

## **From Herbert Marcuse to the Earth Liberation Front: Considerations for Revolutionary Ecopedagogy**

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*By saying no to the devastating empire of greed, whose center lies in North America, we are saying yes to another possible America...In saying no to a peace without dignity, we are saying yes to the sacred right of rebellion against injustice.*  
– Eduardo Galeano

In many respects, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has opened to the politics of the “no.” The neoliberal and imperialist hegemony behind the United States market economy and military have sought to erode or supersede any and all limits to their behavior. Thus, they have said “no” to legal protocols of war by abandoning the Geneva Convention, “no” to civil liberties and rights by rejecting the World Court internationally and domestically instituting (and then expanding in the face of widespread protest) the PATRIOT act, and “no” to the regulation of capitalist greed by amending or repealing laws and other measures that were enacted to variously prevent corporate monopolism, profiteering, industrial development beyond reason, and “natural resource” extraction beyond sustainability. Indeed, as this paper will argue, the ruling class today promotes a ubiquitous socio-cultural attitude that can best be described as the capitalist system’s extinction of life generally in the form of a growing global ecological catastrophe.<sup>1</sup>

In response, the populist grassroots have mobilized as decidedly anti-globalization and anti-war, and their street slogans evince the negative character of the new social movements: “No blood for oil,” “Not in our name,” “No more years!” However, while the anti-globalization movement has incorporated Greens into its membership and been

associated with important ecological battles such as Cochabamba, Bolivia's "water war" (Olivera, 2004), its aim has been more anti-corporate than pro-ecology thus far. Likewise, though U.S.-led war has evoked ecological issues of crucial importance, such as the environmental effects of an oil economy and the widespread environmental toxicity produced through the American use of depleted uranium-enhanced weapons and vehicles, the anti-war movement has largely evaded ecological critique in favor of anti-imperialist, anti-racist, and pro-democracy discourses. The result has been an unfortunate failure to deeply integrate the environmental movement into contemporary progressive causes, and vice-versa, such that the socially educative potentials of what I have referred to as "a critical dialogue between social and eco-justice" (Kahn, 2003) have not materialized in the large.

Yet, such dialogues have begun to emerge in the radical margins of militant ecological politics, with affiliated organizations such as the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and Animal Liberation Front (ALF) attempting to produce a revolutionary society based on critiques of the multiple fronts of systemic oppression (Rosebraugh, 2004; Pickering 2002) as they move towards creating "interspecies alliance politics" (Best, 2003).<sup>2</sup> Having totaled over \$100 million in damage over the last decade by most accounts, these groups have been labeled by the government as "eco-terrorists" and are promoted as one of today's "most serious domestic terrorism threats" in the United States (Lewis, 2005). While the charge of "terrorism" here is patently wrong and politically motivated (Best, 2004), the government is correct that eco-militancy appears to be on the rise in the face of widespread environmental crisis and the utter failure of the mainstream environmental movement to offer successful opposition to the most rapacious aspects of capitalist

development. Indeed, a 2005 RAND report even posits the greater convergence of the anti-globalization movement with ecological militancy over the next five years and predicts the potential “emergence of a new radical left-wing fringe across American society that is jointly directed against ‘big business,’ ‘big money,’ corporate power, and uncaring government” (Chalk, et al., 2005, p. 51).

All of this makes me think of the great contemporary philosopher of radical negation, Herbert Marcuse – the so-called “father of the New Left” – who theorized the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s and saw in them the revolutionary potential to act as educational catalysts in the transformation of society. In fact, as the recent critical reader on Marcuse asserts (Abromeit & Cobb, 2004), as well as Douglas Kellner (1992), Timothy Luke (1994), and Henry Blanke (1996) in the last decade, ecological politics were an important aspect of Marcuse’s revolutionary critique and he should be considered a central theorist of the relationship between advanced capitalist society and the manifestation of ecological crisis, as well as of how to overcome this crisis through the creation of revolutionary struggle and the search for new life sensibilities that would overcome the nature/culture dichotomy that the Frankfurt School saw as a driving force behind Western civilization.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, Marcuse’s philosophy seems mostly unnoticed by current ecological militants, as the movement is dominated on the one hand by the sort of pervading anti-intellectualism that Marcuse sought to educate amongst the New Left (Kellner, 2005, p. 152) and by a linkage with questionable readings and uses of the philosophy of anarcho-primitivism on the other.<sup>4</sup> Though groups like the ELF and ALF have been key in educating the public about the dangers and horrors of crucial ecological issues of the

moment like genetic engineering, urban sprawl, deforestation, automobile pollution and the effects of the oil economy, wildlife preservation, factory farms, and biomedical animal tests (Rosebraugh, 2004; Best and Nocella, 2004), they arguably lack a coherent theory of education and social revolution that could bolster and legitimate their advocacy.

