

question of bringing the science of society, that is, the totality of the so-called historical and philosophical sciences, into harmony with the materialist base, and of reconstructing it on this base, but this was not granted to Feuerbach. (Engels, 1976: 25)

There is an irony in this rejection of physiology as the basis of materialism. Given this hostility to physiology, the question of the human body and its relationship to production and reproduction via the institutions of the family and patriarchy largely disappeared from Marxist philosophy. The main exception to this assertion is to be found in the work of the Italian Marxist, Sebastiano Timpanaro, who in *Sul Materialismo* (1970) argued pessimistically that in death nature has its final and irreversible triumph over man. The problem of the body was submerged by this rejection of physiological materialism, which was regarded as ahistorical and passive. At the same time, Marx rejected the argument of Malthus and Malthusians that population pressures had a major importance for the analysis of economic growth and prosperity. The population issue had to be rendered as an historical question, not as a static restraint on the economic base: 'Every special historic mode of production has its own special laws of population, historically valid within its limits alone' (Marx, 1974, vol. 1: 693). For Marx, the idea that the accumulation of capital could be explained by reference to the control of sexual urges was a myth of hypocritical bourgeois theorists. Despite Marx's perceptive criticisms of the static nature of physiology as a basis for materialism, the consequence of these rejections was that Marxism did not, despite appeals to the notion of 'dialectics', address itself to the classical desire/reason problem. Furthermore, as a science, Marxism tended to embrace technical rationality. Consequently any interest in emotions, passions and desire, on the one hand, or populations and reproduction, on the other, was either diminished or seen to be the result of heresy, especially methodological individualism. Contemporary theoretical interest in the body/desire couple has thus been primarily stimulated by debates with Freudianism, which have emerged in two wings of modern social theory – critical theory and structuralism.

Critical Theory

The early work of the Frankfurt School (Jay, 1973) saw the struggle by man to dominate nature through technical rationality as resulting in political slavery and the renunciation of feeling. This theme can be seen explicitly in Adorno, especially in Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1973) where they explored the myth of Odysseus and the Sirens. Odysseus avoided the temptation of the Sirens' songs by blocking the ears of his sailors with wax and by lashing himself to the mast. This myth represents the psychological logic of bourgeois civilization in which the workers have to deny and sublimate their emotions in favour of hard work and practicality, while the bourgeois capitalist must restrain and discipline desire in the

interests of further accumulation. Enjoyment through consumption stands in the way of economic growth; capitalism requires the control of nature through technology but also requires, as it were, the control of inner nature in the human species. Because personal ecstasy is 'a promise of happiness which threatened civilization at every moment' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1973: 33), civilization was seen by critical theorists in terms of renunciation. It is thus easy to understand why the Frankfurt School perceived the relevance of Freud's analysis of the permanent conflict between egoistic pleasures and social controls. However, for writers like Marcuse, capitalism at least had the economic potential to satisfy basic needs and to reduce the social requirement for psychic repression. The realization of that potential became the main political battle within late capitalism, a battle which aims 'to minimize the self-destructive aspects of human desires' (Leiss, 1972: 197).

Critical theorists, especially Marcuse, came to see hedonism as a potentially liberating force in society. Classical hedonism protested against the view that happiness was essentially spiritual by demanding 'that man's sensual and sensuous potentialities and needs, too, should find satisfaction' (Marcuse, 1968: 162). The failure of the Cyrenaic version of hedonism was that it took wants and needs as empirically given, and its commitment to ethical relativism prevented hedonism from making judgements about true and false happiness, or between short-term and long-term pleasures. This version of hedonism ruled out any critique of capitalist society, the existence of which depends partly on fostering false needs through advertising and mass consumption. By contrast, Epicurean hedonism attempts to differentiate between pleasures with the aid of reason. Marcuse thus suggested that the traditional opposition between reason and desire was false, since, in the case of Epicurus 'reason is made a pleasure' and 'pleasure is made reasonable' (Marcuse, 1968: 171). Capitalism, however, involves the splitting of reason and pleasure by restricting pleasures to the sphere of consumption and harnessing reason to the needs of technical production.

For Marcuse, classical Marxism is increasingly redundant as a theory of late capitalism. Marx could not and did not fully grasp the liberating potential in automation which could in principle free human labour from conditions of drudgery and boredom. In addition, Marcuse suspected that Marx's emphasis on labour harboured a puritanical, moralistic attitude towards play and leisure as mere epiphenomena. Against Marxism, Marcuse suggested that sexual fulfilment would result in a liberating devaluation of work and labour. This is a distinctively odd view of Marx, since Marx in the manuscripts of 1844 in many respects precisely anticipated the view of critical theory that civilization equals renunciation. Indeed, these were his precise words:

Political economy, this science of wealth, is therefore simultaneously the science of renunciation, of want, of saving – and it actually reaches the point where it spares man the need of either fresh air or physical exercise. This science of marvellous industry is simultaneously the science of asceticism, and its true

ideal is the ascetic but extortionate master and the ascetic but productive slave. Its moral ideal is the worker who takes part of his wages to the savings-bank, and it has even found readymade an abject art in which to embody this pet idea ... [P]olitical economy – despite its worldly and wanton appearance – is a true moral science, the most moral of the sciences. Self-renunciation, the renunciation of life and of all human needs, is its principal thesis. (Marx, 1970: 150)

