its governing “principle of efficiency” (1998:73-77), is here “in the total service of imperialist expansion” (ibid:77; see also pp. 72-73, 78-80, 92) and this desire for expansion is absolutely uncompromising. Everything, all of the horror, is committed in its name. As a consequence of this, the terror that holds this society together is “not only that of the concentration camps, prisons and pogroms; it is not only the terror of lawlessness, but also the less conspicuous though no less efficient legalized terror of bureaucratization” (ibid) which aims to assist in the abolishment of the separation between state and society and between society and individual (ibid:70, 75-76,

78).²² Insofar as the latter is concerned, this is achieved in two ways: 1) “The regime releases all those forces of brutal self-interest which the democratic countries have tried to curb and combine with the interest of freedom” (ibid:80) and 2) through the “*abolition of highly sanctioned taboos*” (ibid: 84 [original emphasis]). The consequences of the release of competitive self-interest is that it facilitates the organization of individuals into a mass (ibid:80):

These masses...are not united by a common interest and common “consciousness”. They are rather made up of individuals each of whom follows only his most primitive self-interest, and their unification is brought about by the fact that this self-interest is reduced to the bare instinct of self-preservation which is identical in all of them. The coordination of individuals into a crowd has intensified rather than abolished their atomization and isolation from each other... They are susceptible to manipulation and unification from above because they are stripped of everything that might transcend their self-interest and establish a real community. They are led to entertainment, they rest and holiday as masses. ...Reduced to that brute and abstract instinct of self-preservation which is equal in all of them, they are easily forced into masses which, by their mere weight, prevent any articulation of common interest. This atomization and isolation provides the safe ground on which the individual’s forces and faculties can issue into the service of the regime (ibid:80-81; see also p. 70).

At the same time, the National Socialist regime relaxed and in some cases completely removed prevalent taboos, such as those on chastity, monogamy, and the sanctity of the

²² While more detailed discussion of the abolition of the distinction between state and society under National Socialism is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note the following as it sheds light on the extent to which social and political institutions and interests became coordinated under this system. This coordination was assisted by extensive and unrelenting bureaucratization (1998:78). Marcuse asserts, “The National Socialist state emerges as the threefold sovereignty of industry, party, and army which have divided up among themselves the former monopoly of coercive power. The whole system is by no means a homogenous one. The three ruling hierarchies frequently clash with each other and each is divided within itself. ...Despite the diverging claims and tendencies, however, the conflicts do not break out in the open because of the deeper pre-existing harmony between the interests of industry, the party and the army. This harmony is symbolized in the *Leader*” (ibid:76 [original emphasis], 78).

family (ibid:83-86, 90). The abolition of the taboo on privacy, under which these other taboos fall, was most disastrous insofar as the status of the individual's relationship to the social order is concerned due to the fact that in one's private, leisure time one "may come to *think*, [one's] impulses, feelings and thoughts may be driven into regions which are foreign and inimical to the prevailing order" (ibid:89 [original emphasis]). Furthermore, these taboos "tended...to aggravate the antagonism between individual satisfaction and social frustration; the former was kept apart from society and, by this very fact, retained elements of a freedom and happiness which were alien to the social reality" (ibid:83). The removal of these taboos therefore has a repressive rather than truly liberatory function (ibid:90) despite appearance to the contrary. Indeed, the abolition of taboos and the emergence of the mass, particularly when connected with "the drives and impulses directed against the chosen enemies of the Third Reich" (ibid:86) result in the (almost) total identification²³ of the individual with her society (ibid:87). The terror of the National Socialist order is tolerated because individuals come to see themselves as *compensated* for it; the identification is so strong that they, as the privileged members of the "German race", see themselves as the new masters instead of as the ones who are mastered by the National Socialist constellation of industry, party, and army (ibid:86-87).

Now, while it is certainly the case that many contemporary "democratic" societies are also rabidly imperialistic, highly bureaucratized, and also to a certain extent organize

²³ Used here in the Freudian sense.

individuals into a “mass”, Marcuse argues that these societies have not (d)evolved into an *openly* terroristic technocracy due in large part to the fact that in this case liberal values (such as liberty, self-determination, civil rights, and rule of law) are at least formally and ideologically upheld (see 1998:71-72; 1964:51) and in many cases were an integral part of the history of their state-formation.²⁴ Nonetheless, Marcuse asserts that “[d]emocracy would appear to be the most efficient system of domination” (1964:52) *due to the very fact that its unfreedom is non-terroristic in nature*. Under these circumstances unfreedom in fact appears, and is indeed experienced, as freedom (2001 [1965]:86; 2001 [1961]:37) and this makes freedom itself “a powerful instrument of domination” (1964:7).

“Democratic” advanced capitalist societies are particularly good at liquidating, containing, and/or integrating threats to the self-preservation of the status quo; indeed, the “irrational in this society appears as rational because people indeed have more comforts, and more fun. Domination appears as freedom because people indeed have the choice of

²⁴ The argument can of course be made that especially in the current climate these values are at the very least under threat if not protected in name only. Yet even if this is the case, this only underlines Marcuse’s point that democracy (as we know it) is not fundamentally incompatible with the development of an openly fascist order. Again, given that technological rationality dominates both systems the question is not whether it is *possible* for a democratic nation like the United States or Canada to become fascist but rather what provides for the most effective resistance *against* such a possibility. Put differently, the question is how to keep countries like these from becoming so. As Marcuse argues, “Certain groups among the population of the democratic countries are all too readily inclined to marvel at the efficiency of the Nazi machine in dealing with internal problems (labor trouble, rationalization, overall control of production, distribution and consumption, elimination of waste and subversive activities, etc.). They may be tempted to seize upon any opportunity to contrast these German ‘achievements’ with the conditions of their own country, and to draw the conclusion that, after all, Nazism did some useful things” (1998a:190). It may not be ridiculous to argue that these words are perhaps as true today as they were when Marcuse first wrote them and Marx’s famous dictum that history repeats itself, “the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce” seems an especially prescient caution.

prefabricated goods and prefabricated candidates. Behind the technological veil domination of man by man continues as it did before and operates within the conception and context of free individuals” (Marcuse 2001 [1965]:86; 2001 [1961]:38, 40, 49-50; 1964).²⁵ The efficacy of this domination-through-integration is especially clear if we look in two directions: 1) its manifestation in the very psyches of the individuals living in these societies and 2) at the assimilation of the proletariat. These issues are not unrelated; in fact, the latter is made possible not only by the increased mechanization of labour and the higher standard of living in the capitalist centres, but also by the ramifications of the issues discussed up to this point for individuals’ psychic lives.

As we have seen in our discussion of repressive desublimation above, non-terroristic technocracies, like terroristic ones, relax taboos around sexuality and do so toward a repressive end. In both terroristic and non-terroristic industrial societies repressive desublimation operates as a means of promoting “satisfaction” and this satisfaction, be it the “privilege” of belonging to the “master race” or that of being able to watch “Sex and the City” or “Desperate Housewives”, to sit behind the wheel of a Honda or a Cadillac, only serves the self-preservation of the entire order which produces and

²⁵ Marcuse makes this especially clear in his assertion that, “Free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves. Free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear – that is, if they sustain alienation. And the spontaneous reproduction of superimposed needs by the individual does not establish autonomy; it only testifies to the efficacy of the controls” (1964:7-8; Marcuse also uses these exact words in 2001 [1961]:52).

assimilates such “freedom”. This makes the desublimation not only repressive, but dangerous. As Marcuse argues,

...with the release of the death and destruction instinct, we have a dangerous paradoxical situation; the liberalization of the destruction instinct is not a satisfaction of the destruction instinct by virtue of which the instinct would be alleviated. The opposite is the case...because in the technological society the relaxation of controls over the death instinct decreases rather than increases individual instinctual satisfaction and therefore involves frustration, which in turn necessitates the repetition of the destruction instinct on an ever larger scale (2001 [1965]:91).

Repressive desublimation is a powerful tool of domination: it can be used to bolster not only the “democratic” capitalist order but also the more openly terroristic brand of socio-political organization and psychological compliance discussed in relation to National Socialism above. Furthermore, it’s operation both facilitates and is facilitated by the integration of the proletariat within the capitalist centres. It is to discussion of this that we now turn.

Marcuse argues that in conjunction with increasing surplus-repression, the rule of the performance principle, and repressive desublimation there have also been several developments in the process of production since Marx’s time that contribute to the “transformation” and resultant assimilation of the proletariat. First, increased mechanization has changed the nature of labour in the capitalist centres (1964:24).

According to Marcuse,

Now the ever-more-complete mechanization of labor in advanced capitalism, while sustaining exploitation, modifies the attitude and status of the exploited. ...Standardization and routine assimilate productive and non-productive jobs. The proletarian of the previous stages of capitalism was indeed a beast of burden, by the labor of his [sic] body procuring the

necessities and luxuries of life while living in filth and poverty. Thus he was the living denial of his society. In contrast, the organized worker in the advanced areas of technological society lives this denial less conspicuously and, like other human objects of the social division of labor, he is being incorporated into the technological community of the administered population (ibid:25-26).