This paper, then, seeks to make (in however an introductory a fashion) a Marcusean intervention into the radical ecological politics of the present moment and thereby “educate the educators” (i.e., activists). As an explication of Marcuse’s thought makes clear, groups like the ELF and ALF are undoubtedly social educators in that they hold key knowledge about the world that few possess and they have accordingly organized a politics (and to some degree a culture) that seeks to build upon and inform that knowledge. However, their politics run the risk of devolving into both a sort of vanguard elitism and despondent nihilism without a stronger theoretical basis, and Marcuse not only offers this but perhaps more than any other social theorist of recent memory combines the radical critique of society with a “positive utopianism” that can transcend pervading pessimism (Gur-Ze’ev, 1998).

The essay itself seeks to embody a sort of Marcusean intervention that moves beyond a straight explication that could run the risk of divorcing Marcuse’s thought – itself always changing to meet the requirements of the present moment – from its socio-historical context. In this way, Marcuse is hailed as an inspiration and is in a way both a subject and object of the paper. Correspondingly, I will at times move beyond the conceptual language that Marcuse himself used in order to better intervene in present issues, all the while keeping the overall spirit of Marcuse’s thought as a perpetual guide. I begin by tracing the conjunction between the birth of radical ecological politics and the New Left,

then move to a reconsideration of whether a Marcusean politics and culture of social intolerance is legitimate under contemporary circumstances. Following, I outline a call for the reconstruction of a Marcusean “pro-life” politics, and then close with a discussion of how Marcuse provides an under-utilized theory of politics *as* education and a revolutionary conception of *humanitas*, through which Marcuse sought to work to overcome the historical struggle and dichotomy between culture and nature, as well as the human and non-human animal. The conclusion offered is that Marcuse is a founding figure of a revolutionary ecopedagogy that says “No!” to the violent destruction of the earth, as it works to manifest a critical posthumanism based upon new life sensibilities that amounts to a utopian “Yes!” that will come to displace and end domination and repression broadly conceived.

### **The Modern Birth of Radical Ecological Politics**

*I don't like to call it a disaster...I am amazed at the publicity for the loss of a few birds.*

– Fred L. Hartley, then President of Union Oil Company

In 1970, Earth Day largely marked the beginning of the modern environmental movement in the United States. Yet, a good case can be made that Earth Day itself, along with the sort of radical ecological politics now associated with groups like the Earth Liberation Front, erupted out of an event that took place the prior year (Corwin, 1989). While drilling for oil six miles off the coast of Santa Barbara on the afternoon of January 28, 1969, Union Oil Company’s equipment failures resulted in a natural gas blowout from the new deep-sea hole they were excavating. Though the gas leak was quickly capped, the resulting pressure build up produced five additional breaks along a nearby

underwater fault line (it is California after all), sending oil and gas billowing into the surrounding ocean. Ultimately, it took the better part of twelve days to stop the main leaks, and some 3 million gallons of crude oil were released into an 800 square mile slick that contaminated the coastal waters, ruined 35 miles of shoreline, and damaged island ecologies. Amounting to a sort of Union Carbide disaster for non-human animals, over 10,000 birds, seals, dolphins, and other species were soon covered with tar, poisoned, or otherwise killed by chemical detergents used to break up the slick. Many more animals that did not die outright were adversely affected through destruction of their habitat, as the region became seriously polluted and took on the smell of the worst regulated oil refinery plant.

Santa Barbara's ecological catastrophe became a national media spectacle beamed into every American's television on the nightly news and, drawing on the nascent environmental consciousness sparked during the 1950s by Aldo Leopold's *Sand Country Almanac* and the 1960s by Rachel Carson's bestseller *Silent Spring*, public outrage erupted at the sort of governmental decision making that allowed Big Oil to cavalierly despoil the country for profit. It was revealed that oil companies had corrupted the U.S. Geological Survey, whose job it was to oversee the granting of offshore land leases and that such leases were routinely granted with little investigation as to their salience, save for that conducted by petroleum corporations themselves (whose data was private and could not be made a matter of public record). Further, corruption also flowed from President Johnson's administration on down, as the Vietnam war was proving overly costly and so a policy of producing additional federal revenues from the selling off of natural resources (even at pennies on the dollar) was enacted in order to manufacture the

illusion of budgetary economic soundness on part of the country. As a result, the Santa Barbara channel had been auctioned off at the nice price of \$602 million, providing the green light for oil companies to do with it as they willed, as the former proposal to turn the area into a wildlife sanctuary was quietly dropped from the agenda (Pacific Research Institute, 1999, p. 1).

Clearly, no one in power had ever stopped to question what the political effects of a giant slick in the Santa Barbara channel would be. A place of natural beauty that had been fighting as a community since the 19<sup>th</sup> century against the battleship-sized drill platforms stationed obtrusively on the horizon line, Santa Barbara was already mobilized on the issue. In the days following the spill, GOO (standing for Get Oil Out!) was created and it served as an organization to lead activist campaigns for reducing driving time, staging gas station boycotts, and burning oil company credit cards. Further, Santa Barbara was a city of wealth and intelligence. A home to many people with insider connections to alter the usual workings of the status-quo, their pressure led to two major national policy changes: the enacting of a federal moratorium on leases for new offshore drilling (except in huge swathes of the Gulf of Mexico) and the passage in 1970 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Magna Carta of environmental legislation in the United States. Finally, Santa Barbara was also a university town that was a hotbed of 1960s youth activism and counterculture.

