

**The Totalizing Terror of the Bureaucratic Society of Controlled
Consumption**

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(ABSTRACT)

As an advanced society of industrialized capitalism has an ever-tighter grip on our everyday lives, I ask if rebellion is possible in the current context.

To this end, I formulate a model of rebellion based on my readings of Marcuse and Camus; from Marcuse, the idea that a person can formulate a rebellious subjectivity through the consumption of art in the creation of the aesthetic dimension, and from Camus, an individual placing limits on what oppression he will take from an existing order and at what point she will say “no” to that order and giving a concurrent “yes” by acting in such a way that fosters Camus’ human community.

I argue after the Cold War especially, the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption closes down spaces for meaningful rebellion. As we have moved from hip consumerism to market populism, the goal of the existing order is for the citizens thereof to legitimate the order.

I analyze various groups to see if they are engaging in rebellion, such as Al Qaeda, Hamas, the Earth and Animal Liberation Fronts, and analyze their methods. I find that instead of labeling as terrorist or rebel, we should let the rebellious subjectivity guide our judgment of their actions.

Ultimately, I conclude that rebellion is still a possibility even in the encroaching totality of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, and that a preservation of the rebellious subjectivity can provide a basis for formulating a rebellious praxis not yet called into being.

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All errors grammatical, syntactical, and substantive are my very own.

To Mick and Kelly, unwaveringly

“Hey, what was the good news and what was the bad news?”

-Kurt Vonnegut

For Joshua Guimond

Never far from my thoughts

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis will explore the possibility of rebellion in the totalizing nature of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption. I define a rebel using a historical context, but it is not to argue that it is quaint or outdated. Rather, there are notions in my conception of rebellion through my readings of Marcuse and Camus that I want to both see how they stand up in a current context, and to argue that there is something in this formulation worth preserving. The rebellion I define is saying “no” to the external forces that cross the subjects limits and a subsequent “yes” that there is something in a common humanity worth fighting for when the individual decides to act. To make these considerations, it is also focused on defending and trying to encourage a liberating rebellious subjectivity that gives anybody who formulates this subjectivity the critical capacity by which to either rebel or assess other rebellious activities. This subjectivity also allows us to see through the cracks of social orders and allows for one to think of ways to act against the regime.

While I attempt to step into a broader context, the vast majority of analysis that I offer is in the context of recent United States history and current United States context. This is largely because I am trying to articulate a totalizing regime, and I would argue that this is best accomplished in the regime in which one is most firmly entrenched. That said, my conception of rebellion tries not to be nation-specific. It tries to allow anybody with a rebellious subjectivity to assess other’s actions in other contexts. But to do this, one must first figure out what the rebel is, where the rebel comes from, against what one rebels, and how people are to gauge those actions. I also argue that the pressure from the consumption society tries to restrict those questions from being answered, instead redefining rebellion in a more conducive way to prevent actual challenges to the social order.

In chapter two, I set up my conception of rebellion, in this case a historically situated method of rebellion formulated through my readings of both Herbert Marcuse and Albert Camus. I turn to The Aesthetic Dimension to deploy his idea that for any

individual to imagine, and then to work toward constructing, a better world, they must first be able to liberate themselves to be untethered, or at least less tethered, from the world of consumption. They do this through formulating the aesthetic dimension through art, as this art provides the basis for re-imagining what is real and allows them to work toward building that new world re-imagined in the aesthetic dimension. This dimension is important because it is the birth of the rebellious subjectivity, and as I supplement it with my readings of Camus, this is necessary, because rebellion must come out of an individual's understanding of when the social order crosses the limits the individual has imposed on it.

To argue the importance of this liberatory space is not to make the argument that all we need to do is read the right number of a certain canon of books or films and we will be free to reinvent the world. Rather, in seeking to cultivate the liberational aesthetic dimension, one at least preserves the possibility of seeing, and perhaps seeing the cracks in, those external forces that try to suppress such free thought. Marcuse tells us, "The fetishism of the commodity world, which seems to become denser every day, can be destroyed only by men and women who have torn aside the technological and ideological veil which conceals what is going on, which covers the insane rationality of the whole – men and women who have become free to develop their own needs, to build, in solidarity, their own world."¹ I argue along with Marcuse and my reading of Camus, that the consumption of art and the subsequent formation of the aesthetic dimension, does the best job of providing the basis by which the men and women Marcuse speaks about may be able to remove that veil.

With the idea of where the rebel comes from, I then argue what exactly, the rebel and revolutionary activity are. I base this on my readings of Camus' essays, such as The Rebel, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death as well as The Myth of Sisyphus to construct a theoretical model for the rebel. That is, the person who not only issues the "great refusal," which Marcuse defines as the proper political response to irrational suppression, saying "no" by not being placated by comforts of the material world, but the rebel must also

¹ Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1972), 131

simultaneously affirm something about his or her own subjectivity, that saying “no” means saying “yes” to their worth as a human being, capable of making ones own decisions, free from coercion. By valuing this subject-centered notion of rebellion allows us to imagine placing limits on the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, where Camus’ rebel would be able to say no, and none further beyond this point. I argue particularly that the external force that seeks to stop rebellion is the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption. This also addresses the role of violence vis-à-vis the state. This is a result of the limits being established, how far the individual will go in letting the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption have a coercive control on their lives. The reason I am looking to both Camus and Marcuse to establish a theoretical model of the rebel and revolutionary activity is for these two reasons: first, Marcuse’s great refusal is meaningless unless there is a “yes” behind it. To simply say “no” is as irrational as the situation that causes the great refusal in the first place. Camus argues that that refusal must be followed by revolutionary activity in concert. Otherwise it is useless. Second, when we use rebellion as an affirmation of the core of humanity that is inviolable as Camus does, it becomes easier to answer the question of whether or not a rebel may try to appropriate some of the state’s monopolized violence to his or herself. If the actions of the state, or in my argument, the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption crosses the limits on the individuals inviolable rights that the rebel sets, revolutionary activity is potentially justified. It is this move from the state to the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption that we must re-analyze the ability of an individual to rebel.

Camus’ formulation of rebellion seems concerned almost exclusively with the individual’s relationship to the state, and revolutionary activity is fairly limited in scope to include only those actions that lead to a shifting of the state power structure. His conception is relatively straightforward because state power is usually very tangible. Marcuse goes further to include the world of production as a source of oppression against which one must rebel. This conception does not do away with the notion of rebelling against the state, but expands it. This expansion to include the technological, ideological, and consumptive aspects of society in general increases the burden on the individual for how to rebel against it. It is not merely a matter of identifying an unjust regime and

fighting to change it, since the regime is not as tangible as the state alone. Although my readings of Marcuse and Camus are clearly historically situated, I will eventually use them to see how well they fit in the current context, and also that there are some notions worth keeping in this construction of rebellion, even if it is not necessarily effective in the current context.

Before making this argument, however, I first examine the external challenges the individual faces in the social order. In chapter three I discuss the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, relying heavily on my reading of Lefebvre's Everyday Life in the Modern World. This consumer society is the way a modern capitalist society seeks to programmatize and reorder our everyday lives for the explicit purpose of proper consumption. Though the pervasiveness of the social order is there, this is not to say that there is a tangible bureaucratic regime built up to instruct the people on how or what to consume. This is rather a discussion about everyday life; life as people experience it. The constant media barrage to show ones subversiveness, youthfulness, rebelliousness, through consuming is how the consumption society seeks to imprint the everyday lives of the people with a corporatized consuming imprint.² I will later explain how this notion that people willingly turn themselves into commodities themselves through consumption practices constitutes a kind of terrorism from which it is difficult to escape.

My discussion of this consumption society starts soon after the beginning the Cold War with the focus on hip consumerism in the 1960s. This intense focus on consumption and how to advertise consuming as a cool way affirm the existing order of consumption did not attempt to co-opt the counterculture that was emerging from a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the social order. Rather, it incorporated that dissatisfaction into an avenue through which rebellious impulses could be satisfied through consumption.

This faux counterculture, which was produced parallel to, but not co-opting, the existing counter culture, was vital for the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, as it allowed capital to expand even more into the citizenry's everyday lives, and the fake counterculture was able to effectively squash a real politically motivated counterculture.

² Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), xv

This happened because the social order was efficient in channeling those rebellious impulses that may make one join some kind of counterculture into rationales for consuming. This is borne out in advertisements of youthful aftershaves, rebellious cars, and food that show what non-conformists people are.

In the decade or so before the end of the Cold War, when the United States narrative changed to arguing that the Soviet Union would no longer provide any real challenge to the capitalist order, instead of the previous narrative that focused on making The United States the “cool” alternative, the use for consumption being cool was no longer the priority. To be sure, cool consumption did not go away, but was expanded in the idea of market populism. Now, not only was consumption cool, it was the morally correct option. Heeding and validating the market’s whims became a top priority. Here is where the merger in the current context of the state and the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption becomes complete: the market is what controls people’s motivations, desires, and needs. If these are satisfied, then the market is more democratic than any system of government could ever be.

With this conflation in mind, I return to my conception of the rebel and ask how one is able to rebel. Relatedly, against what does one rebel? In chapter four I explore the possibilities of the model of rebellion that I have set up in the current context. If the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is so totalizing and engrained in our everyday lives, how does one say no to such a totality? How do people find spaces in which to try to extract themselves from their current context? Is saying “no” in certain areas but legitimating the order in others really a “no?” Essentially, I am asking if the model of rebellion put forth by my readings of Camus and Marcuse are cogent in the current context. Even with a solid formulation of what it means to rebel, there are still some challenges that must be faced to try to expose the cracks in the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption.

At this point, I return to the discussion of Lefebvre’s text to argue that the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is a terrorist society. This does not mean that there is a threat of random acts of violence, but it is rather an inward-directed terror

that is “so fundamental to modern life that it has become second nature.”³ This inward-directed terrorism of turning oneself into a commodity (having good hair and teeth, using the right chemicals to smell good and be attractive) and in essence selling people back to themselves through the products used to commodify the individual in the first place.

Lefebvre also discusses in the terrorist nature of the modern world is that there is no oppressive state looming overhead, it is everywhere and nowhere at the same time, giving the illusion of freedom while oppressing opposing thought, with its aim to eliminate critical thinking.⁴ The admixture of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption’s oppression and simultaneous illusory freedom to rebel indicates that rebellion is an increasing impossibility, rendering my theoretical construct the rebel impotent. In the face of this problem, two possibilities seem to emerge. First the subject is driven inwards instead of acting publicly. If people are unable to understand each other and our misgivings about the social order, what can be done? Second, the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption seeks to placate the people under its auspices with entertainment and democracy through spending, and even though this is not necessarily an unsatisfying way to live our lives, what are the alternatives? Marcuse warns us that the nature of capital is to not be able to sate the wants it creates, and that drives an ever-increasing amount of production.⁵

Yet, if there are market populists, the true believers in the United States context, why question it? This theodicy is powerful, and even if we construct an aesthetic dimension, the totality may be too much to overcome. This essentially severs the important connection Camus makes between rebellion and revolutionary activity. Individual rebellion, as Camus reminds us, is fruitless, and the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption seems to have severed that nexus with hip consumerism and market populism. Those under a bureaucratic society of controlled consumption conflate affluence with happiness, combine consumption and satisfaction, rebellion with market

³ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), xv

⁴ Ibid, 187

⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1972), 16

affirmation. But that is not to say that people are duped, or somehow fooled and are wallowing in ignorance. Rather, there is simply no alternative, and the totality of the society does not allow for real rebellious action, and instead props up its facsimile that essentially affirms the existing order. The bureaucratic society of controlled consumption produces its own counterculture through avenues like hip consumerism and market populism to channel the rebellious impulses of dissatisfied customers into affirming capital by consuming. Instead of doing the hard political work of trying to change the world, consumers are instead implored by commercials to buy certain cell phones to end AIDS in Africa, play an online game to send rice to poor countries, or state ones preferences on ironic tee-shirts to let everybody know just how jaded and discontent a person really is. None of these things actually seek to change the existing order even though some may accomplish meaningful goals – sending rice to an impoverished country is probably a good thing - yet consumption and market participation seems to be the only readily available channel. The market's elevation to a moral regime with true believers makes it harder for meaningful alternatives or true dissent to emerge. This is why it is easier to just declare the end of history after the Cold War instead of re-evaluating rebellious politics. At that point, one person establishing the aesthetic dimension and liberating themselves through art and trying to negate the order for a better world becomes almost impossible, and rebellious impulses become sublimated into a reworking of ones place in the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption.

I then try to step into a broader, global context and analyze various groups: illegal immigrant groups in France, burgeoning democratic happenings in Brazil, even conventional “terrorist” groups in the United States context such as Al Qaeda and Hamas. I argue that even though these groups are outside of the United States context that I focus on, those who establish that liberating aesthetic dimension can still evaluate the rebellious nature of their actions to decide if they are really rebellious, terrorists, or seek assimilation into the global capital regime. Beyond this mere assessment, I also note that these global groups are important for helping those in the United States context see the cracks in the consumption society, to step outside of media narratives and use the critical

thinking capacities given by the rebellious subjectivity in the aesthetic dimension to make judgments about rebellious actions for themselves.

But this is not easy to do, and I conclude that rebellion is in dire straits. The concept that I elaborate does not graft very well onto the current context, and even though there are some things worth reclaiming about rebellion in my readings of Marcuse and Camus, a new rebel, a subject not yet called into being must be formulated. The difficulty is that the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is so pervasive and total that it actually breeds a rebellion, but only a certain kind of rebellion – the rebellion that ends up taking the genuine feeling of dissatisfaction of everyday life and uses it merely to consume by other means, to legitimate the order by other ways. Even if people fulfill both Camus' and Marcuse's condition for rebellion; even if they are able to liberate themselves and see how things really are, and they say "no" to the regime; and, at the same time, even as they affirm the inherent worth of their humanity, the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption still maintains control. Though these difficulties are enormous, rebellious subjectivity is important for resisting the social order. It should be cultivated, preserved, hopefully to the extent that real challenges can be mounted to market populists in the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption.

