

ARTICLE

Aesthetics and liberation: Herbert Marcuse on the sociopolitical value of the arts

Christine Doran*

Faculty of Arts and Society, Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia

Abstract

The role of the arts in society and politics was of profound concern to Herbert Marcuse in his philosophical work. From the 1950s to the 1970s, Herbert Marcuse – a prominent member of the Frankfurt School – became increasingly insistent on the fundamental importance of the arts for the well-being of both the individual and society. Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in the philosophy and social thought of Marcuse. This paper highlights that Marcuse's conceptualization of the significance of the arts – especially their social and political roles – offers valuable insights for contemporary theorists, artists, and their supporters. This paper particularly focuses on the implications of Marcuse's work for understanding the role of the arts in fostering social change. It outlines Marcuse's ideas on political economy – his claim that technological development under capitalism has produced an abundance of output that could provide the basis for radical social and political change. In addition, this study examines the philosophical grounding of Marcuse's ideas regarding the role of the arts through the esthetic theories of Kant and Schiller. Some objections that might be raised against Marcuse's theories concerning the arts are considered critically. Finally, the affective potency and value of Marcuse's work are underlined.

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(christine.doran@cdu.edu.au)**Citation:** Doran C. Aesthetics and liberation: Herbert Marcuse on the sociopolitical value of the arts. *Arts & Communication*. 2026;4(1):025190035. doi: 10.36922/AC025190035**Received:** May 6, 2025**Revised:** July 4, 2025**Accepted:** July 8, 2025**Published online:** July 28, 2025**Copyright:** © 2025 Author(s). This is an Open-Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.**Publisher's Note:** AccScience Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.**1. Introduction**

Herbert Marcuse (1898 – 1979), a leading member of the Frankfurt School, frequently addressed the question of the role of the arts in society in his publications from the 1950s to the 1970s. Toward the end of his career, he became increasingly insistent on the fundamental importance of the arts for the well-being of both society as a whole and individuals. His last published book, *The Esthetic Dimension*,¹ contained a summation of his views on the relationship between the realm of the esthetic and the development of community life.

This study underscores that Marcuse's conceptualization of the significance of the arts – and their social and political roles – offers valuable insights for contemporary theorists, artists, and their supporters. This paper particularly focuses on the implications of Marcuse's work for understanding the role of the arts in fostering social change. What Marcuse offers to our understanding of this crucial role for the arts will emerge through the exposition of his thought throughout this paper. For now, suffice it to say that

Marcuse believed – and argued consistently throughout his career – that artistic production could serve to prefigure the creative character of all labor, and indeed all of life, in an enlightened and free society of the future. The arts were capable of giving signs and hints of the possibilities of freedom, both in their products and in their processes. The conclusion offers a brief assessment of the impact of Marcuse's writings, with emphasis on their emotional – and indeed, inspirational – valences.

In the last decade, there has been a revival of interest in Marcuse's philosophy and social thought. With the hegemonic rise of neoliberalism from the late 1970s and the accompanying academic predominance of post-structuralism and deconstruction – in particular, the prevalence of the thought of Foucault and Derrida – Marcuse and the Frankfurt School in general, with the partial exception of Walter Benjamin, fell out of academic favor.

However, Marcuse's philosophical contributions have more recently come in for significant reassessment within academic debates – so much so that Clark² went so far as to question, in 2017, whether we are seeing a “New Marcusean Moment.” Indeed, the second decade of the new millennium witnessed a resurgence of interest in Marcuse, as well as in the work of his colleagues, such as Adorno and Horkheimer.^{3–7} There has even been a new biography of Marcuse published in graphic form.⁸ No doubt, the ever-tightening grip of harsh neoliberal and globalizing policies in many areas of the world, exacerbated by the Global Financial Crisis beginning in 2007, has contributed to this reorientation toward the critical theoretical work of Marcuse, along with that of his Frankfurt School colleagues. Increasingly, authoritarian trends in political regimes around the world have redirected academic attention to theories of fascism. There is, however, no simple explanation for this phenomenon. There has been a concurrent upsurge of interest in Marcuse's contributions within specific fields of social theory, such as gender relations, technology, ecology, and the environment, as well as the arts.

