

A Comparative Study of Foucault's Madness and Civilization and Marcuse's Eros and Civilization

Xian Liu^{1,a,*}

¹School of Marxism, Capital Normal University, Beijing, 100123, China

a. liuxian20020526@163.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault explores the history of human civilization's repression of irrationality based on the study of the history of human madness, while Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* starts from the perspective of civilization's repression of lust for love, and tries to explore a brand-new way out of the civilization of non-repression. Through combing and comparing the two books on the repression of irrational power and the solution paths, it can be found that both books are related to the driving role of aesthetic power in the evolution of human civilization. Among them, the attention and discussion on the phenomenon of madness by philosophers and artists can enable us to better start from the dimension of aesthetics, conduct a comparative study of the two books, and at the same time explore the solution path to get rid of human society's suppression of irrationality.

Keywords: madness, amorality, civilization, aesthetics

1. Introduction

In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault makes full use of archaeological and genealogical methods to examine the history of human madness. Through the unfolding study of Western marginal cultures, he focuses on at what cost human beings in the development of civilization tell their own truths and at what cost they describe the truths about madness [1]. However, Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* puts forward the theory of the essence of eroticism on the basis of the critical inheritance of Freud's theory of eroticism, attempting to explore a path of liberation for the realization of a non-repressive civilization from the in-depth excavation of the life instinct of eroticism.

Foucault's genealogy itself contains a certain element of eros [1], and Marcuse's eros is described as a kind of life instinct that is different from "sexual desire" [2], and both of them provide their own explanations for the repression of civilization in the irrational man. In addition, both books analyze irrationality in the context of "philosophy of life". According to Schneiderbach's point of view, the western "philosophy of life" can be divided into three major schools, one is the metaphysical philosophy of life, represented by Bergson. The second is the philosophy of life of the philosophy of history, represented by Spengler. The third is the so-called philosophy of life represented by Nietzsche as the value of life as the judgment of the philosophy of life [3]. Foucault and Marcuse coincidentally both chose to perpetuate the third, which is to dissect society from the perspective of civilization's repression of human instincts.

For Foucault, eros is to sexuality as unreason is to madness, and thus eros and sexuality are inseparable [4]. And Freud carefully discerned the difference between eros and sexuality in *Eros and*

Civilization. Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* inherits more of Nietzsche's theory of the powerful, only mentioning Freud at the end of the book. Marcuse mainly analyzes Freud, and his *Eros and Civilization* proposes the theory of the nature of eroticism based on the critical inheritance of Freud's theory of eroticism. Freud's related theories thus figure prominently in it. In fact, Nietzsche died before Freud, and in the year of Nietzsche's death, Freud's seminal work on psychoanalysis, *the Interpretation of Dreams*, had just been published, so it is hard to believe that Freud never drew on Nietzsche's ideas for his essence. A comparative study of Foucault and Marcuse, who were surprisingly similar in some parts of their respective works, may shed more light on the two.

This paper first uses historical analysis by combing through the history of madness to get a glimpse of the repression of irrationality in the Western world since the Middle Ages. After that, the comparative research method is used to analyze the difference in emphasis between Foucault and Marcuse on how to solve the problem of the repression of irrationality by the ruling class. On the basis of extensive comparative research and literature review, the two books are summarized from the perspective of the aesthetic dimension to provide a solution to the search for a way out of the repression of irrationality by human civilization.

2. History of Madness

At the end of the Middle Ages, leprosy disappeared from the Western world as if by magic, and the lepers almost faded from memory [1]. However, poor vagabonds, criminals, and the "insane" would take over the role of lepers in society [1]. The Renaissance saw the emergence of new imagery, the "Ship of Fools", symbolizing the search for truth. During this period, the madman occupied a unique place in the literature of Cervantes and others, and his presence served a revealing function.

