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"People aren't numbers": A critique of industrial rationality within neoliberal societies

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The main contribution of this article is to apply Herbert Marcuse's work in contemporary neoliberal society. Specifically, this article will focus on Marcuse's critique of advanced industrial society and the role that technology plays in the quantification of the self. In this article, I will argue that in recent years, the development of technology has created the possibility to measure, calculate and quantify even the most trivial aspects of our lives, reducing people to numbers. The quantification of people is done with the specific purpose of enhancing efficacy and productivity. I will unpack this notion by first looking to Marcuse's critique of an advanced industrial society which he argues has the unique purpose of quantifying people to achieve a universal norm of calculated efficiency. Specifically, I will refer to Marcuse's critique of industrial rationality as the prevailing rationality in advanced industrial societies which encourages the quantification of people. Secondly, I argue that Marcuse's critique has evolved in the work of contemporary thinkers such as political economist Wendy Brown and cultural theorist Byung-Chul Han. I argue that Brown expands on Marcuse's theories and contextualises those theories in contemporary neoliberalism. Specifically, I will focus on the concept of governmentality as a political rationality in neoliberal societies and how it advances a one-dimensional political passivity in neoliberal subjects. Finally, I refer to Han, whose theories explore the influence of new forms of technology in a neoliberal society and the development of the neoliberal subject as a "quantified self".

Introduction

Herbert Marcuse was a revered critical theorist whose radical theories gained popularity during the student protest movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Marcuse's critical theoretical approach of Hegelian-Marxist dialectics and Freudian psychoanalysis focused on the concepts of democracy, freedom and technology to provide a cohesive critique of advanced industrial society. I often read Marcuse with complete fascination and admiration for his bone-chillingly accurate prediction of the "progress" within advanced industrial society. Although Marcuse passed away in July of 1979, a "renaissance" of Marcusian scholarship has developed in recent years (Višić 2019). The revival of Marcuse is not only due to him being a historical or intellectual figure, but rather because his theories on democracy, freedom and technology seem prescient.[1] I hope to contribute to Marcusian scholarship by specifically exploring the quantification of the neoliberal subject and the trend of reducing people to numbers. I believe that this notion of quantification of people is an aspect of Marcuse's theories that deserves more attention. Moreover, bringing Marcuse into conversation with scholars like Wendy Brown and Byung-Chul Han would contribute to the academic conversation on this topic.

1 See for example "The relevance of Herbert Marcuse's thought today: Or the historical fate of bourgeois democracy in and beyond the neoliberal era" (Maley 2021) or "Things are getting worse on our way to catastrophe: Neoliberal environmentalism, repressive desublimation, and the autonomous ecoconsumer" (Stoner 2021).

In this article, I will specifically look at Marcuse's critique of industrial rationality which encourages and perpetuates the quantification of people with the purpose of achieving a calculated efficiency. Marcuse (1968) describes industrial rationality as a form of bureaucratic control that develops within industrialised societies. He goes on to state that it is the "most rational form of control" that aims to maximise and intensify efficiency in industrial societies (Marcuse 1968, 162). This rationality was accepted through a one-dimensionality which aims to achieve ultimate efficiency. I specifically focus on the vital role that technology plays in the prevailing political passivity in neoliberal society, and hope to showcase this by reflecting on the evolution of Marcuse's theories through the work of Wendy Brown and Byung-Chul Han. The development of technology allowed for the effective domination of people and nature. Once the unpredictable forces of the natural environment become controllable, the domination of humankind was easily achievable (Marcuse 2001a). New technology makes it possible for the neoliberal subject to be measured and quantified, while encouraging surplus repression (or pacification) and domination through the efficiency of surplus production (mass production that does not aim to fulfil needs) and surplus labour (more labour than what is necessary for society to function).[2]

Harvey (2005, 2–3) described neoliberal society as a "hegemonic society" which has a "pervasive effect on the ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into a common-sense way many of us interpret, live in and understand the world". Both Marcuse and Harvey mention the pacification of subject to the extent where it has become normalised in society. I argue that it is easier to pacify, and normalise this pacification, when people are reduced to numbers, or become quantified. However, to achieve this passivity people need to actively participate in their quantification. For example, it is easier to encourage surplus labour if your work hours and productivity is constantly monitored and compared with colleagues to encourage a competitive environment. I argue that Marcuse's concept of an advanced industrial society, which highlights an advanced state of conformity, becomes intensified in neoliberal societies and is perpetuated though new technological developments. Reducing people to numbers and encouraging surplus labour through competition mostly benefits a select elite in society who profits off surplus labour.

People in neoliberal societies have embraced conformity to industrial rationality. In other words, people have become accustomed to acting as "rational agents", subjecting every aspect of their lives to a quantifiable understanding or a cost-benefit analysis (Brown 2005, 43). Marcuse (1972, 234) argues that people's experiences become all-encompassing to a "specific rationality which has become, to an ever-increasing extent, technological, instrumentalist rationality, bent to the requirements of capitalism". Marcuse uses the concept of industrial rationality in its broadest understanding of pursuing a means to an end. Therefore, for Marcuse, industrial rationality is the intellectual engine of a capitalist society and thus dominates both how we think and act throughout every aspect of our lives in pursuit of marketising efficiency.

