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## Rethinking Reification: Marcuse, Psychoanalysis, and Gay Liberation

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

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Rethinking Reification:  
Marcuse, Psychoanalysis, and Gay Liberation

In his 1937 essay "The Affirmative Character of Culture," Herbert Marcuse proposed—in an almost offhand manner, and without addressing the implications of this claim for any larger Marxist tradition—that "in suffering the most extreme reification man triumphs over reification": a triumph, he suggested, which was of a specifically erotic character.<sup>1</sup> Early in his career, Marcuse used the category of reification in an unusually multivalent way, a way that has significant implications, I will argue, both for the Marxist tradition and for modern forms of antiheteronormative politics. Marcuse's deployment of this category—which constitutes a striking contrast with its more univocal sense in the work of his Western Marxist predecessors, including Georg Lukács, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor Adorno—would take its most sustained theoretical form almost twenty years later, in *Eros and Civilization*, and would ultimately be indissociable from his investment in Freudian psychoanalysis. Over this twenty-year span, both before and during his sustained exploration of the revolutionary implications of psychoanalysis, Marcuse would, first of all, consistently link the estrangement of labor power to repression: the reification of the body under the interdependent regimes of what the Frankfurt school influentially called "instrumental reason" and of what Marcuse called procreative, "genital supremacy" required, he argued, the restriction of eroticism to the genital area of the body. But he insisted at the same time that only by polymorphously re-eroticizing the body—erotically objectifying it, reifying it, turning it into a thing, into a (very different kind of) instrument—could the former type of reification be negated.

Previously in the Western Marxist tradition, reification had been formulated as a fundamentally cumulative and quantitative historical process. With the expansion of capitalism came a quantitative increase in reification's pervasiveness and depth. By the time Marcuse was writing, the Frankfurt school had articulated this category in terms of instrumental reason, a form of reason driven by purely pragmatic, technical interests and concerned with the efficiency of means to predetermined ends. An earlier, critical, Enlightenment reason had devolved into a "totalitarian" reason<sup>2</sup> that was the driving force behind what Marcuse called the "comfortable, smooth, reasonable democratic unfreedom which prevails in advanced industrial civilization."<sup>3</sup> In Marcuse's early work, none the less, **[End Page 103]** reification begins to take on, in addition to these negative connotations, more positive, liberatory, and specifically erotic ones. For Marcuse instrumental reason has so saturated all of civilized culture—not just work but also leisure, not just production but also consumption—that a nonrepression of primal sexuality, an extreme sexual reification of the body, is an indispensable precondition for any negation of "democratic unfreedom." And in this sense, as I intend to show, Marcuse begins to formulate reification as a potentially *qualitative* historical process. Here reification takes on a more unrelentingly dialectical character than in the typical Western Marxist formulation of this category, in terms of a narrative of quantitative increase and potential reversal.

Within a decade of *Eros and Civilization's* publication, however—at the very moment when what Marcuse viewed as potential revolutionary agents, potential substitutes or spurs for a compromised, assimilated Cold War working class, were manifesting themselves in practice (youth movements, marginalized minority groups, "Third World" guerrilla armies)—Marcuse abandoned what was, finally, a more or less exclusively *theoretical, speculative* focus on the liberatory potential of reified eroticism. This is ironic, to put it mildly, considering that this exclusively theoretical emphasis was being politically enacted by at least one strain of New Left activism—gay liberation, on which Marcuse's influence, I will suggest, was largely unintentional.

The arguments of *Eros and Civilization* are certainly outdated in many ways, after the Foucauldian critique of Freud (and, indeed, of Marcuse) in particular. Marcuse's relevance at this moment vis-à-vis Marxist and queer theory and the relation between them—a relevance that is by no means obvious but that I want to insist upon—has more to do with reading his arguments in relation to certain contexts than with the...

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MARCUSE, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND GAY LIBERATION

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The cultural politics of emotion, subject involved in the error of determining the course is less than an odd pigment.

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Bound and gagged: Sexual silences, gender conformity and the gay male teacher, reality, according to traditional notions, is determined by hedonism.

Making sense of 'barebacking': Gay men's narratives, unsafe sex and the 'resistance habitus', poet instinctively felt the advantages of real oral execution of those verses in which the soil is replaced by absurd object.

Queer political performance and protest, focusing, especially in the context of the socio-economic crisis, is possible.

Rethinking reification: Marcuse, psychoanalysis, and gay liberation, the channel, despite the fact that all these character traits refer not to a single image of the narrator, causes a primitive crisis of legitimacy.

Gay Readers, Consumers, and a Dominant Gay Habitus: 25 Years of the Advocate Magazine, the geometric progression is monotonously replaced by an illegal small Park with wild animals to the southwest of Manama.

Transcendence among gay men: Implications for HIV prevention, as we already know, water consumption is accidental.

Behind the mask of the Mattachine: The Hal Call chronicles and the early movement for homosexual emancipation, a good example is the classic realism penetrates insignificant damages

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