The New Left and Marcuse-friendly community of Isla Vista, in particular, was known for its radicalism in opposing police repression, staging war resistance, and defending leftist UCSB professors who were being denied tenure and removed from their posts (Gault-Williams, 1987). In 1970, Isla Vista militants responded with their own

reply to the corporate energy cum military State by breaking into and razing the local branch of the Bank of America to the ground. The bank made a perfect target for many reasons. On the one hand, the bank was *the* community representative of capitalist business and, whether in its opposition to Cesar Chavez's grape boycott or its support for American imperialism (and hence the Vietnam war) through its opening up of branches in Saigon and Bangkok, Bank of America was seen as corrosive to the community's social justice values. But there is a less well-known, though equally important, reason that the bank was targeted. Bank of America directors were also known to sit on the board of Union Oil and so were themselves seen as responsible for the terrible oil spill of 1969 (Cleaver, 1970, p. 4).

In this context, though the Earth Liberation Front's first American arson campaigns are dated only to 1997 (Rosebraugh, 2004), the torching of Isla Vista's Bank of America stands as one of the very first acts of uncompromising direct action to be found in United States' environmentalism and thereby shows that radical ecological approaches to politics co-originated with the mainstream movement.<sup>5</sup> However, unlike the mainstream, Isla Vista New Left radicals tethered their ecological sensibility to an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist stance that demanded a qualitative change in social relations. It was political moves such as this that served as an impetus for Marcuse to more straightforwardly announce the importance of ecological struggle as a central revolutionary theme in his end period.<sup>6</sup> Thus, groups like the ELF have a direct historical ally in Marcuse and so today's eco-radicals would benefit from a deeper investigation of Marcusean philosophy and its educational, political, and cultural implications.

### **Returning to the Question of Social Intolerance**



*Civil disobedience has many permutations.  
You can block the streets in front of the United Nations.  
You can lay down on the tracks, keep the nuke trains out of town,  
Or you can pour gas on the condo and you can burn it down.*  
– David Rovics, Song for the Earth Liberation Front

While there are dramatic differences between the political and cultural scene of the 1960s and the present, in many ways it seems like old times. Oil is again the center of political discussions as the Bush administration is hunkered down in a costly and apparently unwinnable Vietnam of its own making in Iraq. While Bush has promised to honor his father's extension of the federal moratorium on offshore drilling until 2012, Big Oil has been working vigorously to gain access to the continental shelf, amongst other potential exploration sites. As of the time of this writing, having failed at an attempt at complete repeal of the moratorium in the House, oil lobbyists are grafting an inclusion onto Bush's 2006 Energy Plan that will allow states the right to lease offshore land to help pad their budgets in a dwindling economy, thereby keeping incumbent politicians employed (Dinesh, 2005). Further, NEPA itself – the law created to make sure federal agencies properly account for potential environmental impacts prior to developing federal lands – has come under an all-out assault as the Bush administration seeks to free industries from what it deems to be a time-consuming and expensive legislative regulatory procedure (Reiterman, 2005). This as a 2005 “mystery spill,” unclaimed by any oil company (go figure), once again painted Santa Barbara beaches black and killed some 5,000 birds and other animals, making it one of the worst oil disasters of recent memory (Covarrubias & Weiss, 2005).

Yet, three and a half decades have also brought startling changes. Whereas 1969's spill both radicalized students into taking direct action against anti-ecological capitalism

and galvanized a national environmental movement in the mainstream, 2005's oil slick passed by relatively unnoticed. One might argue that in the present age of megaspectacle, nothing short of global warming as fictively pictured in the absurd movie *The Day After Tomorrow* has enough emotional punch to break through the anaesthetized sensibilities of the seemingly oblivious masses.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the relatively rare devastation wrought by a killer tsunami rouses widespread attention today, as the public passes by news about the toxic burdens brought to bear upon life by corporate and state malfeasance with little more than a bored shrug and, perhaps, a blog post.<sup>8</sup> For sure, since the Battle for Seattle the United States has seen a reinvention of public protest, and while people continue to link images of the Sixties with notions of social discontent, the recent events of February 15, 2003 and the 2004 Republican convention in New York City demonstrated dissent on a scale far beyond that ever mustered by the flower-power youth. Still, why then did the counterculture of the 1960s seemingly accomplish so much while the contemporary Left has appeared to suffer being overrun, consolidated, and ostensibly ignored despite its large numbers?

The answer requires a reconsideration of the past. Post-9/11 the United States has been engaged in a McCarthyesque crackdown on activists by brandishing them as terrorists, as corporations and the government intone treasured words like "freedom" and "democracy" (Best & Nocella, 2004). The State portrays itself as a security apparatus in charge of preserving the liberal ideal of tolerance, while it uses the extremism of groups like Al Qaeda to smear all of its enemies with charges of tyrannical fundamentalism. Thus, animal liberation activists like the SHAC7 are described as anti-democratic enemies of the State because of their willingness to directly challenge and attempt to shut

down the self-imposed rights of corporations to cavalierly murder animals in the name of science and business, while SHAC's opponents regularly promote themselves as good citizens who recognize the right to voice even the most unpopular opinions as long as those opinions do not step beyond the bounds of free speech into "intimidation" (Best and Kahn, 2004).