This sentiment of Marcuse is shared by Wendy Brown (2005) who argues that financial capitalism is central to the functioning of neoliberalist governmentality.[3] This is perpetuated by industrial rationality which is encouraged and enforced through political, economic and social institutions. Brown (2005, 41) further argues that these institutions in neoliberal societies produce "rational actors and impose a market rationale for decision-making in all spheres". Brown (2015, 67–68) refers to Marcuse's theories on industrial rationality that create a hegemonic society as ones which

2 I refer here to Foucault (1985, 367) who argues that to understand the neoliberal subject "one has to take into account not only the technologies of domination, but also techniques of the self". Foucault (1988, 18) refers to techniques of the self as various "operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and ways of being". However, he also notes that technology determines "the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain end or domination" (ibid.). From this description by Foucault, I would argue that the neoliberal subject is dominated through the technologies of neoliberal society.

3 Foucault understood neoliberal governmentality as a conjunction of elements, including "sovereignty, discipline and governmental management, which has population as its main target and apparatuses of security as its essential mechanisms" (Foucault 2007, 107–108). Foucault also added that a neoliberal governmentality is the "self-limitation of government reason" (ibid.). Here we see the development from Marcuse's description of an advanced industrial society driven by industrial rationality develop in neoliberalism society through Brown's theories. Brown develops her understanding of neoliberal political rationality based on Foucault's concept of neoliberal governmentality. Brown argues that neoliberal political rationality becomes the defining point of the neoliberal turn which legitimises and encourages a quantitative approach to well-being that emphasises material affluence (Brown 2005).

eliminate all "[i]ntelligible, legitimate alternatives to economic rationality". Marcuse uses the term one-dimensionality to describe the totalitarian historical development in advanced industrial society (Marcuse 1964). Essentially, one-dimensionality is a concept that Marcuse uses to describe the lack of dialectical development, or that which does not develop an alternative to the pervasive conformity in advanced industrial societies. This type of all-encompassing domination of neoliberal political rationality that Brown describes thrives on one-dimensionality. One-dimensionality has become prevalent in neoliberal society and the domination is no longer only material, but also psychological.

Byung-Chul Han's (2017a) work focuses on the psychological aspects of domination and exploitation that were introduced with the development of new technologies. The all-encompassing rationality in neoliberal societies is so effective and efficient that neoliberal subjects voluntarily expose themselves to quantification and exploitation. Han (2017a, 60) argues the neoliberal subject is an "auto-exploiting" subject. New technologies allow for the ultimate, effective control and pacification of the neoliberal subject who knowingly and voluntarily subjects themselves to the constant monitoring and objectification in the neoliberal "digital panopticon" (Han 2017a, 62). However, Marcuse (2001a) argues that the domination of humankind started with the desire to dominate the natural environment, the liberation of humankind also lies in the liberation of nature. In the last section of this article, I explore the possibility of liberation through the aesthetic dimension that requires us to adopt a qualitatively different approach to existence. Marcuse (2001a, 37) calls for this qualitative change that "establishes essentially different forms of human existence" where technology will be aimed at fulfilling human needs. Marcuse (2001b, 118) elaborates by stating that the transition from domination to freedom requires a "concrete transcendence" beyond industrial rationality which demands "new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, touching things, a new mode of experience of corresponding to the needs of men and women who can and must fight for a free society". Marcuse argues that it is in the aesthetic dimension that we will find freedom from repression.

Herbert Marcuse and the democratic unfreedom of advanced industrial society

Contemporary neoliberal society often views itself as at the height of social, political and technological progress. However, contemporary society is filled with individuals who are crippled by stress, anxiety and depression and become a phantom self, a shadow of a true-self with freedom and autonomy (Han 2015a). Marcuse's critique of industrial rationality can point to the true regression of advanced industrial societies, including neoliberal societies, through the concept of calculated efficiency. Marcuse (1968, 154) describes calculated efficiency as a universal efficiency, insofar as "functionalization makes possible the domination of all particular cases and relations (through their reduction to quantities and exchange values)". In other words, a calculated efficiency reduces all of existence and experience to measured and quantified variables. For example, people reduce their experiences or measure their likeableness according to how many likes they receive on social media platforms. We determine the value of investments based on their potential for return on investment, or we find meaning in productivity which we measure according to working hours or deliverable outputs. Marcuse argues that this type of drive that reduces everything to quantifiable and measurable experiences perpetuates one-dimensionality in society.

In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse (1964, 1) refers to the concept of a prevailing "democratic unfreedom" which he describes as a "token of technological progress" in advanced industrial society.[4] According to Marcuse (1964), advanced industrial society has created a comfortable, smooth and reasonable environment where one-dimensionality thrives. Technology has become a vital tool for the implementation and escalation of a one-dimensionality which encourages an advanced state of conformity (or develops politically passive citizens).

