

# ***“No Wealth But Life”: Art and Nature in Left Cultural Politics from Kant to the Frankfurt School***

James Mark Shields ©1991, revised 2007

## **Abstract**

Virtually all aspects of the thought of Karl Marx have been analyzed, argued, and interpreted to death; most everyone is familiar with such concepts as historical materialism, class consciousness, and dictatorship of the proletariat. However, Marx wrote a tremendous amount during his lifetime, not all of which has been as studiously and laboriously ravaged as the prime ribs of *Capital* and the *Communist Manifesto*. Marx’s insights regarding the individual and human nature, for instance—his implicit and explicit references to quality of life (beyond subsistence), along with his musings on creativity and the relationship between humanity and nature, have often been dismissed as “early” (i.e., immature) work of minimal theoretical or practical importance. In the investigation of Marx’s writings on art and beauty, with subsequent reference to his theories about the individual and human nature, it becomes evident that these seemingly disparate strands of thought are closely connected in Marx’s thought, just as they are in many of the notable nineteenth and early twentieth century philosophers and culture theorists. In particular, Marx’s German predecessors—Feuerbach, Kant and Schiller—provide fertile ground for an aesthetic and political “philosophical anthropology.” In addition, a distinct line of social criticism arose with the dramatic changes of the Gilded Age, based upon a rather loosely defined notion of “culture,” and often connected with the arts and aesthetic theory. The English critic John Ruskin attacked liberal-democratic and capitalist society for, in his view, two great sins: the spiritual alienation of humankind, and the ruthless destruction of nature’s beauty by the relentless growth of modern technology and industrialism. It is this dual crisis perceived by Ruskin that allows us to envisage a potential contradiction within Marxist thought: Marx predicted the emergence of a communist society, and a corresponding new communist man, founded upon the principles of equality, self-realization, and aesthetic beauty—yet he did not, like Ruskin, make a plea for an end or reduction to technological and industrial advance. Whereas Ruskin both looked and longed for a return to a pre-capitalist “craftsman” era (or an idealized picture of such), Marx, caught up in the technological optimism of the Machine Age, characterized such medievalism as “crude romantic philistinism.” This discrepancy is certainly not the only difference, nor perhaps even the main difference between Ruskinian and Marxist social theory. However, when placed before the issue of life-quality and the future of humanity on our planet, both as individuals and as a species, the problem gains in significance. William Morris, an English designer and social critic who was both a disciple of Ruskin and an early and prominent figure in British socialism, attempted to synthesize the political and economic theories of Marx with the social and aesthetic theories of Ruskin, with mixed success. The difficulty in combining the essentially conservative thesis of Ruskin with the radical views of Marx points to an interesting relationship between two prominent streams of nineteenth-century thought; two streams that, though radically dissimilar, share a broadly “organic” (as opposed to mechanical or utilitarian) approach to life and society. In effect, the intellectual traditions epitomized by Marx and Ruskin followed similar tenets as a basis for critical theory, but while Ruskin and the conservatives lacked a program for social change or individual emancipation, the Marxian socialist side failed with regard to the “natural” side of aesthetics. In twentieth century thought, “aesthetic humanism” emerged as an important concern, yet many of the central questions address over a century ago remain unresolved. As we enter the twenty-first century, issues of life-quality (in the most general sense), creativity, alienation, and “ecological consciousness” have great relevance to most ordinary people. A renewed concern with “life” has become apparent. Anthropological, political and aesthetic theory can contribute to a fuller understanding of the human being and her unique position on our planet, by recognizing our limits as well as our potentialities, while keeping in mind Ruskin’s single conclusive tenet: *There is no wealth but life.*

---

*We can no longer close our eyes to the fact that humanism today is undergoing a crisis which threatens its very existence, and which demands a rigorous reassessment of the situation...*  
– Lucien Goldmann, *Immanuel Kant*, 18

*Disregard for nature’s richness leads to the destruction of living forms and eventually to the degradation and destruction of man himself...*  
– Gyorgy Kepes, “Art and Ecological Consciousness,” 2

*[C]ommunism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man...*  
– Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 135

*Man is the only being on earth that has understanding and hence an ability to set himself purposes of his own choice, and in this respect he holds the title of lord of nature...*  
– Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 318

*Man is at times more daring even “than Life itself is”...*  
– Martin Heidegger, “What Are Poets For?” 118

## **Preface: Aesthetics and Life**

*Is there... a possible objective heritage, i.e., one that is not only within history by also a heritage of the non-ideological kind, one not only of the culturally humanistic surplus but also one that concerns the cognition of objective nature itself?*  
– Ernst Bloch, *Utopian Function of Art & Literature*, 64

The above question was posed by German thinker Ernst Bloch in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, a work published in the early 1970s. More than thirty years hence, Bloch's query is more pertinent than ever, with the recent but powerful emergence of environmentalism in the Western industrialized world. Bloch raises the common dichotomy between nature and culture, which implies a dualism of "natural" and "artificial"—and thus "nature"<sup>1</sup> and "art." This seemingly fundamental opposition between the human and non-human realm could be dealt with through an investigation of the philosophical traditions of humanism and naturalism<sup>2</sup>—but such a study would be a significantly laborious (and tedious) undertaking. Instead, we might work around such great masses of philosophical speculation by focusing rather on the broad but fertile field of aesthetics.

The term "aesthetics" comes from the Greek *aesthetikos*, and is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "a concern with or sensitivity to the beautiful; artistic; tasteful." Such a definition is of course limited, but it does bring to light certain key points of the aesthetic as a conceptual category: it generally involves the senses, and is intrinsically connected with the abstract notion of *quality* (as opposed to *quantity*). As well, the aesthetic has often been connected with morality, and holds a vital position in any discussion of subject-object relations, whether such involves humans relating to other humans, art or nature. Aesthetic theory, then, is a necessarily expansive field, encompassing not only theories of art but also theories of natural beauty and natural qualities more generally.

The significance of aesthetics is inestimable in the undertaking of any comprehensive investigation into the quality of life on our planet, and thus has profound implications not only for art theory, but also for social, anthropological, political, ethical, and psychological theory. The beauty of the aesthetic is its cross-disciplinary aspect. For although "quality of life" is ostensibly a goal of various works of political and anthropological investigation, we must not be taken in by a long-standing tradition of Western anthropocentrism: "life" refers not only to human life but to all biotic (or perhaps "sentient") existence on our planet, indeed to the ecosystem of the earth itself. As flexible and broad ranging as the boundaries established within an aesthetic framework are, they will no doubt be stretched in the course of this dissertation—which serves as a basis for future investigation into these increasingly important matters.

## Introduction

*[C]ommunism... as human self-estrangement... [is] the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore [is] the complete return of man to himself... a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development.*

—Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 135

Virtually all aspects of the thought of Karl Marx have been analyzed, argued, and interpreted to death; most everyone is familiar with such concepts as historical materialism, class consciousness, and dictatorship of the proletariat. However, Marx wrote a tremendous amount during his lifetime, not all of which has been as studiously and laboriously ravaged as the prime ribs of *Capital* and the *Communist Manifesto*. Marx's insights regarding the individual and human nature, for instance—his philosophical anthropology—his implicit and

explicit references to quality of life (beyond subsistence), along with his musings on creativity and the relationship between man<sup>3</sup> and nature, have often been dismissed as "early" (i.e., immature) work of minimal theoretical or practical importance. In the twentieth century so-called Marxist humanism emerged to fill this gap in the study of Marx and Marxism, and by mid-century had developed into a significant and diverse intellectual movement, yet there continues to be an intellectual bias against the early writings of Marx. Admittedly, Marx had little to say about specifically humanist issues (and even less about aesthetics), yet such writings do exist, and upon examination a certain aesthetic humanism can be derived from such. In the investigation of Marx's writings on art and beauty, with subsequent reference to his theories about the individual and human nature, it becomes evident that these seemingly disparate strands of thought are closely connected in Marx's thought, just as they are in many of the notable nineteenth and early twentieth century philosophers and culture theorists. In particular, Marx's German predecessors—Feuerbach, Kant and Schiller—provide fertile ground for an aesthetic and political "philosophical anthropology."

The middle and latter part of the nineteenth century, what has come to be known as the Gilded Age, was a period of great misery and despair for many in the Western world—particularly for those of the lower socio-economic strata who experienced first hand the blows of unmitigated industrialization. A distinct line of social criticism arose with the dramatic changes of the era, one based upon a rather loosely defined notion of "culture," and often connected with the arts and aesthetic theory. Perhaps the prominent critic to emerge in England in these times was John Ruskin, who turned from an earlier interest in art criticism to formulate an extensive philosophy of life (or perhaps, a philosophy of Life) for his Victorian peers. With characteristic fervor, Ruskin attacked liberal-democratic and capitalist society for, in his view, two great sins: the spiritual alienation of humankind, and the ruthless destruction of nature's beauty by the relentless growth of modern technology and industrialism.

It is this dual crisis perceived by Ruskin that allows us to envisage a potential contradiction within Marxist thought: Marx predicted the emergence of a communist society, and a corresponding new communist man, founded upon the principles of equality, self-realization, and aesthetic beauty—yet he did not, like Ruskin, make a plea for an end or reduction to technological and industrial advance. Whereas Ruskin both looked and longed for a return to a pre-capitalist "craftsman" era (or an idealized picture of such), Marx, caught up in the technological optimism of the Machine Age, characterized such medievalism as "crude romantic philistinism." The society longed for by such writers, thought Marx, was necessarily and finally superseded by industrial capitalism, which contains within its massive productive capacities the seeds for the final stage of human history—the development of communism. After all, Marx was, first and foremost, opposed to the capitalist *mode* of industrialization—he was not opposed to technological and scientific progress as such. In fact, for both Marx and Engels, it was science and only science that could lead the way to the future, obliterating all remnants of "utopian socialism" along the way.

This discrepancy is certainly not the only difference, nor perhaps even the main difference between Ruskinian and

Marxist social theory. However, when placed before the issue of life-quality and the future of humanity on our planet, both as individuals and as a species, the problem gains in significance. William Morris, an English designer and social critic who was both a disciple of Ruskin and an early and prominent figure in British socialism, attempted to synthesize the political and economic theories of Marx with the social and aesthetic theories of Ruskin, with mixed success. A satisfactory resolution to this problem was never attained by Morris, who reverted in later writings to an inconclusive medievalist utopianism that did little to reconcile the felt contradiction between “life” and “progress.” The difficulty in combining the essentially conservative thesis of Ruskin with the radical views of Marx points to an interesting relationship between two prominent streams of nineteenth-century thought; two streams that, though radically dissimilar, share a broadly “organic” (as opposed to mechanical or utilitarian) approach to life and society. In effect, the intellectual traditions epitomized by Marx and Ruskin followed similar tenets as a basis for critical theory, but while Ruskin and the conservatives lacked a program for social change or individual emancipation, the Marxian socialist side failed with regard to the “natural” side of aesthetics.

In twentieth century thought, “aesthetic humanism” emerged as an important concern, yet many of the central questions address over a century ago remain unresolved. As we enter the twenty-first century, issues of life-quality (in the most general sense), creativity, alienation, and “ecological consciousness” have great relevance to most ordinary people. A renewed concern with “life” has become apparent. Such issues are often couched in high, even utopian terms, but the curious mingling we now witness of optimism for the future and despair with the present allows for a positive critical theory focused on these matters. Anthropological, political and aesthetic theory can contribute to a fuller understanding of the human being and her unique position on our planet, by recognizing our limits as well as our potentialities, while keeping in mind Ruskin’s single conclusive tenet: *There is no wealth but life*. For what is a world full of money and goods, if it is one without human beings, living with some degree of harmony and coexistence—or one without the natural beauty of an un-ravaged physical environment. Moreover, the historical dichotomy between humanity and nature, which implies antagonism at least as much as it does stewardship, as well as a limited choice between Bacon’s anthropocentrism and Spinoza’s pantheism, hinders the fulfillment of a real ecological consciousness—one that is *biocentric*, yet does not exclude either the individual human being as a free and autonomous moral agent nor the importance of human solidarity on the collective level.

## II. Pre-Marxian Aesthetics

### A. The Roots

*Though need may drive Man into society, and Reason implant social principles in him, Beauty alone can confer on him a social character.*

– Friedrich Schiller, *Aesthetic Education of Man*, 36

The study of aesthetics has a long pedigree in Western philosophy—the Greeks were perhaps the first to raise questions about appearance and reality vis-à-vis the relation between and image of an object and the object itself. By the

classical period there was a great interest among thinkers in the nature and source of an artist’s creative power. Plato, though disparaging of the arts in his *Republic*<sup>4</sup>, makes an important distinction between “acquisitive” (i.e., money/profit-making) and “productive” (i.e., creative/artistic) modes of activity. According to Plato, we must aspire to a path that will bring us into a direct apprehension of Beauty, insofar as it is possible while our souls remain entrapped within our bodies; only thus can *eros*, the divine love within us, be satisfied. When art is “correct,” says Plato, it wields tremendous power to good in society; thus his connection between the aesthetic and moral/social realms. In this way, Plato opened up several crucial issues relating to aesthetic theory and its connection to economic, political and moral activity.

Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine and Aquinas all contributed their respective two-cents worth to the study of aesthetics, but without significant deviation from Plato’s foundations. In the Renaissance, Marsiglio Ficino found a locus of personal experience in all creative activity, in that it allows for an inward attention to what does not yet exist, except as an ideal or future thing. For Ficino this involves freeing the soul from the body, and is the determinant justification for the superiority of humans over animals (who cannot step outside of nature and master it the way that humans can). This idea gained popularity during the early modern era—not only was the human being considered superior because of his creative powers, the artist himself was judged a superior man (cf. Bruno). In the writings of John Dryden, nature finally gains some status within aesthetics; he argues that the goal of painting is to understand what nature has made most beautiful. In Dryden, as in many of the later Romantics, nature becomes an intimate companion of the creative person.

Modern aesthetic theory is often traced back to Baumgarten, who coined the term “aesthetics” and who brought about a shift from aesthetics as a theory of beauty to a “science of sensory cognition” (Beardsley 157). With this turn, aesthetics lost much of its religious and spiritual implications, evolving, with Burke, into a phenomenon reducible to psychology.

This brief history of Western aesthetics is not meant to be comprehensive, but helps us to set the scene for the revolutionary eighteenth century, a time of ferment in political, epistemological, literary and artistic activity. It was during this heady period that two men in particular, Friedrich von Schiller and Immanuel Kant, provided, for the first time since Plato, an account of aesthetics that was not separated from philosophical concerns, but could be included within a more general philosophy of human existence.

### B. Kantian Aesthetics: Humanity, Art and Nature

In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant aims to reunite the worlds of nature and humanity/freedom.<sup>5</sup> A lofty goal, it would seem, but one that for Kant can be fulfilled through the realm of aesthetics. He attempts to establish a theory of aesthetic judgment free from the temptations of relativism, accomplished by drawing an intimate connection between aesthetic values and the cognitive faculties of the mind—while at the same time suggesting the autonomy of the aesthetic from desire and knowledge. Essentially, Kant looks to

aesthetic (reflective) judgment for a connection between the human realm of freedom and the realm of natural necessity.

In several fundamental ways, Kantian aesthetics and the third *Critique* prefigure certain Marxian concepts. Throughout the past century and a half of Marxist thought, however, Kant has not fared well; the obvious differences that exist between these two giants of modern Western thought may have blinded us from seeing similarities and convergences. Below, the more general implications of a Kantian Marxism will be discussed; for now we will focus on the aesthetic premises and conclusions of Kant that have relevance for Marxian theory. Kant's reconciliation (between nature/necessity and humanity/freedom) prefigures Marx's recognition of a fundamental opposition between the two, and the need to transcend that opposition. Moreover, *Critique of Judgment* offers an ideological paradigm for both the individual and society. Aesthetic judgment is intrinsically connected with altruism: in responding to beauty (whether in art or nature), "I" (the subject) place my own aversions and desires aside, allowing me to take the place of others and judge from a standpoint of "universal subjectivity." In order to understand the consequences of such a process, we must keep in mind the Kantian imperative of treating and all human beings as end-in-themselves. In sum: aesthetic inter-subjectivity creates a utopian community of subjects, who are all united in some basis sense. These subjects, as ends-in-themselves, make up what Kant calls "culture," which he distinguishes from the "political" domain, where true bourgeois individuals are bound together in purely Mandevillian instrumental fashion for the pursuit off ends. By contrast, culture is that "inner, personal interrelation between subjects as rational and feeling beings" (Kant *Judgment* 319). Reacting against a social philosophy based on egoism and appetite, Kant's community of ends, which is maintained through "non-coercive consensus," not only prefigures the ideal of Marxian communism, but also that of the various conservative culture theorists of the nineteenth century, who were to discover in the notion of culture a prototype of human possibility to wield against both feudal absolutism and bourgeois materialism.

Yet Kant's *Kultur* is not merely a realm of enjoyment; it is something much greater and more significant. As the "beautiful" contributes to culture by teaching us to be mindful of purposiveness in feeling pleasure, and preparing us to love something (even nature) without interest; the "sublime"—that fearsome intrusion upon reason and imagination—prepares us to "esteem" something, even against our intent. Kant recognizes in aesthetic judgment something fundamental to human progress and civilization. Someone abandoned on a desert island, he relates, "would not, just for himself, adorn either his hut or himself... only in society does it occur to him to be not merely a human being, but one who is also refined in his own way" (163-64).

Thus, the aesthetic-cultural realm presupposes society, and refinement presupposes communication—the communication of one's pleasure to others, and the liking for an object in a community with others. Moreover, "a concern for universal communication is something that everyone expects and demands from everyone else, on the basis, as it were, of an original contract dictated by our very humanity." When civilization has reached its peak, Kant concludes, "it makes this communication almost the principal activity of refined inclination, and sensations are solved only to the

extent that they are universally communicable." The idea of universal communicability, or inter-subjectivity, is fundamental here; it not only increases the value of personal aesthetic pleasure, it also sets the stage for a higher level of human social existence.

Kant professes the superiority of natural beauty over that of art per se, even if art were to excel nature in form. Natural beauty, he argues, arouses in the spectator a *direct* interest, and agrees with the "refined and solid" way of thinking of people who have cultivated their moral feelings. (*Judgment* 165) Yet art and nature are intrinsically connected, in that a work of art, though it must be recognizably "art," must appear (in purposiveness) "to be as free from any compulsion of arbitrary rules as if it were a product of... nature" (174). Beauty in art and in nature is the same, except that artistic beauty is restricted to the concept of a thing's purpose. Fine art, says Kant, must have as its standard the reflective power of judgment (involving universal communicability), rather than "mere" sensation. Kant summarizes the connection between art and nature in the following fashion:

Independent natural beauty reveals to us a technic of nature that allows us to present nature as a system in terms of laws whose principle we do not find anywhere in our understanding: the principle of a purposiveness directed to our uses of judgment as regards appearances. Under this principle, appearances must be judged as belonging not merely to nature as governed by its purposeless mechanism, but also to [nature considered by] analogy with art. (*Judgment* 168)

Thus, reflective judgments of art and nature work on an analogical basis. Similarly, aesthetic judgment as a whole can be seen as analogous to moral judgment: While an interest in the beautiful in art is not "proof" of moral goodness, to take a direct interest in nature, says Kant, is "always the mark of a good soul" (228). The beautiful is, in some sense, the symbol of the morally good, particularly the beauty that induces a *direct* interest—e.g., the beauty of nature.