Furthermore, “[t]he same technological organization which makes for a mechanical community at work also generates a larger interdependence which integrates the worker with the plant” (ibid:30); this actually promotes feelings of gratification amongst the workers, who often come to view themselves as members of a team (ibid:26) and feel an attachment and loyalty to their place of work itself (ibid:30, see also pp. 19-20). This is an additional means by which the proletariat no longer experiences itself or its work as contradictory to capitalism. Furthermore,

To the extent to which the machine becomes itself a system of mechanical tools and relations and thus extends far beyond individual work process, it asserts its larger domination by reducing “professional autonomy” of the laborer and integrating him [sic] with other professions which suffer and direct the technical ensemble. To be sure, the former “professional” autonomy of the laborer was rather his professional enslavement. But this *specific* mode of enslavement was at the same time the source of his specific, professional power of negation – the power to stop a process which threatened him with annihilation as a human being. Now the laborer is losing the professional autonomy which made him a member of a class set off from the other occupational groups because it embodied the refutation of established society (ibid:28 [original emphasis]).

In other words, the proletariat can no longer be distinguished based on the fact that its labour is *manual* and *directly productive* in nature. As mechanization increases, so too does standardization; both spread into all sectors of society and the labour performed in the factory and the office become more and more alike. This is the assimilation of jobs; in

addition, the overall trend is such that "...the 'blue-collar' work force declines in relation to the 'white-collar' element; the number of non-production workers increases" (ibid:27). As mechanization, standardization, and the assimilation of labour increases in degree and scope, the proletariat finds itself incorporated into the system to an ever-greater extent. They do not experience their labour or their lives as oppositional; in fact, they often find themselves "satisfied".²⁶

The result of all of this is a "weakening of the negative position of the working class: the latter no longer appears to be the living contradiction to the established society" (1964:32, see also p. 19; 2001 [1961]:38). This is further exacerbated by the fact that many proletarians in the capitalist centres are able, through their labour, to participate in the consumptive practices of the society as a whole. They can dress and eat well, buy homes and cars, take vacations, go to the theatre, have access to and enjoy stock options, and so on. This is another important part of what makes their position as the "living denial" of the social order less "conspicuous". But this is not all. Again, the proletariat is not only integrated into this system physically but mentally as well; its members develop a "Happy Consciousness", a belief that "the system delivers the goods" (1964:79, 84; 1955:103-104). Furthermore, as we have seen, on an unconscious level they learn to desire what they have been (pre)conditioned to desire and to experience satisfaction

²⁶ Again, this feeling of "satisfaction" is itself a "token of repression" (Marcuse 1955:220) and signals the psychological component of the domination-through-integration mentioned previously.

through the repressive sublimation required for their labour;²⁷ “The machine process in the technological universe breaks the innermost privacy of freedom and joins sexuality and labor in one unconscious, rhythmic automatism...” (ibid:27). The extent to which both surplus-repression and repressive desublimation operate in contemporary capitalism works to ensure the inability for the proletariat to feel their oppression as such.²⁸ This is further bolstered by “...the effect of the technological organization of production...on management and direction. Domination is transfigured into administration. The capitalist bosses and owners are losing their identity as responsible agents; they are assuming the function of bureaucrats in a corporate machine” (ibid:32). The consequences of this are dire, for,

Within the vast hierarchy of executive and managerial boards extending far beyond the individual establishment into the scientific laboratory and research institute, the national government and national purpose, the tangible source of exploitation disappears behind the façade of objective rationality. Hatred and frustration are deprived of their specific target, and the technological veil conceals the reproduction of inequality and enslavement. With technical progress as its instrument, unfreedom – in the sense of man’s [sic] subjection to his productive apparatus – is perpetuated and intensified in the form of many liberties and comforts. The novel feature is the overwhelming rationality of this irrational enterprise, and the depth of the preconditioning which shapes the instinctual drives and aspirations of the individuals and obscures the difference between false and true consciousness. For in reality, neither the utilization of administrative rather

²⁷ A prime example of this is the integration of the worker with the plant mentioned above.

²⁸ Lukács’ assertion that “...[I]n capitalist society reality is – immediately – the same for both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat” (1971 [1923]:164) takes on a particularly ominous connotation in this context due to the fact that the possibility of freedom is no longer merely a question of the development of a “true class consciousness” but rather of the abolition of alienation on the instinctual level as well. People have come to literally identify themselves with this society (Marcuse 1964:10; 1955:90); they “...recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment” (ibid:9).

than physical controls...nor the change in the character of heavy work, nor the assimilation of occupational classes, nor the equalization in the sphere of consumption compensate for the fact that the decisions over life and death, over personal and national security are made at places over which the individuals have no control. The slaves of developed industrial society are sublimated slaves, but they are slaves. ...This is the pure form of servitude: to exist as an instrument, as a thing. And this mode of existence is not abrogated if the thing is animated and chooses its material and intellectual food, if it does not feel its being-a-thing, if it is a pretty, clean, mobile thing. Conversely, as reification tends to become totalitarian by virtue of its technological form, the organizers and administrators themselves become increasingly dependent on the machinery which they organize and administer. And this mutual dependence is no longer the dialectical relationship between Master and Servant, which has been broken in the struggle for mutual recognition, but rather a vicious circle which encloses both the Master and the Servant (ibid:32-33).²⁹

Each of the two major classes appears to lose its particular identity in the face of the technological, bureaucratic administration of society. Instead of clearly standing on opposite sides of the labour relation, they appear almost as though standing together, on the same side, the differences between them a matter of degree rather than fundamental (see also 2001 [1961]:38). The proletariat is no longer driven to view its liberation as a matter of life and death; in fact, the question of liberation now appears to have no relevance at all. The conditions outlined above "...promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood" (ibid:12). The most significant implication here is not that the transformation of society appears impossible but rather that its transformation and by extension real freedom have become *undesirable*.³⁰

²⁹ Here Marcuse refers to Hegel's argument in the "Lordship and Bondage" section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1979 [1807]).

³⁰ For discussion of this in relation to Critical Theory more broadly, see Jacoby (1975:81-82).

Advanced capitalism is a system of social relations that is perhaps uniquely able to “contain” the potentially liberatory forces of society; change from within the system seems more and more unlikely as the “use-value of freedom” (Marcuse 1964:49) is reduced. The changes in the labour process and the resultant transformation of both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the capitalist centres help to produce a situation in which the contradictions of capitalism appear to be smoothed out. Any potential site of resistance is absorbed into the system and used to further “social cohesion”. Marcuse argues,

Today’s novel feature is the flattening out of antagonism between culture and social reality through the obliteration of the oppositional, alien, and transcendent elements in the higher culture by virtue of which it constituted *another dimension* of reality. This liquidation of *two-dimensional* culture takes place not through the denial and rejection of the “cultural values,” but through their wholesale incorporation into the established order, through their reproduction and display on a massive scale. ...If mass communications blend together harmoniously, and often unnoticeably, art, politics, religion, and philosophy with commercials, they bring these realms of culture to their common denominator – the commodity form. The music of the soul is also the music of salesmanship. Exchange value, not truth value counts. On it centers the rationality of the status quo, and all alien rationality is bent to it (1964:57 [original emphasis]).

Everyone and everything in the society is mobilized, consciously and unconsciously, against “the Enemy”, the “real spectre [sic] of liberation” (ibid:52). Under these circumstances the possibilities for resistance and emancipation may appear particularly bleak. Yet the tension running throughout Marcuse’s work is actually that of the simultaneous impossibility *and* possibility of freedom (1964:xlvi). For Marcuse genuine freedom would, in the current context, be better described as negative freedom for

...economic freedom would mean freedom *from* the economy, that is, man's [sic] freedom from being determined by economic forces and relationships: freedom from the daily struggle for existence, from earning a living. Political freedom would mean liberation of the individuals *from* politics over which they have no effective control – the disappearance of politics as a separate branch and function in the social division of labor. Similarly, intellectual freedom would mean the restoration of individual thought after its absorption by mass communication and indoctrination – abolition of 'public opinion' together with its makers. The unrealistic sound of these propositions is indicative, not of their utopian character, but of the predominance of forces which prevent their realization by preconditioning the material and intellectual needs which perpetuate obsolete forms of the struggle for existence (2001 [1961]:51 [original emphasis]).

So, then, where does the possibility for this freedom lie? The answer is twofold. First – and strikingly – Marcuse, like Marx, argues that it is *still* to be found in the process of production itself (and in the culture that it produces). At the same time, however, Marcuse asserts that perhaps the greatest hope for liberation in the capitalist centres is actually to be found in the reactivation of critique and of critical thinking more generally. We begin, then, with some discussion of the former possibility before closing this chapter by engaging with Marcuse's analysis of the recuperation of two-dimensional thought.

The increased mechanization of labour, though highly repressive, also contains revolutionary potential. Marcuse is clear that this possibility is not assured; automation is either "an explosive or non-explosive catalyst in the material base of qualitative change" (1964:36). Its potentially "explosive" element can be found in two, apparently contradictory, places: 1) its increase to the point where it becomes "*the* process of material production" (ibid:37 [original emphasis]) and 2) in the resistance of labour to it. In Marcuse's view, the former appears to hold more potential than the latter due to the

fact that “...the declining proportion of human labor power in the productive process means a decline in the political power of the opposition” (ibid:38). Furthermore, in the capitalist centres white-collar labour becomes increasingly important. In order, then, for the resistance to automation to become a real challenge to the system, the political radicalization of white-collar workers becomes necessary and this radicalization “...would have to be accompanied by the emergence of an independent political consciousness and action among the white-collar groups – a rather unlikely development in advanced industrial society” (ibid). What then of the revolutionary potential of *increased* automation? Marcuse follows Marx here,³¹ arguing that were automation to become total, the relation of labour to the process of production would change in such a way that the individual labourer would be *excluded from it*. The production of commodities and of surplus value would no longer depend upon direct human labour power. Therefore,

...the social process of automation expresses the...transubstantiation of labor power, in which the latter, separated from the individual, becomes an independent producing object and thus a subject itself. Automation, once it became *the* process of material production, would revolutionize the whole society. The reification of human labor power, driven to perfection, would shatter the reified form by cutting the chain that ties the individual to the machinery – the mechanism through which his [sic] own labor enslaves him. Complete automation in the realm of necessity would open the dimension of free time as the one in which man’s private *and* societal existence would constitute itself. This would be the historical transcendence toward a new civilization (ibid:36-37 [original emphasis]; 1955:129).

