

# (1st part of) Chapter 4: The Closing of the Universe of Discourse *from One-Dimensional Man* Herbert Marcuse

*Dans l'état présent de l'Histoire, toute écriture politique ne peut que confirmer un univers policier, de même toute écriture intellectuelle ne peut qu'instituer une para-littérature, qui n'ose plus dire son nom.*

In the present state of history, all political writing can only confirm a police-universe, just as all intellectual writing can only produce para-literature which does not dare any longer to tell its name.

—Roland Barthes

The Happy Consciousness—the belief that the real is rational and that the system delivers the goods—reflects the new conformism which is a facet of technological rationality translated into social behavior. It is new because it is rational to an unprecedented degree. It sustains a society which has reduced—and in its most advanced areas eliminated—the more primitive irrationality of the preceding stages, which prolongs and improves life more regularly than before. The war of annihilation has not yet occurred; the Nazi extermination camps have been abolished. The Happy Consciousness repels the connection. Torture has been re-introduced as a normal affair, but in a colonial war which takes place at the margin of the civilized world<sup>1</sup>. And there it is practiced with good conscience for war is war. And this war, too, is at the margin—it ravages only the “underdeveloped” countries. Otherwise, peace reigns.

The power over man which this society has acquired is daily absolved by its efficacy and productiveness. If it assimilates everything it touches, if it absorbs the opposition, if it plays with the contradiction, it demonstrates its cultural superiority. And in the same way the destruction of resources and the proliferation of waste demonstrate its opulence and the “high levels of well-being”; the Community is too well off to care<sup>2</sup>.

## **The Language of Total Administration**

This sort of well-being, the productive superstructure over the unhappy base of society, permeates the “media” which mediate between the masters and their dependents. Its publicity agents shape the universe of communication in which the one-dimensional behavior expresses itself. Its language testifies to identification and unification, to the systematic promotion of positive thinking and doing, to the concerted attack on transcendent, critical nations. In the prevailing modes of speech, the contrast appeals between two-dimensional, dialectical modes of thought and technological behavior or social “habits of thought.”

In the expression of these habits of thought, the tension between appearance and reality, fact and factor, substance and attribute tend to disappear. The elements of autonomy, discovery, demonstration, and critique recede before designation, assertion, and imitation. Magical, authoritarian and ritual elements permeate speech and language. Discourse is deprived of the mediations which are the stages of the process of cognition and cognitive evaluation. The concepts which comprehend the facts and thereby transcend the facts are losing their authentic linguistic representation. Without these mediations, language tends to express and promote the immediate identification of reason and fact, truth and established truth, essence and existence, the thing and its function.

These identifications, which appeared as a feature of operationalism,<sup>3</sup> reappear as features of discourse in social behavior. Here functionalization of language helps to repel non-conformist elements from the structure and movement of speech. Vocabulary and syntax are equally affected. Society expresses its requirements directly in the linguistic material but not without opposition; the popular language strikes with spiteful and defiant humor at the official and semi-official discourse. Slang and colloquial speech have rarely been so creative. It is as if the common man (or his anonymous spokesman) would in his speech assert his humanity against the powers that be, as if the rejection and revolt, subdued in the political sphere, would burst out in the vocabulary that calls things by their names: “head-shrinker” and “egghead,” “boob tube,” “think tank,” “beat it” and “dig it,” and “gone, man, gone.”

However, the defense laboratories and the executive offices, the governments and the machines, the time-keepers and managers, the efficiency experts and the political beauty parlors (which provide the leaders with the appropriate make-up) speak a different language and, for the time being, they seem to have the last word. It is the word that orders and organizes, that induces people to do, to buy, and to accept. It is transmitted in a style which is a veritable linguistic creation; a syntax in which the structure of the sentence is abridged and condensed in such a way that no tension, no “space” is left between the parts of the sentence. This linguistic form militates against a development of meaning. I shall presently try to illustrate this style.