Chapter 2: A Theoretical Construction of the Rebel

Before constructing a model of the rebel, it makes sense to first decide whether it is worth talking about the rebel at all. If there are other forms of resistance that are available, why bring up this concept? I argue through my readings of Marcuse and Camus that the rebel is the proper agent of change in a society as a response to irrational oppression. The rebel comes out of a rebellious subjectivity through a liberating aesthetic dimension. This dimension is not only important for the rebel, in deciding how and why to rebel, but also important for the individuals who critically assess the rebel's actions to decide if that person is actually rebelling.

To identify the rebel I must track from where the rebel comes. In his short book The Aesthetic Dimension, Herbert Marcuse makes the argument that art, by valuing the subject, can open for that subject a liberational aesthetic dimension. Marcuse is constantly vigilant against is the one-dimensionality of society and the totality that it entails. From the title alone, we can infer that the aesthetic dimension is a way for us to free ourselves from the one-dimensionality of encroaching totality. How does Marcuse ask us to create this space? Through art. But before we move on to using art to produce a space of liberation, we must first figure out what art is. Even though Marcuse focuses on literature in The Aesthetic Dimension, we can probably apply it to all forms of art. Art is authentic when it is revolutionary, or carries with it a revolutionary potential. It is... “subversive of perception and understanding, an indictment of the established reality, the appearance of the image of liberation.”⁶ He points out that this can happen in different ways in different spaces and times, from surrealism being an indictment of the Fordist capitalist order to the power of Goethe. In this function of art, Marcuse finds its truth when he says “The truth of art lies in this: that the world really is as it appears in the work of art.”⁷ Herein lies the impetus of art. Art is not art because of external evaluation. It has the power in and of itself for the subject interacting with it, to inform the subject's praxis. This essentially means that when we engage art, it opens up for us a possibility of a better

⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press. Boston, 1978), xi

⁷ Ibid, xii

or different world and the space that opens up and propels us to see these possibilities is the aesthetic dimension. Marcuse asserts that, “Art breaks open a dimension inaccessible to other experience, a dimension in which human beings, nature, and things no longer stand under the law of the established reality principle. Subjects and objects encounter the appearance of that autonomy which is denied them in their society.”⁸ From this we can derive that the aesthetic dimension is arguably more real than the material world – the perhaps one-dimensional world of capital, and from this new realm of experience, the dimension gives us a richer world of existence. He notes that “The transcendence of immediate reality shatters the reified objectivity of established social relations and opens a new dimension of experience: rebirth of the rebellious subjectivity.”⁹ Art opens up a way to think about the world in other ways, to imagine a better place, so through the cultivation of this new dimension, these possibilities are formulated and refined.

If art is good for one, it is probably good for all, even though there may be different reactions as to what constitutes good art – the effects that it can have are still impressionable. Sometimes the art is revolutionary in that it broadens and forms the aesthetic dimension for an individual, and sometimes not. It is important to remember, however, that Marcuse thinks that there is such a thing as art for art’s sake. It is edifying to consume art because even if it does not immediately lead to rebellion, as it still allows the subject to form a liberational space by which to guide their actions. Marcuse tells us that, “It is all too easy to relegate love and hate, joy and sorrow, hope and despair to the domain of psychology, thereby removing them from the concerns of radical praxis. Indeed, in terms of political economy they may not be ‘forces of production,’ but for every human being they are decisive, they constitute reality.”¹⁰ Because art helps us constitute our reality, and helps us piece together the emotional and experiential aspects of our everyday life, we can say that art is always already good for us.

This makes sense because we do not often rely on macro level number-crunched empirical data to guide our lives; indeed many times this is impractical. Therein also lies

⁸ Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press. Boston, 1978), 72

⁹ Ibid, 7

¹⁰ Ibid, 5

the given-ness of art; what is as we find it, that allows us to exercise our subjectivity to our own ends surpassing the given, taking this malleable thing and doing with it what we please, to act in such a manner that this dimension guides us. Marcuse argues that it is art that is part of the given and yet still able to transgress the given, the way we find things. We create for ourselves, in the aesthetic dimension, a brand new space, removed from actuality, to “create a counter-conscious: a negation of the realist conformist mind.”¹¹ A new reality from the given reality; maybe a realer reality, or at least a richer, virtual one. To be sure, cognizance of the value of literature is not able to change the world, but as Marcuse says, “it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world.”¹² Art informs praxis. Praxis informs action. Action informs change. The first step is vital because it is difficult to establish a praxis for action that is based upon empiricism, because again, sometimes this is impossible, and rebellion in the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is impossible because we do not have empirical data about it. And this comes about because of the subject and his or her relation to art, as Marcuse says, “Liberating subjectivity constitutes itself in the inner history of the individuals – their own history, which is not identical with their social existence... experiences which are not necessarily grounded in their class situation and which are not even comprehensible from this perspective.”¹³ This history addresses the individual and avoids focusing only on the social predicament. The bureaucratic society of controlled consumption seeks to focus on the social existence only, and discourages people from exploring this inner history. Art allows this inner history to be released and the possibility of a new reality is considered.

Within this dimension, the individual is free to formulate new ways of social life unencumbered by the world of production. If this free thought and desire for a better reality leads the individual to rebel, this dimension is where it comes from, the desire that things can be better. But establishing the aesthetic dimension does not mean that every individual becomes a rebel. The difficulty of becoming a rebel is that there is no quick

¹¹ Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press. Boston, 1978), 9

¹² *Ibid*, 32

¹³ *Ibid*, 5

how-to guide. Merely uttering the “grand refusal,” or being dissatisfied with the status quo does not a rebel make. There is the notion of free action, and saying both “yes” and “no,” not delimiting rebellion to mere negation. With this understanding that the concept of rebellion is a free act where a subject has the freedom to say yes or no, we can look at the rebel as an individual. Camus’ definition of a rebel is:

A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes, from the moment he makes his first gesture of rebellion... What does he mean by saying no? He means, for example, that “this has been going on too long,” “up to a point yes, beyond it no,” “you are going too far,” or, again, “there is a limit beyond which you shall not go.” In other words, his no affirms the existence of a borderline... He affirms that there are limits and also that he suspects – and wishes to preserve – the existence of certain things on this side of the borderline. He demonstrates, with obstinacy, that there is something in him which is “worth while” and which must be taken into consideration. In a certain way, he confronts an order of things which oppresses him with the insistence on a kind of right not to be oppressed beyond the limit that he can tolerate.¹⁴

There is a clear move by Camus to set up a distinction between the refusal and a renunciation. This distinction is important because it attempts to set up some sort of framework for action. An attempt to renounce everything seems impossible, since that individual is enmeshed in that context, and that if everything is worth renouncing, then there is nothing fighting for, and at that point, rebellion becomes meaningless. The “no” becomes a way to direct the rebellious impulse *at* something, setting up the limits of rebellion. In Camus’ construction, the borderline is set by the individual who is engaged in rebellion, the parameters established by whatever is worth while inside the rebel, and this idea lends itself to the notion that it must be the individual who decides to what limit they will be oppressed, while at the same time supposing that the person rebelling is aware of the order that is doing the oppressing.

The idea that the rebel must both say “yes” and “no” indicates that while there is a rejection there must be a simultaneous affirmation of something; something worth saving in ones subjectivity; this is also what drives the argument by Marcuse. Camus pulls the

¹⁴ Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York, NY: Vintage International Press, 1956), 13

idea out of just the subject, and if one decides to rebel, he or she must keep it in the context of broader action, that if this refusal or implementation of limits is good for one person it must be good for everyone, and so justifies rebellion. For Camus:

The sudden appearance of the concept of “All or Nothing” demonstrates that rebellion, contrary to current opinion, and though it springs from everything that is most strictly individualistic in man, questions the very idea of the individual. If the individual, in fact, accepts death and happens to die as a consequence of his act of rebellion, he demonstrates by doing so that he is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of a common good which he considers more important than his own destiny... We see that the affirmation implicit in every act of rebellion is extended to something that transcends the individual in so far as it withdraws him from his supposed solitude and gives him a reason to act.¹⁵

Here Camus sets up the idea that rebellion cannot be for the individual deciding to rebel alone. Though we know that a rebellious impulse arises from the individual, the individualism can be given up for the common good. Here is where the shift from I to we begins to take place. *I* rebel in order that *we* may inhabit a better world.

Rebellious action is not just a matter of saying “no” and then things change, or saying “no” and then doing nothing. Rather, in Camus’ construction, the rebellious action that results from the initial impulse to rebel is equally important. Rebellious action carries with it the possibility of violence, and participating in violence is not an issue to be taken lightly, but rather must be well-grounded in the subject that violence could be a possibility. A discussion of Camus’ take of the “fastidious assassins of 1905” in his play, *The Just Assassins* underscores this point:

“...necessary and inexcusable – that is how murder appeared to them.” Necessary and inexcusable – a tragic conjunction from which the just assassins refused to shy away. These men were heroes for Camus because “they lived on the plane of their idea.” As revolutionaries, they refused to place themselves above the dangers and risks attached to the use of violence.¹⁶

¹⁵ Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York, NY: Vintage International Press, 1956), 15-16

¹⁶ Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 136-137

A tension seems to emerge here between the worth of the individual and the willingness of the individual to sacrifice themselves for the “worth while” aspects of all individuals. My reading of Camus is not that this tension is somehow resolved through proper rebellion, or alleviated by certain kinds of violence. Rather, I use this position by Camus to argue that the tension can never be resolved, only understood. The individual must then act. So when the assassins said “no” to the current order, they are not merely voicing some sort of dissatisfaction with the regime, but live with that tension that comes with rebellion, that is both necessary and inexcusable. When confronted with the very brutal consequences of rebellious actions for them, in this case murder, we see that they accept it, even though the very idea of rebellion itself abhors violence because of a fundamental belief of a human nature that is worth preserving for all, even at the expense of the rebel:

Analysis of rebellion leads at least to the suspicion that, contrary to the postulates of contemporary thought, a human nature does exist, as the Greeks believed. Why rebel if there is nothing permanent in oneself worth preserving? It is for the sake of everyone in the world that the slave asserts himself when he comes to the conclusion that a command has infringed on something in him which does not belong to him alone, but which is common ground where all men – even the man who insults and oppresses him – have a natural community.¹⁷

It is interesting to note here that Camus does not explain what the “natural community” is, and what we can pull from this reading is that it is up to the individual engaging in rebellious activity to determine what it is for them. The rebellious subjectivity is just that, informed by the subject. But since it is also dangerous to validate every impetus for rebellion, we must come back to is Camus’ shifting sands that we must pay attention to while seeking the foundations for and limits of rebellion. The initial decision to engage in rebellious activity morally challenges the individual, and the decision to follow through is an act that morally challenges the nature of humanity itself. Camus sums up this idea in one sentence: “I rebel, therefore we exist.”¹⁸ My reading of Camus asserts then, that a true act of rebellion is itself an affirmation of the worth of humanity, shifting from the

¹⁷ Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York, NY: Vintage International Press, 1956), 16

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 22

individual decision to act to the broader social consequences of that rebellion would be, but for it to be rebellion in a Camusian sense, there must be this shift from “I” to “we” when a person decides to rebel.

Even though it is unclear what Camus’ natural community is, or what the worthwhile aspects of humanity are, Camus argues that it is up to the individual to decide what that is for oneself when deciding to act. Camus seems to be issuing a call for people to act like the just assassins; to live with their decisions, understanding what it means to rebel, fully understanding that the consequences of their actions is necessarily unknowable. We also see once again the connection between the individual saying no and then the call to act in concert with other people, showing the move from the individual decision to rebel to the working of rebellion being done with others. It is up to each individual to tear down the curtain and see how things really are, and only then can the idea of action be entertained.

This is a relatively loose construction of rebellion, and it is by design, because when looking for possibilities of rebellion borne out of the formation of the aesthetic dimension, it is important not to limit the subject’s actions by labeling certain actions as proper rebellion and others as improper. I argue that the “yes” and “no” are sufficient conditions. This is not an attempt to write the rebellion textbook. That said, it is possible to pervert this idea, so at this point, we should look at what a rebel is not in Camus’ construction. A rebel is not simply a person who is dissatisfied with their everyday lives, or a person who seeks to express themselves. Most important, a rebel is not somebody who is not free. A rebel must have the freedom, the ability to form the space for their rebellious subjectivity, I argue in my reading of Marcuse, through the formation of the liberatory aesthetic dimension.

So in order to rebel, the subject must have a certain degree of freedom in which to operate and fully understand their dissatisfaction and decision to rebel, with a free, liberatory space in which to do so. It is not merely a desire to find a counterculture, nor is it a niche. Camus’ rebel has to have a space of self-awareness that is made through a rebellious subjectivity, but is still vulnerable to external threats, the largest of which is the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, because it seeks to shut down the spaces

where this self-awareness can be cultivated, and action contemplated. Someone engaging in rebellion does not merely seek to change the regime, and blindly entrust their freedom to another regime of their making (such, Camus would say, is the fall of many revolutions), and notes that anybody who would do such a thing “has no right to be surprised when [freedom] is immediately dishonored” in the new regime.¹⁹ The rebel does not merely jump on the revolution bandwagon to replace one regime with another, but rather, through the free thought the aesthetic dimension provides, makes the decision to rebel. Acting in concert comes after that, and the rebel is still allowed to value that free thought that provided the impetus to rebel in the first place.

At this point, one may wonder why I focus so much on the “yes” in rebellion perhaps even more so than the “no.” In other words, why bother using both Marcuse and Camus, why go beyond the great refusal? I argue that even though Marcuse is correct that the great refusal is a proper political response to irrational oppression – in this case by the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, the response is only one part of rebellion. As individuals, we can say no to anything, from designer wear, to wasteful energy consumption, to brussel sprouts. The great refusal is not enough. Marcuse understands this too, and he is quick to point out the example of his student, Abbie Hoffman and the Yippies, arguing that although they were successfully able to pull back the ideological veil by being unable to take “law and order,” and “justice” seriously, merely exposing the structure behind the veil does not do anything to change that structure, unless they establish a consciousness in the people who are part of the structure behind the veil to eventually move them toward having a radical praxis.²⁰ In my conception of the Marcuse/Camus rebellion, the Yippie movement failed because it did not seek to foster that “yes” and “no” that the rebel needs to utter, and instead was content to rail against the state. However, one does not need to be a rebel to do this. Marcuse continues to argue that rebellious action can happen when the populace becomes aware of the machinations of the structure – but this can only happen when the emancipation is of the consciousness,

¹⁹ Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (New York, NY: Vintage International, 1960), 89

²⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1972), 132

and without it, “radical activism remains blind, self-defeating.”²¹ Camus sets a grounding for how to spread this radicalism, affirming the dignity of humanity by making “the revolutionary struggle, the centuries-old straining toward liberation can be defined first of all as a double and constant rejection of humiliation.”²² This construction seeks to go beyond the great refusal and try to construct the rebel as an individual who affirms humanity, and not just to edify his or herself.

