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DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY II: TOWARDS A NEW INTELLECTUALITY

Ben Agger

In the preceding article[1], I called for a new concept of radicalism, appropriate to late capitalist society. I returned to Marx's and Marcuse's concept of the advisory role of critical theory in its relation to existing alienation and to efforts to overcome alienation. In this article, I want to develop further the concept of "dialectical sensibility" as it might inform the activity of radical intellectuals.

Instead of submerging theory in the tactics of revolutionary preparation, I will argue for a theory which does not pretend that it is value-neutral in its orientation to the possibility of change. The dialectical sensibility, as I conceive of it, democratizes critical intellectuality as a way of creating social change "from within", countering what Weber so perceptively called bureaucratic "imperative coordination". In this regard I do not wish to imply that changing bourgeois concepts of scholarship is a sufficient form of practice today: we must still produce a theory which explains utopian possibilities contained in the empirical present.

Cognitive Self-Management

The dialectical sensibility begins to live the revolution. In this sense, intellectuals do not "merely talk" but exemplify in their own activities the order of a new society, refusing to be bound and determined by imposed standards of truth and value. What I call cognitive self-management involves the transcendence of ideology and imposed intellectual authority. But cognitive self-management implies more than mere thought; it also changes the very activity of cognition. The radical intellectual portrays dialectical sensibility, demonstrating to the powerless that they need not live forever under the tyranny of self-imposed ignorance and passivity. The radical intellectual begins to live the revolution by becoming *more* than an isolated intellectual, refusing to stay within the confines of the academic role. It is this multi-dimensionality of role-playing that I contend is revolutionary, challenging the very essence of technocratic society which counsels people only to consume (commodities and commands).

It would be hypocritical to preserve the role of the traditional Marxist intellectual while counseling others to destroy the division of labour. The dialectical sensibility must transform itself in the midst of efforts to transform society. Without developing this type of sensibility on the part of radical intellectuals, the notion of cognitive self-management would rest on precarious foundations: everyone but intellectuals would be exhorted to engage in the merging of theory and practice.

Cognitive self-management will take the form of what Marcuse calls "new science" or what I have called "radical empiricism". The idea of a new science is a metaphor which stimulates the imagination, furnishing a workable image of a dedifferentiated, demystified society. In this context, new science is an essential mode of free human activity, practiced for its own sake, without reference to externally imposed purposes. I have developed the notion that cognition can become a form of mental play, reiterating Marcuse's vision that alienated work can be eliminated and thus fundamentally transformed under a different social order. New science is crucial here because it stimulates human beings to take control of cognition in learning that cognition is an activity not reserved for experts.

I do not believe that modern capitalism is moving towards its inexorable collapse. This does not mean, however, that change is impossible or even improbable, for the psychic costs of domination are mounting rapidly, especially as capitalism is increasingly capable of satisfying basic material needs and yet people still go hungry and work at unsatisfying jobs. Marcuse has explicitly suggested that subversive forces are already being produced by capitalist society, albeit in forms which depart from orthodox Marxian models of change. I accept that this trend exists; the question facing critical theory today is how do we recognize and enhance these "ambiguous" forces, as Marcuse has called them.

At this juncture, the concept of a dialectical sensibility, engaging in cognitive self-management, is a reasonable place to carry on the struggle, both theoretical and political. Since the struggle is already happening in multifarious forms — as human beings attempt to overcome alienation in their own lives — this is a place for radical intellectuals to join the process of self-transformation. While this may be a painful and troubled process, I can think of no better way of contributing to social change than to transform the traditional disengagement of the lonely scholar, in the process creating an archetype of dialectical sensibility, engaged in revolutionary self-management.

As radical intellectuals carry out their own critical activity, they will necessarily engage in political education which explicates the possibility of cognitive self-management. Instead of merely revealing the *fact* of domination, political education will instead demonstrate potentials for changing society in feasible and comprehensible ways. In demonstrating these potentials, dialectical sensibilities will draw upon existing examples of rebellion and struggle, refusing to

invent unrealistic, improbable scenarios in acts of sheer projection. Political education will communicate with existing resistance to the present order in attempting to raise its radicalism to a higher, more theoretically coherent level.