The feature of operationalism—to make the concept synonymous with the corresponding set of operations<sup>4</sup>—recurs in the linguistic tendency “to consider the names of *things* as being indicative at the same time of their manner of functioning, and the names of properties and processes as symbolical of the apparatus used to detect or produce them.”<sup>5</sup> This is technological reasoning, which tends “to identify things and their functions.”<sup>6</sup>

As a habit of thought outside the scientific and technical language, such reasoning shapes the expression of a specific social and political behaviorism. In this behavioral universe, words and concepts tend to coincide, or rather the concept tends to be absorbed by the word. The former has no other content than that designated by the word in the publicized and standardized usage, and the word is expected to have no other response than the publicized and standardized behavior (reaction). The word becomes *cliché* and, as cliché, governs the speech or the writing; the communication thus precludes genuine development of meaning.

To be sure, any language contains innumerable terms which do not require development of their meaning, such as the terms designating the objects and implements of daily life, visible nature, vital needs and wants. These terms are generally understood so that their mere appearance produces a response (linguistic or operational) adequate to the pragmatic context in which they are spoken.

The situation is very different with respect to terms which denote things or occurrences beyond this non-controversial context. Here, the functionalization of language expresses an abridgement of meaning which has a political connotation. The names of things are not only “indicative of their manner of functioning,” but their (actual) manner of functioning also defines and “closes” the meaning of the thing, excluding other manners of functioning. The noun governs the sentence in an authoritarian and totalitarian fashion, and the sentence becomes a declaration to be accepted—it repels demonstration, qualification, negation of its codified and declared meaning.

At the nodal points of the universe of public discourse, self-validating, analytical propositions appear which function like magic-ritual formulas. Hammered and re-hammered into the recipient’s mind, they produce the effect of enclosing it within the circle of the conditions prescribed by the formula.

I have already referred to the self-validating hypothesis as propositional form in the universe of political

discourse<sup>7</sup>. Such nouns as “freedom,” “equality,” “democracy,” and “peace” imply, analytically, a specific set of attributes which occur invariably when the noun is spoken or written. In the West, the analytic predication is in such terms as free enterprise, initiative, elections, individual; in the East in terms of workers and peasants, building communism or socialism, abolition of hostile classes. On either side, transgression of the discourse beyond the closed analytical structure is incorrect or propaganda, although the means of enforcing the truth and the degree of punishment are very different. In this universe of public discourse, speech moves in synonyms and tautologies; actually, it never moves toward the qualitative difference. The analytic structure insulates the governing noun from those of its contents which would invalidate or at least disturb the accepted use of the noun in statements of policy and public opinion. The ritualized concept is made immune against contradiction.

Thus, the fact that the prevailing mode of freedom is servitude, and that the prevailing mode of equality is super-imposed inequality is barred from expression by the closed definition of these concepts in terms of the powers which shape the respective universe of discourse. The result is the familiar Orwellian language (“peace is war” and “war is peace,” etc.), which is by no means that of terroristic totalitarianism only. Nor is it any less Orwellian if the contradiction is not made explicit in the sentence but is enclosed in the noun. That a political party which works for the defense and growth of capitalism is called “Socialist,” and a despotic government “democratic,” and a rigged election “free” are familiar linguistic—and political—features which long predate Orwell.

Relatively new is the general acceptance of these lies by public and private opinion, the suppression of their monstrous content. The spread and the effectiveness of this language testify to the triumph of society over the contradictions which it contains; they are reproduced without exploding the social system. And it is the outspoken, blatant contradiction which is made into a device of speech and publicity. The syntax of abridgment proclaims the reconciliation of opposites by welding them together in a firm and familiar structure. I shall attempt to show that the “clean bomb” and the “harmless fall-out” are only the extreme creations of a normal style. Once considered the principal offense against logic, the contradiction now appeals as a principle of the logic of manipulation—realistic caricature of dialectics. It is the logic of a society which can afford to dispense with logic and play with destruction, a society with technological mastery of mind and matter.