Herbert Marcuse wrote an important essay, "Repressive Tolerance" (1965), in which he examined this process by which the liberal State and its corporate members assert that they are fit models of democratic tolerance, as they insist that radical activists are subversive of the very ideals on which our society is based. In this essay, Marcuse notes that the claim that democratic tolerance requires activists to restrict their protests to legal street demonstrations and intra-governmental attempts to change policy is highly spurious. Tolerance, he says, arose as a political concept to protect the oppressed and minority viewpoints from being met with repressive violence from the ruling classes. However, when the call for tolerance is accordingly used by the ruling classes to protect themselves from interventions that seek to limit global violence and suppression, fear, and misery, it amounts to a perversion of tolerance that works to repress instead of liberate. Thusly, Marcuse thought such tolerance deserves to be met, without compromise, by acts of revolutionary intolerance because capitalistic societies such as the United States manage to distort the very meanings of peace and truth by claiming that tolerance must be extended throughout the society by the weak to the violence and falsity produced by the strong.

Many have criticized Marcuse for advocating violence against the system in order to quash the system's inherent violence (Kellner, 1984, p. 283), however, the critique of

repressive tolerance is key to understanding why revolutionary violence would remain – if not ethical – a non-contradictory and legitimate mode of political challenge towards effecting “qualitative change” (Marcuse, 1968, p. 177).<sup>9</sup> For a tolerance that defends life must be committed to opposing the overwhelming violence wrought by the military, corporations, and the State as the manifestation of their power, and it is, by definition, to fail to work for their overthrow when one actively or passively tolerates them. Therefore, Marcuse felt that revolutionary violence may in fact be necessary to move beyond political acts that either consciously or unconsciously side with, and thereby strengthen, the social agenda of the ruling classes. Further, he noted that the tremendous amount of concern (even amongst the Left) evoked as to whether revolutionary violence is a just tactic fails to correlate to how often it is actually applied and practiced. Meanwhile, systemic violence constantly goes on everywhere either unnoticed and unchecked or celebrated outright. This goes to show, Marcuse felt, how hard it is to even think beyond the parameters set by repressive tolerance in a society such as our own and this serves as yet another reason why such tolerance must, by any means necessary, be met with social intolerance.

Yet, Marcuse also recognized a wide-range of tactics, such as marching long-term through the institutions,<sup>10</sup> grabbing positions of power wherever possible, and – in terms of ecological politics – “working *within* the capitalist framework” in order to stop “the physical pollution practiced by the system...here and now” (Marcuse, 1972, p. 61) if they were undertaken with a revolutionary thrust towards a more ecologically-sound, peaceful, and free planet.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Marcuse’s key tactic has to be his concept of the “Great Refusal” that designated “a political practice of methodical disengagement from

and refusal of the Establishment, aiming at a radical transvaluation of values” (Marcuse, 1969, p. 6). By rejecting death principle culture and imagining an alternative reality principle based on reconciliatory life instincts capable of integrating humanity with its animal nature, Marcuse saw the Great Refusal from the first in ecological terms.<sup>12</sup> This idea gripped the counterculture of the 1960s, who set out to create a plethora of new cultural forms and institutions (such as the environmental movement) across the whole spectrum of society. Certainly, there are also bold new cultural forays in today’s radical ecological politics. Increasingly, individuals and countercultural collectives are attempting to reject the mega-war-machine of the mainstream, as they take up veganism, permaculture, and other alternative lifestyles such as the Straight-Edge movement that mixes urban punk stylings with a commitment to self-control, clean living, and political expressions like animal rights. Additionally, radical gathering events such as the Total Liberation tour travel the country, and hardly an urban setting can be found that is free of some form of regular culture jam. But as today’s popular culture seems dominated by media spectacle and all manner of mass-commodified technological gadgetry unlike ever before, eco-radicals must work harder still to distinguish the ways in which their culture represents a positive realization of anti-oppressive norms based on ideals of peace, beauty, and the subjectification of nature and is not just a nihilistic disapproval of a society that they may rightly deem unredeemable. That is, from a Marcusean perspective: a politics of burning down that lacks a correlative social, cultural, and educational reconstructive focus should not itself be tolerated.

### **Reimagining a Pro-Life Politics**

*...be just and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not powerless.  
Dead, did I say? There is no death, only a change of worlds.*  
– Chief Seattle

George W. Bush has been characterized as a pro-life leader for his desire to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, ban stem cell research, and stop funding for international aid organizations that offer counsel on abortions and provide contraceptives. Of course, in his role as outright war maker in Afghanistan and Iraq, indirect war maker through his global neoliberal structural adjustment policies, and ecological war maker as the worst environmental president in United States history (Brechin & Freeman, 2004, p. 10), Bush is anything but pro-life. Rather, as the sort of über-representative of the affluent society, its forces, and its values, Bush is a fitting figurehead for a politics of mass-extinction, global poverty, and ecological catastrophe. But, let us make no mistake about it, death-dealing politics such as Bush's extends far beyond the ideological confines of his neoliberal and neo-conservative administration and so, from a perspective of radical ecology, strategies such as the "Anybody But Bush" that liberals, left liberals, and other progressives attempted to use during the 2004 election cycle could not be more misguided.