In the second part of *Critique of Judgment*, the section entitled "Critique of Teleological Judgment," Kant draws some conclusions based upon his earlier conclusions throughout the work. We have grounds, he says, for judging man to be not just a natural purpose, but rather the *ultimate* purpose of nature on earth—"by reference to which all other natural things constitute a system of purpose" (317). What is it *within* man that is a purpose and that he is to further through his connection with nature? This interior purpose must either be one fulfilled by nature's beneficence (human happiness), or man's aptitude for pursuing various purposes for which he can use nature (for Kant, this is culture). Happiness, though the highest physical good we can achieve in the world, is ineffective as an ultimate purpose. Since "man" is the only living being that has understanding and can thus set his own purposes, it must be in this sense that he hold the title of "lord of nature." Humanity is the ultimate purpose of nature, says Kant, but she is always conditioned by her understanding and her will, which give both nature and herself reference to a self-sufficient purpose, one that is independent of nature; a *final* purpose. Thus, the final purpose is humanity's aptitude for setting itself purposes, and for using nature as a means for achieving these purposes (in accordance with the maxims of

its free purposes). This, again, is Kant's "culture," the purpose that we have cause to attribute to nature with respect to the human species. The formal end, Kant concludes, under which nature can along achieve this aim is within "that constitution of human relations where the impairment to freedom that results from the mutually conflicting freedoms is countered by lawful authority within a whole called civil society" (320).

Thus, teleological judgment achieves the unity of the realms of nature and of purpose into one system, in which the human appears as both a causally determined being and a morally free agent. Kant goes on to deduce the implications of such towards the conception of a deity ("On Ethics and Physicotheology"), but of greater importance here are his conclusions regarding the respective conditions of, and the relationship between, nature and humanity. Kant allows for the recognition of the basic insignificance of humanity in the cosmos, but also concludes that in his capacity for autonomous moral agency, man is lord of nature: "If things in the world which are dependent beings with regard to their existence, require a supreme cause that acts in terms of purposes, then man is the final purpose of creation, and *to which all of nature is teleologically subordinated*" (*Judgment* 323, my emphasis). The conclusion is of course nothing radical, but is nonetheless significant because of Kant's reluctance in giving the victor ("man") full autonomy over nature. The esteem engendered by the sublime must remain.

### C. Schillerian Aesthetics: Art, Life and Society

Friedrich von Schiller, a younger contemporary and pupil of Kant, also provides a fertile basis for the formation of modern aesthetics. Unlike Kant, Schiller was a man of the arts (poet, playwright) first, a philosopher second; but his aesthetics pick up the Kantian base and "anthropologizes" it into an epistemological category—one that, he believed, would bring forth the resolution of sense and spirit, matter and form, chance and permanence, finitude and infinity. Schiller's asked Plato's question, that few had investigated thoroughly since Plato: What is the ultimate role of art and beauty in human life and culture? For Schiller, aesthetics is the mediating link between barbarism and civilization: "If man is ever to solve that problem of politics [i.e., the quest for a well-ordered state] in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic—because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to freedom" (Eagleton 106). In order to succeed, he argues, every "progressive" politics will have to venture into the psychical and investigate the problem of transforming the human subject. Despite the possible eugenic overtones to this outlook, Schiller was genuinely concerned with culture as the product of continual refashioning—as a purveyor and product of a "revolutionized subjectivity." Thus, Schiller sees aesthetics as a possible means to human progress in the political sphere, but a progress necessarily founded upon an anthropological revolution.

Schiller's thought is grounded in holism: to achieve her full humanity—i.e., her ideal nature—a person must find some kind of harmony within herself; a process that is analogous and intrinsically connected to the state striving for a harmony of discordant wills—in both cases without suppression. Schiller found in his own day a situation of profound cultural crisis: harmony had been lost, and human nature was experiencing a deep split out of which emerged the Industrial Revolution, during which time:

State and Church, law and customs, were... torn asunder; enjoyment was separated from labour, means from ends, effort from reward. Eternally chained to only one single little fragment of the whole, Man himself grew to be only a fragment; with the monstrous noise of the wheel he drives everlastingly in his ears, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of imprinting humanity upon his nature he becomes merely the imprint of his occupation, of his science. (Beardsley 226)

This fragmentation of humanity under industrial capitalism brings to mind Marx's concept of spiritual alienation. Indeed, Schiller decried the spiritual devastation that the emergent social order had wrought upon the people, effectively destroying the unity within human nature and setting the harmonious powers of such against one another in a disastrous conflict.

How to overcome this dual fragmentation of society and self? This remained the problem for Schiller's aesthetics. The fine arts, he says, are what enable us to open up to well springs of pure and clear thought, untainted by the political realm and its inherent corruptive tendencies. Schiller submits that this may be claiming a lot for aesthetics, but Beauty must be sought as an abstraction, something inferred from the possibility of a nature that is both sensuous *and* rational.

Schiller's complete aesthetic experience is one in which "we find ourselves at the same time in the condition of utter rest and extreme movement, and the result is that wonderful emotion for which reason has no conception and language no name" (Beardsley 229). The highest enjoyment is freedom of spirit "in the vivacious play of all its powers." The beautiful, then, essentially allows humankind to evolve from mere sensation to thought; there is no other way to make the sensuous man rational than by first making him "aesthetic." Beauty's function is to free humanity for the realization of her higher self, which develops in conjunction with what Schiller calls the "play impulse," creating an aesthetic condition that is not just a step toward the highest state of humanity, but a *constituent part* of the highest state of humanity—in which both the sensuous and the intellectual sides of human nature are kept in a free harmonious relationship. Correspondingly, it is only through a continuous experience of beauty that the political system will be able to combine order with freedom. Aesthetic taste is the *only* possibility for social harmony, because, according to Schiller, it established harmony within the individual. All other forms of perception divide the subject, being based exclusively on either sense or intellect.

Thus, the Schillerian aesthetic. Like the Kantian version, beauty, and aesthetic reflection in general serve to develop some kind of harmony in both self and society. Schiller goes further than Kant in attacking the socio-political and economic system of his day, and it is this latter aspect—his vision of stunted human capacities, dissociated powers, and the fragmentation of human nature—that returns with a vengeance in the work of Marx.

### D. Legacy of Kant and Schiller

A justifiable question or set of questions can be raised at this point: Why Kant? Why Schiller? After all, the most obvious influence on Marx's thought is without question Hegel. However, Hegelian philosophy is so deeply interwoven with

Marxian thought that such a reiteration would be unnecessary. Kant and Schiller, by contrast, had minimal *direct* influence on Marx (who condemned both for their idealism), yet there are nevertheless certain key features of the two earlier thinkers' respective aesthetics that point at once to Marx and beyond Marx to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The choice was not solely based on novelty, however, and will be justified further in this essay. To summarize up to this point: Kant brought aesthetics back into the light of philosophical inquiry, while Schiller, following the Kantian lead, continued to exhort the power of the aesthetic, with more explicit reference to its place within his existing social and political context, and to its revolutionary potential. After Kant and Schiller, the German Idealists (including Hegel) continued to see art as a social and cultural construct, as well as an important realm full of the metaphysical connotations developed by Kant. Art becomes a social fact, and the aesthetic an indispensable philosophical category.

Perhaps it is necessary, before proceeding into the work of Marx himself, to establish some basis or justification for our use of the category of aesthetics in a study, such as this one, ostensibly focusing on philosophical anthropology and socio-political philosophy. Terry Eagleton may have put it best when he says that his own work is "an attempt to find in the category of the aesthetic a way of gaining access to certain cultural questions of modern European thought—to light up, from that particular angle, a range of wider social/political/ethical issues" (Eagleton 1). From Kant to contemporary Marxism, aesthetics have gained a foothold within social theory, but it is a position that is yet to be explored with respect to distinctively modern issues like the global environmental crisis.

One aspect of the aesthetic that is of particular significance is its very indeterminacy—its opacity as a discipline, which, in effect, enables non-experts license to speak on its concerns. In our so-called post-modern age of Foucaultian "disciplines" and "discourses," where power to speak on certain subjects tends to be monopolized by a supposedly knowledgeable elite, the democratic tendency of aesthetics is a welcome respite. The very versatility of aesthetics allows it to play a persistent (though rarely defined) role in the preoccupations of modern thought. Vagueness and ill definition are hardly justification, however. In this essay, the aesthetic will be raised not just as a *possibility*, but rather as an essential and indispensable *basis* from which to illuminate various crises of contemporary social existence. Not, however, as the catalyst or prototype for political or economic revolution, but first and foremost as an essential aspect of socio-individual transformation—a revolution, as it were, of consciousness. As such, our dealings with Marx will not focus specifically on traditional themes of Marxist economic and political theory, but instead on his earlier, humanistic writings, which maintain the ethic of revolutionary praxis while emphasizing transformation on the individual and cultural level.

For the young Marx, the aesthetic held an important position, as a mode of being that is entirely self-regulating and self-determining. As such, the aesthetic draws out, in clear fashion, one of several contradictions within bourgeois existence: an once an ideological mode of subjectivity, which justifies the material operations of capitalism, the aesthetic also emphasizes the self-determining nature of human

capacities. It is this latter aspect that allows aesthetics to become, in the early work of Marx, "the anthropological foundation of a revolutionary opposition to bourgeois utility" (Eagleton 202). Thus, the aesthetic is a double-edged sword, with the ability to cut deep in more than one direction.

In any case, the aesthetic is a category with definite socio-political implications, but only via more primary psychological and cultural effects. As we shall see below, Marx and Engels may have lost the power originally granted the aesthetic by opting instead (for possibly legitimate reasons) towards a "scientific" socialism based upon unrelenting materialist principles. Marx never rejected his early interest in aesthetics, but in his later writings he makes little or no mention of the possible emancipatory force of such, perhaps in reaction to the culture theorists of his day, who professed a similar aesthetic ideal but carried such toward decidedly conservative socio-political conclusions. Herein lies the importance of aesthetics: its possibilities for change in human life—individual, cultural, and (by way of the first two) socio-political. As well, aesthetics may hold a primary position in any non-anthropocentric and ecological philosophy of the future.

### III. The Industrial Age: Marriage of Hope and Despair

*In every cry of every Man,*

*In every Infants cry of fear,*

*In every voice: in every ban,*

*The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.*

– William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

*[The poor] are drawn into large cities where they breathe a poorer atmosphere than in the country;... they are deprived of all means of cleanliness...*

– Friedrich Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England*

The poet and the revolutionary writer agree: The Industrial Revolution, that great transformation by which European societies rose to such loft heights of "progress," was intrinsically connected with a rise in (urban) poverty, squalor, filth, sorrow, and ugliness—the physical, moral, and psychological degradation of a massive number of people. The working class, in particular, moving from the countryside to the crowded cities, became easy prey to infectious disease, malnutrition, alcoholism, and countless other pathological conditions associated with economic, physical, and mental misery. Perhaps the most significant revolution in modern history was by no means universally hailed as a positive one. There were, at first, a few feeble cries of protest, which grew louder as conditions prevailed and even worsened. The Romantic movement that emerged across Western Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, was one important critical reaction to the Machine Age.

Essentially, the Romantics believed that so-called progress (measured in terms of economic productivity, increased trade and efficiency, and in more recent times Gross National Product) was not worth the degrading and dehumanizing costs paid by a large number of ordinary folks. William Wordsworth, the father of English Romantic poetry, also rejected the effects of the Industrial Revolution upon nature in general and the English landscape in particular. However, ecology was not a primary concern of the

Romantics, and despite their ideals of Noble Peasants, Outcastes, and Working Men, neither in some respects were the actual people most directly affected. Rather, their concern was with humanity in the abstract, and the dehumanization of the species as a whole.

In short, the Romantic critique was leveled against the machines and ‘satanic mills’ rather than against a particular class or group of people. According to Robert Southey: “Men are being reduced to machines, and he who... uses his fellow creatures as bodily machines for producing wealth, ends not infrequently in becoming an intellectual one himself, employed in continually increasing what it is impossible for him to enjoy.” (Williams 23) In the century separating William Blake and Friedrich Engels, Romanticism rose, withered, and all but died as a movement. Yet its effects were profound, not least in saturating nineteenth century European social thought. During this same period, industrialism continued apace, reaching its peak around the time of Engel’s *Condition of the Working-Class in England*, and spreading across the European continent and to America and beyond. Progress and despair continued to perpetuate one another, or so it seemed, and the stage was set for a new socio-political vision. The Romantics had succeeded in vilifying the Industrial Revolution and its catastrophic effects, but they could go no further, remaining entrenched in idealistic longings for a New Jerusalem, without a positive or productive basis upon which to proceed.

#### IV. Karl Marx and Left Cultural Politics

From the dismal depths of Victorian London, we turn to Paris, France, in the year 1844, where a young Karl Marx labors at what will come to be known as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. Though at this stage hardly a revolutionary, the young Marx was intensely concerned with the state of the individual and the society of his day. The *Manuscripts*, as well as the later *Grundrisse*,<sup>6</sup> have been at the center of a controversy within Marxism for a century or so. Neither of these works were published within Marx’s own lifetime, thus undermining, in the eyes of many, their validity and importance to his corpus. However, in recent years the investigation of “early Marx” has become something of a trend; many now maintain that these are in fact the richest of Marx’s writings, as they are clearly the most conducive to any form of Marxist humanism. As a result, there is a divide between those who see the later writings as a fulfillment of the principles sketched in the earlier works, and those who view the earlier writings as mere transitory musings made superfluous (sublated?) by the later published works. Judgment on this issue will never be final, and there is some confusion due to the difference between what Marx himself saw as important, what was important in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and what is of most importance in our post-1989 and post-9/11 world. In any case, to neglect the early works of Marx, or to reject them out of hand, cannot be but harmful to the full understanding of Marxism and—more importantly—the implications of Marxian thought for the contemporary world situation.

##### A. Feuerbach: The Philosophy of the Future

The earlier writings of Marx are those most influenced by previous German philosophy, Hegel in particular. Another figure, however, of considerably less fame but of great significance for Marx and his Young Hegelian cohorts was

Ludwig Feuerbach. In the 1840s, Feuerbach emerged on the German intellectual scene with an argument, along Hegelian lines, for what he called a New Philosophy—one that would replace traditional religion and philosophy and usher in a new era of human emancipation. According to Engels: “We [i.e., the Young Hegelians] all became at once Feuerbachians” (Feuerbach vii). Feuerbach’s theory promises no less than the renewal of the human spirit on the basis of love and affirmation, allowing, at long last, for the emergence of “true humanity.”

Particularly important in Feuerbach’s work is his emphasis on an anthropological and materialist philosophy—“one that would begin with human beings as they concretely existed and would not posit any reality beyond that in which they lived” (Feuerbach viii). Without the presence, he argues, of the abstractions of traditional religion and philosophy, humankind could come to realize its *own* divinity, in realizing its true ‘species character’. In *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, Feuerbach outlines his position as a naturalistic and humanistic one, which takes up the Hegelian torch and carries it to the dawn of a new era. Borrowing a page from Kant, he claims that the entire history of religious and philosophical thought has been “a history of the development of alienated forms of human self-consciousness” (xliii). As a collective species, humans may realize this infinitude, transcending the limitations that plague individuals. Feuerbach characterizes the Philosophy of the Future by several key terms, including “anthropologism,” “empiricism,” “humanism,” and “naturalism.” Form a holistic point of view he condemns the traditional understanding of humans (i.e., as purely rational beings) as an abstract and disembodied conception that neglects both action and emotion. The New Philosophy must incorporate human feelings—and important philosophical innovation that allows us, today, to see a failure in modern thought (at least, until very recently) in the general neglect of the cognitive significance of the emotions.<sup>7</sup>

Feuerbach sets high goals for his New Philosophy, but his work is not without its flaws. Wartenburg argues that Feuerbach’s anthropological approach is at once a great strength and a fatal weakness of his materialist humanism. While it enables Feuerbach to assess traditional philosophy in a radically new way, it is problematic in its objectifications of “man” and “community,” which remain abstractions. Thus, while Feuerbach’s work is enlightening, and clears the ground for new developments in critical thought, his positive philosophy, like that of the Romantics, is seriously lacking: the New Philosophy could not fill the space its author had marked out for it. Feuerbach’s influence however rests on the anthropological-materialist perspective he endorsed—“an attempt to pull philosophy down from the divine, self-sufficient bliss in the realm of ideas into human misery... to derive the necessity of a philosophy of man, that is, an anthropology; from the philosophy of the absolute, that is theology” (Feuerbach 3). The New Philosophy would make humanity complete, not least via “the inclusion of Nature as the foundation of man” (70). Here we see Feuerbach’s anthropologism as an aesthetico-naturalistic humanism, but one with questionable socio-political applications—a lack duly noted by many of the Young Hegelians. Nevertheless, one finds in Feuerbach a philosophic outlook with great possibilities, and it is precisely the fertility of Feuerbachian soil that allows him the esteemed position of a muse figure for

Marx and Engels. The torch that Feuerbach picked up from Hegel was passed to Marx, who rejected the a-historical naturalism of mentor while recognizing the space opened by the New Philosophy.

## **B. Marxian Philosophical Anthropology**

### **i) Individualism, Self-Realization and Creativity**

*Above all we must avoid postulating "society" again as an abstraction vis-à-vis the individual.*

– Karl Marx

Though portraying Marx as a methodological individualist may be going too far, the softer case for ethical individualism in Marx's thought is tenable. Jon Elster argues that the individual is not only important to Marx, but in fact the main attraction of communism is precisely the possibility of a free and full realization of the individual. To most Westerners, who have long been exposed to the liberal democratic argument against communism based upon its perceived neglect of individual freedoms, this aspect of Marx's work may seem surprising or contradictory. But Marx was always careful not to allow the individual to be forgotten; he put forth a theory (contra the Romantics) for people, not for an abstract "humanity."

Marx's philosophy is rooted in the Western philosophical humanist tradition reaching from Spinoza to Hegel, and which is concerned above all with the realization of human potentiality. In Feuerbachian terms, Marx grapples with the issue of the existence of the true individual, one "who is what he does, and whose 'nature' unfolds itself in history" (Fromm vi). For Marx, the full realization of the humanity in a person is inextractable from recognition of the social forces that condition and imprison her, and from which she can be released only via attendant social change. The popular misconception of Marx—that he had neither respect nor understanding for the individual—is, to be frank, bunk (though understandable given the assaults by Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot on the individual in their respective regimes). Marx's aim was that of a cultural and 'spiritual' as well as economic and political emancipation of humanity—a return to human wholeness, "enabling him to find unity and harmony with his fellow man and with nature" (3).

Erich Fromm links Marx to a long tradition of Judeo-Christian prophetic messianism, which also aimed at the full realization of the human soul. Marxian socialism, argues Fromm, is a combination of this tradition in the non-theistic language of the nineteenth century. Certainly Marx was concerned with the emancipation of the individual in more than just political terms, an emphasis that opposes his work to that of the "vulgar materialism" and economic determinism of some other thinkers—including a number of Marxists. While economics is central, and in some ways the foundation of human existence, it must not, warns Marx, be construed as the sole determining element in history. "The ultimate determining element in history," writes Engels in reply to the one-sided un-dialectical causality of so-called "economicism," "is the production and reproduction of real life" (Bloch *Utopian* 28-29). As well, Marx touches upon the Kantian principle that persons must always be treated as ends rather than means, and furthers the categorical ethic by stating that humanity's essence must never be reduced to a mean's for individual (or, it goes without saying, political) existence.

Perhaps the most striking components of Marxian philosophical anthropology are found in his notions of creativity and alienation. The Marxian concept of humanity is based, in large part, upon the idea of a self-creative being, one who is self-conscious and progressive yet develops her powers in social intercourse with other beings of her kind.<sup>8</sup> "The whole of what is called world history is nothing but the creation of man by human labor, and the emergence of nature for man; he therefore has the evident and irrefutable proof of his self-creation, of his own origins" (Fromm 26). Self-creation is, for Marx, associated with the creative powers of humankind more generally, an idea with roots in the early modern mystic Jakob Boehme's principle of movement and the creative drive within. The essence of humanity, says Marx, is to create, for the sake of others—to *externalize* one's creative powers in the service of humanity. Independence and freedom are based upon the act of self-creation, and the creative drive more generally. This notion is distinctly Hegelian—humanity transforms both social reality and its appearance, in the process acquiring illusions that are accepted and discarded in turn, "as they come closer to seeing themselves and the world as they really are" (Plamenatz 15). Whereas Hegel makes the Spirit self-creative, Marx humanizes this notion while usurping it, making the self-affirmation of humanity the result of the bringing forth of all of his species powers.