The royal decree establishing a general hospital in Paris was issued in 1656 [1]. The people in the asylums had an obligation to be supported, but at the same time, they had to accept the physical and moral constraints of confinement. As for society, the great confinement undoubtedly provided effective control over lawbreakers, domestic prodigals, hobos, and the mentally ill. Because idleness has become the worst form of rebellion, the loafer must be compelled to work, to pass the time with an endless labor [1]. The line of demarcation between laborers and idlers was drawn so clearly once, and this division reflected a rejection of leprosy, both in terms of the map's distribution map and in terms of morality [1].

By the end of the 18th century, insanity broke the silence of the asylum and became a performance, thus turning into an open scandal for the entertainment of the public [1]. Wherever it appeared, it was kept at a distance, under some kind of rational supervision [1]. People of this period even believed that madmen were capable of bearing the hardships of life without limit. They did not need to be protected or kept warm [1].

Based on the above social background, Foucault explains the causes and treatments of madness from a psychological and medical perspective [5]. Passion and delirium are considered to be part of the causes of insanity, with passion being the result of a clash of reason, and delirium being more of a delusion of self and a corruption of nature. Madness, though proceeding from the passions, is still a violent movement in the rational unity of spirit and flesh [1]. For example, in the tragedies of the early 17th century, the combination of madness and passion was at one point at its height. The Renaissance offered an excellent idea for a therapeutic pathway for madness, as music has regained its medical powers since the Renaissance. It also shows that art can effectively penetrate people's minds, have a soothing effect on them, and penetrate their physical bodies.

By the 19th century, people finally realized the seriousness of mixing the insane with criminals. Positivists continued to claim that it was they who first liberated the insane from the deplorable state of being mixed with criminals, and distinguished innocent irrationality from crime [1]. On the one hand, insanity itself is innocent, and the insane are merely insane. Mixing the two would hinder the

recovery of the sick, while many of the madmen who are confined are incapable of doing their labor work well. On the other hand, the superintendent, the superintendent, and others constantly demanded that the convicts be separated from the madmen, and the workhouse of labor reform was disturbed by them. For the criminals, keeping the madmen with them was an effective punishment, but it was clear that this ugly practice was unfair to the madmen. Thus, the madman becomes both the subject and the object of oppression, both the symbol and the target of oppression.

After Pinel and Tooker, psychiatry would become a distinct medicine. The patient believed that the psychiatrist's power to eliminate insanity was due to the fact that his knowledge had a certain mystery [1]. As a result, the patient fully recognizes and submits to his authority. And Freud's psychoanalysis made a great improvement. But while he rescued the existence of the patients in the asylums, he also transferred the various powers of the asylums into the hands of the doctors and utilized them to the utmost. The establishment of the asylum seems to be a kind of liberation for the insane, a way for the rational world to atone for insanity. To bring madness back to the light of humanity, no longer suffering from flesh and blood, throwing off the handcuffs and shackles, not having to be exhibited and scrutinized by the rational public [6]. In essence, however, it is only then that insanity enters fully into the prison of the rational mental realm. Although psychoanalysis is capable of eliminating certain forms of insanity, it is only a rational scientific method, and in any case, psychoanalysis has never been able to enter the realm of irrational domination.

3. The History of Repressed Eros

3.1. The Theory of the Nature of Love

Freud put forward the view that sexual desire is a human instinct in the spiritual realm. However, because of his over-emphasis and reliance on sexuality, he was later criticized for his "pansexualism". Based on Freud's theory of sexual desire, Marcuse put forward the theory of the nature of love, and believed that human instinct is eros, and that the pleasure brought by eros is only partial and temporary. Only activities such as pastimes in eros will give a comprehensive and lasting pleasure and establish a new social relationship.

In fact, Freud had earlier discussed "eros", which he defined as an effort "to bring the living body into a greater unity, thus prolonging life and bringing it to a higher stage of development" [2]. This definition acquires a richer meaning as a result of advocating the idea of non-repressive sublimation. Moreover, Freud made no distinction between "eros" and "libido". This state of affairs continued until Marcuse, who drew a clear distinction between the two. In terms of social function, eros is both destructive and constructive, whereas libido seems to be only destructive, which is one of Marcuse's major arguments against Freud's theory of repression of libido. Eros among individuals is ultimately small-scale. The advancement of civilization would be greatly benefited if this emotion of love and lust were extended to develop a whole new level of fraternity towards the whole society. In Marcuse's view, the fundamental way to realize the liberation of eros is to break the alienation of labor, and for this reason, he cuts into the critique of the contemporary labor situation from the perspective of alienation.