³¹ See the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973 [1857-1858]).

With the possibility of this “transcendence” toward a new, non-repressive civilization comes the potential for the “transformation of work into play”; the end of alienated labour would mean that the individual would be free to sublimate her desires in her work and as such she would exist “...not as an instrument of alienated labor but as a subject of self-realization – in other words...socially useful work [would become] at the same time the transparent satisfaction of an individual need” (1955:210, see also p. 218). Here, then, is an instance in which the progression of alienation in the relations of production becomes (at least potentially) “positive”. Alongside this are the potentially positive aspects of alienation in the realm of capitalist culture and it is to discussion of this that we now turn.

We have seen that advanced capitalism is able to contain emancipatory forces in part through the absorption of the antagonistic elements of its culture (Marcuse 1964:57). Art, for Marcuse, has historically been able to express the contradictions of the society in which it is created; it represented and communicated the “...unhappy consciousness of the divided world, the defeated possibilities, the hopes unfulfilled, and the promises betrayed. [It was] a rational, cognitive force, revealing a dimension of man and nature which was repressed and repelled in reality” (ibid:61). Even elements within bourgeois art performed this function and art in general presented and represented the tension between actual and ideal reality, between the world as it is and the world as it could be (ibid, see also pp. 58, 60). While the proletariat was the negation of the “established order” in flesh, art was its negation in culture. As this negative, contradictory force, it

constituted a propitious form of alienation and as such it was “the Great Refusal – the protest against that which is” (ibid:63, 256-257; 1955:149f). Marcuse argues that this “artistic alienation” stands “in contrast to the Marxian concept” (ibid:60) and is subversive insofar as it is “the conscious transcendence of the alienated existence – a ‘higher level’ or mediated alienation. ...The traditional images of artistic alienation...recall and preserve in memory...images of a gratification that would dissolve the society which suppresses it” (1964:60). However, even this alienation is absorbed by the process of one-dimensional, technological rationality (ibid:65):

Now this essential gap between the arts and the order of the day, kept open in artistic alienation, is progressively closed by the advancing technological society. And with its closing, the Great Refusal is in turn refused; the “other dimension” is absorbed into the prevailing state of affairs. The works of alienation are themselves incorporated into this society and circulate as part and parcel of the equipment which adorns and psychoanalyzes the prevailing state of affairs. Thus they become commercials – they sell, comfort, or excite (ibid:64).

While on the one hand, great works of art are now accessible to more and more people, in their mass reproduction and availability they have lost their oppositional element; through the process of repressive desublimation, and their reduction to mere commodities, their power of negation has, to a large extent, been divested from them (ibid:72). Art is therefore rendered largely harmless and “...the joys which it grants promote social cohesion and contentment” (ibid). The possibility for resistance in this realm still exists, however. What is required is the conscious effort to communicate art’s truth without allowing it to become absorbed by, and integrated into, the prevailing order (ibid:66). If we have come to completely identify with our society, then the trick becomes

breaking that identification in order to produce a “dissociation in which the world can be recognized as what it is” (ibid:67). Marcuse, like other members of the Frankfurt School, points to the avant-garde as a site where attempts to do so are being made but the reactivation of the negative power of art, like the revolutionary potential of automation, is far from assured.³²

The reactivation of art’s negativity is connected to the recuperation of critical thinking more generally. Indeed, each depends upon and strengthens the other. The reactivation of two-dimensional thought as well as of its ability to recognize history as a “hidden dimension of meaning” in the dominant discourses of society is necessary, for “unless the recognition of what is being done and what is being prevented subverts the consciousness and the behavior of man, not even a catastrophe will bring about...change” (1964:xlvi).³³ According to Marcuse, such recognition “shatters the natural and reified form in which the given universe of discourse first appears” (ibid:181). Furthermore, the reactivation of two-dimensional, negative thinking would also be the reemergence of the critical judgment, which would at least challenge, if not destroy, the technological attitude due to the fact that this form of judgment not only imagines and articulates how things *ought* to be but is also, therefore, explicitly *political* (ibid:123f). Marcuse sees the

³² Marcuse cites Brecht’s “estrangement effect” as an example of the conscious attempt to reassert the revolutionary potential of alienation in art (1964:66). Further discussion of this, and Marcuse’s arguments concerning aesthetics more generally, are beyond the scope of this chapter. For more on this issue, see Marcuse 1998:91-92; 1998 [1993]; 1979; 1978; 1964.

³³ Indeed, we can see that this is the case by looking to history. There have arguably already been many “catastrophes” and rather than exploding the prevailing order, they have instead appeared, to a great extent, to strengthen it.

development of a philosophy that is immanently critical (e.g., the Frankfurt School's own "Critical Theory") as one of the main means, alongside art, of reviving critical thought.

Marcuse argues,

The unscientific, speculative character of critical theory derives from the specific character of its concepts, which designate and define the irrational in the rational, the mystification in the reality. Their mythological quality reflects the mystifying quality of the given facts – the deceptive harmonization of the societal conditions (ibid:189, see also pp. 140-141).

Therefore,

In the totalitarian era, the therapeutic task of philosophy would be a political task, since the established universe of ordinary language tends to coagulate into a totally manipulated and indoctrinated universe. The politics would appear in philosophy, not as a special discipline or object of analysis, nor as a special political philosophy, but as the intent of its concepts to comprehend the unmutated reality (ibid:199).³⁴

Of course, as we have seen in the discussion of the transformation of negative into positive thinking above, critical thought is capable of being contained and absorbed by the prevailing social order. Indeed, this form of thought has become increasingly "socially impotent" as a result both of the "growth of the industrial apparatus" and the resulting coordination of "all spheres of life" and as an outcome of the assimilation of historically oppositional elements, such as labour and art, into the apparatus itself (1998

³⁴ For more on the importance of Critical Theory to social transformation, see Jacoby (1975:73-100) where he argues that the "...overpowering by a brutal reality which has left the individual numb and dumb is to be overcome, at least in thought and theory, before subjectivity can be realized: insight into the very material and social conditions that mutilate it. Before the individual can exist, before it can become an individual, it must recognize to what extent it does not yet exist. It must shed the illusion of the individual before becoming one. Subjectivity must be brought to objectivity so it can be realized" (ibid:81; see also pp. 80, 90-91, 99). This is the negative (and negating) power of Critical Theory.

[1941]:51-52). Nonetheless, Marcuse argues that we must continue to develop this critique in an effort to find ways of keeping it from losing its “edge” and becoming “merge[d] with the old and familiar” (ibid:51). Otherwise, we run the risk of becoming completely incapable of escaping a truly pervasive and destructive totalitarianism, one that covers not only all of society but the mind and body as well.

While Marcuse does not prescribe any definitive solutions to the problem of emancipation under advanced capitalism, he does clearly argue that in general “...the liberation from this state seems to require, not the arrest of alienation, but its consummation, not the reactivation of the repressed and productive personality but its abolition. The elimination of human potentialities from the world of (alienated) labor creates the preconditions for the elimination of labor from the world of human potentialities” (1955:105). Furthermore, “The possibility of a non-repressive civilization is predicated not upon the arrest, but upon the liberation of progress” (ibid:198). This leaves us in a paradoxical position: the possibility of freedom, at least in the centres of capitalism, lies in the completion of alienation, in the total reification of existence. Like Marx, Marcuse claims that the progression of capitalism may very well create conditions that are incompatible with its own continued existence.³⁵ On the other hand, its ability to “obliterate” all opposition may only get stronger. Indeed, Marcuse is calling on us to understand that despite a higher standard of living, despite the “luxury” of (what appears

³⁵ This is stated explicitly in the introduction to *One Dimensional Man* (1964:xlvi).

to be) more options than ever before, ours is a mutilated reality and a mutilated experience. The barbarism of everyday life can be seen in the very fact that we live in a world where alienation has become almost total; we live subjected to an order in which we are blind to our subjection and our unfreedom appears as freedom. Now, we should not misunderstand Marcuse as making some sort of vulgar historical determinist argument advocating that we do nothing because capitalism will “take care of itself”. Marcuse, like both Marx and Lukács, is clear that “[a]ll liberation depends on consciousness of servitude” (1964:7); the question becomes how to cultivate that consciousness in a system so adept at preventing it.

Marcuse’s arguments are very narrowly focused on central capitalism. However, if we bring them into contact with Amin’s arguments concerning the relations between centre and periphery, they can be resituated in the broader context of the imperialist world system. It is to the explicit synthesis of the work of Marcuse and Amin that we now turn.

Chapter 4: Synthesizing Marcuse and Amin

In our discussion up to this point, I have engaged in some detail with both Samir Amin's and Herbert Marcuse's analyses of alienation. Amin's arguments are, as we have seen, situated in the context of a capitalist imperialist world system increasingly polarized into periphery and centre. Marcuse's arguments, by contrast, emerge in the context of the advanced capitalist centres where the experience of alienation, and the consequent identification – and compliance – of individuals with the status quo is totalizing. In spite of these different points of departure, their analyses are deeply compatible. This chapter highlights the ways in which a synthesis of the work of these representatives of two highly influential Marxist traditions can deepen our understanding of capitalist imperialism as well as of alienation as a mode of experience and way of being under the rule of such a system.