Thus Marx's "man," in some sense, usurps the throne of God: In recognizing herself as self-creative, she sees that she is the product of her own activities, comes to understand herself and her environment, and no longer has any need to postulate a Creator or Redeemer external to herself. There are no purposes higher than her own, and the world is the sphere in which she expresses herself and comes to realize her potential. In short, she becomes fully human in a humanized world. Although Marx insists that humanity is itself a product of nature, the doctrine of self-creativity clearly places humanity on the throne as lord of nature.

The type of worker who is most obviously creative is, of course, the artist, poet or thinker, who produces what is her own and is recognized by others. However, most people are not creative to this degree, and need not be so in order to be happy or fulfilled. The more appropriate sense of the sphere of "creative" for Marx is one in which a person is a "craftsman" in the broadest sense—one who exercises skill and judgment in producing something well made; or, more generally still—the exercise of such powers in bringing about a beneficial result for himself and others. This type of creativeness, the artists in every one of us, is something that humans have little opportunity to develop in industrialized societies, where such activities are relegated to leisure hours.

Thus, Marx sees humankind as a species constantly involved in a process of self-creation, through which will emerge the full realization of our collective and individual humanity. The creative element of the human being must be unleashed from its fetters. For Marx, "man" is not only active and purposeful, he is also creative and self-creative; "[i]ndeed, if he were not all this—he could not be alienated" (Plamenatz 17).

### **ii) Alienation as Spiritual Estrangement**

Alienation is a Marxian concept about which much has been written; in recent times, it has become something of a byword



for the “malaise of (post-)modernity.” Our analysis here will be restricted to the significance of alienation for Marxian philosophical anthropology, and will focus on “spiritual” rather than “social” alienation,<sup>9</sup> though the two are very much connected. Essentially, Marx’s concept of alienation is a protest (like twentieth century existentialism) against the general dehumanization of modern persons brought on by specifically modern conditions. Just as Kierkegaard was concerned with the salvation of the individual, so too Marx denounces the capitalist mode of production and the ensuing enslavement of humanity as well as the destruction of true individuality—not so much by the capitalist as by the things that are the making of both worker and capitalist. Thus, with regard to spiritual alienation, Marx looked not just for the emancipation of the working class but for the liberation of all human beings “through the restitution of unalienated and hence free activity of all men” (Fromm 50). According to Wood, the issue is not whether my conscious drives are satisfied or how I think about my self or my life, but whether my life in fact actualizes the potentialities that are objectively present in my human essence. (Elster 75)

Alienation of this sort develops as a person, working with others, adapts the natural environment to his needs, and produces a social environment without realizing its. Society, as a product of human activity, seems alien to the human being, who feels oppressed by it—though it is (unconsciously) of his own making, consists only of human activities, and is the environment in which he develops the capacities peculiar to the human species. Thus, alienation involves a failure to satisfy cultural (or, with Hegel, spiritual) needs. An important theme of Marx’s work is the transformation of alienated meaning; the transformation of a person’s labor into free and productive labor, not the better payment of alienated labor by an abstract state capitalism. Alienation from the circumstances of labor does not involve only self-alienation, but also alienation from other people and from nature. In sum: along with the notion of creativity, alienation underlines the importance of the individual within Marxian thought. The implications of such with regard to life, art, and nature are of significance in reaching a deeper analysis of Marxian humanism.

### iii) Humanist Materialism and the Good Life

Having already discussed a common misconception regarding the importance of the individual for Marx, there remains another fundamental misunderstanding about Marx’s materialism. Both Marx and Engels derided “economicism,” and their feelings towards what they called “vulgar materialism” are equally hostile. Yet it is widely believed that Marx understood the paramount psychological motive in humankind to be the striving for maximum profit (in monetary or material gain and material comfort). Marx certainly wanted the economic and material improvement of the worker, yet this was not his only wish, for he would likely see the alienated life of the average Soviet factory worker as of no better than that of the average American worker under capitalism. Erich Fromm claims that Marx’s humanism is distinguishable from both idealism and materialism, while at the same time constituting their “unifying truth” (9). In a sense, Marxian humanism allows humans to be “human”; i.e., lower than the gods or angels, but higher than the beasts.<sup>10</sup>

For Marx, the human being is both self-conscious and self-directing: the social structure is constantly evolving out of the life process of definite individuals; not as they may appear in their own or other people’s imagination, but as they really are—effective, materially productive, and under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will. The “good life” for humanity is one of active creation at all times, as opposed to the ethic of passive consumption engendered and perpetuated by capitalism (or at least late capitalism). In capitalism needs are for consumption only, rather than for the active development and exercise of one’s truly human capacities through creative activity. The reification of human capacities under capitalism is equivalent to the fragmentation of “man,” who experiences a one-sided development of some abilities (e.g., to consume) at the expense of others (e.g., to create). The notion of the importance of creativity over consumption comes from Leibniz, for whom it was not tranquility but the overcoming of obstacles that leads to happiness (this is also a Nietzschean trope). In the same sense Marx condemns Adam Smith, who had “no inkling whatsoever that the overcoming of obstacles is in itself a liberating activity” (Elster 85). Hegel, as well, argued that a life of pure consumption is a life without substance, and one that destroys the ‘existence-for-others’ engendered through creative work.<sup>11</sup>

### A. Marx and Needs

Before proceeding to a discussion of the Marxian theory of nature, we may look at the theory of “needs” that is fundamental to an understanding both of Marxian philosophical anthropology and Marxian naturalism. Hegel, in his writings, provided a new account of the socio-political order, one that differed from the contract theorists, economists, and utilitarians of the day, especially with respect to human needs. This new Hegelian vision was based on the his conception humans as social beings whose wants and needs are transformed by the activities they inspire, and who gradually moves towards a more comprehensive understanding of themselves and their environment. Marx also reject contemporary and traditional assumptions regarding needs, arguing that the commodity-based structure of capitalism must be superseded by a new system if the needs of humanity are to be met. In *The Theory of Need in Marx*, Agnes Heller argues that the precondition of human wealth, for Marx, is only the basis for the free development of all human capacities: the free and many-sided activity of every individual. The needs that arise with the emergence of distinctively human qualities and skills (cultural/spiritual) needs, are every bit as important as biological and material ones, and quite often take precedence in Marxian theory. In sum: “They must satisfy their biological wants if their species is to survive, but their spiritual needs they must satisfy to find life worth living” (Plamenatz 101).

The satisfaction of both biological and cultural/spiritual needs can be found within society, in the social process of “objectification,” which involves “making things for use.” In order to satisfy her many wants, a person must not only use/consume what is external to her, but she must also transform it to meet her desires, to serve her purposes. In doing so, says Marx, she acquired new wants and new purposes, and increases her understanding both of what she uses and adapts, and the activities involved in this use and

adaptation. These activities, being her own, enable a person to understand herself through the understanding of her activities. As well, she comes to an understanding of her environment in which he is a part (though a special part) of nature. Thus, the process of objectification educates and transforms a person, enabling her as well to control not only herself but also that which is external to her.

With objectification, humans are able to exploit nature to meet their own needs, which necessarily involves collaboration with others—it is at once production *and* social intercourse. Unless it is both, a person could not develop her species-powers and come to know herself for what she is, which involves seeing herself in relation to a particular environment. Thus, Marx concludes, “man can develop his essentially human powers, and come to see himself as a man, only by acting with others, to produce what satisfies his needs” (Plamenatz 117). At this point we can see a convergence of Marxian theory of the individual, society, and nature. Marx rescued the first two from domination by the third (and the first by the second), while bringing these two into an intimate connection. To rescue the last from the first two, however, proves a task beyond the means of Marxian thought. Marx does bring the conception of human needs into the natural realm, however—labor, as a form of self-expression, helps to form the agent as well as the object worked upon. Labor satisfies the essential human need for self-affirmation in connection with the appropriation of nature to the needs of humankind.

#### D. Marxian Naturalism: “Sensuous Appropriation”

In Marx’s writings regarding humanity’s relations to external nature, his material environment, he affirms that “man” uses all of nature, mineral and organic, to satisfy his needs *as a species*. In doing so, he “objectifies” himself in a part of the external world—an objectification that transforms both nature and humanity, for “man” cannot “know himself” until he has produced concepts that he can apply to himself (Plamenatz 72); and, just as importantly, he achieves this in *society*, i.e., in association with others.

Despite some interpretations to the contrary,<sup>12</sup> Marx does place some importance on the natural realm, over and above the mere utilitarian appropriation of such. In the process of appropriation, in which a person becomes fully human, nature is also “humanized”—i.e., we come to understand the external world from their human point of view. Nature, says Marx, “as it develops in human history... as it develops through industry... is truly anthropological nature” (Plamenatz 73). The view of nature being mediated by human labor through and through was deeply entrenched in Marx’s writings—humans can only see themselves in a world they have created—with nature as an “endless mirror” reflecting themselves (Elster 57). Moreover, the “essence of man and nature, man as a natural being and nature as a human reality” (Plamenatz 74), must become (and will become) evident in everyday life. This idea of humanizing nature by one’s labor activity is by no means as clear as it could be, and has often been dismissed by commentators as a bit of Hegelian baggage that Marx failed to clear out of his system, and which is incongruous with Marxist theory.

The “naturalization” of humankind, as a result of human experience with nature, seems to be a more tenable and understandable concept. “It is not absurd to speak, as Marx

does, of man educating his senses in the process of working on nature to satisfy his needs, and of coming to have an attitude both to what he works on and to his work which is not utilitarian but *aesthetic*” (Plamenatz 75, my emphasis). The aesthetic quality derives from Marx’s statement regarding “the sensuous appropriation of the human essence and of human life, of objective man and of human creations, by and for man” (73). This appropriation, being “sensuous,” must not be understood only in the sense of possession, however; as opposed to the utilitarian appropriation of private property *by* humankind, the sensuous appropriation of nature *by and for* humankind involves, if not the humanization of the former, certainly the humanization (via naturalization) of the latter, eliminating in the process the egoistic character of desire and need. Nature loses its status as mere utility in that its utilization has become *human* utilization. Thus, according to Marx, the objectification of the human essence, in theory and in practice, is a necessary step towards the humanization of the senses, in addition to being “an important aspect in the creation of the human senses corresponding to all the wealth of human and natural being” (76).

The above explanation provides an adequate outline of the thoughts of Marx with regard to nature, but goes almost nowhere in explaining their significance or application. Obviously, Marx conceived of the appropriation and use of nature under bourgeois capitalism as utilitarian and therefore tainted. The “exploitation and squandering of [the] vitality [of the natural world] takes the place of conscious rational calculation [of nature] as... communal property, an inalienable condition for existence and reproduction of a chain of successive generations of the human race” (Marx *Capital* 239). Sensuous appropriation of nature goes beyond mere needs, and even beyond sensual enjoyment, to an enjoyment of nature that is tied up with self-expression—at once creative and contemplative—in a word, *aesthetic*. Marx is resolute in fitting the use of nature into his wider philosophical scheme: the sensuous appropriation of nature “is not egoistic because it is not a setting apart of [nature] for oneself to the exclusion of others and involves no sense of competing with others” (Plamenatz 75). The sensuous appropriation of nature by humankind allows nature to become a (Kantian) end rather than a means, as it is now part of an activity that is both creative and contemplative (perhaps this is the real humanization of nature). Although in some sense and end-in-itself, nature nonetheless satisfies humankind directly, and is “human” because it is human beings (and human beings alone) who express themselves, develop their powers, and gain self-knowledge through their use of what is external to themselves.

Thus far, the picture seems decidedly one-sided, as even the humanization of nature is ultimately for the benefit of humankind (though not in the sense of utilitarian exploitation). Yet this new knowledge of the self, as an aesthetic understanding, also involves some sort of knowledge about and appreciation for the external world, however ineffective this knowledge and esteem prove to be with respect to human action. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx makes the claim that nature is in fact humanity’s inorganic body. By living in and on nature, humanity’s physical *and* spiritual life is linked to nature in such a way that nature is linked to itself, for of course humanity is a part of nature. In coming to understand themselves through nature, humans must come to feel at home in the natural world that they understand intellectually and

appreciate aesthetically—and in which they are active in attempting to satisfy their needs. This gloss does not, however, eliminate all problems. Can the appropriation of humankind’s “essence” through nature actually engender deep feelings that are neither utilitarian nor hedonistic? In appropriating her essence, a person comes to *possess* nature in a similar way: the realization of humanity through nature must come with human control over the natural environment. Can the three aspects involved in this process—contemplation, self-expression/creativity, and appropriation—actually co-exist in harmony among themselves, let alone with the external parts of nature being utilized?

Despite his attempts to put an aesthetic face on the process of natural appropriation, Marx’s theory of nature contains certain serious flaws.<sup>13</sup> For one, Marx continually speaks of nature as he does of society, when in fact the two spheres are anything but isomorphic (at least, beyond the level of metaphor). Whereas society is certainly a human product, which would not exist without humankind, nature is inherently less dependent upon humankind for its existence. Thus, the relations of the two with respect to humankind cannot be so easily equated. Specifically, our understanding of society is related, directly, to our goals and the pursuit of such, in ways that our understanding of nature is not. As well, our beliefs about society affect human behavior in ways that our beliefs about nature do not—and our beliefs about society affect our image of ourselves more directly, and are far more quickly evolving, than our beliefs about nature.

In sum, Marx’s mistake in this regard was not his attempt to base a theory of society upon the principles of natural science, but rather his attempt to found a theory of humanity and nature on the principles of socio-political theory. The dialectical process in which humanity and nature become humanized results as we “develop [our] capacities in the process of subduing [nature] to [our] purposes... and [thus] coming to understand it” (Plamenatz 82). The evolution of humanity throughout history, Marx argues, has been characterized by a struggle with nature, but in the near future humankind will have finally developed the productive source of nature to the extent that the only appropriation will be of an aesthetic kind, whereby the antagonism between humanity and nature can be finally transcended. At this point, which presumably coincides with the advent of communism, our true humanity will finally emerge.

Marx’s writing on nature, though clearly not his strongest work, reveals a genuine attempt to overcome the utilitarian/hedonistic exploitation of nature practiced by industrial capitalism and the self-seeking world of modernity. Though this attempt may at first glance appear to amount to little more than a gloss upon the appropriation of the natural world for human purposes, Marxian naturalism is distinguished by an emphasis on appropriation *for the sake of others*—for humankind as a species. Humankind is prone to solipsism with respect to the non-human world; although Marx transfers the Sun from the individual to the species, he could not break free from the deep-rooted anthropocentrism of his day.

### **E. Marxian Aesthetics: Quality, Sociality, and Human Development**

*Sense perception must be the basis of all science. Only when science starts out from sense perception in the dual form of*

*sensuous consciousness and sensuous need (i.e. only when science starts out from nature)—it is real science. The whole of history is a preparation, a development, for man to become the object of sensuous consciousness and for the needs of “man as man” to become sensuous needs.*

– Marx in Eagleton, 197

As we see in the above remark, as well as in our preceding discussion of Marxian naturalism, Marx makes a connection between the realm of nature and the realm of the aesthetic—as spheres in which humanity’s true sensuous nature makes its appearance. Sense perception, for Marx, is the constitutive structure of human activity, rather than a set of contemplative organs. In the modern world, however, “[a]ll the physical and intellectual senses have been replaced by the same estrangement of all these senses—the sense of having” (Eagleton 197). Capitalist political economy reduces the life of the worker to such a state of subsistence that the need of consumption becomes the only need (in our day, this is bolstered by the power of advertising media). As well, says Marx, the capitalist himself, in his (Weberian) austerity, reduces his needs and senses to that of saving and acquiring capital. The goal of Marxism is to restore the “plundered powers” of humankind, through the realization of communism and the subsequent elimination of private property. “The suppression of private property,” says Eagleton, “is therefore the complete emancipation of all human sense and attributes,”

but it is this emancipation because these senses and attributes have become human, subjectively as well as objectively. The eye has become a human eye, just as its object has become a social, human object, made for man by man. The senses have therefore become transactions in their immediate praxis. They relate to the thing for its own sake, but the thing itself is an objective human relation to itself and to man, and vice-versa. Need of enjoyment have therefore lost their egoistic nature, and nature has lost its mere utility in the sense that its use has become human use. (Eagleton 201)

Marxian aesthetics is connected with the overthrow of bourgeois society and the liberation-cum-humanization of nature. Somewhat paradoxically, the elimination of sensual utilitarianism will only be achieved by the instrumental replacement of society via revolution. Within the new realm, the subject would be at once released from the bonds of abstract need, and the object restored to its proper place as something with sensuous use-value that must be treated for its own sake—as an end in itself. Only by subverting the state will we be able, according to Marxian theory, to experience our bodies fully and live aesthetically: “the society that is fully developed produces man in all the richness of his being, the rich man who is profoundly and abundantly endowed with all the senses, as its constantly reality” (Eagleton 202).

Thus the importance, in general terms, of the category of the aesthetic for Marx. More particularly, Marx insists on the Schillerian ideal of an all-round, many-sided human development; like Schiller and his Idealist contemporaries, Marx believed that human societies must be ends-in-themselves. For Schiller, human society is born, first of all, for progressive ends, but will eventually evolve beyond strict utility to become a “delightful” end-in-itself. Marx utilizes a

similar conception of aesthetic bonding, and makes a central part of his political program the realization of the universal “brotherhood of man.” Marx interprets Schiller’s disinterested concern with the all-round realization of human powers as an end-in-itself, but he takes this further by making it the basis for a broader vision of a many-sided, holistic community. Although Marx would reject the disinterested contemplation of the Kantian aesthetic, he envisions, like Kant, a fundamental conflict between nature and humanity—and antimony that will only be eliminated through the “sensuous appropriation” of the objective world.

As Terry Eagleton so graciously affirms: “Given the fact that Marx had more urgent tasks on his hands than the formulation of a systematic aesthetic theory,” we must not expect the comprehensiveness that imbues his economic writings, for example. (Lifshitz 7). However, it is not Marx’s opinions on art, poetry or the artist as such that concerns us here, but rather the general aesthetics of Marx that emerges out of his works—especially the early writings—and which plays a significant role in the understanding of the foundations of Marxian humanism.

Marx realized the limits of the power of art, which by itself is powerless to liberate humankind, yet he also realized that art is not primarily about utility, and as an autonomous superstructure can provide images and stories of pending emancipation. Marx, living in a century that witnessed the emergence of the study of politics, economics, and sociology, moved aesthetics beyond the sterile discussion of the beautiful and the sublime and into the realm of socio-political theory. The bourgeois world and its “realm of necessity” had effectively replace *quality* by *quantity*, disrupting the aesthetic climate in the process. Schiller and the Romantics, as we have seen, also emphasized the place of aesthetics in transcending the realm of necessity, but their work (like that of Fichte, and ultimately, Feuerbach) was primarily deconstructive rather than constructive. Even the optimistic Schiller reverts to a pessimistic conclusion,<sup>14</sup> when he notes that it is the gods, envious of humans, who restrain them from rising to heights where “brotherly kiss and unity of heart... bind all men within one circle” (Lifshitz 9). Only in poetic fancy, Schiller concludes, can humans be truly free and happy.

Marx broke with Fichte and Schiller, embarking on a more radical and comprehensive social critique, albeit one that is still very much concerned with the twin problems of (self-)creativity and alienation. True wealth, for Marx, is an evaluation of the creative aesthetic idea: “The absolute working-out of (human) creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historical development, the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a predetermined yardstick” (Eagleton 212). Feuerbach’s influence can be unearthed here, as he too rejected Hegel’s dissolution of art into abstract thought, instead positing the importance of all humanity’s creative powers in making and shaping the world. For Marx as well, it is not only, or even mainly by the power of reason that human beings assert their humanity, but through the use of *all* their senses. Even more than Feuerbach, Marx realized that contemplation alone will not suffice, but the creative aspect of the aesthetic is necessary for change. For Marx, the senses arise out of the process of human creative activity, and the production of the aesthetic object, like the sensuous

appropriation of nature, both objectifies the individual and individuates the object.