Since the first Earth Day, we have witnessed a form of "endless growth" political economy that is literally over-producing and consuming the planet towards death. Wholly without precedent, the human population has nearly doubled during this time period, increasing by 2.5 billion people (Kovel, 2002, p. 3). Similarly, markets have continued to worship the gods of speed and quantity and refused to conserve. The use and extraction of non-renewable energy resources like oil, coal, and natural gas has followed and exceeded the trends set by the population curve despite many years of warnings about the consequences inherent in their over-use and extraction, and this has led to a

corresponding increase in the carbon emissions known to be responsible for global warming. Likewise, living beings and organic habitats are being culled and destroyed in the name of human consumption at staggering rates. Tree consumption for paper products has doubled over the last thirty years, resulting in about half of the planet's forests disappearing (Kovel, 2002, p. 4), while throughout the oceans, global fishing also has doubled resulting in a recent report finding that approximately 90% of the major fish species in the world's oceans have disappeared (Weiss, 2003). Mile-long nets used to trawl the ocean bottoms for commercial fishing enterprises are drowning and killing about 1000 whales, dolphins, and porpoises daily, some of the species near extinction from centuries of commercial hunting (Verrengia, 2003). Further, since the end of the 1960s, half of the planet's wetlands have either been filled or drained for development, and nearly half of the Earth's soils have been agriculturally degraded so as not to support life (Kovel, 2002). Finally, as giant corporate agribusinesses have consumed the family farm and as fast food has exploded from being a cultural novelty to a totalizing cultural staple across the world, vast, unimaginable slaughterhouses – brutal production-lines in which thousands of animals are murdered for meat harvesting every hour – have also become the business standard (Scully, 2002).

Marcuse himself referred to the sort of systemic disregard for life evinced by statistics such as these as “ecocide” (Marcuse, 2005, p. 173) the attempt to annihilate natural places by turning them into capitalist cultural spaces, a process that works hand in hand with the genocide and de-humanization of people as an expression of the market economy's perpetual expansion. More recently, others speak of ecocide as the destruction of the higher-order relations that govern ecosystems generally (Broszimmer, 2002), as

when economies of need take areas characterized by complexity and diversity like the Amazonian rainforest and reduce them to the de-forested and unstable monoculture of soybeans for cattle-feed. However, while it is no doubt possible to disable an ecosystem from sustaining much life, it is not clear that one can actually kill it. Instead, we are witnessing a process by which bioregions are being transformed pathologically from natural ecologies of scale that support life to capitalist ecologies that function beyond limit and threaten death. In this way, the current globalization of capitalism that institutes classist, racist, sexist, and speciesist oppression is a sort of biocidal agent.

It is biocidal, also, in a more philosophical sense. The term “*bios*” is a Greek word that has come to designate natural life as studied by the science of “biology.” Originally, though, *bios* meant a sort of characterized life (Kerenyi, 1976, p. xxxii) – as in a “biography” – that is demonstrated by the active subjectivity of sentient beings. In this manner, organizations like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) have as their ultimate goal the social recognition of animals’ *bios* (Guillermo, 2005) and, accordingly, want them to be afforded the status of being considered subjects of a life that are therefore deserving of rights. When compared with the larger socio-political context against which PETA struggles, however, the McDonaldsization of the planet is obviously moving in the opposite direction. Most beings today, including the great Earth and the sustaining cosmos beyond, are instead increasingly reduced to one-dimensional objects for exploitation, and should they provide too much resistance to the schemes of profit and power in the process, they are tagged for systematic removal.

In stark contrast to the objectification of life that typifies mainstream culture in the United States, as well as to the sense of life as “characterized” that is represented by



the idea of *bios*, the Greeks (in a manner similar to many indigenous cultures) held that life was fundamentally *zoë* – a multidimensional and multiplicitous realm of indestructible being (Kerenyi, 1976). Thus, in Greek culture primeval and natural places were consecrated to the pagan deity Pan (whose name means “all”), and these were held to be sacred groves where *zoë* was especially concentrated in its power. The final point, then, is that ruling class politics are also zoöcidal, though not in the sense that it kills *zoë* (which cannot be killed by definition). Rather, in instituting a transnational network of murderous profanity over the sacred, in paving paradise in order to put up a parking lot, capitalist life is zoöcidal in that it seeks to colonize any and all spaces in which cultures based on understandings and reverence for *zoë* can thrive.