The key in my conception of rebellion is that the rebel is the proper agent for social change. The individual deciding to rebel must be fully aware of what he or she is rebelling against, why, and for what reason. I argue in my reading of Marcuse that the best way to do this is through formulating the liberational aesthetic dimension to carve out a space where the agent can formulate their rebellious subjectivity. This subjectivity is what allows people to shift from the “I” of dissatisfaction to the “we” of acting with others to improve the world. This may prompt one to wonder if social change is possible through agency without bringing in the notion of the rebel. My argument is that the rebel is a necessary agent in attempting to change a social order, the rebel focuses on tearing down the structure behind Marcuse’s ideological veil that cannot happen through an ethos of reform. For an individual to recognize that the social order has overstepped its bounds and an individual’s limits breached, rebellion is the proper political response, not reform. Agreeing with Marcuse in my construction of rebellion to argue that rebellion is the proper political response to irrational oppression, it is important to note that rebellion is not merely taking up arms, and in fact as we recall the rebel should avoid violence. Rather, rebellious activities are those that seek to take down the ideological veil as well as assault the structure behind it to change the social conditions. The rebel shows the cracks in the structures in an attempt to foster the rebellious subjectivity in others.

Before continuing, it must be pointed out that this conception of rebellion based on my reading of Camus and Marcuse is historically situated a couple of decades past the middle of the twentieth century. Even though this construction is decades old, I argue that there is something worth preserving in the notion of a liberatory aesthetic dimension and

²¹ Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1972), 38

²² Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (New York, NY: Vintage International, 1960), 98

the idea that the rebel is the proper agent who issues both a “yes” and “no.” When I apply it to the current context, it is not to show how quaint this conception is, but the challenges that the current order present to it and if there is a way to preserve these basic tenets of rebellion for the future.

Even if this is all true, there is still the question of external forces. In my case, the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is able to effectively stop this rebellion. It not only tops the act of rebellion or revolutionary activity, but it stops the notion of rebelling from ever taking root in the subject’s consciousness. If the individual is still able to, through the aesthetic dimension, say the simultaneous no and yes of rebellion that both negates the existing order and affirms humanity, the next question we must ask is “so what?” If the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is so totalizing that the subject is unable to do anything with their rebellious impulses, or is compelled to act in a way that is ultimately counterproductive to those rebellious impulses, then what good is rebelling? In the construction given, using Camus and Marcuse jointly, it seems easy enough to answer the questions necessary for rebellion. If, however, the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is so pervasive, hence obfuscating that we can no longer answer the questions of rebellion: Against whom? Why? To what end? Then there must either be a re-imagining of rebellious politics or we come to the conclusion that the agency required to rebel is stunted and the totalizing terror of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is most likely insurmountable.

Analyzing the entire bureaucratic society of controlled consumption would fill volumes, and I want to try to keep the discussion of it in the specific mechanisms within it to disrupt rebellious subjectivity. With this in mind, I will attempt to analyze two distinct strains in the American current context: hip consumerism and market populism. Hip consumerism seeks to create a false counterculture by channeling peoples’ rebellious impulses into methods of consumption with self-advertised “subversive” brands. This was a way to identify the consumption society as the “cool” alternative to the Soviet Union. This then evolved into market populism, where not only as market validation through consumption the cool thing to do, it was the morally correct thing to do. Market populism is a neoliberal strand of thinking that conflates market participation with

democracy. Against the backdrop these two phenomena, I will apply my construction of the rebel.

Chapter 3: The Bureaucratic Society of Controlled Consumption; Hip

Consumerism and Market Populism

The bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, concisely formulated by Lefebvre as a modern capitalist society that programs everyday life for proper consuming practices.²³ In order to homogenize everyday life the “cool” is constructed, where, “instead of tragedy there are objects, certainties, ‘values,’ roles, satisfactions, jobs, situation and function.”²⁴ The whole point of this consumption society is to satisfy the material wants of its citizens, even if those wants are manufactured. The point of the bureaucratization of everyday life is not that there is an oppressive state machine telling people how to consume or live our everyday lives, but rather it is an inward directed phenomenon; in this regime people willfully put up with these satisfactions.²⁵

It also gives the citizenry a mechanism within itself through which to critically analyze the society, which works best when fully enmeshed in a society of consumption.²⁶ In an effort to keep with the cool, controlled consumption presents a fake counterculture to placate a subject’s desire for rebellion by diverting it into consumption, a “hip consumerism.” Lefebvre notes in the 1960s some advertisements for products like aftershave, and how they show a rugged individuality, and how in even more general terms try to sell not a product but a way of life. Now there is more to everyday life than just consumption, there are ways in which we are supposed to correctly enjoy the fruits of that consumption.²⁷ Because of capital’s desire for people under its auspices to consume correctly, it does not make sense to talk about co-optation in the United States context that I focus on in this chapter. Instead of co-opting the “hip” and changing populism, the consumption society merely changed the definitions of each and appropriated this new

²³ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), 65

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid, 192

²⁶ Ibid, 79

²⁷ Ibid, 106-7

definition as the normative one that should be followed. It is in this way the society produces culture.

The bureaucratic society of controlled consumption exists to produce a culture. It makes an everyday life that is completely in sync with patterns of consumption, and what better way than to convey this new, edgy, non-conformist everyday life that the capitalist society thinks everybody wants than to advertise it as such? If advertisers tell us that cars are a mark of the truly rebellious individual, we may still consume it, even if we know that it is not true because of the status it confers. The bureaucratic society of controlled consumption not only tells us what to want, but it also tells us how to want it. Consumption not only becomes a means by which to satisfy ones material wants. They are also signs that indicate status. Lefebvre tells us that the car is a “status symbol, it stands for comfort, power, authority and speed.”²⁸

During this battle for the hearts and minds of the citizenry, capital became cool – consumption showed just how subversive people really were. However, in the decades before the Cold War was over, the uncool construction of the Soviet Union that had been built up– bread lines, ratty wool overcoats and Volga cars; patently uncool stuff to be sure – ceased to be important. One did not need to rebel in order to think this way, but with the basis of criticism coming from within the society itself, the consumption society needs to validate its option as the cooler one. Without this alternative, the social order that emerged had to be right. Here is the impetus for the utopian writings of the 1990s, the techno liberation we became destined for, out-of-the-box business production that would release our chains to the world. This is turning out to be false, but constant legitimation is what the regime needs. Even with all this earnest affirmation of the market, people still find that they are unsatisfied by the regime of capital. When there is a legitimate feeling of dissatisfaction, and a desire to make a space in which to rebel, capital seeks to placate those feelings by providing its own counterculture – a rebellion that affirms the existing order. The fact that the bureaucratic society of controlled

²⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), 101

consumption can produce its own form of rebellion speaks to its totality; it is large enough to engineer a space to truly encompass everybody, even the truly discontent.

Hip Consumerism

The idea of capitalism presenting alternative or hip lifestyles from within its own framework is not a new idea. The notion that a capitalist structure will take the idea of the carnival and turn it into something that can be marketed as carnival-esque is one such “alternative” provided, and that the old hum-drum of work and leisure has been recast in such a way that even leisure has to be done correctly through the proper channels, not taken up for its own sake or as the “reward of labor” through intermediaries like television, tourism, and cinema.²⁹ But the faux culture is not perfect, and the people who have this faux culture imposed on them are able to see through much of it, much like the consumers of culture can today with being savvy consumers, aware of the obvious marketing blitz:

The middle classes wallow in satisfactions and are yet half-aware of being swindled; they carry very little weight, have only a smattering of wealth, no power and no authority, but their way of life seems to have conquered the whole of society including the working classes, so that they must live henceforth like the proletariat or only a fraction better.³⁰

There is no trickery involved here; it does not take a rebel to understand that we are being told to consume certain goods and instructed on how to spend our leisure time, and we know that a car does not make one a better or worse person, and yet this hip consumerism “works” in that the society still does consume these things in an orderly fashion.

Conventional wisdom has it that we should buy new computers every two years, because the models we are using now will be hopelessly obsolete by then. Still, in the 1950s and 1960s, advertisers and the business culture seized upon this notion of the hip consumer making smart choices about the goods they consumed.

²⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), 54

³⁰ *Ibid*, 93

Business culture utilized the idea of hipness in industry to make a faux counterculture to perpetuate a system of consumerism. When ad agencies and menswear firms were breaking out of their gray flannel suit mold and mathematical rubrics for placement of products in advertisements, they seized upon the idea of the counterculture, and used the rebel, the individual who says no, and the emphasis of youth to their end.³¹ What happened as American dissatisfaction from the 1950s was changed by a creative revolution in the business culture was a move for the very reason of consuming itself. Even as political conservatives railed against the faux counterculture, it nevertheless “conveniently and efficiently transform[ed] the myriad petty tyrannies of economic life – all the complaints about conformity, oppression, bureaucracy, meaningless, and the disappearance of individualism that became virtually a national obsession during the 1950s – into rationales for consuming.”³² We are already seeing how reaching the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is; it employs the markets and those who profit from them to manufacture a desire for products deemed countercultural, and right-wing zealots can rail against these rebels, closing down spaces for real rebellious activity.

This is not to say that consumers are stupid. It’s not that advertising really “tricks” people, and that people for the most part understand what is being done to them. Frank notes that many Americans think advertising “works” either because of subliminal messages, or because of the awesome power of a Paris-New York fashion cabal. He tries to explore the middle ground, where advertisers are neither mind-controllers, but nor do they simply shove products down our throats.³³ Rather, the business culture simply attempts to capture and reproduce the ethos of the counterculture, and as David Ogilvy wrote, “Our business needs massive transfusions of *talent*. And talent, I believe, is most likely to be found among the nonconformists, dissenters, and rebels.”³⁴ Talent seems like a desirable thing, but Ogilvy does not give a standard for talent, nor does he elucidate whom the nonconformists, dissenters, and rebels are. Nevertheless, these exciting

³¹ Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 27

³² *Ibid*, 31

³³ *Ibid*

³⁴ *Ibid*, 50

buzzwords and the chase of the cutting edge shook up the 1950s' stodgy conformist order and did indeed infuse the industry with a real creative talent. Is that synonymous with infusing the stodgy conformist order with actual rebels? Ogilvy misses the point of actual rebellion.

But we can see this infusion of creative talent marketing to in-the-know consumers in a litany of advertisements from the 60s. From Volkswagen's knowing wink that "you're too smart for advertising" advertisement: "Just because we sell cars doesn't put selling at the top of the agenda" or "How much longer can we hand you this line?"³⁵ to transgressive ad agencies that used creativity to subvert the establishment ad agencies, which ad guru George Lois says:

...was the venom of the establishment... Ninety-nine percent of the advertising came from the BBDOs and the J. Walter Thompsons, who were sitting there watching Doyle Dane's advertising and my advertising, and they were furious, because their clients were saying, "Why can't you do something like that?" Dozens of small ad agencies appeared overnight... promising to deliver the anti-establishment magic of the Volkswagen campaign.³⁶

It is unclear exactly how a car manufacturer can be anti-establishment; after all, Lois never bothers to say what, exactly, the establishment is. But lest you think only automobiles can deliver us from the humdrum of everyday life, even soda became a product of cultural liberation.

Dr. Pepper's uniqueness and hipness supposedly rocked the foundation of the establishment by how people in the know ordered soda:

...A number of Dr. Pepper consumers...confront a bookish librarian, quintessential enforcer of the logocentric order, coaxing her to "Have some excitement." After tasting "some originality" in the form of Dr. Pepper, she is instantly liberated and begins to cast off her various sartorial restraints; removing jacket, glasses, scarf, letting her hair down, and joining in the carnivalesque Dr. Pepper dance.³⁷

³⁵ Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 65

³⁶ Ibid, 91

³⁷ Ibid, 164

The order, of course, was not rocked. It was a good way for Dr. Pepper to advertise, however, and was very successful. It is important to remember that all of this hip transgression in the advertising industry, responsible for shaping a piece of American culture, was a very real response to the 1950s, and that the creativity there was also real. But it is not counterculture. It is so close, however, that you can hardly blame a person for confusing business culture and counterculture in the 1960s.³⁸ There is also no reason to think this has stopped in the 1960s. Now that the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is the only moral option following the cold war, there is at the very least the same degree of business culture-as-counterculture. It has worked for decades, and there is no real reason to stop now, cars can still be consumed as symbols of power and status, and feeling like we are doing something subversive when we buy certain products still has its appeal.

In that same vein, Cadillac semi-erotically wants to know if our cars return the favor when we turn them on³⁹, and Cheetos has re-branded itself as a snack for adults during nighttime commercial hours. The ad agency for Cheetos wants us to join the “Orange Underground,” by not putting up with snotty people treating us poorly, and that eating Cheetos as an adult “feels like a nonconformist movement. You’re supposed to be eating arugula dip, but you have a nonconformist desire.”⁴⁰ No comment from the people who are supposed to be eating artichoke dip. This is not a radical departure from the advertising campaigns of the 1960s, telling us not only what to desire, but how to desire it. Rather, we see the continuation, and it should certainly disavow any notion of some kind of romanticized good old days, where advertisers were honest and direct. The marketing of a purely manufactured counterculture is nothing new. In fact, we see that “late capitalism so successfully reorganized American society during the 1940s and 1950s that, by the 1960s and 1970s, the further extension of corporate capital’s institutional rationality proved politically counterproductive and organizationally

³⁸ Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 111

³⁹ Cadillac-GM Sites, “Turn You On (Kate)” Accessed 4/23:
www.cadillac.com/cadillacjsp/footer/downloads.jsp

⁴⁰ Slate.com Chester’s Got a Brand New Bag. Seth Stevenson, March 18, 2008. slate.com/id/2186601/

destructive.”⁴¹ The bureaucratic society of controlled consumption understands that there must be a certain discontent element in society, and as such manufactured a counterculture to always make sure that people acted by consuming.