The aesthetic modification of the world of things is one of the ways of assimilating nature. An aesthetic relation to objective reality (which emerges out of the objectification process in creativity) is one of inner organic unity with the object—a unity that, according to Marx, is in fact the highest level of spiritual attainment. It is, in some sense, nothing less than the liberation of consciousness. According to Mikhail Lifshitz: “Whatever the deficiencies in Marx’s theoretical attitude toward art may have been, he was perfectly aware that after the economic, social, and political revolution the most difficult revolution would still remain to be made—the cultural one” (32). As opposed to some Marxists who put art on the same footing as religion, Marx avows that art is in fact an ever-renewing creative act—the active dialogue between spirit and matter. As such, as Michele Barrett put is, “art by its very nature is no opiate; it is a weapon” (Barrett 711). Ernst Fischer concurs: Art is concerned, he says, with creating “the man of tomorrow” (8).

It should by now be evident that Marxian aesthetics is very much a part of his larger philosophical and political program. In particular, the Schillerian/Feuerbachian notion of a holistic community, both sensuous and ratioc, combined with the Marxian emphasis on creative and self-creative activity allows for an intensely humanistic aesthetics, within which,

Man adapts his all-sided being in an all-sided manner, in other words, as a total man. Every one of his human relations with the world: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, willing, acting, loving, in short, all the organs of his individuality as well as the organs which in their immediate form are common to us all, are in their objective attitude or in their attitude to the object an adaptation of the latter. (Marx & Engels *Literature* 61)

From this ground emerges much of Marxian thought. The realm of aesthetics cannot be dismissed as a separate, passing interest for Marx, but is rather a necessary and integral component of our humanity, and thus of fundamental importance.<sup>15</sup> Most significantly, perhaps, subject-object relations for Marx must not be merely contemplative, but must be *actively creative*. The aesthetic experience is another form by which humanity objectifies itself through the sensuous appropriation of what is (at first) external, but which can become a part of humanity itself.

## V. Progress in Marxian Socio-political Philosophy

### A. Capitalism: Destructive Progress

The preconditions off Marx’s ideal society are set, of course, by and within capitalism. Unlike the Romantics, mediaevalists, and some other Young Hegelians (e.g., Bruno Bauer), Marx saw in capitalism an important and necessary, even “revolutionary” phase of human development. According to Marx, the bourgeoisie have played the most revolutionary role in history by bringing about the eclipse of the feudal order, with all its patriarchal and oppressive structures. In doing so, of course, there were costs: by eliminating the ties that bound people to their “natural superiors,” all that was left to tie them together was naked self-interest. Capitalism has

“drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation” (Marx & Engels *Literature* 32). Thus, the great historical mission of the bourgeois capitalist era is somewhat of a mixed blessing. The capitalist economy, as Marx never ceased to assert, is by far the most productive in world history; the capitalist, as a “fanatical profit seeker,” creates “those material conditions... which can alone form the real basis of a higher type of society, whose fundamental principle is the full and free development of the individual” (Marx *Grundrisse* 111). In this sense, capital is a “great influence,” as it produces a stage of society by which all earlier stages prove, in comparison, to have been “merely local progress and idolatry of nature.” For the first time, under capitalism, nature becomes simply an object for humankind; it ceases, rightly, says Marx, to be a power in its own right. As well, the knowledge of the “independent laws” of nature remain only as a strategy designed to subdue nature to human requirements—as an object of consumption or a means of production. “Pursuing this tendency,” says Marx,

Capital has pushed beyond national boundaries and prejudices, beyond the deification of nature and the inherited, self-sufficient satisfaction of existing needs confined within the well-defined bounds, and the reproduction of the traditional way of life. It is destructive of all this, and permanently revolutionary, tearing down all obstacles that impede the development of productive forces, the expansion of needs, the diversity of production and the exploitation and exchange of natural and intellectual forces. (Marx *Grundrisse* 111)

Thus, capitalist production is an invaluable forward step: in its enormous productive powers it allows for a more effective appropriation of the natural world to fit the needs of humanity (despite its obvious lack of “sensuous” appropriating techniques).

In the human realm as well, capitalism for Marx has its benefits. Even at the cost of breaking up the old family system, it lays the economic foundations for a new form of domestic relations. Capitalism is the great wrecking ball, shattering any and all ties based upon stultifying and inhibiting traditions. It allows “man” to face his environment, both natural and social, without the former restraints. As such, argues Marx, capitalism brings human beings face-to-face with themselves, forcing them to examine their human condition more closely—“to think more boldly and act more drastically,” than he has ever had to, or was ever able to do before. (Elster 515) Capitalism is an important progressive stage for humankind, permitting, in Marxian terms, for an unprecedented expansion of human species powers. Through capitalism, individuality is enriched, new creative powers are developed, and new forms of social intercourse are created. In sum, capitalism brings the individual to new levels of self-awareness, and as such makes room for a wealth of subjectivity.<sup>16</sup>

The emancipatory impact of capitalism comes at a significant price, however, and before claiming Marx as a bourgeois radical it may be pertinent to touch upon some of the negative aspects of the new socio-political system. Fundamentally, the great progress that is capitalism, which in one sense allows for unprecedented material production and

the expansion of humankind’s species powers, has a disastrous effect on the all-sided development of the powers of the individual—as best explained via Marx’s concept of alienation. Marx was appalled by the miserable and passive existence led by mi-nineteenth century workers, who were little more than machine appendages at work, lifeless, exhausted consumers (or at least, those who could afford to be) at home. The great majority of men and women, as Marx had no trouble realizing, and witnessing with his own eyes, are confined under industrial capitalism to a Hobbesian existence of wretched, fruitless toil. The factory, he says, “transforms the worker into a cripple, a monster, by forcing him to develop some highly specialized dexterity at the cost of a world of productive impulses and faculties” (Plamenatz 19). Thus, the gains of capitalism, paradoxically, have not and cannot be harvested under the capitalist system. For one thing, the god-like power of money under capitalism acts as the “diverted wealth of humanity” by transforming all human and natural qualities into an alienated and externalized nature of humanity.

As well, and along similar lines, private property has “made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is ours only if we *have* it” (Marx & Engels *Literature* 61). Private property, ostensibly the means to sustenance, becomes a life in itself, around which work and capital hover. Hence, Marx proclaims, there has been an alienation of *all* the senses, the sense of *having* remaining an absolute master of all physical and spiritual inclinations. The capitalist labor process, in allowing the complete domination of dead matter over humankind, estranges the species from humanity: “It changes for him the life of the species into a means of individual life” (Marx *Economic* 112). In sum, capitalism, while allowing for the mastery of the natural world, and helping to eliminate disease, famine, and natural catastrophe, has also enabled nature to prey on itself. In brining the individual to new heights of self-awareness, capitalism produces a predatory egoist. Thus the self-contradictory nature of capitalism: it has generated a great wealth of capacities in the midst of widespread poverty, creeping alienation, and the general fragmentation of human being.

The mutilation of humanity under capitalism, which allows for the contradictions that will pave the way for socialism and a new realization of human capacities, extends, as well, into the aesthetic sphere. Bourgeois contempt for aesthetic appreciation is tied, according to Lifshitz, to the nature of the mercantile world: “Born leveller and cynic, it is always ready to exchange not only soul, but body with any and every commodity” (Lifshitz 95). In general, the transformation is, again, one from *quality* to *quantity*, and from *use-value* to *exchange-value*. The costs of capitalism, for Marx, are essentially the physical, moral, cultural, spiritual, and aesthetic degradation of humanity. The benefits? The possibilities, both materially and humanistically, for a new era.

The significance of Marx’s views on capitalism lies in the in his understanding of this dual nature: at once enormously progressive and insidiously repressive.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, Marx blazed a new trail in going beyond the dualistic opposition between a wholesale embrace of capitalistic progress by liberal utilitarians (or today’s neo-conservatives) and a wholesale rejection by Romantics, Tories, and culture theorists of his day. Marx walked a tightrope between the two sides, with his theory of dialectical materialism and the “inevitability” of proletarian revolution as the balancing bar.

Essentially, Marx believed that the bourgeois period of history, despite its obvious problems, creates the material basis for the new world via, “on the one hand, universal intercourse founded upon the mutual dependency of mankind, and the means of that intercourse—on the other hand the development of the productive powers of man and the transformation of material production into a scientific domination of natural agencies.” (Lifshitz 99) It is to this last point that we must now turn, one that echoes throughout all of Marx’s work.

## **B. The Nature of Progress**

Progress, generally considered, is the development of humankind towards a better life—however “better” may be defined. For Marx, the capitalist system sets the social contradictions that are necessary for the progress of the individual and society to be realized in socialism/communism. The productive capabilities of industrial capitalism, under the rubric of science and technology, allow for great material appropriation, which, under a more just and equitable system, could hardly fail to benefit the whole of humankind.<sup>18</sup> For it is the development of science alone (the most solid form of wealth) that arises out of capitalism and effectively eliminates the ancient and feudal worlds. The highest development of science, Marx claims, “is the point at which it has been elaborated to a form in which it can be united with the highest degree of productive forces, and also with the richest development of the individual” (*Grundrisse* 142). As we have seen, the full development of the individual is intrinsically related—though perhaps not identical—with the full development of human species powers, of which the mastery of nature (the objective world) must play a significant role.

As a child of the nineteenth century, it is understandable that Marx would reject capitalist *values* while applauding its accompanying *techniques*. With many others of his era, Marx saw automation and technology as major factors in human alienation—but he also say, with nearly all his contemporaries, the importance of these factors in bringing about a better, i.e., more prosperous, human world. Like Hegel, but unlike the rationalist and utilitarian philosophers of the eighteenth century or Rousseau and the Romantics, Marx combined faith in progress with the ideal of a holistic and harmonious human condition. Both Hegel and Marx tried to explain how progress first produces a situation like that under capitalism but eventually enables human beings to recognize and surpass the limitations of such. In some sense, Marx uses the rationalists and utilitarians as a means to reach Rousseau: for the time being quality of life can and must be sacrificed to quantity of material needs, but only in order for both to emerge in unity in the coming age.

Once absorbed into the production process of capital, the means of labor undergoes various metamorphoses, of which the last is the automatic system of machinery. This system is set in motion by “automation”—a motive force, says Marx, which moves of its own control. Automation consists of a number of mechanical and intellectual organs, so that the workers themselves are no more than its conscious limbs: “In the machine, and still more in machinery as an automatic system, the means of labor is transferred as regards its use-value, i.e., as regards its material existence suitable for fixed capital and capital in general” (*Grundrisse* 155). The machine, unlike the tool, is not the means of labor of the individual

worker; rather it is itself the virtuoso—a spirit of its own in the mechanical laws that take effect in it; it consumes, as it were, coal and oil for its own constant self-propulsion. Thus, under full automation, the production process ceases to be a labor process, as labor is no longer its essential feature. On the contrary, labor appears to be merely a conscious organ, “composed of individual living workers at a number of points in the mechanical system.” Dispersed and subjected to the general process of the machinery itself, labor is only a limb of the system, “whose unity exists not in the living workers but in the living machinery which seems to be a powerful organism when compared to their individual, insignificant activities.” Through the constant development of machinery (i.e., automation), an increase in productivity is reached, as well as a great diminution of necessary labor.

The process of automation clearly spells out the contradictions, for Marx, inherent in the capitalist system. At once powerful and progressive, the transference from the worker to capital in the form of the machine devalues the labor power of the individual. Yet, as heavy industry develops, the creation of real wealth depends less on labor time and labor quantity than on the power of the mechanical agents themselves. Real wealth depends upon the state of science and technological progress, along with the application of such to the productive process. As such, the worker no longer inserts transformed natural objects as intermediaries between the natural world and himself; “he now inserts the natural process that he has transformed into an industrial one between himself and inorganic nature, over which he has achieved mastery” (*Grundrisse* 165). This transformation—the appropriation by man of his own general productive forces (and correspondingly, his understanding and mastery of nature)—is not only the basis of production and wealth, but also the crucial step toward the development of the “social individual.”

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx carefully outlines this tendency of industrial capitalism, as well as the central place of automation in such. “As soon as labour, in its direct form, has ceased to be the main source of wealth, then labour time ceases to be its standard of measurement and exchange value ceases to be the measurement of use value” (166). Thus, the surplus labor of the masses ceases to be a condition for the development of wealth in general, and the non-labor of the few ceases to be a condition for the development of the mind. Production based upon exchange value, as in capitalism, eventually falls apart and the process of material production loses its antagonistic form, allowing, finally, for the free development of the individual in society. It is no longer, says Marx, a question of reducing the necessary labor time in order to create surplus labor, but of reducing the necessary labor of society to a minimum, allowing for individual development in the free time made available to all.

To sum up: the introduction of the capitalist system is, for Marx, a necessary and important socio-historical phenomenon, although one fraught with contradictions, perhaps the fundamental one being that between the productive capacities of automation and the alienation and fragmentation of the working masses, who for the first time, under capitalism, are able to glimpse the possibilities of change. Marx’s praise of technological progress mirrors that of his pro-capitalist contemporaries:

Nature does not construct machines, locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs...[t]hese are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will to dominate nature or to realize itself therein. They are organs of the human brain, created by human hands; the power of knowledge made into an object. (*Grundrisse* 166)

The latent possibilities of capitalism allow the individual living under such a system, whatever the spiritual or cultural poverty she may experience, to have at least some sense of the achievements of humankind, which may allow her to realize that human life really could be rich and free—if only she could contrive to make it so.

### C. Communism: Productive Progress?

Now that Marx's idea of progress has been explored, both for the individual (creative self-realization through objectification) and for society (automation and the mastery of nature), the Marxian utopia may be approached, if not as an actual picture of some future ideal state (after all, utopia literally translates as "nowhere"), then perhaps as a basis for a Marxian philosophy of life—a normative Marxism. Marx himself never really describes such a society, primarily because he rejected Romantic utopian dreams in favor of a hard-edged philosophy for the present. Plamenatz, for one, does not share Marx's beliefs about the communist society or the hopes of its arrival; yet, like Jean-Paul Sartre, he sees in Marx's vision the potential for an certain existentialist philosophical anthropology—and one to live by.

For our purposes, Marxian communism might be summarized in the following cursory manner: "man" becomes truly human in the new society he helps to create, and the acquired material and cultural wealth of humankind in its entirety will henceforth be appropriated by all people. Now a properly social being, in harmony with others, nature and herself, this liberation brings about the collapse of all contradictions—between existence and essence, individual and species, self and other, necessity and freedom.

In the *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels contrast the situation in capitalist society, in which "each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape," with communist society, "where nobody has an exclusive sphere of activity, but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, and society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow... to do... just as I have a mind" (*Ideology* 22). Communist society will eliminate the distinction between work and leisure, along with the capitalist division of labor, all without losing the Marxian insistence upon automation and the progress of science and technology—the element that clearly distinguishes communism from Romantic, mediaevalist or Luddite utopias.

Marx believed that communist society would and must be technologically sophisticated, as much if not more so than capitalist society. Yet, as Plamenatz notes, Marx and Engels fail to mention coal-mining, ship-building, and working in a factory as labors that the new communist person would "have a mind" to perform, preferring instead to enumerate the more "primitive" labor pursuits such as hunting, fishing, and tending cattle. Perhaps speaking of common industrial

occupations would lessen the attractiveness (or spell out more clearly the implausibility) of such a utopian existence. According to Lifshitz, in early Marx the perfect state was one without land ownership, material things of manufacturing; it was a state of purely spiritual forces, with form presiding over base matter. Art is an intimate compassion of the early Marxian utopia: "Communism removes the fetishistic concretization of human relations which obstructs the development of art, it is a means to overcome the material foundations of social life" (Lifshitz 61). At the same time, Marx explicitly rejects the sort of political idealism that ignores the real life of the individual, embracing as he does the Schillerian ideal of humanity that combines the highest freedom with the fullest existence. The marriage of these ideas has proven, however, to be a difficult one.

The highest freedom allowed by communism develops, for Marx, through the individual first and foremost, via the realization of her species powers. Marx is offended, on aesthetic grounds, by the crude instrumentalization of human capacities, and (like Aristotle before him) finds a desirable moral goal not in "truth" but in happiness and human well-being. Of course, there is a certain irony here, as the final aestheticization of human existence (i.e., communism) can only be brought about through the use of rationality and instrumental action. In a collective society, conditioned by the revolution of the proletariat and the elimination of private property, an all-sided development of personality can occur; a development that is contingent upon the association of individuals for common purposes. Communist society will apparently eliminate not only the abstract contradiction between work and pleasure, but also the concrete contradiction between feeling and reason. Together, says Lifshitz, the abolition of classes and the disappearance of the distinction between physical and spiritual labor allows for the manifold development of the entire individual; communism becomes the real appropriation of the human essence by and for humanity. It is "the complete return of man to himself as a social [i.e., 'human'] being" (Marx *Economic* 135). Communism, in this sense, is the fruition of humanist theory; it is a "fully developed humanism."

Yet this self-realization can also be witnessed in economic terms. With the proliferation of automation, and sophisticated technology put to good use, large amounts of resources can be liberated for more constructive purposes than previously. Socialism *needs* the immense forces of production raised by the capitalist bourgeoisie. Unleashed, such forces will mean the "unfolding of human richness" (Elster 526), through the mastery over nature and the complete and final appropriation of such for human use. In short, under communism, productive forces are freed to work *for* humankind, no longer *on* humankind.

Thus, Marx foretold the coming of a communist society in which men would be equal and free, one that could be attained provided that human understanding and mastery of their environment continued to increase. As such, Marx claims, communism is not only fully developed humanism, but also (and equivalently) it is "fully developed naturalism," and as such can be seen as, "the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature [as well as] between man and man... society is the unity of being of man with nature—the true resurrection of nature—the naturalism of man and the

humanism of nature both brought to fulfillment” (*Economic* 135)

Marx maintained his balance on the perilous path between reactionary Romanticism on the one hand and utilitarian instrumentalism on the other. Elster argues that Marx’s communism is in fact a (Hegelian) synthesis of capitalist and pre-capitalist societies, reconciling (or attempting to reconcile) the individualism of the former and the communitarian character of the latter. Individual self-realization should take place in creative work done for the sake of the community. Marx may have recognized the precariousness of his own position, in which a slight shift to either side of the pendulum would mean certain disaster both for the individual and the collectivity.

In the *German Ideology*, Marx proffers an ideal that, while never repudiated, is neglected or bypassed in his later work. Here Marx speaks of the free time available for the complete development of the individual: a “realm of freedom” that begins only where labor ceases, succeeding the “realm of necessity.”<sup>19</sup> It was to the realm of freedom that Marx looked for the complete development of the individual—the sphere of their lives that he believed would provide most people in an industrial society (even, or especially, a communist one) with the chance to develop their talents in the ways most satisfying to themselves.<sup>20</sup> In later Marx, communist society is necessarily industrial and maintains a complicated but carefully controlled production process. Thus, Marx may have held a belief in the future society as one of a glorious community of friends, but he also recognized it as a complex technological society—able to feed, clothe and protect all its members in equal proportion. Combining the advantages of material progress with the close human ties that this progress, in its capitalist phase, had so effectively and utterly destroyed, the new era must restore those ties at an even higher level, a level consistent with aspirations to freedom and self-realization unknown to pre-capitalist societies.

