

and the present, but also on wider structural transformations and effects initiated by the experiment in neo-liberalism.

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Herbert Marcuse: An Aesthetics of Liberation by **Malcolm Miles**. London: Pluto Press, 2012. 194pp., £19.99, ISBN 978 0 7453 3038 9

Malcolm Miles has produced a comprehensive overview of the history of Marcuse's aesthetic theory which also functions as an introduction to the entirety of Marcuse's philosophy. In his inviting prose, he successfully captures both the inherently cross-disciplinary nature of Marcuse's writings and the passionate spirit of Eros imbued in all of them. Miles begins the work by explaining why Marcuse's aesthetic theory is again – in the throes of globalised capitalism – timely and uniquely important. Echoing Marcuse, Miles argues that when political change seems out of reach and 'activism inspires hope, but ... is too easily marginalised' (p. 3), aesthetics provides both the inherent sensuality and imagination to subvert the dominant rationalistic tentacles of unfree society and breathe new life into alternative possibilities.

The book is organised into eight chapters, with each chapter devoted to a particular research project of Marcuse's. As such, each chapter also functions as a stop along the timeline of Marcuse's aesthetic theories, with the first chapter discussing his approach to a revisionist Marxism, and ending with a chapter dedicated to four case studies in the art world that speak to Marcuse's goals for a blossoming society. From his early examinations of the artist novel in the 1930s, to his envisioning of a liberated society as work of art with *An Essay on Liberation* in the 1960s, to his mature revolutionary theory of the 1970s as exemplified in *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Marcuse believed that a spontaneous (temporary) loss of (the ordered and rational) self leads to self-awakening.

Throughout, Miles conveys how tightly Marcuse's social theory is wrapped up with his aesthetic theory – to attempt to separate them completely would be missing the essence of Marcusean thought, as aesthetics, in being the opposing force to a rational and thus repressive status quo, naturally contains the imaginative tools with which to re-envision society.

Marcuse believed desperately in the need to resuscitate the sensuality and joy of Eros in society. He felt that the rationalisation of consumerism had distorted the individual's ability to conceive of alternatives to the imposed structure and needs of everyday life. Miles breathes fresh confidence into Marcuse's energised calls to revolt against the confines of popular society and truly live as art.

This is an important and valuable introduction and accompaniment to the reading of Marcuse's many works. He is a provocative philosopher who has not been encountered nearly enough in theory that considers the malaise and disconnect within today's public spaces and institutions. The primary idea in this book, and in the writings of Marcuse himself, that creativity can rejuvenate both individuals and society, should be a vital source for reflection and change as we move further into the twenty-first century.

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Ethics for a Broken World: Imagining Philosophy after Catastrophe by **Tim Mulgan**. Durham: Acumen, 2011. 228pp., £16.99, ISBN 978 1 84465 488 8

Philosophy in an affluent society is conducted above a foundational assumption: that there exists an abundance of resources such that all basic human needs can be met. This abundance makes the material prosperity and cultural liberalism of an affluent society possible. Tim Mulgan, in *Ethics for a Broken World*, supposes that the foundational assumption is false, and asks us to explore the shortcomings of familiar philosophical theories, and – ultimately – the possibility that many of our cherished ideals are contingent upon the truth of the foundational assumption.

Mulgan's book is presented as a series of eighteen 'history of philosophy' lectures given at some point in the not-so-distant future. This imagined future class studies topics such as rights, libertarianism, utilitarianism, the social contract and democracy, and tries to see how these theories would translate into a 'broken world' – a world in which the foundational assumption is false. Some of these theories have great difficulty making the transition. Mulgan argues that Robert Nozick's libertarianism, for example, is unworkable in a broken future. Utilitarianism seems to deliver more