The Frankfurt School was based in a research institute founded in Frankfurt and was composed of a group of radical German thinkers. The Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research) was established in 1923 and continued in various forms and locations, as well as with various personnel, until the early 1970s.^{9–12} As a school, it was strongly influenced by Marxism, but believed that Marxist theory needed to be continuously updated to meet the circumstances of the time.

The Frankfurt School – and the Critical Theory it strove to develop – was Marxist in methodological terms, in that

it employed dialectical thinking as a method to approach the critical analysis of society. Critical Theory also drew inspiration from Freudian psychology, though often with results that would have surprised Freud. As one of the earliest “think tanks,” the group initially focused on why Germany had not followed Russia into the communist revolution, as many radicals had expected. They later turned their attention to explaining the rise of fascism. Many of the ideas developed through the Frankfurt School's research also informed their interpretations of developments in Western societies, and in Asian societies, after the Second World War. Much of the institute's research was focused on problems of philosophy and aesthetics. Among the well-known members or close associates of the Frankfurt School were Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, and Marcuse, who joined the institute in 1933.

2. The economic base

Before exploring Marcuse's concepts of the arts in relation to social change, it is useful to begin with a brief outline of his economic ideas – an appropriate starting point for a Marxist or neo-Marxist thinker like Marcuse, given the foundational Marxist emphasis on the relationship between the economic base and the social and cultural superstructure. Although Marcuse did not write extensively or in depth about the economy, his ideas about the economy can be seen as the linchpin of his social and political thought. Instead of being ruled by the harsh discipline of scarcity – as assumed by both classical economics and the alternative system of economic thought developed by the Soviets – Marcuse believed that the modern economy was characterized, if not by abundance, then by the availability of an adequate sufficiency. It was on this productive economic base that Marcuse pinned his hopes for a future “non-repressive civilization.”

As Marcuse saw it, the development of technology and productive capability – spurred by capitalism – had, by the post-war period (i.e., after the Second World War), generated enough productivity to meet the needs of all.^{13(p7)} Marcuse applied this not just to the affluent West but to the whole world, arguing that if the existing productive output were distributed more equally – and fairly – there would be sufficient to meet the needs of populations in the developed, developing, and under-developed countries. Thus, Marcuse could write of “the possible conquest of want.”^{14(p138)} In many ways, this is the most subversive idea that Marcuse disseminated. It challenges the predominance and inevitability of what Marx, in a memorable phrase, called the “dull compulsion”^{15(p523)} of material life – the economic imperatives and constraints that restrict the human spirit and creativity. Indeed, so

important were Marcuse's economic premises that if one does not accept his characterization of the fundamentals of modern industrial and post-industrial economies, then most of his philosophical ideas are likely to seem fanciful and irrelevant. This has been the basis, often unstated, for the positions of many of his critics. Yet, in the period, since Marcuse wrote, advances in computing, robotics, and artificial intelligence have only made his vision of economic sufficiency even more achievable.

Marcuse admitted that scarcity could never be completely eliminated, but its impact on individuals could be significantly alleviated by a more equal distribution of scarcity among members of the community – that is, by an overturning of the existing “hierarchical distribution of scarcity.”^{14(p40)} His emphasis on the existing, grossly unequal distribution of scarcity, has been confirmed by the recent analyses of Piketty,¹⁶ who has stressed the ever-increasing inequality in virtually all economies around the world.

Moreover, Marcuse argued that the appearance of continuing scarcity was deliberately maintained by ruling interests for ideological purposes. He regarded the modern economy as resting on the proliferation of waste, obsolescence, managerialism, bureaucracy, corruption, and unnecessary military armament. In his view, the contemporary economic system relies on the artificial creation and intensification of a sense of scarcity: “Only the systematic increase in waste, destruction, and management keeps the system going.”^{13(p7)} Marcuse argued that the availability of abundant production provided the basis for radical social transformation, in which the arts played a crucial role.

3. Philosophical foundations

Marcuse's thinking on society and the arts was embedded in a long tradition of German philosophical thought that saw the ultimate goal of philosophy as contributing to the expansion of human freedom. In *Eros and Civilization*,¹⁴ Marcuse set out the philosophical foundations of his approach to what he called the “esthetic dimension.” He based this approach primarily on his reading of the philosophies of Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) and Friedrich Schiller (1759 – 1805). For Kant, the main reference was to the *Critique of Judgment*, often called the third critique, first published in 1790.

