The Critique of Alienated Labor: Marx, Marcuse and Countermodels of the 1960s

Daniel Koechlin

Dans Revue française d'études américaines 2015/4 N° spécial 145 , pages 183 à 195
Éditions Belin

ISSN 0397-7870
ISBN 9782701194950
DOI 10.3917/e.rfea.145.0183
Date de mise en ligne : 06/09/2016

Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse
https://shs.cairn.info/journal-revue-francaise-d-etudes-americaines-2015-4-page-183?lang=en

CAIRN.INFO

Découvrir le sommaire de ce numéro, suivre la revue par email, s'abonner...
Scannez ce QR Code pour accéder à la page de ce numéro sur Cairn.info.

Distribution électronique Cairn.info pour Belin.
Vous avez l'autorisation de reproduire cet article dans les limites des conditions d'utilisation de Cairn.info ou, le cas échéant, des conditions générales de la licence souscrite par votre établissement. Détails et conditions sur cairn.info/copyright.
Sauf dispositions légales contraires, les usages numériques à des fins pédagogiques des présentes ressources sont soumises à l'autorisation de l'Éditeur ou, le cas échéant, de l'organisme de gestion collective habilité à cet effet. Il en est ainsi notamment en France avec le CFC qui est l'organisme agréé en la matière.

Belin | Téléchargé le 10/06/2026 sur https://shs.cairn.info (IP: 216.73.216.179)

The Critique of Alienated Labor: Marx, Marcuse and Countermodels of the 1960s

Daniel Koechlin

In the 1960s, at the height of the Cold War, the American "New Left" advocated a re-evaluation of the productivist model of advanced industrial society. This nebulous movement, extensively overlapping with the anti-war and counterculture movements (McMillan 6), included such figures as sociologist C. Wright Mills—who coined the expression "New Left" and was instrumental in early SDS (Aronowitz 221)—, philosophers Herbert Marcuse and Eric Fromm, SDS members like Tom Hayden, and members of the "theatrical left," i.e. the Diggers and the Yippies. Despite their diverse orientations, they agreed on the need for new modalities of revolutionary change and radically humanist countermodels, since the assumptions of Conservatives, Liberals, Social Democrats and Marxist-Leninists were based on a model subject to economic growth and the scientific management of the workforce. This model was denounced under various names, but one historically precise appellation, which was not used at the time, would be the "Fordist" model (Frayssé 5-9). The "Old Left," who saw their role as reclaiming the surplus value usurped by capitalists, were accused by the New Left of uncritically preserving the underlying logic of bourgeois political economy. This break with productivist, Taylorist and managerial values was often central in defining the New Left (Gitlin 251), although they retained many points of convergence with their predecessors (McMillan 140).

In a nutshell, the Old Left were "labor-oriented—what C. Wright Mills called the "labor mystique"—glorifying the figure of the worker and trusting in union activity and party politics. On the other hand, the New Left gradually shifted to a total critique of alienated labor, which necessarily implied a "ruthless criticism of all that exists" (Marx 3:44).

The word *alienation* was bandied about in the 1960s, although its philosophical ramifications were often only vaguely understood. Yet its totalizing potential, encapsulating the whole of modern experience, made

Belin | Téléchargé le 10/06/2026 sur https://shs.cairn.info (IP: 216.73.216.179)

it an apt description of sanitized, mainstream America (Gitlin 11-80). The wholesale rejection of the prevailing model resulted both from tectonic shifts in the American economy and the "crisis of Marxism" in the 1950s. These interrelated factors led to renewed interest in, and reinterpretation of, Marx's concept of alienation in light of psychoanalytic and post-industrial theory.

"Classical" works on the radical 1960s published in the 1980s, especially Gitlin and Miller, attributed the rise of the New Left to a desire on the part of antiwar and civil rights student activists to escape from Old Left politics and Cold War rhetoric; and the later "fragmentation" of this current to (amongst other things) the influence of the Counterculture. More recent scholarship has focused on the similarities between early SDS and the "Old Left," i.e. liberals (Rossinow; Mattson) and the labor movement (Levy).