The universe of discourse in which the opposites are reconciled has a firm basis for such unification—its beneficial destructiveness. Total commercialization joins formerly antagonistic spheres of life, and this union expresses itself in the smooth linguistic conjunction of conflicting parts of speech. To a mind not yet sufficiently conditioned, much of the public speaking and printing appeals utterly surrealistic.

Captions such as “Labor is Seeking Missile Harmony,”<sup>8</sup> and advertisements such as a “Luxury Fall-Out Shelter”<sup>9</sup> may still evoke the naive reaction that “Labor,” “Missile,” and “Harmony” are irreconcilable contradictions, and that no logic and no language should be capable of correctly joining luxury and fall-out. However, the logic and the language become perfectly rational when we learn that a “nuclear-powered, ballistic-missile-firing submarine” “carries a price tag of \$120,000,000” and that “carpeting, scrabble and TV” are provided in the \$1,000 model of the shelter. The validation is not primarily in the fact that this language sells (it seems that the fall-out business was not so good) but rather that it promotes the immediate identification of the particular with the general interest, Business with National Power, prosperity with the annihilation potential. It is only a slip of the truth if a theater announces as a “Special Election Eve Perf., Strindberg’s *Dance of Death*.”<sup>10</sup> The announcement reveals the connection in a less ideological form than is normally admitted.

The unification of opposites which characterizes the commercial and political style is one of the many ways in which discourse and communication make themselves immune against the expression of protest

and refusal. How can such protest and refusal find the fight word when the organs of the established order admit and advertise that peace is really the brink of war, that the ultimate weapons carry their profitable price tags, and that the bomb shelter may spell coziness? In exhibiting its contradictions as the token of its truth, this universe of discourse closes itself against any other discourse which is not on its own terms. And, by its capacity to assimilate another's terms to its own, it offers the prospect of combining the greatest possible tolerance with the greatest possible unity. Nevertheless its language testifies to the repressive character of this unity. This language speaks in constructions which impose upon the recipient the slanted and abridged meaning, the blocked development of content, the acceptance of that which is offered in the form in which it is offered.

The analytic predication is such a repressive construction. The fact that a specific noun is almost always coupled with the same "explicatory" adjectives and attributes makes the sentence into a hypnotic formula which, endlessly repeated, fixes the meaning in the recipient's mind. He does not think of essentially different (and possibly true) explications of the noun. Later we shall examine other constructions in which the authoritarian character of this language reveals itself. They have in common a telescoping and abridgment of syntax which cuts off development of meaning by creating fixed images which impose themselves with an overwhelming and petrified concreteness. It is the well-known technique of the advertisement industry, where it is methodically used for "establishing an image" which sticks to the mind and to the product, and helps to sell the men and the goods. Speech and writing are grouped around "impact lines" and "audience rousers" which convey the image. This image may be "freedom" or "peace," or the "nice guy" or the "communist" or "Miss Rheingold." The reader or listener is expected to associate (and does associate) with them a fixated structure of institutions, attitudes, aspirations, and he is expected to react in a fixated, specific manner.

Beyond the relatively harmless sphere of merchandising, the consequences are rather serious, for such language is at one and the same time "intimidation and glorification."<sup>11</sup> Propositions assume the form of suggestive commands—they are evocative rather than demonstrative. Predication becomes prescription; the whole communication has a hypnotic character. At the same time it is tinged with a false familiarity—the result of constant repetition, and of the skillfully managed popular directness of the communication. This relates itself to the recipient immediately—without distance of status, education, and office—and hits him or her in the informal atmosphere of the living room, kitchen, and bedroom.

The same familiarity is established through personalized language, which plays a considerable role in advanced communication<sup>12</sup>. It is "your" congressman, "your" highway, "your" favorite drugstore, "your" newspaper; it is brought "to you," it invites "you," etc. In this manner, superimposed, standardized, and general things and functions are presented as "especially for you," It makes little difference whether or not the individuals thus addressed believe it. Its success indicates that it promotes the self-identification of the individuals with the functions which they and the others perform.