To summarize a complex body of work, the first two critiques of Kant¹⁷ dealt with Pure – or Theoretical – Reason on the one hand, and Practical Reason on the other; however, in his theorizing, there was a lack of connection between the two realms. Theoretical Reason was Kant's answer to the problem of objective knowledge – it dealt with nature and causality and was a domain of necessity.

Practical Reason, on the other hand, was concerned with ethics and was a domain of freedom. Kant believed that both metaphysics and ethics would be incomplete without a theory of the esthetic. He assigned to aesthetics its own mental faculty – esthetic judgment. According to Kant, the faculty of judgment mediates between understanding and practical reason so that esthetic judgment involves a harmonious unity of understanding and imagination. In this way, Kant gave aesthetics a central, mediating role in his philosophical system.

What Marcuse drew from Kant was that aesthetics offered a way of overcoming the division between certain antinomies or contradictions – not only between practical and theoretical reason, but also between “sensuousness and intellect” and “desire and cognition,” or the head and the heart. As Marcuse put it, “To Kant, the esthetic dimension is the medium in which the senses and the intellect meet. The mediation is accomplished by imagination, which is the ‘third’ mental faculty.”^{14(pp172, 179)}

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant argued that every esthetic act was informed by a sense of hope for the future of humanity – a shared vision of human potential. For Marcuse, the esthetic represents a way of bringing together or harmonizing disparate elements of human capabilities and experiences – of finding “the inner connection between pleasure, sensuousness, beauty, truth, art, and freedom.”^{14(p172)}

For Schiller, the focal reference text was his *Letters on the Esthetic Education of Mankind*,¹⁸ first published in 1795. Schiller considered this long essay – comprising 27 letters addressed to his patron – his most important theoretical work. Strongly influenced by Kant's third critique, Schiller expounded a vision of a more fully developed human personality, characterized by a balanced and harmonious development of all its facets. Schiller also emphasized the impulse to play and display, which he thought underlies all artistic activity. The esthetic impulse could create a “joyous kingdom of play and of semblance, in which man is relieved of the shackles of circumstance, and released from all that might be called constraint, alike in the physical and in the moral sphere.”^{18(p215)}

Through artistic production, the deformation of the personality that Schiller observed in contemporary social life could be overcome, and psychic reunification and integration could be achieved. In Schiller's view, “Art is a daughter of Freedom,” which should boldly soar “above our wants and needs” and “the exigencies of matter.”^{18(p7)} Schiller's work on aesthetics was a constant source of inspiration for Marcuse, and Marcuse's analysis of art drew heavily on it.^{14(pp180-196)}

The implications of Schiller's esthetic philosophy were also political, although these aspects were not elaborated in great depth by Schiller himself. In Jameson's assessment, Schiller's, "is not primarily an esthetic, but rather still a political system, and that the importance of beauty consists, for him, in the possibility the esthetic experience affords – a practical apprenticeship for the real political and social freedom to come."^{19(p90)}

According to Schiller, works of art evoke a type of emotional rehearsal of life within a new potential social configuration, as well as prompting social change:

- In art, consciousness prepares itself for a change in the world itself and at the same time learns to make demands on the real world which hasten that change: for the experience of the imaginary offers (in an imaginary mode) that total satisfaction of the personality and of being in the light of which the real world stands condemned, in the light of which the Utopian idea, the revolutionary blueprint, may be conceived.^{19(p90)}

These esthetic theories of Kant and Schiller, emerging out of the German philosophical tradition, had a deep impact on Marcuse's thinking about the esthetic and were incorporated into all his philosophical works from the 1950s through the late 1970s.

4. Sociopolitical role of the arts reimagined

Essentially, Marcuse saw the role of the arts as working on and with the human imagination to create a shift in consciousness that would prepare the ground for social and political transformation. The arts would, by turns, express, stimulate, and guide the imagination and consciousness toward the possibilities of a new world of freedom. To adopt the phraseology of the period, he saw the arts as having a powerful role to play in "consciousness-raising." Marcuse saw signs around him that a "new sensibility" was already emerging – including within artistic production – and he envisaged the arts as promoting and accelerating this developing awareness. In placing such an emphasis on the arts, Marcuse was going against the grain of much of traditional Marxist theory, which tended to regard such esthetic approaches as an "intolerable deviation."^{13(p52)} In this respect, it is significant to note that the subtitle of Marcuse's last book was *Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*.¹

