Essay

Community and the Long Shadow of the Analytic: Rieffian Pessimism in Social Thought

Peter McMylor

School of Social Science, University of Manchester, Oxford Rd, Manchester M13 9PL, UK;
E-Mail: peter.mcmylor@manchester.ac.uk; Tel.: +44-0161-275-2000

Abstract: This paper sets out to explore the thinking and the direct and often indirect influence of the social theorist Philip Rieff on later generations of social theorists, especially in regard to the key sociological concept of community. It is argued that the work of this culturally-conservative social theorist has had a powerful, if somewhat shadowy, influence on such key radical critics of modern societies such as Christopher Lasch and Richard Sennett, revealing the need to acknowledge the significant resources of a Rieffian cultural sociology for critical thought.

1. Introduction

No thinkers vanish more rapidly than those of the recent past. Their ideas are not so much refuted as shoved aside for a succession of new ones that address the present more directly. We secretly fear the ideas of the past-not those of the remote past but of the past still remembered. Their growing paleness reminds us uncomfortably of the transiency of our own thoughts.

—Louis Dupre [1] [1]

The idea of community continues to haunt social thought and popular culture alike. It certainly seemed to haunt the thought of that remarkable social theorist and rather extraordinary character Philip

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[1]   Cited in ([1], p. xx.)

Rieff [2]. Since his death in 2006, Rieff's work has come to receive more attention, not least because of the posthumous publication of several significant works, including three collected volumes of essays that go under the title of *Sacred Order/Social Order* [3–5] and his long awaited and important study, *Charisma* [6]. These writings joining as they do his earlier work, including his first book, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist*, originally published in 1959 [7], and the very influential *Triumph of the Therapeutic* [8], and especially in this latter work, we see him articulate a theory of culture that signals the profound roots of his work in the classical social thought of the 19th Century [9]. However they also mark some significant and distinct developments in his thought in both the style of expression and purpose. They mark a move from the cool and what Manning ([10], p. 243) calls the "bleakly knowing" realism of the Freud book and the crucial follow up work *Triumph of the Therapeutic*, to the angry and even mordantly prophetic tone that emerges with the remarkable work *Fellow Teachers* [11], which sets the tone and much of the style of the later and posthumously-published work. These late works require careful reading and assessment, a process that has only very recently begun (see [12]), but in many respects, they have not as yet had anything like the same impact as Rieff's early work (for an exception, see Note 2 below).

This paper concerns itself with the nature and impact of the Rieff's earlier work. I shall suggest that this early work of Rieff's has had a long-term influence, often subterranean, on the work of figures like Christopher Lasch, Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Sennett, Russell Jacoby, the Australian cultural sociologist John Carroll and, even, perhaps surprisingly, the liberal sociologist Bryan Turner [2]. In what follows, I want to highlight some of the roots of his thought in classical theory and look at the continuing Rieffian influence on thinking about community and the way his acute framing of our culture's characteristic response to community as a problem, apparently, without solution, continues to instructively haunt our understandings [3].

Rieff at the end of his account of Freud presented his own conception of the new character ideal of mid-twentieth century modernity as the "psychological man" supplanting the prior character ideals of the Western tradition: the "political man" of the classical world, the "religious man" of Christianity and then, most recently, "economic man" (see note 5 below). The latter Rieff saw in fact as a transitional figure who paved the way for "psychological man" as he put it, "we will recognize in the case history of psychological man the nervous habits of his father, economic man: he is anti-heroic, shrewd, carefully counting his satisfactions and dissatisfactions, studying unprofitable commitments as the sins most to be avoided" ([7], p. 356). Already then with the rise of a capitalist culture in the nineteenth century, visions of the positive communities of belief and action that were aspects of the dominance of political and religious social types were coming under suspicion. In the twentieth century with the ever-increasing awareness of the costs to the self of overarching commitments has led to our embrace of what Rieff sees as a culture of negative communities; to grasp more fully what he

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[2]   In 2009, Turner was prepared to say "Rieff's critique of modern culture in many respects parallels my analysis of religion in the age of information. We might say in a Rieffian framework that Madonna's 'Like a prayer' in 1989 is a death work in which Catholicism as an authoritative and meaningful system is collapsing under the weight of the democratizing feminist message of the video." ([13], p. 197).

[3]   I use the term haunted in a manner that echoes Avery Gordon's now classic text [14] in a sense that Rieff's account, (and its descendants) of the self in relation to the communal disturbs our frequent avowals of support for the idea of community.

means by this, it will prove helpful later for me to highlight the structure of probably the greatest modern vision of positive community: Marx's conception of communism aimed as it was at, in effect, restoring the dominance of the classical ideal of the political over the emerging apparently autonomous economic one [4]. Firstly, however, we must see how Rieff frames his problem as one of cultural sociology. For Rieff, "culture is another name for a design of motives directing the self outwards, towards those communal purposes in which alone the self can be realized and satisfied" ([8], p. 4).