In the most advanced sectors of functional and manipulated communication, language imposes in truly striking constructions the authoritarian identification of person and function. *Time* magazine may serve as an extreme example of this trend. Its use of the inflectional genitive makes individuals appeal to be mere appendices or properties of their place, their job, their employer, or enterprise. They are introduced as Virginia's Byrd, U.S. Steel's Blough, Egypt's Nasser. A hyphenated attributive construction creates a fixed syndrome:

"Georgia's high-handed, low-browed governor ... had the stage all set for one of his wild political rallies last week."

The governor<sup>13</sup>, his function, his physical features, and his political practices are fused together into

one indivisible and immutable structure which, in its natural innocence and immediacy, overwhelms the reader's mind. The structure leaves no space for distinction, development, differentiation of meaning: it moves and lives only as a whole. Dominated by such personalized and hypnotic images, the article can then proceed to give even essential information. The narrative remains safely within the well-edited framework of a more or less human interest story as defined by the publisher's policy.

Use of the hyphenized abridgment is widespread. For example, "brush-browed" Teller, the "father of the H-bomb," "bull-shouldered missileman von Braun," "science-military dinner"<sup>14</sup> and the "nuclear-powered, ballistic-missile-firing" submarine. Such constructions are, perhaps not accidentally, particularly frequent in phrases joining technology, politics, and the military. Terms designating quite different spheres or qualities are forced together into a solid, overpowering whole.

The effect is again a magical and hypnotic one—the projection of images which convey irresistible unity, harmony of contradictions. Thus the loved and feared Father, the spender of life, generates the H-bomb for the annihilation of life; "science-military" joins the efforts to reduce anxiety and suffering with the job of creating anxiety and suffering. Or, without the hyphen, the Freedom Academy of cold war specialists<sup>15</sup>, and the "clean bomb"—attributing to destruction moral and physical integrity. People who speak and accept such language seem to be immune to everything—and susceptible to everything. Hyphenation (explicit or not) does not always reconcile the irreconcilable; frequently, the combine is quite gentle—as in the case of the "bull-shouldered missileman"—or it conveys a threat, or an inspiring dynamic. But the *effect* is similar. The imposing structure unites the actors and actions of violence, power, protection, and propaganda in one lightning flash. We see the man or the thing in operation and only in operation—it cannot be otherwise.

#### **Note on abridgment. NATO, SEATO, UN, AFL-CIO, AEC, but also USSR, DDR, etc.**

Most of these abbreviations are perfectly reasonable and justified by the length of the unabbreviated designata. However, one might venture to see in some of them a "cunning of Reason"—the abbreviation may help to repress undesired questions. NATO does not suggest what North Atlantic Treaty Organization says, namely, a treaty among the nations on the North-Atlantic—in which case one might ask questions about the membership of Greece and Turkey. USSR abbreviates Socialism and Soviet; DDR: democratic. UN dispenses with undue emphasis on "united"; SEATO with those Southeast-Asian countries which do not belong to it. AFL-CIO entombs the radical political differences which once separated the two organizations, and AEC is just one administrative agency among many others. The abbreviations denote that and only that which is institutionalized in such a way that the transcending connotation is cut *off*. The meaning is fixed, doctored, loaded. Once it has become an official vocable, constantly repeated in general usage, "sanctioned" by the intellectuals, it has lost all cognitive value and serves merely for recognition of an unquestionable fact.

This style is of an overwhelming *concreteness*. The "thing identified with its function" is more real than the thing distinguished from its function, and the linguistic expression of this identification (in the functional noun, and in the many forms of syntactical abridgment) creates a basic vocabulary and syntax which stand in the way of differentiation, separation, and distinction. This language, which constantly imposes *images*, militates against the development and expression of *concepts*. In its immediacy and directness, it impedes conceptual thinking; thus, it impedes thinking. For the concept does *not* identify the thing and its function. Such identification may well be the legitimate and perhaps even the only meaning of the operational and technological concept, but operational and technological definitions are specific usages of concepts for specific purposes. Moreover, they dissolve concepts in operations and exclude the conceptual intent which

is opposed to such dissolution. Prior to its operational usage, the concept *denies* the identification of the thing with its function; it distinguishes that which the thing *is* from the contingent functions of the thing in the established reality.