Marcuse's theorizing about the nature of art emphasized its subjective, individual, and emotional aspects, which he saw as the source of its subversive, radical political potential: "the need for radical change must be rooted in the subjectivity of individuals themselves, in their intelligence and their passions, their drives and their

goals."^{1(pp3-4)} Marcuse thought of art as offering a *promesse du bonheur* (promise of happiness), borrowing the phrase from Adorno, who took it from Stendhal. The demand for human happiness – including sensuous pleasure – was a fundamental component of Marcuse's thinking. He rejected asceticism and valorized consumption rather than simply production, again challenging the tendency of much previous Marxist theorizing. As Marcuse saw it, by preserving the promise of happiness, art can recall struggling humanity to the need for social change.^{1(p69)}

Marcuse did not give specific parameters or a blueprint for the future development of the arts – preferring instead to grant artists the freedom to follow their imaginations and interests. However, he did offer one clear indication – a tendency he foresaw as a strong trend in the arts of the future. Given the technological and scientific basis of emerging social and political configurations, Marcuse's vision for the development of the arts positioned them in closer touch with science. He envisaged the arts as bridging the growing gap between arts and science, to which Snow²⁰ had called attention with his concept of the "two cultures."

In Marcuse's view, one effect of a "liberated consciousness" would be the freeing of science and technology to serve the "life instincts" rather than act against them. According to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the "life instincts" – or Eros – encompass sexual and reproductive drives, instincts of self-preservation, and, more broadly, the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. This realignment of science in support of the life instincts would require a radical transformation in how science is practiced: "In order to become vehicles of freedom, science and technology would have to change their present direction and goals; they would have to be reconstructed in accord with a new sensibility – the demands of the life instincts."^{13(p18)}

Science and technology would then coalesce with the arts in the service of consciousness-raising, overcoming harmful divisions and antinomies within the human personality: "Technique would then tend to become art, and art would tend to form reality: the opposition between imagination and reason, higher and lower faculties, poetic and scientific thought, would be invalidated."^{13(p24)} Marcuse identified this combination of artistic sensibility and scientific intelligence as the creation of an "esthetic ethos," where "the sensuous, the playful, the calm, and the beautiful become forms of existence and thereby the *Form* of the society itself."^{13(p25)}

Looking at the role of the arts more broadly, Marcuse recognized the part that the arts could play in cultural and cognitive disruption, particularly through unconventional forms of social protest. Reflecting on the

social and cultural developments of the late 1960s – such as “happenings,” spontaneous “events,” artistic performances, and demonstrations – he celebrated the “often bizarre forms” of protest generated by the student movement, the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, and the counterculture more generally. Even these, in his view, were not merely superficial or trivial phenomena, as many assumed at the time. They were significant, he thought, because they “quite frequently make the absurd reasonableness of the Establishment, and the anti-heroic, sensuous images of the alternative more transparent than the most serious argument could do.”^{13(p60)} Whereas the Frankfurt School has often been criticized for being hostile to popular culture, Marcuse saw that the antinomian, anarchistic tendencies of the popular protest movements often took on “weird and clownish forms” that had the ability to “get on the nerves of the Establishment.”^{13(p63)}

Satire, irony, and “laughing provocation” became essential elements of political activity – a way of demonstrating contempt for the deadly *esprit de sérieux* (spirit of seriousness) of institutionalized politics. In the spirit of rebellion, the protest movements revived the “desperate laughter and the cynical defiance of the fool” to challenge the reigning social system and dominant order of values.^{13(p64)} Although the Frankfurt School has often been characterized as hostile to popular culture – and in that sense, as cultural elitists – Marcuse embraced these popular forms of artistic activity.

The one artistic practitioner and theorist to whom Marcuse continually referred in his writings on aesthetics was André Breton. Breton was an influential French artist and intellectual with a commitment to promoting both surrealism and Marxism. Taking inspiration from the work of Sigmund Freud, Breton advocated tapping into the unconscious through dreams and free associations, and pioneered the technique of “automatism” – acts of spontaneous, unconstrained expression in writing, painting, and drawing. Marcuse viewed Breton, and the surrealism he promoted – especially in the 1920s and 1930s – as the classic exemplar of artistic movements working toward the formation of a “new sensibility.”^{13(p31)}