Amin's work serves as a supplement to Marcuse's thought insofar as it situates the analysis of alienation in the context of the world system allowing us to be able to flesh out Marcuse's analysis so as to protect it more fully from the critique that it is Eurocentric, too narrow, and therefore largely outdated or useful only when applied to specific academic contexts/fields (for example, leisure studies, sociology of consumption, etc.). Because of his focus on the centres of the world system, Marcuse comes to the conclusion that art and the revitalization of critical thought point the way toward freedom. While these are certainly important to the possibility of a radical transformation

of the given social order, this conclusion is at the same time somewhat unsatisfying and is at least partly to blame for the common conception of the Frankfurt School in general, and Marcuse in particular, as pessimistic and having little to offer by way of concrete alternatives. By resituating Marcuse's analysis of advanced capitalism into the broader context articulated by Amin, we are better able to see Marcuse's conclusions not as absolute, applying to the situation-at-hand *in general*, but rather as a crucial, albeit *particular*, part of the solution.

While Marcuse's argument that freedom is possible only with the reactivation of critical thought is both incisive and important, it is incomplete insofar as it is also necessary to see freedom as made possible by conditions arising out of the contradictions (i.e., crises) of capitalism – for example, by inter-imperialist rivalries in the centre and the particular conditions present in the periphery. From the other side, Marcuse is able to supplement Amin insofar as Amin's work is less thorough when it comes to the analysis of the ideology of the centres, specifically in terms of the connections between Enlightenment thought, instrumental rationality, and alienation and its consequences for human experience.¹

The analysis of the capitalist imperialist world system, human experience under such a system, and alienation as a mode of being-in-the-world becomes particularly strong when the powerful analysis of imperialism offered by Amin and the powerful

¹ Recall that Amin himself points to the work of the Frankfurt School, and Marcuse in particular, as important for understanding these issues.

analysis of human experience under advanced capitalism offered by Marcuse are used to supplement each other in this way. For, as Jacoby argues, “The psychic and character forms of reification are historically specific in a manner different from the non-psychic; each has a different dynamic which is not insular but derived from the dynamic of capitalism” (1975:100). These dynamics can only be properly understood from the vantage point of the world system and yet, at the same time, the world system cannot be adequately apprehended without the understanding of how these dynamics operate in the centres of the system, where capitalist domination has become, for all intents and purposes, total. This chapter returns to the discussion of alienation and the consequences of this analysis for our understanding of the role of class begun in the previous chapters before turning our focus, once again, to the question of human freedom. The chapter concludes with questions for future research.

As we have seen, Marcuse’s analysis of alienation begins with his discussion of the transformation of two-dimensional into one-dimensional thought, a consequence of the progress of capitalism and, more specifically, the emergence of technological rationality as dominant. Marcuse’s understanding of alienation generally follows that of Marx, however, he goes beyond Marx’s formulation particularly insofar as he integrates Freudian concepts into his conceptual framework. It is worth reemphasizing that for Marcuse this is necessary due to the fact that with the progress of technological, advanced capitalist society, alienation has come to affect individuals not just on the level of their consciousness and conscious experience, but rather on the level of their

unconscious drives and desires as well (1964:6, 32, 72; 1955:46, 89, 102-103, 129).

Marcuse historicizes several of Freud's most important concepts: he argues that Freud's discussion of work and its relation to scarcity, repression, the reality principle, and sublimation all must be understood not simply as a part of the biogenetic evolution of the individual human being, but rather as products of the mode of production in which they arise. In other words, these concepts must "...be paired with corresponding terms denoting the specific socio-historical component" (1955:35). Unlike Freud, Marcuse distinguishes between alienated and non-alienated work, repression and surplus repression, repressive and non-repressive sublimation (and desublimation), and the reality and performance principles. In doing so, Marcuse is able to provide a particularly robust analysis of the consequences of the progress of alienation for human experience, not just of each other, our work, or our environment, but of our very selves, on the most intimate and basic levels, as well. These consequences include, as we have seen, the emergence of a matter-of-fact attitude and overall psychological neutrality that becomes an integral part of the "mechanics of conformity" in technological society (1998 [1941]:48). Our ability, therefore, to resist the totalitarianism of advanced capitalist societies, whether terroristic or non-terroristic in nature, is deeply compromised.

Yet, just as Marcuse found it necessary to historicize Freudian concepts in order to develop a more complete understanding of alienation, so too is it necessary to socially and historically locate Marcuse's conceptualizations. It bears repeating that Marcuse's concern is specifically with the advanced capitalist centres. It stands to reason, then, that

the picture may be somewhat different once we extend the analysis to the world system more broadly. It is here that Amin's work is especially useful. Marcuse and Amin both understand economic alienation in generally similar terms, largely due to the fact that both draw here specifically from Marx's analysis. Yet, unlike Marcuse – and due to his focus on the history and nature of the world system – Amin introduces further distinctions into our understanding of this concept. First of all, Amin argues that the form of alienation dominating tributary societies is actually metaphysical rather than economic in nature due on the one hand to the “transparency of the economic relations of exploitation and, on the other hand, from the limited degree of mastery over nature at the corresponding levels of development of the productive forces” (1980:ix; 2011:180, 182; 1998:54-55; 1977:76-77; 1976:70-71). In tributary societies, the “politico-ideological instance...dominates social life” (1976:25; 1989:5, 22; recall Chapter 2). Of course, in the capitalist mode, this relationship is inverted and the political becomes subordinated to the economic. Again, on this Marcuse and Amin agree. However, it is here that Amin takes the analysis yet another step further: by taking into account the imperialist character of the global context, he goes beyond Marx and Marcuse, arguing that within the world system operates a “pyramid of alienations” (2011:189).

It is worth restating what Amin means by this term. Because the contemporary world system, though dominated by capitalism, is still nonetheless characterized by mixed modes of production, a conflict between various forms of alienation arises. The advanced capitalist centres are typified by an increasingly totalizing economic alienation;

however, in the peripheries, tributary modes can still be found and because of this, there is a conflict between the economic alienation resultant from the capitalist nature of the system as a whole and the metaphysical alienation that persists as a result of its retention of tributary features. This conflict plays itself out within the peripheral societies themselves; while in the centre the contradictions of capitalism are largely smoothed out (for all of the reasons both Amin and Marcuse identify),² in the periphery these contradictions may remain more visible. This has implications for our understanding of the possibility of transformative social change as well as of the role of the proletariat in such a transformation.

It is precisely the mechanics of the interrelationship between alienation and the increasingly totalitarian nature of advanced capitalist society that leads Marcuse to wonder if perhaps the proletariat is no longer the motive force of social transformation. But this apparent impasse is breached if we take Amin's "pyramid of alienations" argument seriously. The fact that mixed modes of production are still present, particularly in the periphery, means that we can no longer think of class simply in terms of "proletariat" and "bourgeoisie". Rather, what we have seen is that these categories must be further subdivided into the imperialist bourgeoisie (i.e., the central bourgeoisie), the central proletariat, the peripheral bourgeoisie (i.e. the national bourgeoisie of the various peripheral societies), and the peripheral proletariat (i.e., the super-exploited). In other

² See Chapters 2 and 3 above.

words, when Marcuse asserts that the proletariat may no longer be the locus of societal transformation, what he is identifying are the limitations of the transformative potential of the *central* proletariat. Understood this way, we see that Marcuse and Amin agree that the proletariat of the centre is largely integrated into the society such that their ability to pose a real threat to the status quo is apparently – at least in the present moment – limited. This integration occurs not just on the level of the actually existing mechanics of the society (e.g., the interrelationship between democratic ideology, for example, and the market; the effect of mechanization and standardization on workers' labour) but also in terms of the actual experience of workers in this society (e.g., along the axes of alienation articulated by Marx and developed by Marcuse further to encompass psychoanalytic dynamics) as well. Furthermore, this integration is not simply the result of the dynamics operating in the centres themselves, in isolation, but is rather also the result of the dynamics of the world system in general. Indeed, if we ignore one locus in favor of the other, our understanding is necessarily limited in ways it need not be. It is therefore perhaps helpful to briefly revisit Amin's and Marcuse's arguments concerning the integration of the central proletariat before turning to some further discussion of the periphery.

For Amin as for Marcuse, economic alienation "...functions...to hide the elimination of the autonomy of the political" (2004:45) but it is not simply that democracy and the market have converged. Rather, the former is subjected to the latter (ibid:46). What we are left with is "... a theory of imaginary politics" that "...forms, in

its own sphere, the counterpart of ‘pure economics,’ which is not the theory of really-existing capitalism, but of an imaginary economy” (ibid:47). We are faced with the mystification of both economics and politics. The way in which the system truly functions is obscured. As a consequence of this, “...there appears to be no alternative to the dominant ideology” (ibid:46, 21); “Subjection to the established facts is total” (Marcuse 1964:178). For the central proletariat, one consequence of this is that they come to accept the “hegemony of social democracy” (Amin 1976:378-379). This partly stems from the fact that the working class has made real gains through social democratic mechanisms (for example, the formation of unions and the resultant establishment of labour laws, the establishment of welfare state policies, etc.) and indeed, one could interpret this as an indication that there is in fact the possibility that some transformation along this route may be possible.³ However, the prevailing tendency has on the contrary been the emptying out “...of all content [of democracy] which restricts and is potentially dangerous for the market. It becomes a ‘low-intensity democracy’. You are free to vote as you choose: white, blue, green, pink, or red. In any case, it will have no effect; your fate is decided elsewhere, outside the precincts of Parliament, in the market” (Amin 2004:46).^{4, 5} Or, in Marcuse’s words, “[d]emocracy would appear to be the most efficient

³ Yet, even if we were to accept this interpretation, recall that Amin argues that these gains have actually been made possible as a result of imperialist rent; the central proletariat can only enjoy these benefits because such advances are to a large extent not possible in the peripheries (2011:168, 163; see page 104 above).