Adopting another tack, various studies (in McMillan and in Gosse) have argued for the need to "reconsider two analytical strategies: the notion that the New Left became countercultural rather than the reverse, and the too-easy detachment of a politically-committed and publicly-oriented New Left from an apolitical and 'alternative' (rather than oppositional) counterculture. The cliché is often accurate, but has been overplayed" (McBride in McMillan 130). Too often, narratives of the 1960s fail to make explicit the overall logic of the *Great Refusal* and its grounding in the critique of alienated labor. One notable work is Stephens's examination of anti-authoritarianism as the underlying theme running through the radical 1960s and 1970s (1998). Indeed, this paper, which shares many of her premises, seeks to indicate potential threads of investigation for a more thorough intellectual genealogy of the New Left and the Counterculture, pointing to a unifying *Weltanschauung* derived from critical Marxism. Its scope is limited to examining broad patterns and similarities rather than mutually exclusive differences between individuals and groups, focusing more (because of the greater wealth of data) on leaders and thinkers than on grassroots actions.

Alienation from Marx to the Radical 1960s: Lines of Descent

The "crisis" of orthodox Marxism, highlighted by Khrushchev's speech at the 20th Congress of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), coincided with a fresh interest in the West in the Utopian component of Marx's assessment of the condition of man in capitalist society.

Since the 1920s, Critical and Hegelian Marxists, notably Lukács and Korsch, had attacked so-called "scientific" Marxism (Kolakowski 253-324). Their case was bolstered with the rediscovery in the early 1930s of unpublished early writings by Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, and the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

Belin | Téléchargé le 10/06/2026 sur https://shs.cairn.info (IP: 216.73.216.179)

The 1950s English translation of Marx's "*Manuskripte* […] became a second Bible to some," (Leopold 29). The young Marx's central concept of alienation (*Entfremdung*)—which had remained peripheral in orthodox Marxism (Kołakowski 91-125)—was a complete overhaul of concepts bearing similar names in Hegel and Feuerbach.

> *What, then, constitutes the alienation of labor? First, in the fact that labor is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, [...] does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. [...] His labor [...] is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague.*
>
> (Marx 3:345)

Marx identified four consequences of being obliged to sell one's labor as a commodity (Ollman 137; Sayers):

1) The individual becomes separated from the products of his labor, receiving only a portion of its value.

2) Estranged from his own activity, he is a "mere tool;" someone else decides whether or not he shall be employed, the work he will perform, and the manner of performing it.

3) He is isolated from his fellow men, whom he regards as other dehumanized tools also performing "abstract" functions ("wearing masks").

4) He is cut off from his humanity, his "species-being" (*Gattungswesen*), unable to realize the potential for creativity and community that make us truly human.

True communism, as understood by Humanist Marxists (including the New Left), implied healing these breaches, as was reflected in the phrasing of the earliest SDS manifestos, such as the 1962 *Port Huron Statement*:

> *Loneliness, estrangement, isolation describe the vast distance between man and man today. These dominant tendencies cannot be overcome by better personnel management, nor by improved gadgets, but only when a love of man overcomes the idolatrous worship of things by man.*

Post-war US students were also exposed to the concept of alienation in Existentialist philosophy. While Camus and Sartre both largely followed Heidegger, Sartre incorporated Marxian elements (Flynn 188-190; Targ and Judson; Fulton). The question of how Marxist and Existentialist thinking are related, and what their compatibility was (Kellner 43-50; Jaeggi 11-22), remains a matter for debate.