In saying this, he consciously associated himself with ideas, the origins of which lie in classical thought, and elaborated in the sociological theory that emerged in the 19th century that was so much concerned with the whole question of community. Rieff's fellow traditionalist Robert Nisbet, in his classic account, argues that:

> the idea of community holds the same pivotal importance in the 19th century that the idea of contract had held in the Age of Reason...In the 19th century, however, we find contract waning before the rediscovered symbolism of community. In many spheres of thought, the ties of community—real or imagined traditional or contrived—come to form the image of the good society. Community becomes the means of denoting legitimacy in associations as diverse as state, church, trade unions, revolutionary movement, profession and co-operative ([18], p. 47).

Rieff, the heir to the classical tradition of social thought, emphasized the connection between community and the sense of wellbeing and health that flowed from the membership of communities. According to Rieff, much of philosophy can be seen as the "elaborated systems of symbolic integration" ([8], p. 67) often, in the modern era, with the particular intention of integrating themselves as philosophers, as much as anyone else.

However, as both Rieff and Nisbet understood, this community-based view of wellbeing has deep roots in the classical tradition. It is perhaps most clearly seen in Aristotle's definition of man as a citizen, an active definition, teleological in form, that saw that whether a man could fully express his humanity or not depended on his membership in the political community. Therefore, for Aristotle, in his *Politics*, a citizen is "he who enjoys the right of sharing in the deliberative or judicial office" and that it followed from this that "a state, in its simplest terms, is a body of such persons adequate in number for achieving a self-sufficient existence" ([19], p. 109) [5]. In this situation an individual's continued wellbeing, material, emotional and psychological, depended on the continued existence of that community, defined by Aristotle as the city-state. Nor are such views of merely antiquarian interest. They held, until recently, a central place in virtually all social theory: Rieff like Nisbet argues for its centrality, whether in the conservatism of Bonald, the liberalism of De Tocqueville or the revolutionary socialism of Marx. In Rieff's analysis of community's therapeutic function, it is the priest, philosopher or magician who cures personal disorder via committing people to the symbol system of the community. These communal symbols are what Rieff calls "commitment therapies".

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[4] Marx's fascination with classical culture is well known and the impact of Aristotle on his thought well attested. See for a sample of a large literature [15,16], and for a slightly different interpretation, see [17].

[5] We should of course note the maleness of this definition, which I retained because it now signals to us who this tradition left out: women, as well as slaves. We might also add that these points are of course relevant to Rieff own mid-twentieth century usage.

> Behind shaman and priest, philosopher and physician, stands the great community, as the ultimate corrective of personal disorder culture is the system of significances attached to behavior by which a society explains itself to itself. A culture that is not thus self-explicative must be undergoing, in the measure of the negative condition, a profound change ([8], pp. 68–69).

To say this is to raise the question and the problem of what happens when the community itself is in a state of disorder or undergoing a profound change. Rieff is suggesting that these cultural changes are so great as to destroy the therapeutic power of the community, for:

> ...then, in the destruction of all idealisations upon which traditional and classical communities were based, in theory and in practice, is to be sought the origin of modernity ([8], p. 69).

In order to explicate this analysis a little, I will briefly sketch elements drawn from the tradition of social thought that illuminate the conditions that gave rise to the therapeutic culture that Rieff so famously describes, but, in so doing, going a little beyond Rieff's own account by linking it to Alasdair MacIntyre's analysis. Rieff seems sympathetic to the account of moral transformation given by MacIntyre in *After Virtue* [20]; see Rieff's commendation in Rieff ([21], p. 358). In essence, MacIntyre points to how the self was stripped of its classical and medieval Aristotelian functional teleology, which linked human-nature-as-it-is to human-nature-as-it-might-become, a process of change that naturally generated considerable confusion. In the sphere of ethics, the contradiction emerged between an inherited ethical/religious system, to which many wanted to remain loyal, at least in the early phases of this change, and the reality of an empirical "human nature" with desires that seemed very distant from what was demanded of it. This tended to produce two responses of long-term significance in Western societies: on the one hand, the conservative tradition, which viewed the moral demands of the community as rational moral law, which we had a duty to obey (Kant's response); on the other, the romantic view, from Rousseau down to D. H. Lawrence and beyond, which viewed moral regulation as a painful weight on the goodness of human nature. The latter tradition pushed for greater detachment of the individual from communal restraint, as it was now perceived.[6]

However, this latter movement was only one of several processes at work that helped produce the modern self that Rieff sees at home in a culture of negative community, and it does no service to the significance of Rieff's work to turn it into an idealist account of social change. Turner has helped bring some conceptual clarity to these processes, which, taken together, seem to provide a context for the emergence of negative communities. He suggests three distinct elements: individualism, individuality and individuation [22,23]. Individualism, he suggests, is best understood as the conception of individuals possessing particular individual rights with a strong emphasis on external relations between separate and formally equal individuals on the basis of some form of social contract. Individualism, in this form, is the principal source for the notion of rights, which Macintyre saw as a crucial component of "bureaucratic individualism' as he terms it in *After Virtue* ([20], pp. 70–71).

