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Beyond the Reality Principle: On the Political Role of Imagination in Herbert Marcuse's Libidinal Economy

Keywords: performance principle, reality principle, imagination, libidinal economy, Marcuse

Abstract

According to the psychoanalytic tradition, we function in the social world thanks to the reality principle. The article will deal with the role of the imagination as a political force, a force transforming the framework of social reality animated by the historical modification of this principle – *the performance principle*. Due to the fact that – as Marcuse has shown – reason has become an element of domination, the only emancipatory force capable of opposing the daily routine and repetition is imagination. Therefore, we propose developing this idea of imagination as a means of liberation from the one-dimensional world and transformation of the social world in the context of the new libidinal economy outlined by Herbert Marcuse in two works: *Eros and Civilization* and *One-Dimensional Man*.

Introduction

We are possessed by our images, suffer our own images.
(Marcuse, 2002 p. 254)

Psychoanalysis shows in various ways that reality is a problematic concept. One of its fundamental discoveries is that reality functions in a double mode. On the one hand, external reality is a threat to the subject/ego, something over which we have no control, which provides us with stimuli to which – even if pleasant – we need to get used. On the other hand, the reality present in our psyche in the form of the reality principle forces us to temporarily delay the immediate satisfaction of our thirst, which allows us to extend (and complicate) the pleasure provided by life. (It can be said that the reality principle is nothing other than the *modified* pleasure principle). It is not a rule, but a principle of creating, structuring and assessing an image of reality: thanks to this, the concept of reality has a cognitive and normative aspect: it is a guarantor of a proper, mature way of functioning (Freud, 1924).

This article focuses on imagination understood as a potentially political force capable of transforming the boundaries of the social world. Writing about fantasy and the work of imagination, the author of *Eros and Civilization* [1955] does not stray too far from the remaining representatives of the Frankfurt School (Jay, 1973; Feenberg, 2018). They share the conviction that the basic problem of modernity is the domination of the degenerate form of instrumental reason and the loss of imagination (Adorno, Horkheimer, 2002), understood as a free (not reified) game that allows the subject to maintain a certain kind of aesthetic autonomy (Schiller, 1954; Rancière, 2006). Of course, for Frankfurters, imagination has a transcendental and dialectical character; it enables the production of an image of the world, but it is not this image. It combines heterogeneous elements but also different time modes, and it also makes it possible to think about infinity, reviving the ossified, petrified image of the social world. The question is what role imagination can play in criticizing capitalism? I put forward the thesis that only the psychoanalytic imagination in close relationship with the libidinal roots of desire is able to transform the world of capitalist corporations and free us from the chains of commodity fetishism.

In *The Philosophy of Money* (2011), Georg Simmel outlines the foundations of the capitalist economy, characterizing it as an economy of

desire. The power of desire is an economic force as it directly influences the value of objects of economic exchange (Markowska, 2018). Without the desire resulting from/rooted in our material and immaterial needs (including those imagined), the world would have no value. Psychoanalysis has made a revolutionary contribution to the libidinal economy as it has discovered the impossibility of satisfaction. The utopian nature of satisfaction is not negotiable. The impossibility is not an insufficiency, but is structural, and in the world of excess, prosperity does not solve the problem. Desire searches for an object that is unavailable by definition. In this way, the Lacanian version of psychoanalysis managed to formalize Freud's anthropological assumptions. The basic question is what place imagination has in the libidinal economy of the subject, that is, what role it plays in satisfying our needs. Is it a necessary condition for desire to remain alive in us despite our constant disappointment with successive objects?

This article focuses particularly on the intertwining of desire and reality, interpreted at the level of collective imagination, imagination understood as a social process. To analyze this problem, I use the classic modification of the Freudian reality principle that Marcuse made by introducing – in place of the ahistorical reality principle – the historically variable formula of the performance principle. This split allows him to locate himself within the scope of Freud-Marxism. Here is the project to 'revolutionize' psychoanalysis: using psychoanalytic discoveries (and knowledge of its mechanisms) to transform capitalist society (Marcuse, 1970). Therapeutic liberation of the past does not mean simple reconciliation with the present, but involves free shaping of the future – focusing on childhood is supposed to give us liberation rather than involve us in a game of transference and dependence on the psychoanalyst. Undoubtedly, Marcuse was aware of its double-edged message, which may turn into a tool of oppression (Illouz, 2007) or social and political emancipation (Reich, 2000; Leder, 2014).