The prevalent tendencies of speech, which repulse these distinctions, are expressive of the changes in the modes of thought discussed in the earlier chapters—the functionalized, abridged and unified language is the language of one-dimensional thought. In order to illustrate its novelty, I shall contrast it briefly with a classical philosophy of grammar which transcends the behavioral universe and relates linguistic to ontological categories.

According to this philosophy, the grammatical subject of a sentence is first a “substance” and remains such in the various states, functions, and qualities which the sentence predicates of the subject. It is actively or passively related to its predicates but remains different from them. If it is not a proper noun, the subject is more than a noun: it names the *concept* of a thing, a universal which the sentence defines as in a particular state or function. The grammatical subject thus carries a meaning in *excess* of that expressed in the sentence.

In the words of Wilhelm von Humboldt: the noun as grammatical subject denotes something that “can enter into certain relationships,”<sup>16</sup> but is not identical with these relationships. Moreover, it remains what it is in and “against” these relationships; it is their “universal” and substantive core. The propositional synthesis links the action (or state) with the subject in such a manner that the subject is designated as the actor (or bearer) and thus is distinguished from the state or function in which it happens to be. In saying: “lightning strikes,” one “thinks not merely of *the striking lightning*, but of *the lightning itself which strikes*,” of a subject which “passed into action.” And if a sentence gives a definition of its subject, it *does not* dissolve the subject in its states and functions, but defines it as being in this state, or exercising this function. Neither disappearing in its predicates nor existing as an entity before and outside its predicates, the subject constitutes itself in its predicates—the result of *a process of mediation* which is expressed in the sentence<sup>17</sup>.

I have alluded to the philosophy of *grammar* in order to illuminate the extent to which the linguistic abridgments indicate an abridgment of *thought* which they in turn fortify and promote. Insistence on the philosophical elements in grammar, on the link between the grammatical, logical, and ontological “subject,” points up the contents which are suppressed in the functional language, barred from expression and communication. Abridgment of the concept in fixed images; arrested development in self-validating, hypnotic formulas; immunity against contradiction; identification of *the thing* (and of *the person*) with its *function*—these tendencies reveal the one-dimensional mind in the language it speaks.

If the linguistic behavior blocks conceptual development, if it militates against abstraction and mediation, if it surrenders to the immediate facts, it repels recognition of the factors behind the facts, and thus repels recognition of the facts, and of their historical content. In and for the society, this organization of functional discourse is of vital importance; it serves as a vehicle of coordination and subordination. The unified, functional language is an irreconcilably anti-critical and anti-dialectical language. In it, operational and behavioral rationality absorbs the transcendent, negative, oppositional elements of Reason.

I shall discuss<sup>18</sup> these elements in terms of the tension between the “is” and the “ought,” between essence and appearance, potentiality and actuality—ingression of the negative in the positive determinations of logic. This sustained tension permeates the two-dimensional universe of discourse which is the universe of critical, abstract thought. The two dimensions are antagonistic to each other; the reality partakes of both of them, and the dialectical concepts develop the real contradictions. In its own development, dialectical thought came to comprehend the historical character of the contradictions and the process of their mediation as historical process. Thus the “other” dimension of thought appeared to be *historical* dimension—the

potentiality as historical possibility, its realization as historical event.