The Counterculture also showed marked interest in the pranks, absurdist films, "*dérive*" practices and defiant manifestos of the "Situationist International" founded in 1957 by French thinker Guy Debord under the impact of Left-Wing

Belin | Téléchargé le 10/06/2026 sur https://shs.cairn.info (IP: 216.73.216.179)

communism, Surrealism and existentialism (Plant; Jappe). Situationists used Hegelian dialectics and the young Marx's critique of alienation to confront the "society of the spectacle," so that "all human activities can take the form of the fulfillment of desires and passions [which] implies the conversion of all productive activity into play" (Jappe 130). Artistic avant-gardes were the real revolutionaries, as they directly confronted alienation through "the setting up of a temporary field of activity favorable to [old] desires [and] the emergence of new ones" (Debord quoted in Jappe).

The most decisive influence on the US New Left and Counterculture came from Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse. In 1932, Marcuse had been the first author to examine the implications of the *Manuscripts of 1844*. A former student of Heidegger and member of the Frankfurt School, along with Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, Korsch, Fromm, and others, he developed a "critical theory" of modern capitalism, based on Marxism but incorporating insights from other intellectual currents (Wiggershaus). He was a charismatic teacher at Brandeis, and many of his students, including Abbie Hoffman and Angela Davis, rose to public prominence. "While all his contemporaries were scolding the young for their excesses in politics, sex and drugs," Hoffman reminisces, "Marcuse alone cheered us on" (1980 85). Indeed, his participation in US and European protest was multifaceted, and helped him clarify his own conceptions as events unfolded. "Although it is unlikely that many people who responded to his ideas and politics actually studied his writings seriously, there is no doubt that his thought was absorbed into the political culture of the 1960s and had a worldwide impact" (Kellner 3).

Marcuse's main contribution—the fusing of psychoanalysis and social critique—"linked sexuality to politics in a way that enabled students and intellectuals to rethink the Cold War containment of sexuality" (Gerhard 83). Examining the relation between psychoanalytical repression and alienated labor, he added new content to the Marxian concept of alienation. "Freudo-Marxism," as expounded by Fromm and Marcuse, rehabilitated the libido as essential in a future "non-repressive civilization" (Marcuse EC 275). and held that "freedom is the fundamental condition for any growth" (Fromm 290). Freud, they contended, had failed to see that "human nature is essentially historically conditioned," and so erroneously considered the pleasure principle as eternally incompatible with living in community.

The influence of the critique of alienation developed by Marcuse, Fromm, Sartre, Debord, Adorno, and others was originally felt in the Bohemian avant-garde "low-rent enclaves […] just off major campuses," where "pseudobeat talk, avantgarde talk, political talk, sex talk, and art talk were buzzing and mingling" (Gitlin 53). From the mid-1960s on, several groups emerged, using "guerilla theatre" to confront commodification and authoritarianism. The Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers in New York, and especially the Californian

Belin | Téléchargé le 10/06/2026 sur https://shs.cairn.info (IP: 216.73.216.179)

Diggers, an offshoot of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, helped shape the Counterculture (Stephens 25-47). Their most theoretically-minded members, such as Peter Berg and libertarian Marxist Ron Davis, saw guerilla theatre as a means of collectively "'dropping out' of bourgeois society and devising in its stead an alternative 'life-style that replaces most, if not all, middle-class capitalistic assumptions'" (Davis quoted in Doyle 76).

With the first "Human Be-In" on January 14, 1967, the Counterculture that had been maturing in San Francisco grabbed the attention of television audiences nationwide and heralded the Summer of Love (Gitlin 210-212). In 1968, Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, inspired by the Diggers, founded the Yippies (a derisive acronym of Youth International Party) to bridge the gap between the academic New Left and the Hippie movement (Hoffman 1980 99).