So as cutting edge ad agencies are selling people rebellious cars and sodas that stick it to the man, we should wonder if there was, and if so - what happened to the actual counterculture; a possible space for rebellious action. It certainly is not to be found in cars or soda, or menswear. Culture production actually made menswear a gold mine in the faux counterculture. Industry was able to keep up with the tastes and trends of people and styles in such a short amount of time that shops could afford to take risks with weird styles that would be obsolete in three months anyway:

The men’s clothing industry was not an impartial observer to this shift in public tastes, nor did it defend the looks it had produced in previous years. Entrenched and “established” though it was, this branch of capital spoke out forthrightly for the counterculture’s revolution in consciousness and the resulting revolution in the way men bought clothing.⁴²

Essentially, advertising gurus in menswear are saying that counterculture is whatever is coming out in next season’s line; it is up to the rebel-consumers to keep up with the pace and make sure we have Nehru jackets when appropriate.

Of course, this is only one area of the faux counterculture that can sublimate an individual’s dissatisfaction and desire to rebel. This is fine within the framework of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, because they manufacture more articles of clothing for our different styles. Clothes are no longer for a purpose and meant to be worn until they unraveled – they now had to be constantly bought. One way to rebel is to keep up with fashion week and show that you know better, or you could buy different commodities to prove that fashion does not mean much to you. In the current context, it stands to reason that this phenomenon is even more accelerated. Not only are there larger conglomerates pumping out even more massive and varied amounts and styles of clothes, we can get on the internet and order them directly from the manufacturer, or at least a wholesaler, and we can get them on the cheap. Target must be keenly aware that its

⁴¹ Timothy W. Luke, *Social Theory and Modernity* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 160

⁴² Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 223

current ad campaign selling Converse One-Stars is aimed at mid-twenties adults who paid attention when Nirvana front man Kurt Cobain made them popular in the mid-1990s.⁴³

Not finding the counterculture in any of the facets of the creative revolution that swept through the culture industry, the claim that the business culture and counterculture as parallel phenomena that do not cross becomes more convincing. But regardless, for all the railing of the faux counterculture done by political conservatives, there was an actual counterculture, and it makes sense that advertisers would attempt to seize upon that notion to sell more goods. The problem is that in the hunt for the real counterculture, the advertising agencies had a difficult time making it past the mirror: “Madison Avenue’s vision of the counterculture was notoriously unconvincing to those who actually took part in the movement – and for a very simple reason: they were not necessarily the primary target of such campaigns... Caught up in the frenzies of the Creative Revolution, admen looked at the counterculture and saw...themselves.”⁴⁴ They simply mined the values that fit them and made a fake counterculture and sold it to people to perpetuate a society of consumption through this fake rebellion. The actual counterculture, the real space where rebellion is possible, is not granted by snarky ad-men, nor is it given to us by the market that understands; it must be made.

There would be a variety of ways to establish a counterculture; what is important is that the counterculture cannot come out of the market framework. It makes sense that we are unable to find it in the creative revolution of the business culture, but we may yet be able to keep the notion that it exists, since the culture that produced the business culture’s creative revolution was a similar impetus to an actual counterculture, and that it exists outside the creative revolution, and outside of a completely capitalist framework entirely. After all, there is nothing fake about the dissatisfaction and dissociation that people feel with their everyday lives. But Madison Avenue’s hip revolution in business culture must exist inside the framework capitalism, and sure enough:

⁴³ PRNewswire, “Converse and Target to Launch 'One Star' Exclusive Sportswear and Footwear Beginning Spring 2008” 11/19/2007 Accessed 4/23: www.prnewswire.com/cgi-bin/stories.pl?ACCT=109&STORY=/www/story/11-19-2007/0004708708&EDATE=

⁴⁴ Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 120-1

Yet through it all, capital remained firmly in the national saddle, its economic and cultural products unimpeded even though the years of conformity had given way to those of cultural radicalism. What changed were...the strategies of consumerism, the ideology by which business explained its domination of the national life. Now products existed to facilitate our rebellion against the soul-deadening world of products, to put us in touch with our authentic selves, to distinguish us from the mass-produced herd, to express our outrage at the stifling world of economic necessity.⁴⁵

The whole point of advertising, after all, is to sell goods to consumers. No matter how much the advertising agencies try to parrot a real counterculture, at the end of the day, their job remains the same. But they were able to make a rationale for consuming as a way to show ones dissatisfaction with consumption.

The circularity of the idea that when we get fed up with a consumer culture, we should consume the fake counterculture should be unsettling. Real notions of counterculture, where there was a direct challenge to the order of ever-increasing consumerism, could be found in Abbie Hoffman's book, for instance, or understanding how "hip consumerism" is a contradiction that merely changes our mindset of "affluence" to one of "rebellion." Now we talk about rebel billionaires, and revolutionaries who really shake things up by investing in stocks, bonds, and hedge funds. The counterculture seems to have been defeated. The faux consumer counterculture is still well in place and was in fact replicated in the 1990s, when people wanted authenticity, and products that were subversive and rebellious.⁴⁶

The cycle of the faux counterculture seems to repeat itself every few years so we can be brought out of our malaise to embrace the rebel youth culture and buy more stuff. "Business seems to find whatever it chooses to find in youth culture, and any creative lifestyle reporter can think of a dozen pseudo-historical platitudes to rationalize whatever identity they are seeking to pin on the demographic at hand."⁴⁷ Here is where a fake counterculture can be manufactured. All that capital has to do is pretend like consumption

⁴⁵ Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 229

⁴⁶ Ibid, 230-232

⁴⁷ Ibid, p 234

is the way to address a very real youth culture bubbling for free expression under the normal humdrum of life, and now we have the true believers to make it so. Real counterculture though, is pushed even further on the fringes of society, and in this mass production of creative business culture, becomes ever harder to find. This is how the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption seeks to shut down spaces for rebellious action; by misdirecting the impulse. But that way is merely a way to consume things differently, and so the cycle repeats itself, and rebellious action is never seriously considered. Dissatisfaction is placated with consumption, and the cycle continues.

Market Populism

We see that hip consumerism never truly went away. In the 1990s, however, the market did not need to be cool; it needed validation, because there was no longer a competing ideology for the structure of everyday life. After all, for there to be something that is cool, something must precede or offer an alternative theory to the cool. In the 1990s after the Cold War ended and there was no viable political alternative to the capitalist order, that formerly tragically unhip alternative, the lumbering oppressive communist regimes of the twentieth century went under, and with no alternative, the market no longer had any use for being cool, but that presented a new kind of challenge: validation. Now it needed to be morally right and get some true believers on board. Merely using consumption to convince people that a capitalist regime was cooler than Soviet Russia was easy enough – consumption of the right products means affirmation of the order, and a gross mischaracterization about the everyday life in Soviet Russia helped this notion.

But now that capital is the only contender, the challenge is that it must be right, it has to be the morally correct social order. This further attempts to close down spaces of rebellion, because not only does it provide the fake counterculture to placate our rebellious impulses, it essentially established a religion that the virtuous citizens are supposed to believe in, maintaining that corporations are just individuals like us, and they

seek spiritual guidance just like us.⁴⁸ If nothing else, the market became for us an even more democratic version of democracy itself.⁴⁹

To accomplish this feat of getting true believers behind the beneficent market would take the propelling mechanisms of capitalism out of strictly economic structures; that “‘destroying the old’ and making the world safe for billionaires has been as much a cultural and political operation as an economic one... today, American opinion leaders seem generally convinced that democracy and the free market are simply identical.”⁵⁰ The goal of the business revolution was a logical offshoot of the cultural revolution, as a way for capitalism to not only become more appealing to the consumer, but for the consumers to become true believers themselves as integrated and identical to the market, that the market’s whims dictate their own.

The market-populist citizen arose in the 1990s in response to the post-Cold War malaise, with the specter of Soviet Communism no longer salient, the market populist found that the enemy of Communism was within us the whole time in the form of totalitarian management hierarchies, and the final liberation would come when markets validated the people.⁵¹ Since free market capitalism “won” the Cold War, these markets had to be the “right” way to organize a society, and in the American narrative, that means empowering the people, so that is what had to be argued. The notion of a more people-oriented business management style was the impetus that put forth ideas of citizens who control the means of production – but the production is their creative ideas, not a far offshoot from the rebel influence of the fake counterculture. It is Richard Florida’s “creative economy” that’s based on meta-ideas, “ideas about how to support the production of transmission of other ideas.”⁵² However, once you get out of the circularity of this tautological loop, we see that there is an interesting idea that gets put more or less on Marxist terms; ideas are the means of productions, and since people have ideas, and

⁴⁸ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 229

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 29

⁵⁰ Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 15

⁵¹ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 212

⁵² Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002), 48

people who have ideas are creative people, then creative people who have ideas control the means of production.⁵³ Ideators of the world, unite! one supposes.

This analysis is groundwork for Florida's conception of creativity and the creative class. By defining the parameters of what it means to be in the creative class, Florida hopes to make true believers of us all; after all, since we can all be creative, we can all be in the creative class. For Florida, creativity is the utmost human expression, the impetus behind all major social change, including the Civil Rights movement:

Hiring for diversity, once a matter of legal compliance, has become a matter of economic survival because creativity comes in all colors, genders, and personal preferences... Creativity must be motivated and nurtured in a multitude of ways, by employers, by people themselves and the communities where they locate. Small wonder that we find the creative ethos bleeding out from the sphere of work to infuse every corner of our lives.⁵⁴

By Florida's logic, culture does not change unless business culture wills it to. The creative class seems to have the amazing ability, by the power of their jobs, to change the very fabric of society. What he seems to virtually ignore, however, is the historical aspect of his claim. If integration was good for business, why did it wait until legislation was passed and punitive measures taken for non-compliance? Does he really mean to argue that until legislation was passed it was more creative to discriminate? This aspect lends more credibility to the idea that capital is simply able to adapt to any social circumstances that it needs to in order to thrive. Even though markets shape and drive culture, culture can also influence markets.

Regardless, Florida continues the triumph of creativity as the zenith of human existence, when he notes, "In this new world, it is no longer the organizations we work for, churches, neighborhoods or even family ties that define us. Instead, we do this ourselves, defining our identities along the varied

⁵³ Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002), 37

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 5

dimensions of our creativity.”⁵⁵ We no longer need to be worried about the fetters of spatial, geographical, historical, and class realities. For Florida, our job performance allows us to shape a social existence for ourselves along whatever dimension we like. While this may seem laughable on face, it serves a purpose for Florida’s conception of the creative class. Now, he would have us believe, we can get rid of all of those old class distinctions based on things like wealth, privilege, race, religion, etc. Now we have the creative class and the service class, and no matter what your job or status, the creative class welcomes all, from business and finance professionals to doctors and lawyers. But it gets even better, because Florida would say that even those in the service class could become part of the creative class by as simple and as obvious a virtue as creativity.⁵⁶ What we do not get from this conception, however, is how any service work actually gets done. Further, even though Florida does not enumerate what the “dimensions of our creativity” are, it seems obvious that our creativity is our participation in, and contribution to, the market. In other words, we should be true believers – we are not our neighborhoods, churches, etc: we are our jobs. Real counterculturalists, then, in Florida’s conception, are not looking to change the existing order, they are merely creative people on the fringes of business culture waiting to be heard, rebelling by questioning certain management tactics.⁵⁷

In order to get people on board this market populism, everybody must be able to fit into it. In this regard, Florida’s definition of creativity becomes a catch-all virtue. Creative people work hard, are subversive (though subversive to what, when everybody can be part of the creative class, is a question that remains unanswered – but we can probably assume he means the faux-counterculture discussed in the previous chapter), and concern themselves only with innovation and product design, and cannot be bothered to worry about manufacturing.⁵⁸ It

⁵⁵ Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002), 7

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 8

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 210

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 53

goes without saying by now that the ultimate arbiter of creativity is the market. Creativity and capitalism go hand in hand, so any business must, “create these kinds of environments or they will wither and die.”⁵⁹ No longer is economic failure or success a matter of economics, culture, production, or heaven forbid, chance – with everybody in one class demanding the same thing, the only the fostering of creativity makes business sink or swim. At this point it is clear that “creativity” is a clever euphemism for market value, and Florida wants to make that the true *vox populi*.

It does not take long for Florida to take the next step and say that creativity is vital not only to our economic well-being but political well-being as well. Investing in creative class jobs expanded the class and created 636,000 new jobs in 2001, and even though the manufacturing sector lost 1.2 million jobs in the same year, the investment in creativity would eventually pay dividends that would easily cover up the 664,000 net jobs that were lost in that year – the market, and the creative class, demands it, and so it must be true.⁶⁰ Those people who lost their jobs will eventually be grateful, because once they unshackled themselves from their traditional jobs; they can unlock their creative potential and make something of themselves.⁶¹ How they are supposed to do that, however, Florida fails to answer. They do not need to care about benefits or location; they can go wherever the creativity is because apparently that is what the creative class craves above all else.⁶² One must abdicate any notions of reaching into the upper echelons of management and settle for a horizontal life, shifting from town to town, job to job, unconcerned with security or promotion, because we are all smarter than our bosses now anyway – even if not richer.⁶³ Conspicuously absent in this discussion are those in higher management positions. How do they get there, and if they are not creative enough, why do those positions not evaporate at

⁵⁹ Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002), 13

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 319

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 10

⁶² *Ibid*, 90-1 Figures 5.1, 5.2

⁶³ *Ibid*, 113-4

the altar of the creative free market? The consequences of this mindset are severe. Workers are to be happy with no safety net, little security, and unemployment is a pesky little concern that will not bother us because the market demands so much more from us, and we ought to live up to those expectations. Apparently, people are either creative, or life is miserable. If we fail to adequately believe in the market for capabilities, we have nobody to blame but ourselves.