The reality principle and the project of the libidinal economy

As Marcuse has shown, psychoanalysis is an excellent tool for diagnosing the spirit of capitalism.¹ Freud's anthropological concept is of an economic

¹ When reading his most famous works, we can only be amazed at the specific status of his discourse, which, on the one hand, is "outdated" as it is based on a classical –

nature in both meanings of the word: it concerns the differentiation of forces – the circulation of energy and the distribution of free and bound energy in the mental apparatus, and postulates a radical economization of thinking (Leder, 2007, pp. 275–286). Thinking – or actually learning reality – must always be defined and means a qualitative synthesis of many different elements in order to create a coherent picture of the world. This means that we are forced to omit certain elements (the primary selection of sensations or the mechanism of repression). Thinking close to the primal scene is very energy-intensive – this activity is typical of a child, a madman, or an artist.

In one of his early meta-psychological writings, entitled *Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning*, Freud writes about the desire for satisfaction in an infant:

It was only the non-occurrence of the expected satisfaction, the disappointment experienced, that led to the abandonment of this attempt at satisfaction by means of hallucination. Instead of it, the psychical apparatus had to decide to form a conception of the real circumstances in the external world and to endeavor to make a real alteration in them. A new principle of mental functioning was thus introduced; what was presented in the mind was no longer what was agreeable but what was real, even if it happened to be disagreeable. (Freud, 1911, p. 219)

As the author states, the establishment of this principle is a great achievement of the mental apparatus, which must use the many functions available to it, including attention, evaluation and memory, to construct it; they all make it possible to transform the reality in which we live; not so much a simple release of tension as individual adaptation to something that will later be a source of particularly long-lasting pleasure for us. “Considered from the economic point of view, the reality principle corresponds to a transformation of free energy into bound energy ...” (Laplanche, Pontalis, 1973, p. 383). It is no longer about the pleasure of releasing blocked energy, but the lasting pleasure of structured craving over time. According to Freud, the reality principle is not opposed to the pleasure principle (*Lustprinzip*), but is its perfect complement, responsible for the persistence of the self and its desire despite the lack of satisfaction. Following this intuition, the reality principle can be understood as *appropriate pleasure* – a modification of the pleasure

not Lacanian – reading of Freud and, on the other, is in some way still relevant. In the text, I directly use the power of this relevancy. Cf. Maley (2017).

principle – which is the basis for the development of consciousness and serves primarily to ‘protect’ our self from the action of the death drive.²

Summarizing, the reality principle results from the mechanism of the economization of desire. According to Freud, hallucinatory satiation is uneconomical (energetically costly) because desire shifts from one element to another, which on a conscious level creates a sequence of unrelated representations, a kind of delirium. This state can be compared to unbridled, over-the-top consumerism. Unsatisfied need creates a state of lack of pleasure in the mental apparatus, giving rise to the desire to achieve satisfaction (pleasure), which in this case means giving up hallucinations and turning to a real object that brings a real discharge of tension. Reality has more dimensions than hallucinations – it engages us much more strongly and binds our desire more tightly, puts an end to the delirium and allows us to save our libidinal energy.

Contrary to appearances, the reality principle is not purely negative. In his essay *Civilization and Its Discontents* (2002), Freud clearly suggests that repression is the source of the original suppression of drive, but also the only guarantor of a long and happy life. Its action is dialectical; suppression becomes a source of accumulation of life drives, just as Protestant asceticism is a source of wealth. The price we pay for this life is not high at all, the pleasure that comes from creative work is long and multidimensional, unlike sensual pleasure which, when too intense, ‘dulls’ the senses and transforms into its own opposite. A libido sacrifice is necessary, and liberation attempts would be a disaster due to the intensity of the discharge. The matter of time is the key to grasping the subtle difference between the two sides of *pleasure* based on short or long-term satisfaction or, in other words, the difference in intensity. Transition to the reality principle does not mean the abolition of the pleasure principle, which still reigns in fantasy and fantasizing (traversing the phantasm that structures desire). It means deep satisfaction in partially satisfying the desire in reality in a previously negotiated manner. Of course, the basic question for us is what this reality is – what this principle is about and what its status is. If we can satisfy ourselves in fantasy, why do we make the effort to obtain a real object? In other words, does it calculate to be adult *homo oeconomicus*? The answer is ‘yes’, as long as the social world enables us to fulfil our fantasies in various forms.