The radical intellectual in this way will help to organize on-going efforts to resist the division of labour between expert and non-expert, encouraging revolutionary democracy as the most direct means of creating a new order and avoiding vanguardism. Although the radical intellectual is an "expert" of sorts, he is only too willing to abandon his expertise in the interest of liberating others — perhaps less theoretically and politically articulate — from the tyranny and hegemony of expertise. The radical intellectual is not opposed to specialized knowledge but only to the type of specialized knowledge which, through mystification, becomes politically dominating. Significant social change will only occur, I submit, when human beings become able to articulate reasons for alienation and the systematic possibility of a new social order. The radical intellectual helps to provide the language and theoretical system through which that type of revolutionary comprehension might take place.

At this time, political resistance is fragmented and scattered. This resistance may be organized by providing a model of change through which each — otherwise isolated and therefore impotent — pocket of resistance can be orchestrated. This type of orchestration can avoid the perils of vanguardism by encouraging rebellion and resistance to develop its own self-confidence and political freedom of choice: this is the emancipatory content of the phrase "cognitive self-management".

Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed was designed to raise political consciousness by teaching peasants the rudiments of literacy, giving them a new purchase on heightened self-esteem and thus political efficacy[2]. This can serve as an archetype of the political education which dialectical sensibilities will conduct. Instead of learning to read and write, people in advanced industrial societies will be shown the possibility of becoming "new scientists", free from the yoke of imperative coordination by experts. Indeed, Freire's literacy-techniques are precisely an example of cognitive self-management, revealing to human beings the practical opportunity to control their own intellectual, and implicitly political, destinies.

This type of political education differs from prior forms in that it *relates* human suffering and the resistance which it occasions to the visible, palpable prospect of a qualitatively different society. Instead of merely projecting a new order in speculative fashion, political education will articulate the dialectic between empirically discoverable struggle — no matter how reformist it may appear — and the prospect of creating a new order. The dialectical sensibility recognizes the subjective roots of objective social change: emancipation will not fall from the sky.

The dialectical sensibility does not shun on-going resistance, harbouring a preformed image of an "authentic" revolution. Indeed, the radical intellectual draws his own optimism precisely from that which he studies and assists in the process of self-emancipation. In the hands of Horkheimer and Adorno critical theory regrettably became a form of negative proof, vindicating its own historical pessimism by demonstrating that radicalism does not — and therefore cannot — exist. Instead, radical intellectuals will look to the existence of resistance as confirming their own suspicion that the system can be changed by purposeful, articulate human beings, suggesting that we need not await the millennium or an "automatic" revolution.

Theory becomes the practice of thinking and living the concept of radicalism; a new order cannot be separated from the movement to achieve it. I have said that the dialectical sensibility would become a living theorist, free from guilt about appearing politically inactive in the usual sense. This type of guilt plagued the original critical theorists, pushing them further away from living theory. Adorno wrote in his 1966 work, *Negative Dialectics*: "My thought is driven to [negative dialectics] by its own inevitable insufficiency, by my guilt of what I am thinking." The concept of dialectical sensibility entails a "sufficient" intellectuality, a dialectics which breaks out of the confines of isolated thought without losing the reflective moment. We can overcome critical theory's dichotomous approach to thought and action, reminiscent of philosophical dualism — the same dualism which Hegelian Marxism originally opposed.

Dialectical sensibility will perceive the positive within the negative, domination producing its transcendence: this is the foundation of the radical intellectuality which I am proposing. Horkheimer and Adorno were overwhelmed by the appearance of the negative totality: Adorno, paraphrasing Hegel, wrote that the whole is the untruth, meaning that everything is today equally reified and thus intractable. Even critical thought tends to be degraded into a commodity by market pressures and the cultural star-system. Adorno failed to recognize, however, that human beings do not — in the empirical here and now — always acquiesce in their bondage. Human beings have not surrendered. And it is the task of dialectical sensibility to locate that resistance within a conceptual totality which gives political voice to it, moving beyond its initial isolation and fragmentary quality.