⁴ For more on “low-intensity democracy” see Amin 2004:21, 29, 42-48, 68, 70.

⁵ Indeed, today the weakness of social democratic mechanisms is increasingly apparent. For example, union membership in the centres, particularly in North America, has dramatically declined; legislation aimed at

system of domination” (1964:52) precisely because under its rule, unfreedom is actually experienced as freedom; “Domination appears as freedom because people indeed have the choice of prefabricated goods and prefabricated candidates. Behind the technological veil domination of man by man continues as it did before and operates within the conception and context of free individuals” (2001 [1965]:86; see also, 2001 [1961]:38, 40, 49-50; 1964).

The integration of the central proletariat is apparent in more than just their acceptance of social democracy as an end-in-itself, however. Rather, on the domestic level, we have seen that the assimilation of jobs is another factor. So too is the ability of many members of the class to participate in the consumptive practices of the society as a whole. As Marcuse points out, this domination-through-integration is not only physical but also psychological in nature; the conditions of the centre “...promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood” (1964:12). It is necessary to reemphasize, however, that these conditions arise out of the context of a polarized and polarizing world system. It is not simply the totalitarianism of the centres of capitalism (both on the material and ideological levels) that is to blame for the integration of the proletariat. In other words, the dynamics that lead to its assimilation are not simply “local”. They are, quite literally, international. The integration of the central proletariat is,

undoing the gains made by unions – such as so-called “Right to Work” and “Back to Work” legislation – has become increasingly popular; the welfare state is being systematically dismantled in favor of, domestically, austerity measures and, generally, a turn towards “globalized neoliberalism” (recall that this is Amin’s term; see 1998:43 or page 86 above for further discussion).

in other words, a direct result of the autocentred accumulation of the centres and the concomitant super-exploitation of the periphery (Amin 2011; 2010 [1978]). Taken together, the “external” dynamics of the imperialist world system and the “internal” dynamics of the central societies themselves come together in such a way so as to blunt the transformative potential of the central working class by inoculating them against both understanding and experiencing themselves as the “living contradiction to the established society” (Marcuse 1964:32). It is precisely this consequence of the interplay between these dynamics that leads Amin to reach a similar conclusion to Marcuse and to further argue that given this – and especially given the specific dynamics of autocentred accumulation – the “main nucleus” of the proletariat is no longer in the centre (1976:360); rather, “...it is necessary to leave behind the viewpoint of the popular classes in the rich centres alone, to see the reality of the globalised capitalist system” (2011:191). What then of the peripheral proletariat?

To begin, Amin argues that contrary to the assertions of those like Hardt and Negri (2000), the world system has not left imperialism behind and instead entered into a stage of “empire” but rather has developed a “new imperialism” that differs from previous forms in some important ways.⁶ This, he argues, is “...by nature an imperialist system exacerbated to the extreme” (Amin 2004:22). Indeed,

⁶Amin’s critique of the “currently fashionable intellectual discourse” (2004:22) represented by books like *Empire* (2000) follows the same line as that of liberalism generally and post-modern discourse in particular and is discussed in some detail in Chapter 3. For explicit discussion of *Empire* see Amin 2004:19-27.

...accumulation in the prior imperialist stage was based on the binary relation between the industrialized centers and the non-industrialized peripheries, while in the new conditions of the system's evolution the opposition is between the beneficiaries of the centers' new monopolies (technology, access to natural resources, communications, weapons of mass destruction) and peripheries that are industrialized, but still subordinated by means of these monopolies (2004:23; 2011:6).

Furthermore, while

[i]mperialism in the past was multiple ('imperialisms' in conflict)... the new one is collective (the Triad, even if this be in the wake of United States hegemony). From this fact, the 'conflicts' among the partners of the Triad are only minor, while the conflict between the Triad and the rest of the world is clearly the major one (2004:22-23).

For Amin, the consequences of this imperialism – an imperialism that has become increasingly violent (ibid:22, 34; 2011) – are dire, especially but not only for those in the peripheries.

Perhaps the greatest threat stemming from the emergence of this “new imperialism” is that it operates according to a logic that “...is no longer able to ensure the simple survival of humanity” (Amin 2011:106). This is the case whether we look in the direction of the continuing and intensifying environmental degradation/destruction or whether we look toward the expansionist requirements of the system. Indeed, these two outcomes perpetuate and reinforce each other. The consequences of climate change, habitat destruction and pollution, and the need for rapid and rabid expansion to ever bigger and newer markets can and will also be felt in the centres, though for the moment our experience of their effects are (or at least appear to be) mitigated by our monopoly over access to, and use of, technologies, financial systems, natural resources, media and

information systems, and weapons of mass destruction (Amin 2011:60, 62; 2004:23; 2003:13, 63-65; 1998:26). However, our ability to mitigate these consequences as a result of our ‘enjoyment’ of these monopolies is at the same time necessarily the intensification of these destructive tendencies themselves. And the consequences of these tendencies are nowhere more – immediately – devastating than in the periphery, where, as Amin argues, the only prospect the system can truly offer is “...a planet full of slums and billions of ‘too many’ human beings” (2011:105-106; recall also the discussion on pages 78-80 and footnote 33 on page 95, above).⁷ Furthermore, it is the peripheries of the world system that disproportionately bear the burdens of the state of permanent war that is a “natural” outgrowth of the polarizing expansion of the world system.

Both Amin and Marcuse have much to say about the emergence and mobilization of a state of permanent war. Marcuse couches his discussion in terms of the way the

⁷ Of course, the consequences for people in the centres have also been, and continue to be, devastating as well, albeit in a different way. Marcuse’s analysis of the consequences of capitalist development for human reason and experience is particularly important in this regard. The price we pay for the comforts we “enjoy” as a consequence of the super-exploitation of the periphery is an alienation that is absolutely totalizing; our unfreedom is understood and experienced as freedom and as such our ability to mount a defense against the increasing deficiencies of experience and the short-term, irrational rationality characterizing the contemporary scene is compromised. Indeed, as we have seen, a significant implication of Marcuse’s analysis is that the question of liberation itself no longer even appears relevant; the transformation of society not only appears impossible, but rather this transformation and by extension real freedom has become *undesireable*. This begs the question of what responses are still possible both within the centre and beyond it. If what is required in the centres is, as Amin argues, substantive internationalist solidarity with “the struggles for emancipation of the peoples in the peripheries” (2011:191), how do we cultivate this, particularly given not only that our standard of living is dependent upon a continuation of the status quo but, perhaps more troubling, that it is becoming more and more difficult for the average person to develop the sociological imagination (Mills 2000 [1959]) required for apprehending these connections, both intellectually and emotionally. At the same time, even if these connections are made, the entire system itself is mobilized to contain the potentially liberatory forces of society. This seems a bleak picture, indeed. We return to the question of a way forward, below.

liberation of “destructive and aggressive energy” (2001 [1965]:91; 1955), necessitated by the repressive desublimation prevalent in the advanced capitalist centres, impacts unconscious drives and desires. This, he argues, is a clear symptom of the matter-of-fact, technological attitude. This attitude, as the outcome of the totalizing force of technological rationality, is characterized by (sometimes extreme) rationalization on the part of the individual; wars, scarcity, toil – injustices of all kinds – are seen as reasonable and/or pragmatic. This leads to a standpoint of detachment and resignation (2001 [1961]:49; 1998a:187-188; 1998 [1941]:44-48); everyone and everything in the society is mobilized, consciously and unconsciously, against “the Enemy”, the “real spectre of liberation” (1964:52). However, this mobilization has consequences not just for the centres, but for peripheral societies as well. Marcuse, of course, remained focused on the former. But it is clear in this instance, as in all the others we have discussed so far, that the veracity of both Marcuse’s and Amin’s arguments is enhanced once they are brought into conversation with one another in the specific context of the imperialist world system.

The psychological neutrality that Marcuse argues characterizes the viewpoint of those in the centres in fact serves not only to inoculate people against recognition of the actual origins and nature of the injustices of life domestically but importantly against recognizing their complicity in the oppression and exploitation of the peoples of the periphery as well. Compliance and obedience at home enables and reinforces the intensification of globalized “accumulation through dispossession” (i.e., the autocentred

accumulation of the centres at the expense of the vast majority of the world's population)

(2011:19, 112; 2004; 1980:225-230).⁸ Amin argues,

...the global expansion of capitalism, because it is polarizing, always implies the political intervention of the dominant powers, that is, the states of the system's center, in the societies of the dominated periphery. This expansion cannot occur by the force of economic laws alone; it is necessary to complement that with political support (and military, if necessary) from states in the service of dominant capital. In this sense, the expansion is always entirely imperialist... In this sense, the contemporary intervention of the United States is no less imperialist than were the colonial conquests of the nineteenth century. Washington's objective in Iraq, for example, (and tomorrow elsewhere) is to put in place a dictatorship in the service of American capital (and not a "democracy"), enabling the pillage of the country's natural resources, and nothing more. The globalized "liberal" economic order requires permanent war – military interventions endlessly succeeding one another – as the only means to submit the peoples of the periphery to its demands (2004:23-24; 2011:1-18).

