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ARTÍCULOS
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*Counterrevolution and Revolt, fifty Years later. Kant, Marx, and the Relevance of Herbert Marcuse's aesthetic Dimension**

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Abstract: Recently, Critical Theory has been revisited due to the relevance of its critique of contemporary forms of alienation. This critique allows the unveiling of structural elements of contemporary ways of life, offering an accurate analysis of the material and subjective causes of the current environmental crisis. An example of this contribution is Herbert Marcuse's book *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, published in 1972. This article addresses the relationship between aesthetics and political ecology established in the main theses of Marcuse's book. The objective is to present how Marcuse employs the German philosophical tradition, more specifically elements of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, to constitute a conceptual project of emancipation based on what he calls the aesthetic dimension. The article concludes by claiming that Marcuse's critics and formulation entail a double requirement in which the field of Aesthetics has a central role.

Keywords: Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Herbert Marcuse, aesthetics, political ecology, social philosophy, critical theory

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Introduction

Herbert Marcuse's philosophy is a philosophy of emancipation. It is based on a collaborative diagnosis, which cuts across Western Marxism's history, and reveals alienation as the major misfortune of capitalist and industrial societies.¹ With other authors of Critical Theory, Marcuse contributed to developing this diagnosis, showing that the instrumentalization that accompanies industrial capitalism impacts the social and economic sphere and, above all, the subjective sphere of individuals. His merit was to realize, quite early in his path, that the aesthetic experience can be a model and an alternative for emancipation. It challenges the hegemonic epistemic matrix established and stabilized by modern capitalism, revealing the possible production of new horizons of experience.

The book *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, written fifty years ago, offers a privileged conceptual condensation of the functionality of aesthetics within Marcuse's critical work. The shift that took the author from the cognitive to the sensitive sphere of emancipation, built throughout his philosophical itinerary, appears paradigmatically in this book from 1972. Renewed by the ecological concern, it can be understood as a response to the crises unfolded by the capitalist mode of production.² Given the permanence of the contradictions pointed out by the work and the vitality of the theses it contains, I will try to trace the intellectual history that makes it possible, thus allowing a genetic understanding of the philosophical project outlined by Marcuse.

In light of the recently completed ephemeris of this work, and given the need to assess how pertinent it remains to reflection within social philosophy, the purpose of this article is to retrace the genealogy of the theses contained in it. To do so, I proceed in three moments: (1) in the first section, I show how aesthetics has been present since the beginning of Marcuse's philosophical thought and how it develops a fundamental role in Marcuse's reading of the young Marx, made possible by the publication, in 1932, of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. (2) In the second section, I offer an interpretation and a possible definition of the concept of the aesthetic dimension. I show how Marcuse's reading of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* was fundamental to the formulation of this concept since it allows Marcuse to think of a philosophical ground for the idea of *purposiveness* in nature. (3) Finally, in the last section, I address Marcuse's mature work, showing how in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*,

1 The critical fortune of this trajectory, focused mainly on the contribution of the authors gathered around the *Institute for Social Research*, both in their stay in Frankfurt and in their American period, began to be synthesized after the end of the 1960s. See the celebrated works: Jay, 1973; Assoun & Raulet, 1978; Wiggerhaus, 1986. For comments about Marcuse's work, see Katz, 1982; Kellner, 1984; Raulet, 1992.

2 For an analysis of the relationship between the theses of critical theory and the environmental issue, see Vogel, 1996. In recent years Marcuse's work has aroused attention, given the conceptual contributions it brings to the ecological debate. See: Loureiro, 2003; Miles, 2016; Stevenson, 2020; Reitz, 2022.

Marcuse operates a fusion between Kant and Marx to think of the constitutive role of aesthetics in the construction of technology engaged with environmental challenges.

1. The *Paris Manuscripts*: Sensibility reencountered

One of the most important references in the constitution of Marcuse's aesthetic project is the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of Marx, written in 1844 during his stay in Paris. Marcuse was one of its first readers, and already in 1932, the year of its publication, he offered a critical reading of the *Manuscripts* (Marcuse, 1932/1978). The theses of the young Marx, which are in close dialogue with the work of Hegel and Feuerbach, mark not only a break in European Marxian reception but also an essential rupture within Marcuse's thinking. On the one hand, they show a Marx concerned with philosophical questions, shedding new light on the economic aspects of his writings and thus transforming the reading that had been made until then of *Capital*, his major work. On the other hand, they contributed to Marcuse's work with the materialist and existential reflections already inscribed in Marx, thus moving Marcuse away from the Heideggerian ontological matrix (Habermas *et al.*, 1978). To illustrate the importance and permanence of such theses, I will discuss the main aspects of the *Manuscripts* and their reception in Marcuse's work in this section. First, I will address the centrality of the concept of *species-being* [*Gattungswesen*] and its implication in the notion of self-engendering proper to human nature. Secondly, I revisit the importance of sensibility within Marx's critique, highlighting the main points that Marcuse will take up. This analysis will serve as the basis for understanding the young Marx operated in Marcuse's late work, which I will develop further in the third section of this article.

1.1 *Species-being, a central Concept*

The *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, written in 1844 in Paris, changed Western Marxism's landscape when published in 1932. Influenced by Hegel and Feuerbach, they analyze the political economy through an anthropological perspective, of which work is the central element. In line with Hegel, the relationship between subject and object, between the individual and his environment, appear to the young Marx as a process. Work appears as the characteristic activity of the human, through which he externalizes and objectifies himself in nature. It is work, as subjective externalization, that produces, and this product of work is part of the subject. It allows subjects to appropriate themselves since it permits that, once their product is objectified before themselves, these creations open the way to self-consciousness and development. Marx's merit was to show that this human characteristic is estranged from humans within the capitalist system. In producing commodities, which feed capital, the human product is alienated