3.2. Liberation from Eros

The fundamental way to achieve liberation from eros lies in the breaking down of the alienation of labor and the transformation of eros into a way out of repression and alienation. Unlike Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, in Marcuse's view, eros is the only way to save those who are bound by the prison of reason. The work of satisfying eros is non-alienating work, a free pastime for the various organs and faculties of man. The essence of this pastime is the satisfaction of eros and nothing else, unlike alienated labor, which is only necessary to provide the means of life for man's self-preservation.

The special character of labor lies in the fact that it is a means of obtaining the necessities of life in addition to this basic purpose [7]. Marx viewed labor as the essence of man and considered it to be the mediator of man's transition from nature to human society, the importance of which cannot be overstated. It is this same point that Marcuse values when he sees the liberation of labor as the key to the liberation of love and desire.

Labor occupies the majority of people's daily lives and thus provides ample opportunity for the mass release of eros. However, the alienation of labor prevents people from giving vent to their erotic desires, and labor and erotic desire thus become a pair of contradictory existences. Thus, restoring the essential nature of labor and allowing people to freely release their erotic desires in labor, instead of making labor a livelihood activity, becomes the goal of Marcuse's theory of liberation from eroticism.

3.3. Additional Repression and Operational Principle

The history of mankind is, in fact, the history of repression. Civilization was born as a result of the methodical suppression of the primary instincts. The entire progress of civilization was also possible only because of the transformative use of the death instinct and its derivatives. The transfer of the primary destructive nature from the self to the external world led to technological progress [2]. In this respect, the two men share a remarkably similar viewpoint, both of them inheriting more or less critically Nietzsche's theory of the powerful will and Freud's theory of the vital instinct. In Marcuse's view, eros has an intrinsic binding, cohesive force, but is not antisocial. Thus, it is not necessarily in conflict with civilization.

In order to better elucidate the biological and socio-historical roots of the repression of eros, which Freud failed to specify, and to demonstrate the real possibility of a non-repressive civilization, Marcuse proposes two special concepts, "additional repression" and "operational principle", in addition to Freud's "repression" and "principle of reality".

The existence of additional repression is the repression imposed on human love in order to perpetuate human civilization. In addition to the basic repression demanded by civilization in general, it is necessary to maintain a particular form of dominance. Freud was undoubtedly correct in arguing that human love-desire are repressed by the principle of reality. But Marcuse argues that it is also necessary to distinguish between the principle of reality as a general civilizational requirement and the principle of operative as a requirement of a particular form of civilization, as a way of distinguishing between basic repression and additional repression. At this stage, civilization is no longer in conflict with eros and desire. On the contrary, the development of civilization has created conditions for elimination of repression. The development of science and technology allows for the minimization or even the elimination of all unpleasant work [2]. However, in order to maintain the survival of a given society, the additional restrictions imposed by the operating principles on the desire to love can cause unreasonable additional repression of the instincts of individual life, whether it is a sense of guilt caused by the "Oedipus complex" (a patricide or matricide-patricide) that has always been hidden deep within the human being, or a feeling of guilt inflicted on the individual by the ruling forces, such as the external ruling institutions. Self-repression compels people to constantly rebel against the external ruling forces, family management, and government control, thus, creating the cycle of domination, rebellion, and reinforcement of domination. Based on this view of civilization, Marcuse points out that the way forward for the entire human civilization is to eliminate repression, break down alienation, release love and desire, and break the cycle.

4. Exploring the Link from the Aesthetic Dimension

Both Marcuse and Foucault attached great importance to the study of art, especially to the promotion of human civilization by artistic work. The madness of artists and philosophers has always been incomprehensible to rationalism, except in the true psychiatric sense. Historically, people have also been trying to eliminate this madness through different means (e.g., confinement). Psychoanalysis also sees it as a pathology. Currently, there is no clear and unambiguous definition of this “madness”, and the means of elimination are constantly adding new forms.