Furthermore,

...in order to maintain their status as affluent societies, the countries of the imperialist Triad are henceforth obliged to reserve access to the planet's natural resources for their own exclusive benefit. This new requirement is at the origin of the militarisation of globalisation... In line with the Washington project of military control over the planet and the waging of pre-emptive wars under the pretext of the war on terror, NATO has

⁸ There are, of course, moments of resistance in the centres (for example, demonstrations against government cuts to social services of various kinds, marches against Western intervention in various countries throughout the world), however, their impact is limited not only structurally but also by the dominant ideology itself, which Amin argues promotes a culturalist approach in which "nations and classes have already left the scene and ceded political space to the individual, who is now the active subject of social transformation" (2011:14; 2004:57-58; 1998:33-35). Marcuse argues something similar when he states, "Theories of society and social change which imply objective historical tendencies and an objective evaluation of historical alternatives now appear as unrealistic speculation, and commitment to them as a matter of personal (or group) preference" (2001 [1961]:39). As a result, "in the current state of affairs, social protest movements, despite their visible growth, remain as a whole unable to question the social order linked to the capitalism of the oligopolies in the absence of a coherent political project that can match up to the challenges" (Amin 2011:15). As we saw in Chapter 2, under these circumstances the way in which the system actually operates continues to be obscured and this further leads to a fundamentally reformist orientation to the present state of affairs.

portrayed itself as the representative of the international community and has thereby marginalised the UN...Of course, these real goals cannot be openly acknowledged. In order to mask them, the powers in question have chosen to instrumentalise the discourse on democracy and have arrogated to themselves the right to intervene so as to impose 'respect for human rights'. ...[T]he new political management of the society of oligopolistic capitalism, established by means of a systematic depoliticisation, has given rise to a new political culture of 'consensus' (modelled on the example of the United States) which substitutes the consumer and the political spectator for the active citizen – who is a condition for an authentic democracy (2011:13-14).

Amin's language here recalls Marcuse's. His discussion of the relationship between the shift in material conditions from the tributary to the capitalist mode and the concomitant changes in the dominant ideologies characterizing these forms paired with Marcuse's analysis of the development of technological rationality and its relationship to the emergence of the matter-of-fact attitude in the centre permits a clear understanding of *how* this "systematic depoliticisation" and "culture of 'consensus'" arises. Here is the place where the analyses of these two thinkers most clearly and explicitly converge. Marcuse is especially adept at offering a more thorough explanation of how the substitution of "the consumer and the political spectator for the active citizen" occurs in the centres while Amin is able to provide further insight into the ways in which "[e]mbracing the ideological alienation which is caused by capitalism" (2011:15) affects those in the periphery alongside those in the centre. According to Amin, "The peoples of the peripheries, who are for the most part deprived of access to acceptable levels of consumption and blinded by aspirations to consume like the opulent North, are losing

consciousness of the fact that the logic of historical capitalism makes the extension of this model to the entire globe impossible” (ibid).

This “loss of consciousness” is not simply the result of consumerist aspirations; it is an outcome of the conflict between economic and metaphysical alienation that continues to characterize the peripheral situation. These forces, always in contention, are symptomatic of the fact that in the periphery the homogenizing tendency of capitalism has not yet won out, or, stated differently, the homogenization of social, political, and economic life has not progressed to the same extent as it has in the centres. Therefore, the tendency to “lose consciousness” of the way in which the capitalist system actually operates itself occurs alongside the fact that the “homogenization of the whole of the planet” (Amin 1980:240) is in reality impossible due to the fact that the centre-periphery contradiction is fundamental.⁹ Recall that though the necessity of capitalist markets to continually expand forms the “material basis” for capitalism’s homogenizing tendency – a tendency that, Amin argues, also envelopes “all aspects” of social life and culture – it is *at the same time* “held in check by the effects of unequal accumulation”, i.e., by the very polarization inherent in the world capitalist imperialist system (ibid:30-32). This dynamic ensures that the majority of the world’s societies will remain – indeed *must* remain –

⁹ Also important to remember are the actual historical struggles on the ground of those in the peripheries. Amin pays particular attention to the Russian and Chinese revolutions, as well as to the historical situations in Cuba and Vietnam. He also emphasizes the Bandung era of 1955-80. These “advances that have been followed by dramatic retreats” also affect people’s consciousness of the current state of affairs. Unfortunately, discussion of these events is beyond the scope of this project. See in particular Amin 2011:78-99 for more on these issues.

underdeveloped, and is, as Amin emphasizes, the very reason that the contradictions of capitalism remain (at least potentially) more visible in the peripheries of the world system (1977:80, 83). Notably, in dealing with the totalizing character of advanced capitalism, Marcuse appears to come to a similar conclusion, although he does not elaborate on its implications. He argues,

...large sections of the laboring classes in the most advanced areas of industrial civilization are led from “absolute negation” to resignation and even affirmation of the system. In the absence of demonstrable agents and agencies of social change, the critique is thrown back to a high level of abstraction: there is no ground on which theory and practice, thought and action meet. ...Insulation against [the] context [of objective historical tendencies and an objective evaluation of historical alternatives] falsifies the facts and their function in the society because it insulates the facts against their negation, i.e., against the forces which make for their transcendence [sic] toward modes of existence rendered possible and at the same time precluded by the given society. If the insulation is corrected, the facts appear as other than they are in the immediate (insulated) experience. Now they are “comprehended”, understood in the light of a historical reality which joins capitalism and communism, overdeveloped and underdeveloped areas, pre-technological and technological cultures, the affluent and the miserable society in one global historical structure. *The latter is the empirical ground for the formation of the concepts and criteria for the critique of contemporary society* (2001 [1961]:39 [emphasis added]).

If both Amin and Marcuse are correct that the “empirical ground” for a transformative praxis is to be found through comprehension of the “global historical structure” and by extension through the recognition of the particular status of the “miserable societies” in such a structure, then what we must further comprehend is that while “...obsolescent capitalism, by means of a violent imperialism, is busily annulling all of the emancipatory possibilities” (Amin 2004:27), its success is potentially limited by the nature of the capitalist imperialist world system itself. This system requires the super-

exploitation of vast swaths of the world's population so that those in the "affluent societies" may maintain their level of comfort. And this fundamental contradiction remains more visible in the peripheries of the world system, where the consequences of the organization of the system are most strongly felt. How, then, might the transcendence of the current state of affairs be possible? This is perhaps one of the most important questions of our time; indeed, now, perhaps more than ever before, Rosa Luxemburg's warning that we stand at a crossroads between socialism and barbarism (1915:6) demands recognition. Faced with a state of permanent war, increasing environmental degradation in the name of profit, and the omnipresent, existential threat of climate change, something has got to give. In 1964 Marcuse wrote, "...unless the recognition of what is being done and what is being prevented subverts the consciousness and the behavior of man, not even a catastrophe will bring about the change" (xlvii). Amin, too, argues that "[u]p until now the world is more engaged on the road to chaos because the movements in the struggle have not measured up to the challenge" (2011:192).

There is no formula, no perfect solution to finding a way forward. It is possible only to point in certain directions where the possibility of successful transcendence toward an organization of society and of daily life that is not based on exploitation, that is truly satisfying, that is *free*, are increased. Marcus and Amin agree that nostalgia for some romanticized version of the past and veneration of "traditional values", is dangerous; going down that road leads us in the direction of fascism, religious or ethnic fundamentalisms, and terror, though it seems, distressingly, to be a road more and more

people in more and more places are taking.¹⁰ This ideological outgrowth of the material conditions of the organization of the world system, characterized by short-term rationality and one-dimensional thinking, must be combated. Marcuse, writing specifically about the situation in the centres argues that,

...underneath the conservative popular base is a substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and unemployable. They exist outside the democratic process; their life is the most immediate and the more real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions. Thus their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not. Their opposition hits the system from without and is therefore not deflected by the system; it is an elementary force which violates the rules of the game and, in doing so, reveals it as a rigged game. ...Their force is behind every political demonstration for the victims of law and order. The fact that they start refusing to play the game may be the fact which marks the beginning of the end of a period (1964:256-257).

However, despite this,

Nothing indicates that it will be a good end. The economic and technical capabilities of the established societies are sufficiently vast to allow for adjustments and concessions to the underdog, and their armed forces sufficiently trained and equipped to take care of emergency situations. *However, the spectre is there again, inside and outside the frontiers of the advanced societies.* The facile historical parallel with the barbarians threatening the empire of civilization prejudices the issue; the second period of barbarism may well be the continued empire of civilization itself. But the chance is that in this period, the historical extremes may meet again: the most advanced consciousness of humanity and its most exploited force. It is nothing but a chance. At the beginning of the fascist era, Walter Benjamin

¹⁰ Think for example of the 2014 European Parliament elections, which were the "...first time openly neo-Nazi parties [sat] in Brussels as representatives of their nations" (Elgot 2014:para. 2); the 2016 election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and the concomitant entry of the so-called "alt-right" into the American mainstream; the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria; the rise of Golden Dawn in Greece (and other nationalist, populist parties throughout Europe); the Harper Government's "Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act" (Bill C-24); increases in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia; and so on.

wrote: ...It is only for the sake of those without hope that hope is given to us (ibid:257 [emphasis added]).