While Trotskyite (and later, Maoist) groups proudly called themselves "Marxist-Leninist," Marx, young or old, was not put forward as the emblematic figure of the Diggers or Yippies. Yet, thanks to them, the characteristic idiom of the 1960s countermodels was indeed that of the radical critique of alienation, itself ultimately derived from the categories of the *Manuscripts of 1844.*

Liberation from the Affluent Society

Americans in the 1960s had never before enjoyed such a high standard of living, and the Great Society promised to eliminate residual poverty through good wages and social welfare. Most of the liberals that had turned to socialism in the 1930s now concluded that "well-managed capitalism" worked (Gitlin 58-62). But there were also signs that the Fordist model of mass production and mass consumption, in its economic, social, and cultural dimensions, was maturing into something new, with radical countermodels a by-product of this transition process, as contradictions within the "system" became apparent. The apogee of Fordism resulted in an increasing emphasis on high-level control over the production process, in the "increasing 'intellectualization' of material production—replacement of physical by mental energy" (Marcuse CTS 145). 1956 was the first year when white-collar jobs outnumbered blue-collar jobs. Although low-level bureaucratic control remained essential, many aspects of data-management were rapidly being taken over by card-punching computers and teletexts. The Taylorist management of the workforce was not suited to the new complex tasks that required a greater degree of initiative and knowledge.

Modern economic requirements meant that the student population doubled between 1960 and 1969, becoming "the first society in human history" to have "three times more students than farmers" (Gitlin 41). Students arriving in college were confronted with a university system that was organized along Fordist lines (Frayssé 23) and, in this structure, they experienced a heightened feeling of alienation.

Belin | Téléchargé le 10/06/2026 sur https://shs.cairn.info (IP: 216.73.216.179)

But what struck Americans the most during those years were the changes brought about by automation. Famous liberal economist John Kenneth Galbraith argued that, thanks to automation, the "affluent society" would "eliminate toil as a required economic institution" (Galbraith 263), but many feared mass unemployment as a result. The mass media and many public intellectuals predicted the imminence of a drastic reduction in the work week. In 1968, 1,300 economists wrote a letter to Congress, urging the passing of a bill to guarantee an income to everyone, whether they worked or not (Aronowitz and Cutler 86). SDS expounded the ideas of the "new working class" and "post-scarcity" in *America in the New Era* (1963). With declining traditions of labor organizing, and the growth in white collar jobs, automation, directed exclusively in the service of corporations and government, would result in a powerless, amorphous and disorganized workforce. If, however, the "new insurgency," bringing together Blacks, students, radicalized unions and middle-class liberals, managed to force their political and cultural agenda through, automation "would lead to the possibility of a world of plenty [that] could give leisure to all, and change the meaning of 'work.' [...] It frees workers [and] could leave time to participate in decision-making and self-development." Thus, the "most revolutionary potential" of modern technology was to make direct democracy and bottom-up economic planning real possibilities (SDS 1963). Similarly, SDS's *Port Authority Statement* (1967) declared that, given the substantial level of wealth that "has been or could be realized" in the US, "automation and rationalizing techniques […] makes possible the social complexion of post-scarcity"— i.e. "the fulfillment of all social needs and of non-compulsory labor."

On this point, the optimism of a large section of the New Left was due to the influence of Marcuse, for whom "total automation would be the optimum" (157). In *Eros and Civilization* (1955) he had argued,

> *The liberation from the reality which is here envisaged is not transcendental, "inner," or merely intellectual freedom [...] but freedom in the reality. The reality that "loses its seriousness" is the inhumane reality of want and need, and it loses its seriousness when wants and needs can be satisfied without alienated labor. Then, man is free to "play" with his faculties and potentialities and with those of nature, and only by 'playing' with them is he free.*
>
> (Marcuse ER189)

Marcuse's definition of play was indebted to psychoanalysis, although he disagreed with Freud's notion that repression was necessary for the very survival of the species. Marcuse suggested that the libido, repressed under capitalist productivism, be reintegrated into the sphere of production as part of the re-eroticization of life. Sexuality, currently fixed on the genital organs, serves an exclusively "productivist" function. A return to the polymorphous perversity of earlier stages of the individual's psychic life, by "eroticizing the body as a whole," is the key to turning work into play—into "auto-erotic

Belin | Téléchargé le 10/06/2026 sur https://shs.cairn.info (IP: 216.73.216.179)

pleasure"—regardless of the physical and mental energy expended in its performance (215-223). Children demonstrate that what makes an activity play-like is the fact that its purpose is in, not apart from, itself.