The suppression of this dimension in the societal universe of operational rationality is a *suppression of history*, and this is not an academic but a political affair. It is suppression of the society's own past—and of its future, inasmuch as this future invokes the qualitative change, the negation of the present. A universe of discourse in which the categories of freedom have become interchangeable and even identical with their opposites is not only practicing Orwellian or Aesopian language but is repulsing and forgetting the historical reality—the horror of fascism; the idea of socialism; the preconditions of democracy; the content of freedom. If a bureaucratic dictatorship rules and defines communist society, if fascist regimes are functioning as partners of the Free World, if the welfare program of enlightened capitalism is successfully defeated by labeling it “socialism,” if the foundations of democracy are harmoniously abrogated in democracy, then the old historical concepts are invalidated by up-to-date operational redefinitions. The redefinitions are falsifications which, imposed by the powers that be and the powers of fact, serve to transform falsehood into truth.

The functional language is a radically anti-historical language: operational rationality has little room and little use for historical reason<sup>19</sup>. Is this fight against history part of the fight against a dimension of the mind in which centrifugal faculties and forces might develop—faculties and forces that might hinder the total coordination of the individual with the society? Remembrance of the Past may give rise to dangerous insights, and the established society seems to be apprehensive of the subversive contents of memory. Remembrance is a mode of dissociation from the given facts, a mode of “mediation” which breaks, for short moments, the omnipresent power of the given facts. Memory recalls the terror and the hope that passed. Both come to life again, but whereas in reality, the former recurs in ever new forms, the latter remains hope. And in the personal events which reappear in the individual memory, the fears and aspirations of mankind assert themselves—the *universal* in the particular. It is history which memory preserves. It succumbs to the totalitarian power of the behavioral universe:

“Das Schreckbild einer Menschheit ohne Erinnerung . . . ist kein blosses Verfallsprodukt . . . sondern es ist mit der Fortschrittlichkeit des bürgerlichen Prinzips notwendig verknüpft. Ökonomen und Soziologen wie Werner Sombart und Max Weber haben das Prinzip des Traditionalismus den feudalen Gesellschaftsformen zugeordnet und das der Rationalität den bürgerlichen. Das sagt aber nicht weniger, als dass Erinnerung, Zeit, Gedächtnis von der fortschreitenden bürgerlichen Gesellschaft selber als eine Art irrationaler Rest liquidiert wird . . .”<sup>20</sup>

If the progressing rationality of advanced industrial society tends to liquidate, as an “irrational past,” the disturbing elements of Time and Memory, it also tends to liquidate the disturbing rationality contained in this irrational past. Recognition and relation to the past as present counteracts the functionalization of thought by and in the established reality. It militates against the closing of the universe of discourse and behavior it renders possible the development of concepts which destabilize and transcend the closed universe by comprehending it as historical universe. Confronted with the given society as object of its reflection, critical thought becomes historical consciousness as such, it is essentially judgment<sup>21</sup>. Far from necessitating an indifferent relativism, it searches in the real history of man for the criteria of truth and falsehood, progress and regression<sup>22</sup>. The mediation of the past with the present discovers the factors which made the facts, which determined the war of life, which established the masters and the servants; it projects the limits and the alternatives. When this critical consciousness speaks, it speaks “le langage de la connaissance” (Roland Barthes) which breaks open a closed universe of discourse and its petrified structure. The key terms of this language are not hypnotic nouns which evoke endlessly the same frozen predicates. They rather allow of an open development; they even unfold their content in contradictory predicates.

The Communist Manifesto provides a classical example. Here the two key terms, Bourgeoisie and Proletariat, each “govern” contrary predicates. The “bourgeoisie” is the subject of technical progress, liberation, conquest of nature, creation of social wealth, *and* of the perversion and destruction of these achievements. Similarly, the “proletariat” carries the attributes of total oppression *and* of the total defeat of oppression.

Such dialectical relation of opposites in and by the proposition is rendered possible by the recognition of the subject as an historical agent whose identity constitutes itself in *and against* its historical practice, in *and against* its social reality. The discourse develops and states the conflict between the thing and its function, and this conflict finds linguistic expression in sentences which join contradictory predicates in a logical unit—conceptual counterpart of the objective reality. In contrast to all Orwellian language, the contradiction is demonstrated, made explicit, explained, and denounced.