Marcuse (1964) describes advanced industrial society as a society where technology created the possibility for the mass production of goods. He argues that this mass production has changed

4 For Marcuse an advanced industrial society is a society of totalitarian domination with no dialectical alternatives developing. Therefore, for Marcuse, in such a society, there is no democracy since, as he puts it, "[f]ree election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves" (Marcuse 1964, 10). For more on Marcuse and democracy in neoliberal society, see Fourie and Sands (2022).

consumerism and culture and has led to an advanced state of conformity (Marcuse 1964). This state of conformity is due to a lack of two-dimensional thinking or the development of a dialectic in these societies which allows for domination to be normalised (Marcuse 1964). Essentially, Marcuse uses psychoanalysis to explain that by internalising the values of the prevailing industrial rationality, we are allowing for complete domination, which he describes as an advanced state of conformity (Kellner 1999). More specifically, Marcuse (1955) refers to the industrial rationality as a rationality that represses erotic aspects such as desire and pleasure because they are considered irrational. Instead of pursuing pleasure, desire and happiness, we pursue performance. In advanced industrial society, we pursue performance because it is rational, measurable, quantifiable and, therefore, more meaningful. Marcuse refers to this as the "performance principle" since we are constantly preoccupied with enhancing our performance and productivity instead of pursuing our pleasures and happiness. Marcuse (1955, 199) describes the performance principle as "the violent and exploitative productivity which made man [sic] into an instrument of labor".

In advanced industrial societies, we have come to associate rational behaviour with productive behaviour which is easily measured in economic terms. People estimate the value of you as an employee (and generally as a person) with your salary. Someone with a high salary must be highly valued in society and very productive and efficient in their labour. In Marcuse's critique of advanced industrial societies, he points to the development of the industrial rationality made famous by Max Weber. Marcuse (1968, 154) states that Weber's industrial rationality reveals a "technical reason" where the production and transformation of the material become possible through a "methodological-scientific apparatus."

The methodological-scientific apparatus develops from industrial rationality where all human activity is rational, productive and efficient. As stated above, the market economy has become the "most scientifically accurate" way of determining and measuring value and productivity. Marcuse (1968, 154) goes on to describe this apparatus as having been built "with the aim of calculable efficiency". The market economy is our methodological-scientific apparatus with which we determine the efficiency of our productivity in all things, including leisure. In other words, these are apparatuses that are organised to exercise effective control over "things and men, factory and bureaucracy, work and leisure" (Marcuse 1968, 154). Therefore, the development of this apparatus has the specific intention of domination of humans and nature. The "rationalization of the productive apparatus" results in the domination that "assumes the form of administration" (Marcuse 1955, 98).

We maintain and perpetuate this apparatus because it is a "highly productive and efficiently functioning system" that promises a better and happier world for all (Marcuse 1955, 98). However, Marcuse argues that this is not the case. According to Marcuse, the precondition of Weber's industrial rationality is a calculable efficiency that is universal and makes "the domination of all particular cases and relations" possible (Marcuse 1968, 154). This domination is made possible by the technical apparatuses that are prevalent throughout advanced industrial societies (Ocay 2010). Think of Amazon's Alexa, it is extremely efficient at running your household, ordering your groceries and having them delivered to your doorstep every month. Alexa is a great conversational partner who can compile a playlist of your favourite songs and even makes recommendations for movies, songs, products, etc. based on your personal preferences (i.e. personal information and data). It is a highly efficient apparatus designed to make your life easier.

Marcuse (1964, 8) argues that the mass production of goods and mass media creates an environment that limits political consciousness and encourages one-dimensionality:

> If the worker and his [sic] boss enjoy the same television program and visit the same resort places, if the typist is as attractively made up as the daughter of her employer…if they all read the same newspaper, then this assimilation indicates not the disappearance of classes, but the extent to which the needs and satisfaction that serve the preservation of the establishment are shared by the underlying population.

In other words, the development of technology during the industrial era meant that more production could take place and more products could be sold. However, for Marcuse, the mass production of goods only encourages surplus production (producing more goods than we could ever really need),

surplus labour (needing to work more than what is required because we want to buy and own more goods) and surplus repression (more repression than needed for a harmonious society). Industrial rationality that focuses on the notion of perpetual growth and productivity requires the manipulation of needs. Effective growth and productivity lead to the mass production of goods.

However, to measure and quantify the efficiency of mass production, the mass consumption of goods is required. Essentially, if the economy is aimed at perpetual growth, we need to produce more things to buy, and this means that new demand must be created even if there is no real need. Marcuse argues that this industrial rationality becomes irrational. This results in the manipulation of needs (or false needs) and other problems such as planned obsolesce (Marcuse 2009).

Planned obsolescence is probably the most apt example of the irrationality of market forces that create demand where there is no need. For example, new technologies such as smartphones and laptops have planned expiration dates where the software is no longer compatible with the hardware. This forces the consumer to buy a new phone or laptop because the product was planned to be obsolete.