And so, we have met the market, and it is our creative selves. That we are all so inexorably bound into the market and its functions and that the people grant it legitimacy is an idea that Frank rails about in One Market Under God. For a writer like Florida, whenever the market is in trouble, it must be because there are not enough creative people who sufficiently believe in it to sustain it, and Frank finds this idea patently ludicrous when remarking on a George Gilder article:

When stock markets tanked, when companies blundered, when economies slumped, responsibility for the nastiness could sloughed off on those who did not have faith in the market, on those who had criticized capitalism. A remarkable example of this logic in action was a 1997 editorial in *Forbes ASAP* that urged readers to “get ready to defend the free market.” Throwing together the perfidy of critics, the glory of the Internet, and the horror of France into a gigantic preemptive *j'accuse*, the essay suggested that those who badmouthed the market were sending the world straight into depression, and – yes – war!⁶⁴

This is tough language, and it clearly seeks to make true believers out of its readers. Besides, if people really felt this way, that the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption was a moral order and to act against it was to attempt to destroy civilization, where is there room for the “yes” and “no” of rebellion? For the justification why it was so important to get people to reach a consensus about the inevitability, totality, and benevolence of the market, we need only to point to American history from the 1920s, to show that the market was not always worshipped by the masses: “Unfortunately, the corporate cause has never been very popular. The conservative politicians who are the heroes of the market order – the people who transferred power from government to

⁶⁴ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 21

business – were never able to win elections on that basis alone.”⁶⁵ There was a time when people would look at free markets and in some instances say “no” to them. In order for the business class to overcome that obstacle, they merely changed their strategy and adopted populist backlash language and culturally conscious middle class values:

Barbara Ehrenreich, one of [the backlash’s] most astute chroniclers, points out that the backlash always hinged on a particular appeal to working-class voters, a handful of whom were roped into the Republican coalition with talk of patriotism, culture war, and family values. Both Reagan and Nixon spoke fondly of blue-collar “middle America” even as they kicked its ass... Lee Atwater, an adviser to Presidents Reagan and Bush, warned his colleagues in 1984 that their new blue-collar constituents were “liberal on economics,” and that without culture wars to distract them “populists were left with no compelling reason to vote Republican.”⁶⁶

And even though the culture wars continue today, they lack the ability to gain consensus. After all, there needs to be two sides for a war to occur. To truly fuse the free market system with the people, and remove the order from outside the scope of critique, market populism was the answer. Now the rebel was not only the person who showed his or her dissatisfaction through fashion and food consumption, but also the rebel is the same person who defends the existing market order! In Marcuse’s one-dimensional “society without opposition” the existing order has nothing to be concerned about, since in its totality it has the ability to preclude “the emergence of an effective opposition against the whole.”⁶⁷ This brings the discussion back to Lefebvre’s criticism of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption that has its own acceptable critique build into it. So the consumption society seeks to legitimate itself by using forms of rebellion, or in the form the “creative class,” or some other iteration:

Market populism was just the thing for a social order requiring constant doses of legitimacy. Taking as fact the notion that business gives people what they want, market populism proceeds to build all manner of populist fantasies: Of businessmen as public servants; of industrial and cultural production as a simple reflection of popular desire, of the box office as voting booth. By consuming the fruits of industry, we the people are

⁶⁵ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 25

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 26-7

⁶⁷ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964), 3

endorsing the industrial system, voting for it in a plebiscite far more democratic than a mere election... Since markets express the will of the people, virtually any criticism of business could be described as an act of despicable contempt for the common man... [Market populism] would permit both Hollywood executives and cultural studies scholars to shoot down critics of virtually any culture product as snobs out of touch with the tastes of common people.⁶⁸

The mantra is the same: the market, whatever it did, and regardless of the effect it had on peoples' everyday lives, is the true *vox populi*, more democratic than democracy, and we must respect that as each one of us is told to, "Surrender your arrogant egotism and humbly heed what the market whispers."⁶⁹ Within this narrative, the individual is simultaneously trapped and liberated. Trapped in regards to the options for organizing social life – only an arrogant elitist would dare think of attempting such a task by criticizing the market – since the market is bigger than us all, but liberated in that every single action a person takes within that framework is not only an attempt to validate that framework but maximizes the democratic process by letting us vote with our dollars for everything, a process hastened immeasurably by great technological innovations. We can sign e-petitions, text message votes to let popular reality shows know how we feel, or see a flurry of responses to the State of the Union well before the opposition party is able to get on the air. But we must note that this is not the liberating aesthetic dimension that allows for free action, but a very thinly defined slice of liberation within the oppressive regime where we are allowed to choose how best to validate the market order. True believers have no gripes here in this very specific sphere of liberation. In a particularly disturbing example of the totality of this narrative, there is an argument of Walter Wriston's:

In an ideological homily that would become so orthodox by the end of the decade that it would color much of the foreign affairs reporting to appear in the US, Wriston recites how the VCR brought down Marcos, how the cassette tape brought down the Shah, and how TV destroyed Communism. So wondrous these devices' democratic properties, in fact, that when people watch TV they are actually "voting" for the laissez-faire way, "for

⁶⁸ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 30

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 31

Madonna and Benetton, Pepsi and Prince – but also for democracy, free expression, free markets, and free movement of people and money.” Culture warriors might huff about Madonna’s bad values, but Wriston saw the light: To watch the “material girl” prance was to do nothing less than endorse the steel industry’s efforts to escape regulation and unionization, to authorize Wriston’s own legendary attacks on Glass-Steagall.⁷⁰

The emergence of mass media clearly does not invalidate Glass-Steagall, but market populists can make it fit their narrative, any innovation must be not only good for us but a validation of the current order. For a market populist, it seems, any innovation is labeled “progress,” and all progress in all fields serve to validate the inherent goodness of the free market. It is convenient for market populists to argue in this way, because after all, who would turn down the opportunity to be rich? Why would people who are harmed by this system agree to play the game if they do not believe that they can one day join the billionaires club? And after all, it is easier to think that the internet will save us all than to actually try to engage in democratic or rebellious politics.

Lest we think that we have lost our way since the 1920s, or found our way, for the true believers, it is important to remember that there have been capitalists hyping up and worshipping the free market, and it is not a new phenomenon in American history. It makes sense that wealthy person would be a capitalist to accumulate more capital. In the context that drives one to constantly increase both production and consumption, accumulating more capital comes with that same territory. What is not as clear, though, is why people who are not in the upper levels of the business class accept the logic that if only the market were unblemished by regulation and union activity, then everybody would be wealthy. What makes people accept the equivalence of the market with democracy?⁷¹ Frank argues that the terminology merely shifted. People used populist language to stick it to the “elites,” foster “revolution,” all the while validating the process by which those elites accumulated wealth, appropriating the terms for itself:

This is not to say that [Kevin] Kelly, the confirmed counterculturalist, was acting as a shill for the great bankers and small-town merchants whose ideological position he seemed to have adopted. Heaven forbid! In fact,

⁷⁰ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 55

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 57

and along with many other market populists of the decade, he vigorously shook his fist at the hierarchical corporate powers of the world and declared that the networking logic of nature (and of the market) would “truly revolutionize almost every business.” What Kelly meant by “revolution,” though, was not common ownership or even a more democratic distribution of wealth, but an increasing reliance on “outsourcing” by companies that had figured out they no longer required massive, vertically integrated operation.⁷²

What kind of counterculturalist was Kelly? Obviously he is the kind that buys into the hip consumerism and market populism model provided by the consumption society. His notion of revolution through outsourcing might not make much sense, but if the markets are always right, then outsourcing it must be. Going back to the idea that the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption provides a space for rebellion and counterculture – so long as it is under its auspices – then in the context of the consumption society, revolution is whatever it needs it to be. Under this context, revolution means tax cuts for the wealthy, rebellion means taking a risk on some hedge funds. So in the current context Kelly is right – in the totalizing context of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, this is what rebellious activity is reduced to. Platitudes about business hierarchies and investing them right out from the top floor replace actual revolutionary activity.

Here, Florida’s analysis and a critique from Frank’s position are even clearer. Stripped down, it seems a “creative class” worker is simply a non-unionized worker with no job benefits or security, at the mercy of the market, horizontally inclined to move from job to job with little room for advancement, and this is a situation that Kelly somehow deems revolutionary, because it takes a stab at the old vertical corporate hierarchy. This is not rebellious activity, just more misdirection from the society if bureaucratically controlled consumption. Frank reminds us of the “short but painful strike” at General Motors that Kelly does not deign worthy of discussion, and asserts that Kelly is so taken up with the coolness of decentralization that it doesn’t matter what the actual

⁷² Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 58

consequences of such policies are.⁷³ Labor squabbles would not appeal to someone like Kelly, and these disruptions where labor dare seeks to assert itself are given the brush off. Kelly also falls into the techno-progress narrative as well, predicting that a shift to electronic money would “break the monopoly of the financial Brahmins,” an idea that is, to say the least, underdeveloped:

Were we all just supposed to get free money? Had these “financial Brahmins” been hoarding greenbacks in their vaults? But who needed an explanation? Once the divine logic of the network had been fully embraced by the corporate world, hierarchies would just *have* to tumble; people would *have* to be empowered.⁷⁴

This did not happen because the religion of the market is a sham, one that seeks to close down spaces for alternatives to it, and compels us to thank the market for the privilege of controlling our everyday lives. And all the while, we are expected to validate the order, because corporations are looking out for us. “Corporate America is not an oppressor but a sponsor of fun, provider of lifestyle accoutrements, facilitator of carnival, our slang-speaking partner in the quest for that ever-more apocalyptic orgasm.⁷⁵” The bureaucratic society of controlled consumption provides us all we need; how can it be wrong?

In the current context, the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption seeks to shut down spaces for real rebellious activity through such avenues as hip consumerism and market populism. Even if an individual is dissatisfied to the point of issuing a refusal and attempting rebellious activity, where is there space for it? The faux counterculture attempts to manufacture consent through an endless validation of the principles of the free market.

⁷³ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 58

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 59

⁷⁵ Thomas Frank, “Why Johnny Can’t Dissent.” *Commodify Your Dissent* Frank Thomas, Ed. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1997), 34

Chapter 4: Is Rebellion Possible in a Society of Bureaucratically Controlled

Consumption?

This brings us to now. Never mind that the tech bubble burst of the early 2000s happened, or the sub-prime mortgage crisis of the late 2000s, the market is still king. Capital is still in control. “Rebel” finance guru Jim Cramer tells us how to make “Mad Money,” by telling people not to dump their Bear-Stearns stock the day before the stock price plummeted, and there are babies on E*Trade commercials buying stock. This legitimization of the neo-liberal regime has been a product decades in the making. David Harvey gives the neo-liberal ethos: “All forms of social solidarity were to be dissolved in favor of individualism, private property, personal responsibility and family values.”⁷⁶ Harvey continues that by building this personal ethos, the state was able to build a system where “the financialization of everything” was the ultimate goal, and the state would not care at all about “the consequences for employment or social well-being,” seeking to weaken social solidarity in all its forms.⁷⁷ The problem for Harvey, and why there is a dearth of critical thinking about this regime, is that it has for the most part been internalized and instead of being critical of neo-liberalism, the critique is merely about the method:

Neo-liberalism has spawned within itself an extensive oppositional culture. The opposition tends, however, to accept many of the basic propositions of neo-liberalism and focus on internal contradictions. It typically takes questions of individual rights and freedoms seriously and opposes them to the authoritarianism and frequent arbitrariness of political, economic and class power.⁷⁸

Critical thinking on the part of ordinary people is not a concern for many market populists according to Frank either, since, as far as they were concerned, the argument was over and the market the victor. So not only would rebellion be morally wrong in the

⁷⁶ David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (New York, NY: Verso, 2006), 17

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 24-25

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 50

bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, it would be pointless, arguing a lost cause. In fact, any effort to critically engage the order was to empower Soviet-style communism. To be critical of the market or to argue for government regulation or protection would make Stalin proud, and here is where the shift from capital needing to be cool to needing to be morally correct becomes amplified:

Communism was only the most radical expression of a misguided faith in government... “Marxism and communism not only constituted a competitive model to market societies but also shaped the terms of the global debate, weighting it toward a powerful role for the state even within capitalist systems.” The American regulatory state and the European welfare states are only a slightly lighter shade of red; the commissar is cousin to the OSHA bureaucrat.⁷⁹

This one-dimensional line of thinking does not allow for Marxism and communism to be actual alternatives to free markets – quite the opposite, they are merely propped up to show what happens when people oppose free markets, and again we see the formation of a society without opposition.

This logic, that faith in government, or the value of regulations would seem to indicate that all governments, regardless of ideology, want the same thing – to steal money from its people and hinder their personal (or creative) growth. Even though it seems apparent that there is indeed a difference between the KGB and worker protection regulations, the neo-liberal logic remains, and we understand that government is always already a destructive force. And this neo-liberal logic that resistance to the market is akin to treason has taken hold and shut down many opportunities for citizens to organize their social lives as they see fit. The Seattle riots protesting the WTO in 1999 were hardly massive, but the way the police force responded seems to indicate otherwise. If the totality of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is supposed to make us true believers in the free market, are there avenues through which one can rebel?

⁷⁹ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 62

The Terror of the Bureaucratic Society of Controlled Consumption

Before Sam Lowry is about to be tortured in the 1985 film “Brazil,” a police officer gives him some advice: “Don't fight it son. Confess quickly! If you hold out too long you could jeopardize your credit rating.”⁸⁰ This line in the film does a good job showing us the encroaching totality of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption. The financialization of everything makes an individual pause before acting – sure, we may be dissatisfied, be mad as hell, and not going to take it anymore - but we also need to be able to buy a car or house. The answer is not to start blowing things up, but in the current context it is worth asking how can we rebel if it is both illegal and can harm our credit report. Here, the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption seeks to shut down avenues of rebellion not only by appealing to the law, but also by inducing a passivity, because challenging the order, or rebelling in the sense I explore in chapter two becomes an even more dangerous proposition.

This is where there terror of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption becomes realized. The totality is so complete that not only does the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption shut down avenues of rebellion but it also produces a space for rebellion that also falls under its auspices. Lefebvre defines this terrorist society as such:

...a terrorist society is the logical and structural outcome of an over-repressive society; compulsion and the illusion of freedom converge; unacknowledged compulsions besiege the lives of communities and organize them according to a general strategy; the distinction between *other-directed* and *inner-directed* conscience is abolished since what now plays the part of the *inner* is the *other* disguised, integrated and justified; opposition is silenced either through being condemned as a perversion and thus invalidated, or by integration... In a terrorist society terror is diffuse, violence is always latent, pressure is exerted on all sides on its members, who can only avoid it and shift its weight by a super-human effort...⁸¹

The terror here goes beyond just the use of violence by the state but is all-encompassing, with a cocoon of external pressures shutting down avenues for liberation in the people

⁸⁰ *Brazil*. Dir. Terry Gilliam. Embassy International Pictures. 1985.