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[6] It might well be argued that in making this distinction, I am neglecting the romantic communitarian strands of thought that attempted in at least their socialist and proto-socialist forms to reconstruct community, and this is true; but, this is why I regard Marx's thought as so significant, because it attempted to transcend both aspects of this division by conceiving of a "social individuality" (see below). In general, it remains the case to this day that much of the cultural politics of Western societies are articulated in terms of rule following or its rejection.

The concept of individuality is as Turner puts it: "a romantic theory of the interior and private nature of personal life" ([22], p. 11).

The nature and consequences of such a form are notoriously difficult to analyse. The powerful and formative impacts of new forms of thought of German and English intellectuals at the turn of the 19th century are the key instances of this process. The literary and cultural critic George Steiner catches something of the social origins and consequences of this interiorisation process and its focus on the intensely personal, when he notes:

It is the historicisation of the personal which is the commanding truth and legacy of the French Revolution...Time had changed. The inner temporalities, the orderings of remembrance, momentariness, and, above all, of futurity by virtue of which we compose our grasp of self, had altered the closely argued metamorphic relations between the Revolution and the new densities of personal time in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, are famous evidence. But there is scarcely a recorded life or body of experience in the 1790s, in the Napoleonic era, in the decades of explosive urbanisation, technological change, and social challenge that followed which do not bear witness to the irruption of the political into the private ([24], pp. 10–11; see also [25], chap. 1).

The breadth and significance of this transformation of the sense of self has been further underlined in the work of historians like Dror Wahrman [26], who underline the speed and innovative impact of this change within a wide range of social settings and contexts in Britain and France at the end of the eighteenth century. Wahrman describes this new sense of self as a "cultural revolution" with "extraordinary reach" ([26], p. xiv) Perhaps the most significant cultural change of the 20th century was the diffusion of the expression of this intellectual sensibility, amongst the bulk of the populations of the countries of the Western world.

Finally, the third element, individuation, refers to the process whereby people are individuated by bureaucratic practices and disciplines. Almost all of the apparatuses of the modern state and large-scale private bureaucracies are involved in such processes, as taxation, educational certification, health and welfare regulation, as well as, of course, the practices of police surveillance. This is a major theme of the darker tradition of social analysis from Weber, through the Frankfurt School down to Foucault; a principal preoccupation being "the death of the individual" in those processes.

As Turner puts it:

The paradox of individuation is that, in making people different and separate, it also makes them more subject to control and regulation. Individuation is essentially registration, the precise determination of persons within a network of files, records, documents tabulations and portfolios ([22], pp. 11–12).

However, as Turner also notes, although this process does mean the regulation of the individual, its critics note that individuation is also a necessary basis for meeting the basic levels of human need with some degree of equality, through health and welfare agencies. It would seem to follow, therefore, that individualism is in some measure an ideology connected to civil and political rights, whilst the process of individuation is the necessary accompaniment of wider social rights. The irony is that at least in the public domain, the rise of universalistic criteria of citizenship has the effect of seemingly eliminating

the "individual" and the particular upon which the sense of individuality flourished. Wahrman suggests that this is why we have an increasing awareness of this sense of self's historically-contingent nature, even though it remains of immense significance to us within the private sphere and, we might add, encourages the self-protective withdrawal from the public arena ([26], pp. 274–78).

Many of these processes were evident to 19th century social theorists. At the beginning of the century, perhaps the most perceptive was Alex de Tocqueville. In the fast emerging secular liberal culture of his time, he delineated the sensibility at home within such societies. He saw clearly that it was not powerful bonding sentiments, but critical detachment that most found more conducive to wellbeing. De Tocqueville's work, especially *Democracy in America*, was an attempt to examine the relationship between the condition of the psyche and the social structure. He argued that in politically unequal societies, the social bond is firm and, therefore, the sense of communal purpose high. However, in conditions of equal citizenship, what would happen to public life once individualism had sapped its virtues? As he suggests:

> Individualism is a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends, so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society, at large to itself ([18], p. 281).

It seemed that within an individually-differentiated democratic culture, perhaps, for the first time, there arose the possibility of every person standing for themselves, each leading a truly private life and most importantly trained to understand rather than to love or hate their neighbours. A sense of reflective choice and detachment begins to emerge, that provides the context for the emergence of a sensibility of cultural individualism linked to, but distinct from, civic and political individualism. It was these elements in De Tocqueville's work that later theorists like Rieff would note as prescient for contemporary developments within Western liberal societies.[7]

Rieff was acutely aware of the debt that his cultural sociology and the specific American form of that tradition that he, Rieff, stood in (Cooley being a key source and example) owed to George Simmel's account of modernity. Although couched in different terms, Simmel produced a remarkably similar analysis to De Tocqueville's. In his central work, *The Philosophy of Money*, Simmel examines the growth of freedom and its relationship to the movement to a market-based money economy. In a money economy, individuals are able to participate in the social order without totally committing their whole personalities. They are sustained as material individuals by participating in an ever-more complex set of impersonal exchanges.