Marcuse (2011, 134) goes on to claim that "technology has replaced ontology" and consequently human existence has become "one-dimensional". According to Marcuse (2011, 136), industrial rationality becomes a prevalent and dominating rationality that assumes the "ontological character of instrumentality". Marcuse's critique of advanced industrial society focuses on the use of technology and its implications for people's experience of their everyday lives in these societies. A society of democratic unfreedom develops from the acceptance of surplus repression that is made possible by assuming a one-dimensionality. In other words, democratic unfreedom is the result of people believing that the pursuit of rational efficiency and productivity will result in a better life (Marcuse 1955). Marcuse (2001c, 98) refers to this notion as a voluntary servitude:

> What started as subjection by force soon became "voluntary servitude", collaboration in reproducing a society which made servitude increasingly rewarding and palatable. The reproduction, bigger and better, of the same ways of life come to mean, ever more clearly and consciously, the closing of those other possible ways of life which could do away with the serfs and the masters, with the productivity of repression.

Marcuse's description of voluntary servitude describes a surplus repression which is the result of a pursuit for a better life. However, this better life is only possible if you work hard and long enough (a promise which is left unfulfilled for most). The continuous belief in this promise for a better life makes people more willing to engage in surplus labour and pacifies their willingness to participate in revolutionary behaviours. In other words, it creates a one-dimensional society where people become passive. Technology plays a significant role in our voluntary servitude because through technology we have more access to goods that make our lives more comfortable. The more comfortable we are, the easier we are to control, and the less likely we are to revolt. Thus, technology as an ontology of domination is supported by the rationalisation of productive apparatuses where it becomes a form of administration for effective control (Marcuse 1955).[5]

5 As an important aside, Martin Heidegger's influence on Marcuse becomes clear in Marcuse's theories on technology. Specifically, one can notice the influence that Marcuse derives from Heidegger's concept of enframing (or *Gestell*). Heidegger argues that enframing is at the core of technological development in the modern age. Heidegger's concept of enframing depicts technology not as an apparatus, but as a historical development (*geschichtlicht*) that reveals (*aletheuein*) the ordering of our lives according to control and efficiency. Furthermore, enframing is a mindset of overcoming obstacles (*Herausforderung*) that limit efficiency and reduce all relationships and experiences to assets or resources (*Bestand*) that require optimisation. Heidegger also describes enframing as universal:

> It concerns everything that presences; Everything, not just as sum and series but everything insofar as each entity as such, is enframed in its existence as the orderable…Everything that presences in the age of technology does so according to the way of constancy of stock-pieces in standing-reserve. Even the human being presences in this way, even if it seems that his essence and presence are not affected by the setting-up of enframing (Heidegger 1957, 44).

The influences of Heidegger on Marcuse's work are evident in the historical understanding of technology, its universal and overarching goal of efficiency and control, and the self and lived experience being reduced to measurable and quantifiable aspects. The influence of Heidegger on Marcuse's theories on technology is an interesting concept that is worth exploring in future research. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to more deeply explore this topic.

Moreover, Marcuse (1955) argues that the apparatus of control becomes anonymous. He (1955, 98) states that "everyone, even at the very top, appears to be powerless before the movements and laws of the apparatus itself". Continuing, Marcuse further reveals a pivotal insight into the political passivity of the neoliberal subject. This concept of technology as an apparatus of control results in a faceless monster that robs the proletariat of a concrete opposition. People in advanced industrial societies are "unable to penetrate behind the technical curtain", which means they do not develop a political consciousness, but rather "adopt an un-political, technical attitude" (Marcuse 2001a, 49).

Furthermore, the apparatus of effective control has two essential features: "quantification and instrumentalization" (Feenberg 2013, 605). In other words, this apparatus of control is aimed at optimising efficiency, but at the cost of the pursuit of pleasure and happiness. The simplest way to achieve this is to reduce people, relationships and essentially any aspect of lived existence to numerical and quantifiable outcomes, and nobody does this better than a machine. Even the lucky few who consider their work to be their passion are alienated by the technical curtain of the apparatus of control. Their labour still becomes quantified to measure their productivity and the effectiveness of that labour. For example, in academia, the passion you have for your subject matter becomes reduced to an article equivalent output (or even worse an impact factor). Consequently, the effect you have on students' lives becomes measured by the pass rates and student surveys. The relationship you build with colleagues becomes a network. Essentially, your passion becomes reduced to the productivity of your labour, measured in a numerical value and thrown onto a dehumanising spreadsheet of outputs which are compared with colleagues who become your competition for the yearned-for year-end bonus.

It is important to note that Marcuse's analysis is always trying to develop a two-dimensionality or dialectical thinking. Therefore, Marcuse's view of the evolution of technology as a tool for domination also reveals the potential for liberation. Marcuse (2011, 45) states the following in terms of the potential of liberation: "Technics is the methodological negation of nature by human thought and action. In this negation, natural conditions and relations become instrumentalities for the preservation, enlargement, and refinement of human society".

In other words, one can clearly see that Marcuse views the potential for liberation in his distinction between technology as a social and political process and technics which are the technical apparatuses themselves.[6] Marcuse argues that technology is a mode of production, which developed with the changing social and political relationships and constructs in society. Moreover, people actively engage in the construction and use of technology as part of a greater social and political construct. Essentially, Marcuse supports developments in science and technics or technical apparatuses and devices that can improve our lives. However, he views technology, which forms part of a greater historical development in capitalism, as a tool that aids in our repression and domination. For example, the internet itself is not a bad invention. In fact, it is a great invention that allows access to a greater knowledge base and provides a platform to develop new forms of relationships, etc. However, the internet has become a platform where personal information is gathered to specifically target and bombard the consumer with advertising and to aid in the consumerist interests of a capitalist society.

