

# Accumulation of Crises, Abundance of Refusals

*Andrew T. Lamas*

*Abstract: This is the introductory essay for the first of two special issues of Radical Philosophy Review marking the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of one of the twentieth century's most provocative, subversive, and widely read works of radical theory—Herbert Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man (1964), which we now reassess in an effort to contribute to the critical theory of our time. What are the possibilities and limits of our current situation? What are the prospects for moving beyond one-dimensionality? A summary of each of the articles featured in this special issue is also provided.*

## Refusing One-Dimensionality

This is the first of two special issues in *Radical Philosophy Review* marking the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of one of the twentieth century's most provocative, subversive, and widely read works of radical theory—Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*.<sup>1</sup> The second special issue will be published in 2017. Both issues are presented under the thematic title, "Refusing One-Dimensionality," which was selected as *an affirmation* of the critical method and as *a critique* of the world historical situation. The critical method, used by Marcuse and by the authors of this special issue, is a project of radical enlightenment, seeking to understand the limits and possibilities of the contemporary situation, and to support liberation movements in the struggle for a better world. Our aim is to contribute to the development of critical theory for our time by

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1. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

exploring, clarifying, critiquing, and, where useful and appropriate in our present situation, extending the critical legacy of Marcuse's work.

This special issue is a beneficiary of the past contributions of radical theorists such as Marcuse but also, and more importantly so, of the liberation movements with which he and so many others were engaged. As the great radical theorist (and student of Marcuse) Angela Davis recollected: "Herbert Marcuse taught me that it was possible to be an academic and an activist, a scholar and a revolutionary."<sup>2</sup> And, in turn, Marcuse acknowledged what he learned about the philosophy of liberation from Davis' writings on Kant, Hegel, and Frederick Douglass.<sup>3</sup> Such respect and engaged cooperation—such recognition, mutuality, and reciprocity—has been central to the critical work reflected in these pages. Their collegial practice of teaching, learning, and engaged radical scholarship remains a model for many intellectuals today.

That the revival of interest in Marcuse's work in recent years is occurring amidst a resurgence of radical politics and radical theory testifies to its continuing relevance for conceptualizing and challenging the forces of oppression and domination. Marcuse's name was invoked in the planning and the proceedings of the recent conference on the Black Radical Tradition in Philadelphia,<sup>4</sup> and scholars and activists around the world—from Toronto to Rio de Janeiro, from London to Athens, from Gwangju to Johannesburg, from Ramallah to Mexico City—are discovering or returning to Marcuse. He is appreciated today because of his many original contributions and his serious, longstanding commitment to theorizing matters of such fundamental significance that they still remain of great concern, e.g., the destructive nature of capitalist domination, the obstacles to the development of radical subjectivity, and the possibilities of and conditions for liberation and social

2. Angela Y. Davis, as quoted in *Herbert's Hippopotamus: A Story about Revolution in Paradise*, dir. Paul Alexander Juutilainen (Los Angeles: De Facto Fiction Films, 1996).
3. See Herbert Marcuse, "Dear Angela" (a letter from Herbert Marcuse to Angela Davis), *Ramparts* 9 (February 1971): 22; republished in *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Douglas Kellner, vol. 3, *The New Left and the 1960s* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 49–50.
4. The conference, entitled "Reclaiming Our Future: The Black Radical Tradition in Our Time," was held at Temple University, Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, and the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia, January 8–10, 2016. Featured speakers included Angela Y. Davis, Cornel West, Robin D. G. Kelley, Vijay Prashad, Jeremiah White, Anthony Monteiro, Glen Ford, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Charlene A. Carruthers, and many others. The conference statement reads, in part, as follows: "Anchored in revolutionary love, the conference represented the unity within Black Philadelphia and with activists around the nation in challenging white supremacy and capitalism, and it anticipated the next stage of the Black liberation movement." For more information, visit the conference website at [www.theblackradicaltradition.org](http://www.theblackradicaltradition.org).