These exchanges, in turn, produce universal objective standards, *i.e.*, prices, which provides general social knowledge of the rates at which commodities will be supplied. Although this increases the individual's reliance on the whole society, it does, however, reduce an individual's reliance upon particular persons. The growth of universal standards results, along with the growth of the social

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7 Indeed, as we see below, it is De Tocqueville's account of the potential social psychology of liberalism that has made him so attractive to social critics like Sennett; see, for example, *The Fall of Public Man* [27], where he (De Tocqueville) has pride of place on the opening page with a quotation before the table of contents: "Each person withdrawn into himself behaves as a stranger to the destiny of others…". The countervailing elements in the America of De Tocqueville's day and which he noted are seen to have decayed by these modern commentators.

division of labour, in greater substitutability between the providers of goods and services and so increases choice. These changes reduced the importance of ascriptive relations, increasing autonomy and self-direction.

These processes generate what Simmel describes as objective culture, *i.e.*, that so much social life is embodied in production and exchange, which in effect means the reification of human activity. Human society may begin to take on the aspect of an objective and fateful natural process. Human intervention into this objective culture seems less and less effective. Yet, at the same time, Simmel notes tendencies corresponding to De Tocqueville's predictions; for this process of reification also seems to allow the individual to create a sphere of free self-development. This is due to the rather abstract quality of life, freed from direct concern with particular people or things, which allows the development of a deeper and detached inner nature. As Simmel puts it:

> If modern man can, under favourable circumstances, secure an island of subjectivity, a secret closed off sphere of privacy…then this is due to the fact that money relieves us to an ever increasing extent of direct contact with things, while at the same time making it easier for us to dominate them and select from them what we require ([28], p. 469).

Pushed to its logical conclusion, Simmel feels that this process can only strengthen the ego as all the material contents of life become increasingly objective and impersonal, so that the remainder that cannot be reified becomes all the more personal, all the more the indisputable property of the self.

Additionally, as he adds concerning the mechanization of culture, in this case the typewriter:

> No matter how socialistic all such mechanical contrivances may be, the remaining private property of the intellectual self becomes all the more jealously guarded ([28], p. 469).

The self, withdrawn and self-preoccupied, is seen as in danger of disappearing altogether from the public realm, in societies with modern complex economies. This is a major theme for what might be termed the dark side of social theory. De Tocqueville, Simmel, Weber, the Frankfurt School and the inheritors of this tradition, as well as Rieff, Lasch, MacIntyre and Sennett, insistently ask not just "is this all that modernity amounts to?" but also, explicitly or implicitly, can we learn to cope with such privacies?

2. Community as Cure

Philip Rieff responds to this situation by noting the "cures" of the classical tradition in both its conservative, and its radical forms were agreed, despite their differences, that the good life was the life of a good citizen. As he put it:

> In short, security cured and security came through membership in an "organic" community. This was the basis of conservative and radical political theory alike: community cures through the achievement by the individual of his collective identity. To cure a man, one need only return him to his community or construct a new one ([8], p. 70).

It is within this context that Rieff notes the importance of Marxism for presenting the image of a new community. In some of Marx's writings, we see elements that recall the analysis of the pessimistic

tradition in social theory, as for example, in his attack on so-called natural rights in *On the Jewish Question*, Marx writes:

> thus none of the so called rights of man, goes beyond egoistic man, man as he is in civil society, namely an individual withdrawn behind his private interests and whims and separated from the community. Far from the rights of man conceiving of man as a species-being, species-life itself, society appears as a framework exterior to individuals a limitation of their original self-sufficiency. The only bond that holds them together is natural necessity, need and private interest, the conservation of their property and egoistic person ([29], p. 54).

Here, Marx is making what will become almost the standard criticism of many social theorists, but Rieff is surely right in seeing Marx's importance, for he offers a way forward, a transcendence of this situation, not merely a rational appraisal of it. Rieff makes the point well:

> Marxist diagnosis, without the Marxist ideal of a new community, would be not socialism but sociology. Marx's utopian vision of a communist identity, predicate of true individuality, combines both the radical and conservative tradition. Marxism is more than theory; at the same time it is a type of commitment therapy ([8], p. 71).

This is most clearly brought out if we examine the structure of Marx's thought on this issue; it will be useful to borrow a schema that Carol Gould uses to reconstruct Marx's use of Hegel's dialectic as a logic of historical development ([30], pp. 4–5).

The three historical stages are:

(1) Pre-capitalist formations.
(2) Capitalism.
(3) Communal Society.

The forms of social relations that correspond to these are:

(1) Personal dependence.
(2) Personal independence based on objective dependence.
(3) Free social individuality.

These stages can be further characterized as:

(1) Internal relations that are concretely particular.
(2) External relations that are abstractly universal.
(3) Internal relations that are concretely universal.

With respect to the characteristic of equality, the three historical stages may be ordered in terms of:

(1) Relations of inequality.
(2) Relations of formal equality.
(3) Relations of concrete equality.