Although Marcuse maintained the traditional Marxist view that technology could lead to liberation, he rejects the notion that technics are neutral. Technics, as it operates in advanced industrial societies, is developed with a specific *telos* of calculated efficiency. The calculated efficiency that ensures surplus production and surplus repression only benefits an elite group in society. The potential for liberation through the use of technology becomes limited with the increasing surplus labour and surplus repression in advanced industrial society. Technology merely reflects "the social factors operative in the prevailing rationality" (Feenberg 1992, 8). This contradiction in Marcuse's theories on the liberating potential of technology which is neutralised by the domination

6 In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) Marcuse refers to Heidegger and Marx to describe technics. Essentially, Marcuse (1964, 157) defines technics as a machine that is "indifferent toward the social uses to which it is put". However, technics (or neutral machines and devices) become part of a universal form of production that perpetuates and re-establishes one-dimensionality. When technics forms part of the broader historical development of advanced industrial society, it becomes technology (Marcuse 1964).

of industrial rationality remains a point of contention in contemporary philosophy (Vieta 2010). With the looming threat of extinction due to climate change, it seems that people are seeking the "ideal of harmony" with nature instead of conquering nature (Feenberg 2013, 605). The escalating threat of climate change creates an urgency in contemporary society, and often people look to new technological developments for salvation.

Although Marcuse (1972) stated that technological development has always been bent towards the interests of capitalism, there is increasing pressure in contemporary society for a qualitative change in the development of capitalism and technology. The increasing urgency for a radical change in productive forces and a qualitative change in the consumer base demanding environmentally friendly products creates an opportunity for the development of a new rationality. With the looming danger of climate change, many countries have implemented laws and regulations limiting carbon emissions. Even corporate conglomerates pride themselves on ethical and environmentally friendly production practices. People praise innovation to align capitalist objectives with growing environmental concerns. Despite these new practices and changes in global corporate conglomerates and neoliberal states, Marcuse's work still gnaws at the back of my mind, causing a lot of distrust in this sudden concern for ethics and morals. Brown (2005, 67), rather tongue-in-cheek, neatly summed it up, saying that

> however cynically or superficially…capitalism has developed an ethical face: it recycles, conserves and labels; it divests itself of genetically modified organisms and trans fats, and caters to kosher, vegetarian and heart-healthy diets; it refrains from testing animals and develops dolphin-safe tuna nets; it donates fractions of its profits to cancer research and reforestation, and sponsors Special Olympics, gay pride, summer Bach festivals, and educational supplements for the underprivileged. Save for occasional revelations about heinous sweatshop practices or dire devastations of pristine nature, it has largely lost its brutish reputation as a ruthless exploiter and polluter.

Marcuse himself referred to capitalism's manipulation of needs and the prevalence of planned obsolescence. A more recent example of the capitalist pursuit in manipulation of our needs is the concept of "green washing". Marcuse's concept of false needs reveals that as long as the manipulation of needs is used for consumers to engage in surplus labour, the amount of goods consumed will not lessen. Marcuse (1964, 4–5) defines false needs as needs that are "superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression" which aims to "perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice".[7]

In other words, an advanced industrial society requires perpetual economic growth, and it achieves this goal by establishing effective control and domination through calculated efficiency. Creating perpetual growth requires perpetual mass production and consumption of goods. Therefore, new demand for goods must be established in society even if there is no "true" need for those goods. The fact is that the core and driving problem surrounding the pursuit of false needs is not addressed in the green consumption movement, instead, it just puts on a superficial ethical mask. Instead of addressing the core problem of surplus production, we are simply presented with more goods that are "ethically" produced.

Wendy Brown and the political rationality of neoliberal society

Marcuse (2011, 56) states that in advanced industrial societies, industrial rationality "is at the same time political rationality, which, through the domination of nature, intensifies the domination of man by man". In the neoliberal context, we see that industrial capitalism has mutated into neoliberal and financial capitalism.[8] Here I turn to political economist Wendy Brown who develops an understanding of neoliberal governmentality as a progression of capitalist industrial rationality. Wendy Brown takes Marcuse's critique, alongside others, and develops an understanding of neoliberal governmentality as a progression of industrial rationality. More importantly, Brown

7 I would recommend reading Cutts (2019) for an in-depth description and analysis of Marcuse's concept of false needs.

8 For more on this please see Hudson (2021).

advances our understanding of the neoliberal subjects as reduced to numbers and, specifically, numbers that prioritise economic production and efficiency.