Marx's analytic treatment of the Paris Commune is an example of this kind of intellectuality: he seized upon the Commune as the bell-wether of future world communism, not minimizing its importance merely because it began as an isolated movement. That the Commune failed to realize communism does not vitiate Marx's posture towards it. Opposition forces were stronger than the original communists. Dialectical sensibility must be analytically scrupulous in assessing the political potential of resistance: as often as not it will arrive at a

pessimistic conclusion, discovering that resistance and struggle is purely reformist, auguring no fundamental alternative to the present. However there is a difference between Adorno's pessimism and dialectical sensibility: Adorno could not see the positive penumbra surrounding the shadow of domination. The radical intellectual, by contrast, refuses to see only grey on grey, going beyond the appearance of heteronomy in search of alternatives produced from within the seemingly total darkness of the present.

Contra Orthodoxy

By stressing the initial importance of cognitive liberation we do not ignore more fundamentally material modes of change involving political and economic institutions. I have already redefined cognition as involving the "sensibility"[3] of the person: sensibility combines mental and manual activity. Thus, cognitive liberation goes beyond the traditional concept of disengaged intellectuality, auguring more than a purely cerebral freedom. This blossoming of mental into material liberation is what Marcuse intends when he argues that "social change becomes an individual need."

It may be objected that dialectical sensibility will fail to change the world because it remains isolated in the university or the study. Allegedly, we fail to consider the strategic question of how to produce a world of dialectical sensibilities: we are "idealists".

This type of criticism is a product of mechanistic tendencies in Marxism which dialectical sensibility opposes. Dialectical sensibility acts by thinking about how the division of labour and imperative coordination can be overcome — by thinkers and actors. Questions of strategy can only be answered in the particular contexts of contemporary existence and must not be resolved from above, and the solutions then imposed on mute actors. The point is that the revolution will always fail in its ultimate aims if socialism is imposed; dialectical sensibility *recreates* the revolution in counter-hegemonic institutions and thus heads off the self-perpetuating, self-institutionalizing tendencies of authoritarian socialism. Cognitive self-management guarantees that theoretical vanguardism will not crystallize in a dictatorship *over* the proletariat, as Karl Korsch called it.

Questions of strategy are not immaterial; but neither can they be resolved in the old, orthodox terms. It is not a matter of drawing up new blueprints of society, to be submitted to the "executive committee" of the Left and then automatically carried out.[4] Socialism must be lived in the present, even if it produces deep and unsettling contradictions between "old" bourgeois and "new" socialist existence. Counter-hegemonic institutions are not the end all and be all of critical theory; counter-institutions ultimately wish to become nor-

mal and pervasive in a new society, no longer being oppositional. But in the interim, between domination and freedom, counter-institutions can harbour fragile human beings and also augur a possible future.[5]

To "live the revolution" is deemed impossible by orthodox Marxists for whom change requires the destruction of private property. Since I do not equate exploitation only with private property I have a different vision of the new society. I contend that it is possible to live the revolution in terms of an interpersonal ethics rooted in mutual respect and care for humanity and nature. This type of ethics will not be superimposed on human beings but will *inhere* in their dialectical sensibilities. Orthodox Marxism has ignored ethics because it was concerned more with changing economic structures than with changing human beings: it assumed that humanity would automatically be transformed after private property had been abolished.

Dialectical ethics has a number of features. It involves respect and care for the being of others; it involves a "rationality of gratification", as Marcuse calls it, treating others as sensuous beings; it also involves a new relation between human and nonhuman nature — an ethics which governs our attitudes towards the environment. I submit that these features of ethical praxis are truer to Marx's vision of communism than the economistic notion that communism means only collective ownership of the instruments of production. (I believe that the notion of public ownership is implied in the type of ethics emanating from dialectical sensibility, and does not have to be introduced from the outside.)

A dialectical ethics does not concern only "idealistic" attitudes but is fundamentally materialist in its implications. Human beings are subject-objects who live in and through a sensuous world. Bourgeois concepts of ethics have ignored the sensuous world and man-nature relations, being concerned primarily with rights in the abstract legal sense. An emancipatory ethics goes beyond this conception and develops non-exploitative strategies for coexisting with others and with nature. Thus, an emancipatory ethics takes responsibility for political, economic and ecological as well as strictly "moral" dimensions of human existence, refusing to separate a person's social "fate" and his abstract legal rights and duties.