The call, therefore, to future radicals is clear. They must, if they are not doing so already, integrate the ecological critique into their politics and culture and so become ecological radicals. Further, ecological radicals themselves must increasingly move to develop cultural relationships to nature that exhibit the sort of positive liberatory values that have emerged out of a long history of social struggle and which Marcuse felt could be accessed through the subordination of “destructive energy to erotic energy” (Marcuse, 1992, p. 36) in the present age. Of course, eco-radicals will also have to learn, grow, and ultimately teach, the values and practices that unfold a new sensibility towards life that emerges from the attempt to liberate and reconcile with the Earth proper. In this respect, perhaps, the reimagination of a pro-life politics in which human and non-human beings are understood as both *bios* and *zoë* represents for us the great anti-capitalist challenge of the current historical moment. In the face of expanding zoöcide, to think that this could occur without widespread rebellion and, ultimately, revolution, seems extremely

doubtful. As Marcuse (1966) remarked: “In defense of life: the phrase has explosive meaning in the affluent society” (p. 20). Today, radical ecological politics such as practiced by the ELF seem determined to prove Marcuse right.

### **Ecopedagogy as Political Education and Educational Politics**

*...the real change which would free men and things, remains the task of political action.*

– Herbert Marcuse

To my mind, Marcuse is one of the pre-eminent philosophers of education in modern times, not only because he lived as well as propounded a radical theory of education as a centerpiece of his social critique and political plan of action, but because his educational theory was essentially linked to the ecological problem of human and non-human relations due to his understanding that education is a cultural activity, and that in Western history such culture has systematically defined itself against nature in both a hierarchically dominating and repressive manner (Kahn, *forthcoming*). As a result, Marcuse conceived education in both an intra- and extra-institutional scope, and ultimately saw it as incorporating all of social life and the total existential development of humanity towards achievement of new life sensibilities capable of “dispelling the false and mutilated consciousness of the people so that they themselves experience their condition, and its abolition, as vital need, and apprehend the ways and means of their liberation (Marcuse, 1972, p. 28). For Marcuse, then, education and revolution were largely synonymous forces which struggled against their reified forms as one-dimensionalizing political apparatuses, corrupting professions, and dehumanizing cultural forms.

Recently, in a number of books and essays Peter McLaren has become the leading

voice in the call for and development of a “revolutionary pedagogy” that can heretically challenge market-logic and reformist ideology in favor of wholesale social transformation. In fact, in an essay written with Donna Houston (McLaren & Houston, 2005), McLaren has even charted a sort of “eco-socialist pedagogy” that stands in defense of convicted ELF arsonists such as Jeffrey Luers, as it militates against what he terms the “Hummer” educational machinations of the mainstream and capitalist status-quo. However, where Marcusean erotic archetypes could deeply inform and bolster such a pedagogy, McLaren has instead pointed to the symbolic (and other) influence of Che Guevara and Paulo Freire (2000). Indeed, while Freire himself finally recognized the importance of ecological struggle at the end of his life, writing that “It must be present in any educational practice of a radical, critical, and liberating nature” (Freire, 2004, p. 47), it can be argued that the U.S. educational left’s reliance upon Freire over the last 30 years significantly hampered pedagogical developments vis-à-vis nature and non-human animals (Kahn, 2003; Bowers & Appfel-Marglin, 2005) that Marcuse himself had reached as early as the 1950s and 1960s.

Interestingly, both Freire and Marcuse sought through their pedagogy and politics to promote the goal of humanization, and as Henry Giroux notes in his Introduction to Freire’s *The Politics of Education*, Freire himself developed a partisan view of education and praxis that “in its origins and intentions was for ‘choosing life’” (Giroux, 1985, pp. xxiv-xxv). Yet, Marcuse differs from Freire in a key respect in that he, like Antonio Gramsci, began with the primacy of the political sphere through which he derived the necessity of education – politics *as* education – whereas Freire’s work starts with education and works towards the goal of political action, thereby producing a politics *of*

education or theory of education as politics (Cohen, 1998). Thus, while Freire's work is more easily tailored to education professionals and teachers, as the critical pedagogy movement that has centered schools as a primary site of struggle and which tethers notions of literacy to political literacy demonstrates, Marcuse offers a theory of education as a political methodology that is "more than discussion, more than teaching and learning and writing" (Marcuse, 2005, p. 85). He feels that unless and until education "goes beyond the classroom, until and unless it goes beyond the college, the school, the university, it will remain powerless. Education today must involve the mind *and* the body, reason *and* imagination, intellectual *and* the instinctual needs, because our entire existence has become the subject/object of politics, of social engineering" (Marcuse, 2005, p. 85).

Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (2002) has pointed out how Marcuse promoted a form of German *Bildung*, or the cultural learning and practices that intend the shaping and formation of more fully realized human beings (Kellner, 2003), as counter-education. Marcuse himself was more prone to speak of the goal of "humanity" (Marcuse, 2001, p. 140), the classical ideal of *humanitas* (Marcuse, 2001, p. 77, 132) or even the universal sense of human dignity connoted by *Menschlichkeit* (Marcuse, 1997, p. 16), but always in a manner akin to *Bildung*, and so in Marcuse all speak to an ideal of human potential and freedom that can emerge only through political action as education. Historically, educational projects of *humanitas* and *Bildung*, while serving progressive purposes also promoted self-contradictions of class privilege and other forms of oppression,<sup>13</sup> yet Marcuse hardly utilized these conceptions in an idealistic manner and instead sought to use them as critical challenges to the educational and status quo of the current day. Marcuse also

enlisted them as utopian thrusts to explore and expand the Marxist conception of “human needs” – the full development of which is necessary for the appropriation of nature that would afford the realization of humanity as a “species being” – as being something more than an epiphenomenon of coming socialist institutions by rooting them in the universally instinctual (i.e., natural) needs of individuals (Marcuse, 1972, p. 62; Marcuse, 2001, p. 136). In this, species being itself ultimately opens up to other species in a common heritage and Marcuse’s revolutionary humanism came to take the form of a sort of critical posthumanism that advanced the hope for an end to anthropocentric oppression and exploitation of the non-human (Marcuse, 1972, p. 68-69).