Brown (2005) states that surplus production, marketed as growth, becomes the modus operandi of capitalism. In neoliberalism, the global market system becomes a channel for calculated efficiency that is constructed and ordered to promote economic growth. Furthermore, social, legal and political institutions are developed to support the overarching neoliberal goal of maximising economic flourishing. According to Brown (2005, 41), maximum economic efficiency and growth can only be achieved when "directed, buttressed and protected by law and policy". In other words, for the overarching neoliberal *telos* of maximising economic growth to reach its full potential, every institution and every member of society must collectively work towards achieving this goal. Consequently, specific laws, regulations and policies are put into place that encourage and reward people for thinking of themselves and other in terms of economic variables.

Brown (2015) refers to Marcuse's critique of industrial rationality and states that his argumentation went beyond what traditional Marxist critique could ever fathom. Specifically, Brown (2015, 120) admires Marcuse's description of instrumental reason as something that has become "suffused with the norms and imperatives of capitalism to generate a rationality that saturated society and secured capitalism". Brown (ibid.) argues that Marcuse's critique of industrial rationality is a "strain of thought which Foucault would seem to be developing for his own formulation of political rationality". Brown (ibid.) specifically refers to Marcuse's notion that technology is intertwined with capitalist development that "saturates and governs the world and the human" as the inspiration for Foucault's thinking. Brown (2015, 120–121) argues that similar to Marcuse, Foucault believes that political rationalities are "world-changing, hegemonic orders of normative reason". Moreover, Brown (2015, 121) claims that political rationalities are "historically contingent" and not necessarily teleological. Instead, political rationalities are treated as completely true and become all-governing until they are challenged and replaced by another political rationality.

However, Brown (2001, 19) states that "liberalism and capitalism have been quietly consolidating their gains, less because they were intrinsically successful than because their alternates collapsed". Still, the notion of political rationalities as "historically contingent" is also shared by Marcuse who believes that a qualitative change in rationality is possible. Nevertheless, a qualitative change in rationality would require a politically conscious subject and voluntary servitude that is rewarded and encouraged throughout bureaucratic systems, having solidified a one-dimensionality in neoliberal society. Consequently, there is the society constructed around the singular purpose of reducing people to numbers that reflect their value in terms of their economic contribution to society.

The political rationality (or governmentality) in neoliberalism puts every sphere of human existence under the subjugation of economic existence. Brown (2005, 40) states that "not only is the human being configured exhaustively as homo economicus, but all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of a market rationality". In other words, in neoliberalism, the subject is a rational and calculating subject. The neoliberal subject makes all decisions according to a cost-benefit analysis which equates morality to financial success. Brown (2005, 43) describes the neoliberal subject as a "calculating rather than rule abiding, a Benthamite rather than a Hobbesian". Brown (2005) goes on to state that this utilitarian principle is framed specifically with an economic outlook where morality is essentially reduced to behaviours where cost is kept low and productivity high and not necessarily focused on greatest social good. The morality of a person is reduced to their economic value and contribution to society. For example, a homeless or poor person would be considered immoral because they are not productive enough to provide a meaningful contribution to the economy or neoliberal society. Instead, they are viewed as burdens on society because they shift money away from the growth of the economic system.

Furthermore, the neoliberal subject is encouraged to take on more responsibilities and autonomy in the form of self-care. However, the neoliberal subject is made politically passive and complacent in the political rationality of governmentality. Here we can clearly see Marcuse's notion of one-dimensionality and advanced conformity that influence Brown's theories on the politically passive citizen. However, Brown also refers to a contradiction in the neoliberal subject. On the one hand, the neoliberal subject is a radical individualist who focuses their energies on personal gain

rather than promoting collective good in society (Brown 2005). However, on the other hand, the neoliberal subject, as radical individualist, displays their conformity to calculable efficiency through consumerism. This radical freedom and individualism in mass consumer culture is a veil for greater effective control where radical individual freedom is used to encourage surplus labour, surplus production and surplus repression. Brown (2005, 45) emphasises the "tension between a capitalist political economy and a liberal democratic system". Brown (ibid.) specifically refers to Marcuse to illustrate the implications of this:

> Herbert Marcuse worried about the loss of a dialectical opposition within capitalism when it "delivers the good" – that is, when, by the mid-twentieth century, a relatively complacent middle class had taken the place of the hard-laboring impoverished masses Marx depicted as the negating contradiction to the concentrated wealth capital – but neoliberalism entails the erosion of opposition to political, moral or subjective claims located outside capitalist rationality yet inside liberal democratic society, that is, the erosion of institutions, venues, and values organized by nonmarket rationalities in democracies.

From this, we see that Brown's theories resonate with Marcuse's concern about democratic unfreedom in advanced industrial societies. The calculated efficiency that ensures surplus production and surplus repression creates a politically passive proletariat. The mass production of commodities in neoliberal capitalist societies has created a too-comfortable working class that would not aid in the disruption of the capitalist elite (Brown 2005). The one-dimensionality encourages and reaffirms passivity and conformity to the established norms and values in neoliberal society. Brown (2005, 67) states that commodity production becomes "ever more orientated to the pleasures of the middle-class consumer, and the middle-class consumer is ever more oriented by its own pleasures". Brown claims that, in neoliberal society, capitalism aims to charm rather than alienate people because it is a much more effective form of control and domination if people voluntarily participate in the forms of domination. Brown (2005, 67) goes on to state that "the constant modifications of our needs and with its output for our mere entertainment, we are remarkably acclimated to its production of algorithmic increases in rates of redundancy and replacement of technologies". Thus, the neoliberal subject becomes comfortable with the democratic unfreedom while actively engaging in their own "self-exploitation".