Finally, the social relations in the three stages may be characterised as:

(1) Communal.
(2) Individuality and external sociality,
(3) Communal individuality.

This is clearly a heavily Hegelian view of Marxism as a theory.

There may be good grounds for believing that the Hegelian heritage stays with Marx throughout most of his intellectual and political life.[8] This schema helps us see the role of a positive community in Marx's thought and makes clear the significance of Rieff's comment that Marxism without some notion of the new community inscribed in its theory becomes mere sociology!

It is clear that in the pre-capitalist stage the individual is integrated into the whole, and although the community is hierarchically divided, it is fairly stable and self-sufficient, with land and agriculture forming the basis of material life. The relations of producer to production are immediate, as Gould puts it:

> he or she produces in order to consume and consumes what he or she produces. It is because of this immediate unity between labour and the natural conditions of production both the mode of production and the relations within which the individual stands appear as natural ([30], p. 10).

Relations between individuals within this organic community can be seen as internal. This means that people relate to each other personally on the basis of their status and role, so that the relations between people are determined by their place within the social totality. These relationships have a nature-like quality, which means that, generally, they are difficult, but not necessarily impossible to question, but are often heavily internalized. This means according to Gould that individuality remains bound to particularity; universality belongs only to the community, and this universality is limited to the local, the regional, the traditional ([30], p. 13).

The second historical stage, capitalism, involves the dissolution of the pre-capitalist community, both in terms of relations between people and the means of production, *i.e.*, the emergence of landless and propertiless workers. As is well known, this requires that there exists a fund of capital to buy labour and a system of exchange relations. This second stage is apparently characterized by personal independence, but, as we can see from the schema, this is an illusion in that dependence is not eliminated, but takes on an objective form. Marx suggests that this independence is "more correctly called indifference" ([30], quoted p. 14). Each individual produces out of their own self-interest and simply views others as a means of fulfilling their own aims.

The obvious question is how is the higher synthesis of the two early forms to be achieved in a new society of "communal individuality"?

Now, the difficulties are clear, as we will see in a moment, but Rieff rightly saw Marx's importance as a theorist who united at a conceptual level traditionalist and radical views of community and, in effect, transposed them into a communist future. Now, clearly Marx's view of the communist future has been criticised by much of the sociological tradition. The great radical sociologist Alvin Gouldner shortly before his death was particularly trenchant when he compared Marx's vision of socialism unfavourably with Durkheim [33]. Gouldner saw Marx as a theorist of indefinite growth, who solved the classic problem of communal individuality by abolishing scarcity in the future in effect simply by producing more.

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[8] For the Hegelian continuity, perhaps the single most important work in this context is [31], where the Hegelian approach is seen as clearly present in the very heart of *Capital*. However, also, see the important discussion of the role of the concept of communism in Marx's thought in [32], where Marx is understood to fuse what Berki calls "insight" with "vision" to understand communism as both substantive and ideal.

Gouldner argues that both Marx and Durkheim saw human desire as potentially infinite (always growing and developing), but that Marx's position is incompatible with the belief that production will solve the problem. He sees this as endemic to Marxism, because of its refusal to look at the subjective side of demand and value, he notes:

> for Marx it is the sheer amount of production, the sheer supply side of the equation alone, that will, without reference to the demand side, solve the problem of scarcity ([33], p. 216).

Gouldner compares this view to Durkheim's conception of the way out of scarcity; he quotes Durkheim thusly:

> What is needed if social order is to reign...is that the mass of men be content with their lot. But what is needed for them to be content, is not that they have more or less, but that they be convinced that they have no right to more. And for this it is absolutely essential that there be an authority whose superiority they acknowledge and which tells them what is right...a moral power is required whose superiority they acknowledge and which tells them what is right...a moral power is required whose superiority (man) recognizes [33].

This is a profoundly Rieffian vision of a society in good Durkheimian working order, but one that Rieff did not believe was now available. The reason lay in modernity's conceptual reorganization of the relationship of the self to authority that Rieff attempts to grasp through his account of what he terms the analytic attitude.

The analytic attitude seems to emerge as a response to, and an acceptance of the stripping away from, the self of binding attachments and communal purposes. However, it can differ profoundly from the romantic celebration of this process. It is frequently deeply anti-utopian, in that it accepts that there are no positive communities within which one could merge oneself. It construes its realism in the act of disbelieving that any such communities could be constructed. This is perhaps the most important feature for Rieff when he characterized the emergence of "psychological man" as so significant and requiring its articulation in a fuller cultural sociology presented in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* [8].

The analytic, as a cultural type, involves first of all detachment, which itself, as Simmel noted, is both a product of and support for certain characteristics of our individualistic culture. Secondly, it involves the construction of what Rieff calls "negative communities" ([8], p. 73). Positive communities were those that offered salvation to the individual by subordinating them to some communal purposes, either religious or political, which, in turn, transformed the individual. Negative communities are almost self-sustaining; capitalist market societies are our clearest model: they do not offer a type of collective salvation and are not transformative, but informative; understanding and no passion must be the basis of their attitude [34]; even if they allow for romantic self-surrender in moments of consumption [35], at the root, they are what Russell Jacoby termed societies of "calculative hedonism" [36].