Like Benjamin,²¹ Marcuse – in his early work on the arts – placed a high value on surrealism, both for its disruptive qualities and its theoretical contributions. These included Breton’s concept of *hasard objectif* – the notion that our everyday chance encounters with objects are made meaningful and seemingly mysterious by the investment of unconscious psychic energy. Marcuse extended this idea to signify the creation of a new material reality that would embody, or make objective, human desires, faculties, and esthetic sensibilities.^{13(p31)}

Despite Breton’s misogyny, Marcuse acknowledged the role that both Breton and surrealism played in inspiring the student revolts, particularly in Paris in 1968.^{13(p22)} The “Great Refusal” was a term that Marcuse borrowed from Breton to refer to the popular rejection of “the rules of the game that is rigged against them.”^{13(p6)} The Great Refusal – which Marcuse often emphasized by capitalizing the phrase – is “the protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom.”^{14(p149)} This phrase was used repeatedly by Marcuse and came to be closely associated with his name.

In addition to surrealism, Marcuse highlighted the disruptive potential of a range of new artistic developments – particularly their ability to interrupt received patterns of thought and challenge existing sensibilities:

- Non-objective, abstract painting and sculpture, stream-of-consciousness and formalist literature, twelve-tone composition, blues, and jazz: these are not merely new modes of perception reorienting and intensifying the old ones; they rather dissolve the very structure of perception in order to make room – for what? The new object of art is not yet “given,” but the familiar object has become impossible, false.^{13(p38)}

In the poetic arts, Marcuse cited the work of Baudelaire, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Paul Valéry. In *An Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse emphasized the importance of blues and jazz as forms of cultural critique.^{13(p38)} This assessment distinguished his views from those of Adorno, whose hostility to jazz was unrelenting.

New trends in the arts could even amount to a challenge of “anti-art” – “the eruption of anti-art in art has manifested itself in many familiar forms: destruction of syntax, fragmentation of words and sentences, explosive use of ordinary language, compositions without score, and sonatas for anything.”^{13(pp41–42)}

However, in accordance with the logic of the dialectic, Marcuse then turned to a critique of some of these emerging trends within the arts: “Yet, this entire de-formation is Form: anti-art has remained art, supplied, purchased, and contemplated as art.”^{13(p42)} This theme of the recurring recuperation or reincorporation of anti-art or avant-gardist trends into the arts by the existing art establishment, and within a wider commercialized economy of profitability, was to become a central preoccupation of Marcuse’s last book, *The Esthetic Dimension*, where he was more critical of surrealism alongside other avant-garde art forms.^{1(ppxi,37)}

Marcuse was critical of the art of Andy Warhol, for example, seeing it as both a “renunciation of the esthetic form” and as enmeshed in the “prevailing art industry and its heteronomous art.”^{1(pp50–53)} This brought Marcuse closer

to the position of his Frankfurt School colleague, Theodor Adorno, who tended to be skeptical of the enduring revolutionary potential of unconventional forms in the arts, underlining instead their ability to become assimilated over time into mainstream culture.²² As Adorno put it, “it is a mockery how the increasing merchandise character of culture estheticizes it for utility’s sake,” as capital, under the compulsion to expand its investments, transforms the products of the artistic spirit into property.^{23(pp394-395)} Despite these misgivings and caveats about the commercialization of some forms of artistic expression, Marcuse continued to be optimistic about the radical potential of the arts in their roles as both cultural sabotage and prophecy of future emancipation.

5. Potential criticisms of Marcuse’s theories

Marcuse’s critics have sometimes raised objections to his theories concerning the arts, especially for their alleged instrumentalism and utopianism. It could be objected, to take the first criticism, that Marcuse’s theorizing of the role of the arts in social change adopted an instrumental approach to the arts. It could appear that Marcuse’s approach represented a gross and potentially dangerous departure from any idea of “art for art’s sake” toward didactic art, and it is true that at times his discourse bears traces of a social engineering agenda. But this reproach would go too far, for Marcuse favored a development and shift of artistic values and tastes originating from the bottom up, from the grassroots of society. His argument was that the existing world of the arts already had an ideological role to play, directed by the powerful forces of the existing capitalist status quo. Marcuse recognized “the mark of social repression, even in the most sublime manifestations of traditional culture.”^{13(pix)} As noted above, Marcuse was adamant that the choice of subjects and techniques should be left to individual artists. In addition, he valorized a multitude of diverse artistic forms. Therefore, to argue that Marcuse, as a Marxist, was advocating interference with the free play of artistic life would be naïve or disingenuous.