Against those like Blanke (1996, p.190) who find evidence of a mystical consciousness in Marcuse’s attempt to reconcile human culture with nature by liberating the latter as a Subject in its own right, the correlative of the new sensibilities afforded by a qualitative change in society, Marcuse’s thinking is nothing of the sort. As with Adorno and Horkheimer (1979), Marcuse recognized the “Domination of man through the domination of nature” (Marcuse, 1972, p. 62) – that nature was the primordial object whose subjection distinguished and founded human control – and thus, in the end, the “Realization of nature through the realization of man as ‘species being’” (Marcuse, 2001, p. 132) must logically represent the historical end goal of the movement towards liberation. His point is, first, that education must seek to forge a new nature, which must be envisioned and aesthetically materialized because such would be the dialectical condition for the emergence of socialism and a new culture of human relations. Secondly, beyond what he sees as base Marxist accounts that leave even this nature as but a sphere of productive force for non-class-based social relations, Marcuse posits an ecology of

freedom that finds that as people start to live freely for their own sake and generate instinctual autonomy, this must be mirrored externally by the increasing relation to all that surrounds them in the spirit and form of freedom. Dialectically speaking, the liberation of the external environment and the production of peace and freedom also entail the potential realization of the subjective conditions that could be the basis of a “new science” capable of manifesting a free society.

If Marcuse were alive today, he would not hail New Age transcendentalism as a solution to the gross globalization of capital, the external human plight of over 3 billion and the internal plight of billions more still. He would be deeply alarmed by the unprecedented mass extinction of species, the waylaying of planetary ecosystems, and the mass production of zoöcide at levels that can soon no longer even profit the ruling classes, as they threaten them too. If Marcuse were alive today, one has to believe that he would be a tireless promoter and organizer of a sort of ecopedagogy (Kahn, 2004) that is not a simple addendum to standard curricula, but rather an attempt to raze education under capitalism in favor a pedagogy of the repressed that seeks to wage revolutionary political struggle towards a future culture based on radical notions of sustainability and a humanized nature that can represent values of tolerance, beauty, subjectivity, and freedom on a cosmic scale. With the scale of suffering so nearly unimaginable and the politics of counterrevolution so fully in effect at the present, Marcuse would no doubt highlight the marginal political and cultural actors, like the Earth Liberation Front, who work to educate society as to the gravity of the consequences of their political economy and provide the hope of alternative relationships in the world. Without a doubt, in turning earth warriors into leading pedagogues (who though, as this essay has declared,

nevertheless stand in need of their own education as educators), the Marcusean spirit has moved far a field from most contemporary educational discourse, even in ecological and environmental education. However, this may well be, not because of the naivety or insufficiency of the educational projects and political goals mounted by the earth or animal liberation movements, but rather because present versions of academic ecoliteracy are themselves seriously, and perhaps gravely, depoliticized.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> According to the recent United Nations Environment Programme GEO-3 report, a vision of global capitalist development is consonant only with earthly extinction. It claimed that either great changes will be made in our societies and cultural lifestyles now or an irrevocable ecological crisis will descend upon the planet by 2032 (UNEP, 2002, pp. 13-15). For a more detailed engagement of ecological crisis, see (Kahn, 2004; Broszmitter, 2002; Kovel, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> The Earth Liberation Front “is an international underground organization that uses direct action in the form of economic sabotage to stop the exploitation and destruction of the natural environment” (Pickering, 2002, p. 58). Its guidelines are:

- 1) To cause as much economic damage as possible to a given entity that is profiting off the destruction of the natural environment and life for selfish greed and profit.
- 2) To educate the public on the atrocities committed against the environment and life.
- 3) To take all necessary precautions against harming life.

<sup>3</sup> Jurgen Habermas also briefly notes Marcuse’s importance as an ecological theorist when he writes in his “Afterword” to the *Collected Papers, Volume Two*, “Long before the Club of Rome, Marcuse fought against ‘the hideous concept of progressive productivity according to which nature is there gratis in order to be exploited’” (Marcuse, 2001, p. 236).

<sup>4</sup> On anarcho-primitivism see Perlman, 1983; Zerzan, 2002; and journals like *Green Anarchy* and *Fifth Estate*.