² The correctness of this interpretation is evidenced by the change in title of another text devoted to these issues, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1967), which makes it clear that in addition to this one principle that serves the life of the body, there is the death drive, which is the main subject of the author’s research.

The reality principle as the performance principle

Two questions arise here: how is the reality to which man's knowledge is universally attuned constituted by these images, these objects of interest? And how is the *I* constituted, in which the subject recognizes himself, by his typical identifications?

(Lacan, 2006, p. 74)

What does Marcuse say about reality? The problem for him is not that reality takes away our right to pleasure, but that it provides it in excess. The social reality of mature capitalism resembles a childhood hallucination based on the extreme and immediate fulfilment of a desire. In his *Eros and Civilization* ([1955] 2015), Marcuse points out that Freud's great discovery was that he indicated the regressive nature of drives. The fact that life based on drives tends to be conservative means that a revolution based on the liberation of sex drives is doomed to failure. If we want to abolish the logic of domination that enables sublimation, we fall into a regressive phase of primal pleasure, which is total, timeless and tends towards an earlier state of development. Only the tension resulting from non-fulfilment and prohibition brings movement and development into our existence and creates a chance for transgression. The key element with which Marcuse struggles is the question of the structural necessity of individual and species repression. On both these levels, prohibition is the cornerstone of subjective constitution and the foundation of social cooperation, making a difference between nature and culture. Marcuse uses this division for his purposes and distinguishes between the biologically necessary reality principle and the principle at the level of species, which is cultural and historically changeable. It is this reality principle – taking the form of the performance principle under the present circumstances – that, according to him, has the character of surplus repression. The reference to Marx's surplus value indicates that the author assumed its relationship with the basic law of capital accumulation permeating modern society.

Both kinds of repression resulting from the two levels of the reality principle are intertwined and occur together in the form of internalized guilt that originates from the inability to satisfy both principles at the same time. The performance principle demands a different kind of sacrifice from us than the pleasure principle because the performance principle develops historically and takes all kinds of institutional forms that can easily turn

against us and our individual existence. Therefore, the question arises whether the reality in which we live is on the side of life or death. Is a world based on the performance principle a world that enables the development of Eros (or Thanatos)? Do competition and the division of labor actually lead to greater social harmony, and can the abundance of goods lead us to a liberated existence? Paradoxically, deprived of material concerns, the average European living a high-profile life has the right to believe that they live a life devoid of tension, anxiety and remorse. However, is such a ‘reconciled’ life not an imaginary life, or can such a person be said to have contact with reality? According to Marcuse, the performance principle, which is responsible for the surrounding technological progress, is transformed into the abundance principle, which makes the class division and alienation of workers melt away like a phantasmagoria in the reality of shopping malls:

What is retrogressive is not mechanization and standardization but their containment, not the universal coordination but its concealment under spurious liberties, choices, and individualities ... the good and services that the individuals buy control their needs and petrify their faculties. In exchange for the commodities that enrich their life, the individuals sell not only their labour but also their free time. The better living is offset by the all-pervasive control over living. People ... have innumerable choices, innumerable gadgets which are all of the same sort and keep the occupied and divert their attention from the real issue – which is the awareness that they could both work less and determine their own needs and satisfactions. (Marcuse, 2015, p. 99)