At the end of the 18th century, any insanity without delirium but characterized by dullness, despair, and some kind of trance tended to be classified as melancholia [1]. During the classical period, hysteria and hypochondria were gradually included in the field of mental disorders [1]. Insanity has always been seen as an aberration, antithetical to the rationality of civilized society, and the insane seemed to be nothing but objects of medical study in asylums [8]. Not only that, but the insanity of artists and philosophers has even posed a great challenge to the social fabric, to the lives and well-being of sufferers and their families, and to the stability of the social order [9]. Although the condition may not be sufficient to be included in the field of mental illness as far as modern medicine is concerned, its social acceptance is still not optimistic. And bringing their madness back to sanity is more like a process of re-socializing madness.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault uses the works of Hölderlin, Nevar, Nietzsche, and Aalto as examples to argue that irrational beings can never be reduced to treatable insanity. And they resist the great moral yoke with their own power [1]. Foucault found that psychiatry was no longer able to understand such irrational works after the artist had gone mad, and Western civilization was unable to assess them more objectively. One is forced to rethink the relationship between oneself and the irrational. If the power of life has submerged the individual in the management of the population, the madman, who does not submit to any discipline or control, is indeed the last hope of mankind [3].

Similar to Foucault, Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* seeks a deeper basis for “imagination” from an aesthetic perspective, and uses Kant's *Critique of Judgment* to point out that defending “imagination” is what the discipline of aesthetics means to human civilization. Marcuse attaches great importance to the role of art and aesthetics in the liberation of human beings, and both in the “theory of liberation of eros and desire” and the “theory of the great refusal”, the work of art and the aesthetics play an important role. Within the framework of the theory of liberation of eros and desire, Marcuse believes that aesthetics embodies the principle of pleasure under the principle of resistance to reality, and at the same time, it is also the highest spiritual product of the instinct of love and desire, which has the potential to rebel against the social order.

Historically, since Kant, the exploration of the term “aesthetics” at the heart of aesthetics has focused more on human subjectivity. For Marcuse, the basic confrontation between subject and object is divided into sensibility and intelligibility in the mental faculties. Under the principles of pleasure and reality, there is necessarily an intermediate sphere between the sensible and the intelligible, the “third faculty”. The third faculty is precisely the transitional area between the two faculties, and its function is to link these two faculties, which Kant calls the judgment faculty. Thus, the trichotomy of the mind replaces the original dichotomy with judgment, regulating the two aspects of pain and pleasure. And the judgment associated with the sense of pleasure is the judgment of the aesthetic, whose field of application is artistic work. The aesthetic has a crucial place in Kant's philosophy, occupying a central position in bridging the sensual and the moral [10]. In life, the process of aesthetic education, or the process of raising the level of aesthetics in society as a whole, essentially refers to the addition of a transitional stage of sensibility between the present stage and the purely sensual stage, which is reconciled in order to cope with the widespread conflict between the sensual and rational functions in society.

5. Conclusion

Perhaps Foucault's later aesthetic, that ethical reconstruction can compensate for the romantic tendencies of *Madness and Civilization*, suggests that people may not be able to escape from the control of the power of life, but they can resist the power of life and create their own life and forms of life through certain strategies. The value of Marcuse's aesthetic theory lies in its use of aesthetics as a means to restore the human personality, reshape the subjective consciousness, and release the human desire for love. Nowadays, although many people still have some misunderstandings about the crazy behavior of contemporary artists or philosophers, irrational behavior is still being regulated and suppressed by reason in various fields. On the whole, the power of aesthetics will be a major breakthrough for irrationality to realize freedom from bondage.

Although this paper has roughly explored the contribution of Foucault and Marcuse to the liberation of repressive civilization by aesthetics, other scholars' research on this issue is still seriously insufficient, and additional research will be carried out in the future. Through a comparative study of more scholars' responses to this issue, we will refine the conclusions of the article and propose better ideas for solving the problem.

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