Several things follow from this view of advanced capitalist societies as culturally negative. Without communal purposes, actions tend to become increasingly based on rationalistic self-interested forms of justification. Given this, controls (necessary to regulate the impersonal, but potentially conflictual relations) must be established in ways other than that produced by transcendent transformations of the individual. In a liberal individualistic culture, such controls over an individual life tend to be informational or psychotherapeutic, intended to rationalistically manage the problems of living as a detached individual in society. The clearest character type of this kind was the intellectual of the late 19th

century and early 20th century. For Rieff, this type is undoubtedly exemplified by Freud himself. The essence of Freud's theory is that in rational detachment, we will learn that particular style in which our individuality can flourish within the materially-feasible opportunities that are compatible with our rationally-arrived at sense of personal limitation. This is why MacIntyre follows Rieff in *After Virtue* by making the therapist the second key character, after the manager, in the modern social order ([20], pp. 29–30).[9]

It is, however, with the notion of the rational that problems appear. How is this concept to be arrived at and coherently grounded in order to have power to curb desire, but without damaging spontaneity? George Steiner has pointed to the difficulties and peculiarities of analytic thought, in terms of the violence that it does to the object of analysis as a process of reducing or taking apart, without any certainty about what will be found. He argues for the great difference in the radicalism of analytic and Marxist thought. He writes:

> We are ready to ask very large and inherently destructive questions. This is radicalism in a special sense. Not Hegelian Marxist radicalism with its implicit futurity, with its almost axiomatic presumption that we go to the root of a problem in order to solve it, and because we know that destruction, uprooting, is only a necessary risk before solution. No; our going to the root of things is more ambivalent. We would do so even when we are not confident that there is a solution. It may be, in fact, that the aspect of demolition, the apocalyptic strain, gently, tempt us. We are fascinated by "last things", by the end of cultures, of ideologies, of art forms, of modes of sensibility. We are certainly since Nietzsche and Spengler "terminalists". Our view of history, says Levi-Strauss in a deep pun, is not anthropology but an entropology ([39], p. 186).

In a much less apocalyptic strain, more recent sociological work on morality has strengthened the Rieffian position by exploring the popular spread of analytic attitudes in regards to a more general "demoralization" in Western societies [34], in which a rationalistic refusal to judge has encouraged an atrophy of public sentiment and an undermining of a capacity to achieve belief in aspects of reality (and by no means just supernatural aspects), such as love for or trust in others with respect to the areas of life, especially personal relations, which cannot be easily quantified and measured or securely predicted.

Understanding the distinctions between these two very different modes of rational thought (the analytic and the radical) is quite crucial for understanding the significance of the Rieffian position. The dominance, for whatever reasons, of the analytic attitude seems to underlie much of the difficulty contemporary social and political thought has in dealing with the issue of community.

So far, we have been treating these Rieffian themes in an abstract outline. Is there a more precise way of grounding the decline of "positive communities", in particular instances and processes?

Much of Richard Sennett's work, from his path-breaking *The Fall of Public Man* [27] to his work on the culture of contemporary capitalism, such as *The Corrosion of Character* [40] and *The Culture of the New Capitalism* [41], has in a number of different ways been directly concerned with a processes that

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[9] I have discussed MacIntyre's use of characters in ([37], pp. 19, 26–27) and MacIntyre's use of role analysis in [38], but it is worth noting that, for MacIntyre, these characters are more than social roles within modernity; it is what others take them to be that is as significant as what they do themselves in their particular social roles; hence the term "character" in that these figure possess a symbolic and dramatic quality within all of our self-interpretation within the modern social order.

seem to characterize social changes in a manner similar to that of the decline of "positive community". Sennett begins from the work of Alex De Tocqueville, especially the analysis and the predictions to be found in his work *Democracy in America*. The influence of De Tocqueville and the assumptions at work in *The Fall of Public Man* were intimated in an earlier book with Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* [42], in which Sennett argues that:

> "what needs to be understood is how the class structure in American is organised so that the tools of freedom become sources of indignity." ([42], p. 30).

Sennett and Cobb claim that because of the awareness that one's class position is flexible, this means that it is likely to be seen as an attribute of the self, rather than located in terms of family or region. The claim that there exists equal opportunity within a context in which there is some real opportunity for upward mobility has the effect, they claim, when combined with the existence of real inequality, of turning the injuries of class inwards.

What this means is that class, at least in the modern American context, is no longer culturally perceived as an external objective reality, but instead has come to be understood as an emanation springing directly from the self, *i.e.*, a subjective definition of success or failure. Sennett and Cobb compare this situation with the situation of craftsmen in the Italian Renaissance, when there was also competition between workers for success. However, they point out that these craftsmen would have thought it ridiculous to think of a dignified man being reflected in his ability to make a good piece of jewellery: what he created would establish his repute independent of his person, the jewellery or silver, perhaps keeping his name alive after his death ([42], p. 245).