How can we resist this process that makes us slaves to our own pleasures, which are, in fact, only a mask of the death drive? Today, in the face of a growing climate catastrophe, we know that on the collective level of the species, such practices – completely innocent from an individual perspective – are tantamount to self-destruction. Marcuse wrote as early as 1973 about the political importance of ecology, which makes us look at the capitalist world not from the perspective of the exploitation of workers, but from the perspective of the destruction that the earth undergoes as a resource, a reservoir of life and energy producing values on which we feed and which we ruthlessly capitalize.³ This prophetic tone was based on the acumen of his

³ “So, why be concerned about ecology? Because the violation of the Earth is a vital aspect of the counterrevolution. The genocidal war against people is also “ecocide” in so far

earlier diagnoses. On the other hand, the greatest problem that we have to this day concerns the interpretation of the methods he proposes to emerge from the crisis of civilization, to which I return at the end of this article.

Eros and Civilization contains a thread on the eroticization of social relations, which is based on the wrong opposition between the life drive and the death drive. The resulting recognition is that strong Eros weakens Thanatos, but as soon as its strength weakens, the destructive tendencies of the death drive grow in the form of wars, conflicts and violence. This interpretation clearly deviates from the discovery of Freud, who suggested that these are two aspects of the same drive, the death drive, which depend entirely on its dynamics. Let us recall that for Freud the death drive meant a regressive process of returning to earlier states of existence. When the drive intensifies, Eros and Thanatos are also strong; when it weakens, both destruction and the creative, life-giving impulse disappear. If Eros were to be only the guardian of life – understood as the opposition to death – it would have to be very weak. Otherwise, it would have to contain the passion and capacity for violence (real and symbolic) which is a condition of a cultural order based on calculation, prediction and the ability to sacrifice immediate gratification.

The consequences of this misreading can be seen in Marcuse's suggestion that we should generate 'a climate in which the instinctual roots of the performance principle are drying up' (2015, p. 102). This involves the belief that the development of technology and automation of work will in the future weaken the libidinal and, at the same time, destructive job-related fixation that, Freud believes, provides us with satisfaction in place of the forbidden object of desire. The ideological system that represents the performance principle in which we live must be disconnected from the individual's drive structure. How is it possible if the drive is historical and co-created by social relations and is therefore responsible not only for the surrounding repression but also for access to pleasure? The liberation of man from the compulsion of hard work requires not so much that alienation be stopped, but be completed, not

as it attacks the sources and resources of life itself. It is no longer enough to do away with people living now; life must also be denied to those who aren't even born yet by burning and poisoning the Earth, defoliating the forests, blowing up the dikes. This bloody insanity will not alter the ultimate course of the war but it is a very clear expression of where contemporary capitalism is at: the cruel waste of productive resources in the imperialist homeland goes hand in hand with the cruel waste of destructive forces and consumption of commodities of death manufactured by the war industry" (Marcuse, Kellner, 1998, p. 173).

the repressed and productive personality be reactivated, but be abolished. Work would become a meaningless activity (cf. Debord, 1995). Prosperity plus technology are to free Eros from the performance principle and establish a new reality principle, which will involve self-sublimation of sexuality and de-sublimation of Reason so that the senses and reason can overcome the culturally generated separation and melt again in the free game of erotic life. This solution is extremely one-sided and naive in creating a vision of a future society. I therefore propose to follow Freud rather than Marcuse in this matter.

If Eros is perceived as a symbol of life whose goal is not to overcome death, but to reach an end in its own way, it becomes clear why it is capable of self-limitation according to the primal (apparently biological) reality principle. The repressed and unweakened life drive is ready to recreate the elements of earlier states in various ways, treating these regressive elements as a necessary condition for progress. For example, a life devoid of arduous work is very similar to the state of carefree childhood, which is the starting point for us as subjects, and can be the final stage of our development if we recall the figure of the *Übermensch* who does not know the toil of work, not because they do not know the effort, but because they actively affirm everything that happens to them. According to Nietzsche, being as innocent as a child does not mean being an infantile child. Hence, the striving to repeat what already happened allows life to pay off the debt to death and overcome it in an unnoticed way, achieving a form of life devoid of resentment and having contact with a multidimensional reality that is more than our fantasy.

The ideology of one-dimensionality

‘The reality of labouring classes in advanced industrial societies makes the Marxian ‘proletariat’ a mythological concept, the reality of present-day socialism makes the Marxian idea a dream.’