I have illustrated the contrast between the two languages by referring to the style of Marxian theory, but the critical, cognitive qualities are not the exclusive characteristics of the Marxian style. They can also be found (though in different modes) in the style of the great conservative and liberal critique of the unfolding bourgeois society. For example, the language of Burke and Tocqueville on the one side, of John Stuart Mill on the other is a highly demonstrative, conceptual, “open” language, which has not yet succumbed to the hypnotic-ritual formulas of present-day neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism.

However, the authoritarian ritualization of discourse is more striking where it affects the dialectical language itself. The requirements of competitive industrialization, and the total subjection of man to the productive apparatus appears in the authoritarian transformation of the Marxist into the Stalinist and post-Stalinist language. These requirements, as interpreted by the leadership which controls the apparatus, define what is right and wrong, true and false. They leave no time and no space for a discussion which would project disruptive alternatives. This language no longer lends itself to “discourse” at all, It pronounces and, by virtue of the power of the apparatus, establishes facts—it is self-validating enunciation. Here<sup>23</sup>, it must suffice to quote and paraphrase the passage in which Roland Barthes describes its magic-authoritarian features: “il n’y a plus aucun sursis entre la denomination et le jugement, et la cloture du langage est parfaite. . . ”<sup>24</sup>

The closed language does not demonstrate and explain—it communicates decision, dictum, command, Where it defines, the definition becomes “separation of good from evil”; it establishes unquestionable fights and wrongs, and one value as justification of another value. It moves in tautologies, but the tautologies are terribly effective “sentences.” They pass judgment in a “prejudged form”; they pronounce condemnation. For example, the “objective content,” that is, the definition of such terms as “deviationist,” “revisionist,” is that of the penal code, and this soft of validation promotes a consciousness for which the language of the powers that be is the language of truth<sup>25</sup>.

Unfortunately, this is not all. The productive growth of the established communist society also condemns the libertarian communist opposition; the language which tries to recall and preserve the original truth succumbs to its ritualization. The orientation of discourse (and action) on terms such as “the proletariat,” “workers’ councils,” the “dictatorship of the Stalinist apparatus,” becomes orientation on ritual formulas where the “proletariat” no longer or not yet exists, where direct control “from below” would interfere with the progress of mass production, and where the fight against the bureaucracy would weaken the efficacy of the only real force that can be mobilized against capitalism on an international scale. Here the past is rigidly retained but not mediated with the present. One opposes the concepts which comprehended a historical situation without developing them into the present situation—one blocks their dialectic.

The ritual-authoritarian language spreads over the contemporary world, through democratic and non-democratic, capitalist and non-capitalist countries<sup>26</sup>. According to Roland Barthes, it is the language “propre a tous les régimes d’autorité,” and is there today, in the orbit of advanced industrial civilization,

a society which is not under an authoritarian regime? As the substance of the various regimes no longer appeals in alternative modes of life, it comes to rest in alternative techniques of manipulation and control. Language not only reflects these controls but becomes itself an instrument of control even where it does not transmit orders but information; where it demands, not obedience but choice, not submission but freedom.

This language controls by reducing the linguistic forms and symbols of reflection, abstraction, development, contradiction; by substituting images for concepts. It denies or absorbs the transcendent vocabulary; it does not search for but establishes and imposes truth and falsehood. But this kind of discourse is not terroristic. It seems unwarranted to assume that the recipients believe, or are made to believe, what they are being told. The new touch of the magic-ritual language rather is that people don't believe it, or don't care, and yet act accordingly. One does not "believe" the statement of an operational concept but it justifies itself in action—in getting the job done, in selling and buying, in refusal to listen to others, etc.

If the language of politics tends to become that of advertising, thereby bridging the gap between two formerly *very* different realms of society, then this tendency seems to express the degree to which domination and administration have ceased to be a separate and independent function in the technological society. This does not mean that the power of the professional politicians has decreased. The contrary is the case. The more global the challenge they build up in order to meet it, the more normal the vicinity of total destruction, the greater their freedom from effective popular sovereignty. But their domination has been incorporated into the daily performances and relaxation of the citizens, and the "symbols" of politics are also those of business, commerce, and fun.