As for the charge of utopianism, there can be no gainsaying the fact that many of Marcuse’s ideas – most notably in *Eros and Civilization*¹⁴ and *An Essay on Liberation*¹³ – had a utopian cast. Marcuse did not deny this. In *An Essay on Liberation*, written in a mood of optimism immediately before and after the upsurge of student protest in Paris and elsewhere in 1968, he nevertheless acknowledged that his vision of a future free, non-repressive society was “no more and no less than a hope.”^{13(p71)} Although utopian, Marcuse’s thought was never unrealistic or Pollyanna-like. His vision, for example, of a post-scarcity economy of abundance – or at least material sufficiency – is perhaps easily dismissed as unattainable.

However, it has long been the promise of modern science, from the early days of Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* and Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, to enable lives of comfort and leisure by replacing the burdens of toil with machine production.^{24(p145)} Marcuse’s utopianism has prompted, and no doubt will continue to lead many to denigrate his social thought. However, Jameson raised pertinent points when he asked rhetorically, in regard to our tendency to judge against utopianism:

- What if our judgment were itself a measure and a symptom of our own incapacity to support such thinking, of our own repression of the principle of futurity, smothered under the realism of the reality principle and the massive weight of what is? What if it were the very psychologism, the cynical reductionism, of the reality principle itself that turned out to be not reality, but just another symptom?^{19(p90)}

In other words, there is the distinct possibility that the rejection of utopianism is itself ideological – a sign and symptom of our immersion in and subjection to the existing systems of thought. Lukács underlined the important functions of utopian thought, writing that a utopian perspective serves a double function – enabling “the artist to portray the present age truthfully without giving way to despair,” while also allowing her to “go beyond the mere affirmation of existing conditions, to explore values not found in present society.”^{25(p61)}

As Marcuse himself put it, the “relegation of real possibilities to the no-man’s land of utopia is itself an essential element of the ideology of the performance principle.”^{14(p150)} There has often been in the Marxist tradition, in particular, an entrenched strain of contemptuous disdain for utopian thinking. In Marx’s classic analysis – as in those of many of his followers in the Marxist lineage – “utopian thought represented a diversion of revolutionary energy into idle wish-fulfillment and imaginary satisfactions.”^{19(pp110-111)} Yet, as Jameson²⁶ stressed – and as he explored in much of his own work – the utopian idea “keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and taking the form of a stubborn negation of all that is.”^{19(p111)} In *Old Gods, New Enigmas*, Davis listed the resources potentially available to enable the political left to confront the contemporary challenges of rising inequality, authoritarianism, and climate change: “insurgent communities, pirate technologies, bootlegged media, rebel science, and forgotten utopias.”^{27(p202)} Marcuse’s utopian writings are hardly forgotten, given the recent revival of academic interest in them, but they represent a significant resource that could be more frequently and thoroughly accessed by the artistic community and their supporters, as well as by the political left.

6. Conclusion

The affective potency of Marcuse's work has emerged as a compelling area of focus. Especially in *Eros and Civilization* and *An Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse's writing has the effect of inspiring a joyful response, a sense of relief, and a feeling – or at least a hope – of freedom. His style of writing and composition is notable for its emotive impact and its appeal to the reader's imagination. In these dark days of global neoliberal ascendancy, with the continual reiteration of the inevitability of scarcity, economic rationalism, inequality, and globalization, these affective qualities are more necessary than ever. As Deleuze put it succinctly in his reflections on the contribution of the affects to empowerment and disempowerment: "Sadness will be any passion whatsoever which involves a diminution of my power of acting, and joy will be any passion involving an increase in my power of acting."²⁸ To sustain continued action – whether in the realms of politics, aesthetics, or academic discourse – turning to and immersing oneself in the thought of intellectuals like Marcuse plays an important role. Echoing the words of Jameson on Marcuse and other utopian thinkers, this study concludes that "it pleases me for another moment still to contemplate the stubborn rebirth of the idea of freedom,"^{19(p116)} the "irrepressible revolutionary wish."^{19(p159)} In this sense, Marcuse's philosophical works can contribute to fulfilling the inspirational and hopeful role that he envisaged for the arts as a whole.

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