(Marcuse, 2002, p. 193)

Our interpretation is supported by another work entitled *One-Dimensional Man* [1964] which Marcuse wrote a few years later. The narrative of this book intertwines two threads concerning the essence of the society of the 1960s: permanent weariness and satiety resulting from the excess, boredom and predictability of the Welfare Society. Advances in technology, Marcuse argues,

and hence ‘the effective manipulation of mental and material productivity have brought about a shift in the locus of mystification’ (2002, p. 194). In this society, rationality is the carrier of mystification, that is, the ideological reign of the performance principle, which begins to reveal its deeply irrational, impulsive nature. The reality principle proves to be the unreality principle, a daydream. The source of the mystification is the colloquial language and the language of positive science concerning facts devoid of historical context: both languages falsify our reality because they deprive it of depth and meaning:

This larger context of experience, **this real empirical world, today is still that of the gas chambers and concentration camps, of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of American Cadillacs and German Mercedes, of the Pentagon and the Kremlin, of the nuclear cities and the Chinese communes, of Cuba, of brainwashing and massacres.** But the real empirical world is also that in which all these things are taken for granted or forgotten or repressed or unknown, in which people are free. It is a world ... in which the daily toll and the daily comforts are perhaps the only items that make up all experience. And this second, restricted empirical universe is part of the first; **the powers that rule the first** also shape the restricted experience [emphasized by BMM] (Marcuse, 2002, p. 185).

The reality principle based on the idea of productivity and the reign of instrumental rationality is the highest form of ideology that presents itself as bare reality – a collection of indisputable, empirical facts. The omnipresent scientism and economism have political ramifications, especially when it comes to the limits of social imagination: the border between what is possible and what seems impossible to us. Marcuse writes directly about the closure of the political universe and the impossibility of any real change, sensing Francis Fukuyama’s later thesis (1989) about the end of history, or rather its ‘agony’ in a shoddy supermarket. The perspective adopted by these authors seems surprising from today’s point of view, considering that this social conformism indicates the power of collective repression of the Holocaust and war atrocities. This obliviousness may stem from the inability to confront the trauma or understand completely what happened. Anyway, the inability to confront the Real became one of the leading motives of psychoanalysis from the late 1950s and the early 1960s (Lacan, 1992). It was also picked up by Louis Althusser (2014), who argued that social reality as a collective image must be ideological, that is, act as a defence mechanism

against the reality. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Real is a traumatic void that can only be perceived thanks to the cracks in the emerging reality. Žižek aptly explains this when pointing out that the Real in capitalism is “a spectral logic of capital that determines what goes on in social reality Therein resides the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism: this violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their ‘evil’ intentions, but is purely ‘objective’, systemic, anonymous” (2009, p. 11). This approach leads to the conclusion that, from a psychoanalytical point of view, it is the social and cultural systems that define our libidinal structure and strategies for (not) reaching satisfaction under the conditions of the free-market economy dominance (McGowan, 2016).

The model for this systemic violence is American society, which has been immersed in a democratic dream for 200 years.⁴ As Marcuse points out, despite material abundance, people in the Welfare Society experience an irrational lack of happiness, an impasse of desire and the purpose of life although, on a libidinal level, they constantly indulge in petty pleasures that allow them to maintain the balance and stability of biological existence. Several decades later, when taking up the topic of capitalist realism, Marc Fisher (2009) stated that a defensive reaction must appear in the human subject in the form of permanent depression as a side effect of overstimulation and the excessive nature of reality. These states are slowly becoming permanent elements of the condition of modern man and, what is extremely important – according to Fisher – they are socially (and politically) generated, despite the fact that they are perceived as neurodevelopmental diseases independent of the broader cultural context. Pharmacological treatment is not a substitute for a change (or modification) of the performance principle that has imperceptibly turned into a blatant incarnation of the death drive based on a new version of commodity fetishism, which is climate denialism. The ecological catastrophe in late capitalism exists only as a kind of simulacrum, its consequences being too traumatic for the system to assimilate. Resources are endless, capital can multiply without human labor and abandoning the Earth’s crust. The Real works but it never shows itself on the level of representation. The environmental catastrophe, despite its numerous thematizations, remains this real: “The relationship between capitalism and eco-disaster is