Marcuse followed Marx in arguing that capitalism, as a blind self-destructive force, brought about the technological possibility for liberating mankind from "labor in which a human does what a thing could do" (Marx 1857). The Fordist model in which the worker is reduced to the status of a machine, and the culture it fostered, could be dispensed with, once it had reached the final stage of almost complete automation. For Marcuse, "what is denounced as 'Utopian' is no longer that which has 'no place' and cannot have any place in the historical universe, but rather that which is blocked from coming about by the power of the established societies" (Marcuse EL 3-4).

Marx (1857) also maintained that, as "property relations [...] from forms of development of the productive forces [...] turn into their fetters," i.e. as capitalism becomes an obstacle to technological progress, the working class would take matters into their own hands and remove this impediment. But the American working class did not appear to be eager to usher in a new society. As a result, a major distinction between the Old Left and many on the New Left was the view that the working class had become "integrated" into capitalism (Marcuse EL 14). At the 1967 "Dialectics of Liberation Congress," attended by the luminaries of the New Left and the Counterculture, Marcuse provocatively declared, "we are faced with a novel situation in history, because today we have to be liberated from […] the affluent society" (Marcuse LAS).

From the early 1950s onwards, consumerism had been blamed by many liberal and conservative pundits for the superficiality and materialism of society (Gitlin 19). But for the New Left, consumerism was also what enslaved workers, by keeping them bound to their jobs. Marcuse saw a two-fold development in capitalist society: although automated mass production extended the possibility of freedom, "the radicalization of the working classes is counteracted by a socially engineered arrest of consciousness, and by the development and satisfaction of needs which perpetuate the servitude of the exploited" (Marcuse EL 16).

Another factor in working class passivity was the "managerial revolution." As early as the 1940s, Burnham and others argued that modern industrial society inevitably led to rationalized bureaucratic totalitarianism, a trend visible both in the Capitalist West and the Socialist Eastern bloc. Be it ownership, corporate, or governmental, the essential demarcation between the ruling elite (executives, managers, and senior bureaucrats) and the mass of society was based not only on ownership, but also on managerial control (Mills 116-123; Burnham 90-115). Extensive social engineering reinforced the idea that the individual as such was being taken care of, and should leave decision making to those best qualified.

Belin | Téléchargé le 10/06/2026 sur https://shs.cairn.info (IP: 216.73.216.179)

Finally, "surplus repression" was both the cause and the consequence of the first two factors. Marcuse agreed with Freud that in modes of production where scarcity reigns, the need for stable cooperation with fellow human beings results in repression. "[The ego] dethrones the pleasure-principle […] and substitutes for it the reality-principle, which promises greater security and greater success" (Marcuse EC 30). But Marcuse then introduced "surplus repression," "the restrictions [on human behavior] necessitated by social domination," arguing that surplus repression was a consequence of a social organization of labor in which resources had "not been distributed collectively in accordance with individual needs" (36). The rapid disappearance of the objective necessity of work in the US had not been accompanied by a corresponding loosening of repression, but by an ever-increasing surplus repression, which produced a personality type dependent on the social order and fearful of emancipation, similar to Mills's bureaucrat in *White Collar* (1951).

So, although for Marcuse, what Marx had called "the prehistory of mankind" was over, and the technological basis of liberation finally attained, his great fear, typical of the Frankfurt School, was that the forces of liberation might not prevail in the near future. The alternative would be "a new order of totalitarian suppression" (Marcuse EL 8), a recent example of which was the Nazi regime.

Countermodels: "Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out"

For the New Left, the problem remained that a "relatively well-functioning, rich, powerful society" managed to "deliver the goods" (Marcuse LAS). On the bright side, the leisure society also appeared to be fostering "new transcending needs which cannot be satisfied without abolishing the capitalist mode of production" (Marcuse CR 16-17). These new needs were manifest in "the fight against the necessity and productivity of stupid performances and stupid merchandise, deprivation in the guise of the good life, against pollution as a way of life." As "moral and aesthetic needs become basic, vital needs," Marcuse explained, they "drive toward new relationships between men and women and nature."