## VI. Life versus Progress

### A. The Problem: Humanity versus Nature

The crux of the matter is that for Marx, self-realization and self-assertion are closely related and complementary ideas. Self-realization, which is the final goal of Marxian humanism, and self-assertion, which is the active/creative impulse in humanity as well as the final goal of Marxian naturalism (through the appropriation of nature), are both realized under communism. Thus, communism is for Marx the pinnacle of human existence, both materially and spiritually. Although the development of species powers is of central significance, the productive powers (the material base) is privileged; the development of material productions is what generates the free time necessary for the development and exercise of humanity’s species powers more generally. Thus, Marxist historical materialism, which is based upon the growth of productive forces, has a somewhat different slant than the humanism that arises out of Marxian philosophical anthropology, which emphasizes the development of human species powers in a holistic manner. The conflict that emerges from this discrepancy does less damage to Marxism as a theoretical whole than to the potential application of Marxian principles to the contemporary world.

The balance Marx strives to maintain is essentially one between the respective claims of progress and welfare or

quality of life in a more holistic sense. Elster gives the example of a nuclear power station, which combines enormous productive and destructive potential. Fundamentally, certain technological advances may be incompatible with Marxian values of self-actualization, co-operation, and creative self-realization. Terry Eagleton sees two possibilities arising from this conundrum: either one sees the expansion of productive forces as a value in itself, and socialism as the appropriation and further development of such forces as being for the good (a *laissez-faire* approach), or one insists that these forces be subordinated to “conditions most favourable to and worthy of human nature” (a pro-active approach) (Eagleton 222). The second alternative, of course, raises important questions as to which aspects of material development are to be permitted and which discontinued, and whose particular criteria of human nature are to be employed?

As we have seen, Marx was a firm believer in material progress, which for him can only be possible with the continual development of science and technology. Engels, in his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, alludes to Robert Owen, an early English communist who recognized the importance of modern industry for a reconstruction of society and a “new moral world.” Like Owen, and Marx, Engels champions technological progress when dealing with the issue of socio-political revolution. Marx himself increasingly turned away from the emphasis on the manifold development of human powers, which had been a point of insistence in the *Manuscripts*, and towards a recognition of the productive advantages of capitalistic industry. Coupled with his anthropocentric naturalism, Marxian socialism became, in Engels’s heavily normative term, “scientific socialism.”

As such, the marriage of communist economic and political conditions and capitalist industrial production was consummated in Marxian theory. Marx’s vision of the new era (Plamenatz: “Marx’s fancy”) was of a world transformed by proletarian revolution, without alienation, everyone a creative worker in a community of equals, without a division of labor, and yet, a highly industrialized and technologically sophisticated society. The development of the “social individual” under communism is of great importance to the production of wealth, as it is the “appropriation of man’s own general productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence in a social body” (Elster 84).

According to Marxian aesthetic naturalism, however, the un-alienated socialist does not dominate nature, but becomes one with it in the process of sensuous appropriation or objectification. Humans must be responsive towards objects, so that objects come to life for them. The sensuous part of this equation appears to wither away in more strictly economic Marxism, however. Erich Fromm claims that Marx is ultimately heir to a long tradition of Judeo-Christian messianism, in which prelapsarian “man” lives in unity with nature, but the growing realization of his own consciousness and freedom allows him to see conflicts within nature and humankind. As such, the process of history is the process by which “man” develops his species powers until he has achieved full and true humanity, and only then can he return to that lost unity between himself and the world. In fact, however, this will be a higher unity in which “man” is not only fully conscious of himself, but also of nature and his fellow humans. Certainly there are striking similarities here



with the Judeo-Christian worldview, but the Christian New Jerusalem is not generally conceived in concrete, let alone advanced technological terms. Can this synthesis be upheld in Marxian theory? How does the unlimited appropriation of nature (however sensuous) lead directly to the unity of humanity and nature?

In the *Manuscripts*, Marx maintains that in the future life of peoples, the inanimate forces of nature working in machines will be our slaves: humans will no longer work as machines, but through machines will dominate the natural world. Industry, says Marx, “is the actual historical relationship of nature, and therefore of natural science, to man” (142). Reducing nature to natural science is a convenient step towards the justification of the industrial-technological domination of such, and towards the so-called realm of freedom that begins only where labor, which is determined by necessity and mundane conditions, ceases: “Just as a savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production” (*Capital* 820).

Yet, the path toward the realm of freedom is not without its potholes, for although freedom can only consist in socialized humans (the associated producers) rationally regulating their interchange with nature and bringing it under common control, they must do so with the least expenditure of energy and, once again, “*under conditions most favourable to and worthy of their human nature.*” In reading this, one comes away with the feeling that nature must be appropriated in order to move beyond the realm of necessity and into freedom (where there will be an aesthetic unity of humanity and nature)—yet, in mastering nature, humanity must stay within the bounds of some abstract concept of human worth.

In general, the problem appears to be a conflict between ends and means; a contradiction rooted within Marxian humanistic, naturalistic and socio-political theory. Humanity’s being must be perceptive being, and Marx’s aesthetic conception of human self-affirmation reveals the place of nature and industry in the realm of freedom. If human emotions and passions are not merely anthropological definitions but true ontological affirmations of human nature, and if they are only affirmative in that their object is perceptive, it follows that: 1) sensory affirmation, being the intimate abolition of the object in its independent form, is the affirmation (humanization?) of the object; 2) insofar as we are human, affirmation of the object by another is likewise our own enjoyment; and 3) only when industry is developed does the ontological nature of human passion achieve its wholeness, its humanity. Thus, the “whole sphere of the conditions of life which environ man, and which have hitherto ruled man, now comes under the dominion and control of man, who for the first time becomes lord of Nature, because he has now become master of his own social organization” (Engels *Socialism* 82).

Marx seems to have taken for granted that the maximization of individual self-realization would go together with the material progress of humankind as a whole, based upon the industrial appropriation of the natural world. Elster disputes this assumption: “It is not obvious that self-realization will also provide the technical efficiency that is its precondition. Economy, unlike beauty and truth, is not a goal in itself—it is a purely instrumental value, in which compromises are of the essence and perfectionism is to be

avoided” (524). To Elster, the idea that communism, as a realm of great material abundance, will be able to maintain and foster the development of both the individual and the collectivity is sheer utopianism (in the Engelsian, i.e., pejorative sense). Fischer and Fromm concur; neither shares the optimism of many technologists who believe that material production will be the sphere in which humanity can (creatively) realize itself. Instead, we must “constantly re-examine the way towards our utopian goal on the basis of technical progress” (Fromm 107), for “Western man, whenever... under the influence of gigantic material conquests, [gives] himself unrestrictedly to the new powers he [has] acquired, and drunk with those new powers, forgets himself” (66). Marx does not forget himself; rather we might say he remembers himself only too well—in fact this entire problem rests on Marx’s unlimited anthropocentrism, which begins with Promethean humanism and heads towards a virtual species solipsism. Yet, “[i]s it not a mistake to expect the perfection of man to come from the perfection of technology? Are we not advancing along the wrong path?” (Fischer 110)

In sum, a conflict arises within Marxian theory between humans as active, creative and aesthetic beings, and the natural world as an object for the needs and desires of humanity. For Agnes Heller, “[t]here are many respects in which Marx’s ideas on the society of associated producers and on the system of needs of united individuals are utopian, when measured against our own today and our possibilities for action” (130). Yet Heller submits that Marx’s ideas are nonetheless “fertile,” as a norm against which we can measure the reality, value and limitations of our ideas and actions. This is indeed the case, though Heller’s use of the term fertile is ironic, given that is precisely Marx’s anthropocentric naturalism that, handed over to the powerful reins of technological (or scientific) socialism, yields a vision less of a fertile utopia than a concrete dystopia.

This problem, in its more purely economic and political aspects, has concerned not a few Marxian sympathizers, but seeing the difficulty in achieving both freedom and equality in an economically advanced and highly productive society, socialists have generally followed Marx in welcoming the spread of industry as a liberating force, while saying little about its damaging environmental and aesthetic effects. Today, of course, industrialization is not everywhere capitalist, as it was in Marx’s day, and it seems that many of the problems of industrial society have as much to do with industrialism and accompanying values of progress as with anything inherent in capitalism. Marx may have been lax in failing to fully delineate the benefits and problems of industrialism, beyond the capitalist version of such. Above all, it is Marx’s overweening faith in progress that undermines his aesthetic humanism, and which also dates Marxism as a nineteenth and twentieth-century phenomenon.

## **B. John Ruskin: Aesthetic Naturalism and Biotic Medievalism**

Karl Marx was not alone in his vociferous rejection of utilitarian economicism and vulgar bourgeois materialism—a similar outcry arose from conservatives and culture theorists of the same period, most strongly, perhaps in the person of British critic John Ruskin. The significance of Ruskin has been neglected over the past century, in which he was seen, if

at all, as a reactionary Romantic, lost in hopeless reverie for the return of the glorious Middle Ages. While there is some truth to such a characterization, it does a disservice in eliminating a number of important themes that can be retrieved from Ruskin's work and applied to our present situation.

Ruskin was heir to a particular brand of British Romanticism (via Thomas Carlyle), and he was also very much a Victorian in his reflection upon the ills of his society. With his aesthetic grasp of the human condition, however, Ruskin was far from common, and it is this aspect of his work that has most relevance, and which is often cited when Ruskin is hailed as a prophetic figure. Like Marx, Ruskin witnessed first hand the wrath of capitalist industrialism, and turning from his artistic background felt compelled to speak out on social issues, without ever losing his background in aesthetics or his love of beauty and human creativity. Speaking with unabashed contempt of all the so-called 'higher practical achievements' of his century,<sup>21</sup> Ruskin viewed Victorian cities as "so many working models of hell" (Sherburne 27). He launched a full-scale assault upon orthodox political economy, which in his view was entrenched in capitalist, utilitarian-technological principles of calculation and exchange-value. Ruskin, then, follows Carlyle in the denunciation of the Machine Age, but his critique extends further to a more general attack on post-Enlightenment scientific and rationalist thought. At once an outcry against social injustice and inhumanity, Ruskin's work is also a direct assault upon the "bastard science" of political economy, which mechanizes, isolates, and fragments human beings and society, producing in its wake a vast impersonal machine of separate, self-interested atoms.

Industrial machinery, says Ruskin, is only the most concrete manifestation of a way of thought that renders life impure. Human beings and society must only be understood as complex and multi-faceted organisms, rather than as Ricardo's *homo oeconomicus*, which for Ruskin is an insult upon human dignity. Mechanical development in the Machine Age subdued humankind to a state of spiritual slavery, whereby development gains priority over human happiness and quality of life. Ruskinian critical theory has its base in one central tenet immortalized in his essay "Unto This Last:" *There is no Wealth But Life*. For Ruskin:

Intrinsic value is the absolute power of anything to support life. Exchange value is merely the price the possessor will take for it, and they are not identical. The exchange value of a cannon ball and a pudding may be the same but their intrinsic value is not. To exclude intrinsic value from economic calculations is unscientific. (Avison 21)

Life, says Ruskin, in its *totality*, must be the end and aim of consumption, as well as the focus of any true political economy. Here Ruskin borrows from Edmund Burke, adding social affections and moral factors into political and economic calculations, not as sentimental whim but on the basis of scientific procedure and common sense. The questions of art, economy, and politics cannot be separated from each other—or from the questions of morality and ethics.

Essentially, Ruskin sees, at the roots of the central problems of his day (the dehumanization of humanity in poverty, ugliness and squalor), not a certain class of people,

but, first, a philosophy based on a mechanistic account of human nature, and second, a belief in liberty when the reality of depravity made such a concept hollow and useless. As well, Ruskin mentions a third problem: the (Mandevillian) conviction that communal prosperity can only be achieved by the pursuit of individual self-interest. From Adam Smith to Malthus to Mill, Ruskin combated the liberal democratic vision of humanity as the sum of his own interests, detached from a social context. "Unto This Last" was written with the dual purpose of giving a logical definition of wealth and to show that the acquisition of wealth is possible only under certain moral conditions of society. In particular, Ruskin voraciously attacks so-called progress that, based on an incorrect notion of wealth and prosperity, cannot help but be disastrous to humanity in the long run. A true definition of value, he suggests, would be one based upon the original Latin root (*valorem*)—a word that means to be strong or valuable for someone or something. Value, like wealth, must be concerned with, or avail towards, life.

Ruskin's aesthetic background is fundamental to his life philosophy. A society so dedicated to squalor and heartless brutality, he says, cannot help but be indifferent to all praised of beauty. Drawing a link between morality and the realm of beauty, Ruskin sees in art (especially Gothic, i.e., pre-industrial, art and architecture in particular) the achievement of an equitable relationship between human creativity and the given world. As a mediaevalist in both aesthetics and social theory, he sees in the idealized picture of the mediaeval European craftsman and his village a prototype for all human artistic and social fulfilment. Yet art must have a purpose, which is ultimately to "get the country clean and the people beautiful" (Avison 12). An aesthetic principle for life not only benefits humanity directly, but also indirectly, by enjoining the beautification and sustenance of nature. Ruskin broadens the concept of art by enlarging the formal emphasis on beauty to cover a whole range of human (and non-human) experience.

Nature, which paints the world for all,<sup>22</sup> must be treated with respect, says Ruskin, even if only for the instrumental reason of an improved life for our species as a whole. Patrick Geddes, writing on Ruskin in 1884, draws an analogy between his subject and the Darwinians with respect to the question of human adaptation:

Darwin's greatest law—that an organism is made by function and environment [when applied to humankind, reveals that] if he is to remain healthy and become civilized, must aim at the highest standard of cerebral as well as non-cerebral excellence, and so at function healthy and delightful, but must take especial need of his environment; not only at his peril keeping the natural factors of air, water and light at their purest, but caring only for "production of wealth" at all, in so far as, it shapes the artificial factors, the material surroundings of domestic and civic life, into forms more completely serviceable for the Ascent of Man. (35)

The alternative to a revived natural environment, says Ruskin, one full of life and beauty, is transformation of industrial society into one huge manufacturing town; its inhabitant living diminished lives in the midst of noise, darkness, and deadly exhalation. "As the art of life is learned, it will be found at least that all lovely things are also

necessary, the wild flowers by the wayside, as the tended corn... because man does not live by bread alone, but also by the desert manna" (Ruskin "Unto" 226)

Ruskin's critique, though somewhat idealistic, nevertheless sets a foundation for an aesthetic naturalism while making a ringing indictment of the continued destruction of humanity as individuals and as a species. Though his socio-political views had many of the elements of socialism, Ruskin steadfastly refused to accept the notion of equality, preferring to advocate mediaeval notions of law, rank, and nobility in the social system. Even in his most devastating critiques, Ruskin never fully understood economic theory. Moreover, Ruskin's ideal—a future society of healthy and happy workers, surrounded by imperishable treasures—is a rather improbable utopia, especially considering that, like his Romantic forebears, he never furnished a plan or possible means to reach that goal. Despite these glaring flaws, Geddes sees in Ruskin "the germs of systematic science and of its noblest application" (38).

Certainly, John Ruskin is no Marxist, nor even a democrat—his expressed continual aim being "to show the external superiority of some men to others" (Avison 5)—yet he was a "socialist" (and often condemned as such) in another sense, namely in the conviction of the importance of the social good (and belief in society as an interrelated, organic whole), over and above the good of the individual. Ironically, what in large part distinguishes Ruskin from Marx is the former's anti-individualism: although he places humanity in a central position, Ruskin reacted to bourgeois individualism by going to the other extreme, placing not only the social whole but the natural world above the individual human being.

Ruskin's immediate influence was great; it is only in the past fifty or sixty years that his name and work have drifted into relative obscurity. Yet Ruskin's legacy may become increasingly important in the near future, particularly with respect to his "aesthetic naturalism" (and corresponding "aesthetic socialism"). Indeed, Ruskin can be seen as an early ecological thinker, and perhaps the first important writer to sense the dangers of industrial waste and uninhibited consumerism, not just for the world but also for the future of the human species. Ruskin's "ecologism" is not restricted to environmentalism, but extends, in the broader sense of the term, to focus on all forms of life in the context of their environment. Tolstoy praised Ruskin as a prophet, and Proust and Wilde were among the many important writers who considered themselves disciples of the man. Ruskin can perhaps best be viewed as an intellectual instigator, yet one whose instinctive conservatism prevented him from expanding on his principles in a more detailed and systematic manner. In 1884, Patrick Geddes predicted that reform was finally on its way: "the health and culture of the worker, the ennoblement of function, the purification of the environment have at last won... recognition as truly practical" (42). Over a century hence, Geddes's words ring rather optimistic. Perhaps it is time to assuage Ruskin's fears, when he relates: "It is not my work that drives me mad, but the sense that nothing comes of it" ("Fors" 168).

### C. William Morris: A Left Naturalistic Humanism

*I think that this blindness to beauty will draw down a kind of revenge one day: who knows?... perhaps the gods are preparing troubles and terrors for the world (or our small*

*corner of it) again, that it may become beautiful and dramatic withal: for I do not believe that they will have it dull and ugly for ever.*

– William Morris "Letter," 11

One of Ruskin's disciples who attempted to make something out of his master's work was William Morris. Morris, a younger contemporary of Ruskin, found himself, like his mentor, pushed from art towards social criticism. Ruskin's writings, in particular, led him closer and closer to a movement that was abhorrent to Ruskin himself: Marxist socialism. Morris attempted, at least implicitly, to unite Marx and Ruskin, in order to develop a truly ecological socialism, founded upon Marxian economics and Ruskinian aesthetics and ecologism. Morris realized the futility in the Romantic longing for a vanished past, and as such he turned to a critical inquiry into the modern social and industrial system and its ills. Morris, contra Ruskin, looked for the fulfillment of his aspirations in an ideal of a future reconstructed society—one that would surpass even the most glorious of Romantic and medievalist idylls.

Morris praised the ethical aspect of Ruskinian theory, along with Ruskin's rudimentary steps towards the foundations of the principles of a new society, including the recognition that the solution must include a certain "aesthetic." Though "the lack of beauty in modern life is now recognized by a part of the public as an evil to be remedied," by far the greater number of people, says Morris, do not feel the lack in the least, and thus "no general sense of beauty is extant which would *force* us into the creation of a feeling for art which in its turn would *force* us into taking up the dropped links of tradition" (Vallance 242). Morris recognized the death of popular art, and looked instead towards the Greater Arts of Life: the making of matters instrumental to our daily life into works of art. The beautification of our homes, clothes, furniture, utensils—objects which now appear as "degrading shams of better things"—was one of Morris's central tenets. As well, a love of nature in all its forms must be the ruling spirit of such works of art and of life (and labor) more generally.

Morris's art and his socialism are intrinsically associated; in fact the first was a necessary stimulus to the second. In some ways, Morris picks up where Ruskin leaves off, leading his erstwhile mentor into the brave new world of ecological socialism:

[A] condition of society in which there should be neither rich nor poor, neither master nor master's man, neither idle nor overworked, neither brain-sick brain workers, nor heart-sick hand workers, in a word, in which all men would be living in equality of condition, and would manage their affairs unwastefully, and with the full consciousness that harm to one would mean harm to all—the realization at last of the meaning of the word COMMONWEALTH. (Vallance 310)

Morrisian socialism relies largely upon the Ruskinian vital imperative: There is no wealth but life. Modern society, he concludes, has been reduced to an "eyeless vulgarity" that has destroyed art and meaningful labor. Morris envisaged art as the purveyor of the ideal of a full and reasonable post-revolutionary existence, "to which the perception and creation of beauty, the enjoyment of real pleasure that is, shall be felt

to be as necessary to man as his daily bread” (Morris “How We Live” 37). The cause of art is the “cause of the people... one day we shall win back Art, that is to say pleasure in life.” The connection between Morris’s aesthetics and politics extends to his conception of the labor process: nothing should be made by human hands (or, for that matter, by machinery) that is without inherent worth, or that is in any way degrading to the worker or consumer.