⁴ It is striking how the mechanisms of Alexis de Tocqueville’s new despotism resonate with Marcuse’s analysis of new forms of control.

neither coincidental nor accidental: capital's "need of a constantly expanding market", its "growth fetish", mean that capitalism is by its very nature opposed to any notion of sustainability" (Fisher, 2009, p. 18). If the development of capitalist society continues in accordance with the logic of the Capitalocene, we will be doomed (Moore, 2016).

Imagination as a political force

Setting the pace and style of politics, the power of imagination far exceeds Alice in Wonderland in the manipulation of words, turning sense into nonsense and nonsense into sense.

(Marcuse, 2002, p. 252)

What, then, to do with a world that is heading for catastrophe? Is awakening possible? It seems to me that psychoanalysis allows us to understand that we cannot live close to the real, but we can modify social relations in such a way – primarily thanks to individual practices – that they will allow us to live a more fulfilling life. Let us move on to the question of imagination, which Marcuse mentions in both his works (2015, 2002). In fact, this is the only thread that brings a shadow of hope for a transformation of this oppressive, one-dimensional world: Reason is helpless and, according to Marcuse, has become an element of domination. Imagination is the only emancipating force capable of undermining this domination in its totality, routine and repetition (Schoolman, 1980), which has been a component of cognitive powers since the times of Kantian criticism (1987). At this point, a distinction must be made between individual fantasy and imagination, understood as a collective social process. The fantasy that Marcuse mentions in his *Eros and Civilization* makes it possible to look at the world from a distance, but does not introduce a revolutionary change. As a shelter, an escape, an auxiliary structure, it is an individual solution to libidinal tensions or, at best, a source of individual perception of the world, which can be capitalized in the form of artistic activities.

A much more interesting plot is introduced at the end of *One-Dimensional Man*, where he understands imagination on a collective level as a kind of transcendental bridge between Reason and Technology.⁵ Art that is

⁵ Marcuse later returned to the issue of aesthetics many times, arguing that the art of living had the ability to balance Eros' creative impulse with the limitations of Thanatos (1978, pp. 1–39). Jacques Rancière has adopted a similar position (2013).

a symbol of imagination understood in this way would be a sensual mediator between theoretical/abstract thought and practical action; a mode of translation between what is general (systemic violence) and a specific application. Imagination as a mediator determines the boundaries of our world and, above all, its meaning. What does this mean? This means that it is the force that animates reality by reaching to its libidinal roots, the force that produces images and meanings, and is not the images itself. Let us remember that the slogan of the Paris May 1968 was ‘free your imagination’, which stood for a struggle to (re)enchant the unified world. An excellent example of the therapeutic power of properly directed imagination is the influence of psychoanalytic imagination on corporate practices and the style of managing workers’ emotions as described by Elton Mayo. He has shown that the productivity (and quality) of work depends on caring for the feelings of employees and meeting their emotional, not only economic, needs (Illouz, 2007, pp. 243–260).⁶

However, imagination is a double-edged sword, which can be reified. Moreover, it can become a tool of enslavement when mass images dominate social life, transforming into thoughtless stereotypes. When imagination surrenders to the reality of technological and scientific progress, we may have reasons for concern:

The willful play with fantastic possibilities, the ability to act with good conscience. *contra naturam*, to experiment with men and things, to convert illusion into reality and fiction into truth, testify to the extent to which Imagination has become an instrument of progress. (Marcuse, 2002, p. 252)

Imagination has been touched by the process of reification, which means that instead of making us free, we ‘suffer our own images’ (ibid., p. 254). Imagination as a political force has been coupled into the sphere of production; productivity is fed by vision and desire: it captures the logic of a phantasm. Reality turns into a dream and sleep becomes our reality. We live day-dreaming, which means that we do not understand the true meaning of the surrounding activities and processes, we do not see the terrifying power of the surrounding technology, nor do we see the real consequences of climate