If this is ultimately a pessimistic conclusion (notwithstanding the mention of “hope”), perhaps this can be mediated by extending Marcuse’s argument and pairing it with Amin’s. Marcuse has been proven right; the central societies have been very adept at containing social change and dealing with the dissent of those within it; power has made concessions and adjustments. Alienation has continued to progress. At the same time, dissatisfaction even within the centres is growing. Though we are faced with the danger that this dissatisfaction will be increasingly harnessed by fascist attempts to “reject the Other” (Marcuse 1964:245) there are some indications that more and more people can see the game is rigged, and that rather than turning toward right-wing populism, they instead seek a more egalitarian and “just” society.¹¹ One need only think of the Occupy movement and its spread across various cities in the centre to see this possibility. Yet Amin too is correct that movements such as Occupy have been unable to adequately “match up to the challenges” (2011:15, 192); these projects were and are doomed to fail given that their demands for an end to inequality largely remain beholden to the myths of the liberal democratic ideology in which they are immersed. As such, their ability to adequately critique the prevailing order, or to mount a substantive challenge to it, is inadequate and incomplete. What, then, is needed?

¹¹ This is the case perhaps especially since the “beginning” of economic crisis in 2008, which has resulted in various austerity measures being put in place by governments as a means of “coping”.

Marcuse argues that in the centres what is required is that the "...repressed dimensions of experience can come to life again" (1964:245). Fundamentally, this necessitates that our very *needs* be redefined (ibid). As we have seen, for Marcuse, the potential for this development can be found in the reactivation of critical thought, both in the realm of philosophy (i.e., Critical Theory) and in the realm of art. In the case of the former, this philosophy can challenge the technological attitude due to the fact that the reemergence of the critical judgment it entails not only imagines and articulates how things *ought* to be but is also, therefore, explicitly political (1964:123f). As an immanently critical endeavor, the "intent of its concepts" is to "comprehend the unmutilated reality" (ibid:199). This theoretical approach must shatter the myths that enslave us; it must help us to shed our illusions about the nature not only of the society in which we live but of our very experience as well. The reemergence of artistic alienation is a part of this project; the reactivation of art's negative power would mean the conscious effort to communicate art's truth without allowing it to become absorbed by, and integrated into, the prevailing order (ibid:66). It would mean breaking our identification with the given society in order to produce a "dissociation in which the world can be recognized as what it is" (ibid:67). This may not be as abstract as it sounds. If we extend Marcuse's argument that the opposition of "outsiders" is "revolutionary even if their consciousness is not" (1964:256), if we elaborate on his claim that "the spectre is there again, inside and outside the frontiers of the advanced societies" (ibid:257), the possibility exists of connecting Marcuse's calls for the "Great Refusal" in

the centres to a truly international and internationalist emancipatory project. If the Great Refusal is, as Marcuse identifies, "...a refusal of repression and injustice, a saying no, an elemental opposition to a system of oppression, a noncompliance with the rules of a rigged game, a form of radical resistance and struggle", if it is "...based on a subjectivity that is not able to tolerate injustice and that engages in resistance and opposition to all forms of domination, instinctual and political" (Kellner 2000:para. 26), then this project must necessarily take as its foundation understanding of the world system and the struggles of exploited peoples in both the centres and the peripheries. As we have seen there are places where Marcuse acknowledges this, but his project was such that following this line of thought very far was beyond his scope. Recognition of the need for such an approach is, however, a cornerstone of Amin's work.

For Amin, we must look to the periphery as the primary locus of the potential for revolutionary change. Like Marcuse, and for similar reasons, he is ambivalent about whether this potential will be realized or whether capitalist imperialism will continue to develop into something increasingly barbaric and destructive (2011; 1977). Unlike Marcuse, the courses of action he identifies are – at least immediately – more concrete. As was discussed in some detail in Chapter 2, Amin identifies delinking as necessary in the peripheries so as to promote the transition from the current state of affairs, in which the periphery is extraverted, to conditions under which the periphery may become autocentred (2003:160; 2011:37, 58). Indeed,

Historical capitalism must be overtaken and this cannot be done unless the societies in the peripheries (the great majority of humanity) set to work out

systematic strategies of delinking from the global system and reconstructing themselves on an autonomous basis, thus creating the conditions for an alternative globalisation, engaged on the long road to world socialism (2011:58; 2003:158).

These strategies are crucial to the project of the Great Refusal not only insofar as they require a fundamental reshaping of the organization of the world system but also because the required approach is "...critical of the world as it is today, in all its dimensions, and mobilizes the inventive imagination characteristic of creative Utopianism" (Amin 2003:159). Furthermore, though both the central and peripheral bourgeoisie "cannot really imagine delinking", for the peripheral proletariat, including the peasant population, "...delinking becomes a necessity as soon as they try to use political power to transform their conditions and to free themselves from the inhuman consequences of the polarizing global expansion of capitalism" (ibid:160). As we have seen, what is ultimately necessary here is a new wave of national liberation struggles, which are by their nature anti-imperialist (2011:162; 1980:252-253; 1976:382-383) and in which the strategies for delinking come from the peripheries themselves as a result of their specific historical and material conditions. Indeed, "Self-reliant [i.e., autcentred] development and delinking can...never become ready-made formulas valid for all situations and moments; they have to be considered afresh in the light of the lessons of history and the evolution of capitalist globalization" (2003:162). Nonetheless, Amin points us in two directions in particular that may increase the likelihood of delinking: 1) peripheral nations must form alliances with one another against their continued domination by the centre and 2) this project begins with the fight for food sovereignty.

According to Amin, given the current situation, there is no alternative to this battle (2011:106-108, 124, 141).¹² Furthermore, because the transition from capitalist imperialism to communism (by way of the transitional period of socialism), if it is to occur at all, will be a long one, Amin argues that recognizing and understanding “...the requirements of the state in the transition period...acquires a central importance” (2011:188). This

...does not only concern the national, popular, democratic state of the long transition based on the revolutionary advances in the peripheries of the system. It concerns every state in their no shorter transition in the developed centres. It requires the articulation between the needs for the socialization of economic management and those for the progress in the democratization of society. It requires the articulation between the policies of (national) states and the implementation of a multipolar globalisation (ibid).

In other words, rather than fall into the trap of believing that the state is in decline, it must be recentred as a fundamental part of any attempt to adequately understand the dynamics of the world system.

Given all of this, the question facing those in the centres who are committed to the emancipatory transformation of society – not just ours, but all – becomes how best to support the struggles of those in the periphery. This does not mean that we ignore the conditions in our own societies or that we stop fighting for their improvement. Rather, it means recognizing that there is continuity and connection between the struggles we face domestically and the struggles of exploited people everywhere. It means taking the nature

¹² Recall the discussion of this issue in Chapter 2.

of the imperialist world system, and its consequences materially, ideologically, psychologically, and experientially as our starting point. This is true for academics, for artists, for teachers, and for activists. Our work – of all these various, interrelated kinds – must be oriented toward solidarity in a truly substantive sense. It must aim to fully understand the imperialist nature of the world system and be fundamentally anti-imperialist in orientation. In other words, it must be critical in precisely the way that Marcuse ultimately describes and internationalist in precisely the way that Amin envisions. Without this orientation, any project interested in the alleviation of suffering is destined to fail. Yet, even with this orientation success is far from assured. As we have seen, this system is particularly adept at absorbing dissent; every apparatus is mobilized against “the spectre of liberation” (Marcuse 1964:52), wherever it is to be found, whether central or peripheral. Nonetheless, we have to try.

If we accept that there is merit to the synthesis of Marcuse and Amin as a means of apprehending the world capitalist imperialist system as it operates in both the centres and peripheries, some topics for future empirical research emerge. Much like the work of the Frankfurt School historically, this analysis could be used as a means of crossing disciplinary boundaries and interrogating topics largely treated as disparate. Such an approach is mandated by the analysis itself. That said, we are also able to focus on more traditionally “sociological” and “political” questions; for example, while the analysis presented here focuses on the underdeveloped peripheral nations as the primary locus of change for the system as a whole, it is important to interrogate “peripheral elements”

within the central societies themselves. Both Marcuse and Amin neglect the question of those circumstances under which the periphery is present within the centres. Synthesis of Amin and Marcuse, such as is offered in this dissertation, could be used to analyze the increasingly significant issue of migrant labour, migrant labourers, and other undocumented workers in the centres, not just in terms of what such work means on the level of material conditions but also on a more experiential level as well. Could these workers and solidarity with their struggles be a place for a more substantial challenge to the system as a whole from *within* the centres themselves?

Also of interest could be analysis of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), their emerging alliances, and what this means not only for the Triad and American hegemony but also in relation to Amin's arguments concerning delinking. The BRICS countries are currently attracting academic attention, largely in the areas of economics and international relations. Is there any progressive potential in the development of alliances between the BRICS countries, or in the inclusion of other peripheral countries like Indonesia and Turkey? How should their annual summits and projects be understood? What can be made of the fact that several other countries have expressed interest in joining? Perhaps most significantly, how should we understand the development of the "BRICS Bank", established in 2013, which is meant to offer both an alternative and a rival to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank? Is this just a reflection of the imperialist aspirations of the member states or does it have the potential to be something else?

Amin argues that the “collective imperialism” of the Triad implies the “obliteration of the European project” and that,

Only if social struggles in Europe acquire a political dimension strong enough to impose a political and social bloc less exclusively in the service of transnational capital will a genuine ‘European project’ conceivably make headway both internally (through the market regulation it requires and enables) and externally (through relations of a different kind with the South). Europe will be on the left, in a serious sense of the term, or there will be no Europe (2003:76-77; see also 2004:89-97).