The difference, however, between Marx and Marcuse is that in Marx the idea of human happiness as a criterion of social progress is relatively unimportant by comparison with other values, like freedom and equality. One other difference is that Marcuse reifies and unifies the emotional life of people into ahistorical oppositions between Reason and Nature or Man and Desire. While Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1974) criticized the ‘speculative philosophers’, such as Feuerbach, for converting the life of real, sensuous men into the abstract ‘essence of man’, Marcuse persistently abstracts people from their social relations in order to write about the hedonistic interests of Man. Both aspects of Marcuse – the elevation of happiness to a political value and the reification of Man – have been usefully criticized by MacIntyre: ‘in making “Man” rather than “men” the subject of history he is at odds with Marx and that in making “happiness” a central goal of man’s striving he is at odds not only with Hegel, as Marcuse himself recognizes, but also once more with Marx’ (1970: 41). Two criticisms of Marcuse’s version of critical theory follow from this observation by MacIntyre. First, if we are to avoid any notion of a unified ‘essence of man’, then it is important to avoid even the generic notion of ‘men’. If the emotional life of people is fundamentally bound up with the particular social relations in which they are embedded, then we can have no unified concept of pleasure. We can only talk of ‘pleasures’ which are specific to particular persons in particular contexts. The implication is that ‘pleasures’ are inevitably relativistic, idiosyncratic, peculiar and personal. If this is the case, then Marcuse’s search for some notion of universally valid hedonism which is compatible with reason is false. In other words, the Epicurean version of hedonism fails because no universal standard of critical reason could adjudicate my pleasures. In the last analysis, I am the only authority on my pleasures. My preference for anti-social, short-term pornography may be incompatible with critical theory and the product of capitalist exploitation, but this preference is still pleasurable. One reason for this personal authority is that the relationship between my pleasure and my body is irreducibly immediate and intimate. This observation leads to the second criticism of Marcuse, namely that, despite all the talk about sexuality, Marcusean pleasures are strangely dissociated from the body. While it is obvious that thinking and imagining are activities we would describe as pleasurable, most of our pleasures involve the body because these pleasures typically involve physical sensations – eating, sleeping, sexuality, exercise, resting. I am not arguing that these are simply physical activities. They are in fact deeply cultural or at least mediated by culture, but they also presuppose that people have bodies and that the person is embodied. Marcuse does not take

seriously Marx's observation in the 'Theses on Feuerbach' that sensuousness is practical, human-sensuous activity.

Structuralism

In modern social theory, it is pre-eminently in the work of Michel Foucault that the human body is located centrally as an issue of knowledge. The importance of the body and desire in modern structuralist thought has often been recognized (Benoist, 1978), but the question of the body has a peculiar persistence in Foucault's approach to historical analysis. His ideas are difficult to grasp, but one important feature of his perspective is that, while in most conventional philosophy and social theory power is seen to repress desire, Foucault treats power as constructive and productive: desire is brought about by power/knowledge. While modern societies often appear to be characterized by sexual repression, in fact sexuality is constantly produced and examined by contemporary discourses, but these have come under the control of medical and psychiatric professions. The will to know has become the will to know sexuality and, since to know is to control, the sexual body has become the specific object of politics (Lemert and Gillan, 1982). There is, therefore, a very real difference between the approaches of Marcuse and Foucault in relation to the repression and representation of sexuality. For Marcuse, the repression of sex in capitalism is real and constitutes part of the surplus repression of libidinal pleasures. For Foucault, sexual repression is a myth, since sex has in fact become the object and product of endless scientific discourses – psychoanalysis, demography, biology, medical science – which aim to control and normalize sexuality. Knowledge produced desire in order to control it. In this respect, Foucault avoids the pitfall of treating desire as a unified phenomenon in history precisely because he treats desire as the product of certain historical discourses. However, this creates an ambiguity in Foucault's theory. At times he treats the body as a real entity – as, for example, in the effects of population growth on scientific thought or in his analysis of the effect of penology on the body. Foucault appears to treat the body as a unified, concrete aspect of human history which is continuous across epochs. Such a position is, however, clearly at odds with his views on the discontinuities of history and with his argument that the body is constructed by discourse. Thus, one interpretation of Foucault asserts that:

Clearly Foucault does not adopt Merleau-Ponty's solution. The body of desire is not, for him, the phenomenal, lived body. It is not a corporeal, incarnate subjectivity. ... Desire, for Foucault, is neither expressed in the body, nor is the body the lived form of desire. (Lemert and Gillan, 1982: 105)

On the other hand, Foucault has also said that, rather than starting with the analysis of ideology, it would be 'more materialist to study first the question of the body and the effects of power on it' (Foucault, 1981: 139). Such a materialist project would appear to take the corporeality of life seriously.