Orthodox Marxists ridicule the dialectical sensibility because in their own lives they respect the division of labour and the concept of their own specialized authority. They believe that their time is better spent on scholarship than in unifying their own fragmented activities. They fail to recognize that the dialectical sensibility does not abandon thought and theorizing but rather *integrates* thought and theory into the totality of human existence. The orthodox Marxist scholar rationalizes his disengagement by saying that conditions are not ripe for personal liberation; but today social change in a total sense begins with personal liberation. There is a dialectical dependence between human and institu-

tional change. Only by guaranteeing personal change can the authoritarian tendencies of traditional socialism be effectively challenged "from below".

Orthodox Marxists play the roles of traditional scholarship, separating their thought and action, because orthodoxy prescribes and sanctions the dictatorship of the proletariat and thus the concept of revolutionary professionalism. Allegedly, Marx sanctioned the traditional role of the professional scholar, thinking that the revolution would occur automatically and would then go through two distinct stages, with communism only to be reached in the distant future (when intellectuality could become generalized). Orthodoxy in this sense repeats orthodox social relations, trusting in the dualisms of contemporary experience. The orthodox Marxist admits that eventually dualisms will be overcome and new men produced. Yet he postpones that time because otherwise his own authoritative behaviour would lose its sanction.

I submit that the only way to create a new order is to begin with personal existences, creating new sensibilities capable of engaging in cognitive and political self-management. Historical pessimism can be reconciled with dialectical sensibility. Hegel taught that the dialectic reveals the universal in the particular. Today this means that domination must be read in the "fates" of people; and, further, that liberation must be conceived as involving struggling, frustrated human beings, not taking place behind their backs or on a cosmic, transpersonal level. We need not retain Hegel's fatalistic concept of the cunning of reason but can instead rely on his notion of the dialectic. Hegel suggested that the whole is the truth, indicating that the particular cannot survive without echoing the universal. Similarly, the dialectical dependence between personal and societal change cannot be abrogated. When Marxism becomes a living theory, a form of personality, the entire nature of scholarship will change, calling into question deep-seated emotional preferences and habits. The dialectic requires that thought think of itself as an activity, oriented to generating a truly democratic intellectuality as a route to significant social change.

The Dualisms of Oppression

Radical social scientists are engaged in *unifying* activity, uniting activities heretofore conceived as separate. These separations — between work and play, science and commonsense, reflection and action — protect dominant interests by legitimating structures of expertise and imposed authority. Knowledge is produced by experts and consumed by non-experts in advanced industrial society: this is the sense of Lukács' concept of reification as involving the transformation of mental processes and ideas into things, even commodities. Social change will result, I submit, from making non-experts producers as well as consumers.

In challenging certain dualisms, the radical intellectual does not go overboard and reduce everything to subjectivity. The dialectical non-identity between subject and object will be preserved: activity produces objectivity, creating a *continuum* between humanity and the world. The radical intellectual only attacks those dualisms such as oppressor and oppressed which are historical and can be eliminated. The dialectic between subject and object — man and world — is not a dualism and cannot be effaced. Theories which reduce everything to subjectivity gloss over contradictions and tensions in objective reality, pretending that the world can be changed in the mind of the thinking subject. Rather, the subject must interact with the world in transforming its historical character.

While radical intellectuals will engage in unifying activity — making non-experts experts, capable of comprehending and overcoming their own domination — they will preserve the elemental difference between subject and object which motivates social change. It is not enough that non-experts think that they are experts; they must *act* as experts, wresting control of cognitive and political processes from technocrats. In overcoming the dualism between the oppressor and the oppressed (the expert and the non-expert) we do not intend to eliminate the difference between man and the world. The communist person will be destined to an objective body and to space-time. Subjectivity will sustain itself by recognizing its dialectical dependence on the objective world, free — for the first time in human history — to interact with the world in its own chosen ways.