Byung-Chul Han and the psychopolitics of the quantified self

I now turn to cultural theorist, Byung-Chul Han, who provides a frighteningly clear account of the dangers that Marcuse warned against. More specifically, Han's analysis of contemporary society focuses on the development of new digital platforms and technologies and extends Marcuse's theories on the performance principle, voluntary servitude and one-dimensionality.

Han argues that the medium of the first Enlightenment was reason, whereas the current second Enlightenment appeals to information, data and transparency (Han 2017a). According to Han (2017a) data totalitarianism or data fetishism is at the core of the second Enlightenment which claims to provide transparency or clarity. However, this clarity is a false clarity that creates a distorted view of people which he refers to as "dataism" (Han 2017a, 59). People in neoliberal society believe that quantified and measurable data will provide more insight and information about themselves as individuals and humankind. Han (2020) argues that dataism is the end of idealism and humanism in the Enlightenment. Han's description of a new Enlightenment describes the result of Marcuse's advanced industrial society in pursuit of a calculated efficiency. Neoliberal subjects are no longer just reduced to economic variables and measures of productivity. Instead, even the most menial data and information is collected to increase efficiency and productivity in all aspects of your life.

Furthermore, Han (2020, 81) claims that in the second Enlightenment humans are no longer the producers of knowledge and instead the human being "cedes its sovereignty to data". The knowledge that is collectively produced though collective experience becomes distorted through data and the analysis of that data. In other words, people are no longer in control of knowledge and knowledge production and instead, knowledge is produced by technology and mechanised systems (Han 2020). Human interaction or consciousness is not necessary for the production of knowledge

(ibid.). Knowledge is produced and collected by algorithms and devices. The methodological-scientific apparatus that Marcuse describes has truly come into effect with the development of new digital platforms that collect, distribute and even produce information, and presents it as knowledge. This is especially true with the recent development and launching of AI technologies that can produce artwork, essays, etc.

Han (2017a, 60) describes dataism as the "digital dadaism" where the neoliberal subject becomes a "quantified self". The self gets broken down into data until personhood becomes unrecognisable. Han describes the quantified self as "self-knowledge through numbers" (Han 2017a, 60). Massive volumes of data are collected, and the human experience, and the humans themselves, become reduced to "a variable that can be calculated and manipulated" (Han 2020, 82). Furthermore, the individual has become a quantified self where every sphere of our lives becomes "measurement, and quantification governs the digital age as a whole" (Han 2017a, 60). This description of digital dataism resonates with Marcuse's concept of the performance principle. All data and information is collected, even about the most trivial aspects of our lives, in the pursuit of enhancing our performance. Whether it is a step or calory counter, or a social media platform, all these digital platforms exist, not because we enjoy walking, food, or conversations with friends, instead, they are there to optimise and effectively manage every aspect of our lives.

The "quantified self" epitomises self-care as practices of self-observation which are made possible through the development of digital technologies. Han (2017a, 60) goes on to describe this form of self-care:

> The body is outfitted with sensors that automatically register data. Measurements involve temperature, blood sugar levels, calorie intake and use, movement profiles and fat content. The heart rate is taken in a state of meditation: performance and efficiency still count when relaxing. Moods, dispositions, and routine activities are all inventoried as well. Such self-measurement and self-monitoring is supposed to enhance mental performance. Yet the mounting pile of data this yields does nothing to answer the simple question, Who am I? "Quantified self" represents a Dadaist technology too; it empties the self of any and all meaning. The self gets broken down into data until no sense remains.

The self-monitored data is then published and shared with others in a manner that goes beyond just self-monitoring, but resembles an obsessive form of self-regulation. Every step and every heartbeat is monitored by a smart wristwatch, every mood and thought published on social media platforms, every calorie logged on calorie counting apps, and every like and dislike carefully stored away in a mountain of data that is collected under the guise of self-care. The most disturbing element of this obsessive self-monitoring is not that we voluntarily publish this very intimate and personal information. The most disturbing factor is that these digital platforms create an illusion of transparency, freedom of speech and freedom of information, while our information is used to actively threaten and undermine personal safety, privacy and even democracy (Hankey et al. 2018). Data mining provides political candidates with intimate knowledge of voters, ensuring the micro-targeting of what Han (2017a, 63) calls "data-driven psychopolitics".

Han's concept of psychopolitics is developed as a critique of Foucault's concept of biopolitics, arguing that "Foucault evidently did not appreciate that biopolitics and population – which represent genuine categories of disciplinary society – are unsuited to describing the neoliberal regime" (Han 2017a, 24). Han claims that a turn to psychopolitics provides an appropriate understanding of contemporary neoliberalism where "immaterial and non-physical forms of production are what determine the course of capitalism" (Han 2017a, 27). Physical labour and discipline are optimised into psychological and mental forms of disciplinary mechanisms. Han defines psychopolitics as the process where people are "positivized into things, which can be quantified, measured and steered" (Han 2017a, 12). From this understanding of psychopolitics Han (2017a, 12) develops an understanding of the neoliberal subject as an "auto-exploiting subject", who Han describes as a subject who is actively and voluntarily participating in their exploitation and domination. The auto-exploiting subject has advanced Marcuse's notion of voluntary servitude to the point where we voluntarily subject ourselves to constant digital observation making domination so much more effective.