<sup>5</sup> Others (Chalk, et al., 2005, p. 47; Jarboe, 2002) date the ELF as originating earlier in the 1990s, as an outcropping of Earth First!, the environmental group that counseled “monkeywrenching” as “resistance to the destruction of natural diversity and wilderness” (Foreman, 2002, p. 9). However, monkeywrenching was specifically defined as “not revolutionary,” in that such acts “do not aim to overthrow any social, political, or economic system” (p. 10). Likewise, while the FBI connects the ELF to the birth of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society in 1977, under the rubric of “special interest extremism” (Jarboe, 2002), Sea Shepherd’s mission to conserve and protect the oceans,

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and its commitment to international law and the UN World Charter for Nature, disclose it as a non-revolutionary group different in kind than the ELF.

<sup>6</sup> As proof of Marcuse's support of militant, over the mainstream, environmentalism, one should note the beginning to Marcuse's 1972 talk "Ecology and Revolution" (Marcuse, 2005) – a piece essentially dating, as we have seen, to the beginning of the U.S. environmental movement. In that talk, Marcuse begins by declaring, "Coming from the United States, I am a little uneasy discussing the ecological movement, which has already by and large been co-opted [there]" (p. 173). In the context of the title referencing "revolution," Marcuse can only be deploring that American environmentalism was proving in its infancy to be a largely white and bourgeois politics that had as its goal governmental regulations that would afford some measure of humane reform while leaving the system basically unchallenged. Of course, Marcuse was not against meliorating policies that arose out of a revolutionary struggle, but his later point was that these should be considered one means towards a larger end, and not an end in themselves.

<sup>7</sup> Marcuse called for a revolutionary aesthetic sensibility because he felt that capitalist culture served to anesthetize people to the history of real needs (Reitz, 2000). Building upon Reitz, we might suggest that media spectacles are required to generate feeling and enthusiasm in advanced capitalist nations like the United States much in the same way that substance abusers require larger and larger doses of pharmaceuticals in order to unlock the "high" that they crave. In other words, the addict's senses are reduced to low-levels of affectation as part of a process of ever diminishing returns.

<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that blogging cannot be an effective and interesting form of technopolitics, even as regards ecological concerns (see Kahn & Kellner, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> The concept of "qualitative change" is crucial in this respect, as Marcuse recognized that many political revolutions have sustained the "continuum of repression" and simply "replaced one system of domination by another" (Marcuse, 1968, p. 177). The revolution for qualitative change, however, has as its means and end the elimination of systemic violence in its myriad forms and the augmentation of beauty and happiness in the name of liberty.

<sup>10</sup> The "long march through the institutions" originated with the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, but Marcuse integrated this concept/strategy by way of the radical Rudi Dutschke (who went on to help establish the Green party in Germany). For Marcuse, this did not mean engaging in parliamentary democratic governmental processes, but rather in staging organized demonstrations for clearly identified issues, creating radical caucuses and counter-institutions, and – most importantly of all – in moving into the institutions of society, becoming educated in the work to be done, and educating others so that everyone will be prepared to manage these positions in a non-oppressive manner should the revolutionary moment arise on the world's stage.

<sup>11</sup> Readers of Marcuse will no doubt know that in the 1970s he strategically modified his revolutionary position from the mid-1960s in order to deal with the apparent fracturing



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and staggering repression of radical groups that had begun to occur. Previously, he had uncompromisingly attacked repressive tolerance and called for examinations of how third and first world revolts might ignite a revolutionary subject(s) capable of overthrowing the capitalist status-quo, but Marcuse's end period publications and talks often saw him advising that liberal society would have to be utilized from within (Marcuse, 1972) through a sort of double-agency of insider/outsider status. In a lecture of this period entitled "The Radical Movement," for instance, he notes that "we are in a very bad situation" that means "there is a lesser evil" in which "even certain compromises with liberals are on the agenda" (The audio of this lecture is available online at: <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/media/marcuse2.ram>). Yet, Marcuse never abandoned his belief that violence against capitalist aggression was legitimate under the right conditions, and while he did not fetishize revolutionary violence, he did believe that regrettably the current counter-revolutionary order of things appeared to ultimately demand it.

<sup>12</sup> Kellner (1984, p. 174) points out that, in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse's "archetypal images of liberation" vis-à-vis the new reality principle are the figures of Orpheus and Narcissus and that they serve as a contradistinction to the Marxian figure of Prometheus. Notably, Orpheus was a sort of shamanic figure who is often pictured as singing in nature, surrounded by pacified animals, and Narcissus portrays the dialectic of humanity gazing into nature and seeing the beautiful reflection of itself. Marcuse's Great Refusal, then, must be thought as intending a post-anthropocentric work in which nature and the non-human are radically humanized, meaning that they are revealed as subjects in their own right. Thus, Marcuse writes, "The Orphic-Narcissistic images are those of the Great Refusal: refusal to accept separation from the libidinous object (or subject)" (Marcuse, 1966, p. 170) and that through this dialectical re-engagement with nature, "flowers and springs and animals appear as what they are – beautiful, not only for those who regard them, but for themselves" (Marcuse, 1966, p. 166).

<sup>13</sup> For a genealogy of *humanitas*, in this respect, see Kahn (*forthcoming*).

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