Most New Left activists saw the elements of society that were not completely entangled in the "performance system" (i.e. minorities and students) as an emerging revolutionary consciousness being produced by the very affluence of capitalism, as expressed in SDS's Port Huron Statement: "We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit" (1962).

In this sense, the shared sense of disaffection was more significant than the distinction often made between apolitical hippies and left-wing "politicos." As Marcuse noted,

Belin | Téléchargé le 10/06/2026 sur https://shs.cairn.info (IP: 216.73.216.179)

> *[…] this part of the Hippies, in which sexual, moral and political rebellion are somehow united, is indeed an aggressive non-aggressive form of life which achieves, at least potentially, the demonstration of qualitatively different values.*
>
> (Marcuse LAS).

The radical critique of advanced industrial society created countermodels predicated on various forms of "dropping out." These embodiments of Marcuse's Great Refusal were both symbolic acts of defiance, to expose the repressive nature of society, and, equally importantly, a means to achieve individual self-realization (Hoffman 2005 58). Attempting to keep the two aspects apart was seen as reproducing alienated reality, and thereby reproducing the errors of Leninism.

Aware that they were still very far from constituting a majority, many saw their revolutionary role as "potential catalysts of rebellion within the majorities" (Marcuse EL 51). The perception that young people were dropping out all over the country—a view reinforced by the media—seemed proof that "times were a-changin'," and that a generational divide was taking precedence over the class divide (Gitlin 199). For the Yippies, the refusal of labor, not the seizure of power by the working class, would lead the way out of capitalism and alienation:

> *What would happen if large numbers of people really do decide to fuck the system? [...] We'd have ourselves one hell of a revolution, that's what. Who would do the work? Fuck it.*
>
> (Hoffman 2005 219).

Unlike earlier incarnations of socialism, the Counterculture of the 1960s rejected productivism and the cult of economic growth. Instead, it emphasized living off the waste of the consumer society, which was just as important as the refusal of alienated labor, being the clearest expression of the end of necessity and the advent of true post-scarcity communism. "A Utopia would rise out of the garbage," wrote Hoffman (1980 97). Rubin's *Steal This Book* advised on eating for free in restaurants and stealing from stores. "Take what you want, take what you need" urged the Yippies, refusing to acknowledge the exchange value of commodities and only accepting their use value (Hoffman 2005 20).

In San Francisco, the Diggers started the "free movement," with free food, free "crash pads," free clinics, and "Free Stores." Notices proclaimed, "You run the free store," highlighting inclusive participation (Stephens 42-47). "Less a store than a philosophical experience, the Free Store stood as the symbol of a new kind of economic exchange," "a free forum |...] in which the forces of art battle the forces of garbage" (Hoffman 2005 148-149).

The avowedly leaderless character of the movement again reflected the desire to end the estrangement of individuals from each other under the guise of the division of labor. The Diggers all called themselves Emmett Grogan to render the concept of figurehead obsolete (Stephens 28). Feminists, however, pointed out that males still tended to grab the limelight (Gitlin 367-371).

Belin | Téléchargé le 10/06/2026 sur https://shs.cairn.info (IP: 216.73.216.179)

"Spontaneity" and "authenticity" were the buzzwords of the period, hence the ephemeral quality of their actions and their predilection for "street happenings," turning traditional forms of political protest, such as anti-war demonstrations, into venues for consciousness-raising total theatre (Stephens 27-32). "The tactics of frivolity and creative lunacy" (Stephens 35) were radical signs of a "contempt for the deadly *esprit de sérieux*" (Marcuse EL 7). Hallucinogenic drugs, Marcuse explained, were "the artificial and 'private' liberation [which] anticipates, in a distorted manner, an exigency of the social liberation" (Marcuse EL 37).