Perhaps most striking about Morris’s synthesis is the *naturalism* that he brings from Ruskin into Marxian socialism. First of all, Morris attacks the so-called technological socialists, notably the Fabians (of Shavian fame), for overestimating the means or mechanism of a social system apart from the ends towards which it might be employed. The proper object of machinery is not, moreover, the production of material goods or the pursuit of economic abundance in itself, but rather the alleviation of human suffering. In response to Edward Bellamy’s technological-evolutionary utopia in *Looking Backwards* (1889), Morris lamented the central emphasis placed on machinery as the vehicle for progress. “I believe,” he protests, that “the multiplication of machinery will just—multiply machinery” (Vallance 346). Morris countered Bellamy with his own *New from Nowhere* (1890), a utopian novel set in a future London where grass grows up to the banks of the Thames and where humans work freely, pleasurably, and efficiently. The society in *News* is one centered on beauty and pleasure: physical, natural, and artificial.

In the end, Morris had difficulty maintaining a balance between Marx and Ruskin, eventually turning to the former in times of hope, to the latter in when in need of solace. He ultimately fails in his attempt to fully bring the aesthetic naturalism of Ruskin into line with Marxian economic and political priorities. Yet one can extract from Morris a remodeled concept of Ruskinian naturalism, one infused with a Marxian concern for the self-realization of the individual. The two chief principles that Morris tries to impress upon his readers are: 1) pleasure in work is the secret of art and of happiness and peace; and 2) delight in physical upon earth is the natural state of humanity. Morris saw, and perhaps for the first time laid out in a systematic manner, the destructive potential of rampant industrialism and consumerism on both the human individual via alienation (Marx) and the natural, non-human environment (Ruskin).<sup>23</sup> Yet Morris’s opinion of machinery is equivocal; while clearing himself of charges of reactionary pessimism, he admits that production by machinery, while dynamically good, is statically dangerous. Essentially, the Marxian vision is one of the eventual withering away of the Machine: “I have a kind of hope,” he relates,

that the very elaboration of machinery in a society whose purpose is not the multiplication of labour, as it now is, but the carrying on of a pleasant life, as it would be under social order—that the elaboration of machinery... will lead to the simplification of life, and so once more to the limitation of machinery” (Vallance 444).

William Morris would have judged a society by the kind of people produced, and by the quality of life of those people. His socialism is a moral, aesthetic, and naturalistic (ecological) one, and is the prelude to the development of

Marxist humanism and the foundations of a socialist consciousness. Perhaps the first modern thinker to link the moral, the social, the aesthetic and the ecological together in a comprehensive life-philosophy, Morris’s conclusions have great relevance to the idea of the liberation of consciousness that was to emerge in succeeding generations of Marxist writers.

## VII. Human Aesthetics and Neo-Marxism

In modern society, art has become autonomous of the cognitive, ethical, and political by virtue of being incorporated wholesale into the capitalist mode of production. Thus commodified, art is effectively released from its traditional social significance. The study of aesthetics was born at the moment of this demise of art, and according to Eagleton, it “flourishes on the corpse of its social relevance” (368). A left aesthetics tradition can be traced, within socio-political thought, from Schiller and Marx to Morris and the Neo-Marxist humanists of the twentieth century. In this tradition, art becomes an ideal for the reconciliation of subject and object, universal and particular, theory and practice, individual and society, existence and essence.

### A. The Development of Marxist Humanism and Aesthetics

Marx was a contemporary of John Ruskin and the conservative organicists who postulated a certain ideal of culture, but a truly Marxian understanding of culture did not emerge until the 1930s. William Morris had linked the cause of socialism and the cause of art, as we have seen, and while his socialism was of the Marxian sort, the basis of his theory of vitality and aesthetics came largely from Ruskin. In fact, much of the “Marxist” writings of the early twentieth-century were actually part of a re-emergence of the old Romantic protest that there was no place in modern society for the artist and the intellectual—with a new clause that workers were about to end the old system and establish a more just, socialist one, thereby providing such a place. This intellectual wing of English Marxist culture-theory emphasized the continuities between the Romantics and Marx, and the transformation of Romantic idealism into reality by providing it with a context of material social relevance. Essentially, culture theory became important as Marxism developed into more than simply an economic or political philosophy, but a more broad-based interpretive and critical movement interpreting the past, present and future conditions of culture. These early attempts at a Marxist theory of culture did not, however, have nearly the impact of the Neo-Marxist humanism to emerge in Germany in the 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s.

Ever since Baumgarten, Germany had been the intellectual home of European aesthetics, and in the twentieth century Marxism joined this tradition under the direction of Theodor Adorno, Berthold Brecht, Ernst Bloch, Marx Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and the Austro-Marxists. In general, Marxist aesthetics attributes an enlightening capacity to art and the realm of beauty, and attempts to determine the basis of the emancipatory impact of such for the liberation of consciousness that is fundamental to socialist revolution. According to Pauline Johnson, a successful theory of Marxist aesthetics must identify what Heller has called the “radical needs” generated by social experience, which can then act as a motive for ideological change.

The so-called Frankfurt School (*Franfurterschule*), made up of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, focused in particular on the progressive need for an enlightened consciousness—a need that has been lost to modern “one-dimensional” society. In the early ‘20s, while the mainstream sociological tradition continued to neglect the phenomena of the arts and mass culture, European Marxism turned its attention to the study of aesthetics and the analysis of “cultural superstructures.” This shift been attributed by some as a pessimistic retreat of leftist intellectuals after the failure of the proletarian revolution post-World War One, but whatever the causes, the effects on both theoretical Marxism and the study of aesthetics were significant. For one, Marxist aesthetics has an important part to play in the articulation of goals in a socialist society, and provides a suitable forum for a humanistic critique of alienated life experience in the modern industrialized world. This humanistic standpoint, which makes its most clear in the work of Gyorgy Lukács and Marcuse, stands as a reminder that the ultimate goal of socialism is not merely material but also cultural and even spiritual in nature.

Marxist aesthetics often emerges as a convergence of neo-Kantian sociology and Hegelian or early Marxism. The introduction of Kant into Marxism became the foundation for the so-called Austro-Marxist school, which sought the enrichment of Marxist doctrine with Kantian ethics as a normative basis. One significant point in Austro-Marxism is their appeal to “all rational mind,” regardless of class—they emphasized the intellectual and moral universality of Marxist (and Kantian) principles. The Austro-Marxists also placed much weight on treating individuals as ends, according to the Kantian precept. “Socialism,” they exclaim, “would be a parody of itself if it did not have as its sole aim the free development of human powers in association” (Kolakowski 243). In addition, Kantianism emerges as a bid to rehabilitate philosophy from the scientific and positivistic outlook of the day. The assertion (of positivists) that natural science can be the only means of attaining reliable knowledge is rejected by the Austro-Marxists as an example of “philosophical suicide.” Kant, they suggest, provides socialism with a moral foundation by showing that ethics cannot be based solely upon anthropology: “for man’s natural drives could not give rise to the idea of humanity and of the unique value of the individual” (240). Thus, an ethical socialism is born, which allows for the acceptance of socialism as both a good as well as an inevitability, and shows that the socialist order must be one in which society has no aim higher than the dignity and welfare of the human being.

The drive to “humanize” Marx gained steam in the 1930s and ‘40s. Louis Althusser allows that if we look at early Marx we can see that he subscribed first to a Kantian-Fichtean outlook, and then to a Feuerbachian way of thinking—each humanistic and containing a strong ethical component based upon a certain philosophical anthropology. Althusser insists that the normative character of Marxism is necessary if it is to indeed serve as an impetus and guide for social change. Marx seems to have left the task of establishing a humanistic or ethical socialism to his followers; he himself rejected all appeals to religious or metaphysical considerations that might be invoked either to privilege some forms of it over others or to justify the attribution to human beings of an essential nature that would do this work.

Community is not forgotten in a Marxian normative theory: even if we live our lives and relate to others in a morally prescribed way, we are isolated from human morality, activity and enjoyment unless we develop real community, through which (and only through which) personal and species emancipation are possible. The depersonalization, antagonism, competition, and callous exploitation that characterize human relationships in bourgeois society (according to these principles) must be overcome via the medicine of a new Marxian ethic. Fundamentally, a normative Marxism would deal with the quality of life of human beings, revealing the disparity between the character of life shaped by the prevailing social system and one that is not only attainable but is arguably superior to it, and therefore highly desirable. This is the direction in which twentieth-century Marxist aesthetics, in particular, was headed.

### **B. Lukács: Art, Realism, and Egoism**

Marxist humanist aesthetics is not just about art, but the emancipatory impact of the aesthetic upon the subject or recipient, which allows for the possibility of a transformed or liberated consciousness. Gyorgy Lukács is one of the foremost of a generation of post-Morrisian thinkers who turned towards a more explicitly humanist Marxism. Specifically concerned to discover how an enlightened and de-fetishized consciousness can be produced out of the dynamics of the alienated present, Lukács protested against the loss of meaning in the everyday life of modern society. He stood against the “vulgar materialist economism” that “bases itself on the ‘natural laws’ of economic development which are to bring about this transition by their own impetus” (Johnson 9). The revolution must be a conscious transformation of the existing order. Art, says Lukács, may be able to change the consciousness of the modern person and thus make daily life “re-experienceable.”

Lukács seeks an aesthetic of “realism,” yet he is as firmly against Plekhanov and the so-called vulgar Marxists who made art an expression of a certain point in class struggle as he is contra the “subjective idealist tendencies” of thinkers like Franz Mehring. Lukács incorporates much of prior German aesthetics and literary theory into his system: Goethe on symbolism and allegory; Schiller on form and content; Hegel’s dialectic; and Kant’s notion of disinterestedness. Realism, he claims, is indispensable to art as part of the dialectical process that shows things as they really are and resolves contradictions to produce greater knowledge. Art is a reflection of the whole person, because it is the result of mental work—of an observation of “man’s deeply rooted relationship with the many facets of the physical world” (Királyfalvi 49). As a method of reflection, art gains its own identity through consciousness; a consciousness that is capable of satisfying the demands of a changing dialectic reality.<sup>24</sup>

Lukács comes to the conclusion that art is both anthropomorphic and anthropocentric: whereas science is humankind’s consciousness of the objective world, art is humankind’s *real*<sup>25</sup> self-awareness and self-consciousness, by virtue of its immediate effect. As well, aesthetic reflection has the ability to unify the seemingly contradictory elements of reality, providing humanity with a “fuller, [more] fruitful, livelier, more dynamic” reflection of that reality, and allowing him a deeper and more concrete glimpse of some aspects of reality that his normal experience will not permit. (Királyfalvi

58) The ultimate effect of art, for Lukács, is ethical: aesthetic reflection promotes a “long, subtle, and uneven” but definite change that, taken collectively, is the socio-historical effect of awakening human consciousness to the fact that he “makes himself”—and the broadening of the concept of the individual person as a member of an ongoing species. However, for Lukács the aesthetic must remain in the realm of contemplation, as its role is to broaden humankind’s horizons and to reveal the condition and consequences of life without moving directly into the realm of practice. Art’s contribution to improving quality of life lies in its promotion of the aesthetic-ethical growth of the total person. Human totality means the full realization that there is no aspect of individual existence that is not also a part of communal life—thus the aesthetic is intrinsic to the formation of a total socio-human personality.

Although Lukács condemns, like Marx before him, the “anti-scientific machine wreckers”—those “modern expressionists” who see “an anti-cultural and anti-human revolt in the development of science and technology” (Királyfalvi 61), he was discouraged by the effects of overpopulation and the advancing technological system that seemed to be further multiplying rather than alleviating the problem of the division of labor within both socialist and capitalist nations. He stresses the “ontological” importance of Marxism, and the significance of consciousness, which “reflects reality, and on that basis makes possible its modification through work” (20). Lukács concurs with Marx on the question of humanity and nature: “With the mastering of fire, speech, and various tools (with work) man made himself; asserting his humanity he became a creator” (43). Humanity must assert itself as the center of being. Lukács quotes Engels with regard to the necessary and fundamental “egoism” of communism: “What is valid is the idea that we have to make a cause our own before we are prepared to work for it, that, in this sense, apart from any material gain, we are communists out of egoism” (Lukács 131). Engels continues, however, in more nuanced and highly ecological prose, concluding that this egoism must be “an egoism of the heart, [which] will be the ground of our love of humanity and give it sound roots.”

### C. Marcuse: Technology and One-Dimensionality

Herbert Marcuse followed the path set by Lukács, with some notable deviations from the Lukácsian branch of Neo-Marxist aesthetic humanism. A member of the Frankfurt School, Marcuse was concerned with the realization of human creative possibilities, and maintains in his writings that it is the specific sociological characteristics of our times that have undermined the foundations within immediacy for ideological change. In his later work, especially, Marcuse emphasizes the “psychic deconstruction of the civilized individual” (Johnson 99) as the necessary prerequisite for radical social change. He goes so far as to suggest that Marxism can only preserve its character as a theory of revolutionary struggle by uniting with Freudian psychoanalysis:

What is at stake in the socialist revolution is not merely the extension of satisfaction with the existing universe of needs, nor the shift of satisfaction from one (lower) level to a higher one, but the rupture with the universe, the *qualitative leap*. The revolution involves a radical

transformation of the needs and aspirations themselves, cultural as well as material, of consciousness and sensibility. (99)

Freedom, he concludes, “is understood as rooted in the fulfillment of those needs which are sensuous, ethical and rational in one” (100). For Marcuse, the aesthetic form gives a sublimated expression to the repressed desire for the realization of the wealth of human creative potential. His specific concern is to establish the possibility of a “progressive de-sublimation” of the desire for the exercise of “the freely-evolving potentialities of *man and nature*” (105, my emphasis).

In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse presents a harsh indictment of industrial capitalist society, in all its “totalitarian” features and capabilities. In the face of these destructive elements, he argues, the traditional idea of the “neutrality” of technology can no longer be maintained: “Technology as such cannot be isolated from the use to which it is put; the technological society is a system of domination which operates already in the concept and construction of techniques” (Marcuse *One-Dimensional* xvi). Marcuse discusses at some length the classical Marxian theory that envisages the transition from capitalism to socialism as a political evolution in which the proletariat destroys the *political* apparatus of capitalism but retains the *technological* apparatus, subjecting it to socialization. For Marcuse, the continued applications of scientific rationality will eventually reach a terminal point (with the mechanization of all socially necessary, but individually repressive labor) beyond which further “progress” would mean a break—the turning of quantity into quality, opening up the possibility of a new human reality based on the fulfillment of vital human needs. The completion of the technological society would not only be the prerequisite but also the rationale for transcending the technological rationality of today. In effect, scientific concepts could project and define the possible realities of a free and pacified existence.

For Marcuse, the mastery or “pacification” of nature is a necessity, as nature remains the object opposed to the developing subject. History, he says, is the negation of nature, by which what is “merely” natural is overcome and recreated by the powers of reason.<sup>26</sup> All joy and happiness, he concludes, derive from the ability to transcend nature—a transcendence in which the mastery of nature is itself subordinated to liberation and the “pacification of existence.” In this vision, art becomes equivalent to rationality in its ability to “project” existence and define yet unrealized possibilities that could then be envisaged as validated by and functioning in the scientific-technological transformation of the world. Thus, art combats nature: the aesthetic reduction appears in the technological transformation of nature when and if it succeeds, thus linking mastery and liberation. Ultimately, Marcuse comes to the (somewhat dubious) conclusion that such a total conquest of nature will reduce the rapaciousness of humanity vis-à-vis the non-human world.

Marcuse does succeed, however, in introducing several important features into Marxist aesthetic humanism. First, here art fights reification by making the petrified world “stand and speak”—allowing for the “remembrance of things past” as a motive power in the struggle to change the world as it is. Second, art, in its “rationality,” allows for the transformation

to a “realm of freedom” in which the technological rationality of modernity will be transcended, allowing for the free and complete liberation of the individual consciousness.

#### D. Bloch: Utopianism and a Real Ecology

As Terry Eagleton has argued, and as we have witnessed thus far, few words have rung more ominously in Marxist ears than “natural.” Marxism has had great difficulty dealing with the question of what fertile pacts and allegiances might be generated between nature and humankind. For the most part, humanist Marxism of the twentieth century has been unable (or unwilling) to envisage any allegiance beyond the rather one-sided conclusions of Marx himself. Ernst Bloch, another prominent figure in the Neo-Marxist movement, breaks significantly from the tenets and conclusions of his peers Lukács and Marcuse—in means if not in goals—establishing a principle of “utopia” and jarring socialist thought loose from its rigid and narrow self-definition in terms that essentially “prolong the categories of capitalism itself, whether by negation or adaptation (of terms like industrialization, centralization, progress, technology, and even production itself.” Bloch argues that these particular terms “tend to impose their own social limitations and options off those who work with them” (Jameson 210). Reintroducing the memory of a pre-capitalist past as a vital element in the utopian principle and the more general “invention of the future,” Bloch suggests that historical memory need not be sentimental or populist in the sense of the Romantic strains against Marx and nineteenth-century Marxists did battle.

The notion of *utopia* is central to Bloch’s theory, as he seeks an understanding of aesthetics that is related to basic ontological and political questions underlying humanity’s constant search for a better world. Aesthetic questions must be reformulated for the purpose of preserving the cultural heritage that Bloch considers necessary for humankind’s survival and the realization of utopia. Despite his mythical and expressionistic leanings, Bloch turned, in his early writings, towards Marxism as the framework for his questions about ontology, ethics and social change. First, aesthetics cannot simply be disinterested contemplation; rather it must be nothing less than a “clarion call and a challenge” to console, appease, incite, and prefigure the future. (*Utopian* xxvi) The question about the truth of art, says Bloch, becomes philosophically the question concerning the given reproductive potentiality of the so-called “beautiful illusion”—“concerning its degree of reality in a reality of the world that is not one-dimensional” (145). The answer to the aesthetic question about truth is that artistic illusion is not mere illusion but one wrapped in images, as a meaning that only portrays in images that can be carried on. As in Lukács, the aesthetic is a realm in which individual, social, and elemental elements are illuminated that the usual senses can barely detect. In short art is “anticipatory illumination” (146).

Bloch contends that the depreciation of utopia in socialism is due to Marx’s criticism of the French utopian socialists (along with the British Owen). This loss, he says, has meant disaster in Eastern Europe and the USSR, where the apparatus—the how and means of socialist society—had by Bloch’s time taken precedence over and meaningful content, to the extent where no one is allowed even to talk about “possibilities.” “Thereby the theory of socialism that is decidedly hostile toward utopia now tends to become a new

ideology concerned with the domination of humankind” (*Utopian* 12-13). Art is fundamental to the utopian drive, as it claims to create a paradise out of other objects that are immanently driven to an end and made into something at once positive and possible as “anticipatory illumination.” In doing so, art must draw upon the past, the “entire treasure house of humankind,” eliminating all that is useless or irrelevant, but keeping the beneficent aspects without idealizing the culture of any past era.<sup>27</sup> In sum, Bloch contends that Marxist reality means “reality with a future (and a past) within in” (162).

With respect to nature, and the human relationship to such, Bloch raises, perhaps for the first time since William Morris, the question of a possible “objective heritage” of nature that is of a “non-ideological kind”—one that is unrelated to the “culturally-humanistic surplus” of the human species. (*Utopian* 64) This heritage would not belong to the history of humankind, nor to nature as a purely social category: “consequently, it does not belong to the determinedness off natural scientific expressions through social relations or to nature as raw material in the production process of social existence but to the unmarketed nature, which is still independent of human beings” (65). He asks: “Is the calculatory and abstract thinking, which is characteristic of the bourgeoisie, in fact the final contemplation of the knowledge of nature... Does the reification that is economically and culturally incapable of bringing about an awareness of the process in nature, possess an exclusive correlate?” These fundamental questions point Bloch to the quest for a “real ecology,” which has become, he says, “so urgent in our time.”

Bloch’s real ecology means the discovery of a “constitutive correlation” between life and “landscape”—a landscape that is geographic but also “a category... that legitimizes itself precisely with ecology and in ecology, not only as aesthetic phenomenon but also as one made up of a real qualitative context. — One that also becomes even more urgent today as the balance of the symbiosis becomes increasingly more visible through its industrial destruction” (*Utopian* 660). Just as that essence that is hostile to quality was blind to the balance in the house of nature, so it is also blind, says Bloch, to that which is emerging and open and still possible in nature. Yet even Bloch does not take his points and inquiries to their possible conclusions, i.e., the recognition in Marxism of an emphasis on quality that enables the realization of a deep ecological consciousness.