⁶ It is evident that, despite numerous empirical sources in the field of management, *The One-Dimensional Man* does not mention the research described in Mayo’s famous work, *The Human Problems of an Industrialized Civilization*, from 1933.

destabilization. It should be emphasized that Marcuse's critique of the collective process of reification of imagination turns into a place where the hope for emancipation is born:

To liberate the imagination so that it can be given all its means of expression presupposes the repression of much that is now free and that perpetuates a repressive society. And such reversal is not a matter of psychology or ethics but of politics, in the sense in which this term has here been used throughout: the practice in which the basic societal institutions are developed, defined, sustained, and changed. It is the practice of individuals, no matter how organized they may be. Thus the question once again must be faced: how can the administered individuals – who have made their mutilation into their own liberties and satisfactions, and thus reproduce it on an enlarged scale – liberate themselves from themselves as well as from their masters? How is it even thinkable that the vicious circle be broken? (Marcuse, 2002, p. 254)

There is only one answer to this dramatic question: we need to think dialectically. Only a social whole, conceived dialectically and historically, with all its – positive and negative – moments, allows us to think critically, not allowing a political discourse to be closed. Imagination is the only force directed towards the outside, feeding on what is unrepresentable or infinite. In addition to clear Kantian inspirations, the notion of sociological imagination that goes beyond the aesthetic aspect should be recalled here (Lanuza, 2011). In classical terms, it means a form of self-awareness that is subject to changing perspectives and takes account of the entire historical and social context when describing an individual. “It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self – and to see the relations between the two” (Mills, 2000, p. 7). An individual must see themselves from the outside in their class and historical conditions and look at times through the intimacy of their micro world. Seeing connections and dependencies creates the multidimensionality of the social world which consists of millions of different perspectives, including inhuman ones (Gunderson, 2014). It is imagination, as a constantly produced and co-created social process, that breaks the uniform image of the world imposed by politicians and capitalists based on the dogma of ‘business as usual’. The very notion of business must be deeply destabilized and eroded by the power of imagination, which is capable of undermining systemic necessity, turning excess repression into

a source of liberation. To think differently, to act differently. *Let us imagine another world* used literally as a grenade to explode the imposed image of the world and its necessity (economic, military, political, and so on), tainted by the ideology that permeates our reality at the level of micro-practices, ethnocentrism and class-gender distinction.

Conclusion

To sum up, imagination as a political force changes the position of reality (what we treat as reality) in its relation to the Real; the arrangement of forces and elements change. The real conditions of planetary survival require us to make an effort to change our perspective, and this requires broadening our transcendental imagination to the limits of what is possible now (Bińczyk, 2018) and what could be possible in the future (Nowak, 2016). As Arjun Appadurai (2005) indicated from the postcolonial perspective, only imagination socially shaped at the institutional or discursive level increases human cognitive power and allows us to think about the globe as a whole and communicate with others, even if ‘complete’ understanding is impossible. The dialectical approach makes it possible to juggle micro-macro perspectives, to change the internal (subjective) position to the external (objective) one. Being a source of multidimensional translation – a change of perspective and scale – it gives access to other social worlds. It transforms our image of the world – it can turn repression into a source of ‘liberation’, flight, escape, and have political significance in the process of becoming smaller. It means using language in such a way that it does not represent the majority, power and generality, but liberates what is single, rare, weak and unrepresented (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986).

Exercises in dialectical imagination transform intellect into reason, instrumental reason becomes creative, multidimensional and autotelic, focusing again on values and following desire. These values become the objects of desire, which shows that, under favorable conditions, imagination can be a productive force, the main component of libidinal capital, which increases the power/value of life, reviving its libidinal roots. In this way, we achieve the de-sublimation of reason, which is no longer an instrument of domination (read: death drive). Instead, it stands on the side of life and looks for ways to neutralize repression stemming from the reality principle so as to

achieve the ability to make a silent revolution based on the power of giving meaning to fragments of the world or depriving them of it, of slipping out of control by entering other worlds, languages, relationships, or micro-practices: turning the sense imposed by the system into nonsense and non-meaning into meaning.

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