Dialectical dependence between subject and object is eternal. Domination, however, is non-eternal. Dialectical sensibility analyzes the difference between the eternal and the temporary in developing a concept of the *liveable life*, refusing utopia because it attempts to change everything — thus changing nothing.

I have developed the concept of cognitive self-management because I want to emphasize that a new order must be depicted in comprehensible, realistic metaphors. I do not oppose dualism *in toto* but only particular dualisms, such as oppressor-oppressed and expert-non-expert. The shape of the new society can be captured in images which borrow from present concepts: dialectical sensibility allows concepts to point beyond themselves, bringing out their hidden content in new, even unforeseen directions.

Critical theory in the hands of Horkheimer and Adorno has tended to portray the new order as entirely unimaginable by contrast to the present damaged life. I oppose this tendency because I believe it imperative to think through the concept of a new order, utilizing especially the concept of self-management. There will not be a quantum jump between the present and the future, as Engels suggested in his notion of the leap from necessity to freedom. Instead,

people in a new order will still be faced with complex problems of social organization and administration which they must face with seriousness.

Dialectical sensibility *works through* these problems. Damaged life will not automatically produce utopia; it will only produce alternative social forms, none of them ideal. Automatic Marxism has tended to endorse an image of automatic communism. Both concepts are irresponsible, neglecting the necessity of subjective choice and decision.

Experimental Marxism

This is to envisage an experimental Marxism, learning from the experience of creating a new order. Cognition is a vital factor in this process of theoretical self-education. Social existence is so complex as to prevent theorists from planning or predicting every detail of communist life; most of these details will have to be clarified in experimentation with alternative social forms, not foisted upon actors from the beginning. A salient example of experimentation in this sense regards the future of the family. It is difficult to state with certainty which forms of child-raising and adult cohabitation would be appropriate to a self-managed social order. We have insufficient long-term experience with forms like the kibbutz in Israel or the Serbian extended family (the *zadruga*) to project a communist family structure — if there is to be any family at all. Similarly, a psychoanalytically informed Marxism will recognize that the "pain" of personal maturation cannot be avoided under a new order; that mature adult life will require at least a modicum of what Freud called "repression" and "sublimation". As Marcuse stated in a debate with Norman O. Brown, the point is not to eliminate the reality principle but only particular realities such as domination and oppression. An experimental Marxism can determine what the psychological and socio-economic limits of change will be.

Critical theory does not have a purely anticipatory element, awaiting a different *future*. People are already beginning to create a "different" society in their own lives. I have characterized this as unifying heretofore separate activities. Indeed, counter-hegemonic activity today takes the form of redefining the concept and practice of expertise. The world is changing as non-experts become experts, challenging the institutionalized dominance of technocrats and politicians.

The dialectical sensibility lives in the space between today and tomorrow, not entirely a creature of either present or future. The notion of a long road to communism is abandoned because the concept has traditionally legitimated severely hierarchical forms of transition and the institutionalization of the Communist Party. But neither is dialectical sensibility merely a parliamentary socialist sensibility for it lives a different society, refusing to postpone fun-

damental personal changes until that magic moment of parliamentary success. Bolshevik and parliamentary strategies end up changing nothing, eschewing fundamental personal transformation in favour of merely structural modification.

The dialectical sensibility cannot separate social structure from human existence. It interprets Marxian structuralism as an act of revolutionary bad faith. Instead, the dialectical sensibility translates the concept of structure into terms of lived-experience and vice versa, refusing to reduce the complexity of society to either purely objective or purely subjective terms.

Finally, dialectical sensibility is unwilling to delay revolutionary gratification, awaiting "future" liberation to be paid for by present suffering such as organizational discipline and even oppression. The concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat is unnecessary; it trades future benefits against present sacrifices. This sacrificial model of social change is renounced by the dialectical sensibility and in its place a more "self-serving" model of transition is conceived. *Why* must we await the millennium, when everything will allegedly be different, willing to suffer present domination? There is no plausible answer.