The impulse to fuse individual freedom and nurture community, which in Marx's Hegelian formulation was part of the "return of man to himself, to his human, that is, social existence" (Marx 1844), took the form of an inversion of alienated existence, with common enjoyment of lodgings, food, clothes, and drugs. Moreover, the "sexual revolution," by ensuring "there would be no more jealousy, no more monogamy, no more shame" (Allyn 72), was seen as a reaction against the divided and compartmentalized organization of life, and the solution to "virtually all of society's remaining problems."

Conclusion

In the 1960s Zeitgeist, the necessity and centrality of labor was diminishing, together with the Fordist model. This trend was "becoming a guide for theory and practice among the radical left—the historical answer to the actual development of capitalism" (Marcuse CR 4). However, tensions were evident in the clash between hedonism and collective harmony, as well as the contradiction between a joyful trust in technology and a Romantic strand, which, distrustful of the dehumanizing effects of materialism, sought solutions in pre-industrial lifestyles. Here, the New Left, including Marcuse, was more ambivalent about the power of technology to dominate than Marx (Marcuse ODM 162).

Even more important was the question of whether living off the waste of capitalism was not simply reproducing alienation. After all, an important part of man's creative impulse was the "mastery" of nature. Following Marx's anthropology, the New Left saw "[being human as] consciously developing one's own existence by means of the conscious […] praxis of production" (PFCL). True, one could focus on artistic creation, but this still discounted the ideal of democratically controlling all meaningful aspects of life, including production decisions (through workers' councils, for example). Could alienation be said to be abolished in a small group that rejected mainstream society while remaining dependent on it? If dropouts continued to live off the consumer society, trying to convince everyone to do the same until the whole of society joined their cause, they were not completely in control.

Belin | Téléchargé le 10/06/2026 sur https://shs.cairn.info (IP: 216.73.216.179)

And herein lay the greatest obstacle of all. The radical movement's ultimate success was predicated on a critical mass of society seeing through the "veil of illusions" and adhering to the Great Refusal. To be sure, enthusiastic activists were buoyed up by sensational articles in mainstream magazines entitled "To Hell with Work," "Bored on the Job" or "Who Wants to Work?" (Granter 79-103). Absenteeism, turnover, and even sabotage appeared to be on the rise. But in fact, a 1973 government report, "Work in America," concluded that there was no widespread "anti-work ethic," and that 79% of young people believed "a career is a very meaningful part of one's life" (104).

With the advent of a "post-industrial" model in the 1970s and 1980s, the movement soon receded, thus underlining the causal link between the late stages of the Fordist model and the Counterculture. The new productive tasks and methods, however, did not affect the underlying alienated nature of labor. The rejection of bureaucracy, Taylorism and industrial gigantism were taken up by managerial theories (Frank 26) and integrated into the post-Fordist culture. Moreover, the rebelliousness of the 1960s arguably enabled "a sizable part of a generation to develop a new attitude towards life and work […] that prepared them to find their feet in the so-called post-industrial, networked, flat, etc. production system" (Frayssé 1). However, the core aspiration of the Counterculture to a non-commodified life could not be safely incorporated. The failure of the countermodels to overcome capitalist relations meant they were often dismissed as absurd and muddle-headed, being all expressions of a complete rejection of reified, money- or power-mediated social relations.

WORKS CITED

Works by ***Karl Marx***

Vol. and p. references are to the MECW, New York: International Publishers, 1975-2005.

Works by ***Herbert Marcuse***

CR: *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1972.

EC: *Eros and Civilization : A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1974.

EL: *An Essay on Liberation*. Boston : Beacon Press, 1971.

ODM: *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.

PFCL: "On the Philosophical Foundations of the Concept of Labor in Economics." *Telos* (1973): 9-37;

LAS: *Liberation from the Affluent Society* in *The New Left and the 1960s: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, 3*. London, New York : Routledge, 2004.

Belin | Téléchargé le 10/06/2026 sur https://shs.cairn.info (IP: 216.73.216.179)

Other Printed Works

Allyn, David. *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution, an Unfettered History*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2001.