However, today, it seems as though this has been reversed, the interviews that Sennett and Cobb conducted with American workers seem to indicate that ability and excellence are a measurement of the person's inner being. As they go on to suggest:

> The demonstration of worth now has become a demonstration about inner capacity in the man greater than his tangible works, about a virtue which permits him to transcend situation after situation, mastering each but attached and identified with none [42].

As with Simmel, Sennett sees the increasing fluidity and objectivity of lives dominated by production and exchange, leading people to dive ever inwards to find meaning and definition. The key concepts here are authenticity and intimacy. However, Sennett suggests that paradoxically, being driven inward for meaning and definition, must within our culture result in a drive outwards with subjectively-derived utterance, to assert what one really is. Sennett applies Lionel Trilling's highly influential analysis of the cultural move from sincerity to authenticity, to the social order [43]; see also Charles Taylor's use in his path-breaking work on the self [44–46]. These terms refer to the shift from the language of personal sincerity spoken before the 19th century to a language of individual authenticity spoken after it. Sincerity is used here to mean, "the exposure in public of what is felt in private" and authenticity means "the direct exposure to another of a person's own attempts to feel" ([27], p. 29). In this process, the distinctions between public and private become blurred. It stops being possible to see that keeping strong and dangerous feelings from others can be morally expressive. He suggests that "instead self-disclosure becomes a universal measure of believability and truth" ([27], pp. 29–30).

The consequences of this are that:

the more a person concentrates on feeling genuinely rather than on the objective content of what is felt, the more subjectivity becomes an end in itself, the less expressive he can be ([27], p. 30).

In essence, Sennett seems to be arguing that this process equates "feeling" with human development, *i.e.*, to be a person is connected to the strength of feeling, so the more you feel, the more real you are. This dehumanizing process took shape in the 19th century, and Sennett finds evidence for it in the ways people became convinced that they themselves did not have real personality, but instead went in search of those public figures, politicians, artists, actors, conductors, who seemed to feel more intensely than they did and, hence, seemed more real. As Sennett puts it:

Being expressive and having extraordinary talent—that was the formula on which personality entered the public realm ([27], p. 203).

Artists and performers…used shock tactics to make the moment of performing all—important, those who could arouse (and) shock the audience were perceived as powerful persons and therefore, as of superior status, rather than in the servant status of the 18th century performer. In this way as the performer came to rise above his audience he came to transcend his text ([27], p. 205).

On this basis, the common life or public life of society was eroded, as the fictions and rituals of public life, by which performers could distance themselves for the necessary impersonality of public life, failed to stand up to the new criteria of authenticity and intimacy.

By these standards, public life must always be found wanting. Full of strangers, it is hostile and forbidding. There arises then the urge amongst people to seek havens from impersonal contact, to create areas of warmth in a cold world. It is this that Sennett terms *Destructive Gemeinschaft* [47]. This means that the classical ideal of community and the life of the citizen are degraded, "community becomes a weapon against society, whose great vice is now seen to be its impersonality" ([27], p. 339).

Such a culture is preoccupied by its own disposition and is localist in outlook. [10] The prominent personality type is narcissistic. Here, Sennett reveals his deepest affinity with Rieff's portrayal of the analytic attitude, when he argues that:

psychoanalysis in particular, was founded on the faith that in understanding the inner workings of the self sui generis without transcendental ideas of evil or of sin, people might free themselves from these horrors and be liberated to participate more fully and rationally in a life outside the boundaries of their own desires. Masses of people are concerned with their single life-histories and particular emotions as never before, this concern has proved to be a trap rather than a liberation ([27], p. 5).

The impersonal quality of the world makes the search for community into a retreat into smaller groups, ever more narrowly defined and with greater emotional weight put upon these relationships. The most highly-valued, yet paradoxically least realized state according to Sennett is intimacy, because the basis on which it is sought is destructive of real intimacy. Sennett puts forward three elements that

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[10] Modern politics is awash with such movements, from the Tea Party in the U.S., to European movements, like the Front Nationale in France, to the U.K. Independence Party in Britain.

explain the rise of the intimate, desiring self. The first of these is the emergence of the narcissistic personality; Sennett, like Christopher Lasch, notes the move in psychoanalytic data, especially after the Second World War, towards the emergence of more narcissistic personality disorders [48] [11], suggesting a profound shift within the balances of the social order. Sennett suggests that the reason for this shift is that:

> today's society has mobilised the forces of narcissism that are potential in all human beings
> by intensifying the culture of personality immanent in social relations to such a point that
> those relations now appear only as mirrors of self ([47], p. 99).

The second element is the emergence of the protean self, a self with no fixed nature, capable of changing all the time.

This self-hood puts an immense premium on "direct" experience with other people; it detests reserve or masks behind which other people are felt to lurk, because in being distant, they seem to be inauthentic ([47], p. 101) [12].

Thirdly, this protean self interacts with others in peculiar ways, in that it treats intimate interchanges as a market in self revelations. You interact with others according to how much you tell them about yourself: the more "intimate" you become, the more confessions you have made ([47], p. 103).