⁸¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), 147

through political, economic, cultural, and moral levels as seen in hip consumerism and market populism. It also seeks to shut down spaces to formulate the rebellious subjectivity in the aesthetic dimension. What further heightens the terror and speaks to his notion of diffuse terror is that there is no central actor from which the terror emanates; it comes from all of us, it comes from everywhere, and there is no system of terror to attack – this is evidenced when we see that even when uprisings do occur, they are often misdirected and absorbed, and the social order continues humming along.⁸²

What the general public thinks and says is of little consequence. Individuals are so enmeshed in the social order; to try to challenge more than just some machinations is fruitless. We see an example in the debate on genetically modified foods and how the general consensus in the benevolence of the free market effectively short-circuited any meaningful opposition:

Market populism was also useful in the late nineties battle over genetically modified (GM) foods. In the US, of course, there was no battle. Largely lacking institutions for popular participation in economic decision-making, we had no choice but to do as the corporations bade us, and GM foods entered the commodity stream without incident. In Europe, though, massive popular outrage caused big problems for particular companies.⁸³

There is still the question of why people accept this logic, given that in Europe the neoliberal policy of letting the corporate interests define national policy did not bode so well. The dominance of such principles goes mainly unchallenged in the United States, and this is why it is obvious why business and management classes desire unfettered free markets, and in America, the idea is firmly in place. Factually, American workers enjoyed less mobility and had a decrease in the purchasing power of wages, most workers being considerably worse off than they were in the sixties.⁸⁴ The impetus that compels people to think that market populism is good for them lies in a cultural shift about what is good for people and their everyday lives. If people are convinced that the neo-liberal regime is the way things are; and not only that, the way things ought to be, people allow

⁸² Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), 147

⁸³ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 70-1

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 200

this shift to be total, again illustrating the terror aspect of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption. While cultural preferences such as music or lifestyle may seem laughable, “culture isn’t set off from life in a realm all its own, and the culture of the business in particular has massive consequences for the way the rest of us live... While there are of course genuine economic changes underway in America (as there have always been), this idea is in large part not about economies at all but about ways of thinking about economies.”⁸⁵

Essentially, we have a notion that works against peoples’ best interest, but with a shift in the cultural thinking about how we approach and integrate the market into our lives, people become convinced of the synonymy between the market and democracy and that if we accept our worthlessness in the face of the market, work extra hours with no job security and are willing to move from job to job with little hope of promotion, somehow, market populism promises up, this will lead to our joining the moneyed classes. This is more one-dimensional thinking, and may come from either being a true believer in the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, or simply thinking that challenging the order is ultimately futile.

But even so, people may not be happy with the current order, and the relationship between the free market and democracy is uneasy at best, and Frank notes that:

And yet the New Economy is a fraud. Tom Friedman’s formula, “one dollar, one vote,” is not the same thing as universal suffrage, as the complex, hard-won array of rights that most Americans understand as their political heritage. Nor does it mitigate the obscenity of wealth polarization one whit when the richest people ever in history tell us they are “listening” to us, that theirs are “interactive” fortunes, or that they have unusual tastes and work particularly hard. Markets may look like democracy, in that we are all involved in their making, but they are fundamentally not democratic. We did not vote for Bill Gates; we didn’t all sit down one day and agree that we should only use his operating system and we should pay for it just however much he thinks is right. We do not go off to our jobs checking telephone lines or making cold calls or driving a forklift every morning because this is what we want to do; we do it because we have to, because it is the only way we can afford food, shelter, and medicine. The logic of business is coercion, monopoly, and

⁸⁵ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 86

the destruction of the weak, not “choice” or “service” or universal affluence... Markets are interested in profits and profits only; service, quality, and general affluence are different functions altogether.⁸⁶

But in the same vein as the fake counterculture, what can people really do to get out of that framework?

Although it is likely that there are large amounts of laborers who are not happy with the current neoliberal order, not only are rebellious impulses squashed because of the legal ramifications (nobody wants to be an enemy combatant), but also because not being a true believer hurts their ability to live their everyday lives. Ruining ones credit report is no joke, and one does not need to imagine the future dystopian society presented in *Brazil* to see this. Instead, it is much easier for those in the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption to believe that history has indeed ended and that we live in the best possible world.

To think that the current order is the last one not only negates challenges to it, but tries to instill a logic that prevents that thought from ever cropping up. *Of course* the current order is right, *of course* it cannot get any better than this. Besides, the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption can provide things that we like and appreciate: cable television, refrigeration, etc. The bureaucratic society of controlled consumption can provide for people’s material needs, but that does not, we recall from Lefebvre, mean that people are happy. Satisfaction is not the same thing. Maybe there is a better way, but surely things cannot be all that bad, and if we just, as Harvey says often happens within the neoliberal regime, tinker with governance and certain aspects of policy, then there can be plenty for everybody – such must be the case if we have indeed reached the pinnacle of civilization as market populists believe. Again this legitimation occurs because the order *must* be legitimate since it is the only order available.

But even though in the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption markets and democracy would mean the same thing and our everyday lives would be fashioned in a corporate sense, the challenge becomes to find a space in which to issue that simultaneous “no” and “yes.” The market has expanded beyond its intended parameters,

⁸⁶ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 86

and the promises of fulfillment and personal wealth cannot be attained by the very nature of markets themselves, even though there is a cultural shift to get people to think this way. Frank reminds us that as people get nostalgic for a time when prosperity seemed more spread around was “achieved only by a colossal reining in of markets, by the gargantuan effort of mass, popular organizations like labor unions and of the people themselves, working through a series of democratically elected governments not daunted by the myths of the market.”⁸⁷ It seems that culturally, the United States is headed in the wrong direction.

Harvey echoes this sentiment, pointing out that things seem bad now because of the neo-liberal regime that is purported to fix the problems they are experiencing. The neo-liberal thrust found its foothold in the Republican Party as a base by which to pursue its agenda during the 70s, and Harvey is quick to point out that the neo-liberal order is an inherently anti-democratic one.⁸⁸ The way the neo-liberal state associates with various multi-national financial institutions and uses domestic fiscal policy to protect and promote a class restoration, if it comes down to “a conflict between the integrity of the financial system and the well-being of a population, the neo-liberal state will choose the former.”⁸⁹ With this bleak picture of profits before people, why would people willingly agree to live under such a regime, and in fact validate it as democratic? The totality of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption limits the capacity to think of other options.

So market populism rolls along, with the Friedmans of the world cheerleading all the way. Worried about long term security, companies made a peace offerings of company stock or mutual funds in return for lower salaries and lesser job security, providing the logic that if the company did well through having those lower salaries or massive layoffs, the workers would be compensated with these options; and while it is no secret that the market does well with mass participation. But there is a fallacy in this logic:

⁸⁷ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 87

⁸⁸ David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (New York, NY: Verso, 2006), 27

⁸⁹ Ibid

A full 86 percent of the market's advances in the last four years of the bull market... went to the wealthiest 10 percent of the population. The majority of the population, not owning any stock, shared in the great money handout not at all. The booming stock market of the nineties did not democratize wealth; it concentrated wealth... After all, workers can hardly be expected to own shares if they can't afford them.⁹⁰

There is little reason to believe that just because people participate in the free market means that whatever the market does is good for the populace. But these pesky realities do not matter in the face of the all-powerful and all-knowing market.

The shift had been accomplished, and instead of worrying about the income gap between management and labor, we became more concerned with casual Fridays:

The chroniclers of American affluence had discovered – and in the most improbably demographic locale – what sounded like the new ideal language for talking about the market. And in the process, the earnest, ultra-square culture of investing was being transformed into something that seemed very different: The image of the small investor as jaded, knowing hipster... But hipsters were neither buy-and-hold grandmas nor mutual fund-minded family men: They were fundamentally in the know, tuned in to most fleeting trends, and ready to trade on a moment's notice. What emerged as the decade wore on was a curious hybrid of “Adam Smith's” Nietzschean traders and Peter Lynch's everyman-as-expert: Everyman as his own cigar-chomping, commodity-broking, devil-take-the-hindmost asshole, hovering over the office computer to spread rumors on the Raging Bull message boards and scalp the gains on E*Trade, all the while listening to the scabrous rantings of Limp Bizkit, cultivating a goatee, and dreaming about Xtreme sport. Generation X and stocks, it now seemed, went together like Kurt and Courtney.⁹¹

If markets were in fact harming a majority of labor, and the argument was kept in purely economical terms, we might not be surprised if people became critical of the market, but by shifting the terms of the debate into a cultural one, Frank argues that capital was essentially able to “reassure us – the downsized, the laid off, the temp workers, the consumers – that the new way is all for the best.”⁹² After all, now people could wear

⁹⁰ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 97

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 139

⁹² *Ibid*, 192

jeans to work, even if we did not end up working there very long. And anyway, this is what we are told the creative class longs for – the opportunity to find a new job.

But who changed the terms of the debate? Frank reminds us that free markets have never enjoyed popularity on their tenets alone, and it is not until the fusion with a cultural shift and a graft onto the Grand Old Party that the ideas were cemented in the public. This shift to market populism as being brought to you by the cult studs, Frank's virile-sounding nickname for a new breed of cultural studies academics. The cult studs do not actually critique culture; they critique critics of culture, especially that pesky Frankfurt School.⁹³ For the cult studs, authentic culture was to be found in shopping malls and fashion magazines; social commentaries in subversive television shows with a tongue-in-cheek irony.⁹⁴ And while we might be tempted to discuss the difference between high and low culture, that is not the real issue; cult studs legitimated culture through markets, legitimate because of their success in a capitalist framework.⁹⁵ Florida certainly fits this mold; after all, how do we know when a person is successfully in the creative class? When they make enough money, naturally, and the culture follows the money; it comes as no surprise that the cities that foster the creative class are cities that are on an economic upswing. Florida might make the argument that culture is at its finest, where creative people congregate, and the market determines where creative people will be, and so the market legitimates culture, Q.E.D. This explanation is ultimately unsatisfying though, as it places an inexorable link between culture and the market that is not necessarily actually there. To only legitimate culture that is conducive to the market or legitimates capital is simply legitimate capital without dealing without actually thinking critically about culture.

Tyler Cowen, on the other hand, is much less roundabout in making that connection that success in the market legitimates culture, and this populist culture hurtles us toward the future. In his text *In Praise of Commercial Culture*, it is in magazines and TV that the young generation will break the shackles of generation oppression, and it is

⁹³ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 282

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 283

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 290

the very possibility of this freedom that will cause the older generation to look on in fear and see only cultural corruption.⁹⁶ His general thesis in the book is that those who go on about high and low culture are off the mark because there is no real difference between the two. As already noted, Frank does not hem himself into this argument, but rather deals with the issue of legitimacy as he addresses Cowen's text directly:

Certain academics were capable of bringing the populism of cultural studies and the populism of the market together with breathtaking ease. Economist Tyler Cowen, for example, translated the populist reflex into an extended celebration of the benevolence of markets, wandering here and there over the entire history of art in his 1998 book *In Praise of Commercial Culture*, seeking always to prove that the market deserves the credit for all worthwhile cultural production. The market guarantees quality. The market guarantees diversity. And have you ever considered who pays the bills for all those artists? That's right: the market. As it turns out, the market maintains the strong record it does because it is indistinguishable from the people. And "an audience," he writes, "is more intelligent than the individuals who create their entertainment." Those who recognize popular intelligence are "cultural optimists," in whose camp Cowen puts himself... On the other side, meanwhile, stands a motley group of critics united by their shared "elitism," the conviction that they know best. From the Frankfurt School to the Christian Right, they are all "cultural pessimists," doubtful about the people's capacity to decide for themselves, skeptical about popular tastes, contemptuous of progress itself. As even Nazis can be made to fit under such a preposterous definition of "pessimism," Cowen brings them in, too.⁹⁷

Harsh rhetoric indeed, to lump in cultural critics with Nazis.⁹⁸ But it is not that Cowen is opposed to the idea of cultural criticism *per se*, rather, he just wants to make sure that cultural criticism is the right kind of criticism; legitimating the culture that the market is so kind as to bestow upon us. If this is what our options are – rebellion through different kinds of consumption, the outlook is not good.

Although it is true that consumption is not the same thing as consent or good judgment; it is merely a part of our everyday lives that is blown out of proportion by the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption to the point where they almost seem

⁹⁶ Tyler Cowen, *In Praise of Commercial Culture* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 185

⁹⁷ Frank Thomas, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 295-6

⁹⁸ Tyler Cowen, *In Praise of Commercial Culture* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 178-9

indistinguishable. Good judgment becomes proper consumption and vice versa. One needs to consume to survive, and equally important is material well being. Even though it is easy to see that these are not the only aspects to a meaningful everyday life, a way in which to construct a better one is not immediately obvious. Recalling the initial diagnosis of markets: that they are singularly devoted to amassing capital, with no regard for the well-being or quality of life of those who operate under their auspices, an argument more persuasive when taken with Harvey's analysis of the neo-liberal order. It is not hard to flat-out reject the notion that even though the market can make peoples' lives tough, all will be well in the end when we enter the landed gentry ourselves:

Why would anyone choose to live in such a world? Why would we abandon the controls over corporate doings that we have constructed over decades, surrender the limited power we have to compel companies to behave in accordance with the standards of humanity, give up the security of collective bargaining – such as it was – when this panorama of madness and destruction and waste is what business offers us in return? We do it because we believe Tom Peters is right when he says, “*You have no choice.*” There can be no democracy on these questions. But of course there can, and we do. Regardless of what they say in the MCI commercials, the way of the soulful, downsized corporation is not mandated from on high. We can always replace their insane talk of “liberation management” with the real instruments of industrial democracy.⁹⁹

The problem that runs through the analysis of both of Frank's books however is that capital remains firmly in control; through financial scandals, bubble bursts, rebellious youths, and lamenting the good old days, capital is still at the helm. Even if there is a counterculture, or even if there rise up actual cultural critics who implore that we look at the economic realities of market populism, the capitalist order will do all it can to make sure that this does not happen.