The vicissitudes of the language have their parallel in the vicissitudes of political behavior. In the sale of equipment for relaxing entertainment in bomb shelters, in the television show of competing candidates for national leadership, the juncture between politics, business, and fun is complete. But the juncture is fraudulent and fatally premature—business and fun are still the politics of domination. This is not the satire-play after the tragedy; it is not *finis tragoediae*—the tragedy may just begin. And again, it will not be the hero but the people who will be the ritual victims.

## **The Research of Total Administration**

[Left out for brevity—A.C.]

# Notes

<sup>1</sup>The Vietnam war (Arun)

<sup>2</sup> John K. Calbraith, *American Capitalism*; (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1956), p. 96.

<sup>3</sup>See p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>See p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Gerr, Language and Science. in: *Philosophy of Science*, April 1942, p. 156.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>See p. 14

<sup>8</sup>*New York Times*, December 1, 1960

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, November 7. 1960.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, November 7, 1960.

<sup>11</sup>Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1953), p. 33.

<sup>12</sup>See Leo Lowenthal, *Literature, Popular Culture, and Society* (Prentice-Hall, 1961), p. 109ff. and Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* Boston, Beacon Press, 1961), p. 161 ff.

<sup>13</sup>The statement refers, not to the present Governor, but to Mr. Talmadge.

<sup>14</sup>The last three items quoted in *The Nation*, Feb. 22, 1958.

<sup>15</sup>A suggestion of *Life* magazine, quoted in *The Nation*, August 20, 1960. According to David Sarnoff, a bill to establish such an Academy is before Congress. See John K. Jessup, Adlai Stevenson, and others, *The National Purpose* (produced under the supervision and with the help of the editorial staff of *Life* magazine, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 58.

<sup>16</sup>W.v.Humboldt, *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues*, reprint Berlin 1936, p. 254.

<sup>17</sup>See for this philosophy of grammar in dialectical logic Hegel's concept of the "substance as subject" and of the "speculative sentence in the Preface to the *Phaenomenology of the Spirit*.

<sup>18</sup>In chapter V below.

<sup>19</sup>This does not mean that history, private or general, disappears from the universe of discourse. The past is evoked often enough: be it as the Founding Fathers, or Marx-Engels-Lenin, or as the humble origins of a presidential candidate. However these too, are ritualized invocations which do not allow development of the content recalled; frequently, the mere invocation serves to block such development, which would show its historical impropriety.

<sup>20</sup>"The spectre of man without memory . . . is more than an aspect of decline—it is necessarily linked with the principle of progress in bourgeois society. Economists and sociologists such as Werner Sombart and Max Weber correlated the principle of tradition to feudal, and that of rationality to bourgeois, forms of society. This means no less than that the advancing bourgeois society liquidates Memory, Time, Recollection as irrational leftovers of the past. . ." Th. W. Adorno, "Was bedeutet Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?", in: *Bericht über die Erzieherkonferenz am 6. und 7. November in Wiesbaden*; Frankfurt 1960, p. 14. The struggle against history will be further discussed in chapter VII.

<sup>21</sup>[20] See p. x. and chapter V.

<sup>22</sup>For a further discussion of these criteria see chapter VIII

<sup>23</sup>See my *Soviet Marxism*, loc. cit., p. 87 ff,

<sup>24</sup>"there no longer any delay between the naming and the judgment, and the closing of the language is complete. . ."

<sup>25</sup>Roland Barthes, *loc. cit.*, pp. 37–40.

<sup>26</sup>For West Germany see the intensive studies undertaken by the Institut für Sozialforschung. Frankfurt am Main, in 1950-1951: *Gruppen Experiment*, ed. F. Pollack (Frankfurt, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1955) esp. p. 545 f. Also Karl Korn, *Sprache In der verwalteten Welt* (Frankfurt, Heinrich Scheffler, 1958), for both parts of Germany.