Bloch writes of the “technological coldness” inherent in the capitalist-industrial system, which points toward the need for “totally new technology”—not just for profit but also for humanistic purposes, in which,

relief should come and limits at the same time, transformation of the fundamental form of the machine’s spirit, appearance of fixed, purely expressive colourfulness and profusion, detached from finery, from the old luxury.... And the exploitative means of production of these substitutes that destroy culture will have to stand together with the cannons in the same peculiar museums of pernicious legends. (*Utopian* 80)

Bloch is persistent on this point: that one should think long and hard about industry, for the breathtaking step of such involves an acceleration, unrest and estrangement of our

modes of action, as well as the desolate possibilities of “the complete automation of the world” (xviii). In general, Bloch recognizes the difficulties of “progress,” which almost inevitably brings about disorientation and nostalgia for the ways of the past, itself an understandable byproduct of modern disorientation. He calls for creative programs to confront modernism in all its forms, so that the masses will not feel left behind to the tempting evils of fascism, which can at least fulfill their basic cultural needs.

In sum, Ernst Bloch looks towards a deeper humanism—one found in the oldest conscious dream of humankind: “in the overthrow (instead of the hypocritical new installation) of all conditions in which the human individual is a humiliated, enslaved, forsaken, despised creature” (*Utopian* xiv)—i.e., the modern technological world. Such a change must be based upon “hope,” another favorite key word of Bloch. Most importantly, Bloch opens up, for the first time within Marxist humanist aesthetics, the possibility of a deep relationship between humanity and nature, mediated by art, literature and beauty. Bloch’s ecological outlook moves Marxism beyond the realm of the purely human. After all, he says, “[t]he real object of human research was never just humankind.... Human beings could not afford this.... They were [and still are] constantly [living] on an exchange basis with nature” (59).

#### **E. The Aesthetic and the Liberation of Consciousness**

For each of the three writers discussed above—Lukács, Marcuse, and Bloch—the process of human history is not merely a history of class struggle, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the process of self and species *transformation*—the continuing development and unfolding of human creative capacities and abilities. The “one-dimensional” or fragmented / alienated quality of individuality in capitalist societies, they argue, runs counter to the wealth of the historical development of human capacities as a whole. In order to achieve the realization of the human being’s individual and species character, this tension must be overcome and a totalizing relation between individuality and social life (and, for Bloch, the natural world) must be established. Essentially:

Transcending alienation means the eliminating of discord and conflict between human essence and existence—that is, the creation of the condition for a historical development which ends the inverse and antagonistic relationship between the wealth and many-sidedness of social life and the limitation and 1-dimensionality of the lives of individuals. (Johnson 41)

Marxian socialism is a protest against the alienation of humanity; against the very lovelessness of modern society; against “man’s” exploitation of “man” (and woman); and against humankind’s exploitation of nature. The naturalistic element is evident in Morris and Bloch, but scarcely found elsewhere, for although Marxism claims to have the potential to unite humanity and nature, very few self-professed Marxists have allowed for such a possibility in their actual work. The humanist Neo-Marxists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were generally unconcerned with the world of nature as an objective heritage in its own right, being more interested in human concerns, particularly the liberation of consciousness through the aesthetic. They recognize, in aesthetic reception and

experience, a “shaking up of the subjectivity of the recipient so that the passions working in his life obtain new contents and a new direction, they are in this way purified and become the spiritual foundation of virtuous abilities” (Lukács in Johnson 42). This process, the so-called “purification of subjectivity,” is explained with reference to the existing dissatisfaction with the “fetishistic” viewpoint of immediate consciousness. By recognizing this fetishistic viewpoint, “the art work lifts the condition which prohibits the emergence of a totalizing species consciousness. In the receptive act the [subject] is able to recognize her essential species character” (46).

For Marcuse, it is not possible to find a progressive dynamic within immediate existence, due to certain sociological characteristics of contemporary society, and this loss of a revolutionary dynamic must be the concern of Marxist culture theorists. The dynamic can only be sought within the “receptive” experience, which alone can activate the need for the species consciousness that is clearly dormant in the psychic construction of the modern individual. Generally, the humanistic standpoint reminds us of the emancipatory potential of Marxism, with respect to both the individual and the species.

#### **VIII. Resolution: From Red to Green?**

In the past few decades, certainly since the dramatic events of 1989–91, Marxism has experienced a crisis of definition. As it appears to have been seriously defective, to say the least, as a practicable political and economic ideology, it lingers within intellectual circles, especially among those concerned (like the neo-Marxists) with the continuing problems of alienation and oppression in a world dominated by the forces modern industrial capitalist consumerism, but also a world that continues to be faced with threats of religious extremism and the irrational forces of tribalism and nationalism.

##### **A. A Restatement of the Problem**

As we have seen, Marxian thought is very much concerned with the free and complete self-realization of the individual as a total species being. The self-realization process is in turn deeply connected to the tradition of philosophical aesthetics, particularly the streams that emerge out of the work of Kant and Schiller, which emphasize the human potential for self-awareness and self-assertion through creative self-overcoming. The earlier writings of Marx, his philosophical anthropology in particular, provides a basis for a humanistic life-philosophy. However, Marx’s humanism lacks a developed normative quality, as well as any kind of applicable approach to the natural world. Furthermore, Marx’s emphasis on technological progress and the benefits of industrialization do not harmonize well with his views of the aesthetic life of creation and self-creation. The organic social theorists of the nineteenth century, from Coleridge and the Romantics to John Ruskin, provide an aesthetic with a naturalistic bent, but one that is ultimately lacking in a dynamic for individual and social transformation.

The Marxist humanists of the twentieth century strove to create an ethical Marxism, in order to combat the alienation and psychic fragmentation of modernity, generally through the realm of the aesthetic. Ernst Bloch, following upon the unfinished work of William Morris, goes further by allowing for the possibility of a non-humanized natural world, but does



not expand upon the emancipation of nature from anthropocentric domination. This is the problem we must face, and is perhaps the most crucial issue of our day: how can we allow for an aesthetic humanism, which would be critical of the alienating and fragmenting tendencies of the modern Western industrial system, and at the same time releases humanity as a species, and nature (the non-human realm) from the solid grip of anthropocentrism?

### **B. Imagination, Vision and the Sin of Pride**

According to Ernst Fischer, art, whose nature it once was to liberate “man” from the pressures around him—to take him out of harness and anticipate the realm of freedom—is now obliged to reveal the real world behind the apparent one, to drive men who are escaping into irresponsibility back into reality, and to make them conscious of their share in a universal responsibility. It is this responsibility to which we must, in the early years of the twenty-first century, allow to come to fruition. The faith in human potential must be reasserted and upheld, but the tempering realization of our “universal responsibility.” Erich Fromm writes: “I believe that hope and new insight transcending the narrow limits of the positivistic-mechanistic thinking of social science today are needed, if the west is to emerge from this century of trial” (Fromm vi).

The imagination is a way of cognizing the world: of what *is not*, but *could be*. Imagination is hope; not a matter of abandoning reason and science but, on the contrary, of supplementing them by concrete vision and mythic imagery. “Without the imagination,” says Fischer, “there would be a world of facts, and conditions, and events, but *no reality*” (165). The Romantics certainly understood the importance of the imagination; Blake in particular often spoke of the god-like power of the creative intellect. The imaginative process is intrinsic to the aesthetic process in its creative aspects, which are attainable only by human beings. Indeed, it is not reason alone which sets humankind apart from non-human animals—it is also the decidedly human powers of creativity: intellectual, poetic, artistic, or manual. Broadly speaking, it is the realm of the aesthetic that ‘raises’ humanity to the level of beauty, and makes her, in her imaginative, creative, and transformative capacities, like the gods.

Once raised to such heights, however, humankind easily becomes blinded, not by then light of the external sun, but by the light of the sun within herself, which she revolves around as an individual (in capitalism), or as a species (in Marxism). With the aesthetic, she is given wings to fly beyond the clouds, but, like Icarus, hubris easily overcomes. Humanism reaches through the aesthetic, via creative self-realization, thus transcending calculative individualism, but tends towards a broader and less immediately pernicious, but ultimately more dangerous solipsism—a solipsism of the species, otherwise known as anthropocentrism. Intra-species subjectivism is raised to Nietzschean heights, proclaiming the death and subjugation of all that is non-human. Marxism, particularly in its humanist versions, allows for the realization of the free individual within the free collective, but while transcending the egoism of the individual creates a new, less obvious egoism of the species, based on a similar philosophy of mastery, control, and domination.

Humankind must be saved from this precarious position, for the heat of her own sun is slowly but steadily melting the

wax on her wings. A line must be established, between the glorification of humanity found in Marxism, and the degradation of such coming out of some forms of Christianity and so-called post-modern thought. The very aesthetic which can raise humanity to such heights also provides, in its contemplative/receptive aspect, a mode of bringing humanity back down to earth, as it were—a mode activated by *vision*. As the receptive subject looks at the visible phenomenon (natural or human-made), she is aware of it as a visible object, not as possible property, not as a symbol of an idea, not as a means of personal communication, not as a convenient means of transportation, not as a feat of engineering, not as a geological specimen—she simply *attends* to what is there in front of her, in her sight. “The mental state of aesthetic awareness, inaccessible to anthropological observation, is translated into an objective quality—the aesthetic quality—which is located, as it were, in the visual form of the object” (Maquet 19) By actually attending to, or looking at objects (in particular, but not exclusively, objects of the natural world), we may come to understand them as non-human entities, unconnected with the subject in every way except as objects of observation. A phenomenological description of our everyday existence reveals a fundamental distinction, spontaneously and immediately made, between the subject (“I”) and the world surrounding the subject. The distinction is the result not of reasoning but of experience—experience of the world through direct perception. Thus, contemplation is a critical part of the aesthetic experience, one in which the subject faces what is independent of herself. It is a state of awareness in which the subject is oriented towards the object, fully alive to is as an end-in-itself.

The importance of vision can be related to a more naturalistic outlook and conception of human existence as beings-in-the-world (and beings-of-the-earth)—towards a more ecological perspective. Lucien Goldmann, in his work on Kant, focuses on the crisis of modern humanism, invoking the ghosts of the Austro-Marxists by applying the works of Kant to Marx and to Marxist humanism more particularly. Goldmann recognizes the essential anti-egoism of Kantianism, or at last that a Kantian ethic can engender. “Only pluralism,” he says, “can be set against egoism, that is, the following way of thinking: to consider oneself and to behave not as containing the whole universe in oneself, but rather as a mere citizen of the world” (Goldmann 81). It was Kant, he argues, who took the first decisive steps towards a new philosophical category: that of the universe, of the totality, of the whole—and thus opened the way for modern philosophy. Goldmann sees two fundamental categories of human existence—freedom or autonomy of the individual one the one hand, and on the other the universe, the totality of meaning and the product of the freedom of humans as active beings. The most important predecessors of Kant, he argues, with the sole exception of Spinoza, could recognize only the first of these two equally significant aspects of existence. For Goldmann, *totality* in its two principal forms—the universe and the human community—constitute the most important philosophical category, as much within epistemology as within ethics or aesthetics.

Goldmann goes on to posit the existence of two principal philosophical traditions that have permeated Western thought: 1) The individualist/atomist philosophies, which see society and the universe in the interaction and assembly of atoms,

monads, or individuals (e.g., Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Hume); and 2) the holistic worldviews, which look at the whole, the universe, and on the social level the collective, and emphasize feeling, revelation, intuition, enthusiasm, and/or a certain life principle (e.g., Boehme, Schelling, the Romantics, Heidegger). Finally, there is a third worldview, in which “the universe and the human community form a whole whose parts presuppose for their possibility their union in the whole” (Goldmann 53). It is the this third category that Goldmann finds most relevant and most appealing, in which the *autonomy* of the parts and the *reality* of the whole are not only reconciled but constitute reciprocal conditions, “where in place of the partial and one-sided solutions of the individual *or* collective there appears the only total solution: that of the person and the human community.” While admitting that this third option is still very much in the becoming, Goldmann allows for its basis in the works of Kant, Hegel, Marx and Lukács. The development of this philosophy, he concludes, “seems to be the principle task of modern thought.”

The importance of Kant to this new philosophy is crucial; he united the Christian theological notion of the limitations of humanity with the immanence and solipsism (of man as an individual and a species) of the ancients and the Enlightenment thinkers. As we can see, the application of Goldmann’s third option to naturalism broadens the concept of the Kantian universe to mean the *entire* universe, not just as it relates to humanity. The realization of the limits of humankind, particularly with regard to the natural world, tempers the atomistic solipsism of the Enlightenment, as well as the species solipsism of traditional Marxist thought. Kant, by helping us to think philosophically as well as *aesthetically* in moving towards a better human community, absolves us from our collective sin of pride, without degrading or in any way reducing the vast creative potential of humankind.

### C. A Modern Perspective: Implications and Relevance

*Doesn't the kernel of Nature live in the hearts of human beings?*

– Goethe

Industrialization and the productive process of consumerism is now proceeding at such a rate that it does not seem likely that humankind will be able to adapt to the new problems created by such, i.e., “the toxic effects of chemical pollutants and synthetic substances, the psychological and mental aberrations resulting from the mechanization of life, the artificial and violent stimuli that are ubiquitous in the technological world” (Dubos 33). Humankind does appear to be adapting to the ugliness of polluted skies, cities, streams, and to life without an abundance of flowers and birds, but this adaptation is only superficial, and dangerous in that it covers up the problems that must eventually be confronted. Humans, like rats, are extremely adaptable, but even rats cannot adapt to everything. The problems of modernity are not all external, however. According to René Dubos,

Air, water, soil, fire, the subtle forces of the cosmos, the natural rhythms of life and its diversity, have shaped man’s nature during the evolutionary past and have created in him deep-rooted sensual and emotional needs that cannot be eradicated. The impoverishment of sensual

and emotional life will progressively result in the atrophy of the attributes that account for humanness. (34)

“Like the great Anteus in Greek legends,” Dubos concludes, “man loses his strength when he loses contact with the earth” (37). Humans can indeed survive, multiply, and be productive despite malnutrition, environmental pollution, ugliness, boredom, high population density, but this adaptability hides the inescapable loss in human quality of life. Now that science and technology have made us so powerful and so destitute, we try to imagine the kinds of surroundings and ways of life that are proper to humanity. The alternative will be the “smothering of body and soul.” Environmental tasks like widespread recycling, while admirable and necessary in the short term, are not the ultimate answer to our problems, and by revealing our adaptive capacities, must not allow us to forget the urgency of the present crisis, which will eventually necessitate a change in our essential conceptions, a true liberation of consciousness.

Science is the product of the Enlightenment’s attempt to elevate humankind to the pinnacle of the social and natural world, but science seems to be divided between its valid and necessary critique of mysticism and its attempt to solve humanity’s problems by the subordination of nature to human ends. According to Stanley Aronowitz, this preoccupation with the domination of nature arises from our collective fear of human emancipation, “masked as the fear of the terrors visited upon us by ‘natural’ disasters” (Aronowitz 526). The fear of nature is really the fear of unleashing the possibilities inherent in humanity. Horkheimer and Adorno posit that the domination of nature, while matching under the flag of reason, is actually grounded in the “irrational” desiring subject. Nature was deracinated with the Enlightenment, its substantive character denied—all objects consisted, for the purposes of scientific inquiry at least, in their quantitative, measurable dimensions and qualities were assigned to the transcendental subject to be endowed on an indifferent master. (526)

Thus, while the scientific enterprise purports to be in the service of human emancipation, science and technology can only, it seems, go about achieving such through the progressive domination of the natural world. Science, then, is an enterprise with *intent*—the domination of nature—from which arises an unintended consequence: the domination of the human being. Humans who rely on science and technology to be emancipated become slaves to machines (even if not quite to *Matrix*-like extent). Marcuse’s call for an emancipatory science can serve as a latter day call for an ecological outlook on the world. Such an emancipation, to be possible, necessitates a critique, not only of the forms of human domination of one another, but of the domination of nature as well.

Aronowitz gives us a final word on science, technology, and socio-individual transformation:

Technology is a system of reifications and discourses, one that hides a broad range of ideological interests, including those of science. Marxists have always wanted to separate the scientific from the technological in order to appropriate it for themselves. This cannot be done. One has to make a thoroughgoing, fundamental criticism of the presuppositions of both, to show that the Greek notion of *techne* as human practice has been radically

disjoined from the notion of technology. Technology, in turn, has become a new religion. (540)

#### D. Towards an Ecological Consciousness

The Greek term *techné* also has implications for art, and we must now briefly examine the contributions of aesthetics to an ecological worldview. In his essay “Art and Ecological Consciousness,” Gyorgy Kepes proclaims that our man-made environment has not only involved the destruction of our physical environment, but also the sensitive capacities of the human being. Over a century before Kepes, John Ruskin made similar laments. “Ah, masters of modern science,” says Ruskin, “you have divided the elements; and unified them; enslaved them upon the earth; and discerned them in the stars. Teach us, now... all that men need to know—that the Air is given to him for his life; Rain... his thirst; Fire... his warmth; Earth... his means... and his rest” (Kepes 2). Ruskin and his protégé, William Morris, were deeply concerned with the environment from an aesthetic (as much as an ethical) perspective: the negative effects of the destruction of the natural world meant ugliness, which translated for these thinkers into despair and alienation: “Disregard for nature’s richness leads to the destruction of living forms and eventually to the degradation and destruction of man himself.” This situation was even more worrisome for Morris due to the fact that, although many were aware of the urgent need for change nearly all of his peers were carried away by the dynamics of the modern situation and conspired to develop even more powerful tools without a code of values to guide their use.

Kepes recognizes the duality within scientific “progress.” As scientific technology poisons our earth, and may wreak havoc on the genetic future of our species, it allows for the increasing ease of human work, and for ever greater numbers to be housed, clothed, and fed. Once these are achieved, we may assume responsibility for the shaping of human consciousness. But scientific optimism must be tempered if humans are to avoid the fate of Icarus. Through an individual’s contact with the external world, she may gain not only a sense of herself and others, but also a sense of the world itself. For Kepes, it is our imaginative process, coupled with our moral intelligence, which can lead us to an ecological consciousness. Everyone need not be an artist to effect this change; any semblance of aesthetic sensibility (based upon real vision) can serve as a basic, collective, self-regulating device that may help us to register and repel what is harmful and find what is useful and meaningful in our lives. The aesthetic realm helps to educate the public to understand our ecological situation, and the aesthetic attitude towards the non-human world is a primary component in the development of such consciousness, which necessitates the dimming of our species-sun. What is most important is to see the world as a whole, in such a way that we extinguish all our momentary individual concerns. This particular framework of aesthetic perception incorporates subjectivity, collectivism and naturalism in an ecological way of looking at the totality of being.

The issue of an ecological consciousness has been gaining prominence in the past few decades, and is tied up with the emergence of various normative ecological theories—theories of environmental ethics. The aesthetic, particularly with respect to the visual arts and the notion of a real seeing / attention can be co-opted for these purposes. It can be argued

that post-Baconian “man” does not actually *see* nature at all, because he is always identifying himself in his mind with the object itself, and how he might make use of it. Real seeing is to observe silently, openly, and without seeking any particular result—it is a mode of observation in which there is no duality of seer and seen. In other words, the external world is discovered without reference to humanity. To this end, the rationale of control and mastery, which imbues nearly the whole of Western thought, must be overcome. Christianity may have delivered the focus of control from the tribe, *polis* and emperor to God and the Church, and Marxism may have gone further in delivering the reins of control from the individual to the species or the social collectivity, but there is no escaping the solipsistic ethic that pervades all these traditions in one form or another.