Here is the difficulty of the debate. One can use culture to be critical of capital, and yet to rely exclusively on the production of the right kind of culture to actually make social change probably will not happen because it is too tied up in the world of production. What I argue in my readings of Marcuse, Harvey, and Frank is that while

⁹⁹ Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2000), 246

culture is worth critiquing, it is also important to note its relation to capital, and how it is malleable so as to absorb many different kinds of culture. The way around this would be to be equally critical of the world of production. Being critical of culture is simply not enough; the culture that is produced must stand up to criticism but also point to a critique of production.

This must prompt one to ask if Frank is right. When he talks about the “real instruments of industrial democracy,” he neglects to tell us what these instruments are, only to say that the free market order seeks to prevent us from using them. Is this just a matter of citizen laziness or something deeper? One may ask whether the current regime is a result of peoples’ willingness to act or if the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption grows ever stronger. I argue that this is not an either/or proposition. The increasing totality in the terror of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption shuts down spaces for liberational thought, and therefore rebellion and rebellious activity. I have shown how through bureaucratically controlling consumption, capital does indeed fuse compulsion with the illusion of freedom, and under the market populist regime, oppositional voices are berated into silence.

What are the chances for rebellion then in this totalizing terror of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption that attempts to limit the spaces for rebellion legally, culturally, and economically? Even in such a society, individuals can say “no.” This is why preserving the subject is so important, and why a rebellious politics doesn’t bend to the notion that consuming the right things will make things better, or that the market will make life better for everybody. It seems, however, the terrorizing totality of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption; this neoliberal regime may be too great to institute a rebellious politics, whose spontaneous and transitory nature are both part of what makes it revolutionary, and what makes it vulnerable to these various apparatuses.¹⁰⁰

Some political theorists, such as Jeffrey Isaac, argue as such, that we need to re-imagine rebellious politics to draw them more in line with democratic politics. However,

¹⁰⁰ Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 245

Isaac's plea to reorganize democratic politics in order to come more in line with a modern rebellious politics, the totality of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is too much for the structure of the rebel presented. In fact, Camus' rebel is likely not to exist in the current construct, because his decades-old formulation of the rebel ignores "the increasing role of the state in a postindustrial society. The bureaucratic features of the modern state, in other words, are not so easily dismissed or condemned, even if they do warrant severe criticism for inhibiting more democratic forms of political activity."¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, Isaac is right in describing how the current context works, but the implications are more than just noting that stubborn Camus had a hard time legitimating any political regime. Isaac is basically telling us here that the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is so complete, and yet does its job of keeping us materially satisfied, that there must be something to it. This is clearly one-dimensional thinking that snugly resides in a society without opposition. Lefebvre's analysis that the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption implements its own mechanisms for criticisms within itself show again that the terror of this consumption society. We may still be oppressed by the regime, but we have the illusion of freedom to criticize it as the regime sees fit. We are instead supposed to relegate ourselves to quibbling over the details, as long as we do not assail the regime too much.

There is an opportunity here to look at the current context to look at the state of some rebellious or democratic politics. John Gaventa deals in the current context of declining democracy, and looks to poorer areas of the world to see if he can discover more deliberative democratic processes and finds in the poor community of Porto Alegre some interesting "democratic outcomes":

- * creates new associational incentive and spaces
- * allows for a continuous and dynamic process of learning
- * promotes deliberation and compromise
- * promotes innovative solutions to tensions between representation and participation
- * bridges knowledge and authority gap between technocratic expertise and local involvement

¹⁰¹ Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 243

yet even though he sees the evidence solely as “inconclusive,” and that more studies need to be completed, pending just how these local enclaves fit into the increasingly globalized society, and what he hopes for is a way of relinking government and civil society, and he does not seem to challenge the existing order, but rather seems to hope that through these communities the global context could be changed.¹⁰² These communities, while impressive to look at, however, will probably just be enveloped in the financialization of everything that happens in Harvey’s neoliberal agenda. If the question becomes merely: how do we assimilate? Then the notion of rebellion is already gone.

Etienne Balibar brings up the *sans-papiers*, people living in France who were not citizens. The interesting aspect, according to Balibar, is that the government’s decision to essentially have nothing to do with them has allowed, “an activist solidarity that has shown a remarkable and long-term continuity, beyond the understandable alternations of mobilizations and discouragement,” which values family and labor interests and deliberates democratically because they have to.¹⁰³ Here we can make the argument that those who participate democratically are rebelling against the state that will not have them. They say “no” to being outcasts and the obvious coercion of the state to push them out, while simultaneously saying “yes” about their worth as individuals and members of the broader community of people. While there is something exciting about groups of people who are more or less outside the liberal order in that they have no safety net on which to fall back on, no state to help their politics along, the question remains about what a group like the *sans-papiers* wants. They do have a distinct advantage of not being a static group. Balibar discusses them as the people France does not want, so the groups of people belonging to it do not constitute an organized group. Since they must operate as the “other,” that the state does not want, they have done citizens in France a favor by reactivating “the idea of disobedience.”¹⁰⁴ The question that has yet to be resolved is that Balibar’s discussion ends with an idea of citizenship that should more communal in

¹⁰² John Gaventa, "Towards Participatory Local Governance: Six Propositions for Discussion," *Currents* (2002)

¹⁰³ Etienne Balibar, *We the People of Europe?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 48

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 49

nature, and inclusive of all who are part of the people of the state. If there are no more *sans-papiers*, will these democratic groups still exist? Also, if they are able to say no to the state, are they also saying no to the consumption society in which they live? It seems Isaac would say no, and indeed that society provides them with material goods in order to make their democratic politics possible.

The totality of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is so complete that even if the subject wishes to say “no” to the order, it is not entirely clear what the individual is negating, and the concurrent affirmation of something of the existing order is merely legitimating the society in a broader way. To wit, by negating one aspect, we end up affirming the apparatus in another way. The very totality of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, for this reason, fosters its own version of rebellion, and here is where the terror of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption becomes clear. People become severed from the loci of power, and fail to question the power structures as they find them.¹⁰⁵ As long as there is a subset that expresses its dissatisfaction, but through means that merely further entrench them, then the social order is not interrupted. The construction of the rebel presented by thinkers such as Camus and Marcuse are good constructs, but in the current context such rebellious activity is unlikely to happen.

This bears out in some rebellious political theory in the current context. Even though some thinkers look for rebellion, they also are quick to point out that the social order is not all that bad either. There are shades of Isaac’s new and defective rebellious politics that implore people not to forget all the good things the social order does for us too, that rebellion’s in recent history was for the establishment of the welfare state. This is the kind of rebellion a market populist would be happy with, because it is locked in the logic and order of the regime, and the quibbles are over details as to who should get how much of what. Market populism has elevated the free market to a religion in the United States, and with the neoliberal regime in full swing, eventually all over the world. This

¹⁰⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), 147

heightens the terrorist aspect of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, financializing everything, extolling individuality and a competitiveness to a degree that harms subjects – and like many of the characters in dystopian novels, this will seem like the only possible, and therefore moral, social order. The terrorism in the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is increasingly total; in the current context, not only is consumption the cure all for what ails us as a society, the argument that this is the case is rarely refuted. Bad economy in 2008? Three hundred dollars for everyone!

Although I have attempted to fuse the theories of my reading of Marcuse's liberational aesthetic dimension with the external pressures of Lefebvre's bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, these two thinkers vary in their conclusions. Marcuse is unsure that real rebellion is possible against the one-dimensionality of a consumption society:

But the struggle for the solution has outgrown the traditional forms. The totalitarian tendencies of the one-dimensional society render the traditional ways and means of protest ineffective – perhaps even dangerous because they preserve the illusion of popular sovereignty. This illusion contains truth: “the people,” previously the ferment of social change, have “moved up” to become the ferment of social cohesion. Here rather than in the redistribution of wealth and equalization of classes is the new stratification characteristic of advanced industrial society.¹⁰⁶

The bureaucratic society of controlled consumption was encroaching to the point in 1964 where Marcuse was having doubts to the subject's ability to overcome it in One-Dimensional Man, and with the rise of hip consumerism and its expansion into market populism, this encroachment is even more pervasive.

This happens on two levels; the individual who affirms the existing social order, and his notion that criticism becomes increasingly impossible when there is a lack of opposition in society. Lefebvre, on the other hand, argues that it is still possible to see through the cracks in the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption and make an attempt to change the existing order: “Can terrorist pressures and repression reinforce individual self-repression to the point of closing all the issues? Against Marcuse we

¹⁰⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964), 256

continue to assert that they cannot.”¹⁰⁷ Lefebvre points out that much critical and sociological theory is concerned with pointing out how modern business not only seeks to gain political influence, but also tries to use its own template to graft on to society in order to make the society more business-like, doing the job of the urban.¹⁰⁸ It seems that for Lefebvre, being conscious of the encroaching totality can at least provide the space to attempt to resist it, even if it takes a superhuman effort.

What makes my Marcuse more persuasive is that in my construction, the social conditions that he argued would prevent rebellion from happening have only worsened, making rebellion all the more unlikely. The consumption society has indeed made some forms of protest “dangerous” because it is tolerated in the regime. With the move to market populism, we can see that the counterculture becomes investing in risky hedge funds, and demonstrations are smiled upon benevolently as exercises in free speech, even though they do not affect the policy outcome. We recall that criticism in a society without opposition was a problem for Marcuse in the 1970s and even reaching back into his experiences in Germany and New Deal America, the problem being that “*the proletarian class in itself* fails to constitute itself as a *revolutionary class for itself* [emphasis original],” noting the rise in the relationship between labor and capital, and that as capitalism became ever more advanced that these two interests would conflate more rather than intensify in conflict.¹⁰⁹ With the move from hip consumerism to market populism and the fall of the Soviet Union, we are ever closer to Marcuse’s society without opposition. Even though my reading of Marcuse seemingly creates a tension – trying to preserve the space carved out through engaging the aesthetic dimension can provide for liberation while simultaneously arguing that the external pressures of modern capitalism makes for quite a bleak outlook – it does preserve the dialectical aspect of resistance to the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption. Perhaps the years preceding and the fall of the Soviet Union and the hegemony of the social order of the

¹⁰⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), 66

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ Timothy W. Luke, *Social Theory and Modernity* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 128

market seems to mark the end of Marcuse's "political moment."¹¹⁰ A new moment and a new rebellious subject that has yet to be called into being can now emerge. Attempts have been made more currently to think about rebellion. Though thinkers such as Isaac have tried to combine a post-Cold War democratic politics with a new rebellious politics, a new conception is needed for what a rebel is, what a rebel rebels against, and for what does one rebel. Isaac not only argues that there is something worth keeping in the existing order because it provides for our material wants, he would even go so far as to say that the welfare state was the result of rebellion in the first place.¹¹¹ Even under the obstinate optimism of Lefebvre, the model of the rebel presented by Camus and Marcuse simply does not work in the current context.

Even though there is something in my model of rebellion I think is worth preserving, and even though a new form of rebellious subject not yet called into being is necessary, it does not follow to say that rebellion is now and forever impossible as the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption expands and further shuts down spaces for rebellion, perhaps even limiting the aesthetic dimension. It would be disingenuous; it would be claiming the end of history. This is not the end of history, where we are just playing out the last string until the final reckoning. A re-conception of rebellious and democratic politics is needed to deal with the current context, which seeks to contain and change the function of my conception of rebellion. It would seem that until this re-emergence of rebellious politics, retooled and adapted to face the ever-stronger bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, one should follow Marcuse's advice, retreat to the aesthetic dimension, engage in critical theory, and hopefully from that a new rebellious subjectivity can emerge.

The revolution is not coming, but resistance is not futile either. There are still ways that individuals can try to resist the order. In the current context, there are still groups of people who seek to change the order, but whether they are truly rebellious is a matter of contention. One could make the argument that Al Qaeda or Hamas are rebel

¹¹⁰ Timothy W. Luke, *Social Theory and Modernity* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 150

¹¹¹ Jeffrey C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 243

groups, shunning the society of consumption and trying to change the current regime. This notion confronts my construction of the rebel in some important ways. First, there is the argument that through reading the Qur'an and other sacred texts, these individuals are also establishing a liberating aesthetic dimension that guides their actions for social transformation. The other challenge that these groups present is that they are well outside my normal context. It would initially seem difficult to grasp the praxes of individuals in these groups to critique if and how effectively they are rebels. Although this is true to the extent that I am unable to completely remove myself from my context and into another, assessing these groups using my construction of the rebel can still yield results for gauging rebellious activity more generally.

There are some key differences between these groups and my construction of the rebel. Each of these groups are comprised of religious zealots, trying to replace one regime with their own, and we remember that when that happens, Camus says, freedom perishes. Also, under what impetus are they rebelling? Are they saying "no" to the current order because it degrades the individual? It seems their "no" comes from deeply held religious beliefs about how a specific theology should be lived in everyday life, and their rejection of the social/global order is based on the degradation of that specific theology. The only difference between this mode of thinking and Lefebvre's contention that consumption society seeks to imprint a corporate everyday life onto individual everyday life is replacing corporate with a specific kind of theological doctrine. And where is the concurrent "yes" that affirms humanity? There is no shift to the "we" in rebellion – their activity is for those who are already of like mind, or whose minds these groups wish to change. Launching I.E.D.s or destroying people of the other group does not seem to have that quality. Further, my rebel acts on from a deep-seated individual impetus from the aesthetic dimension that drives them to act. Merely finding a certain kind of doctrine palatable does not mean that fighting for that cause constitutes my construction of the rebel and rebellious activity. These groups also do not seek to foster a rebellious subjectivity in others through encouraging other individuals to create the aesthetic dimension; indeed it would seek to close that down, since the goal is a theocratic regime. If that is accomplished, why worry about rebellion anymore? In other

constructions of rebellion, these groups may qualify, but in my conception of rebellion, these groups are not among them.

Al Qaeda and Hamas can still be useful in gauging the United States current context, however. In the narrative of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, these groups are terrorist groups, and the discussion of them as rebel groups and terrorist groups are one in the same. The media refer to them as terrorist groups, and this has two consequences. First, the discourse in the United States media becomes equating rebellion and terrorism, using the words interchangeably, and so any sort of resisting group is deemed a terrorist organization. The second consequence is that it closes down spaces of critical discourse for individuals to decide for themselves if these groups are rebel or terrorist organizations. This feeds the market populist notion that any sort of act against the order is unthinkable, because the capitalist regime is correct, and any attempt to act against it is immediately labeled terrorism. Individuals can make their own decisions about the rebellious nature of Al Qaeda and Hamas, but this becomes more difficult with these narratives in the current context.