Amin further argues that the possibility of a “renaissance of the left” in “certain European countries” exists due to the fact that their “political culture” differs from that of the United States (2004:90), particularly as represented by American-style liberalism.¹³ This could go either way, however. Instead of a renaissance of the left, we may begin to see an “anti-Europeanism of the right” (ibid:93); indeed, one could argue we are seeing this already. It could therefore be interesting to develop a project based on applying the analysis presented in this dissertation to the current situation in Europe, including recent European Parliament elections, the eurozone crisis that began in 2009 (which Amin forewarned), and the implications of this for the European Union itself and its relationship to the periphery. More specifically, how might we understand, for example, events like the resignation of the French Prime Minister Manuel Valls’ government on August 25, 2014 or the success of far-right parties in more recent elections in Germany

¹³ Given this assertion, and the broader context of the analysis that the synthesis of Amin and Marcuse affords, it would also be interesting to examine the 2016 American primaries, particularly the success of Bernie Sanders, and the failure of Hilary Clinton, contra the election of Donald Trump.

and Austria? Or, more broadly speaking, of an increased share of European Parliament votes going to both extreme right and “extreme left” candidates? How should Brexit be understood? What is the significance of these developments? Further, how has the landscape shifted for both Europe and the United States as a result of the election of Donald Trump? Not only Amin, but Marcuse too, might help us to better understand not merely what is going on but what might be possible.

A synthesis of the work of Marcuse and Amin offers us a path to a more insightful analysis and critique of contemporary social movements; an original and thorough analysis of contemporary central social movements and their potential connections to the periphery. It would be important to examine where, for example, events like the World Social Forum, which has been meeting since 2001, and newer developments like the Peoples Social Forum, which was held in Ottawa in August 2014 and is the “first ever pan-Canadian social forum” (Rashi 2014:para. 1) fit in and where they pose a challenge. These are preliminary suggestions; development of them is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I raise them here only as a means of signaling potential starting points for future inquiry. These are merely a few examples; the possibilities are both numerous and exciting.

Conclusion

Inspired by the belief that some of the most productive analytical frameworks have been the result of the synthesis of the work of seemingly disparate theorists (the Frankfurt School stands out as a prime example), I set out to combine the theoretical perspectives put forward by Herbert Marcuse and Samir Amin. My objective in doing this is to produce a more robust theoretical approach capable of increasing our understanding of the world and positioning us to better meet the challenges posed for human emancipation from an exploitative, alienated existence of suffering. For this reason, the dissertation began with C. Wright Mills, who argues that this concern must be at the core of the sociological imagination and the sociological approach more generally.

This dissertation was not undertaken as a mere thought experiment; above all, the assertion of this dissertation is that we have much to gain by bringing Marxist theories of imperialism and Western Marxism into engagement with each other. To that end, I deliberately chose to concentrate on the work of Marcuse and Amin. The real-world impact of each of these thinkers has been profound. Marcuse has been extremely influential to the development of both the Western Marxist tradition itself and the New Left, due to his incisive critique of the totalitarian tendencies inherent in the advanced capitalist centres as well as of the consequences of this for the lived experience of those reared under such a system. The connection between – to use Mills’ terminology – personal troubles and public issues is a clear and central focus of Marcuse’s work.

Despite this, Marcuse's work has been subject to the critique that it is of limited value given its ostensibly inherent Eurocentrism. It is frequently approached as relevant only to specialized disciplinary subfields. Amin, despite having pioneered the centre-periphery distinction foundational to both Dependency and World Systems Theory and being named "the greatest living Marxist analyst of imperialism" (*Monthly Review* Vol. 59:No.7), is no longer widely read in North America. The ghettoization of these two thinkers goes beyond being merely unfortunate. In the years since his death, Marcuse's work has only become *more relevant* to our understanding of advanced capitalism in the centres and the concomitant alienation of human experience, while Amin's work remains of critical importance to our understanding of the imperialist world system and its development, the nature of alienation in the differing social formations, and the increasing polarization of the world. Synthesizing the work of these two deeply influential thinkers has been productive and worthwhile task, pointing to new directions for analysis of advanced capitalism, centre/periphery relations, and social transformation.

In order to undertake this task, the dissertation began, in Chapter 1, with a discussion of the intellectual background shared by Marcuse and Amin. Particular attention was paid to the work of Karl Marx, Georg Lukács, and Sigmund Freud. The Marx section of this chapter focused specifically on his arguments concerning the development of alienation before turning to his arguments concerning the possibility of human emancipation. The second section, on Lukács, focused specifically on the concept

of reification and its consequences for the development of class consciousness. The final section, which took up Freud, focused on the relationship between the development of the individual psyche and the demands of civilization, with particular attention paid to his conceptualization of repression, sublimation, and the pleasure and reality principles.

From here, the dissertation moved to explicit discussion of Amin's work. Here, the focus was on Amin's understanding of the world capitalist imperialist system and its development. Chapter 2 began with discussion of the transition from the tributary to the capitalist social formation in order to explain the role this transition played in the development of the centre-periphery distinction constitutive of the contemporary world system. This analysis covered the differences between tributary and capitalist ideology and the development of alienation. Particular attention was paid to the emergence of "pure economics" and the pervasiveness of short-term rationality as a means of understanding the world. Especially important for our purposes was the discussion of Amin's argument that alienation has a different character in the tributary mode than in the capitalist and that there therefore currently exists not one type of alienation, but rather a "pyramid of alienations". The chapter then moved on to discussion of the consequences of Amin's analysis for our understanding of class and the possibility of human emancipation and the "de-alienation" that this emancipation requires. For Amin, this project requires a long view and will not be resolved in the immediate. The focus was therefore on Amin's arguments concerning the importance of food sovereignty, alliance building, and state policy reforms amongst and within peripheral nations, as these are

important steps in what he sees as the long and crucial process of delinking. The chapter concluded by engaging with Amin's analysis of the ideological perspective dominant in the capitalist epoch. Given Amin's argument that the fight against an increasingly barbaric and genocidal capitalist imperialist world system must be fundamentally internationalist in orientation, and that such an orientation is only possible if we are able to understand the "ideological absolutism" of the centres of advanced capitalism, the dissertation then turned to discussion of the work of Herbert Marcuse who, according to Amin himself (1980:217), was one of the first to undertake such a project.

We began our discussion of Marcuse with analysis of the emergence of "one-dimensional thought" and "technological rationality", emphasizing the relationship between this rationality and alienation, which Marcuse argues infects even our unconscious drives and desires. Because of this, much of our discussion was focused on the ways in which Marcuse is able to historicize some of Freud's central concepts, specifically repression, sublimation, and the reality principle. These concepts are, he argues, actually socio-historical in nature and as such can be further refined. Marcuse therefore re-introduces these concepts as surplus-repression, repressive desublimation, and the performance principle, and they are central to his analysis of the development of the "matter-of-fact" or technological attitude that dominates under advanced capitalism. This attitude, he argues, not only serves the self-preservation of the system as a whole but, perhaps worse, actually becomes perceived by individuals themselves as necessary to their very survival. Indeed, the development of technological rationality and the

alienation that accompanies it leads Marcuse to argue that even the ostensibly “democratic” centres of capitalism are totalitarian in character. This totalitarianism not only characterizes these societies on the level of their organization, but also on the level of human experience, which is fundamentally mutilated. From here, the chapter examined the implications of this for the possibility of transformative social change and the overcoming of alienation. This analysis included discussion of the consequences of this for both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The chapter concluded with the assertion that Marcuse’s arguments here are, in reality, focused on central capitalism and that it is therefore necessary to consider the consequences of resituating them in the broader context of the imperialist world system, which was, as we have seen, the main focus of Amin’s work. We therefore moved on to our final chapter to present a synthesis of their work.

Chapter 4 began by rearticulating the twin aims of this dissertation: 1) to deepen our understanding of capitalist imperialism and alienation and as a result to more adequately engage with the question of the possibility of human freedom, and 2) to revitalize the work of both Marcuse and Amin. The chapter initially focused on a return to the discussion of alienation and its implications for class raised in the previous chapters, before moving once again to the question of emancipation. Here, the discussion emphasized that the same critique Marcuse applies to Freud can be applied to him as well: conceptualizations must be socio-historically situated. This led into discussion of the ways in which Amin’s understanding of both alienation and class can be used as a

corrective to Marcuse's. The chapter then moved on to discuss permanent war as a feature not only of the advanced capitalist centres but rather of the world system as a whole. Indeed, compliance and obedience in the centres of the system enables and reinforces intensified autocentred accumulation of the centres at the expense of the vast majority of the world's population; "[t]he globalized 'liberal' economic order requires permanent war – military interventions endlessly succeeding one another – as the only means to submit the people of the periphery to its demands" (Amin 2004:24). Finally, the chapter revisited both Marcuse's and Amin's arguments concerning the possibility of emancipation and the recuperation of human experience, and sought to bring together Marcuse's project of the Great Refusal and Amin's project of delinking; the conclusion here is that the question facing those in the centres who are committed to the emancipatory transformation of the social, economic, and political order – not just at "home" but necessarily on the level of the world system as well, since, the two cannot be understood separately – becomes a fundamentally and profoundly internationalist one. The chapter concludes with some speculation about using the synthesis as a theoretical basis for future research.

This dissertation seeks to provide a means of reinvigorating the work of Marcuse and Amin by arguing that their synthesis is useful for, and important to, increasing our understanding of the world, not a particularly humble claim. In undertaking this project, I was under no illusions that the result would be a complete theoretical framework. Rather, this project was undertaken with the awareness that theory is "...a process; that is, theory

[is] an ever-developing entity, not [a] perfected product” and therefore, a “discussional” approach to theory generation is important (Glaser and Strauss 2006 [1967]:32, 9). This dissertation was undertaken in the hope it would help clear a path in a new direction. Whether this path leads to a dead end remains to be seen, however, I believe the theoretical approach I offer shows promise and that walking further down this path is worthwhile. I hope to continue the work that this dissertation began, and I hope that others will one day be interested in taking this approach up as well.

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