In essence, then, the whole must be seen without the loss of the self in some kind of discontinuous void of world-unity. Karl Marx provides our first step towards this double vision by enabling us to realize the individual with and through the collectivity, without losing sight of either one. Extended one step further, the individual / collective humanity need not be neglected when seeing the non-human world. This is the crux of the issue at hand: the self, the community / species, and the cosmos are not necessarily mutually exclusive or competing spheres. A continuation or elaboration of Marxian thought, with the help of the neo-Marxist humanists, can take us into the realm of the non-human, so that the individual as well the social whole can be fulfilled without the destruction of the natural world. Such would entail the development of a truly aesthetic *and* ecological consciousness—and a truly *biocentric* worldview.<sup>28</sup> John Ruskin’s century-old tenet can be expanded without changing the original wording, to become the motto for just such a vision of a liberated biocentric consciousness: *There is no wealth but life.*

#### Epilogue: A Future for Marxism?

*It will be a long time before Marxism is exhausted; it is still quite young, almost a child; it has barely begun to develop. It remains then, the philosophy of our epoch... Our whole thinking can grow only on this soil; thinking must stay within this framework, or be lost in a vacuum of become retrograde.*

– Jean-Paul Sartre

*To be radical is to grasp something at its roots. But for man the root is man himself... man is a supreme being for man.*

– Karl Marx

Sartre may be right. Marxism is, even today, quite young, and still fertile. Yet, as we have seen, over the past half-century, and particularly since 1989, Marxism as a practical, political, social and economic system is a spent force. There may be reasons for the decline of Marxism as such, but one fault that Marxian thought shares with other modernist paradigms is that which is made evident in the second quote above: Marx’s radicalism focuses too heavily on the human species to allow it to be a viable alternative in the twenty-first century. However, along with Kant and Ruskin, Marx can still provide us with the grounding for a change in post-modern consciousness, away from “man” and towards life itself. For Marx, in moving the sun from the individual, or God, to the human species, raises humankind, as a species, to the gods. John Ruskin, with his conservative-naturalistic thesis, delivers

a blow to our species pride, one that brings humankind closer to the animal realm. Kant, in some sense, and aesthetic philosophy more generally, bridges the two: while proclaiming the moral freedom and autonomy that are distinctively human attributes, Kant recognizes the limits of Marx's Promethean humanism. For Kant, art is a mediating force—art stands in the middle of the universal hierarchy ranging from the savage beast to the incorporeal ether, bridging the spiritual and the sensuous.

At the heart of this issue is the conflict between Marx's theory of perpetual progress and the realistic view of the perpetual destruction of nature in the modern age, behind which lies an ethic of mastery and domination. Whether a "will to power" of the individual *Übermensch* or of the species as a whole over nature, such an ethic of mastery is clearly an outdated remnant of the post-Enlightenment era. The dominative mood ultimately corrupts humanity, leading to isolation, alienation and exploitation. Paraphrasing Lord Acton: *The will to power corrupts absolutely*. No doctrine based upon such foundations can be advantageous in the present or coming eras. Socialism itself has undergone crises in this regard, and such prominent Marxist writers like Martin Jacques have renounced the anti-ecological component of socialist anthropocentric humanism. According to Jacques, no longer can we hold a dichotomous, either/or view of capitalism and communism; the crisis of the globe is one that penetrates all existing ideologies equally. The challenge can only be met by a combination of national and international action together with a change in personal lifestyles. Says Jacques, the notion of a change in individual consciousness has been neglected by all modern leftist political movements besides the Greens, but is one that must be addressed in the way that it was by William Morris and a few others over a century ago.

With Jon Elster, we may see the possibility of being Marxists in a different sense, mainly with respect to substantive theories, critical inquiry, and above all—values. A critical element of this new Marxism would involve the freedom to create, to invent, and to imagine other worlds—the utopian aesthetic spirit crushed by scientific socialism. According to Marshall Berman, it may turn out that going back can be a way of going forward: remembering the visions and practices of the nineteenth century can give us the courage to create the mechanisms and strategies most appropriate to the twenty-first century. This act of (critical) memory can bring modernism back to its roots, so that it can nourish and renew itself, in order to confront the challenges that lie ahead. Unless there is some sense of Blochian utopian anticipation, unless we look ahead (rather than simply *carpe diem*), there will be no humanity to speak of. Hope and imagination have an ally in the arts and in the aesthetic quest. With Heidegger, we can see a world of difference between the present life of humankind in the world of *techne*—in which everything, including humanity, becomes material for the process of self-assertive imposition of the will on things, regardless of their own essential natures—and a life in which humankind would "dwell" completely (aesthetically) as a full human being.

The warnings were there, even in Marx's day. George Perkins Marsh in 1864 warned that the earth was fast becoming an unfit home for its "noblest inhabitant." Unless we change our ways, said Marsh, the earth will be reduced to "such a condition of impoverished productiveness, of

shattered surfaces, of climatic excess, as to threaten the deprivation, barbarism, and perhaps even extinction of the species" (L. Marx 80). The "noblest inhabitant," who has the power to destroy the earth, also has the potential to restore the earth and to change herself, thereby proving Leonardo da Vinci to be mistaken when he proclaimed at the cusp of the modern age: "The works of man will lead to the death of man."

---

## Notes

1. Throughout this essay the term "nature" will refer to, in a general sense, the non-human world, but with special emphasis on what is "natural" as opposed to what is "artificial" (i.e., human made).
2. The term "naturalism" will be used in this essay to imply a philosophical theory (or set of theories) about nature, in the way that "humanism" is a philosophical theory about humans; i.e., with sympathetic connotations.
3. The use of the gender-specific "man" will be used from time to time in this work, for several reasons. First, virtually all of the authors discussed herein use the term "man" to refer to humankind (at least in theory), and to change their words may do damage to their explicit or implicit meaning. As well, there is no real grammatical equivalent, as of yet, for the term "man" as an abstract but single and bounded entity. This said, the alternative terms "humanity" and "humankind" are employed here wherever possible, and the implicit gender bias of the "man" is somewhat lessened, it is hoped, by a combination of scare quotes and an alternation of the masculine and feminine pronouns.
4. In the *Republic*, Plato sees little room for the arts in an ideal society, because art (visual art) as the imitation of nature is considered by Plato as the reproduction of objects that are already secondary copies of their Ideal forms. Thus art is one step further removed from the realm of Ideas.
5. The discussion of Kantian aesthetics here has been kept necessarily short, though the author realizes that treating such a complex thinker in a cursory manner allows for ambiguity and misunderstanding. However, a comprehensive investigation of Kantian thought is not our aim in this project; essential principles are what are important here.
6. The *Grundrisse* ("Outlines") is a thousand-page manuscript in which Marx synthesized, for the only time in his life, the humanism of his youth with his later researches in history and economics. The *Grundrisse* contains a detailed account of the process of alienation, and analysis of the nature of work and above all, a vision of the fully automated society in which social wealth could be devoted to the many-sided development of each individual.
7. Ronald DeSousa, in *The Rationality of Emotion*, examines the neglect of the emotions as a cognitive category of any particular significance.
8. According to Erich Fromm, the popular picture of Marxian "anti-spiritual" materialism, and his wish for uniformity and subordination, is false. Marx's aim, rather, was the *spiritual* emancipation of man—his liberation from the claims of economic determinism, the restitution of wholeness, enabling "man" to find unity and harmony with his fellow humans (and with nature).

9. Jon Elster makes this distinction in *Making Sense of Marx*: spiritual alienation arises when human needs are undeveloped and unfulfilled; social alienation arises when the products of “man’s” joint activities take on an independent existence and escape from the control of their makers. (Elster 54)

10. “Marx was not the kind of materialist who holds that mental activities can be reduced to bodily movements and to motions in the brain, or can be treated as mere effects of them” (Plamenatz 7). Moreover, Marx rejected both the Hegelian conception of reality as the self-revelation of spirit and the Cartesian separation of mind from matter, which implies that everything is made up of elements either purely mental or purely physical.

11. Marx’s discussion of alienation only makes sense against this normative view of the “good life”—one of an all-sided activity.

12. Calvez argues that in Marx, nature has “no meaning, no movement, it has chaos, undifferentiated and indifferent manner, and thus ultimately nothing” (Plamenatz 72).

13. In Marx’s 1861-63 “Critique,” has says: “In the form in which they are now used and reproduced by men, the vast majority of objects thought of as the products of nature (plants, animals) are the result of a process of transformation that has taken place under human supervision and as the consequence of human labour over many generations, in the course of which both their form and substance have been modified.” Elster finds this an untenable conception of nature, as it presupposes that society is organized rationally so that the various activities of ‘men’ do not interfere with each other and nature in a destructive way. (Elster 57)

14. “But alas,” says Schiller, “this realm of happiness exists only in dreams” (Lifshitz 9).

15. “[T]he one who experiences, investigates, and creates the world cannot simply be considered in terms of empty individuality: The ‘I’ which experiences, recognizes, appropriates the world goes far back into the pre-human, the animal, the vegetable, and reaches far forward into the not yet accomplished... in the last analysis, however fragmentarily, inadequately, and accidentally, it represents *humanity*” (Fischer 206).

16. Marx: “Say to the workers and the petty bourgeois: it is better to suffer in modern bourgeois society, which by its industry creates the material means for the foundation of a new society that will liberate you all, than to revert to a bygone form of sociality which, on the pretext of saving your classes, thrusts the entire nation back into mediaeval barbarism” (Elster 117).

17. Lifshitz calls this recognition “the greatest significance of Marxist theory” (165).

18. Bourgeois society creates enormous wealth and powerful means for cultural development only to demonstrate most vividly its inability to use these means—the limitations of cultural development in a society based upon the exploitation of man by man” (Lifshitz 165).

19. Marx does hold to this distinction in *Capital*, ch. 3.

20. In Marx’s view, the everyday life of “man” in the future society is not built around productive labor but rather such occupies a subordinate position, the center of which being those activities and human relationships that conform to the species “for itself.” According to Heller, the needs directed towards these (qualitative needs-as-ends) will become “man’s” primary needs—they will constitute his unique

individuality and will limit needs for material goods. It is in this way that personality that is “deep and rich” in needs will be constituted. (Heller 130)

21. “Its science,” says Ruskin, “either of mere mechanism or evolutionary sense, its physics/math mere aids to railroad and telegraph making... its splendid development of modern commerce and finance little better than complex thievery” (Geddes 2).

22. The convergence of Ruskin’s aesthetics and naturalism is expressed most concisely in “The Work of Iron,” where he distinguished between the use of iron in nature, which beautifies (as ore or rust), and the use of iron in industry and policy, where it is melted into a vast furnace or a ghostly engine—“a globe of black, lifeless, excoriated metal” (Ruskin “Iron”).

23. Morris: “The reckless destruction off the natural beauty of the earth, which compels the great mass of the population... to live amidst squalor and ugliness... and worse, competitive commerce destroys our mental wealth by turning all handicraftsmen into machines, compelling them to work which is unintelligent and inhuman... thus robbing men of the gain and victory which long ages of toil and thought have won from hard nature and necessity” (“Lesser” 58).

24. Lukács on this issue: “The objective (outside) world is present as the historical *hic et nunc*, because without it the reflection of man would be isolated and incomplete, but it is reflected from the point-of-view of man” (Királyfalvi 52).

25. Religion being the “unreal” or distorted form of self-awareness, according to Lukács.

26. “With the emergence of man as the *animale rationale*—capable of transforming nature in accordance with the faculties of the mind and the capacities of matter—the merely natural, as the sub-rational, assumes negative status—it becomes a realm to be comprehended and organized by Reason” (Marcuse *One-Dimensional* 236).

27. Bloch cites Engels in this regard: “One can only become a communist when one enriches one’s memory with the knowledge of all the riches that humankind has cultivated” (*Utopian* 58).

28. Paul Taylor, in his *Respect for Nature*, outlines a normative theory of environmental ethics that goes beyond traditional anthropocentrism and is based upon the value of life itself, not simply as an aspect of human happiness or despair. Taylor brings up Kant, invoking Kantian ethics as a basis for a biocentric worldview—extending Kant’s imperative treatment of humans as ends onto an imperative for treating life in general as ends.

---

## Bibliography

- Abrams, M. H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- . *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*. New York: Norton, 1973.
- Adorno, Theodor. “Commitment.” In *Aesthetics and Politics*, edited by Fredric Jameson. New York: Verso, 1970.
- Anderson, Perry. “Modernity and Revolution.” In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

- Anthony, P. D. *John Ruskin's Labour: A Study of Ruskin's Social Theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Aronowitz, Stanley. "The Production of Scientific Knowledge." In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Avison, H. R. C. *The Social and Political Theories of John Ruskin*. Mss. For M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1940.
- Barrett, Michele. "The Place of Aesthetics in Marxist Criticism." In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Beardsley, Monroe C. *Aesthetics from Classical to the Present: A Short History*. New York: MacMillan, 1966.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Reply to Adorno." In *Aesthetics and Politics*, edited by Fredric Jameson. New York: Verso, 1977.
- Berman, Marshall. *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982.
- Bloch, Ernst. "Discussing Expressionism." In *Aesthetics and Politics*, edited by Fredric Jameson. New York: Verso, 1977.
- . *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*. Translated by J. Zipes and F. Mecklenberg. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1988.
- Bloch, Maurice. *Marxism and Anthropology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Booth, W. James. "The Limits of Autonomy: Karl Marx's Kant Critique." Mss. copy received from author, n.d.
- Briggs, Asa. "Introduction." In *News from Nowhere: And Selected Writings and Designs*, William Morris. London: Penguin, 1962.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Hints Towards the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life*. Edited by S. B. Watson. London: John Churchill, 1848.
- Dubos, René. "The Perils of Adaptation." In *Arts of the Environment*, edited by Gyorgy Kepes. New York: George Brazillier, 1972.
- Eagleton, Terry. "The Critic as Clown." In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- . *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990.
- Elster, Jon. *Making Sense of Marx*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Engels, Friedrich. *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*. Translated by E. Aveling. London: Allen & Unwin, 1936.
- . *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1980.
- Feuerbach, Ludwig. *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*. Translated by M. Vogel. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1936.
- Fischer, Ernst. *Art Against Ideology*. Translated by A. Bostock. London: Allen Lane, 1969.
- Fromm, Erich. *Marx's Concept of Man*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1961.
- Geddes, Patrick. *John Ruskin: Economist*. Edinburgh: William Brown, 1884.
- Goldmann, Lucien. 1971. *Immanuel Kant*. Translated by R. Black. London: N.L.B., 1971.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Origin of the Work of Art." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by A. Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
- . "What Are Poets For?" In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by A. Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
- Heller, Agnes. *The Theory of Need in Marx*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976.
- Hobson, J. A. *John Ruskin: Social Reformer*. London: James Nisbet & Co, 1898.
- Jacques, Martin. "After Communism." *Marxism Today*, January 1990.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Afterword." In *Aesthetics and Politics*, edited by Fredric Jameson. New York: Verso, 1977.
- . "Cognitive Mapping." In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Johnson, Pauline. *Marxist Aesthetics: The Foundations Within Everyday Life for an Enlightened Consciousness*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.
- Kant, Immanuel. *On History*. Edited by L. W. Beck. New York: MacMillan, 1963.
- . *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by W. S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987.
- Kepes, Gyorgy. "Art and Ecological Consciousness." In *Arts of the Environment*, edited by Gyorgy Kepes. New York: George Brazillier, 1972.
- . "The Artist's Role in Environmental Self-Regulation." In *Arts of the Environment*, edited by Gyorgy Kepes. New York: George Brazillier, 1972.
- Kiralyfalvi, Béla. *The Aesthetics of Gyorgy Lukács*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975.
- Kolakowski, Leszek. *Main Currents of Marxism: Vol. 2 – The Golden Age*. Translated by P. S. Falla. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Korner, Stephen. *Kant*. London: Penguin Group, 1990.
- Lears, T. J. Jackson. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920*. New York: Pantheon, 1981.
- Lefebvre, Henri. "Toward a Left Cultural Politics." In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Lifshitz, Mikhail. *The Philosophy of Art of Karl Marx*. Translated by R. B. Winn. London: Pluto Press, 1973.
- Lovell, Terry. *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics, Pleasure*. London: British Film Institute, 1980.
- Lukács, Gyorgy. *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. Translated by John and Necke Mander. London: Merlin Press, 1962.
- . "Realism in the Balance." In *Aesthetics and Politics*, edited by Fredric Jameson. New York: Verso, 1977.
- Mannheim, Karl. *Ideology and Utopia*. Translated by L. Wirth and E. Shils. London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985.
- Maquet, Jacques. *Introduction to Aesthetic Anthropology*. Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1979.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *The Aesthetic Dimension*. Translated by H. Marcuse and E. Sherover. Boston: Beacon Press, 1978.
- . *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.

- Markus, Gyorgy. *Marxism and Anthropology: The Concept of 'Human Essence' in the Philosophy of Marx*. Translated by E. de Laczay and G. Markus. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1978.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital*. Translated by S. Moore and E. Aveling, edited by F. Engels. London: William Benton, 1952.
- . *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"*. Translated by A. Jolin and J. O'Malley, edited by J. O'Malley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- . *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Translated by M. Milligan. New York: International Publishers, 1964.
- . *Grundrisse*. Translated by D. McLellan. Bungay: MacMillan, 1971.
- , and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Translated by S. Moore. London: Penguin Books, 1967.
- , and Friedrich Engels. *The German Ideology*. Edited by R. Pascal. New York: International Publishers, 1960.
- , and Friedrich Engels. *Literature and Art: A Selection of Writings*. New York: International Publishers, 1947.
- Marx, Leo. "American Institution and the Ecological Idea." In *Arts of the Environment*, edited by Gyorgy Kepes. New York: George Brazillier, 1972.
- Morris, William. "The Aims of Art." In *News from Nowhere: And Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by A. Briggs. London: Penguin Books, 1962.
- . "Art and Socialism." In *Architecture, Industry and Wealth: Collected Papers*. London: Garland, 1978.
- . "Art and Society." In *News from Nowhere: And Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by A. Briggs. London: Penguin Books, 1962.
- . "Art, Wealth and Riches." In *Architecture, Industry and Wealth: Collected Papers*. London: Garland, 1978.
- . "Four Letters on Socialism." In *News from Nowhere: And Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by A. Briggs. London: Penguin Books, 1962.
- . "How I Became a Socialist." In *News from Nowhere: And Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by A. Briggs. London: Penguin Books, 1962.
- . "How We Live and How We Might Live." In *News from Nowhere: And Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by A. Briggs. London: Penguin Books, 1962.
- . "The Lesser Arts of Life." In *News from Nowhere: And Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by A. Briggs. London: Penguin Books, 1962.
- . "Letter of August 1874." In *News from Nowhere: And Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by A. Briggs. London: Penguin Books, 1962.
- . *News from Nowhere*. Edited by J. Redmond. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970.
- . "Useful Work vs. Useless Toil." In *News from Nowhere: And Selected Writings and Designs*, edited by A. Briggs. London: Penguin Books, 1962.
- Negt, Oskar. "What is a Revival of Marxism?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Nelson, Cary and Lawrence Grossberg. "The Territory of Marxism." In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Peacock, James L. *The Anthropological Lens: Harsh Light, Soft focus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Plamenatz, John. *Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- Plekhanov, Georgii. *Art and Social Life*. Translated by A. Fineberg. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957.
- Ruskin, John. *Sesames and Lilies / The Ethics of the Dust*. London: Oxford University Press, 1925.
- . "Fors Clavigera." In *Unto This Last, and Other Writings*. London: Penguin, 1985.
- . "The King of the Golden River." In *Unto This Last, and Other Writings*. London: Penguin, 1985.
- . "The Nature of Gothic." In *Unto This Last, and Other Writings*. London: Penguin, 1985.
- . "Unto This Last." In *Unto This Last, and Other Writings*. London: Penguin, 1985.
- . "The Work of Iron." In *Unto This Last, and Other Writings*. London: Penguin, 1985.
- Russell, Bertrand. 1979. *A History of Western Philosophy*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1979.
- Schacht, Richard. "Marxism, Normative Theory, and Alienation." In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.