My discussion of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption and the shift from hip consumerism to market populism has been in an almost exclusively United States-centered context. While this is a limitation in the extent to which I can talk about groups in a broader context, there are still groups in the United States that try to be rebellious. The Earth Liberation Front is not a cohesive group. There is a website, but the webmasters claim that they are neither members, nor is the content written or approved by the ELF.¹¹² With a de-centralized, non-hierarchical organization, the actions taken by individuals under their name are of their own choosing, guided by their conscience. When applying my model of rebellion, there must first be a “no,” present. These individuals, for whatever reason, have decided that their limits are breached after some environmental outcome. These people are not merely joining the ELF party, but acting of their own concert. There is also arguably the concurrent “yes” in that these individuals, acting on their conscience, do so to try to encourage a world that is better for everybody.

¹¹² Earth Liberation Front. <http://www.earthliberationfront.com/main.shtml> (Accessed 4/23/2008)

That is the shift from “I” to “we” in my formulation of rebellion. The individual rebels to try to make a better world and foster a rebellious subjectivity in others. Yet many of the actions undertaken by individuals under the ELF banner are illegal, and considered terrorist actions by the state because they destroy personal property, and use psychological techniques to scare people into changing their behavior, in some cases, employing arson to draw attention to government programs and non-earth friendly development.¹¹³ Just because something is illegal, however, does not mean it cannot qualify as rebellious activity. Through aggressive prosecution and labeling as terrorists, two things are happening here. First, this is an equally, if not more, potent form of psychological techniques to scare people into changing their behavior to quell this kind of activity. Second, by immediately labeling people acting under its auspices as “terrorists,” the discourse by which individuals assessing ELF members’ actions is clearly trying to be closed down by the social order. This is where it is vitally important that individuals carve out that liberatory aesthetic dimension in order to engage in these analyses critically. This is vital, because not every action undertaken under the banner of the ELF is necessarily rebellious. Some people may indeed use the ELF mantle to engage in terrorism, and the only way to decide which are acts of rebellion and which are acts of terrorism is to engage in the critical analysis that we can get from a well-formulated praxis in the aesthetic dimension.

The Animal Liberation Front is another such group, though it differs from the ELF in some important ways. The website is run by the organization itself, and it gives a credo, clearly supporting the destruction of corporate property in order to put companies who treat nonhuman animals as property out of business.¹¹⁴ They seem to have more of a sense of cohesion as a group, even though people often act anonymously in small groups, noting that living by the guidelines of the ALF, such as being a vegetarian or vegan, is

¹¹³ Jeff Barnard, “Earth Liberation Front Arsonist Sentenced to Thirteen Years” *The Seattle Times*, 5/24/07. Accessed 4/23/2008: seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2003719703_ecosentence24m.html

¹¹⁴ Credo/Guide, Accessed 4/23/2008, www.animalliberationfront.com/ALFront/alf_credos.htm

adequate to call oneself a member.¹¹⁵ Similarly to the ELF the actions the members take are their own, and they are fully responsible for their ramifications, including a prolific bomber in England who planted a series of bombs at the homes and cars of executives from pharmaceutical companies that performed animal testing, who was sentenced to twelve years.¹¹⁶ Again, to apply my conception of rebellion, there is a “no” for these individuals, that the way nonhuman animals are treated in food and pharmaceutical industries go beyond their limits, with the concurrent “yes” that the world would be better, and the individuals better served, if nonhuman animals were not treated as property. The same issues confront the ALF as the ELF; if the state deems all actions taken under their banner as terrorist actions, then the spaces for talking about them as a rebellious group are being closed down. It is again up to the rebellious subjectivity formed by individuals through the aesthetic dimension to critically engage these actions and make those considerations.

The question becomes less about whether these organizations, or organizations like them, are rebel or terrorist organizations in their entirety. The messy, but accurate, answer is that it depends on the individuals who are critically assessing them. Members of these groups are clearly free to act how they wish, from non-violent measures such as camping in trees to prevent logging or laying on the street to try to disrupt traffic. Others take more extreme measures that cause considerable damage to personal or government property. While it may be easy for the juridical order to say what is terrorism and what is proper protest, the real evaluators of their actions are individuals. They decide for themselves if their actions are warranted or necessary, and we are also able to evaluate them and call them rebels or terrorists.

Regardless of the onus placed on the individual to critically analyze the actions done by individuals who are members of such groups, there is still another level of concern beyond closing down spaces of discourse to talk about rebellion as well as rebellious subjectivity by the consumption society. There is also the danger that my

¹¹⁵ Credo/Guide, Accessed 4/23/2008, www.animalliberationfront.com/ALFront/alf_credo.htm

¹¹⁶ Esther Addley, “Animal Liberation Front Bomber Jailed for Twelve Years” *The Guardian*, 12/8/06. Accessed 4/23/2008: www.guardian.co.uk/science/2006/dec/08/animalrights.uknews

reading of Marcuse mentioned earlier, that traditional forms of rebellion and resistance are dangerous because they have the capability of being enveloped, perverted, and then fostered by the state as acceptable forms of rebellion. In other words, are these groups merely engaging in “cool” rebellion, a kind of rebellion that ultimately affirms the social order? In the cases of the ELF and ALF, most members are not arrested; they act anonymously, and then get to go home. Surely, the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is encompassing enough to provide an outlet for people to act on some rebellious impulses, engage in some dangerous activity, and occasionally be arrested, without actually letting them present a serious threat to the order. What we get then is a bureaucratically controlled rebellion.

To combat this notion, I again return to the rebellious subjectivity formed out of a fleshed out aesthetic dimension. Bureaucratically controlled rebellion happens in my conception when market populism becomes the mindset for individuals, that anything that harms the market harms democracy and therefore cannot be tolerated. If we have this reawakening of the rebellious subjectivity that does not mean that all acts of rebellion are tolerated, but there is at least the ability to engage in that critical analysis. To say this, however, is not to overstate the case and suggest that by establishing the aesthetic dimension then the oppressive nature of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption can be dispelled. Rather, this rebellious subjectivity helps the individual to see the cracks in the encroaching social order and the spaces opened up by the aesthetic dimension do give a way to critically engage the order as well as assess the actions of others who try to do so.

The rebellious subjectivity that Marcuse talks about does need to be reawakened in order to have a more fruitful notion of the rebel in our society, yet the ever encroaching totality of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption seeks to shut those avenues down and end the debate about how people should organize, act, and live their lives before those debates ever begin, again illuminating the terror of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, because while simultaneously oppressing us through the manufacturing of corporate everyday life, it gives us an illusory freedom to talk about acceptable dissent that does not upset the regime. If that rebellious subjectivity is

reawakened broadly, however, and people either engage in or assess acts of rebellion, then perhaps a re-imagining of rebellious politics can occur and this subject not yet called into being out of the aesthetic dimension can emerge.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The conception of rebellion that I have put forth through my readings of Marcuse and Camus does not seem to graft well. The model of the rebel the proper agent who negates the social order, but in so doing must necessarily affirm some aspect about the worth of humanity as a whole is a good theoretical construction, but increasingly irrelevant in the current context. As the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption seeks to shut down avenues where subjects can even consider rebelling through legal, cultural, and economic means, the totalizing terror of that aspect becomes clear. In the current context there is yet to emerge a kind of politics that is liberational enough to allow for people to actually meaningfully challenge the existing order and get away from this one-dimensional action of constantly legitimating the consumption society.

I believe my reading of Marcuse is right, and the first step toward liberation is by establishing an aesthetic dimension. This is where the rebellious subjectivity is born. If the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is totalizing enough to close down even the ability to do that, however, then this would be a dead end. Further, even if we are able to construct this dimension to better understand and be critical of the material world, and try to imagine a better one, the link between that thought and rebellious activity through which to try to establish that world is still tenuous, due to the external pressure of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption. But I cannot say that this is the case, and even though it seems as if the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is both eliminating spaces for actual rebellion while at the same time redefining a fake rebellion that exists the order, the rebellious subjectivity that comes out of the individual establishing the aesthetic dimension. As long as individuals are able to formulate this rebellious subjectivity, rebellion and assessment of other rebellious actions remains a possibility.

In order to foster this rebellious subjectivity, however, in my construction, requires that a person must say “no” and “yes” simultaneously, by rejecting the current order and by affirming something about the shared humanity of individuals in order to think about better ways in which to reorganize social life. The problem is that we must be free in order to make these decisions for ourselves, or for how to gauge the actions of

others. Even though my reading of Marcuse states that we cannot fully escape the one-dimensional society, people still have the critical faculties by formulating the aesthetic dimension to try to critique it, even if they are still enmeshed in that order. The challenge is to preserve that subjectivity. This is where the terrorist aspect of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption comes into play. By both providing the illusion of freedom and the inner-directed terror of commodifying and consuming oneself, the rebel becomes a tenuous concept in the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, because the society seeks to give its citizens its own version of rebellion, under its own control, a means by which it wants us to fulfill our rebellious impulses without actually mounting a challenge to the existing order.

The 1960s serve as a good chronological starting point for this analysis to show the steep rise in the pervasiveness of this society. With hip consumerism, capital sought to make itself the cool alternative to the Soviet Union. In the pervasive fear I illustrate that the battle in the Cold War was for the citizens in the United States to pick capital as the “cool” outcome, capital needed a counterargument to what may have been seen as a viable alternative to the social order in the United States. For capital to counter, hip consumerism was used. Hip consumerism begged citizens to join in the carnival of consumption, to eat and wear the right things, to liberate themselves through purchased lifestyles, and that this would show the Soviets that even if Americans were dissatisfied with the current social order, they still preferred the capitalist regime, even the rebels. This simultaneously created the United States narrative that the Soviet Union was hopelessly uncool, or else the notion of the United States as the cool choice would not work.

The fact that hip consumerism does reinforce the existing order, however, is the whole point. In this era, people like Marcuse’s student Abbie Hoffman and his Yippies were attempting rebellious activity, and even though as Marcuse reminds us that their activity did not follow the next step after tearing away the veil to try to uncover the apparatus, at least there were attempts to try to engage people that other ways of thinking besides consumption were possible. The student riots in the mid-1960s perplexed governments and sociologists alike, yet even the government report on protest indicated

that terms like violence and protest are political, and it only makes sense to speak of them if there is already a solid political ideology in place.¹¹⁷ It seems that at this juncture, individuals and even the government realized that different people had different notions on how to organize their social lives. After that tumultuous time, however, capital remained in control, and indeed adapted by mimicking the burgeoning counterculture for mass consumption, effectively killing the actual counterculture.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the narrative about the correctness of the capitalist regime grew even larger and more total. Instead of being cool, the capital order has to be morally correct, a point hounded upon by countless market populists. These true believers and the concurrent media narratives held that free markets themselves became synonymous with freedom and democratic activity. These markets, the narrative holds, show us the true path to liberation. Indeed, it must be so, since some argue that history stopped with the full implementation of the neoliberal regime, through the financialization of everything and the changing/perverting of Nature in order to change/pervert the nature of those who live under its auspices. The totality of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption has an even tighter stranglehold on our everyday lives. Attempts at rebellious activity were not only part of consumption, rebellion, in the market populist narrative, became synonymous with legitimating the market. Real challenge to the social order became inconceivable, since it “won” over the Soviet Union, so the concept of rebellion had to be put under its auspices, that real rebels invested in volatile stock exchanges and had hedge funds.

By asking what the possibility of rebellion is in the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, I argue through my reading of Lefebvre that this consumption society is a terrorist state. It limits the ability of its citizens to think and act, to act against one another, to diffuse the power so the locus cannot be located, and all the while providing enough basic material satisfaction so the individuals are sated. Even if individuals are not sated, trying to engage in rebellion still be provided for as a rationale for consumption under the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption’s control.

¹¹⁷ Jerome H. Skolnick, *The Politics of Protest* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 4

Rebellion by consumption is part of the apparatus, and it seems there are few avenues for real rebellion, and in the case of contemporary organizations like the ALF, the ELF, even if efforts are made, thinking on the part of members of the consumption society is so one-dimensional that if the state deems their actions illegal then they are indeed confirmed terrorists. The terrorist aspect then of this society is clear; we are free only to agree with the social order. Supposing that even if we are able to follow Marcuse's advice and establish the aesthetic dimension, all avenues by which we would be able to exercise our liberational right to reorganize society as we see fit becomes moot because it is a rebellion of one, and we recall that Camus is quick to point out that only one person rebelling by saying no is not truly revolutionary activity at all. It seems that with the totalizing terror of the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption.

Real revolutionary activity in the current context is now buying cars that turn us on like the in Cadillac ad previously mentioned, eating the right food and being snarky enough to know better than to fall for the advertising that people in the consumption society fall for. Even though this version of rebellion exists, produced entirely by the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, that seeks to subsume the spaces for rebellion for its own purposes, does not mean that there cannot be space made for real rebellion. This is because the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption is not completely total, as Lefebvre would argue no system ever is; he believes eventually, a critical mass must be reached and the society will implode.¹¹⁸

It will not just implode upon itself. I argue it would take the rebirth of my reading of Marcuse's rebellious subjectivity, out of the aesthetic dimension, to mount a serious challenge to the social order. First by critique, and then eventually by people who are motivated by their consciences engaging in rebellion. Though the system is totalizing, it is not completely total. The cage is visible, and that is enough to think that people are able to liberate themselves through art in the aesthetic dimension, form the rebellious subjectivity and perhaps call into being a form of a rebel not yet conceived and mount serious opposition to the social order. There is something to be pulled from my

¹¹⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), 148

conception of rebellion based on Marcuse and Camus that would be useful for guiding a reformulation of rebellious politics; the liberating aesthetic dimension and the simultaneous “yes” and “no” that guides a person’s actions. That is not to say that then people under the oppressive consumption society will then pick their favorite groups and everybody rebels, but it can at least give those people the critical tools to judge for themselves the rebellious worth of actions taken against the society. That is enough to keep the spaces open.

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