Emancipatory theory today confronts the question: how *different* will the future be? Economism and later critical theory both deny the hypothesis that a qualitatively different society may not appear to be entirely different from the present reality. Avoiding the question "how much difference?" will only lead to utopian quagmires in which human beings do nothing to change their own lives in the expectation that real change will only come from above: from the Communist Party or from the cosmic clash of self-contradictory economic structures.

The radical intellectual leans hesitatingly towards the future, recognizing that the preservation of his humanity (albeit "damaged" to some extent) requires that he not renounce suddenly everything he has been and known. How will our lives as individual producers and consumers change under a new order? How can we preserve aspects of present happiness? The critical theorist believes that nothing is worth saving; the orthodox Marxist believes that everything should be changed. The radical intellectual recognizes the truth of each of these positions, orchestrating them in order to produce a feasible strategy of emancipatory living. Emancipatory theory, linking together as it does an experimental Marxism with the principle of cognitive self-management, ultimately begins by reformulating what it means "to begin". In this way, the dialectical sensibility may produce a dialectical social order, a new order beyond the reification which today weighs so heavily upon all of us.

Sociology
University of Waterloo

Notes

1. See my "Dialectical Sensibility I: Critical Theory, Scientism and Empiricism", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Winter 1977.

2. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York, Seabury Press, 1970. I must add that I do not think that Freire goes far enough towards politicizing his concept of radical pedagogy. He does not carry through his analysis of the dialectic between expert and non-expert to its ultimate conclusion, namely, an image of self-management and revolutionary democracy.

3. On the meaning of "sensibility" in this context, see Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1969, especially Chapter 2, "The New Sensibility". Also see Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, Chapter 2, "Nature and Revolution". "Far from being a mere 'psychological' phenomenon in groups or individuals, the new sensibility is the medium in which social change becomes an individual need, the mediation between the political practice of 'changing the world' and the drive for personal liberation." (p. 59). Marcuse's and my concept of sensibility thus involves a concept of "objective subjectivity", political subjectivity.

4. This alludes to the claim that the state is merely the "executive committee of the bourgeoisie". I want to suggest that authoritarian socialism and authoritarian capitalism are both hierarchical and impose authority from above.

5. Already in North America there are a few counter-hegemonic journals which eschew conventional criteria of academic commodity-production. Among these, *Telos* and *New German Critique* are the most important theoretical organs. However, the creation of counter-hegemonic journals such as these has been far from peaceful. It is very instructive to observe the efforts to introduce European Hegelian Marxism to North America. The recent history of these efforts reveals that counter-hegemonic institutions can quickly become as oppressive and authoritarian as established ones. In North American circles of left-wing scholarship "stars" have emerged, and even a productive work-ethic which resembles the old "publish or perish". In the pages of *Telos* certain of these difficulties have been articulated and debated. Russell Jacoby's recent "A Falling Rate of Intelligence?", in *Telos* No. 27, Spring 1976, pp. 141-146, describes the intrusion of commodity-fetishism into academic production. Also see the dispute between James Schmidt and Martin Jay on the subject of orthodoxy and revisionism, carried out in the context of Schmidt's response to a piece by Jay on Mannheim and the Frankfurt School published in *Telos* No. 20. In *Telos* Nos. 21 and 22, Schmidt and Jay battle it out, attempting to resolve the question of "dialectical loyalty". On this topic, see the dispute between Jay and Jacoby in the pages of *Theory and Society* concerning Jacoby's review in that journal of Jay's history of the Frankfurt School, *The Dialectical Imagination*. (See Jacoby's review of Jay's book in *Theory and Society*, I/2, Summer 1974; also see "Marxism and Critical Theory: Martin Jay and Russell Jacoby", *Theory and Society*, II/2, Summer 1975, pp.257-263.) People like Jay and Jacoby are attempting to prevent the fetishism and academicization of critical theory and the consequent creation of a new academic authority-structure rooted in a star-system. These disputes transcend partisan in-fighting and professional jealousy: they display the kinds of problems inherent in creating effective counter-institutions which do not themselves become controlled by an elite. It is a disturbing irony that certain Marxists are often highly scholastic and intellectually authoritarian, regarding "the tradition" as sacred.