All this creates severe problems for any kind of public life and a coherent politics, perhaps, especially, a radical politics. Amongst such people, insecure in their innermost selves, they can only create community by fantasy and projection. The shared imaginary becomes the real purpose of the community and deters rationally-effective political action. Sennett concludes that:

> it is no accident that western bourgeois radicals of the last decade could so easily arrive at a
> notion of changes in immediate personal relations as "models" of what should happen to
> the whole society ([47], p. 104).

Sennett thus condemned the "intimate society" for essentially political reasons. A culture that fears the large scale will leave the real centres of global economic and military power untouched. Sennett feared a culture whose people are so self-obsessed as to be unable to transcend narrow self-interests or imagine an economic system built on anything but privatism.

Christopher Lasch in later work, such as *The Minimal Self*, took this argument further by looking at the effects of the profound uncertainties (cultural, economic, military) of life in the 1980s. In part, this was a response to misunderstandings of his earlier work on narcissism as being merely moralising about selfishness, *etc*. In fact, he argued, narcissism is, in reality, an attempt by the psyche to survive. He writes:

> Narcissism signifies a loss of selfhood not self-assertion. It refers to a self-threatened with
> disintegration and by a sense of inner emptiness...Everyday life has begun to pattern itself
> on the survival strategies forced on those exposed to extreme adversity, selective apathy

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[11] See especially (see [48], Chap. 2) in which he outlines the concept of narcissism within the clinical literature and the tradition of social analysis within which his account stands. Furthermore, see [49], for a detailed recent account, but without Lasch's sophisticated conceptual and historical understanding.

[12] The protean self is clearly analogous with Ralph Turner's conception of a shift in the nature of the self from what he terms "institutional" based to "impulse" based, relying upon spontaneous desire and self-revelation. See [50].

emotional disengagement from others, renunciation of the past and the future, a determination to live one day at a time ([51], p. 57).

Lasch accepts the notion of the protean self as mobile and reconstituted, but sees it as a response to a public environment out of control, leaving only the option of self-management and personal adjustment, with the aid of caring and therapeutic professions.

Lasch's work was important, for he argued against both conservative critics of modern hedonism and liberal apologists for such a culture. Lasch instead roots these cultural changes as part of the process of change in advanced capitalism. It is this that gives Lasch's American-based work its wider applicability: his is an analysis of the way advanced capitalism remakes a social order. New cultural forms of the organization of work and new forms of consumption emerge from the heart of the capitalist market economy. He argued that:

> manipulative, therapeutic, pluralistic and "nonjudgmental" style of social discipline originated like so many other developments with the rise of a professional and managerial class in the early years of the 20th century and then spread from the industrial corporation, where it was first perfected into the political realm as a whole ([51], p. 46).

These processes along with the rise of new professional groupings, like social workers, have introduced therapeutic management forms into what was once the private sphere, substituting observation and measurement for moral judgment (see [52,53]). Lasch built a historically-informed account of the changing pattern of the workplace from the 1950 to the 1980s which conceived of this as the gradual replacement of skilled work with machinery (his vision was powerfully influenced by the work of Harry Braverman [54] [13]) and a process of collusion with the education system that turns education into personnel selection, mobilizing in the apt later phrase "human resources" not just to create skills, but to classify workers. Workers are split into a small group of administrators, technicians, managers and a larger group of workers who carry out instructions. Added to this is the massive invasion of life by advertising and consumerism, remoulding environments and cultural forms on the basis of profit maximization, which makes for "the replacement of a reliable world of durable objects by a world of flickering images" ([51], p. 51).

This, in Lasch's view, is the context to which he adds in the 1980s the hazard of economic recession and nuclear war; such a culture seems to produce survivalism, not in dramatic mountain retreats only, but in psychological preparedness for the worst. However, this is merely the other side of the narcissistic/protean/impulse self, generated by a society based on the dominance of market relations. Lasch, like Sennett, sees here a withdrawal from politics and public life, which, in turn, seems to become one more variety of consumerism as the techniques and models of advertising invade this realm, as well. It hardly needs pointing out that the politics in both the U.S. and Europe over the next decades seemed to bear out substantial aspects of this analysis. However, paradoxically, it is a radical analysis that is in many respects inspired by the cultural conservatism of Phillip Rieff.

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[13] Lasch's earlier work [52], is especially influenced by the Braverman-inspired deskilling argument, but creatively applied to professional intervention into family life in the 20th Century and his essay, "Life in the Therapeutic State", in [53].

3. Conclusions

It is clear that the lessons of Rieff's early work of the late nineteen-fifties and early nineteen-sixties were never entirely lost but lived on in the writings of a number of social theorists who we have discussed above, however what has not happened in the work discussed is a direct confrontation with Rieff's original texts. Given that we now have a range of Rieff's posthumous publications to add to this earlier work, the time has surely come for sociology to confront the Rieffian legacy in its full amplitude and face up the challenges of a powerful and controversial thinker.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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