Aronowitz, Stanley. *Taking it Big: C. Wright Mills and the Making of Political Intellectuals*. New York: Columbia UP, 2012.

Aronowitz, Stanley et Jonathan **Cutler**. *Post-Work*. London: Routledge, 2013.

Burnham, James. *The Managerial Revolution*. London: Penguin Books, 1962.

Doyle, Michael William. "Staging the Revolution: Guerilla Theater as a Countercultural Practice, 1965-68." *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960's and 70's*. Eds. Peter Braunstein & Michael William Doyle, London: Routledge, 2002.

Flynn, Thomas R. *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism: The Test Case of Collective Responsibility*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986.

Frank, Thomas. *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998.

Frayssé, Olivier. "How the US Counterculture Redefined Work for the Age of the Internet." *Digital Labor and Prosumer Capitalism*. Ed. Mathieu O'Neil. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015.

Fromm, Erich. *Escape from Freedom*. New York: Open Road Media, 2013.

Fulton, Ann. *Apostles of Sartre: Existentialism in America, 1945-1963*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1999.

Galbraith, John Kenneth. *The Affluent Society*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1958.

Granter, Edward. *Critical Social Theory and the End of Work*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009.

Gerhard, Jane. *Desiring Revolution: Second-Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920 to 1982*. New York: Columbia UP, 2001.

Gitlin, Todd. *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. New York: Bantam Books, 1987.

Gosse, Van. *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretative History*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. New York: SUNY Press, 1996.

Hoffman, Abbie. *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture*. New York: Putnam, 1980.

—. *Revolution for the Hell of It.* New York: Da Capo Press, 2005.

Isserman, Maurice. *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left*. New York: Basic Books, 1987.

Jaeggi, Rahel. *Alienation*. New York: Columbia UP, 2014.

Jappe, Anselm. *Guy Debord*. Berkeley: California UP, 1999.

KELLNER, Douglas. *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*. Berkeley: California UP, 1985.

KOŁAKOWSKI, Leszek. *Main Currents of Marxism. Vol. 3: The Breakdown.* Wotton-under-Edge: Clarendon Press, 1978.

LEOPOLD, David. *The Young Karl Marx*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007.

LEVY, Peter. *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s*. Urbana, IL: Illinois UP, 1994.

MATTSON, Kevin. *Intellectuals in Action: The Origins of the New Left and Radical Liberalism.* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania UP, 2002.

MCBRIDE, David. "Death City Radicals: The Counterculture in Los Angeles." *The New Left Revisited*. Ed. John McMillian, and Paul Buhle. Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 2002. 110-136.

MCMILLIAN, John and Paul **BUHLE**, eds. The New Left Revisited. Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 2002.

MCMILLIAN, John, ed. *The New Left Revisited*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 2002.

MILLER, James. *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987.

MILLS, C. Wright. *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

OLLMAN, Bertell. *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in a Capitalist Society*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1976.

PLANT, Sadie. *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age*. London: Routledge, 1992.

ROSSINOW, Doug. *Visions of Progress: The Left Led Liberal Tradition in America.* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania UP, 2008.

ROSZAK, Theodore. *The Making of a Counter Culture*. New York: Anchor Books, 1969.

SAYERS, Sean. "Alienation as a Critical Concept." *International Critical Thought* 1.3 (2011): 287–304.

STEPHENS, Julie. *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge UP, 1998.

TARG, Harry & Judson L. **JEFFRIES**. "Camus and the New Left: From Rebels to Revolutionaries." *Radical Philosophy Review* 4.1/2 (2001): 117–134.

WIGGERSHAUS, Rolf. *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*. Trans. Michael Robertson. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995.

Online resources (Feb. 2016)

Digger Archives. Archive of the Digger Papers. <http://www.diggers.org>.

SDS Statements. Archive of SDS documents. <http://www.sds-1960s.org>.

Belin | Téléchargé le 10/06/2026 sur https://shs.cairn.info (IP: 216.73.216.179)