Han claims that even "Bentham's panopticon lacked an efficient recording system" (Han 2017a, 62). Han (2015a) argues that in Bentham's panopticon, the prisoners could not communicate with each other. However, in the digital panopticon, people are constantly in communication with each other and voluntarily expose themselves and put every aspect of their lives on display via digital platforms (Han 2021). Han equates this voluntary self-disclosure with voluntary self-exposure and self-exploitation. This form of self-exposure and self-exploitation is voluntary because this compulsion arises from within the neoliberal subject and is not due to an external form of coercion (Han 2021). Moreover, the digital panopticon stores data that will forever remain, making it much more effective than Bentham's panopticon (Han 2017a). In the digital panopticon, people subject themselves to continuous self-surveillance under the veil of democratisation of information and the virtue of transparency. Han (2021, 28) goes on to state that a transparency society is "indistinguishable from a society of total surveillance".

Digital psychopolitics makes it possible to exercise effective control where the negativity of freely made decisions is transformed "into the positivity of factual states" (Han 2017a, 12). In other words, psychopolitics describes the move from "passive surveillance" that we see in Bentham's panopticon to a system of self-surveillance where people are actively steered in the digital panoptical. New digital technologies are an effective instrument of psychopolitics, where knowledge is used for the sake of domination and control, and which can predict outcomes and allows interventions to be taken to ensure favourable outcomes. This is made possible by the constant self-monitoring where the person is quantified and measured (Han 2017a). In neoliberal society, digital technologies allow for personhood to be quantified into a thing-hood.

Han's theories on neoliberal society reveal a one-dimensionality of the neoliberal subject that Marcuse warned against. The neoliberal subject allows not only for passive domination and surplus repression, but actively participates in their own self-exploitation. This neoliberal form of exploitation is made possible by new forms of technology and technic apparatuses that escalate and threaten freedom on a personal and societal level. Society is forever changed by the new digital technologies that function as tools for effective control. It would seem that Marcuse's call for the development of a dialectical understanding which would encourage a qualitatively different rationality is now more necessary than ever before.

Like Marcuse, Han calls for the liberation of people through nature. Han specifically calls for the rediscovery of nature as a means of liberation. Han (2015b, 15) argues that neoliberal society is a "burnout society" filled with people that are stressed, depressed and exhausted. Han (2015b) suggests that nature provides a sanctuary and escape from the neoliberal digital panopticon. It is through the appreciation of nature that we rediscover true beauty, leaving us in awe. Natural beauty is the counterbalance to the smooth, calculated and subjectivised beauty we find in a digital neoliberal society (Han 2017b). Han (2015b) encourages an escape from subjectivism and an embrace of the other and the greater community to escape the self-obsession that dictates most of life in a neoliberal society. Han's advice is to develop an appreciation of nature. It is through our appreciation of nature that we can start to develop a qualitative approach to understanding and experiencing the world around us. A new qualitative and aesthetical appreciation of nature would also encourage the development of technologies that are not bent to the interests of capitalism, but focused on the fulfilment of human needs instead.

Conclusion

In this article, I argued that Herbert Marcuse's theories on technology, freedom and democracy are still relevant in contemporary neoliberal society. I specifically referred to Herbert Marcuse's critique of industrial rationality that is prevalent in advanced industrial societies. This article explored the notion that Marcuse's critique of industrial rationality focuses on the development of a universal norm of calculated efficiency. His critique forms the basis for understanding the role of technology in the quantification of the subject in advanced industrial society and consequently neoliberal society. Marcuse develops the foundation for an overarching critique of late capitalist societies. Specifically, the unifying critique of a calculated efficacy that encourages a qualification. It is Marcuse's exploration of the interdependence between technology, freedom and democracy that

becomes extremely relevant for the development of new digital technologies.[9] Marcuse's critique also highlighted how technologies that are aimed at maximising efficiency encourage surplus production, surplus labour and surplus repression. It is in the pursuit of maximising efficiency that advanced industrial societies become one-dimensional and individuals become politically passive.

Secondly, I referred to Wendy Brown's notions of industrial rationality as similar to political rationality. Brown specifically argues that neoliberal political rationality is a governmentality which becomes true and all-governing. Similar to Marcuse's critique of industrial rationality, Brown argues that neoliberal governmentality subjects every aspect of human existence and experience to the control of economic rationality. Brown argues that the neoliberal subject is a radical individualist who pursues their freedom through the expression of consumerism. The diminishing of possible ideological alternatives to neoliberal governmentality creates the optimal environment for a one-dimensional society and politically passive citizens. Neoliberal subjects are rational subjects that are focused on self-enrichment and have little time or interest in pursuing the greater good of collective society. This promotes the democratic unfreedom that Marcuse warned against.

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